

EVIDENCE MATTERS

Diversion Programs for Low-Level Drug Offenders: Health Outcomes and Cost-Effectiveness

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Strategies for people with substance use disorder based on criminalisation and aggressive law enforcement have created barriers to harm reduction while having little or no impact on the number of people who use drugs. Jail diversion programs aim to divert low-level drug offenders toward community care resources, avoiding criminal justice costs and disruptions in treatment for HIV, hepatitis C virus (HCV), and drug abuse. This talk describes our model-based analysis of the health benefits and cost-effectiveness of a jail diversion program for low-level drug offenders. Our analysis suggests that diversion programs are likely to substantially reduce spending in the criminal justice system while moderately increasing spending in the healthcare sector, and are likely to be highly cost-effective. The spread of infectious disease stemming from drug

injection and the global overcrowding of jails and prisons suggest that, more than ever, effective, cost-effective, and innovative approaches are required to address these crises. Diversion programs are one such program.

Margaret L. Brandeau is Coleman F. Fung Professor of Engineering and Professor of Medicine (by Courtesy) at Stanford University. Her research focuses on the development of applied mathematical and economic models to support health policy decisions. Her recent work has examined hospital operations management problems, HIV and drug abuse prevention and treatment programs, and programs to control the opioid epidemic. She is a Fellow of INFORMS and a member of the Omega Rho Honor Society for Operations Research and Management Science. From INFORMS, she has received the Philip McCord Morse Lectureship Award, the President's Award, the Pierskalla Prize (in 2001 and 2017), and the Award for the Advancement of Women in Operations Research and the Management Sciences. She has also received the Award for Excellence in Application of Pharmacoeconomics and Health Outcomes Research from the International Society for Pharmacoeconomics and Outcomes Research and a Presidential Young Investigator Award from the National Science Foundation, among other awards. Professor Brandeau earned a BS in Mathematics and an MS in Operations Research from MIT, and a PhD in Engineering-Economic Systems from Stanford.

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