

Purpose and Guiding Principles for Systemic Interventions: Data-Driven Solutions for Justice Improvement

Purpose

The Systemic Interventions workgroup is charged with creating opportunities for dialogue on system change strategies. California has enacted two statewide initiatives that emphasize a realignment and new investment of criminal justice dollars to the local level. SB 678 offers incentives to local probation departments that increase probation success by reducing the prison commitment rates. AB 109 realigns the monitoring of non-serious prisoners and parolees to local probation departments. Both legislative bills call for an evidence-based approach to reduce recidivism leading to prison. Toward this end, the Systemic Interventions workgroup will present a series of webinars in the upcoming months to provide a tutorial in using systems data to identify and implement systemic interventions at the local level that reduce reliance on incarceration.

Premise

We use evidence-based policies and practices to achieve desired outcomes such as reducing recidivism and victimization in our communities. Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) is informed by data and research. Several examples of EBP have been successfully employed to reduce offender risk and subsequent recidivism through the use of effective assessment, supervision and treatment strategies designed to change offender behavior. The focus on changing offender behavior looks at recidivism primarily through an “offender lens,” rather than a “systemic lens.” However, the dramatic increase in rates of incarceration over the past thirty years is only somewhat explained by crime and offender behavior. It is more so explained by systemic policies and practices that have become increasingly reliant on incarceration as the primary response to violations of law and community supervision. Unraveling this reliance will require a combination of interventions at the offender and systems levels that rely on research and data. Therefore, the Systemic Intervention workgroup plans to create a data-driven framework and methodology for systems level interventions to reduce reliance on incarceration. Below are some of the guiding principles and strategies for this work.

Leadership, Collaboration and Self Critique

Reducing reliance on prison requires committed and strong leadership, and a capacity for critique of system inefficiencies and ineffective practices. Key justice stakeholders must be willing to methodically examine system outcomes, identify areas for improvement, and implement necessary changes. Joint planning and oversight are essential as is a willingness to broaden the role of community based partners.

A System Perspective

In this context, a systemic perspective looks into aggregate data that examines trajectories to incarceration and how interventions can be applied to reduce failures that lead to incarceration. A continuum of lesser restrictive interventions can be implemented to intercept the need for incarceration. For example, SB 678 and AB 109 are intended to reduce prison

commitments while systemic interventions look at the entire justice system operation. Parolees returning to jail and the increases of non-serious offenders at the local level will impact local jails, many of which are already overcrowded. In this instance, Systemic Interventions should look at the entire probation and jail populations to determine ways to alleviate the pressures that realignment presents.

Commitment to Thoughtful Planning and Data-Driven Practices

Systemic interventions are based on a data-driven process that relies on objective data, rather than anecdote, to guide system improvement planning, policy development, and continuous improvements in practice. Three components are essential:

- 1) **Baseline Data:** the development of baseline aggregate and disaggregated data that provides a portrait of the system outcomes and processes.
- 2) **Continuous management of a data-driven process,** where: a) system bottlenecks, inefficiencies and unwanted results are identified; b) questions and hypotheses are formed as to what might be leading to the problem, which may require digging deeper into the problem; c) procedural and programmatic solutions are developed and implemented to have the maximum impact with the resources available; and e) ongoing evaluation is conducted.
- 3) **Communication of Results:** data-driven practices are most powerful when all system stakeholders are engaged, capacity is built within organizations to use data-driven practices, and successes are visible to practitioners, stakeholders and the public.

Examination of Key Decision Points

Systemic Interventions are premised on the understanding that at each stage of the justice process (pretrial, sentencing and community supervision) discretionary decisions are made that greatly influence system outcomes. Some systemic practices are conducive to offender success while others may actually compound failures that may not even be linked to criminogenic risk. By disaggregating data at each system decision and process point, problems to be addressed and successes to be championed are illuminated.

Build Capacity through a Continuum of Options to Safely Reduce Reliance on Incarceration

A continuum of lesser restrictive options are developed and tailored for the Pretrial, Sentencing, and Community Supervision stages of the Criminal Process. Evidence-based efforts recognize that incarceration, while necessary in some cases, is costly, provides a contagion factor for deviancy and future recidivism, and may escalate future revocation and imprisonment. A continuum of lesser restrictive options provides the systemic interventions in which evidence-based programs can operate at the local level. These options are developed, implemented, and monitored to ensure that public safety is maintained and net-widening does not occur.

Innovation and Replication

EBP promotes the replication of strategies that have been proven to achieve desired outcomes and encourages the creation of research-based system improvements. Systemic interventions

promote both the replication of strategies that have improved systemic outcomes and the implementation of locally designed innovations that would appear promising after careful data analysis. With ongoing monitoring, effective interventions are identified that can become new evidence-based practices. Ineffective interventions are improved or aborted depending on the outcomes.

From Policy to Practice

The discovery of a data-driven opportunity for a systemic intervention is only part of the battle. The implementation of systemic interventions requires attention to change management and a strategic approach to implementation efforts. Leadership, collaboration, communication, data feedback and the overall alignment of business practices are critical elements in facilitating systemic change.

Commitment to Research Based Practices

Data-driven techniques must be supported by research. A commitment to research helps justice administrators create learning organizations that wisely use resources for maximum public benefit.