

Treatment Instead of Prison Health Impact Assessment: *Alternatives to prison for non-violent offenders in Wisconsin*



The Problem

Wisconsin, like other states, is locking up growing numbers of non-violent drug and alcohol offenders. These people need treatment – not prison, where they're unlikely to get help. Prison disrupts families, increases recidivism, makes communities less safe, and costs far more than treatment. WISDOM, a statewide congregation-based community organizing network, is campaigning to cut Wisconsin's prison population in half by expanding access to treatment programs.

What We Did

In 2012, HIP partnered with WISDOM, state agencies, academics, and other experts to conduct an assessment of the public health impacts of increasing funding to \$75 million a year for Wisconsin's treatment and diversion programs. The year-long study drew on data from state and national diversion programs and insights from focus groups with returning citizens, their families, and officials from the law enforcement, judicial, and public health systems.



“One of the biggest things the HIA has done is change the question people ask about criminal justice. Instead of being about what people deserve, this gets to be about what actually makes things better.”

– David Liners, Organizational Director, WISDOM



What We Found

We found overwhelming evidence that expanding alternatives to incarceration would reduce the prison population, reduce crime, lower recidivism, and strengthen families by keeping up to 1,600 parents a year out of prison each year. Because the cost of treatment is about one-fourth of the cost of putting someone behind bars, the state would also save up to \$2 for every dollar spent on alternative treatment programs.

Impact

The HIA had a tremendous impact on the conversation around treatment over incarceration in Wisconsin. Every major media outlet in the state covered the release of the HIA, and elected officials referred to the findings in their budget discussion. Ultimately, the legislature expanded the budget for treatment alternatives from \$1 million to \$4 million, and from 7 programs to 34, a huge increase - but only a fraction of the HIA recommendation. Half of the counties in Wisconsin applied for the funding, showing a deep need. WISDOM continues to use the HIA in meetings with legislators, to organize their communities, and to keep the issue in the media spotlight. They are embarking on their second HIA, focused on reducing the number of people who return to prison for a technical violation of probation or parole.

Visit the project website to access report materials, media coverage, and a presentation of results: www.humanimpact.org/projects. For more information, contact: kim@humanimpact.org