

Melbourne Drug Court and Opiates

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What is the Drug Court?



What is the Drug Court?



In brief...

- Perfect example of 'therapeutic jurisprudence', or a problem-solving court
- Two main goals
 - Reducing recidivism
 - Improve health and wellbeing

Drug use and offending



Drug Use and Crime

- Increasing drug use leads to neuroadaptation and loss of control
- Need for drugs overwhelms other concerns
- Drugs are illegal
- Drugs are expensive

Drug use and offending



Relevant Statistics

- Traffickable quantity of heroin is 3gm.
- Over 4 in 5 (82%) police detainees tested positive to any drug, and 46% tested positive to multiple drugs.*
- 90% of arrests are consumer-related (as opposed to provider/dealer)
- Heroin doesn't account for the most arrests (11%), but more attribute their arrest to their drug use than any other drug (54%). **
- The number of national illicit drug arrests has increased 80% over the last decade

Participants



The average drug court participant:

- Male (90%)
- 30-39yo (52%)
- 2-5 previous prison sentences (32%)
- Primary substance Heroin or Methamphetamine
- Theft-related offences (47%)

Drug Court History



- First drug court in Florida in 1989
- First in Australia - NSW in 1999
- Dandenong Drug Court in 2002
- Melbourne Drug Court in 2017 set up by Magistrate Tony Parsons
- Currently being expanded to Ballarat, Shepparton and Melbourne County Court

Theoretical Framework

- Designed to counteract the way drug use hijack's the brain's reward pathways
- Operatives on a system of incentives and sanctions (rewards and punishments), based on behavioural psychology principles



How does it work?



- Participants are put on a Drug and Alcohol Treatment Order (DATO, previously DTO) that lasts from 12-24 months
- Must plead guilty to charges
- No sex offences or serious assault charges
- General attempt to filter out 'career criminals'
- Be facing an immediate prison term of no more than two years

How does it work?



The team includes:

- Drug Court Magistrate
- Corrections Victoria case managers
- Clinical advisors
- Victoria Legal Aid lawyers
- Victoria Police prosecutors
- A housing assistance worker
- Alcohol and drug counsellors

How does it work?



Three Phases to Treatment

- Phase 1 - Stabilisation
 - Honesty and attendance, attempt to reduce drug use, weekly appointments
- Phase 2 - Consolidation
 - Minimise drug use, address major life issues, fortnightly appointments
- Phase 3 - Re-integration
 - Maintain abstinence, focus on social re-integration (work, study etc.), monthly appointments

Effectiveness



- Graduates commit fewer crimes (34% less at 24 months follow up)
- Fewer serious crimes (67% reduction)
- Cost effective - reduction in recidivism, prison term served in the community

Other ideas and points



- Significant percentage of DC participants on ORT
- Magistrate has the power to compel people onto ORT
- Demonstrates the difficulty of addressing complex addiction
- Building trust in the magistrate and treatment team is very powerful

References



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Thanks for listening