

Nebraska Justice Program Assessment  
Executive Summary

Nebraska invests millions of dollars annually in rehabilitative programming in prisons. To better understand if these programs are effective, the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) requested that the Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center conduct an in-depth assessment of institutional programs to identify how the department can modify its investments to maximize recidivism reduction.

This Justice Program Assessment (JPA) examined how effectively NDCS programming is 1) targeting people who are most likely to reoffend, 2) using practices rooted in the latest research on what works to reduce recidivism, and 3) being regularly reviewed for quality and fidelity to established models. With these elements in place, a system is more likely to reduce recidivism while being cost-effective.

After a 6-month review, CSG Justice Center staff have found that NDCS uses several state-of-the-art risk-reducing programs. However, the people who need these programs face clear and persistent barriers to accessing them. Current approaches to program delivery at NDCS silo program assignment and unnecessarily stretch program delivery out over time, leading to inefficiencies that increase costs to the state by delaying parole readiness. One-third of people within a year of their parole eligibility date are denied a parole hearing due to lack of programming, leading to numerous people jamming out of prison without supervision.

Nebraska's investments in prison-based programming could have greater impact if NDCS adopted a more evidence-based program assignment and sequencing strategy. NDCS should:

- Use a streamlined assessment to direct people into programs more quickly;
- Make program assignments based on an individual's risk, needs, and time to parole eligibility;
- Modify programs to allow multiple need areas to be addressed simultaneously;
- Expand capacity by adding to the array of core risk-reducing programs (i.e., cognitive behavioral interventions that address criminal thinking) and increase how often they are provided by dedicating some staff to running programming; and
- Develop a system to monitor program delivery and outcomes over time.

Additionally, the state of Nebraska should:

- Increase access to evidence-based community programs for justice-involved populations.
- Incentivize service providers to create a continuum of care in the community that is coordinated with prison programming models.

For additional information on the Justice Program Assessment or the CSG Justice Center's justice reinvestment work in Nebraska, contact Sara Friedman at [sfriedman@csg.org](mailto:sfriedman@csg.org).