

Benefit-cost analysis

Advancing the Use of Evidence and Economics in State Government Policymaking

Background

Since the 1990s, the Washington State legislature has directed WSIPP to review research on “what works” (and what does not) in public policy. WSIPP’s work has spanned many topic areas, including criminal justice, education, child welfare, behavioral health, workforce development, public health, and prevention. In our systematic reviews, we assess the research evidence to identify public policies that improve statewide outcomes of legislative interest; we then estimate the benefits, costs, and risks associated with different options. This has become WSIPP’s standard approach to benefit-cost analysis.

Since 2012, the Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative (Results First) has supported WSIPP’s benefit-cost work through a Board-approved contract. Results First aims to enable other states to take a similar approach to Washington. Over the years, this project has provided support for WSIPP to expand its approach into new policy areas, including health care and higher education, and conduct analyses on hundreds of programs and policy options across a variety of policy areas. This project has also supported the maintenance of WSIPP’s standard benefit-cost model, which we use to assess the economic impact and risk associated with different programs and policies. For information about WSIPP’s benefit-cost model, contact Michael Hirsch, 360-664-9081.

The Current Project

In 2020, WSIPP will update and extend meta-analyses and benefit-cost analyses for select programs and policies. WSIPP will also develop new guidance for our website to improve usability and facilitate the interpretation of results. This project will close on December 31, 2020. For information, contact Eva Westley, 360-664-9089.
