

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.

Cannabis

Cannabis Legalization Evaluation

In November 2012, Washington State voters passed Initiative 502 to regulate and tax the use and sale of cannabis for persons twenty-one years of age and older. As part of I-502, WSIPP was directed to “conduct cost-benefit evaluations of the implementation” of the law. The evaluations must include measures of impacts on public health, public safety, cannabis use, the economy, the criminal justice system, and state and local costs and revenues.

A preliminary report was released in September 2015. The second required report was released in September 2017. Subsequent reports will be released in 2022 and 2032.

Supplemental to the ongoing benefit-cost evaluation of cannabis legalization authorized by Initiative 502 in 2012, the 2018 Washington State Legislature directed WSIPP to conduct additional cannabis research. WSIPP was directed to update its inventory of programs for the prevention and treatment of youth cannabis use; examine current data collection methods measuring the use of cannabis by youth and potential ways to improve on these methods; and identify effective methods used to reduce or eliminate the unlicensed cultivation or distribution of marijuana in jurisdictions with existing legal marijuana markets.

Related reports:

Monitoring Trends in Use Prior to Implementation of I-502 and Employment and Wage Earnings in Licensed Marijuana Businesses.

[Eva Westley, \(360\) 664-9089](#)

Children's services

Short-Term Foster Care Support Services

The 2017 Washington State Legislature directed WSIPP to complete an evaluation of short-term foster care support. The legislation describes short-term support as case aides who provide temporary assistance to foster parents as needed with the overall goal of supporting the parental efforts of the foster parents. The short-term support does not include overnight assistance. The evaluation will, to the maximum extent possible, assess the impact of the short-term support services on the retention of foster homes and the number of placements a foster child receives while in out-of-home care, as well as the return on investment to the state.

A preliminary report was released in November 2018. The final report was originally due to the legislature by June 30, 2020. In 2019, the legislature passed SSB 5955 which extended the due date of the final report to June 30, 2021. In June 2020 Board, the WSIPP Board of Directors voted to extend the study deadline to June 30, 2023.

Rebecca Goodvin, (360) 664-9077

DCYF Resource Center

The 2019 Washington State Legislature directed WSIPP to conduct an evaluation on the outcomes of resource and assessment centers licensed under RCW 74.15.311 and contracted with the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). As part of the evaluation, WSIPP was directed to collect data regarding the following:

- The type of placement children experience following placement at a resource and assessment center;
- The number of placement changes that children experience following placement in a resource and assessment center compared with other foster children;
- The length of stay in foster care that children experience following placement in a resource and assessment center compared with other foster children;
- The likelihood that children placed in a resource and assessment center will be placed with siblings; and
- The length of time that licensed foster families accepting children placed in resource and assessment centers maintain their licensure compared to licensed foster families receiving children directly from child protective services.

The report is due to the legislature, DCYF, and the Oversight Board for DCYF by December 8, 2020.

Devin Bales, (360) 664-9808

Criminal justice

WA ONE Evaluation

The Washington State Department of Corrections (DOC) began implementation of a new dynamic risk assessment tool, the Washington ONE (WA ONE), in December 2017. DOC contracted with WSIPP to design a potential multi-phase study that will evaluate the impact of WA ONE on various outcomes. This evaluation represents the first phase which will focus on changes in risk level classifications and consequent minimum contact requirements.

A report was originally due by June 30, 2020. Due to data delays, the report is now due by October 30, 2020.

Lauren Knoth, (360) 664-9805

Exclusive Adult Jurisdiction

The 2018 Washington State Legislature directed WSIPP to assess the impact of changes to the Juvenile Justice Act (JJA), as outlined in E2SSB 6160. To the extent possible, the study should include impacts to community safety, racial disproportionality, recidivism, state expenditures, and youth rehabilitation.

The 2019 Legislature amended WSIPP's assignment to include an assessment of additional components contained in Sections 2-6 of E2SHB 1646. WSIPP must also conduct a benefit-cost analysis which includes the health impacts and recidivism effects of extending the JJA to include all offenses committed under the age of twenty-one.

A preliminary report is due to the legislature by December 1, 2023 with a final report due December 1, 2031.

Lauren Knoth, (360) 664-9805

Higher education

Participation in Postsecondary Programs among Incarcerated Individuals

The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) contracted with WSIPP to conduct a study examining participation in postsecondary programs among incarcerated individuals. The study will assess rates of program participation and completion among incarcerated individuals and how these rates vary across race, gender, and facility. This study will also identify practices that can promote or inhibit participation in education programs while incarcerated. The final report is due on December 31, 2020.

Danielle Fumia, (360) 664-9076

Mental health

The Effect of Integration on the Involuntary Treatment Systems for Substance Abuse and Mental Health

The 2016 Washington State Legislature directed WSIPP to evaluate the effect of the integration of the involuntary treatment systems for substance use disorders and mental health. WSIPP's report must include whether the integrated system:

- Increases efficiency of evaluation and treatment of persons involuntarily detained for substance use disorders;
- Is cost-effective, including impacts on health care, housing, employment, and criminal justice costs;
- Results in better outcomes for persons involuntarily detained;
- Increases the effectiveness of the crisis response system statewide;
- Impacts commitment based on mental disorders;
- Is sufficiently resourced with enough involuntary treatment beds, less restrictive treatment options, and state funds to provide timely and appropriate treatment for all individuals interacting with the integrated involuntary treatment system; and
- Diverted a significant number of individuals from the mental health involuntary treatment system whose risk results from substance abuse, including an estimate of the net savings from serving these clients into the appropriate substance abuse treatment system.

Preliminary reports are due to the legislature on December 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021, and a final report is due June 30, 2023.

Elizabeth Drake, (360) 664-9075

Pre-K-12 education

LAP Inventory: Effective Practices to Assist Struggling Students

The 2013 Washington State Legislature directed WSIPP to prepare an inventory of evidence- and research-based practices, strategies, and activities for school districts to use in the Learning Assistance Program (LAP).

The state program provides supplemental academic support to eligible K-12 students achieving below grade level or not on track to meet local or state graduation requirements. LAP funds may support programs in reading, writing, mathematics, and readiness, as well as programs to reduce disruptive behavior.

An initial report was released in July 2014. Updates were published in July 2015, July 2016, June 2018, and July 2020. The inventory will be updated every two years thereafter.

Julia Cramer, (360) 664-9073

Early Achievers Quality Rating and Improvement System

The 2015 Washington State Legislature required Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) providers and licensed child care providers who serve non-school aged children and receive state subsidies to participate in Early Achievers. Early Achievers is Washington State's quality rating and improvement system for early childhood education and child care providers.

In the same bill, WSIPP was directed to examine the relationship between the Early Achievers quality ratings and outcomes for children who participate in state-subsidized early education and child care.

A preliminary report was released in December 2019. Subsequent reports will be published in 2020 and 2021. A final report including a benefit-cost analysis of Early Achievers is due to the legislature by December 31, 2022.

Rebecca Goodvin, (360) 664-9077

Policy Changes to Reduce Excessive Absenteeism in Public K–12 Schools

The 2016 Washington State Legislature changed existing statute and added new provisions to decrease absenteeism and truancy in public K-12 schools, including the following:

- All school districts (except very small districts) and their corresponding juvenile courts must establish community truancy boards by the 2017-18 school year;
- Courts must implement an initial stay of truancy petitions and refer children and families to community truancy boards for assessment and intervention; and
- In cases where detention is deemed necessary, the law establishes a preference for placement in secure crisis residential centers or HOPE centers (as opposed to juvenile detention facilities).

The same bill directs WSIPP to evaluate the impacts of this act. A preliminary report on study methods and potential data gaps was published in December 2017, and the final report will be published by January 1, 2021.

Madeline Barch, (360) 664-9070

Evaluations of Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)

Background

The 2013 Washington State Legislature directed WSIPP to conduct an outcome evaluation and return on investment analysis of the state's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP). WSIPP produced two reports: one summarizing the national research literature on the long-term effectiveness of early childhood education programs of various types and a retrospective evaluation of the effectiveness of Washington's ECEAP program through fifth grade for a sample of children born between 1999 and 2004. Many children in this initial study are expected to have graduated from high school by 2019. This offers the opportunity to examine additional long term outcomes of ECEAP.

The current project

WSIPP is producing three reports, which will update and expand our findings from the reports produced in January and December of 2014.

The 2019 Washington State Legislature directed WSIPP to update the previous ECEAP outcome evaluation and examine the long-term impacts on program participants, including high school graduation rates for up to two cohorts. The report is due by December 31, 2021. For information, contact Chasya Hoagland, 360-664-9084.

In addition to the above assignment, WSIPP's Board of Directors also authorized WSIPP staff to update the meta-analysis of state and district early childhood education programs for low-income children provided nationwide. To the extent possible, it will also examine the effectiveness of other types of early education. The report was released in December 2019. For information, contact Chasya Hoagland, 360-664-9084.

The legislative assignment also directed WSIPP to examine several program features. To the extent that data are available, the report will evaluate the short-term effects of ECEAP and address full-day programming compared to part-day programming, educational credentials and demographic characteristics of program staff, and related topics. A final report is due to the legislature by December 31, 2021. For information, contact Julia Cramer, 360-664-9073.

For further information, contact:
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Printed on 10-17-2020



Washington State Institute for Public Policy

The Washington State Legislature created the Washington State Institute for Public Policy in 1983. A Board of Directors—representing the legislature, the governor, and public universities—governs WSIPP and guides the development of all activities. WSIPP's mission is to carry out practical research, at legislative direction, on issues of importance to Washington State.