

## Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute

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### Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) Overview

In 2011, Seattle, Washington piloted the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program. LEAD, now growing across the country, is an evidence-based, collaborative, *pre-arrest* diversion program aimed at improving public safety by reducing drug use, drug selling, and the quality-of-life problems associated with open-air drug markets. The program focuses on providing harm reduction–oriented intensive case management, behavioral health, and substance abuse care rather than filing a criminal charge and seeking prosecution and incarceration.

**Collaboration:** LEAD requires a high level of collaboration between prosecutors, law enforcement, behavioral health providers, and a broad array of support service providers.

- Police officers use discretionary authority, based on prosecutorial agreements and risk assessments, at the point of contact to divert individuals with unmet behavioral health needs from the usual criminal justice sequence: arrest, prosecution, and incarceration.
- Eligible individuals engage in an evidence-based, intensive case management program.
- Case managers seek to engage and retain LEAD participants in community resources applicable to their individualized intervention plan, such as housing placement, medical care, legal advocacy, job training, and mental health and chemical dependency services.
- Prosecutors and law enforcement work with case managers to allow the use of a harm reduction approach; failure to participate in treatment can lead to discharge from the program and filing of the diverted charge.

**Pre-Arrest Diversion:** By diverting individuals at the point of contact, LEAD reduces harms related to arrest and the creation or expansion of a criminal history, such as:

- Expulsion from and lack of ability to obtain housing and employment;
- Aversive attitudes to justice involvement (complacency regarding consequences versus urgency of avoidance of justice involvement);
- Reduced access to public benefits (e.g., termination of Medicaid benefits); and
- Interruption and dissolution of family and supportive relationships.

**Program Success:** LEAD has shown great success for participants who have behavioral health and substance use needs. When compared to non-LEAD participants, LEAD participants are:

- Twice as likely to be sheltered in temporary or transitional housing;
- 89% more likely to have obtained permanent housing;
- 46% more likely to be on the employment continuum;
- 33% more likely to be connected to income/benefits subsequent to LEAD involvement; and
- **60% less likely of having at least one arrest following program entry.**<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Clifasefi, S., Lonczak, H., & Collins, S. (2017). Seattle's Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program. *Crime & Delinquency*, 63(4), 429–445.