



UNITED NATIONS  
*Office on Drugs and Crime*

# DRUG TREATMENT COURTS WORK!



# What are Drug Treatment Courts? (DTC)

Courts that aim to stop drug abuse and related criminal activity of offenders through court-directed treatment and rehabilitation programmes.

## How do they work?

- Eligible participants undergo treatment and rehabilitation programmes instead of traditional final sanctions such as imprisonment.
- The Court's multi-disciplinary justice and healthcare systems team—led by the judge as a leader among equals—oversees each participant's progress throughout.
- Compliance is objectively monitored by frequent substance-abuse testing. Compliance is rewarded and non-compliance sanctioned.
- Successful completion may lead to, e.g., suspension or dismissal of the criminal case, non-custodial sentence or probation.
- Recidivism or serious programme non-compliance usually leads to expulsion. The offender is then dealt with in the traditional criminal justice system.

## Do they all work the same way?

- There is no single universal DTC model. What works best in one place may not in another. But the core underlying characteristics remain the same.
- Some DTCs are newly established separate courts. Others are existing courts with specially adjusted procedures.
- DTC's have evolved in different forms to suit different needs, legal systems and localities.
- Key differences include eligibility criteria, when the case is diverted from prosecution, and end of programme outcomes.

## A growing movement

Courts applying key principles for court-directed treatment and rehabilitation programmes\* operate or are under consideration in:

**Australasia:** Australia, New Zealand

**Americas and Caribbean:** Barbados, Bermuda, Brazil, Canada, Cayman Islands, Chile, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, United States

**Europe:** Norway, Scotland, Ireland

\* See UNODC's Expert Working Group Report on DTC best practice, 1999, chapter 3, para 50:  
[http://www.unodc.org/pdf/lap\\_report\\_ewg\\_casework.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/pdf/lap_report_ewg_casework.pdf)

## DTC success factors

- Effective judicial leadership of the DTC team.
- Strong interdisciplinary team collaboration—each maintaining professional independence.
- Good knowledge of addiction, treatment and recovery by justice system team members, and of criminality by the healthcare members.
- Operational manual for consistency and efficiency.
- Clear participant eligibility criteria, with objective screening of potential participants.
- Detailed assessment of each potential participant.
- Fully informed/documentated consent of each participant to be admitted to DTC.
- Speedy referral of participants to treatment and rehabilitation following arrest.
- Swift, certain and consistent sanctions for non-compliance and rewards for compliance.
- Ongoing DTC programme evaluation, and willingness to make improvements.
- Sufficient, sustained and dedicated DTC funding.
- Changes in underlying substantive or procedural law, if necessary or appropriate.

## Evaluation

Evaluations consistently show that Drug Treatment Courts effectively reduce recidivism and underlying addiction problems of drug abusing offenders.

They provide closer, more comprehensive supervision and more frequent drug testing and monitoring during the programme than other forms of community supervision.

*“It costs approximately \$8,000 Canadian dollars per annum to provide substance abuse treatment to the Toronto Drug Treatment Court participant and \$45,000 to incarcerate the same participant for one year...”*

*“Only 11.6% of those who complete the drug court programme run into trouble again with the law.”* (Canada)

*“... From a sample of 17,000 drug court graduates nationwide, within one year of programme graduation, only 16.4% had been rearrested and charged with a felony offense.”* (USA)

*“A state taxpayer’s return on the upfront investment in drug courts is substantial. They are a more cost effective method of dealing with drug problems than either probation or prison.”* (USA)

*“The Court offers a high level of support and supervision in an endeavour to break the cycle of drug dependency, the commission of crime to finance the dependency, imprisonment and a return to drug dependency upon release from prison.”* (Australia)

*“Recidivism is significantly reduced for those who successfully complete the drug court programme ... the reductions in offending pre-and post-programme are greater for the drug court graduates than the comparison groups.”* (Australia)

# Testimonies

*“Public interest is best served by a situation where an individual manages to overcome an addiction and no longer needs to finance this addiction; then the cycle is broken.”*

(Drug Court Judge)

*“I want to thank the police officer for arresting me then; thanks to Drug Court and the team, now I got my life and my family back.”*

(Drug Court Graduate)

*“This is not soft on crime.*

*This is a programme that works.”* (State Auditor)

*“DTC participants improved in their physical and psychological health. They displayed lower substance use and increased social stability.”*

(Evaluator)

*“I either stopped or died. I took the chance. Going to court (regularly) got me into a structured life.”* (Drug Court Candidate)

*“It is great personal satisfaction to see someone who was a complete addict, written off by everybody, to go through the programme, do well and become a productive member of society.”*

(Prosecutor)

*“I hope that it (Drug Treatment Court) stays in the system so it can help others like myself. To help them bring their lives back on track.”*

(Drug Court Graduate)

# Some useful links

## UNODC

[http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/legal\\_advisory\\_courts.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/legal_advisory_courts.html)

## International Association of Drug Treatment Courts

<http://www.nadcp.org/iadtc/>

## National Association of Drug Court Professionals

<http://www.nadcp.org>

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