

**Washington State Institute for Public Policy**  
**The Costs and Benefits of Programs to Reduce Crime**

Prison treatment programs can be highly effective in reducing recidivism and associated costs to society. Specifically, residential drug treatment (with community aftercare), including the Bureau's Residential Drug Abuse Treatment Program, costs on average \$3,100, but produces a net cost savings of \$5,230 per inmate through lowered costs for arrest, conviction, incarceration, and supervision, and avoided crime victimization. This results in a benefit of \$2.69 for every \$1 of taxpayer money spent (benefit-cost ratio). In-prison vocational training costs on average \$1,960, but has a net cost savings of \$12,017 for each program participant (benefit-cost ratio of \$7.13). Correctional adult basic education programs cost on average \$1,972 per inmate and produce a net savings of \$9,176 per inmate (benefit-cost ratio of \$5.65).<sup>1</sup> Correctional industries cost on average \$777 per participant and produce a net savings of \$4,394 dollars per participant (benefit-cost ratio of \$6.65).<sup>2</sup>

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) completed several evaluations of rigorously designed research (that included control group and treatment group) of correctional programs. By including only the most rigorous and highly rated evaluations, the WSIPP studies provide confidence in the scientific reliability and validity of their findings. WSIPP included the Bureau of Prisons' assessment of work and vocational training programs and its evaluation of Residential Drug Treatment in their analysis, with both studies receiving the highest rating for study quality that an evaluation can receive without using random assignment.

Based on the best studies, WSIPP reported the following:

| <b>Program</b>                                 | <b>Program Cost<br/>(per inmate)</b> | <b>Net Cost Savings<br/>(Benefit)</b> | <b>Benefit-Cost<br/>Ratio</b> |
|--|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Residential Drug Treatment<br>(with aftercare) | \$ 3,100                             | \$ 5,230                              | \$ 2.69                       |
| Prison Vocational Training                     | \$ 1,960                             | \$12,017                              | \$ 7.13                       |
| Corrections Industries                         | \$ 777                               | \$ 4,394                              | \$ 6.65                       |
| Adult Basic Education                          | \$ 1,972                             | \$ 9,176                              | \$ 5.65                       |

*WSIPP Summary May 2012*

<sup>1</sup> Aos, Steve, Phipps, Polly, Barnoski, Robert and Lieb, Roxanne. (2001). The Comparative Costs and Benefits of Programs to Reduce Crime. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy. The study is available at <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/pub.asp?docid=01-05-1201>.

<sup>2</sup> Aos, Steve. (2005). Correctional Industries Programs for Adult Offenders in Prison: Estimates of Benefits and Costs. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy. This study is available at <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/pub.asp?docid=05-01-1202>.