

Drug Court

What is the cost for one person to go through drug court?

Missouri has 82 adult drug courts serving 99 counties.

Drug courts are a type of treatment court where a criminal justice-involved individual can choose to enroll in a drug treatment program run by a team including judicial personnel (e.g., judge, attorneys, parole officer), a treatment provider, a treatment court administrator, a case manager, and law enforcement. The program lasts at least 12 months. At the start, participants meet with the team at least once a week, and towards the end, they meet at least once a month ([MO Treatment Court Standards \(TCS\)](#)).

In 2022, 1,422 people joined drug court, and there were 4,213 active participants in MO ([OSCA 2022](#)). Eight out of ten drug court participants are high risk and high need (e.g. previously unsuccessful treatment, recurring criminal activity, chronic health problems, unemployed, homeless).

From 2013 to 2015, 70% of potential participants (defendants evaluated with the substance use screening tool) were admitted into drug court. Common reasons for non-admittance were the prosecutor denied admission, the defendant chose not to join, or the defendant was ineligible ([OSCA 2017](#)).

- Each drug court sets its eligibility criteria which must align with MO TCS ([MO TCS](#)).



Research Highlights

Missouri has a robust drug court system that uses standardized tools, reporting, and standards.

Graduating from drug court lowers recidivism rates which saves the state money in the long term.

The current cost of drug court is not known.

From 2008 to 2011, about half of drug court participants graduated from the program. Three years after graduation, the recidivism rate was 11%. The recidivism rate of the non-graduates was 23% ([OSCA 2017](#)).

Drug court costs have not been evaluated since the early 2000s.

Nationally, drug court costs (attending hearings, running the program, paying staff, jail or prison time) is around \$5,000 ([NIJ 2014](#); [King 2009](#)).

However, more costs must be considered. People in drug court are more likely to receive treatment for their substance use disorder (SUD) and receive eligible benefits which costs the state money. However, graduating from drug court results in lower recidivism rates than if the participant had not joined. Lower recidivism rates result in fewer arrests, incarcerations, and costs associated with victims which saves the state money ([NIJ 2014](#)).

Cost-benefit analyses show that this decreased recidivism results in about \$2 saved for every \$1 spent (**Figure 1**; [WSIPP 2023](#); [Rossman 2011](#)).

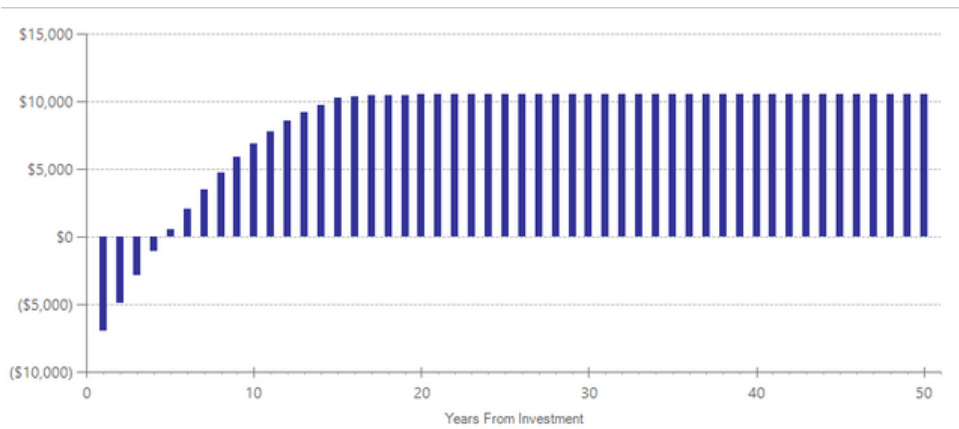


Figure 1. The blue bar shows cumulative net benefits. Successful participation in drug court results in future cost saving to the state totaling about \$10,000 per participant. Figure from [WSIPP 2023](#).

However, statistical analyses show that there is no consistent difference between the costs of someone attending drug court and someone going through normal processes. Higher cost savings were seen when offenders with violent histories or offenders reporting more frequent drug use were enrolled ([Rossman 2011](#)).

Limitation: The data used to inform the cost benefit analyses is from the early 2000s. There is no data on the current cost of operating a drug court and as processes may have changed in two decades it is not reasonable to assume that this data is reflective of the current costs of drug court.

All MO treatment courts must comply with a set of standards.

The MO TCS detail treatment court operations, responsibilities of the team, and expectations of participants.

Treatment Court. The goal of court is to integrate alcohol, drug, and mental health disorder treatment with justice system case processing. The program is carried out in five phases with the first phase addressing needs that will interfere with treatment compliance. Interim phases address needs that impact recidivism, enhance skills for living independently, and socialization. The final phase addresses continuing care before graduation.

Courts must use a standardized assessment of treatment needs and standardized evidence-based treatment programming (e.g. medication assisted treatment, counseling, anger management). Each court is evaluated for program goal achievement ([MO TCS](#)).

Team. The standards clarify the composition of the team and their roles, especially that of the judge, prosecution, and defense. It states avenues to creating partnerships with the community and establishes continuing interdisciplinary education requirements for the team ([MO TCS](#)).

Participants. The standards state who is eligible for treatment court. Treatment court is meant to target individuals who are high risk and high need and are identified using a standardized tool. People with violent histories, charged with drug dealing, or non-drug offenses are not automatically excluded. The standards detail how to impose sanctions and incentives and how to monitor abstinence. It also lists the services participants may access ([MO TCS](#)).

Adherence to these standards helps address common concerns with drug courts. Concerns include people risking incarceration to pursue treatment for a SUD, placing more people under criminal justice supervision, and perpetuating racial bias ([Social Science Research Council 2018](#); [Justice Policy Institute 2011](#)).

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