

Montana Peer Review Process

Background and Overview:

A peer review process was conducted with the Missoula Veterans Treatment Court on July 24 and 25, 2023 by Layla Eichler, Renee Boundy and Jeff Kushner. This report summarizes the highlights of the review process.

Summary of Best Practices:

The following practices that follow the 10 Key Components of Drug Court and NADCP's Adult Best Practice Standards (Volume I, 2013, Volume II, 2015) have been implemented by this program. They are based on research demonstrating that programs with these practices have more positive outcomes than other programs. Congratulations on your program's achievements in these areas!

A full set of practices that is utilized by this program is included at the end of this report with a best practices table.

1. The treatment team contains dedicated and experienced members who are highly motivated to support treatment court and are eager for tools to improve the court.
2. The veteran mentor program is very active and well-functioning. It acts as a catalyst for change.
3. When a participant has trouble meeting the expectations of the court, the treatment team exhausts all possibilities before they consider termination. It is very rare for participants to be terminated and the team works to impose sanctions that support change instead of being purely punitive.
4. The Veterans Administration treatment provider indicated a willingness to work towards meeting the standard that people are enrolled in treatment within 7 days of signing the treatment court contract (establish a priority).
5. Judge has a warm and approachable manner during court. He spends a minimum of three minutes (average was 5 minutes) with each participant. He is non-judgmental and engages the participants in goal setting.
6. The program is very good at dealing with responsiveness needs (housing insecurity, medication issues, mental health issues) so that the participants can concentrate on working on criminogenic needs and reduce recidivism (anti-social attitudes, peers, and behaviors, substance use issues, etc.).
7. The program uses an automated system to collect data (DIMS) and uses it to create reports for staffing. The data would also be available to make program decisions through a dashboard of performance indicators.
8. The percentage of graduates from the program is above the state average.
9. The policies and procedures, participant handbook, contract and other documents meet the best practice standards.
10. Team members have a good understanding of their role on the treatment team.
11. Coordinator does monthly recovery checkups with graduates. Graduates continue to contact the coordinator for help with resources.

12. The program encourages the development of recovery capital by focusing on recovery activities with every participant every time they appear in court.
13. Jail sanctions are used as a very last resort.
14. Judge regularly attends the pre-court staffing.
15. Defense attorney, county attorney, probation and parole officer, treatment providers, the Justice Veteran Outreach Specialist, and a substitute judge regularly attend pre-court staffing meetings.
16. All key team members attend court sessions/status review hearings either in person or virtually (Judge, prosecutor, defense attorney, treatment, program coordinator, and probation).
17. The drug court offers mental health treatment.
18. Program provides (or partners with service providers who provide) participants with legally prescribed psychotropic or addiction medication (MAT).
19. The minimum length of the drug court program is 12 months or more.
20. Drug test results are back in 2 days or less.
21. In the first phase of drug court, drug tests are collected at least 2 times per week.
22. Participants are expected to have greater than 90 days clean (negative drug tests) before graduation.
23. All members of the drug court team are provided with training in the drug court model.

Priority Recommendations:

The following section lists several areas that are not currently aligned with best practices. These are areas that could benefit from enhancements.

1. The Court must implement Title 46 Criminal Procedure, Chapter 1 General Provisions Part 2 requiring a fee and documentation of any waiving of said fee.
2. Provide training for team members. Explore the use of grant funds to attend the NADCP conference.
3. Access the 2022 state conference trainings (URL) and provide to team members.
4. Provide access to DIMS for probation officer and treatment providers so that they can input their data directly into the system for relevant reporting.
5. Schedule team meetings outside of staffing and court to discuss goals and objectives for the court moving forward. This time can also be used to review policies and procedures and other issues.
6. Continue to explore the use of outside providers to cut down the wait time participants experience before entering treatment.
7. Require the participants to complete a self-directed recovery management plan prior to entering phase 4. The state drug court coordinator has a recovery management plan format for this purpose. The drug court team should place focus on this plan so it will be used by the participant long after he/she graduates from the process.
8. Consider implementing the Family Strength and Need Assessment early in phase 1.
9. Treatment providers should provide information on Treatment attendance and absences, a brief progress note and recommendations to the judge and the court prior to the staffing meeting. This will allow the judge to ask relevant questions of the participant regarding their treatment from the bench.

10. Consider including a PBT when the UAs are called.
11. Implement a Steering/Advisory committee.
12. Consider having the Treatment Court Defense Counsel review contracts with all participants before program entry.
13. Develop a more formal process for issuing incentives and sanctions. This could serve to increase the number of incentives and more consistently applying both incentives and sanctions. Get participant feedback on what is most valued as an incentive.
14. Facilitate more team participation during the pre-court staffing meeting.
15. Provide more outreach to referral sources, specifically to OPD and private attorneys.
16. Review of data and/or regular reporting of program statistics should lead to modifications in drug court operations.

Participant Feedback:

An important part of the peer review process was to hear from program participants about their experiences with the program. During the visit, we spoke with several) participants. Here is a summary of their feedback.

Participants most like and appreciate the following parts of the program:

- All the participants expressed appreciation for Judge Marks and Rick Reed. The participants feel like they get good support and input.
- All the participants were highly favorable towards the veteran mentors.
- The participants expressed satisfaction with the collaborative nature of goal setting in court.
- The participants enjoyed the fishbowl but felt like regaining freedoms and meeting the judge's expectations were most rewarding.

Participants reported that the following parts of the program are most challenging for them:

- The participants expressed frustration with obtaining safe, stable housing.
- Some participants expressed frustration with the amount of time it took to start treatment.

Best Practices Table (attached):

Recommended Next Steps

The results of this peer review can be used for many purposes, including 1) improvement of program structure and practices for better participant outcomes (the primary purpose), 2) grant applications to demonstrate program needs or illustrate the program's capabilities, and 3) requesting resources from boards of county commissioners or other local groups.

- Distribute copies of the report** to all members of your team, advisory group, and other key individuals involved with your program.
- Set up a meeting** with your team and steering committee, etc., to discuss the report's findings and recommendations. Ask all members of the group to **read the report** prior to the meeting and **bring ideas and questions**. Peer will **facilitate** the meeting to prioritize goals and learning strategies.
- During the meeting(s), **review each recommendation**, discuss any questions that arise from the group, and develop a Learning Plan and a schedule to review educational content and court data.

- Complete an action plan on resolving recommendations presented in the report (example below):

Recommendation Action Plan Format

Please complete the following table for each recommendation. For any recommendation there may be multiple tasks in the action plan. [PLEASE INSERT THE KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS REPORT UNDER THE “RECOMMENDATION” COLUMNS BELOW]

Recommendation	Responsible individual, group, or agency	Action plan	Target dates	TA or training needed?
1. (RECOMMENDATION)				
2. (RECOMMENDATION)				
3. (RECOMMENDATION)				
4. (RECOMMENDATION)				

Responsible individual, group, or agency: Identify who is the focus of the recommendation, and who has the authority to make related changes.

Action plan: Describe the status of action related to the recommendation (some changes or decisions may already have been made). Identify which tasks have been assigned, to whom, and by what date they will be accomplished, or progress reviewed. Person: (Name)

- Task: (make sure tasks are specific, measurable, and attainable)
- Deadline or review date: (e.g., June 10th) the dates for some tasks should be soon (next month, next 6 months, etc.); others (for longer term goals for example) may be further in the future.
- Who will review: (e.g., advisory committee will review progress at its next meeting)

Target dates: Indicate the date that each task will be accomplished. Add task deadlines to the agendas of future steering committee meetings, to ensure they will be reviewed, or select a date for a follow-up review (in 3 or 6 months, for example), to discuss progress and challenges, and to establish new next steps, task lists, and review dates.

TA or training needed: Add a check mark in this column if training or technical assistance is needed to help address this recommendation. If technical assistance is needed or training, contact statewide drug court coordinator for support.

Send this completed form to the OCA within 30 days, please.