



Assessing Risks and Needs of Realigned Populations: Post-Release Community Supervision and Services

A first and essential step of California probation departments is to use risk and needs assessment for people being released back to the community from state prison under Post-Release Community Supervision (PRCS). It is good public safety policy to use validated assessment tools to assign offenders to the right level of probation monitoring and match them with evidence-based programs that address the specific criminal risk factors of the individual.

This brief looks at the work county probation departments do to prioritize resources towards higher risk offenders, and refer people to programs most likely to reduce recidivism. As realignment continues to be implemented in counties, it will be important to understand whether the full range of evidence-based practices from offender assessment to probation supervision to treatment completion are properly resourced. Although risk and needs assessments can help to make better supervision and referral choices, probation collaboration with community partners is important to ensure quality, availability, and capacity of programs in their community. Criminal justice research has shown that combining probation monitoring with effective treatment will yield the greatest recidivism reduction¹

What is Public Safety Realignment?

Enacted through California Assembly Bills 109 and 117, realignment gave counties responsibility to manage two populations of offenders who have been the responsibility of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). Post-Release Community Supervision (PRCS) and local prison offenders (1170h) share the fact they have been convicted of a felony offense that is non-serious, non-violent, and non-sexual.

For information, go to:
<http://www.cpoc.org/realignment>

STATIC RISK:

Supervision Levels Linked to the Assessed Risk of Offenders

Conducting risk assessments is the cornerstone of the probation business model. Validated risk/needs assessment tools compile elements of an offender's past criminal acts and demography as well as psychometric information to create a set of quantitative scores to assist probation officers in managing and case planning for offenders. Risk assessment allows departments to prioritize intensive supervision on higher risk offenders to keep the public safe. Conversely, it allows probation to shift low risk offenders into less intensive supervision services, which research shows has better outcomes for those less likely to recidivate. Over a 15-month period, 80% of the offenders released from prison as PRCS offenders, were assessed as high or moderate risk to recidivate (Figure 1), with 17% assessed as low risk to recidivate.^{2,3}

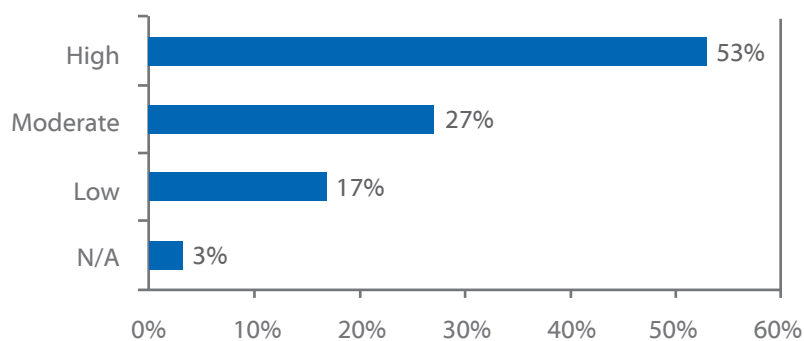
DYNAMIC NEEDS:

Services Linked to the Assessed Needs of Offenders

Assessing offenders for dynamic risk means determining what interventions or services will have the most impact on a particular offender at the time of the assessment, which is partly linked to a

concept called Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR). RNR means the static risk of re-offense and dynamic service needs of the offender inform the program that will best reduce that offender's risk of recidivating. This approach helps to tailor program offerings as well as offender referrals based on offender temperament, culture, and gender. This is an important development as it gives probation officers information about what interventions will do the most to reduce future crime for an offender. For county planning purposes, use of the aggregate needs of the offender population gives an insight into the amount and type of services needed in a jurisdiction. By using needs on the front end to create a menu of services for a county, offenders are more likely to be placed in the right kind of program. Making evidence-based programming referrals is only the first step. Programs must also deliver high quality, effective programming with fidelity to proven methods. Determining the level and range of services is an important component, along with the correct intensity of service. By adhering to principles of risk-need-responsivity with offenders, research shows counties can create plans and allocate appropriate funding to create quality programming across a number of areas which result in better outcomes.^{4,5,6}

FIGURE 1:
Risk Classification of PRCS Releases



APPLYING RISK NEEDS ASSESSMENT TO THE PRCS POPULATION

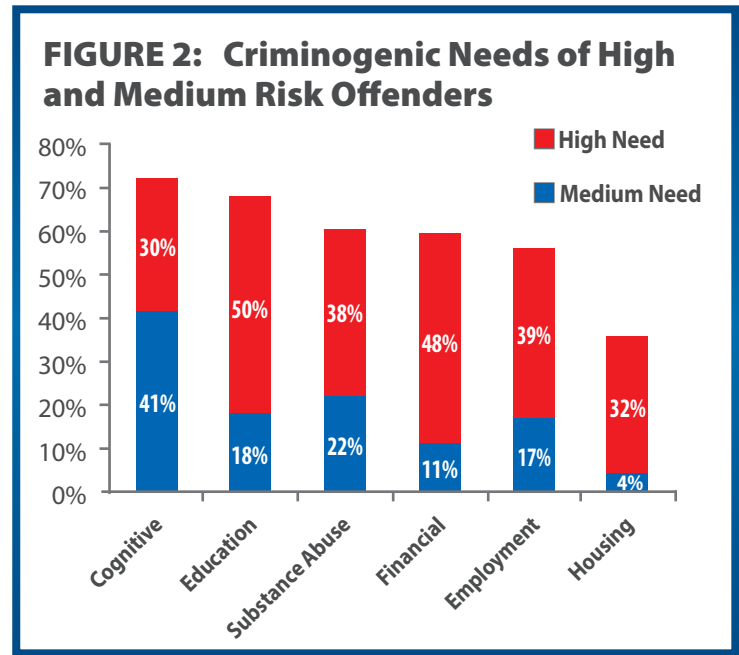
The population being released from prison as PRCS offenders, face challenges around education, antisocial attitudes and cognition, employability, mental health, substance abuse, and homelessness. Figure 2 shows the needs assessments of high and moderate risk offenders from CDCR's COMPAS needs assessment scores. ^{7,8}

Although offenders may need a wide range of services, research shows that services should focus on the "Big 4" criminogenic need areas in case plans: antisocial attitudes, antisocial peers, antisocial personality issues and impulse control. ⁹

72% had a high or medium need for cognitive interventions around criminal thinking.

Major risk factors for offenders tend to be associated with continued thought patterns or cycles that lead to recidivism. Antisocial attitudes, rationalizations for criminal activity, and defiance of authority can get in the way of progress in other areas of an offender's life. Additionally, associations with criminal peers and poor use of recreation time put offenders at risk. Classes and sessions in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) Programs address this need in an evidence based method that includes cognitive restructuring, as well as social and problem solving skill development.

68% had a high or medium need for education.



Nationwide surveys of incarcerated people show 60% completing high school, compared to 85% in the general public. ¹⁰ This low level of educational attainment is a major impediment to employment as inmates tended to have lower reading and quantitative skills, which translates into a cycle of unemployment and idle time. By placing offenders in GED, high school, or college programs and developing their skills, offenders are better able to pursue jobs and use these skills in other areas of their life.

61% had a high or medium need for substance abuse programming.

With incarcerated people having a substance abuse rate substantially higher than the general public, treatment options must target specific types of addiction, as well address it in a dose proven to be effective. Surveys of state prison inmates found only 22% of prisoners received drug treatment during their prison term, despite having treatment needs as they exited prison.¹¹ Although money put into treatment can have a positive impact on offender outcomes, not all programs are evidence-based, or delivered in a way that is backed by research. The programs can be either inpatient where the offender check into a dedicated facility or outpatient in settings such as day reporting centers or community based treatment centers.

56% had a high or medium need for vocation and employment assistance.

Referrals to employment programs focus on offering offenders transitional opportunities for job placement, as well as building job skills. Programs in this area recruit community businesses to serve as a hiring pool which gives offenders access to job opportunities that they otherwise would not have. By improving their employability with resume writing classes and other workforce development opportunities, offenders can begin to better prepare for life in the working world.

36% had a high or medium need for residential services, and 59% for financial assistance.

When residential and financial needs are stabilized, other services can be effective. Homelessness and poverty are common attributes of former prisoners re-entering society, such that other interventions have been found to be ineffective without basic needs being fulfilled. Residential services include housing vouchers and assistance in finding stable or independent living. Financial assistance can be in accessing government services, medical insurance, or social security benefits.

20% of PRCS clients have diagnosed mental health needs.

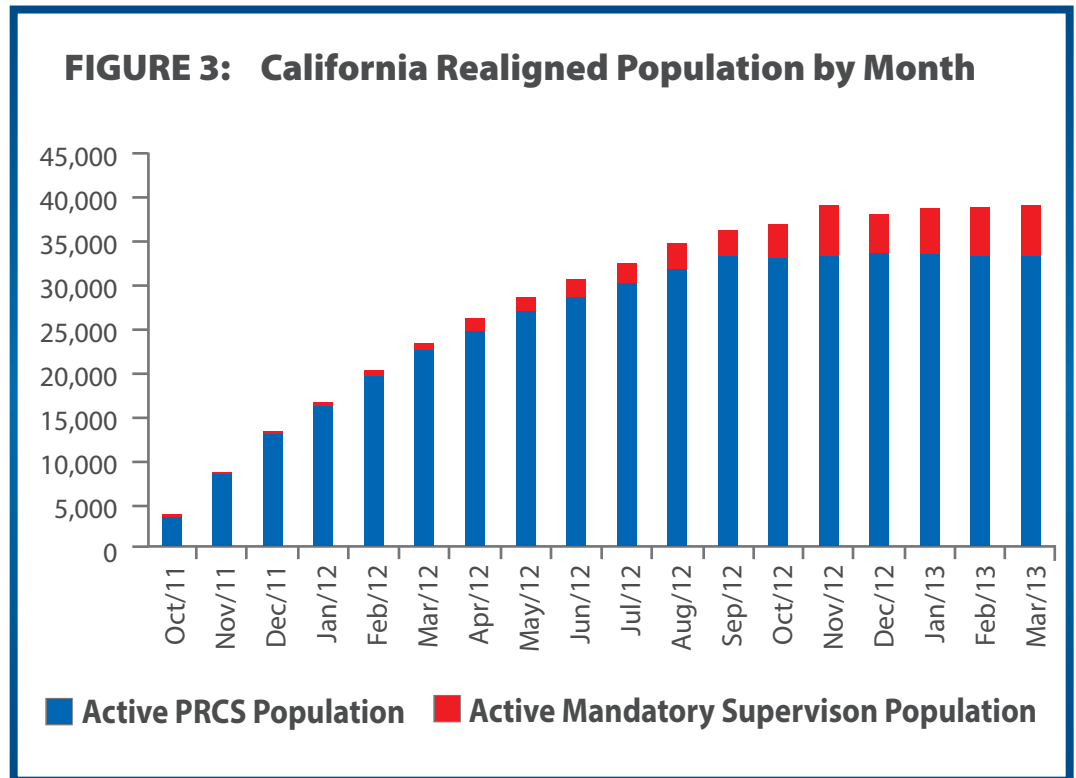
Other interventions are shown to be less effective when the underlying mental health issues are not addressed. Based on CDCR mental health assessments, approximately 4% of PRCS offenders who are released to counties have intensive, acute mental health needs, while an additional 16% have somewhat less intensive mental health issues, but are considered stable. Research studies have shown that around 50% of offenders who had mental health needs received services while in custody. As they return to California counties, this translates into mentally ill PRCS offenders needing long term and ongoing treatment for illnesses including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and depression.^{12, 13}

THE BALANCED APPROACH TO REALIGNMENT

California probation departments have made a commitment to the use of evidence-based practices to match offender's assessed needs with appropriate services, and structure supervision around an offender's relative risk to reoffend. Research shows these strategies and techniques will be successful with the realigned populations, but there also needs to be an emphasis on funding and sustaining their expansion to other population in the adult criminal justice system to make the system successful and our communities safer. By using validated risk assessments at the

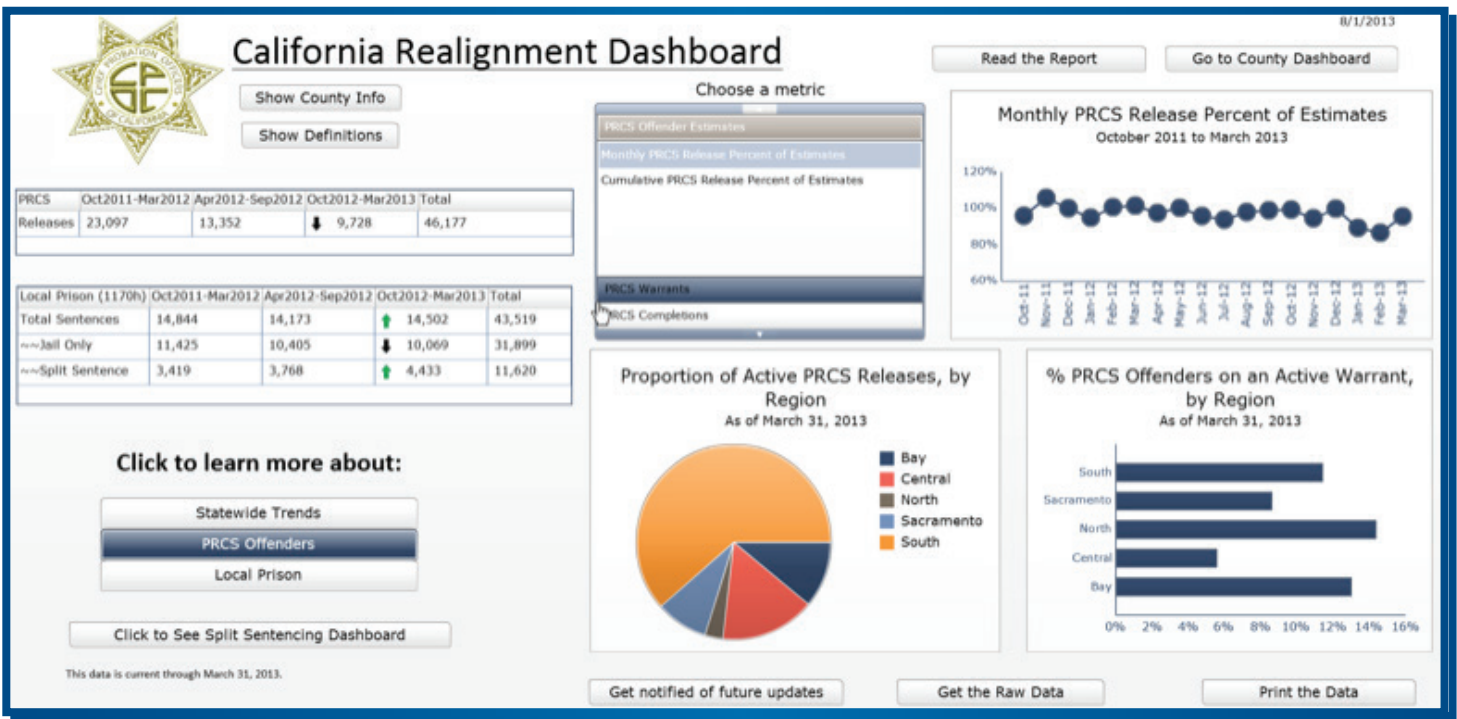
beginning of working with realigned offenders (Figure 3), probation departments can employ a level of supervision that keeps the public safe, as well as provides service referrals based on the factors most likely to reduce recidivism.

Even with proper funding, probation needs access to programs that follow evidence-based models and deliver services to offenders with a high level of fidelity to the program model.



The long term effectiveness of this approach hinges on local Community Corrections Partnerships (CCP) funding programs that are responsive to the needs of that community. This means less victimization, greater probation success, and better use of taxpayer dollars. A properly funded probation delivery system that provides high quality assessment, case planning, supervision, and the sufficient capacity and types of evidence-based interventions that matches the offender population is a sound investment of public safety dollars.

To interact with the statewide realignment data, go to www.cpoc.org.



For questions about this report, please email cpoc@cpoc.org, or visit our website at <http://www.cpoc.org/realignment>

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¹ Aos, S., Miller, M., & Drake, E., (2006) Evidence-Based Adult Corrections Programs: What Works and What Does Not. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

² Turner, S., Hess, J., & Jannetta, J. (2009). Development of the California Static Risk Assessment Instrument (CSRA). University of California, Irvine, Center for Evidence-Based Corrections.

³ Data is based on static risk assessment records of 35,318 PRCS from January 2012 to March 2013 from the California State Risk Assessment (CSRA) administered by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) during PRCS inmates stay in state prison. Although counties assess PRCS offenders for risk upon arrival to a county, there is no database of county-level assessment data, such that CDCR assessments were used to illustrate the risk and needs of PRCS offenders returning to counties. 98% of all PRCS offenders were assessed during their term of incarceration, such that it makes a useful proxy for understanding the risk profile at the time of prison release.

⁴ Bonta, J., & Andrews, D. A. (2007). Risk-Need-Responsivity Model for Offender Assessment and Rehabilitation. Rehabilitation, 06.

⁵ Crites, E. L., & Taxman, F. S. (2013). The Responsivity Principle: Determining the Appropriate Program and Dosage to Match Risk and Needs. In Simulation Strategies to Reduce Recidivism (pp. 143-166). Springer New York.

⁶ Andrews, D. A., "Enhancing Adherence to Risk Need-Responsivity: Making Quality a Matter of Policy," Criminology and Public Policy 5 (2006): 595-602;

⁷ Although 98% of PRCS offenders in the California prison system were assessed for risk, not all were assessed for dynamic needs. Cognitive and educational scores were given to 3,500 PRCS offenders, implying we can be 95% sure of a confidence interval of +/-1.5 percentage points. In this document, the percentages are used to give a general idea of the profile of PRCS offenders, with actual county assessments offering current and more complete information.

⁸ CDCR COMPAS Assessment Fact Sheet, (2009) http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/rehabilitation/docs/FS_COMPAS_Final_4-15-09.pdf

⁹ Bonta, J., Rugge, T., Scott, T. L., Bourgon, G., and Yessine, A. K. (2008). Exploring the Black Box of Community Supervision. Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, 47(3), 248-270

¹⁰ California Legislative Analyst Office. (2008) From Cellblocks to Classrooms: Reforming Inmate Education To Improve Public Safety.

¹¹ Davis LM, et al. (2011). Understanding the Public Health Implications of Prisoner Reentry in California: State-of-the-State Report, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation.

¹² PRCS Monthly Dashboards: http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/realignment/PRCS_Health_Care_Information.html

¹³ CDCR Mental Health Services Delivery System. <http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/dchcs/docs/mental%20health%20program%20guide.pdf>