

Costs and Benefits: Making the Case for Investing in Prevention

Many policy makers and providers are often reticent to invest in prevention and promotion interventions—either because they are skeptical or unaware of the actual benefits derived from such policies and programs. In these financially strapped times, it is important that community-based organizations and other stakeholders possess cost effectiveness data so they can make the case for funding.

This fact sheet provides figures from a cost-benefit analysis of prevention and promotion programs that were presented for use by Washington State. At the request of the legislature, Steve Aos and colleagues at the Washington State Institute for Public Policy developed methods and calculated the costs and benefits of several prevention and early intervention programs being utilized for improving outcomes for youth.

The table below shows savings found in seven outcome areas; crime, substance use, educational achievement, teen pregnancy, teen suicide attempts, child abuse or neglect, and domestic violence. Other public health outcomes were not considered in the calculations. The interventions are categorized by the target setting/type of program.

Program	Benefits	Costs	Benefits per dollar of cost	Benefits minus costs
Pre-Kindergarten Education Programs				
Early Childhood Education for Low Income 3 and 4 Year Olds	\$17,202	\$7,301	\$2.36	\$9,901
HIPPY (Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters)	\$3,313	\$1,837	\$1.80	\$1,476
Parents as Teachers	\$4,300	\$3,500	\$1.23	\$800
Child Welfare/Home Visitation Programs				
Nurse Family Partnership for Low Income Women	\$26,298	\$9,118	\$2.88	\$17,180
Home Visiting Programs for At-risk Mothers and Children	\$10,969	\$4,892	\$2.24	\$6,077
Parent-Child Interaction Therapy	\$4,724	\$1,296	\$3.64	\$3,427
Youth Development Programs				
Seattle Social Development Project	\$14,426	\$4,590	\$3.14	\$9,837
Guiding Good Choices (formerly PDFY)	\$7,605	\$687	\$11.07	\$6,918
Strengthening Families Program for Parents and Youth 10-14	\$6,656	\$851	\$7.82	\$5,805
Child Development Project	\$448	\$16	\$28.42	\$432
Good Behavior Game	\$204	\$8	\$25.92	\$196
Mentoring Programs				
Big Brothers/Big Sisters	\$4,058	\$4,010	\$1.01	\$48
Big Brothers/Big Sisters (taxpayer cost only)	\$4,058	\$1,236	\$3.28	\$2,822
Youth Substance Abuse Prevention Programs				
Adolescent Transitions Program	\$2,420	\$482	\$5.02	\$1,938

Project Northland	\$1,575	\$152	\$10.39	\$1,423
Life Skills Training (LST)	\$746	\$29	\$25.61	\$717
Minnesota Smoking Prevention Program	\$511	\$5	\$102.29	\$506
Other Social Influence/Skills Building Substance Prevention Programs	\$492	\$7	\$70.34	\$485
Project Towards No Tobacco Use (TNT)	\$279	\$5	\$55.84	\$274
Teen Pregnancy Prevention				
Teen Outreach Program	\$801	\$620	\$1.29	\$181
Juvenile Offender Programs				
Dialectical Behavior Therapy (in Washington)	\$32,087	\$843	\$38.05	\$31,243
Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (v. regular group care)	\$26,748	\$2,459	\$10.88	\$24,290
Adolescent Diversion Project	\$24,067	\$1,777	\$13.54	\$22,290
Functional Family Therapy (in Washington)	\$16,455	\$2,140	\$7.69	\$14,315
Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST)	\$14,996	\$5,681	\$2.64	\$9,316

The programs included in the above chart do not include all of the programs that Aos and colleagues showed to be cost effective. Additionally, several programs that were evaluated were shown to cost the government more than the benefits accrued.

Source: Aos, S., Lieb, R., Mayfield, J., Miller, M. & Pennucci, A. (2004). Benefits and costs of prevention and early intervention programs for youth. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy. Retrieved from <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/04-07-3901.pdf>.

This fact sheet was developed by Mental Health America and the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors with support from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services (SAMHSA/CMHS). The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the opinions of SAMHSA/CMHS or any other Federal entity.