



SAN FRANCISCO COLLABORATIVE COURTS

COSTS AND BENEFITS OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH COURT

Findings from “Examining Program Costs and Outcomes of San Francisco’s Behavioral Health Court”

By Arley Lindberg, MSW, May 2009

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH COURT

Behavioral Health Court (BHC) was created in 2002 in response to the increasing number of mentally ill defendants cycling through San Francisco’s jails and courts. Through a combination of judicial supervision, collaborative decision making among partner agencies, and intensive case management, BHC seeks to reduce recidivism by helping defendants with serious mental illness access community treatment.

COSTS AND BENEFITS

This study is among the few independent fiscal analyses of mental health courts in the United States. A comprehensive cost benefit model, developed by the California Administrative Office of the Courts and NPC Research Inc.¹ for the evaluation of drug courts, was utilized as the foundation for this analysis.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

Sample: 94 Behavioral Health Court participants who entered the program in the years 2005 and 2006. Criminal justice and mental health treatment data for these participants serve as the basis of the study.

Costs: BHC operating costs are based on 2008 rates for court session costs, personnel costs, and costs associated with jail days and probation days for an annual caseload of 206 participants.

Comparison I – Comparing Outcomes: Annual criminal justice costs (arrests, police and jail bookings, jail days, court cases adjudicated in traditional court, and days on probation) are compared to mental health treatment costs (all services billed by San Francisco’s Department of Public Health during the study period) before and after BHC program entry.

Comparison II – Comparing Operating Costs & Outcomes: Annual BHC operating costs are compared to savings associated with criminal justice and mental health treatment outcomes (as determined in Comparison I).

KEY FINDINGS

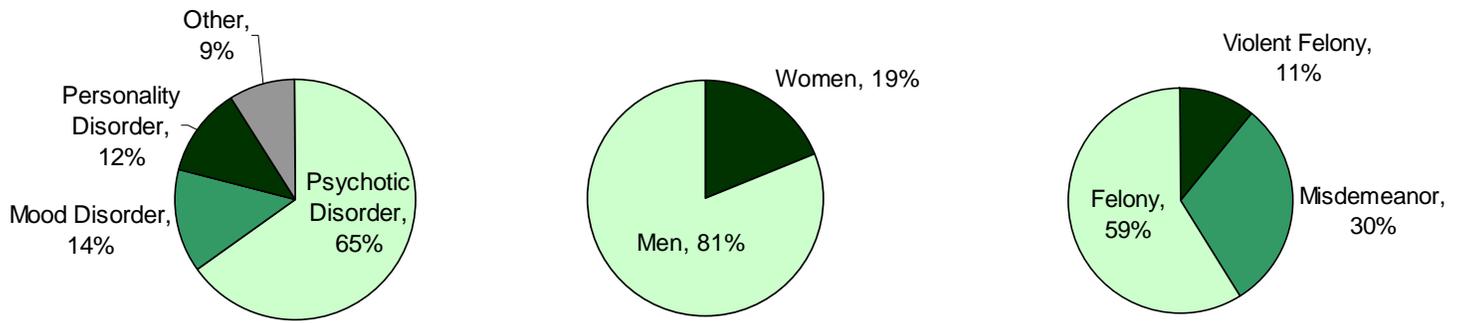
▶ **Majority are men with psychotic disorders facing felony charges.**

▶ **The annual operating cost of San Francisco’s Behavioral Health Court is \$2.49 million.** Jail days between program entry and release into the community represent 53 percent of annual operating costs.

▶ **In all three years post program entry, BHC generates hundreds of thousands of dollars in savings to the criminal justice system.** In the third year post-BHC entry, savings accrued from *both* criminal justice and mental health outcomes for an annual savings of more than \$2.7 million.

▶ **In the third year after participants entered BHC, criminal justice and mental health treatment savings completely offset annual BHC operating costs resulting in a net benefit of \$277,000.**

Study Sample: Majority are men with psychotic disorders facing felony charges



Annual BHC Operating Cost: \$2,492,774

BHC operating costs include court session costs, personnel costs, and costs associated with jail days and probation days for an average annual caseload of 206 clients.

BHC ADMINISTRATIVE AGENCIES & PROGRAM ACTIVITIES	TOTAL ANNUAL COSTS
Agency	Personnel Related Costs + BHC Court Session Costs
Superior Court	\$179,972
Public Defender	\$250,199
District Attorney	\$201,619
Adult Probation Department	\$139,244
Jail Psychiatric Services	\$316,363
Citywide Case Management	\$32,923
Program Activity	Activity Cost x Average Annual BHC Caseload (N=206)
Probation Days	\$43,754
Jail Days (waiting for community placement)	\$1,328,700
Total Operating Costs	\$2,492,774
Operating Costs Per Person	\$12,101

Jail days represent 53 percent of BHC annual operating costs

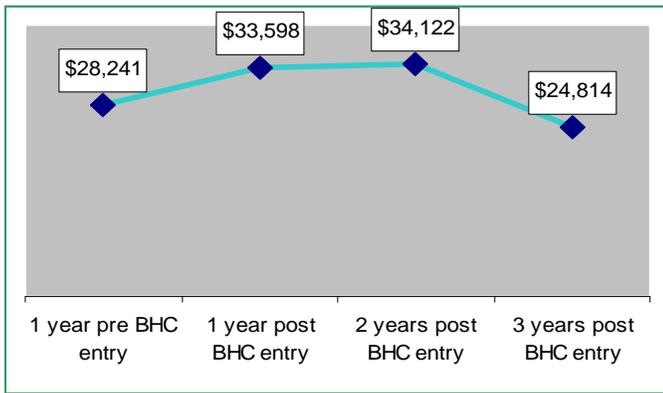
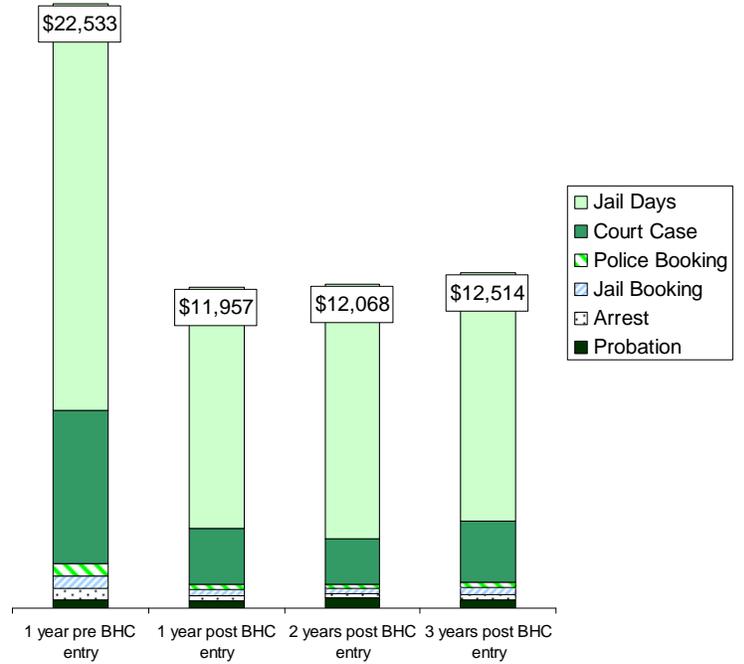
To ensure a seamless continuum of care, BHC clients are screened for eligibility in jail and are not released from custody until Jail Psychiatric Services has located intensive case management services and a housing placement in the community. As budget cuts limit resources, BHC clients may wait longer in custody thereby increasing BHC operating costs.

COMPARISON I: Comparing Criminal Justice and Mental Health Treatment Outcomes

BHC seeks two primary outcomes: reduced recidivism (associated with decreased costs) and increased mental health treatment participation (associated with increased costs). By comparing criminal justice costs and mental health treatment costs pre- and post-BHC entry, this study determines the savings associated with these two program outcomes.

Per person criminal justice costs decreased by nearly 50 percent post-BHC entry ▶

Due to reduced recidivism, criminal justice costs per offender decreased by 47 percent in the first year post-BHC entry in comparison to the year prior. Although costs increased slightly in the second and third years post-BHC entry, they remained nearly 50 percent lower than the average per person cost pre-BHC entry.



Per person mental health treatment costs increased in the two years post program entry

As clients increasingly engaged in mental health treatment, annual treatment costs increased by \$5,357 per client, from \$28,241 in the year prior BHC entry to \$33,598 in the first year post entry. This increase extended into the second year. However, by the third year, mental health treatment costs decreased to below pre-BHC levels, resulting in a per offender savings of \$3,427.

BHC generated \$2.7 million in savings in the 3rd year post program entry (N=206 clients)

In the first and second years post-BHC entry, decreases in criminal justice costs offset increases in mental health treatment costs, resulting in a net benefit. By the third year post entry, savings accrued from *both* criminal justice and mental health outcomes for an annual savings of more than \$2.7 million.

COSTS

SAVINGS

Year	Treatment Cost	Criminal Justice Savings	Total Savings
1st yr post	-\$1,103,542	\$2,178,656	\$1,075,114
2nd yr post	-\$1,211,486	\$2,155,790	\$944,304
3rd yr post	\$705,962	\$2,063,914	\$2,769,876

COMPARISON II: Comparing Operating Costs and Outcome Savings

The table below compares the annual operating cost of Behavioral Health Court to the annual savings resulting from criminal justice and mental health treatment outcomes (as described in Comparison I). In the first two years post-BHC entry, operating costs exceeded program outcome savings, resulting in net costs, as compared to the year prior to BHC entry. However, in the third year post-BHC entry, program outcome savings exceeded operating costs, resulting in an annual net benefit of \$277,102.

Outcome savings exceed annual operating costs in 3rd year post-BHC entry

Year	Operating Costs	Outcome Savings	Operating Costs – Outcome Savings =Net Costs or Net Savings
1 yr post BHC entry	\$2,492,774	\$1,075,114	→ Total net costs: \$1,417,630
2 yrs post BHC entry	\$2,492,774	\$944,304	→ Total net costs: \$1,548,470
3 yrs post BHC entry	\$2,492,774	\$2,769,876	→ Total net <u>savings</u> : \$277,102



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The research findings presented in this brochure derive from Ms. Lindberg’s cost study of San Francisco’s Behavioral Health Court, completed as part of her Masters in Social Welfare program and internship with the Administrative Office of the Courts, Collaborative Justice Unit.

Brochure co-authored by Maria McKee, MPP, Policy & Program Analyst, San Francisco Collaborative Courts.

The **San Francisco Collaborative Courts** office was created in 2006 to oversee the adult and juvenile collaborative court programs that serve San Francisco. **Behavioral Health Court** is a collaboration of the following agencies: Superior Court of California, County of San Francisco; Department of Public Health; Office of the District Attorney; Office of the Public Defender; Adult Probation Department; Sheriff’s Department; Police Department, Jail Psychiatric Services; Citywide Case Management Forensics; and numerous community-based service providers.

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¹ www.npcresearch.com NPC Research Inc., based in Portland Oregon, delivers human services research, evaluation, training, and technical assistance.