



CARDS, CREDIT and MERIT – A comparison of court based diversion initiatives in three states

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Court Assessment & Referral Drug Scheme (CARDS)

- Context

- Commenced in June 2004, complements PDDI and Drug Court

- Intended outcomes

- Decrease drug related crime, illicit drug use and improve health & social functioning

- Eligibility

The person:

- was arrested for possession or use of an illicit drug, excluding indictable drug offences, or
- committed the crime whilst under the influence of an illicit or licit drug, excluding alcohol, or
- committed the offence to support an illicit drug habit.

Court Assessment & Referral Drug Scheme (CARDS)

- Referral

- Anyone involved with defendant can suggest a referral in Court, final decision lies with magistrate
- Self referral

- Program requirements

- Participant to complete 4 sessions of counselling in 3 month period

Comparing Interventions

Feature	CREDIT Victoria	MERIT New South Wales	CARDS South Australia
Target Group	Less serious offenders	Less serious offenders	Less serious offenders
Required treatment time	Approx. 10 weeks	Approx. 12 weeks	Approx. 12 weeks
Location	State wide	Rural (Pilot) Now State wide	1 regional, multiple Metro sites
Guilty Plea Required	No	No	No (unless Bond option is chosen)
Evaluation	Process	Process Impact Outcome	Process Impact Outcome
Court	Local	Local	Local
Program Requirements	8 Counselling sessions	Counselling plus 8 group sessions	assessment + 4 counselling sessions

Demographics and outcomes

- Gender - between 75-80% males in all three programmes
- Age - a significant majority on each programme were aged 35 or less
- Indigenous - CARDS and MERIT had similar proportions of Indigenous clients (15% and 16.1% respectively) whilst CREDIT had 2%
- Drug Use - CARDS clients nominated Amphetamine (54.4%) as their principal drug used, followed by Heroin (25.9%) and Cannabis (12.2%)
- CREDIT clients almost exclusively nominated Heroin as their principal drug used (99%)
- MERIT clients nominated Heroin (50.4%) as the principal drug, followed by Cannabis (22.6%) and Amphetamine (18.4%)
- Client Outcomes CARDS 58.3% Completed
MERIT 50.4% Completed
CREDIT 49.0% Completed

Emerging Issues

- Interagency collaboration
 - Satisfaction with communication
 - Equity
- Role of The Court
 - Viewed by some as a complicated process; and
 - Adding to Court burden

Emerging Issues

- Acceptance of Therapeutic Jurisprudence

“Who runs the court me or this group of counsellors, social workers ... I think even subconsciously there may be a ground warfare going on in our minds and consciously we are required ultimately to make a decision. ... If the decision we ultimately come to is put it in the hands of some other group you are going to find I think, that issue needs to be addressed. Not just the CARDS program, but with all the specialist court programs ... What’s become of our role as Magistrates?”

Issues continued

- Low referrals
 - Identifying Appropriate Defendants
 - Busy Court
 - Not easily able to identify if the defendant has a drug issue
 - Number of Indigenous Referrals
 - Services appropriateness and acceptance
 - Scepticism of clients participation
 - Format of Scheme inappropriate
 - Eligibility
 - Violent offences

Issues continued

- Program model and requirements
 - Appointment rescheduling
 - Treatment period
 - Short Court adjournment

Summary

- Programs are broadly comparable
- Similar issues emerge
- Programs clearly ‘work’ for some participants
- Key challenges include:
 - continued, inclusive debate about the appropriateness, acceptance and limitations of therapeutic jurisprudence
 - developing agreed program models suited to client need