

BRIEF: APPLYING THE EVIDENCE

STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS OPIOID USE DISORDER IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND CHILD WELFARE SETTINGS



KEY STRATEGY 2

ACCESS TO MEDICATION FOR OPIOID USE DISORDER (M-OUD) IN TREATMENT COURTS

TREATMENT COURTS or drug courts, are specialized dockets for criminal defendants, juveniles, and parents with pending child welfare cases who have “alcohol and other drug dependency problems.”¹

TO SAVE LIVES, treatment courts can adopt evidence-based strategies to address substance use disorder, including ensuring access to methadone, buprenorphine, and naltrexone, the three **medications** approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the recognized standard of care for treating opioid use disorder.²

FIGURE 1: Treatment Courts Distance to M-OUD Providers (km)

Drug Courts: Distance to M-OUD providers (km): ■ ≤14.6 ■ 14.7-41.3 ■ 41.4-81.7 ■ 81.8-190.7 ■ 190.8+



FIGURE 2: Number of M-OUD Providers by County

Number of M-OUD Providers by County: □ 0 □ 1 □ 2 □ 3-4 □ 5-9 □ 10+ | + Drug Courts



Maps developed for this Report by American Institutes for Research (AIR). SOURCES: Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreet Map contributors and the GIS User Community. Data Source: <http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov> and National Association of Drug Court Professionals. Figure 1 illustrates the distance between treatment courts and M-OUD providers across the country. Figure 2 maps out the number of M-OUD providers by county in relation to the location of treatment courts.

MEDICATION SAVES MONEY AND LIVES: An analysis of crime costs in California estimated that treating criminal justice-involved persons with methadone or buprenorphine, as opposed to detoxification alone, **saved nearly \$18,000 per person over six months.**³

COURTS CAN ADOPT THE FOLLOWING KEY PRINCIPLES TO ADVANCE EVIDENCE-BASED TREATMENT

- 1. No court should** prohibit participation in medication-based treatment or require participants to refrain from using medication as a term or condition of successful completion of a drug court program.
- 2. Courts can play** a central role in reducing barriers to treatment, particularly in rural areas, by providing affirmative access and linkage to medications for opioid use disorder.
- 3. Courts can promote** expanded access to diversion programs, including for people convicted or accused of a felony.
- 4. Approaches must be** solution-focused, evidence-based and trauma informed.
- 5. A central body** in each state should certify treatment courts using evidence-based standards.
- 6. Treatment courts** are one tool in a holistic system of diversion and deflection; treatment for substance use disorder should be provided outside of the criminal justice system entirely wherever possible.