

Box 2. Drug treatment courts in Australia

The Australian state of New South Wales first created drug courts in 1999. Offenders may be directed to drug courts if they meet the eligibility criteria regarding the kind of offence committed (drug supply and sexual assault prevent inclusion) and proven dependence on drugs. The drug court offers a treatment programme as an alternative to imprisonment on condition that the offender pleads guilty. Compliance with treatment is strictly regulated through urine testing and regular reports to the court. The 1-year programme includes a stabilization phase (3 months), including access to opioid substitution therapy if needed; a consolidation phase (3 months) to develop life and job skills; and a reintegration phase (6 months) where the offender should reintegrate into the community and secure employment.

An evaluation has shown that people who entered the programme were less likely to have further convictions, especially if they successfully completed it (the likelihood of a subsequent conviction for crimes against a person was 23% for the control group and 9% for those who completed treatment; for crimes against property, the likelihoods were 44% and 39% respectively). Cost-benefit analyses also showed that drug courts were as cost-effective as conventional sanctions in delaying time to the first offence and more cost-effective in reducing the frequency of subsequent offending.