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# The Issues Examined

*Your Statutory Expert in Substance Abuse and Mental Health*



## **Invest in Community Substance Abuse Treatment: Reduce Prison Costs by \$639 Million**

*"The next great opportunity to reduce crime is to provide treatment and training to inmates with substance abuse addictions. Inmates will return to a life of criminal activity unless they, upon release, have access to treatment and continuing aftercare." -Excerpted from the Florida Substance Abuse and Mental Health Corporation 2007 Annual Report*

Substance use disorders are a driving factor in the incidence of crime in Florida and the increase in the state's prison population. **Approximately two-thirds of those admitted to Florida prisons have substance abuse problems**, and during FY 2005-06, more than a quarter of new admissions were for drug-related crimes.

Despite the increase in the number of offenders who need substance abuse treatment, cuts in state and federal funding have forced the Florida Department of Corrections (DOC) to continue to reduce treatment services. Because of the lack of treatment capacity, 82% of the 26,872 inmates released from prison in FY 2007-2008 needed substance abuse treatment but had not received it.

In FY 2008-09 alone, **the Department's funding for residential substance abuse drug treatment programs was cut by \$3.7 million**. As a result, the DOC's ability to fully operate its 1,876 contracted residential substance abuse beds was severely jeopardized. This latest funding reduction equates to the loss of approximately 200 residential treatment beds with the capacity to serve about 500 offenders with identified substance abuse services needs.

### **A Short-Sighted Tradeoff**

National research has found strong evidence that substance abuse treatment for those in the criminal justice system will result in:

- **Reduced recidivism and re-incarceration costs**
- Increased public safety
- Reduced healthcare and other social services costs
- Increased employment of those who complete treatment

A 2007 report by the Florida Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability also found that **male offenders who completed the Department of Corrections' substance abuse treatment programs had lower recidivism rates than those who did not complete the programs.**

In 2005, the DOC reported a 94% success rate for offenders who completed treatment while on community supervision in FY 2001-2002. These offenders had no record of recommitment to prison or supervision for a new offense two years after their release.

### **A Cost-Saving Solution**

With its deepening revenue crisis, Florida can't afford to continue building the prison beds needed to house a growing prison population. Based on State Criminal Justice Estimating Conference projections, the state will have to spend \$2.3 billion over the next five year to build the 33,700 prison beds that are needed.

To help reduce the number of offenders entering the corrections system, DOC is proposing that the Legislature earmark \$74.8 million for community substance abuse treatment for probationers over the next five years.

Through this \$74.8 million investment, it is **estimated 27.9%, or \$639 million, of the \$2.3 billion prison construction bill could be avoided by reducing admissions of offenders with substance use disorders.** The figure includes \$222 million in savings in prison operations and an additional \$492 in new prison bed construction.

Increased funding for substance abuse treatment would yield other cost-savings as well. It is conservatively estimated that **every dollar invested in addiction treatment yields a return of \$4 to \$7** in reduced drug-related crime, criminal justice costs and theft, according to the National Institutes of Health.

Florida Substance Abuse and Mental Health Corporation

A non-profit corporation created by the Legislation (Florida Statutes, 394.655) to oversee the state's publicly funded substance abuse and mental health services and to make annual recommendations to the Governor and Legislature on policies designed to improve coordination and cost effectiveness of these systems. The Governor, President of the Senate and Speaker of the House appoint its 12 directors.

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