



OJJDP FACT SHEET

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Community Assessment Centers

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Communities across America are looking for more effective and efficient ways to identify and help juveniles who are at risk of becoming serious, violent, and chronic offenders. Because there are many causes of juvenile delinquent behavior and many system deficiencies, support is growing for integrated service delivery systems. Communities are also working to better determine the needs of youth already in the juvenile justice system and those at risk of entering the system.

Community Assessment Centers (CAC's), which complement the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders, address these challenges by bringing together the fragmented elements of service delivery in a collaborative, timely, cost-efficient, and comprehensive manner. OJJDP believes that CAC's show promise to help overcome the obstacles that contribute to inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the juvenile justice system.

In fiscal year 1996, OJJDP selected four CAC demonstration sites: two communities (Denver, CO, and Lee County, FL) to plan a CAC and two communities (Jefferson County, CO, and Orlando, FL) to enhance their current assessment center programs. As part of OJJDP's CAC initiative, a 2-year independent evaluation was awarded to the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD). In addition, the Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association was selected to provide training and technical assistance to CAC grantees.

The CAC Concept

OJJDP's program development process has identified four key elements that have the potential to positively impact the lives of youth and prevent them from becoming serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenders: a single point of entry, immediate and comprehensive assessments, integrated case management, and a comprehensive and integrated management information system (MIS). The demonstration sites are implementing these elements in their CAC programs.

Single Point of Entry

CAC's seek to serve both at-risk and delinquent youth and their families by integrating the services of multiple agencies through

the creation of an actual or virtual "one-stop shop." Goals of this single point of entry include reducing duplication of services, increasing system efficiency, and improving access.

Immediate and Comprehensive Assessment

As noted in OJJDP's *Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders* (Wilson and Howell, 1993), the use of risk and needs assessment tools is a critical component of an effective juvenile justice system. The CAC concept provides an innovative and cost-effective method for integrating the assessment processes used by diverse systems (e.g., juvenile justice, mental health, child welfare). By providing cross-system services, CAC's may integrate multidisciplinary perspectives on the client's needs, enhance coordination of effort among service providers, afford an opportunity to assess youth immediately, and reduce duplication of assessment services.

Integrated Case Management

The *Comprehensive Strategy* emphasizes the role of the case management system. Integrated case management is crucial for coordinating and monitoring multiple services. The case manager (or case management team) is the link between comprehensive assessment and effective, integrated service delivery. Under the CAC model, case managers should develop individualized treatment plans that identify multiple system intervention priorities and include short- and long-term goals. To ensure that juveniles access available services, followup plans and other methods of tracking progress through the system should be included. Mechanisms for reassessing youth and monitoring service provision are also critical.

Comprehensive and Integrated Management Information System

To effectively monitor the client's involvement in services across systems, a CAC must have an infrastructure that can support integrated case management, i.e., a comprehensive and integrated MIS. Such an MIS should be the cornerstone of the single point of entry and of the assessment process. Although establishing a fully integrated MIS may not be practical for every community, at a minimum, a CAC should have an internal database that can be

used to manage information on the youth it serves. Data collected from other systems should be entered into that database.

CAC Evaluation

While the CAC concept is promising, the success of implementation and the impact of CAC programs on their clients has yet to be assessed. NCCD is conducting an intensive evaluation of each of the four sites chosen for the CAC demonstration program.

Although it is anticipated that the integrated approach of CAC's will lead to positive outcomes for its clients, CAC's should avoid stigmatizing and labeling youth, ensure due process for juvenile offenders, and be careful not to "widen the net." The goal of CAC is not to bring more youth into the system, but to improve service delivery and, ultimately, reduce the number of juveniles who will enter or return to the juvenile justice system.

For Further Information

Community Assessment Centers: A Discussion of the Concept's Efficacy (Shay Bilchik, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1995), an OJJDP concept paper, provides additional information on this topic. The concept paper and

other information on CAC's and assessment processes are available from OJJDP's Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse (JJC), 800-638-8736. OJJDP plans to publish a Bulletin this summer that will further describe the CAC concept and its implementation by the demonstration sites. The Bulletin will also be available from JJC.

Reference

Wilson, J.J., and Howell, J.C. 1993. *A Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

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