



PAROLE ESSENTIALS: PRACTICAL GUIDES FOR PAROLE LEADERS

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# Evidence-Based Policy, Practice, and Decisionmaking

Implications for  
Paroling Authorities

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A well-educated paroling authority that uses current research to guide the way it operates and makes decisions can help make our communities safer and stop needless expenditures of precious public resources. The formation of such an authority requires that Governors appoint parole board members with the competencies for effecting necessary changes—individuals who can and will collaborate with system and community partners, who *understand and will use current research* [emphasis added], and who will build infrastructure and capacity within parole organizations for delivering services effectively and efficiently.

**—Nancy M. Campbell**

*Comprehensive Framework for Paroling  
Authorities in an Era of Evidence-Based Practices*

## Foreword

Paroling authorities play a critical role in correctional systems nationwide. They make thousands of decisions each year about the timing of release from prison for a significant number of offenders. They set conditions of release and respond to violations of postrelease supervision for many thousands more. Recognizing this critical role, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) is engaged in a major initiative to develop useful resources for parole board chairs, members, and their executive staff. In 2008, this initiative sponsored the development of the *Comprehensive Framework for Paroling Authorities in an Era of Evidence-Based Practices* (Campbell 2008). The Comprehensive Framework provides an overview of how the role of paroling authorities is, and should be, changing to meet the challenges facing the corrections field as it looks forward to the second decade of the 21st century. NIC has also made training curricula, delivery, and technical assistance available as part of the initiative.

As an additional part of this initiative, NIC has commissioned the development of a series of five papers entitled *Parole Essentials: Practical Guides for Parole Leaders*. This series builds on the *Comprehensive Framework* and provides concrete guidance on implementing the principles that it outlines. The series is composed of an informative set of products focused on the unique challenges facing parole leaders; it will assist them in further honing their technical skills, clearly defining their roles and responsibilities, and supporting effective practice.

This document, *Evidence-Based Policy, Practice, and Decisionmaking: Implications for Paroling Authorities*, is the second of the series. The paper examines information emerging from research on evidence-based practice and decisionmaking in parole and the implications of these findings for paroling authorities. It is NIC's hope that the information contained in this document will guide parole authorities in the implementation of sound, research-based policies that will result in more efficient use of public resources and, ultimately, reduce future crime.

**Morris L. Thigpen**

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# Preface

This paper is the second in a series of five resource documents developed under the sponsorship of the National Institute of Corrections. The series, entitled *Parole Essentials: Practical Guides for Parole Leaders*, is intended to provide practical information and guidance for paroling authority chairs, members, executive staff, and the officials charged with appointing them. Titles in the series include:

1. *Core Competencies: A Resource for Parole Board Chairs, Members, and Executive Staff*
2. *Evidence-Based Policy, Practice, and Decisionmaking: Implications for Paroling Authorities*
3. *Paroling Authorities' Strategic Planning and Management for Results*
4. *Special Challenges Facing Parole*
5. *The Future of Parole as a Key Partner in Assuring Public Safety*

These papers are being developed as part of a larger initiative of the National Institute of Corrections to provide current information and guidance to paroling authorities. This initiative includes the broad context defined by the *Comprehensive Framework for Paroling Authorities in an Era of Evidence-Based Practices* (Campbell 2008). Additionally, the initiative includes the development, piloting, and delivery of a training curriculum for paroling authority members, entitled "Integrating Evidence-Based Principles into Parole Board Practices" and developed by Betty Gurnell and Susan Yeres. These resources are accessible at [www.nicic.gov](http://www.nicic.gov) on the National Institute of Corrections website. The reader is referred to these other documents as additional resources in pursuing excellence in carrying out paroling authorities' considerable responsibilities in the criminal justice system.

# Acknowledgments

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# Introduction

Governments around the world are moving to align their programs and services with what is known as evidence-based policy and practices (EBP). EBP, which originated in the medical profession three decades ago, asserts that public policy and practice must be based on the best available scientific evidence to be effective in the achievement of its goals and to be efficient in the use of taxpayers' dollars.

To be *evidence-based* is to implement practices, both at the individual and the organizational levels, that are guided by sound, empirical research. The result is more efficient and effective outcomes—outcomes that make better use of public resources and, ultimately, reduce future crime. This paper presents the key research findings that make these goals possible and the implications of these findings for paroling authorities.

## Context

A discussion of *evidence-based* practice and its implications for paroling authorities must recognize and be conducted within a larger context. The prevention of future crime is only one of the interests that paroling authorities may have as they carry out their responsibilities under the specific sentencing laws in their jurisdictions, laws that vary widely from state to state.

In the language of scholars, criminal sentences can have both *utilitarian* and *nonutilitarian* interests or goals and so may paroling authorities as they carry out their unique responsibilities in the case disposition process. Their *utilitarian* interests have to do with seeking purposes that are of some "use" or "benefit" in the future. These interests often have to do with reducing the opportunity for or inclination of offenders to commit crimes in the future (i.e., incapacitation and risk reduction, rehabilitation, and specific deterrence), and with decreasing the likelihood that other individuals will commit crime as a result of the "example" set by the sentences imposed on current offenders (i.e., general deterrence). They may also include assuring the rights of victims by administering systems of victim notification, creating and reviewing victim impact statements as a consideration in the decisionmaking process, creating an opportunity for victims to be heard personally by paroling authorities, and adopting policies and practices that enhance the likelihood of victim compensation and restitution.

It is also important to acknowledge that criminal sentences typically have other, *nonutilitarian* goals such as assuring "appropriate" punishment that is proportionate to the severity of the crime and acknowledges the harm done to victims. Depending on specific state statutes, "appropriate" punishment may incorporate such concepts as "equity and consistency" in punishment, avoiding unwarranted sentencing disparity for similarly situated offenders, not "depreciating the seriousness of the crime," and assuring the fundamental fairness of

the sentencing and parole process. These interests are termed “nonutilitarian,” not because they are unimportant, but to make clear that the measure of accomplishing these goals will not be some future outcome, but is focused rather on an appropriate response to the past crime, regardless of future outcomes.

That is, in addition to seeking future outcomes, such as reduced recidivism, criminal sentences have the “retributive” goal of accomplishing appropriate punishment, or “just deserts.” Depending on the sentencing structure in a particular state, paroling authorities may have greater or lesser responsibility for meeting this sentencing goal. Where they do have a role in establishing appropriate and proportionate punishment, paroling authorities may want to consider and develop a strategy for doing so. Through the development of clear parole decisionmaking guidelines, such a strategy would clarify sentencing goals, how these goals are served, and how they interact in a policy context as well as within the context of specific cases.

The paper that follows is written within this context. Where research is reviewed and its implications are articulated, it is done in the context of paroling authorities seeking to accomplish their goal of risk reduction, that is, the prevention of future crime and victimization. It is not intended to speak to other sanctioning goals. Although this integration is one of the central challenges for paroling authorities—both as they decide individual cases and as they develop a policy framework to guide their decisions—it is a challenge that is reserved for discussion in the final volume of this series of papers on parole, *The Future of Parole as a Key Partner in Assuring Public Safety*.

## A Preview of the Following Chapters

In chapter 1, the term “evidence-based” is defined both from the broad perspective of an organizational business model and from the more focused perspective of improving offender outcomes. This discussion serves as the backdrop to the rest of the paper, which focuses specifically on the role paroling authorities can and do play in contributing to reducing recidivism. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion about risk reduction in the context of the other criminal justice sanctioning goals paroling authorities and others must balance.

There is an extensive body of criminal justice literature about criminal sanctioning, offender behavior, and risk reduction. Contemporary research suggests that recidivism can be reduced by 10, 20, or perhaps 30 percent or more if certain principles and practices are applied. Chapter 2 summarizes key research conclusions related to reducing recidivism and suggests the policy implications of these findings for paroling authorities.

Against the backdrop of an understanding of the terminology of evidence-based practice and the ways in which paroling authorities, as separate and distinct entities, can positively influence offender outcomes, chapter 3 explores the notion that paroling authorities are part of a much larger system responsible for offender management and outcomes. A framework for establishing a *system* of evidence-based organizations—of which paroling authorities are an important part—is offered.

It has been said that any point can be proven with research. But what is the strength of the research that supports that point? Today's professional is challenged by sorting the "wheat from the chaff" in the research literature. Chapter 4 reviews, in nonresearchers' terms, the differences between various "grades" of research and suggests a way to think about the degree to which confidence can be placed in one finding over another. Recognizing that there is a virtual explosion of research that has relevance to the field's work, this chapter concludes with suggestions regarding the ways in which organizations—especially those with limited research capacity—can keep pace with emerging science.

Like other organizations, paroling authorities can derive significant benefits by adopting an evidence-based approach. Chapter 5 outlines the major advantages of this business model for paroling authorities and concludes the paper with specific recommendations for paroling authorities as they seek to build stronger organizations, advance evidence-based work, and improve the outcomes of the offenders over whom they exercise authority.

# Evidence-Based Policy, Practice, and Decisionmaking

## What Is It and Why Should Paroling Authorities Be Interested In It?

**T**he terms “evidence-based policy,” “evidence-based practice,” and, more recently, “evidence-based decisionmaking” are becoming increasingly common in both the private and public sectors, but they are hardly new.

More than three decades ago, Archie Cochrane, a British medical researcher, posited that scarce medical resources should be invested in health care practices demonstrated to be effective through randomized clinical trials because they were much more likely to produce positive and reliable results (Cochrane 1972). This profoundly simple concept—of basing financial and other decisionmaking investments on the strength of empirical evidence—has led to a veritable revolution in approaches in medicine and, indeed, other sciences and professions. Evidence-based health care, evidence-based educational policy, and evidence-based management are but a few examples of new ways to approach professional work.

### Defining Terms

The term “evidence-based” means to apply empirical research to professional policy or practice. In the words of Stanford professor Robert Sutton, the first rule of evidence-based work is “show, don’t tell” (Sutton 2008). To be evidence-based is to build policies and practices on the foundation of empirical knowledge that is objective, reliable, and valid. To apply evidence to decisionmaking is to first seek to understand what research has demonstrated to be true about a particular issue, and then to use that information to inform decisionmaking.

Some professionals express reticence about using an evidence-based approach. Most typically, these reservations are expressed as a concern that:

- The evidence is not sufficient.
- There is no place for professional judgment and experience in an evidence-based world.

- It will cost more money.
- Change is not possible in an overwhelmed and overburdened work environment.
- The public will not understand or support it.

These concerns are explored and addressed throughout this paper following a discussion of the reasons criminal justice practitioners in general, and paroling authorities in particular, are increasingly interested in an evidence-based approach.

### The Rationale for Adopting Evidence-Based Approaches in Correctional Practice

In any given year, it is estimated that 700,000 offenders will be released from our nation’s prisons (Sabol and Couture 2008). According to the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 67 percent of the individuals released from prison are rearrested within 3 years of discharge (Hughes and Wilson 2003). This translates to more than 450,000<sup>1</sup> offenders who are rearrested for new crimes, and it does not consider those removed from the community for technical violations of supervision conditions. It arguably translates to hundreds of thousands of new crimes and potentially as much victimization. It also translates to untold resources spent on processing cases, managing offenders, and supporting the families of the incarcerated. Despite changes in laws, sentencing, intervention approaches, and paroling practices, these recidivism rates have remained relatively stable for decades (Andrews and Bonta 1998; Hughes, Wilson, and Beck 2001).

## WHAT THE PUBLIC THINKS ABOUT EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

- Most (80 percent) think it is unacceptable that about half of the people released from prison fail.
- One-third believe that reducing the likelihood that convicted offenders will commit new crimes is the primary purpose of the criminal justice system, followed by 54 percent who believe the primary purpose is for punishment.
- Seventy-four percent agree that the criminal justice system should increase spending on approaches proven to reduce the chances that offenders will commit new crimes.
- Sixty-one percent indicate that when criminal justice professionals make decisions, research on what works in preventing crime should be the most important thing they rely on, followed by 24 percent who say professional experience and 9 percent who say personal beliefs should be the major determinant.
- Most (89 percent) believe that criminal justice officials should share with the public how well they are doing at reducing crime.

Source: Center for Effective Public Policy, Pretrial Justice Institute, The Justice Management Institute, and The Carey Group. 2010. *Survey of Public Opinion on Evidence-Based Decision Making in Local Criminal Justice Systems*. Unpublished report. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections.

However, research over the past two decades demonstrates that a 30-percent reduction in recidivism is possible (Andrews and Bonta 1998) if current “evidence-based” knowledge is applied with fidelity. No longer is the challenge in understanding what we need to do to positively influence offender behavior; instead, the challenge is in doing it.

Practically speaking, adopting an evidence-based approach means restructuring the way in which we do business in our jails and prisons, in probation and parole, and among judges, prosecutors, parole board members, and others. It is not about adding a new program or replacing a few past practices with new ones. It is about transforming our justice system organizations into evidence-based entities.

## Evidence-Based Approaches: To What End?

### On Becoming an Evidence-Based Organization: Looking Beyond Reducing Recidivism

In the field of criminal justice, the term “evidence-based” has become synonymous with risk reduction—those policies and practices that have been demonstrated to reduce the likelihood of reoffense. In actuality, all policies and practices that are empirically informed are evidence-based. Whether using research to conduct police lineups, guide jury selection, diminish substance abuse, or prevent crime, to use research to guide decisionmaking is to be evidence-based.

Although the purpose of this paper is to focus on the portion of the literature that pertains to changing offender behavior (risk reduction) and to draw implications for paroling authorities from that body of work, it is important not to miss the proverbial forest for the trees. In this case, the “forest” is the expanse of knowledge that should shape day-to-day practice *of all kinds* within an organization in order to achieve the best possible outcomes, not just those that are related to risk reduction. Using an example from another field as an analogy, who would be comfortable if the medical community used research only to address illness intervention, while ignoring the body of literature that provides guidance on general medical practices and hospital management? To do so would mean that simple prevention protocols such as biohazard waste containment and counting instruments after surgical procedures would be disregarded.

In the justice field, professionals need to be equally concerned with addressing serious illness (i.e., reducing offender risk) and with managing hospitals (i.e., running efficient and effective organizations). This is what is meant by the now fairly common term “agency alignment” or, as has been used here, adopting an “evidence-based business model.”

The term “business model” describes a broad range of formal and informal practices that together form the core aspects of an organization. These practices represent the organization’s purpose and define its structures, strategies, and operational policies and processes.<sup>2</sup> To be sure, the most potent aspect of the evidence-based movement is its potential to provide a new way to conceptualize the nation’s justice system organizations:

[An] . . . exciting feature of EBPs—[is the] . . . creativity that results from the dual levels of a model coming into being which delivers both a lens through which to view our work with clients in new and more effective ways, and a lens that allows us to reflect upon our practice in this and in other sectors of our functioning. Once you begin down this path a whole new series of opportunities opens up that enhance practice on many levels, some subtle and others more concrete. . . . EBPs have . . . a major organizational influence. One of the least predicted outcomes . . . is its potential to hold an agency together during times of change, times which are becoming increasingly more of the norm. . . . [T]he rigor involved in an EBP [approach] can provide a calm center to the currently fluid world (Kohomban, Schiller, and O’Gorman 2008: 4).

The “calm center” of an organization is its core operating methodology. When that methodology is reliance on research, the meaning of Robert Sutton’s “show-me-don’t-tell-me” philosophy becomes clear. Decisions about how to conduct the day-to-day activities of the organization begin with a quest first to understand what the research demonstrates, then to build upon that foundation. Not only does this approach assure more effective outcomes, it provides an indisputable rationale for decisionmaking when those decisions are called into question.

In addition to being concerned with evidence-based practices that relate to risk reduction, an evidence-based paroling authority would also be interested in empirical research as it relates to, among other things:

- The most effective and sensitive methods for interacting with victims and providing victim notification.
- The merits of collaborative versus independent decision-making processes.
- The costs and benefits associated with conducting video versus in-person hearings.

- Methods demonstrated effective in eliciting critical information during parole hearings.
- Research-supported approaches to caseload assignments and caseload size (for those with supervision oversight responsibilities).

## Focusing Specifically on Risk Reduction

Paroling authorities interested in building evidence-based organizations are also, of course, interested in the narrower application of the portion of the literature that is related specifically to risk reduction. Like their professional colleagues, parole professionals are deeply concerned with preventing further crime and victimization. However, like their judicial counterparts, parole decisionmakers are at times confronted with choices that can be seemingly oppositional. For example, the science of offender risk assessment has evolved such that it is now possible to determine which groups of offenders are at higher, moderate, and lower risk for reoffending. Further, research demonstrates that those at low risk for reoffending can actually get worse—that is, their risk level can be increased—when the sanctions imposed for their crimes are too intrusive. How does a sentencing judge or a paroling authority, interested in preventing an offender from committing another crime through risk reduction/rehabilitative means, reconcile this fact when a low-risk offender stands before him or her for having committed an egregious crime? Where the law posits multiple goals for the sentencing of criminal offenders—and where paroling authorities are provided the discretion to balance those goals—they must weigh and reconcile multiple legitimate purposes (e.g., punishment, deterrence, rehabilitation/risk reduction) and balance, or choose, among them. In these instances, decisionmakers—judges and paroling authorities in particular—must consider the role of risk reduction in the context of other sanctioning purposes.

## The Role of Risk Reduction in the Context of Other Sanctioning Purposes

Much has been written about philosophies of sanctioning. Each of the major philosophies (just deserts/retribution, deterrence, rehabilitation, and incapacitation) offers a rationale for sanctioning offenders. The most notable of the differences among them is the distinction between utilitarian goals—those that aim to produce some public good as a result of the sanction (such as

discouraging criminal behavior, helping offenders learn to avoid future criminal engagement, or restraining those thought likely to pose a threat in the future)—and the nonutilitarian “just deserts” approach, which asserts that offenders deserve to be punished for their crimes regardless of whether or not that punishment will influence future behavior.<sup>3</sup> Only some of these philosophies address the goal of risk reduction through rehabilitative means.

It is understood that many paroling authorities play a significant role in determining the timing of offender release, and that these decisions must be made by balancing utilitarian and nonutilitarian goals. For those paroling authorities who have significant discretion over the timing as well as the conditions of release, a key question is how best to time release to assure “enough”

punishment while also taking into account research on risk reduction. The final paper in this series, *The Future of Parole as a Key Partner in Assuring Public Safety*, explores this and other challenging questions further.

Because nearly all offenders will eventually be released to the community, risk reduction must be a central consideration as well. The key question is this: For the 95 percent of offenders who will inevitably be released to the community,<sup>4</sup> what management strategies can criminal justice professionals, including—and, in this case, particularly—paroling authorities, employ that will give those released offenders the greatest probability of success (i.e., the absence of violations and new crimes)?

# Significant Research Findings Regarding Risk Reduction

## Implications for Paroling Authorities

**R**esearch conducted in the United States and Canada over the past two decades provides significant promise for the reduction of recidivism among the offender population. The extent of this reduction potential varies across findings. The most conservative estimates suggest that, given current knowledge, it is possible to reduce the rate of reoffense by 10 percent (see Andrews et al. 1990; Lipsey 1995; Losel 1995; Gendreau and Goggin 1996). Others estimate the potential to range from 15 to 30 percent (and perhaps even more) if the relevant findings are implemented across the justice system in a particular locality with fidelity (i.e., precision) (Andrews and Bonta 2006; Landenberger and Lipsey 2005; McGuire 2001, 2002). These higher estimates have yet to be fully demonstrated on a systemwide level<sup>5</sup> although a framework for such an approach is currently under development by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) and planned for implementation in 2010.<sup>6</sup> Regardless of the maximum potential, a reduction of just 10–15 percent offers the possibility of 40,000 or more offenders who will not be returned to prison each year and perhaps as many new crimes averted and individuals spared victimization. Using the most conservative of estimates, it is clear that powerful results are within reach.

Summarizing the full body of research on offender risk reduction is not possible within the context of this paper. Instead, this literature review focuses on key areas of research that have important implications for paroling authorities.<sup>7</sup> These implications are summarized within this chapter. Implemented alone, each of these findings has risk-reducing potential, but that potential can be limited. To maximize the potential of each of these findings, they should be implemented in combination and on a systemwide basis.<sup>8</sup> Paroling authorities play an important part in this systemwide risk-reduction equation.

### 1. What Works: Empirically based assessment instruments are better predictors of risk to reoffend than professional judgment alone

Research demonstrates that structured assessment tools<sup>9</sup> can predict risk of reoffense more effectively than professional judgment alone. These studies show that seasoned professionals who rely exclusively on their experience and professional

#### RECOGNIZING THE FACT

Recognizing the fact that nearly all incarcerated offenders will one day be released from prison, the key question is this: For those offenders who will inevitably be released to the community, what management strategies can paroling authorities employ that will give those released offenders the greatest probability of success?

judgment predict recidivism at rates no better than chance (Harris 2006). The use of actuarial tools, however, has been demonstrated to improve prediction rates. The best predictive outcomes are derived from administration of empirically based actuarial tools combined with clinical judgment (Harris 2006; Andrews, Bonta, and Wormith 2006; Grove et al. 2000). Although these instruments cannot determine any one individual's risk level with absolute certainty, they can—like the actuarial tools

used to determine that a 17-year-old boy is more likely to get into a traffic accident than a 40-year-old woman—identify the outcome of large groups of individuals with similar characteristics.

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### **Policy and Practice Implications for Paroling Authorities**

- Determine the timing of release by using empirically based actuarial instruments (normed on the relevant sample) that determine the likelihood to reoffend (i.e., risk level).
  - Use professional judgment in addition to assessment instruments to determine the likelihood to reoffend.
- 

## **2. What Works: Special populations require special tools**

Although many commonly used assessment instruments have been validated for use with adult male offenders, they may not be as effective with juveniles, women, or other subpopulations of offenders such as those who are mentally ill or those who have committed sexual offenses. Specialized tools—and/or special versions of assessment tools—must also be used for these populations.<sup>10</sup>

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### **Policy and Practice Implications for Paroling Authorities**

- Join with other justice system partners to identify and adopt empirically based tools for the assessment of risk to reoffend.
  - Know the research supporting the selected assessment tools.
  - Use assessment tools for their intended population.
- 

## **3. What Works: Matching intensity of intervention to risk level reduces recidivism**

Research demonstrates that the likelihood of reoffense can be diminished if the level of intervention (defined as both monitoring and treatment) is matched to the assessed level of risk. This is commonly referred to as the “risk principle” (Andrews 2007; Andrews and Bonta 2007; Andrews, Bonta, and Wormith 2006; Andrews and Dowden 2007; Andrews, Dowden, and Gendreau 1999; Bonta 2007; Dowden 1998; Gendreau, Goggin, and Little 1996; Lipsey and Cullen 2007). In other words, a reduction in recidivism among the high-risk offender population<sup>11</sup> is best achieved by delivering high-intensity interventions (e.g., 200–300 hours of programming over 6–12 months), while reduction in recidivism among the moderate-risk population is best achieved through the delivery of moderately intensive interventions (i.e., 100 hours over a modest length of time, e.g., 3–6 months)<sup>12</sup> (Bourgon and Armstrong 2005; Gendreau and Goggin 1996). Research further demonstrates that the best outcomes with the low-risk population are achieved by low levels of intervention. Some research demonstrates that an over-reliance on supervision or the delivery of intense treatment services to the low-risk population can actually increase their likelihood of reoffending (Andrews and Bonta 2007; Cullen and Gendreau 2000; Gendreau et al. 2001; Lowenkamp, Latessa, and Holsinger 2006).

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### **Policy and Practice Implications for Paroling Authorities**

- Provide high-intensity services to high-risk offenders and less to moderate-risk offenders.
  - Provide minimal intervention to the low-risk population.
  - Engage in collaborative discussions with stakeholders who are responsible for providing services to inmates and parolees (e.g., corrections agency staff, service providers) to develop an agreement to prioritize and target treatment services to moderate- and high-risk offenders.
-

#### 4. What Works: Matching services to assessed risk factors reduces recidivism

In addition to assessing static (unchangeable, historical) risk factors, empirically based, actuarial instruments also assess dynamic (changeable) risk factors (often referred to as “criminogenic needs”). The presence of criminogenic needs has been directly linked to recidivism (Andrews and Bonta 2007), and effectively addressing these crime-influencing areas through effective interventions has been demonstrated to reduce recidivism. This is commonly referred to as the “need principle” (Andrews 2007; Andrews et al. 1990). The most common risk factors among adult offenders are antisocial behavior, antisocial personality; antisocial attitudes/cognitions; antisocial associates/peers; family/marital stressors; substance abuse; lack of education/employment stability/achievement; and lack of prosocial leisure activities.

A variety of other conditions (noncriminogenic needs) are also often identified through the offender assessment process. At the present time, there is no research to suggest that targeting these conditions will reduce recidivism. Key examples of noncriminogenic needs include the following: anxiety and stress; vague feelings of psychological/emotional distress; low self-esteem; lack of ambition; and history of victimization (Andrews and Bonta 2007).

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#### ***Policy and Practice Implications for Paroling Authorities***

- Assess offenders to determine their individual criminogenic needs.
  - Use parole release as an incentive to encourage offenders to participate in prison-based programming that addresses their criminogenic needs.
  - Focus interventions on criminogenic needs rather than noncriminogenic needs.
  - Collaborate with corrections officials to ensure that offenders’ case plans (i.e., in prison, during transition, and in the community) identify and include plans to address criminogenic needs effectively.
- 

#### 5. What Works: Address multiple criminogenic needs to achieve the maximum risk-reduction potential

Recidivism is further reduced when multiple criminogenic needs are addressed (Andrews and Bonta 2007; Andrews, Dowden, and Gendreau 1999; Dowden 1998). That is, intervention strategies that address four to six criminogenic needs have significantly better outcomes than those that target only one to three (Andrews and Bonta 2007). Furthermore, by focusing on the most significant among these dynamic criminogenic needs (e.g., antisocial personality, antisocial attitudes, and antisocial peers), the most significant results can be achieved. Beyond reducing postrelease recidivism, targeting a higher number of criminogenic needs also has a significant impact on prison misconduct. Substantially lower incidences of institutional misconduct are realized when three to eight criminogenic needs of incarcerated offenders are addressed as compared with one to two criminogenic needs (French and Gendreau 2006).

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#### ***Policy and Practice Implications for Paroling Authorities***

- Ensure that moderate- and high-risk offenders’ case plans and supervision conditions address four or more of their most significant criminogenic needs.
  - Deliver prison-based programming to reduce antisocial behavior within prison and postrelease.
  - Encourage participation in risk-reducing programming.
  - Consider program participation in release decisionmaking.
- 

#### 6. What Works: Provide services in the manner demonstrated effective through research

The most effective programs for the majority of higher risk offenders are those that address criminal thinking and problem-solving skills. Cognitive-behavioral programs have been demonstrated to be effective in reducing recidivism (Aos, Miller, and Drake 2006a;

## COMMON FACTORS

### Common Historical Risk Factors (Static Risk Factors)

1. Age at first arrest
2. Current age
3. Criminal history

### Common Criminogenic Needs (Dynamic Risk Factors)

1. Antisocial behavior
2. Antisocial personality
3. Antisocial attitudes/cognitions
4. Antisocial associates/peers
5. Family/marital stressors
6. Substance abuse
7. Lack of education/employment stability/achievement
8. Lack of prosocial leisure activities

Lipsey and Landenberger 2006; Pearson et al. 2002; Rotgers, Morgenstern, and Walters 2003; Wilson, Bouffard, and MacKenzie 2005). These programs address antisocial thinking patterns, build problem-solving skills, and apply behavioral techniques that equip offenders with new ways of thinking and behaving through repetition and increasingly difficult practice sessions (Andrews 2007; Aos, Miller, and Drake 2006a; Landenberger and Lipsey 2005; Lipsey and Landenberger 2006; Lipsey, Landenberger and Wilson 2007). Consistent with the risk principle, research demonstrates that high-risk, high-need offenders who receive higher doses of interventions over longer periods of time are less likely to recidivate than are similar offenders who receive a lesser dose (Bourgon and Armstrong 2005; Landenberger and Lipsey 2005; Lipsey 1995; Lowenkamp and Latessa 2004; Lowenkamp, Latessa, and Holsinger 2006). For example, research indicates that 200–300 contact hours over 6–12 months are needed to reduce recidivism for higher risk offenders with multiple needs, while reductions in recidivism among the moderate risk are best achieved through the delivery of moderately intensive interventions (i.e., 100 hours over a modest length of time, for example, 3–6 months) (Bourgon and Armstrong 2005; Gendreau and Goggin 1996). Furthermore, although treatment services provided in structured (e.g., residential, institutional) settings

are demonstrated to be effective, services delivered in natural environments (e.g., settings that most closely resemble prosocial, supportive environments) are the most effective in reducing recidivism (Andrews and Bonta 2006). For treatment services to be effective, they should align with offenders' individual traits or characteristics (e.g., gender, culture, race, learning style, motivation, level of functioning). Finally, to achieve their intended outcomes, services must also address individual "barriers to successful participation" (Andrews 2007). This is commonly referred to as the "responsivity principle" (Andrews, Dowden, and Gendreau 1999; Cullen and Gendreau 2000).

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### **Policy and Practice Implications for Paroling Authorities**

- Deliver more intensive services to higher risk offenders.
- Deliver services in doses and length appropriate for the assessed risk level.
- Deliver services targeted to criminogenic needs and individual traits.
- Deliver services that are cognitive-behavioral.
- Deliver services in natural environments (i.e., the community) where possible.
- Deliver services in consideration of the learning style of the individual.

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## **7. What Works: Swift, certain, and proportional responses to misconduct improve compliance more effectively than severe responses**

Graduated sanctions (i.e., sanctions that increase in severity based on the number and nature of acts of misconduct) decrease noncompliance (Andrews and Janes 2006; Burke 2004; Harrell et al. 2003; Hay 2001; Martin and Van Dine 2008; Taxman, Soule, and Gelb 1999; Taylor and Martin 2006). Swift, certain, and proportional actions that reflect disapproval of behavioral misconduct are more effective in reducing recidivism than actions that are disproportionate, delayed, or inconsistent

(Grasmack and Bryjak 1980; Nichols and Ross 1990; Paternoster 1989; Paternoster et al. 1997; Rhine 1993; Von Hirsch 1993).

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### **Policy and Practice Implications for Paroling Authorities**

- Respond to violations consistently, quickly, with certainty, and in proportion to the acts of noncompliance.
  - Increase severity of responses (i.e., parole conditions) as noncompliant behavior continues.
- 

## **8. What Is Promising: Recidivism declines when officers focus their interactions with offenders on criminogenic needs**

Recent research demonstrates that the amount of time supervision officers devote to dealing with offenders' criminogenic needs correlates inversely with recidivism; that is, the more time spent dealing with a criminogenic need, the lower the rate of recidivism (Bonta et al. 2008).<sup>13</sup> Conversely, the more time spent discussing noncriminogenic needs—which diminishes the amount of time spent addressing criminogenic needs—the higher the recidivism rate.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, those paroling authorities that impose conditions of supervision that are congruent with offenders' individual criminogenic needs necessarily encourage officers to focus their supervision time on those conditions most likely to reduce offender recidivism.

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### **Policy and Practice Implications for Paroling Authorities**

- Establish supervision conditions that are directly related to criminogenic needs.
  - To the extent possible, limit the assignment of conditions that do not address criminogenic needs.
- 

## **9. What Works: Sanctions without programming do not reduce recidivism**

Research demonstrates that sanctions alone (e.g., electronic monitoring, intensive supervision, boot camps, and incarceration), in the absence of treatment interventions, do not contribute to reductions in reoffense rates (Aos, Miller, and Drake 2006a; Gendreau et al. 2001; Gendreau, Goggin, and Cullen 1999; MacKenzie, 1997; MacKenzie et al. 1995; MacKenzie, Wilson, and Kider 2001; Petersilia and Turner 1993). Research also indicates that simply applying more severe sanctions will not on its own change offender behavior. For example, offenders serving longer sentences in prison do not recidivate less often than those who serve shorter sentences. Research demonstrates that even modest increases in time served may increase recidivism (Hughes, Wilson, and Beck 2001; Langan and Levin 2002; Smith, Goggin, and Gendreau 2002).

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### **Policy and Practice Implication for Paroling Authorities**

- Couple sanctions with treatment interventions if recidivism reduction is the goal.
- 

*An occupation may lay claim to being a "profession" only to the extent that its practices are based on research, knowledge, training, and expertise—a triumvirate that promotes the possibility that what it does can be effective.*

—E. Latessa, F. Cullen, and P. Gendreau  
"Beyond Correctional Quackery—Professionalism  
and the Possibility of Effective Treatment,"  
*Federal Probation* 66(2), 2002

Paroling authorities make fundamentally important decisions every day that encompass far more than the traditionally narrow view of “in” and “out” release decisions. From a more expansive view, paroling authorities may determine when to hear cases, what activities offenders must accomplish prior to release, the terms and conditions of their release, how to respond to violation behavior if and when it occurs, and others. Research findings, as illustrated in this chapter, can and should serve as the “intellectual core” of those decisions (Latessa, Cullen, and Gendreau 2002: 43).

The 12 policies and practices presented in exhibit 2–1 are consistent with and are meant to complement the 13 parole supervision strategies to enhance reentry outcomes offered by Solomon and colleagues (*Putting Public Safety First: 13 Parole Supervision Strategies to Enhance Reentry Outcomes*, Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2008). While this paper offers suggestions for paroling authorities, the 13 strategies in *Putting Public Safety First* are specifically focused on parole supervision.

**Exhibit 2–1: Twelve Evidence-Based Parole Policies and Practices at a Glance**

|                            | Parole Policy and Practice  | Rationale  |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| Guiding Philosophy         | Offenders’ likelihood of success can be increased by aligning the intensity and type of prison and community interventions with assessed risk level. Postrelease supervision offers an opportunity to address criminogenic needs, monitor offenders’ community adjustment, and address risk factors prior to release from criminal justice control.   | Ninety-five percent of all incarcerated offenders will eventually be released from prison. A large body of knowledge is available to support decisions that are demonstrated to reduce the likelihood of reoffense.  |
| Risk Assessment            | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Determinations regarding the timing of parole release and requirements of release are guided by clear policy that incorporates an assessment of risk as well as a structured consideration of other factors as defined by the sentencing structure of the jurisdiction.</li> <li>2. Offenders at lower risk of reoffending are identified for parole review and consideration as early in the sentence as possible, in light of other sentencing considerations. Where the law directs the paroling authority to give primary consideration to public safety and the reduction of the likelihood of future crime, offenders at lower risk levels should be identified for release as soon as possible.</li> </ol> | Research demonstrates that it is possible to identify individuals who are most—and least—likely to reoffend. Furthermore, research demonstrates that all categories of offenders (high, moderate, and low risk) are more successful when interventions are tailored to address their risk level. |
| Prison-Based Interventions | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Requirements for in-prison treatment are based on assessed criminogenic needs.</li> <li>4. In-prison programming is prioritized for higher risk offenders and used only selectively with lower risk offenders.</li> </ol>   | In-prison programming is costly and limited. Reserve these resources for those who can benefit from them most. Community-based programming is not only less expensive, but research demonstrates it can also be more effective than in-prison programming.                                       |

**Exhibit 2–1: Twelve Evidence-Based Parole Policies and Practices at a Glance (continued)**

|                                      | <b>Parole Policy and Practice</b>   | <b>Rationale</b>   |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Parole Supervision</b>            | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Parole supervision intensity is based on assessed level of risk.</li> <li>6. Terms and conditions of supervision are individually tailored and based on assessed criminogenic needs.</li> <li>7. Parole officers devote their time and attention to addressing offenders’ criminogenic needs.</li> <li>8. Parole supervision practices align with other evidence-based supervision approaches. Paroling authorities with responsibility for supervision practices are aware of and adhere to this body of knowledge. Those without this responsibility are nonetheless familiar with these findings.</li> </ol> | <p>Assessment tools enable professionals to determine both the level of recidivism risk and the specific factors likely to result in reoffense. Research demonstrates that tailoring interventions—both in terms of intensity and type—to these findings offers the greatest recidivism reduction potential. Furthermore, a body of knowledge exists that provides specific guidance with regard to reducing reoffense through the nature and type of interactions between supervision officers and offenders.</p> |
| <b>Community-Based Interventions</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Three to eight criminogenic needs are targeted for programming and services with moderate- and high-risk offenders (both in prison and in the community).</li> <li>10. Paroling authorities and supervision agencies are familiar with the body of research on effective interventions and engage with providers to ensure that this body of knowledge is integrated into therapeutic practice.</li> </ol>  | <p>Research demonstrates that the rate of recidivism among moderate- and high-risk offenders is reduced when interventions are matched to assessed criminogenic needs, when multiple criminogenic needs are addressed, and when the interventions themselves are evidence-based (e.g., they use appropriate program methodologies and are delivered by skilled staff in research-supported doses).</p>   |
| <b>Responding to Violations</b>      | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. Violations of conditions of supervision are responded to swiftly by parole supervision officers and, where appropriate, boards.</li> <li>12. Responses to violations are proportional and aimed at reducing future noncompliance/criminal behavior rather than punishment alone.</li> </ol>  | <p>Many offenders will violate their conditions of supervision one or more times. Research demonstrates that responses are most effective when they are delivered quickly and when the actions taken seek to positively change, rather than punish, behavior.</p>  |

# Reaching the Full Recidivism Reduction Potential

## Using a Systemwide Approach to Evidence-Based Decisionmaking

As indicated in chapter 2, research demonstrates that modest reductions in recidivism (10–15 percent) are possible when evidence-based practices are applied by agencies and programs at the case level. For example, as reflected in exhibit 3–1, recidivism reduction occurs when offenders are provided common programmatic and policy-based initiatives such as cognitive-behavioral programs, nonresidential in-prison substance abuse treatment, vocational education, and treatment-oriented intensive supervision.

### Integrating Recidivism Reduction Efforts Systemwide

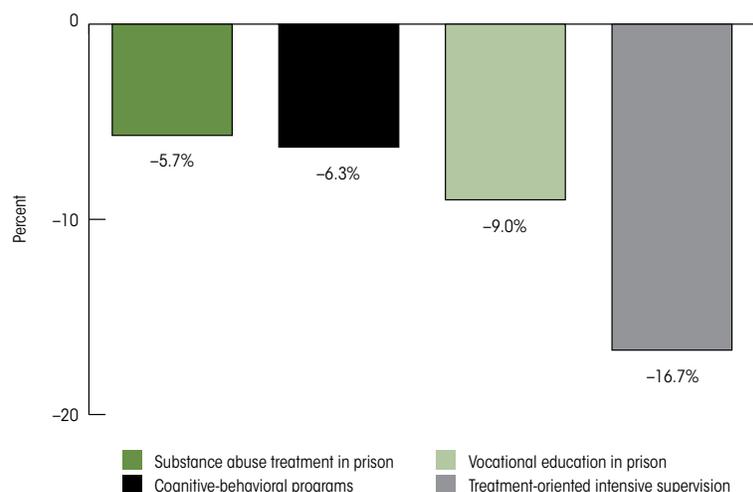
Research suggests, however, that these differences are just the start. If it is demonstrated that single programmatic initiatives (such as vocational education) or supervision strategies (such as a treatment-oriented approach) can reduce recidivism by 10–20 percent,<sup>15</sup> what is the recidivism reduction potential if entire systems implement these approaches in a fully integrated manner at the system, agency, and case levels? Some assert that these results can be improved significantly. Further empirical analysis of this question is critically important to the advancement of the justice system and the improvement of offender outcomes.

In pursuit of this goal, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) has supported a variety of initiatives to assist jurisdictions to align policy and practice with an evidence-based business model across the spectrum of justice system agencies. In NIC's most current effort, the Evidence-Based Decision Making in Local Criminal Justice Systems initiative, the Institute seeks to build a systemwide framework that will result in more collaborative, evidence-based decisionmaking in justice systems (National Institute of Corrections 2010). The project is grounded in the accumulated knowledge of two decades of research on the factors that contribute to criminal reoffending and the processes and methods the justice system can employ to interrupt the cycle of reoffense. It is built on decades of experience working with policymakers and practitioners individually and with

stakeholder teams in local justice systems. It is based on the evidence from empirical studies in the fields of organizational management, evidence-based practice in criminal justice and behavioral health, and collaborative processes. It is framed by a renewed optimism regarding the potential the justice system has for reducing harm and victimization and making communities safer throughout the nation.

The effort seeks to equip criminal justice policymakers with the information, processes, and tools that will result in measurable

**Exhibit 3–1: Intervention Effects for Adult Offenders: Reductions in Recidivism**



Source: S. Aos, M. Miller, and E. Drake, *Evidence-Based Public Policy Options To Reduce Future Prison Construction, Criminal Justice Costs, and Crime Rates* (Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 2006).

reduction of both pretrial misconduct and postconviction reoffending. This is accomplished through adherence to a set of core guiding principles. These principles define, in broad terms, the way criminal justice professionals will work together, make decisions, and operate evidence-based agencies under this

approach. These principles, their research support, and their implications for system actors, including paroling authorities, are summarized below. Further inferences are synthesized in the conclusion of this paper in chapter 5.

## The Evidence-Based Decision Making Framework's Four Core Principles

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**Principle 1: The professional judgment of criminal justice system decisionmakers is enhanced when informed by evidence-based knowledge.<sup>16</sup>**

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Decades of research in the justice and behavioral health fields have resulted in empirical findings that support practices and interventions that result in crime reduction. Enhanced awareness and the consistent application of that knowledge throughout the criminal justice system offer the promise of decreased crime and community harm. The criminal justice system's discretion points provide for the use of professional judgment to ensure that individual factors and the totality of circumstances are taken into consideration when decisions are made.

### Implications of Principle 1 for Paroling Authorities and Other System Actors

For professional judgment to be informed by evidence-based knowledge, the following is necessary:

- Evidence-based knowledge must be documented and readily available.
- The policy implications of knowledge—and their potential outcomes—must be identified.
- The methods for applying knowledge to practice must be delineated.
- Professional judgment should take into account both evidence-based knowledge and individual circumstances.
- Where decisions are made that counter empirical evidence, the rationale for those exceptions should be explicable.

**Principle 2: Every interaction within the criminal justice system offers an opportunity to contribute to harm reduction.<sup>17</sup>**

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Offenders interact with an array of professionals as their cases are processed through the criminal justice system (e.g., law enforcement officers, pretrial officials, jailers, judges, parole board members). Likewise, an array of professionals—and the agencies they represent—interact with one another (e.g., law enforcement with prosecutors, prosecutors with defenders, judges with pretrial officials, parole board members with corrections officials).

Three separate but equally important bodies of research are relevant to these criminal justice system conditions. First, research demonstrates that professionals' interactions with offenders can have a significant positive impact on offenders' behavior. Second, parallel research demonstrates that professionals' positive interactions with victims can promote a sense of satisfaction and fairness. Third, research demonstrates that systems are most effective in achieving their ultimate outcomes when they operate as "value chains." Under a value

chain system, each component of a system provides additive rather than duplicative or detracting value. For this to be true, their interactive operations must be fully coordinated with one another.

### Implications of Principle 2 for Paroling Authorities and Other System Actors

For the criminal justice system to take advantage of its interaction potential, the following is necessary:

- Every professional in the criminal justice system must understand his/her potential positive influence over offender behavior.
- Every professional in the criminal justice system must understand his/her potential positive influence over victims' experiences with the justice system.
- Criminal justice professionals must have the knowledge and skills that will enable them to maximize their influence.
- Agency policies throughout the criminal justice system must enable professionals to exercise this knowledge and apply these skills.
- Criminal justice system processes must be evaluated to ensure that interchanging systems coordinate and are in alignment with one another (i.e., they share information, maintain compatible policies, and ensure that their interests and outcomes are in agreement).
- Where interchanging systems lack coordination, processes must be realigned.

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### **Principle 3: Systems achieve better outcomes when they operate collaboratively.<sup>18</sup>**

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Research demonstrates that specific activities, processes, and approaches—when instituted and adhered to across components—will more likely result in the achievement of articulated outcomes. As distinguished from value chain research that addresses the importance of the interactions of subsystems (components of a larger whole), the research on collaboration speaks to the manner in which the individuals who represent different interests and organizations (e.g., court administration, jail operations, executive directors, and chairs of parole boards) work together toward a shared outcome (e.g., decreased crime and harm, increased community safety).

### Implications of Principle 3 for Paroling Authorities and Other System Actors

For criminal justice leadership to achieve effective collaboration, the following is necessary:

- Key decisionmakers and stakeholders must be identified.
- A formal, ongoing process of collaborative policymaking must be established.
- An informal collaborative culture should be created to facilitate ongoing communication, problem solving, and opportunities for innovation.
- Partners must work to promote collaboration at the system and case levels (only inasmuch as doing so does not infringe upon the individual rights of offenders or the responsibilities and authority of the system actors).

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**Principle 4: The criminal justice system will continually learn and improve when professionals make decisions based on the collection, analysis, and use of data and information.<sup>19</sup>**

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Learning systems are those that adapt to a dynamic environment through a process of continuous information collection, exchange, and analysis. Through this process of individual and collective learning, entities modify and improve their processes and activities in a constant effort to achieve better results at all levels: criminal justice professionals working with individual cases, agencies monitoring overall operations, and the system as a whole monitoring its efficiency and effectiveness. In addition to facilitating continuous improvements within an agency or system, ongoing data collection—and the sharing of that data—adds to the overall body of knowledge in the field about what works and what does not.

### **Implications of Principle 4 for Paroling Authorities and Other System Actors**

For the criminal justice system to become a learning entity, the following is necessary:

- The establishment of clear and specific performance measurements that identify and measure approaches and activities demonstrated or believed to contribute to desired outcomes at the case, agency, and system levels.
- The establishment of baseline measures at the case, agency, and system levels.
- Ongoing and objective collection of data at the case, agency, and system levels.
- Critical and objective analysis of these data to evaluate agency and system performance against established targets.
- Commitment to quality assurance in the performance of activities and in the collection of meaningful data.
- Continual feedback loops to ensure that information is shared, mutually understood, and collaboratively deliberated.
- Commitment to view less-than-desirable results as opportunities to improve.
- Modification of policy and practice as quality control and performance measurement indicate.

This principle suggests that paroling authorities can contribute greatly, through their own performance measurement efforts, to their internal knowledge as well as to the growing body of literature in the field.

# Evaluating the Research

## How Much Evidence Is Enough?

To become evidence-based is to come to rely on research. In doing so, however, it must be understood that all research is not of equal merit. Although some areas of study have been researched so extensively with repeatedly consistent findings that they are considered to be “iron clad,” other findings are less clear. This distinction is fundamentally important. Establishing policies and practices based on rigorously tested ideas that have consistent findings is both sound and defensible. On the other hand, establishing policies or following practices that are unsupported by research is ill-advised. Occupying the middle ground, some research studies offer promise, but further study is still required before policy decisions can be confidently based on their results.

The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) has supported the development of several models to assist professionals in distinguishing between these different “grades” of research. NIC’s widely published eight principles of effective correctional intervention categorizes research into gold, silver, bronze, iron, and dirt standards based on the quality, extensiveness, and/or methodology of the studies (Bogue et al. 2004).

The research standards presented in NIC’s *A Framework for Evidence-Based Decision Making in Local Criminal Justice Systems* offers a similar model: findings are placed in one of four categories based on methodology, replication, and sample sizes (National Institute of Corrections 2010). The Framework categories include the following:

- **What Works.** Findings in this category are based on rigorous and methodologically sound research that demonstrates significant positive findings (e.g., reduced recidivism, reduced violations), either through numerous single studies or through meta-analysis (i.e., the study and synthesis of many studies).
- **What Doesn’t Work.** Findings in this category are also based on rigorous and methodologically sound research that repeatedly shows, either through numerous single studies or meta-analysis, that the intervention does not have the intended or desired results.
- **What’s Promising.** Findings in this category are based on studies that produce the desired results (e.g., reduced

### STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE

Professionals who have integrated science into their work continually ask the question, “What is the strength of the evidence to support that [policy, approach, or decision]?”

recidivism) but are not sufficient to place the intervention in the “What Works” category. That is, because of the study methodology, the size of the sample, and/or a limited number of replications, the intervention requires further rigorous empirical study.

- **What’s Not Clear.** Findings in this category are from studies that have conflicting findings (i.e., one study shows that an intervention works while another study shows that it does not). Further empirical research is needed to understand the effectiveness—or lack of effectiveness—of these interventions.

Exhibit 4–1 illustrates that contemporary research in criminal justice falls into all four of these categories. These findings have important policy and practice implications for paroling authorities and other professionals. Some findings are strong enough to support clear policy choices (as is illustrated in the “What Works” and “What Doesn’t Work” categories). Other research findings offer promising or conflicting results, and while policy

**Exhibit 4–1: Translating Research Findings Into Parole Policies Designed To Reduce Recidivism**

|                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <p><b>What Works</b></p>        | <p><b>Parole Policy Fully Supported by Research</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use risk/needs assessment tools to determine the appropriate level and type of intervention for offenders.</li> <li>• Align conditions of supervision—including, but not limited to, programmatic requirements—with assessed criminogenic need areas and responsivity concerns for the individual.</li> </ul> <p><b>Research Finding:</b> Risk of recidivism is reduced (10–30 percent on average) when offenders are assessed using empirically based assessment tools and interventions (e.g., intensity of supervision and programmatic assignments) are assigned based on assessed level of risk to reoffend, criminogenic needs, and individual characteristics (e.g., gender, level of motivation, functional abilities).</p> <p><b>Standard of Research:</b> What Works</p> <p><b>Sources:</b> Andrews 2007; Andrews et al. 1990.</p> |
| <p><b>What Doesn't Work</b></p> | <p><b>Parole Policy NOT Supported by Research</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assign offenders assessed as low risk to GPS monitoring.</li> </ul> <p><b>Research Finding:</b> Intermediate sanctions (e.g., electronic monitoring, nontherapeutic day-reporting centers) “widen the net” if they target low-risk offenders. They can increase technical violations and lead to higher rates of incarceration.</p> <p><b>Standard of Research:</b> What Doesn't Work</p> <p><b>Sources:</b> Cullen and Gendreau 2000; Gendreau et al. 2001; Gendreau, Goggin, and Fulton 2001; Gendreau, Smith, and Goggin 2001.</p>  |
| <p><b>What's Promising</b></p>  | <p><b>Parole Policy Supported by Promising Research That Requires Further Examination</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Require parole officers to spend the majority of their time working with offenders on criminogenic needs rather than conditions of supervision that are noncriminogenic.</li> </ul> <p><b>Research Finding:</b> Recent research demonstrates that the amount of time supervision officers devote to addressing offenders' criminogenic needs is correlated with recidivism. The more time spent on criminogenic needs, the lower the rate of recidivism. Conversely, the more time spent discussing the conditions of supervision that are unrelated to criminogenic needs—thereby decreasing the time spent on criminogenic needs—the higher the recidivism rate.</p> <p><b>Standard of Research:</b> What's Promising</p> <p><b>Source:</b> Bonta et al. 2008.</p>                                   |
| <p><b>What's Not Clear</b></p>  | <p><b>Parole Policy With Conflicting Research Support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do/do not provide highest risk offenders with correctional interventions.</li> </ul> <p><b>Research Finding:</b> In some instances, services delivered to the highest risk offenders (e.g., very high-risk egocentric offenders with extended histories of antisocial behavior) have not reduced reoffending. Others have found that some sexual psychopaths who perform well in treatment have lower recidivism rates than those who do not perform well in treatment.</p> <p><b>Standard of Research:</b> What's Not Clear</p> <p><b>Sources:</b> Andrews 2007; Langton et al. 2006.</p>   |

choices may be made in light of these findings, careful followup and evaluation are required to ensure that the desired results are achieved.

## Strategies for Becoming Careful Consumers of Research

At the most practical level, being evidence-based means to continually ask the questions: “What do we know?” and “What information is available to guide our decisionmaking?” But given the dynamic nature of research—that is, new knowledge is emerging all the time—being evidence-based is easier said than done:

- Being aware of the release of new studies can be challenging. Currently, there is no single source to which professionals can turn to learn of new research findings.
- Once new research is identified, understanding it, assessing its empirical “strength,” and knowing the extent to which it supports or contradicts previous findings—or adds new knowledge to the field—can be difficult, particularly for those who do not have the benefit of research staff.
- Translating new learning to policies and practices can also prove difficult.
- Collecting data and information within one’s agency and jurisdiction to determine whether expected results are occurring takes a substantial commitment of human and/or financial resources.

## Strategies for Supporting Research-Based Parole Practices

The following are suggested strategies for supporting research-based parole practices:

- **Institute a regular practice of reviewing new research.** Considering local resources and opportunities, parole boards should identify methods to stay abreast of recent research (e.g., by partnering with the state’s department of corrections research entity or a local university). A new resource available to paroling authorities is the National Parole Resource Center. Funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, in cooperation with the

### ON BEING EVIDENCE-BASED: KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. Upon what information do we base this policy, practice, or decision?
2. How strong (reliable) is the evidence? How much “stock” can we put in it?
3. If the evidence is strong enough to rely on, what are the policy and practice implications of the evidence?
4. When we apply the evidence in our setting, do we get the results we expect?
5. If we apply the evidence in our setting and do not get the results we expect, why not?

National Institute of Corrections and administered collaboratively by the Center for Effective Public Policy and the Association of Paroling Authorities International, this resource will serve as a “one-stop shop” on emerging research and practices in parole.

- **Understand the gradations of research.** As discussed earlier in this chapter, not all research is the same. A practice may be promoted as research based, but that does not mean the quality or the methodology of the research is necessarily sound. It is wise to be a skeptical consumer and research the research.
- **Cautiously apply research findings across disciplines.** This is particularly important for paroling authorities whose own processes and outcomes have not been well researched. While parole boards are encouraged to look toward the research on effective interventions with offenders in other arenas (e.g., treatment or community supervision), they must apply these interventions carefully and monitor the outcomes to ensure that the goals, objectives, and expected outcomes are achieved.
- **Contribute to the growing body of knowledge on what works (and what doesn’t) in improving offender outcomes.** Paroling authorities, like all others in the criminal justice system, should collect and analyze data (or partner with a local research entity that can do so)—and share their findings regarding the results of their activities. These efforts will advance agency practice while contributing to the body of knowledge in the field.

## NATIONAL PAROLE RESOURCE CENTER

The goals of the National Parole Resource Center are to support the use of strategic and evidence-based practices to be able to:

- Effectively manage the timing and conditions of release of adult and juvenile offenders across the United States.
- Work to ensure the success of offenders released under parole supervision.
- Respond to violations of parole supervision with evidence-based approaches that are swift, certain, and designed to reduce the likelihood of future violations and new crime behavior.
- Support victims of crime and prevent future victimization.
- Ensure the appropriate use of tools and resources that will lead to reductions in recidivism, increased offender success, increased victim satisfaction, and reductions of justice-system-related costs.

The National Parole Resource Center provides:

- Policy and practice reports and other tools and information to support and enhance parole across the United States.
- Training for parole board and paroling authority members.
- Onsite and offsite technical assistance to advance parole policies and paroling practices.
- A website, complete with information, tools, and resources specifically for those concerned about the advancement of parole as a strategy to enhance public safety, effectively manage offenders, and reduce the rate of recidivism in the United States.

Visit <http://nationalparoleresourcecenter.org> for more information.

## STRATEGIES FOR PAROLING AUTHORITIES: BUILDING EVIDENCE-BASED ORGANIZATIONS AND SUPPORTING A SYSTEMWIDE APPROACH TO EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

- **Come to depend on research.** Reconsider the basis for all policy and practice decisions and understand the research on each.
- **Develop the capacity—and partner with colleague organizations—to stay current on emerging research.** Adjust policy and practice as empirical findings dictate.
- **Know the strength of the research.** Some policies and practices can be implemented with greater confidence than others.
- **Collect, exchange, and analyze local data.** Determine whether expected results are realized; adjust policies and practices where necessary.
- **Build collaborative partnerships** with other system actors that result in coordinated policies and practices (e.g., shared use of risk assessment instruments and communication of their findings, coordinated and purposeful use of programming).
- **Recognize that the sum of the whole is greater than its parts.** Every interaction with each offender, and every interaction with other system players, is an opportunity to change offender behavior and reduce recidivism.

# Benefits of an Evidence-Based Approach and Recommendations for Action

## Why Pursue an Evidence-Based Approach?

**F**or paroling authorities and their criminal justice colleagues, the benefits of applying evidence-based approaches, particularly those related to risk reduction, are many:

- **Improved outcomes.** The research is both compelling and hopeful. Current research demonstrates that the primary goals and interests of paroling authorities—reduced recidivism, reduced rates of technical supervision violations, and increased public safety—can be met by applying research to practice as described in chapter 2 and highlighted below.
- **Reduced costs.** Paroling authorities can contribute to lower system costs by implementing evidence-based practices. Offenders who receive the appropriate level and type of intervention reoffend—and violate their conditions of supervision—at significantly lower rates. The absence of these behaviors saves system costs through reductions in police calls, victimization expenses, parole hearings, and reincarceration. In addition, increased use of programs and services that reduce recidivism has been demonstrated to be fiscally sound. As demonstrated in exhibit 5–1, reliance on crime-reducing programmatic options can produce positive outcomes (see “Percent Change in Crime” column in exhibit 5–1) and significant cost/benefit returns (see “Cost/Benefit per Participant” column in exhibit 5–1).
- **Consistency.** An evidence-based approach to decisionmaking offers individual decisionmakers within and across agencies a framework that provides a coordinated and consistent method for case analysis and management.
- **Explanatory power.** Empirical research provides a sound rationale for the decisions made in individual cases, such as whether an offender was released on parole and the terms and conditions of release.

### Grounding the Work of Paroling Authorities in Evidence-Based Research

Given the state of knowledge in the human behavior and criminal justice fields, it is incumbent upon professionals to reconsider decisionmaking methods and practices and determine the extent to which these align with research. To follow an evidence-based business model is to ensure that individuals, independent entities, and systems of organizations rely on research to guide their policies, practices, and decisions. A substantial body of knowledge is available regarding a vast array of justice system practices (e.g., law enforcement investigative techniques, jury selection, risk reduction) that can result in the establishment of evidence-based organizations. In addition, a growing body of knowledge provides specific guidance to those interested in enhancing community safety by reducing risk among offenders under the management of the criminal justice system. This research has implications for paroling authorities in three significant ways:

- **At the agency level.** The use of research can result in sound and effective policy and practice in all paroling authority operations.
- **At the case management level.** Empirical findings can result in recidivism reductions of 10–30 percent, or perhaps more.
- **Across systems.** Alignment of evidence-based practices within each of the individual justice system organizations—and across all organizations—offers the greatest promise for increased offender success, decreased victimization, more effective use of resources and, most importantly, safer communities.

**Exhibit 5–1: Reducing Crime With Evidence-Based Options: What Works, Benefits, and Costs**

| Programs for Adult Offenders                                     | Percent Change in Crime | Financial Benefits of Program <sup>a</sup> (dollars) |             | Program Costs per Participant | Cost/Benefit per Participant <sup>b</sup> |
|--|-------------------------|--|-------------|-------------------------------|---|
|  |                         | To Crime Victims                                     | To Taxpayer |                               |   |
| Vocational education in prison                                   | -9.0                    | \$8,114  | \$6,806     | \$1,182                       | \$13,738                                  |
| Intensive supervision: treatment-oriented programs               | -16.7                   | 9,318  | 9,369       | 7,124                         | 11,563                                    |
| General education in prison (basic education or postsecondary)   | -7.0                    | 6,325  | 5,306       | 962                           | 10,669                                    |
| Cognitive-behavioral therapy in prison or community              | -6.3                    | 5,658  | 4,746       | 105                           | 10,299                                    |
| Drug treatment in community                                      | -9.3                    | 5,133  | 5,495       | 574                           | 10,054                                    |
| Correctional industries in prison                                | -5.9                    | 5,360  | 4,496       | 417                           | 9,439                                     |
| Drug treatment in prison (therapeutic communities or outpatient) | -5.7                    | 5,133  | 4,306       | 1,604                         | 7,835                                     |
| Employment and job training in the community                     | -4.3                    | 2,373  | 2,386       | 400                           | 4,359                                     |
| Intensive supervision: surveillance-oriented programs            | 0                       | 0  | 0           | 3,747                         | -3,747                                    |

<sup>a</sup> Reduced costs related to reduced recidivism.

<sup>b</sup> Positive numbers indicate system savings.

Source: S. Aos, M. Miller, and E. Drake, *Evidence-Based Public Policy Options To Reduce Future Prison Construction, Criminal Justice Costs, and Crime Rates* (Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 2006).

## Endnotes

1. This figure is calculated by computing a rearrest rate of 67 percent of 700,000 released offenders and rounding down.

2. For more information, see two other papers in this series: *Paroling Authorities' Strategic Planning and Management for Results and Core Competencies: A Resource for Parole Board Chairs, Members, and Executive Staff*.

3. See, particularly, the extensive writings of M. Kay Harris on the topic of sanctioning philosophies.

4. At least 95 percent of prisoners are eventually released to the community (Hughes and Wilson 2003).

5. Although a fully systemic model has yet to be empirically tested, some jurisdictions (e.g., Travis County, Texas, and Maryland) have already experienced a 15- to 30-percent reduction in recidivism using similar approaches.

6. See *A Framework for Evidence-Based Decision Making in Local Criminal Justice Systems* (National Institute of Corrections 2010).

7. Adapted from "7 Ways to Reduce Recidivism" in *A Framework for Evidence-Based Decision Making in Local Criminal Justice Systems* (National Institute of Corrections 2010).

8. See chapter 3, "Reaching the Full Recidivism Reduction Potential: Using a Systemwide Approach to Evidence-Based Decisionmaking," for a discussion of such an approach.

9. Some examples include the Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions (COMPAS) and the Level of Service Inventory–Revised (LSI–R).

10. Regarding the use of assessment tools for women offenders, see Blanchette 2007; Hardyman and Van Voorhis 2004; Orbis Partners 2006; Smith, Cullen, and Latessa 2009; Van Voorhis 2007; and Van Voorhis and Presser 2001. For sex offenders, see Center for Sex Offender Management 2007; Friendship, Mann,

and Beech 2003; Gordon and Nicholaichuk 1996; Hanson 2006; Hanson and Morton-Bourgon 2007; Mailloux et al. 2003; Marques et al. 2005; and Prescott 2006. For juvenile offenders, see Heilbrun, Goldstein, and Redding 2005. For mentally disordered offenders, see Bonta, Law, and Hanson 1998.

11. Throughout this paper, the term "high-risk" is used. In so doing, a distinction is made between "high-risk" offenders and the "highest risk" offenders. At the present time, there are contradictory findings with regard to effective interventions for the "highest risk" population. This issue is briefly addressed in exhibit 4–1, page 18.

12. Although the research on dosage and intensity is limited, it is clear that the intensity and duration of the interventions should increase along with risk levels.

13. See chapter 4, "Evaluating the Research: How Much Evidence Is Enough?," for a discussion of the "What's Promising" categorization.

14. The author recognizes that there may be legitimate conditions that might not affect recidivism that the officer will still need to address (e.g., sex offender registration, payment of child support) in addition to conditions that relate to criminogenic needs.

15. In some instances, results have been demonstrated to be much higher. For example, according to Landenberger and Lipsey (2005), cognitive-behavioral programming resulted in an average recidivism reduction of 25 percent, but the most effective programs saw reductions by as much as 50 percent.

16. Andrews and Bonta 1998; Aos, Miller, and Drake 2006a; Cullen and Gendreau 2000; Gendreau, Little, and Goggin 1996; Gendreau et al. 2001; Grove and Meehl 1996; Grove et al. 2000; Lowenkamp, Latessa, and Holsinger 2006; Lowenkamp, Latessa, and Smith 2006; and Lowenkamp et al. 2007.

17. Bazemore and Schiff 2004; Bonta et al. 2008; Dowden and Andrews 2004; Henggeler et al. 1998; Lind and Tyler 1988; MacDuffie and Helper 2006; Porter 1985; Tyler 2000, 2007; Tyler and Huo 2002; Umbreit 1998; and Washington State Institute for Public Policy 2004.

18. Adler, Kwon, and Heckscher 2008; Collins and Porras 1997; Heckscher and Adler 2006; Henggeler et al. 1998; and Larson and LaFasto 1989.

19. Peters and Austin 1986; Peters and Waterman 2004; and Senge 2006.

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