



National Judicial Opioid Task Force

Five Guiding Principles for State Courts

The Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ) and the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA) established the National Judicial Opioid Task Force (NJOTF) to examine current efforts and find solutions to address the opioid epidemic. The NJOTF will make recommendations to courts at every level, to support our Judiciary and help individuals find a successful recovery.

1. A Comprehensive Approach

The justice system should lead the way in delivering solutions to the opioid epidemic and must be equipped to address the harms of substance use disorders for every person at every intersection point of the justice system. The courts should, in partnership and cooperation with other public and private actors, identify, encourage, and employ a broad range of evidence-based interventions spanning the entire justice system.

2. All Hands On Deck

Judges should maximize their roles as conveners, bringing together government agency and community stakeholders such as law enforcement, corrections, child welfare, and schools. Educating all court personnel on the science of substance use and mental health disorders, effective treatment interventions, the impacts of trauma and appropriate court responses is imperative to this effort.

3. Individualized Treatment and Services

Courts should use validated screening and assessment instruments to ensure that treatment services target the individual's needs. Individualized services may include treatment for substance use, mental health, adverse childhood experiences and other trauma, and co-occurring disorders along with psychiatric services and medication assisted treatment. Treatment should not be limited to only opioid use disorder, but on all substance use disorders because substance abuse trends show that

the use of other dangerous drugs, including cocaine and methamphetamines, is also rising. Services should be available at all points in the justice system including diversion programs, drug courts, alternatives to incarceration, incarceration-based programs, naloxone access for overdose prevention, telehealth services, guardian and continuation services, and other evidence-based programs.

4. Protecting Children and Supporting Families

Interventions should incorporate a continuum of treatment strategies along with recovery support services such as parenting classes, housing assistance, employment services, and child care. Services should be accessible to vulnerable populations such as babies, adolescents, inmates, mentally ill persons, those with a history of trauma, and other historically underserved populations. Family support groups, peer recovery coaches and mentoring programs should be made readily available. Further, courts should encourage and adopt strategies to insure the expeditious placement of children in a safe, stable environment.

5. Making a Difference and Measuring Success

The courts should use data-driven decision-making approaches and establish robust data collection and quality assurance to use data for objectively assessing performance.

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