

Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) Grant Program

Overview

Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) is a model framework that supports community-based alternatives to jail and prosecution for people whose unlawful behavior stems from unmanaged substance use, mental health challenges, or extreme poverty.

The LEAD model originated in Seattle in 2011 and is founded on evidence-based core principles that include advancing safety, health, and equity by equipping communities with improved ways to respond to issues flowing from unmet behavioral health needs and extreme poverty.

LEAD is designed to provide care coordination for people with complex, ongoing, unmet behavioral health needs and/or income instability who may lack shelter/housing, income, food, health care, and social networks and for whom existing systems prove inaccessible, overly complicated, or insufficiently responsive. The LEAD Support Bureau provides technical assistance to the multiple entities involved with administering or implementing these initiatives.

Program structure

The policies and protocols for each LEAD site are adaptive to local needs and are developed by local decision-makers and advocates who make up the Policy Coordinating Group (PCG). Membership may include senior law enforcement officers, prosecutors and public defenders, project managers, business representatives, elected officials, civil rights leaders and community advocates.

An Operational Work Group (OWG) is utilized for operational coordination and case conferencing, where members include frontline personnel, police officers, assistant prosecutors and public defenders, case managers, other service providers, and community leadership representatives.

LEAD expansion

The LEAD model was used as a template to establish a pilot site program through Senate Bill 5380 (2019). Pilot sites were established in four counties: Mason, Snohomish, Thurston, and Whatcom. In 2023, additional funding was provided to create a grant program to award contracts for jurisdictions in the state of Washington to apply for funding to scale existing projects or to launch new LEAD sites.

This expansion has allowed the original sites the opportunity to expand their growing programs and allowed four new sites serving the City of Seattle, Jefferson County, Chelan and Douglas Counties, and Tulalip Tribe/ Marysville.

Eligibility

LEAD starts by diverting people with behavioral health needs away from jail and prosecution and into collaborative, community-based systems of response and care in the pre-booking phase.

Individuals may be referred to LEAD if they are exposed or at risk for entering the criminal legal system due to illegal activity related to behavioral health issues or poverty.

LEAD is primarily designed for people who have had repeated contact with the criminal legal system, whose problematic situation is entrenched and protracted, related to complex challenges.

While LEAD has historically been a pre-booking diversion program, 2E2SSB 5536 added new language to chapter 69.50 RCW, which included LEAD as a referral source for pretrial diversion.

Authority

Enacted through Substitute Senate Bill 5380 (2019) and codified as [RCW 71.24.589](#).

Data

[LEAD program report and status assessment](#)
[LEAD pilot program report](#)

Budget

SFY 2024- \$2.5 million opioid abatement settlement
SFY 2025- \$2.5 million opioid abatement settlement

Partners

- Whatcom County Prosecuting Attorney's Office
- Snohomish County Prosecuting Attorney's Office
- Thurston County Public Health and Social Services
- Mason County Public Health
- City of Seattle
- Gateway to Freedom, Jefferson County
- Catholic Charities of Yakima, serving Chelan & Douglas County
- Second Chance Outreach / Hope for Homies, serving Marysville
- Purpose. Dignity. Action. (PDA)- LEAD Support Bureau

For more information

Contact

Grace Burkhart
Diversion Services Program Manager
360.725.0973
Grace.burkhart@hca.wa.gov

For more information about Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD)

<https://leadbureau.org/>

