



Therapeutic Court Association of Washington
Washington Association of Drug Courts
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Washington State has over 100 Therapeutic Courts!

What Is a Therapeutic Court?

Therapeutic courts are alternative court dockets that focus on rehabilitation rather than punishment for criminal or dependency cases driven by substance use disorder and other underlying behavioral health and social service needs.

They promote public health and protect public safety by effectively addressing root causes, providing an off-ramp from incarceration and a path to maintain parental rights.

Therapeutic Courts:

- Operate within Superior Courts, District Courts, Municipal Courts, and Tribal Courts.
- Authorized in the state of Washington by the Therapeutic Court Statute [RCW 2.03](#)
- Use evidence-based best practices to break the cycle of crime, recidivism, and child abuse/neglect. They are guided by three decades of national research published by [All Rise](#) as the Adult Treatment Court Best Practice Standards.
- Rely on dedicated, multidisciplinary professional teams: judges, prosecuting attorneys, defense attorneys, court coordinators, case managers, social workers, probation officers, law enforcement, treatment providers, peer specialists, and other service providers.
- Provide treatment, case management, supportive services and tangible resources alongside judicial monitoring, drug testing, structure, accountability, and behavioral interventions to help participants overcome substance use and mental health disorders that have contributed to their criminal charges or involvement in the child welfare/dependency system.
- Help participants obtain housing and employment, build healthy, supportive relationships and become positive role models in their families and communities. Have an upstream, generational impact for the many children whose parents participate.
- Include pre-adjudication programs where successful completion results in a dismissal of criminal charges and post-disposition / post-plea tracks where graduation results in a reduced sentence, allowing the participant to avoid incarceration.
- Voluntary programs. Individuals who do not want to participate can take their cases to the mainstream criminal legal or dependency court systems instead.

Therapeutic courts in Washington vary across jurisdictions, reflecting the unique needs, resources, and priorities of local communities. These courts continue to evolve and focus on different populations and challenges, including substance use disorders, mental health needs, veterans, family recovery, and other specialized areas of support and accountability.

Therapeutic Courts in Washington State include:

Adult Drug Court (aka Recovery Court)

- Specially designed court docket for individuals charged with property crimes (vehicle theft, burglary, identity theft, etc.) or other drug-related crimes.
- Goals: address substance use, service needs, and criminogenic factors, stop recidivism.
- Court level: Typically Superior Court. Some at District or Municipal Court.
- Operated in Washington since 1994.
- Classified as evidence-based for reducing crime by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) and found to produce a return on investment for taxpayers.

Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT)

- Specially designed civil court docket for individuals with serious mental illness who are ordered by court to be committed to AOT as a less restrictive alternative (LRA) treatment for up to 18 months. Unlike other therapeutic courts, AOT is not voluntary.
- Goals: address behavioral health needs, ensure safety of committed individual and others, stop cycle of psychiatric hospitalization and incarceration.
- Court level: Superior Court.
- Operated in Washington since 2015 as a pilot program. Widespread implementation by Behavioral Health Administrative Service Organizations (BH-ASOs) began in 2023.

Community Court

- Specially designed court docket for low-level offenses that focuses on addressing individualized service needs and collaborating closely with the local community.
- Goal: address behavioral health and service needs, connect to community, stop recidivism.
- Court level: Typically Municipal Court or District Court.
- Operated in Washington since 2005.

DWI / DUI / Impaired Driving Court

- Specially designed court docket for individuals charged with driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

- Goals: address substance use disorder, ensure traffic safety, stop recidivism.
- Court level: Typically District Court or Municipal Court.
- Operated in Washington since 2004.

Early Childhood Court (aka Safe Babies Court)

- Specially designed court docket for parents of infants and toddlers entering foster care, designed to ensure safety, wellbeing and early brain development.
- Goals: access early intervention services, increase time with parents, safely exit foster care, reach permanence with parents or family members.
- Court level: Typically Superior Court.
- Operated in Washington since 2016.

Family Treatment Court (aka Family Recovery Court / Collaborative Court)

- Specially designed family court docket for dependency cases in which parental substance use is a contributing factor to child abuse or neglect.
- Goals: address substance use, healthy parenting, ensure safe homes for children, increase family reunification.
- Court level: Typically Superior Court.
- Operated in Washington since 2001.

Juvenile Therapeutic Court

- Specially designed docket within the juvenile or family court system to which delinquency / criminal cases are referred.
- Goals: address substance use and service needs, enhance family relationships, functioning and support, decrease truancy, stop recidivism.
- Court level: Typically Superior Court.
- Operated in Washington since 1997.

Mental Health Court

- Specially designed court docket for individuals with severe and persistent mental illness whose symptoms have a nexus to their criminal charges. Participants follow individual treatment plans and are supervised in the community by court and mental health professionals.
- Goals: address mental health and service needs, ensure community safety, stop recidivism.
- Court level: Typically District Court. Some at Superior Court or Municipal Court level.
- Operated in Washington since 1999.

- Classified as evidence-based for reducing crime by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) and found to produce a return on investment for taxpayers.

Tribal Wellness Court (aka Healing to Wellness Court)

- Specially designed court docket operated under tribal jurisdiction that incorporates culturally relevant values, traditions, and healing practices into a structured, team-based therapeutic court approach.
- Goals: address behavioral health and service needs, connect to community, stop recidivism.
- Court level: Tribal Court
- Operated in Washington State since 2017.

Veterans Treatment Court

- Specially designed court docket for military veterans or service members with substance use disorder, PTSD, traumatic brain injury, and other behavioral health needs who are charged with crimes. Incorporates military culture, mentors, and veteran specific services.
- Goals: address behavioral health and service needs, connect to veteran specific services and support, stop recidivism
- Court level: Typically District Court.
- Operated in Washington since 2009.