

WA state SAC policy summary
(from) **Evaluation of
Washington State Department of Corrections (WADOC)
Swift and Certain (SAC) Policy
Process, Outcome and Cost-Benefit Evaluation** (73 pages in all)
Executive Summary

In 2012, the Washington State Department of Corrections (WADOC) embarked on an ambitious effort to restructure their community supervision model. These changes were driven by the passage of Senate Bill 6204, which created substantial operating changes to the Community Corrections Division (CCD) of the WADOC, including matching the level of supervision to offender's risk level, utilizing evidence-based treatment and implementing swift and certain (yet moderate) jail sanctions for community supervision violations (Washington State Department of Corrections 2008; 2014). The Swift and Certain (SAC) policy was implemented in May of 2012, with the intent of expanding the HOPE model to a much broader community-based criminal justice population.

Primarily, SAC was established to reduce confinement time for sanctions following a violation of supervision conditions. While maintaining a substantial focus on public safety, the Washington SAC program also sought to reduce correctional costs associated with short-term confinement for violation sanctioning. Through support by the Laura and John Arnold Foundation (LJAF), researchers at Washington State University (WSU) completed a multi-phase project to examine the implementation process and provide an outcome and cost-benefit evaluation of SAC.

Details of research skipped

While some implementation challenges were apparent, SAC's rollout was relatively efficient and is in use in all WADOC field offices today. The efficiency is likely the result of quality assurance measures implemented with SAC to ensure fidelity. It is also interesting to note that, while some minor differences were identified; overall SAC's implementation and practices are similar across the six correctional regions. What is most remarkable about the study findings is that, despite the accelerated timeline provided by the legislative mandate, SAC was implemented as intended and is achieving its objectives. With a continued focus on quality assurance and training the WADOC will attempt to ensure that the policy retains fidelity and stability over time.

Outcome and Cost-Benefit Evaluation: The core focus of the outcome and cost-benefit evaluation was to examine if SAC was meeting its intended goals, including: reduced confinement sanctioning resulting from community corrections violations, reduced recidivism, increased treatment utilization, reduced violation behavior, and a reduction in correctional and associated costs. Utilizing a quasi-experimental design and making use of a historically matched comparison group (offenders participating in community supervision prior to SAC's implementation) we evaluated these SAC objectives. Overall the findings were positive, demonstrating effectiveness across several key areas. Findings show that:

1) SAC participants were found to incur fewer incarceration sanction days following a violation. Specifically, SAC significantly reduced the proportion of offenders confined following a violation and the duration of time they served for those violations. This was an impressive reduction as the **odds of confinement were reduced by roughly 20 percent and the duration of confinement was reduced by average of 16 days in the initial 12 months following reentry.**

2) SAC's implementation did *not* impact public safety negatively, as participants were found to have a reduced probability of recidivism. Specially, **SAC participants were found to have 20 percent reduced odds of any conviction, felony conviction, and property conviction. Furthermore, SAC participants possessed 30 percent reduced odds of a violent felony conviction.**

3) SAC participants possess greater treatment program utilization. **The findings indicate that SAC participants had an increased participation and duration of chemical dependency and cognitive behavioral therapies,** with many significant differences identified in the 12 months following reentry.

4) SAC participants greatly reduced their propensity of committing "any" and "non-serious" violations and a reduced propensity for "serious" violations in the 12 months following reentry. While SAC participants incurred an anticipated greater frequency of non-serious (or low level) violations in the first months of their supervision, **SAC participants reduced their propensities for non-serious violations at a greater rate than comparison subjects over time and were less likely to incur a serious violation throughout their supervision.** Variations were found among "absconding" violations as well, where policy alterations for this violation type indicated that SAC participants incurred greater absconding propensities prior to the policy. While some implementation challenges were apparent, SAC's rollout was relatively efficient and is in use in all WADOC field offices today. The efficiency is likely the result of quality assurance measures implemented with SAC to ensure fidelity. It is also interesting to note that, while some minor differences were identified; overall SAC's implementation and practices are similar across the six correctional regions. What is most remarkable about the study findings is that, despite the accelerated timeline provided by the legislative mandate, SAC was implemented as intended and is achieving its objectives. With a continued focus on quality assurance and training the WADOC will attempt to ensure that the policy retains fidelity and stability over time.

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 - 5) Participants possess lower correctional and associated costs. As anticipated, supervision and confinement costs decreased, while the costs of treatment provision increased as a result of SAC. Overall, recidivism reduced among participants, which generated costs savings for the policy. **Specifically, a cost savings ratio of 16 dollars saved for every dollar spent on SAC was identified.**
- Overall, SAC has been successful in meeting its intended objectives and, in some respects, may have exceeded expectations. Due to the economic downturn, the WADOC was asked to make large budget cuts, while maintaining public safety. This was a substantial task of which SAC was one of several methods used to achieve this goal. While additional factors may have contributed to the findings, our results indicate that not only was public safety maintained but that reductions in recidivism were also observed. Furthermore, while correctional and associated costs were significantly reduced, what is still unmeasured are the societal cost reductions provided through the reduced confinement time, which (qualitative analyses confirmed) resulted in maintained offender employment, social support and increased treatment participation.

While SAC still has room for improvement, there are many strengths and "take-aways" of the initiative that can be utilized by other states or agencies looking to adopt programs similar to SAC.

- 1) In contrast to many deterrence-based sentencing strategies implemented in previous years that relied on longer periods of incarceration for violations, SAC reduced the length of confinements and created greater proportionality with regard to the violation level. Although WADOC significantly reduced the amount of time spent in jail on violations, these reductions had no appreciable negative impacts on public safety, and in fact our findings indicate improved public safety as a result of SAC.
- 2) While certainty of sanctioning was the key policy alteration, it was combined with a graduated sanctioning schedule that provided distinctions between low versus high level violations. This schedule (for the most part) was well known to all offenders. Findings revealed greater reductions of violations overtime and focus group results of SAC indicated greater appreciation of known consequences and the consistency of their application.
- 3) Portions of the monies saved were reinvested in programming in an attempt to further improve offender's reentry transition and reduce recidivism as a result.
- 4) Perhaps key to this entire initiative was that the WADOC implemented training and quality assurance practices to maintain SAC's fidelity. This contribution has been notably absent in many historical policy shifts or program applications in the corrections field. Still in place currently, the WADOC quality assurance team was an important model component that should be replicated if SAC is attempted in other jurisdictions.