



COMPAS Assessment Tool Launched -- *Evidence-based rehabilitation for offender success*

Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions (COMPAS) is a research-based, risk and needs assessment tool for criminal justice practitioners to assist them in the placement, supervision, and case management of offenders in community and secure settings. The COMPAS is an objective risk and needs assessment instrument.

This tool:

- Allows the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) to use evidence-based principles, including providing rehabilitative programming to the higher risk-to-reoffend prisoners and parolees, and provide other types of programs to low-risk-to-reoffend prisoners and parolees.
- Helps correctional staff assign the right inmates to the right programs at the right time based on individual risk and needs assessments.
- Aids in reducing the likelihood that the inmate will reoffend upon reentry to society.

COMPAS assists CDCR in determining:

- Risk – WHO to target
- Needs – WHAT to treat
- Responsivity – HOW to go about it

COMPAS consists of:

- A series of questions used to determine overall risk potential and criminogenic* needs profile.
- Data on the inmate's history of substance abuse, education, family background, criminal activity, and social functioning.

COMPAS assessments are used to:

- Place inmates in the appropriate programs that will aid in their reentry to society, and will most likely reduce the inmate's chance of reoffending.

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Background: The Public Safety and Offender Rehabilitation Services Act of 2007 (Assembly Bill 900), signed into law by the Governor in May 2007, is a major effort to reform California's prison system by reducing prison overcrowding and increasing rehabilitative programming. In June 2007, the Expert Panel on Adult Offender and Recidivism Reduction Programming (Expert Panel), found that: "Assessing offender risk levels and needs is a crucial component of effective programming. Doing so allows correctional agencies to assign offenders to the programs that will most likely benefit them. But the CDCR was found to most often assign offenders to programming on a first-come, first-served, basis. This practice virtually ensured that offenders were not getting the rehabilitation programming that they need." Correctional agencies assigning offenders to appropriate programming are more likely to reduce recidivism. COMPAS is an evidence-based risk and needs assessment tool selected for use by CDCR.

COMPAS uses principles of evidence-based rehabilitation:

Target Highest Risk Offenders.

Research shows that offenders with different levels of risk to reoffend respond differently to rehabilitation programming. Assessing offenders' risk to reoffend is a crucial component of effective programming which allows assignment of offenders to programs that will most benefit them.

- Give the highest programming priority to those with high and moderate risk to reoffend. Research shows that high and moderate risk to reoffend prisoners and parolees achieve the greatest gains in recidivism reduction.
- Provide low risk offenders with rehabilitation programs that focus on work, life skills and personal growth rather than rehabilitation treatment programs. Research shows that intensive rehabilitation treatment programs for low-risk offenders have a minimal reduction or even an increase in recidivism.
- Provide short-term prisoners with reentry services and reintegration skills training rather than rehabilitative treatment programs. Most credible rehabilitation treatment programs require the offender to participate for at least six months to gain any measurable and sustainable benefit .

Assess Offenders' Needs.

Objective, standardized instruments, rather than subjective judgments alone, are the most effective methods for determining the programming needs that should be targeted for each offender.

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For moderate-to high risk to reoffend prisoners and parolees, determine the needs relating to their criminal behavior. Research has demonstrated that varied combinations of these seven criminogenic needs (dynamic risk factors) drive criminal behavior in male offenders: (A separate COMPAS assessment is provided to female offenders.)

1. Educational-vocational-financial deficits and achievement skills
2. Anti-social attitudes and beliefs
3. Anti-social and pro-criminal associates and isolation
4. Temperament and impulsiveness (weak self-control) factors
5. Familial-marital-dysfunctional relationship (lack of nurturance-caring and/or monitoring-supervision)
6. Alcohol and other drug disorders
7. Deviant sexual preferences and arousal patterns

Design “responsivity” factors into programming.

In assigning programming, it is important to account for individual offender characteristics that interfere with or facilitate an offender’s ability and motivation to learn.

Progress Milestones in implementation of COMPAS :

- CDCR adopted use of an automated risk and needs assessment instrument and began initial implementation at reception centers during FY 2006-07.
- Training for Correctional Counselors at Reception Centers to use the COMPAS risk and needs assessment as part of the process to classify and endorse offenders to an institution began in October 2008 at Deuel Vocational Institution (DVI) in Tracy, the Reception Center “Proof Project” site.
- Beginning in February 2009, correctional staff in all reception centers began to use inmate COMPAS profiles for prison placement – a critical link toward assignment of inmates to appropriate programs based on individual risk and needs assessment.
- Use of the COMPAS assessment information is being tested in the “Pathways to Rehabilitation” project, or the “Proof Project,” which will test California’s newly designed rehabilitation programming, the California Logic Model.

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Parole Violation Decision Making Instrument (PVDMI):

California is also moving forward with a new evidence-based system for dealing with parole violations that will allow parole agents to scientifically weigh an offender's risk level and the benefits of alternatives to prison as part of their decision making process.

- The new Parole Violation Decision Making Instrument (PVDMI) was specifically designed and tested for California parolees, and was developed in coordination with national experts advising the CDCR.
- The centerpiece of the PVDMI is the California Static Risk Assessment (CSRA), which has been normed to California's offender population and used to determine risk to recidivate.
- This new model will help focus CDCR's resources on higher risk offenders.

Sources:

Inmate Treatment and Prison-To-Employment Plan, Legislative Report, March 2008.

Report to the California State Legislature: A Roadmap for Effective Offender Programming in California, Expert Panel on Adult Offender Recidivism Reduction Programming, June 2007.

"Evidence-Based Treatment and the California Logic Model," Steven H. Chapman, Ph.D., Assistant Secretary, Office of Research, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), Power Point Presentation, August 15, 2008.

Report on Expenditure of AB 900 Rehabilitation Funding, Legislative Report, CDCR, January 2008.

"California to Launch Parole Violation Decision Making Instrument to Help Agents Assess Risk and Needs in Determining Sanctions," http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/News/2008_Press_Releases/Oct_3.html, October 3, 2008.

* The concept of criminogenic needs means that research shows that the offender population has a higher prevalence of these behaviors than does the general population. Therefore, the presence of these needs in a person may very well indicate a tendency toward criminal activity. Female offenders have additional needs that correctional programming should address, including treatment of abuse, violence, trauma, family relationships, substance abuse, and co-occurring disorders. (Expert Panel)



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