



Sacramento County Behavioral Health Commission

June 11, 2026

Sacramento County Board of Supervisors
700 H Street, Suite 2450
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Recommendation to Expand Drug Testing as an Evidence-Based Component of Felony Mental Health Diversion

Honorable Supervisors:

The Sacramento County Behavioral Health Commission is recommending the expansion of drug testing as a core component of Sacramento County Felony Mental Health Diversion (MHD). When implemented as a therapeutic and recovery-oriented intervention, drug testing is a well-established evidence-based practice that supports recovery, improves treatment outcomes, enhances program accountability, increases public savings, and contributes to public safety.

Individuals participating in MHD, frequently present with co-occurring substance use and mental health disorders. For these individuals, ongoing substance use can interfere with medication adherence, worsen psychiatric symptoms, reduce treatment engagement, and increase the risk of recidivism. Early identification of substance use allows treatment providers to intervene before relapse escalates into a behavioral health crisis, further criminal justice involvement, or program failure.

Research consistently demonstrates that treatment courts are among the most effective interventions for reducing recidivism among justice-involved individuals with substance use disorders. The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) has found that adult drug courts reduce recidivism and criminal behavior more effectively than traditional case processing. Multiple studies have also found that participants who successfully complete Drug Court programs are significantly less likely to be arrested again and more likely to maintain long-term recovery. The National Treatment Court Resource Center (NTCRC) stated that a successful drug court can reduce recidivism by as much as 35 to 40 percent.

Successful Drug Courts can also save the public money. According to the NIJ, reduced recidivism and other long-term outcomes associated with drug court participation resulted in public savings of \$6,744 per participant, with even greater savings when victimization costs were included at \$12,218. Another study posted by NIJ, the "Cost-Benefit Analysis of Criminal Justice Reforms" found there to be \$5,680 net benefit to the public per person in comparison to the traditional criminal justice approach.

Evidence-based drug testing is a key component of Sacramento County's DUI Treatment Court (DUITC) and Veteran's Treatment Court (VTC). Both programs test weekly and randomly throughout the entirety of the programs. It is one of the key factors that contributes to the success of both of these programs. Over the last 3 years, DUITC has averaged a 71% graduation rate and VTC averaged a 77% graduation rate. However, over those same 3 years, MHD has only averaged a 45% graduation rate.

Drug testing is one of the foundational elements of a successful treatment court. The American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) recognizes drug testing as an evidence-based clinical practice that improves the accuracy of substance use reporting, supports treatment planning, identifies relapse early, and strengthens recovery management. ASAM's guideline "Appropriate Use of Drug Testing in Clinical Addiction Medicine" specifically recommends drug testing as a component of comprehensive substance use disorder treatment and ongoing recovery monitoring. All Rise, formerly known as The National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP), has issued an Adult Drug Court Best Practice Standards, which recommends frequent, random, and observed drug testing as a critical tool for monitoring recovery progress and identifying relapse early. These standards include the need to randomly test at least twice a week until the participant achieves early remission. All Rise references a multisite study that showed testing twice weekly had a 38% reduction in crime and was 61% more cost-effective than testing less frequently. Even after the participant achieves remission, best practices show that while the frequency of testing can reduce, random drug testing should continue through out the treatment court program.

The purpose of drug testing is not punishment, rather, it is to provide objective clinical information that allows treatment teams to respond quickly with appropriate interventions, increased support, and treatment modifications. It also supports recovery by providing clear accountability and measurable milestones. Research has shown that individuals are more likely to remain engaged in treatment when expectations are clear and when treatment providers can identify and address relapse quickly. Accountability and support are not opposing concepts; together, they form the foundation of successful recovery-oriented systems of care.

From a public safety perspective, early identification of relapse can prevent escalation into criminal behavior, psychiatric decompensation, homelessness, hospitalization, and incarceration. By supporting treatment retention and recovery stability, drug testing helps treatment courts achieve their dual goals of improving individual outcomes while reducing future justice system involvement.

Currently in Sacramento County, there are insufficient resources to conduct these evidence based drug testing practices in MHD. In 2025 alone, 717 defendants were granted into felony MHD. The majority of which were diagnosed with substance use disorders. However, many of these participants only engaged in drug testing once every few months and others were drug testing in ways not following the best practice standards that could be easily defeated to avoid detection of drug use.

The Recovery Support & Stability Program model recently proposed for Sacramento County's MHD program reflects these evidence-based principles. As outlined in the proposal, structured monitoring provides objective clinical data, enables early intervention, strengthens treatment engagement, reinforces accountability, supports more productive clinical dialogue, and allows for real-time treatment adjustments. Most importantly, the model is designed to align with Sacramento County's lower-barrier

and engagement-focused philosophy by emphasizing therapeutic intervention rather than punishment. (The Power Point presentation is attached.)

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Board of Supervisors to support the continued use and expansion of evidence-based drug testing within MHD. When implemented ethically, consistently, and within a therapeutic framework, drug testing is not a surveillance tool—it is a recovery support tool. It strengthens treatment engagement, improves recovery outcomes, reduces recidivism, and helps individuals achieve long-term stability and success.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to evidence-based practices that support recovery, public safety, and meaningful system transformation.

Sincerely,

Sarah Weber
Sacramento County Behavioral Health Commission, Chair

cc: Ryan Quist, PhD, Behavioral Health Director
Chevon Kothari, Deputy County Executive, Health and Human Services
Tim Lutz, Director, Health Services
Kelli Weaver, Deputy Director, Behavioral Health Services
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Lori Miller, Division Manager, Substance Use Prevention and Treatment
Behavioral Health Commission Members

Attachment:
Recovery Support & Stability Program