

## Idaho to revamp prison treatment programs

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BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Idaho is eliminating one prison treatment program and will be revamping several others after an in-depth assessment showed that some were ineffective and many relied on outdated research.

Idaho Department of Correction Director Kevin Kempf announced Thursday that all prison "therapeutic community" programs would be halted immediately, and that a team of employees would start looking for replacements for other treatment programs.

The changes are in response to a new in-depth assessment by the Council of State Governments Justice Center, which found that offenders who go through the therapeutic community programs are actually slightly more likely to re-offend than those who go through other types of programming. Inmates who are in the therapeutic communities have a 28 percent recidivism rate, compared to a rate of 23 percent for other inmates, according to the assessment.

Inmates are often sentenced to therapeutic community, or TC, programs as part of their prison stay under Idaho's retained jurisdiction program, where inmates can leave prison after several months if they successfully complete treatment.

"We have been wringing our hands over what to do with the TCs," Kempf said. "We know it's going to make some judges mad and we know it's going to make some people mad. But why would we keep putting our money into something that isn't working?"

The inmates currently in therapeutic community units will still take part in treatment programs, but they will be more like the programs given to general population inmates, without the rigid and often confrontational community structure used in the TCs. Kempf said the switch won't change the length of an inmate's sentence. Both inmates and judges were notified of the changes on Thursday.

Bree Derrick with the Council of State Governments Justice Center led the assessment, working with experts across the country in a variety of fields. Typically, Idaho inmates are assigned to one of 15 different treatment "pathways" - a set list of required programs - based on their needs and the risk they have of re-offending.

Derrick said that an analysis of the 15 pathways showed that some weren't being used and others were nearly identical to each other, and different pathways were being offered at different facilities. All included the same basic core components like anger management and cognitive-behavioral therapy, however. Derrick said consolidating the programs and making them available statewide would increase inmate access.

Surprisingly, Kempf said, the study showed the inmates in the therapeutic treatment units weren't getting more intensive or longer programs - they were getting about the same number of hours and same type of programs, but were simply taking longer to do it.

"The way that therapeutic communities are running here are ineffective," Derrick said. "It's a bit of a shaming culture, and the research shows, we know, that's just not effective at all."

Though the types of programs offered needs improvement, Derrick said, Idaho's doing a good job of selecting which inmates need low, moderate or intensive programming. The assessment showed the people providing the programs are performing well, Derrick said, because they care deeply about the work and are focused on rehabilitation, not punishment.

She commended the Idaho Department of Correction for seeking out the assessment and being open to change.

"I can't stress enough how unique it is to do this level of assessment," Derrick said. "Are we targeting the right people, what are we providing them, and how well is it working? When those pieces are working well, that's when we see an impact on recidivism."