

Technological Innovations in the Justice System: Promoting Safety, Facilitating Recovery

Catching Up With COSSAP, December 2020

Necessity has truly served as the mother of invention for courts, jail administrators, and community corrections personnel seeking to ensure public safety and promote recovery from substance use disorder (SUD) while protecting individual health. Health risks are particularly high for individuals with SUDs, which is the case for well over half of both state prisoners and sentenced jail inmates.¹

The technological applications described below may help organizations operate under unavoidable constraints and eventually become permanent components of comprehensive, evidence-based, structured programming.

Courts



Problem-solving courts have historically relied on regular face-to-face contact among recovering clients and judges, case managers, counselors, and community corrections staff members. Now, adult drug courts, veterans' courts, and opioid treatment courts are combining text messaging applications, social media platforms, videoconferencing,

and telehealth applications to keep participants connected to supports, service, and supervision. Examples include the following:

- The [Addiction Policy Forum](#) has partnered with CHES Health, a health care technology company committed to improving the quality of addiction treatment, to launch [Connections](#), a free smartphone application that features e-therapy ([CBT4CBT](#)), as well as a "recovery help button" for access to recovery specialists. It is currently being [piloted with drug courts, law enforcement agencies, and corrections departments](#).
- CHES Health's precursor to this application, Addiction-Comprehensive Health Enhancement Support System (A-CHES), has shown promise in [randomized clinical trials](#). When it was piloted by a Massachusetts drug court program, participants demonstrated willingness to engage with the application.² Oklahoma's Family & Children's Services used the application extensively in its alternative-to-incarceration [Women in Recovery program](#).
- The National Association of Drug Court Professionals compiled an online [list of creative ways that treatment courts are adapting](#) their programs to COVID-19. Shared by treatment courts across the country, the practices are grouped into categories and range from two-way mirrors in testing rooms (Georgia) to online videos with written assignments for treatment (Michigan). Where applicable, materials to facilitate implementation are available to download.

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Jails

In rural Kentucky, [telehealth is helping connect female inmates in local jails](#) to gender-responsive services upon their release through the Kentucky Women's Justice Community Opioid Innovation Network (WJCOIN), funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Screening, medical evaluations, and other pretreatment services are offered via telehealth prior to inmates' release to ensure seamless admission into treatment programs upon reentry.

Electronic tablets are becoming increasingly popular in jails and prisons. For example, the [Utah Department of Corrections' pioneering work](#) in integrating tablet technology into its programming has been extremely successful with adult offenders. Inmates who received the tablets became so enthusiastically engaged in prerelease planning that program administrators expanded the use of tablets post-release. Release plans on the tablets follow inmates out the door, allowing the tablets to support community supervision and reintegration.



Community Corrections and Reentry

In a nationwide survey of community parole and probation agencies, more than 90 percent of respondents initiated videoconferencing with those they supervised as a direct response to COVID-19.³ Many officers are using [video-calling applications](#) to conduct virtual home visits.⁴ Electronic location monitoring (e.g., ankle bracelets, GPS-based apps) has increased dramatically.⁵ The Nebraska Probation System is finding that the sweat patch method allows for greater social distancing during drug testing while increasing the window of detection, among [other benefits](#).

Support groups are key to both reentry and recovery. With the suspension of in-person meetings because of COVID-19, many recovery community support groups are offering both online meetings and options for people who lack internet access.

- The [Strength Over Stigma \(SOS\) Recovery Community Organization](#) offers telerecovery supports in rural areas of New Hampshire. Probation and parole officers refer individuals to [Peer-Strength](#), which uses a Web-based platform capable of secure video, phone, chat, and messaging services—all accessed through participants' smartphones.

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- [Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery](#) (CCAR) works with the Connecticut Department of Correction to deliver and evaluate post-release recovery check-in calls. CCAR's [Telephone Recovery Support](#) is a peer-to-peer support service through which individuals in recovery receive support, make connections, and obtain information about 12-step meetings, sober activities, and community services. As few as two calls per week from a recovery coach significantly reduced technical violations among those released to community supervision.



Resources

The following print and video resources demonstrate the wide variety of technological innovations being implemented throughout the criminal justice system.

[Providing Court-Connected Behavioral Health Services During the Pandemic: Remote Technology Solutions](#) provides an overview of telehealth resources and options as they pertain to criminal justice-related behavioral health interventions, including teleservices to provide behavioral health screening and assessment and behavioral health treatment.⁶

The National Criminal Justice Association hosted and archived a three-part series on technology in the criminal justice system:

- [Courtroom Technology in the Age of Coronavirus: Supporting the Criminal Justice System as it Turns Digital](#)
- [Supervision Technology in the Age of Coronavirus: Monitoring for Today and in the Future](#)
- [Using Technology to Enhance Treatment and Recovery for People Involved in the Criminal Justice System](#)

[Going the Distance: Remote Residential Substance Abuse Treatment Programming and Recovery Support Options](#) provides information on alternative approaches and resources that are quickly becoming part of the new, no-contact normal in the provision of behavioral health treatment, recovery support, and community supervision for people with SUDs.⁷

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Endnotes

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5 Cara Tabachnick, 2020, "COVID-19 Created a Bigger Market for Electronic Ankle Monitors," *Bloomberg Law*, July 14, retrieved October 26, 2020, from <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/white-collar-and-criminal-law/covid-19-created-a-bigger-market-for-electronic-ankle-monitors>.

6 National Center for State Courts, with the National Judicial Task Force to Examine State Courts' Response to Mental Illness, 2020, *Providing Court-Connected Behavioral Health Services During the Pandemic: Remote Technology Solutions*, July 7, retrieved October 26, 2020, from https://www.ncsc.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0014/42314/Behavioral-Health-Resources.pdf.

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