

Status of LEAD Expansion in Seattle-King County

Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) is designed to improve community health and public order by allowing officers to redirect people engaged in street-level drug possession, sales or sex work to community-based services instead of jail and prosecution whenever appropriate.

Summary--LEAD expansion: Seattle is ready but funding is needed

Enthusiasm for LEAD has grown in neighborhoods longing for a meaningful response to problems stemming from behavioral health needs and extreme poverty. Neighborhoods are proactively requesting more information on LEAD and people are wondering when LEAD will become available in their communities. While LEAD has now been [widely replicated](#) around the country, ironically, it is still only available for new referrals in Seattle's West and East Precincts. Despite widespread support for LEAD in Seattle, there is insufficient funding for case management capacity and office space required to offer the program to new referrals in the South, Southwest and North Precincts. In fact, LEAD does not even have capacity for all eligible referrals in the West (downtown/Belltown/Pioneer Square/Chinatown-ID) and East (Capitol Hill, Central District, First Hill, Little Saigon) Precincts, where LEAD can currently receive referrals.

While it is projected that taking LEAD to scale citywide will require an additional \$4 million over time, because the program is built and deployed carefully and with close partnership with neighborhood leaders, law enforcement and service providers, we estimate that the maximum new funding that could be absorbed in 2018 is "only" \$1-2 million. This would be dedicated to additional case management capacity, and a base of operations for case managers in the South, North, East and Southwest Precincts. We are also working with King County and the Medicaid waiver planning process to possibly identify funding sources outside the City of Seattle, but these are uncertain at this time.

LEAD Description & Service Model

LEAD (first developed in Seattle in 2011) is a pre-booking diversion program designed to intercept the large number of people--65% of whom were black and over 80% of whom were people of color--who were being arrested by SPD for drug offenses, often facing 10 years in prison for sales of tiny amounts of drugs. In LEAD, in stark contrast, police, law enforcement, prosecutors, community public safety leaders and case managers work together in a harm reduction framework to offer services and support desired by the individual referred. Individuals enter LEAD either via arrest diversion (instead of jail booking and prosecution), or on a "social contact referral" basis, in an entirely non-coercive context. Over time, LEAD referrals

have shifted sharply; dominated by arrest diversions at the outset, now, 75% come in on a social contact basis.

The harm reduction framework means each participant helps develop an Individual Intervention Plan (IIP), with goals that are meaningful to them. Abstinence, even as a goal, is not required. Yet, after sustained engagement, well over half of those who originally expressed no interest in reducing drug use, have asked for and entered treatment. LEAD stakeholders adopted a “non-displacement” principle from the outset, meaning that LEAD participants should not have preferential access to any over-subscribed service, as to put one person at the top of a wait list is to push someone else one step further down.

The Public Defender Association serves as project manager for the LEAD program. To date, Evergreen Treatment Services REACH program has been the sole provider of LEAD case management, widely emulated nationally; however, it is acknowledged that, if the program expands, there likely will be communities where other culturally appropriate providers would be an excellent fit.

LEAD expansion and cost

LEAD presently is available to people known to commit drug-related law violations in the West and East Precincts in Seattle, and wherever Metro police patrol. No referrals are presently accepted from the North, South or Southwest Precincts, nor have we yet absorbed a critical mass of those who would be appropriately referred to the program even in the precincts where we currently operate. There are presently approximately 350 active LEAD participants.

Based on various data sources, it appears likely that at least 2,000 people at any given time in Seattle would be appropriate LEAD participants, in the sense that they engage in ongoing law violations, to their detriment and to that of surrounding neighborhoods, and are at risk of justice system involvement. Thus, to take LEAD to scale citywide, we project an addition of 30-35 case managers, with associated supervisors and administrative costs, plus at least four offices which case managers can use as a home base in each precinct. Total added cost to get to scale, over current budget, over a period of time, is approximately \$4 million. However, we could not absorb that in a single year, and rather, propose a more modest increase, sufficient to allow a launch in 2018 in the North and South or Southwest Precincts, plus a plan to complete expansion over a period of 2-3 years.

An added \$1-2 million is needed in 2018 in order to further expand in existing West and East precincts as well as establish LEAD operations in new precincts in 2018.

Racial Equity Impact of LEAD Expansion Strategy

LEAD was expected to disproportionately provide services to black people, who were disproportionately arrested on drug charges when the program launched. The pilot evaluation found that, indeed, 55% of those receiving LEAD case management were black.

LEAD's contribution to racial equity can also be addressed in terms of which neighborhoods' public health and order issues have been addressed. When LEAD expanded to East Precinct in early 2017, LEAD project management and community allies pushed to ensure that services would be open to the entire East Precinct, not just to the Capitol Hill neighborhood. LEAD project managers have worked hard to ensure that referrals are made pertaining to issues in Little Saigon and the Central District.

Councilmembers O'Brien, Johnson and Juarez have all committed to work for LEAD expansion in North Seattle, an approach that fits well the crisis of people living in vehicles, and many people living in public, who commit low level law violations due to their living situation and substance use disorder. Community and police support is clear in the North Precinct and we are prepared to begin work there almost immediately. However, for racial equity reasons, if LEAD expands to the North Precinct, we recommend that the program be offered in the same year to the more racially diverse communities of South and/or Southwest Seattle; LEAD should not be a program the neighborhood benefits of which flow mostly to white-dominated neighborhoods.

Evidence of LEAD's Success

A [cost and system utilization](#) was done by University of Washington researchers funded by the Laura & John Arnold Foundation, comparing costs for the first two years of the flagship LEAD pilot program in Seattle, compared to costs incurred by/for a comparison group which was not offered LEAD and went through the "system as usual" (jail and prosecution). The bottom line is that LEAD cost considerably less (about \$8K per year) than the "system as usual" group, while achieving substantially better results in terms of decreased recidivism.

[Recidivism](#) was 58% less for LEAD participants than members of a similarly situation control group. The LEAD group saw 27% fewer felony filings, and a large reduction in prison admissions and jail days, compared to the system-as-usual group.

Perhaps most meaningful, [participants shared](#) in semi-structured interviews how profoundly different LEAD was than anything they'd previously encountered, primarily because of the degree of acceptance they found not only from case managers but from officers. (All of the quantitative pieces of the LEAD pilot evaluation have been accepted for publication in peer-reviewed journals.)