Following University of Chicago Crime Lab Research, City of Chicago Expands Eligibility Criteria for Narcotics Arrest Diversion Program

Crime Lab Researchers Found Participants 44% Less Likely to be Re-arrested in the Future, Providing Strong Basis for Expanding Largest Ever Drug Arrest Diversion Program in the U.S.

Chicago, IL, June 8, 2022 – The Mayor’s office today announced that the largest ever drug arrest diversion program in the U.S. has expanded its eligibility criteria to reach even more residents in the nation’s third largest city. The City of Chicago’s Narcotics Arrest Diversion Program (NADP) offers individuals arrested on low-level narcotics offenses the opportunity to receive treatment rather than face criminal charges. The program was developed in partnership with the University of Chicago Crime Lab and the University of Chicago Health Lab. NADP’s expansion of eligibility criteria builds on findings from the Crime Lab’s evaluation of the program, which found NADP reduced the amount of contact individuals with substance use disorders have with the criminal justice system, while also increasing public safety. According to the Crime Lab’s evaluation of NADP, participants in the program are 44% less likely to be re-arrested in the future, for drug possession and violent crime charges.

“This expansion of eligibility will make the country’s largest drug arrest diversion program even more effective at combating the public health crisis of substance abuse,” said Roseanna Ander, executive director of the University of Chicago Crime Lab. “The NADP model is just the beginning for how public safety and public health can be reimagined and addressed in a more holistic and equitable way, not only in Chicago, but throughout the country.”

A Chicago Police Department directive allows for more individuals to be eligible for diversion through NADP, expanding the initiative to those arrested for possession of more types and higher weights of drugs. Under these changes, the directive will expand the number of people who can access treatment for substance use disorders instead of being charged with a crime by 42%. In partnership with recovery services provider Thresholds, individuals who are eligible and opt-in to NADP are assessed by a clinician, given access to a tailored combination of therapy or medication, and assigned a recovery coach with lived experience of substance use disorder.

“Arrest deflection creates a recovery pathway for people at high risk of opioid overdose that they wouldn't have if incarcerated. Thresholds is thrilled with the opportunity to expand eligibility for this program to reach more people,” said Mark Ishaug, CEO of Thresholds. “Our hands-on approach saves lives with medication-assisted treatments, overdose prevention drugs and education, practical assistance accessing housing and healthcare, peer support, and more.”

NADP was successfully piloted in Chicago’s West Side before being expanded city-wide in December 2021. Part of the program’s success to date has been in reaching those who stand to benefit most. According to Crime Lab research, 89% of participants in the pilot were medically diagnosed with a substance use disorder, 69% were using narcotics on a daily basis prior to diversion, and 42% were Black men – the population in Chicago most impacted by the opioid crisis and the harms of the criminal justice system.
Death from drug overdose in Chicago continues to outnumber deaths caused by homicide or car accidents, even during a year of historically high gun violence rates. The diversion program seeks to address the root causes of substance use disorder with a focus on supportive recovery and rehabilitation interventions, in contrast to traditional, punitive approaches. Since its inception in 2018, NADP has connected nearly 1,000 individuals with treatment.

“The data shows the promise of the NADP model, demonstrating that it’s possible to connect people to resources that can help them and improve public safety in the process,” said Panka Bencsik, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Chicago Crime Lab, who co-led the evaluation. “We are excited to see the program become even more accessible after the encouraging results we’ve seen thus far.”

As this directive is enacted, the Crime Lab will continue its rigorous evaluation of the program and will release updated results on the impact of the expanded eligibility criteria.

For more information on NADP or to speak with the Crime Lab team, please contact Elizabeth Rasich at erasich@uchicago.edu.

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About the University of Chicago Crime Lab: The University of Chicago Crime Lab is a non-profit research organization that works to improve the public sector’s response to the dual crises of gun violence and America’s broken criminal justice system. For too long, the public sector has failed to address these overlapping and systemic crises, and the Crime Lab uses data and research to identify real-world solutions that advance justice and reduce gun violence at the same time. Since 2008, the Crime Lab has worked to design, test, and implement innovative programs and policies that generate evidence on how to make government more effective. To learn more, please visit our website.

About Thresholds: Thresholds is one of Illinois’ largest and oldest providers of mental health and substance use treatment services. Thresholds provides innovative behavioral and primary healthcare that promotes empowerment, well-being, and full participation in community life. Through unwavering community-based engagement, support, and advocacy, Thresholds helps people living with mental health and substance use conditions find home, health, and hope. Learn more at www.thresholds.org.