

Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

The Benefits of Its Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions Program Are Uncertain

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Our report concludes that the benefits from the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's (Corrections) use of the Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions Program (COMPAS) are, at best, uncertain. Specifically, Corrections' use of COMPAS in its reception centers—facilities where inmates entering the correctional system are evaluated and assigned to a prison—does not meaningfully affect its decision making concerning prison assignments, and by extension, the rehabilitative programs inmates might access at those facilities. Further, the COMPAS core assessment identifies up to five different needs; however, Corrections has rehabilitative programs that address only two. Corrections has not established regulations defining how COMPAS assessments are to be used despite legal requirements to do so.

Our review also revealed other problems with Corrections' deployment of COMPAS that negatively affect its usefulness. Some correctional staff we spoke with at reception centers and parole offices indicated a lack of acceptance of COMPAS, suggesting the need for further training or clarification regarding COMPAS's value. Further, Corrections' use of COMPAS for placing inmates into its in-prison rehabilitative programs is limited to its substance abuse program. However, we found that many in this program either lack COMPAS assessments or have a low COMPAS-identified need for substance abuse treatment. Moreover, relatively few inmates with moderate to high substance abuse treatment needs, as determined through the COMPAS core assessment, are assigned to a treatment program. Finally, we found that Corrections lacks accounting records demonstrating how much it cost to fully deploy and implement COMPAS at its reception centers, prisons, and parole offices.

In the report, the California State Auditor (state auditor) made the following recommendations to Corrections. The state auditor's determination regarding the current status of recommendations is based on Corrections' response to the state auditor as of November 2011.

Recommendation 1.1.a—See pages 21, 37, and 38 of the audit report for information on the related finding.

To ensure that the State does not spend additional resources on COMPAS while its usefulness is uncertain, Corrections should suspend its use of the COMPAS core and reentry assessments until it has issued regulations and updated its operations manual to define how Corrections' use of COMPAS will affect decision making regarding inmates, such as clarifying how COMPAS results will be considered when sending inmates to different prison facilities, enrolling them in rehabilitative programs to address their criminal risk factors, and developing expectations for those on parole.

Corrections' Action: Pending.

Corrections does not agree with our overarching recommendation to suspend its use of COMPAS until it takes certain steps; however, it indicated that it intends to issue regulations and update its operations manual that will discuss COMPAS. Specifically, Corrections indicated that it is coordinating with internal stakeholders to update the California Code of Regulations through the emergency regulation process on the use of the COMPAS core assessment. Corrections anticipates it will adopt regulations by January 2012 and update its department operations manual next year on the use of the COMPAS core assessment. Regarding the use of its COMPAS reentry assessment, Corrections reports that it has developed regulations that will be incorporated into Title 15 of the California Code of Regulations, will develop by late December 2012 procedures to include in its department operations manual, and will implement by September 2014 the California Parole Supervision and Reintegration Model requiring the use of the reentry assessment to identify criminogenic needs and how to address those needs.

Recommendation 1.1.b—See page 29 of the audit report for information on the related finding.

To ensure that the State does not spend additional resources on COMPAS while its usefulness is uncertain, Corrections should suspend its use of the COMPAS core and reentry assessments until it has demonstrated to the Legislature that it has a plan to measure and report COMPAS's effect on reducing recidivism. Such a plan could consider whether inmates enrolled in a rehabilitative program based on a COMPAS assessment had lower recidivism rates than those provided rehabilitative programming as a result of non-COMPAS factors.

Corrections' Action: No action taken.

Corrections indicated it plans to use COMPAS assessment data in future recidivism reports as one component of many within an evaluation framework to assess the effectiveness of Corrections' rehabilitative programs. Corrections' response did not demonstrate that it has communicated with the Legislature regarding how it plans to measure COMPAS's usefulness.

Recommendation 1.2.a—See pages 19, 20, and 37 of the audit report for information on the related finding.

Once Corrections resumes its use of COMPAS core and reentry assessments, it should provide ongoing training to classification staff representatives, parole agents, and others that may administer or interpret COMPAS assessment results to ensure that COMPAS is a valuable inmate assessment and planning tool.

Corrections' Action: Partially implemented.

According to Corrections, some of its staff received training in September 2011 while other staff will be receiving training in 2012 and 2013.

Recommendation 1.2.b—See pages 28 and 36 of the audit report for information on the related finding.

Once Corrections resumes its use of COMPAS core and reentry assessments, it should develop practices or procedures to periodically determine whether its staff are using COMPAS core or reentry assessments as intended. Such a process might include performing periodic site visits to corroborate that COMPAS is being used as required.

Corrections' Action: Pending.

According to Corrections, it is developing a site visit process that will include a review of the assessment process and a report that outlines any issues that were found during the site visit.

Recommendation 1.2.c—See page 23 of the audit report for information on the related finding.

Once Corrections resumes its use of COMPAS core and reentry assessments, it should develop practices or procedures to periodically compare the demand for certain rehabilitative programs, as suggested by a COMPAS core assessment, to the existing capacity to treat such needs.

Corrections' Action: Partially implemented.

According to Corrections, it produces monthly statistics to show the percentage of inmates in a substance abuse program with medium to high COMPAS needs and the number and percentage of inmates released to parole that received programming consistent with their risk and need. However, Corrections did not provide evidence that it is comparing the demand for rehabilitative programs—as suggested by COMPAS—to its program capacity.

Recommendation 1.3.a—See pages 39 and 40 of the audit report for information on the related finding.

To ensure transparency and accountability for costs associated with information technology projects such as COMPAS, Corrections should disclose that it lacks accounting records to support certain COMPAS expenditure amounts it reported to the California Technology Agency and seek guidance on how to proceed with future reporting requirements for its deployment of the COMPAS core assessment to its adult institutions.

Corrections' Action: Fully implemented.

Corrections' staff met with the California Technology Agency in October 2011 and disclosed that it lacked accounting records to support certain COMPAS expenditures that Corrections has been submitting to the California Technology Agency. The California Technology Agency stated that Corrections' reporting of COMPAS costs were appropriate.

Recommendation 1.3.b—See page 40 of the audit report for information on the related finding.

To ensure transparency and accountability for costs associated with information technology projects such as COMPAS, Corrections should develop policies to ensure that accounting or budget management personnel are involved in the project planning phase of future information technology projects so that appropriate accounting codes are established for reporting actual project costs.

Corrections' Action: Pending.

According to Corrections, it has begun discussions with its Corrections' budget staff to revise its cost-tracking guidelines.