



Enhancing Justice System Decision Making Through Universal Risk and Needs Assessment

An evidence-based framework for universal assessment and referral to services

Every day, justice system professionals are asked to make critical decisions—like who is eligible for diversion, what conditions of supervision are appropriate, or when to refer individuals for treatment—with incomplete information. There is a better way to make these decisions. By assessing a person's criminogenic risk (likelihood of reoffending) and their clinical needs (treatment and other services that can change behavior) early in the case process, jurisdictions can match justice-involved individuals with the right combination of supervision and support to reduce reoffending, promote recovery, and strengthen families and communities.

The Challenge

At least two-thirds of arrested individuals have a substance use disorder, mental health condition, or both. Left untreated, these underlying issues can fuel destructive and costly cycles of crime, arrest, and incarceration. Research shows that the most effective way to interrupt the cycle of crime is to assess a person's criminogenic risk and clinical needs and match the person to appropriate supervision and services. However, rapidly obtaining this risk and need information for every person in the justice system is a challenge that few jurisdictions have mastered.

The Solution

All Rise's Center for Advancing Justice has pioneered a universal risk and needs assessment framework that is evidence based and can be customized for any jurisdiction in the country.

Risk assessment is not a new concept. Probation departments, pretrial services agencies, and others have used criminogenic risk assessments for decades to predict the likelihood that an individual will reoffend. Moreover, many risk assessment tools also identify a person's criminogenic needs—factors like antisocial thinking patterns or antisocial peers that can be addressed to reduce a person's risk level. But even the best criminogenic risk assessment tools miss a critical piece of the puzzle: a person's clinical needs, like the need for substance use, mental health, or trauma treatment, medical services, recovery support, and more.

By assessing for both criminogenic risk and clinical needs, justice professionals can gain a deeper understanding of the reasons why a person might reoffend and the specific interventions that can successfully change their trajectory. This information, in turn, can be used to improve justice system decision making regarding eligibility for diversion, conditions of supervision, and referrals to treatment and other services. For example, assessments may indicate that some individuals require robust supervision (high risk) but little or no treatment services (low need) while others need minimal supervision (low risk) but need intensive treatment (high need).

Implementing universal risk and needs assessment early in the criminal case process gives the justice system enhanced information and offers a roadmap for decision making that:

- Matches individuals with the optimal level of supervision and treatment
- Reduces reoffending through targeted, evidence-based interventions
- Saves time and resources by avoiding redundant assessments later in the case process
- Improves communication and transparency among justice system partners

Our Approach

The Center for Advancing Justice has developed the AIRS framework (Assess, Implement, Review, and Sustain) to facilitate our work with local jurisdictions.

Assess: We begin with a comprehensive system assessment to evaluate a jurisdiction's readiness to implement a universal risk and needs approach. Through stakeholder interviews, data analysis, and resource mapping, we help jurisdictions understand how criminogenic risk information is currently being used and how referrals to diversion programs and treatment resources happen.

Implement: After the assessment phase, we work alongside local leaders to craft a jurisdiction-specific implementation plan that leverages existing resources and partnerships. We help select tools, develop policies and procedures, create communication plans to facilitate interagency information sharing, and develop referral pathways to rapidly connect defendants to appropriate supervision and services.

Review: As jurisdictions begin to implement universal risk and needs processes, we provide real-time support to help evaluate impact, gather feedback, and make necessary adjustments, including identifying any supervision and treatment gaps and helping communities develop new, evidence-based diversion approaches.

Sustain: To ensure that changes last beyond the initial implementation period, we support sustainability planning, including long-term funding strategies, staff training plans, cross-system coordination protocols, and the identification of internal champions who will lead ongoing efforts to support system goals such as recovery and family reunification.

Why partner with the Center for Advancing Justice?

Our mission is to advance effective interventions for individuals impacted by substance use and mental health challenges at every stage of the justice system, from first contact with law enforcement to corrections and community reentry. We have the expertise and experience required to develop trusted, pragmatic solutions to meet your unique needs.

Experts in implementation science: Our team brings a deep understanding of how to translate best practices into real-world, sustainable actions to improve outcomes.

Driven by results: We deploy proven strategies for success and rely on data to tell us what's working and what's not.

Customized, ongoing support: Our process is collaborative and adapted to your local community, capacity, and statutory requirements.

Let's Get Started

Whether you're just beginning to explore risk and needs assessments or looking to strengthen and create efficiencies in existing practices, we can help. Contact us today to start the conversation!



Contact us for a custom proposal! Scan the QR code or visit allrise.org/caj