

# Problem-Solving Courts

## What are problem-solving courts and how do they benefit Pennsylvanians?

Problem-solving courts focus on specific types of crimes that often are interwoven with social problems such as drug addiction, untreated mental illness and alcohol abuse. These types of crimes—particularly drug-related crimes—have a major impact on the courts and the prisons.

The goal of problem-solving courts is to facilitate rehabilitation of carefully screened and selected defendants who are willing to try to change their behavior. Instead of a jail sentence, defendants are given counseling, treatment for their addictions or illnesses, educational assistance and healthcare support. The progress of each defendant assigned to a rehab program through a problem-solving court is strictly monitored by a judge. Success depends on a partnership between the defendant and the court in a cooperative rehabilitation effort.

In 1997, Pennsylvania's first problem-solving court - an adult drug court - began operation in Philadelphia. A few months later, similar programs began operating in Chester, Lycoming and York Counties. Today, over half of the judicial districts in the Commonwealth have adult drug courts or have adapted the drug court model to create juvenile drug courts, DUI courts, mental health courts and most recently veterans' courts.

Pennsylvania's problem-solving court initiative continues to expand in Pennsylvania.

Problem-solving courts benefit the public in several ways:

- They provide alternative correctional programs for non-violent offenders, thereby helping to reduce prison overcrowding.
- Through rehabilitation, they reduce the rate of recidivism—a pattern of repeat offenses common to defendants with substance abuse and behavioral problems.
- And perhaps most importantly, they can transform a self-destructive individual, who acts as a drain on society, into a productive citizen who makes a contribution.

*Revised October 2015*

