Oregon Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission
Common Language: Evidence-Based, Promising, Research-Based Practices

Evidence-Based Practice (EBP)

Independent published research has shown that this activity, when conducted "with fidelity" (following exactly the structure and processes specified in the program design) is significantly-more-likely-than-chance to produce well-defined positive outcomes, and is unlikely to produce detrimental results.

This term was coined in the discipline of medical care, beginning in the early 1990s, where it originally meant diagnostic and treatment decision-making that integrates three domains: 1. Currently-available peer-reviewed research demonstrating the efficacy and safety of a particular course of treatment; 2. Knowledge and experience of the treatment provider; 3. Patient choice, belief, and values.

When discussing government-funded substance use disorder (SUD) prevention and treatment, we usually refer only to the first domain. We use the term "evidence-based practice" as shorthand or a synonym for activities that are empirically-supported (by valid experimental design) interventions. These are prevention or treatment activities that have been proven by randomized control trial (or interrupted time series experiments or regression discontinuity) to reliably produce positive outcomes for a specified population, and are designed to be replicated in communities, schools, or treatment settings.

There are two principal rivals of evidence-based (or empirically-supported) practices: tradition (what we've always done) and conventional wisdom (what we believe is possible).

Promising Practice

This activity seems consistent with published research suggesting that it is likely to produce well-defined positive outcomes without detrimental results, but its program design or effectiveness hasn't been fully evaluated.

Most simply, a promising practice is a method or approach that seems to be on its way to becoming an evidence-based practice. Compared to an EBP, a promising practice may impact an outcome in a way that indicates, but doesn't prove, effectiveness. Or the supporting research may lack a randomized control group or may have been conducted on a small subject group.

Research-Based Practice

This activity is based on published research suggesting that it is likely to produce positive outcomes, but it has not been independently evaluated to assure that its particular design or implementation reliably produces positive outcomes without detrimental results.

A research-based practice is the first step toward generating positive outcomes that may one day prove the effectiveness of the method or approach. This is where experiments begins: the prevention or treatment professional asks questions: what is the problem we want to change? What do we know (what have scientists published) about it? And based on this knowledge, what seems reasonable to try?

Funding Preferences

Governments, foundations, and individual philanthropists often express a preference for funding evidence-based practices. Some governments, for example, require that funding be spent exclusively, or mostly, on EBPs. To help funders identify EBPs, PPs, and RBPs, several reputable organizations (including Oregon Health Authority, Washington Department of Social and Health Services, and SAMHSA) publish lists of evidence-based and promising practices.