

myths & facts

Using Risk and Need Assessments to Enhance Outcomes and Reduce Disparities in the Criminal Justice System

	Myths...	...and facts
1	Professional judgment is more accurate than risk and need assessments when predicting the risk to recidivate.	Actuarial risk and need assessments have consistently been found to be more accurate than professional judgment alone in risk prediction.
2	Risk and need assessments exacerbate racial bias within the criminal justice system.	Risk and need assessments can reduce racial bias in criminal justice decisions if objectively used as designed and are specifically validated in the jurisdictions where they are applied.
3	Eliminating risk and need assessments would help to eliminate racial bias in criminal justice decision making.	Eliminating actuarial risk and need assessments would decrease accuracy in risk prediction and increase bias by relying solely on professional judgment.
4	The use of risk and need assessments increases the likelihood that justice-involved individuals are incarcerated.	Risk and need assessments used to make front-end decisions are typically used to identify and safely divert individuals who are more appropriate for supervision and treatment in the community.
5	Risk and need assessments should be used to make sentencing decisions more punitive.	Actuarial risk and need assessments were designed to predict risk, identify areas of criminogenic need, and guide decisions for treatment, not for punitive purposes.
	The bottom line:	Risk and need assessments currently provide the most accurate, objective prediction of the risk to recidivate. While risk and need assessments do not predict with perfect accuracy, they guide practitioners in the field towards the most accurate and equitable decisions available for safely managing justice-involved individuals.

The Community Corrections Collaborative Network (CCCN) is comprised of the leading associations representing 90,000-plus probation, parole, pretrial, and treatment professionals around the country, including the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA), the Association of Paroling Authorities International (APAI), the Federal Probation and Pretrial Officers Association (FPPOA), the International Community Corrections Association (ICCA), the National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP), the National Association of Pretrial Services Agencies (NAPSA), and the National Association of Probation Executives (NAPE). View our position paper, "Using Risk and Need Assessments to Enhance Outcome and Reduce Disparities in the Criminal Justice System" at nicic.gov/library/032859.