

Advancing Fairness and Transparency: National Guidelines for Post-Conviction Risk and Needs Assessment

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Legislators

Criminal justice agencies in all 50 states, territories, and the District of Columbia use risk and needs assessments to support the success of people who are incarcerated, on probation, or on parole. But there is inconsistent—and sometimes nonexistent—policy guiding their use. Newly released by the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Justice Programs’ Bureau of Justice Assistance and The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center under the Public Safety Risk Assessment Project, the **Advancing Fairness and Transparency: National Guidelines for Post-Conviction Risk and Needs Assessment** set practical benchmarks for agencies.

Why are these guidelines needed?

- There are valid and growing concerns about accuracy, fairness, transparency, and communication in the use of risk and needs assessment.
- Risk and needs assessment results are not used enough to inform case decisions and management.
- Criminal justice agencies have not been given the guidance they need to communicate the strengths and limitations of risk and needs assessment.
- People who are being assessed rarely receive information about these assessments, how they work, and what they will be used to determine.

What do the guidelines do?

- Provide agencies with field-tested, practical advice.
- Prioritize accuracy, fairness, and transparency in the communication and use of risk and needs assessment.
- Minimize potentially problematic aspects of the use of risk and needs assessment instruments.
- Outline how to better engage all stakeholders.
- Provide clarity for agency staff.

What are the benefits?

- Mitigation of potential bias and disparities.
- More informed case planning, which leads to increased success.
- Preparedness to respond to external criticism, legal challenges, and political challenges related to risk and needs assessment.
- Cost savings from increased success of people under correctional supervision.
- Increased accountability, which leads to greater buy-in and trust from the community.

Where can I learn more?

- The full set of [***National Guidelines for Post-Conviction Risk and Needs Assessment***](#) outlines concrete advice for promoting accuracy, fairness, transparency, and effective communication and use of risk and needs assessment.
- [***Partnership on AI***](#) offers resources about the responsible use of risk and needs assessment.
- The National Judicial College's [***guidelines for judicial discretion***](#) complement the ***National Guidelines for Post-Conviction Risk and Needs Assessment***, providing advice to judges for fairness in sentencing.
- The Urban Institute's [***Brief on Racial Equity and Criminal Justice Risk Assessment***](#) covers strategies to reduce racial and ethnic disparity in the development and use of risk assessment.



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