

## Meth Is Expensive for Users and Taxpayers

As policymakers discuss the potential for unprecedented budget reductions in public safety, drug treatment, and prevention services, it is important to understand what drug use costs society. With assistance from the Methamphetamine Strike Force (MSF) and County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, SANDAG gathered and analyzed detailed cost information from each public system impacted by one methamphetamine (meth) user.<sup>1</sup> This analysis revealed that one addict could cost San Diego County taxpayers nearly \$2,000 on average a month based on his involvement over an 8-year period in various publicly funded systems.<sup>2</sup> With an estimated 4,092 individuals seeking publicly-funded treatment in San Diego County in 2010,<sup>3</sup> the cost to taxpayers in the short- and long-term can be viewed as significant.

### “Dan’s” Story

“Dan” is a 31-year old San Diegan who has regularly used meth since the age of 14. The father of two children, he first came into contact with the County in 2003 when the children were placed in foster care after interventions by Child Welfare Services (CWS). “Dan’s” first contact with the criminal justice system was in 2006 and over the next 5 years, “Dan” had 10 arrests, 9 convictions, spent 526 days in jail, is currently serving a two-year state prison sentence, and will presumably be released to state parole for a minimum of 13 months supervision. “Dan” was also hospitalized twice between 2006 and 2008 for MRSA<sup>4</sup> and intravenous drug use-related medical problems, the costs for which were partially covered by County Medical Services (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**TIMELINE OF “DAN’S” CONTACT WITH PUBLICLY-FUNDED SYSTEMS**

1993	2003	2006	2008	2010
Meth Use Starts	1 <sup>st</sup> CWS Case Opened	1 <sup>st</sup> Drug-Related Hospitalization	2 <sup>nd</sup> Drug-Related Hospitalization	2 <sup>nd</sup> CWS Case Opened
	1 <sup>st</sup> Time Entered Drug Treatment	1 <sup>st</sup> Adult Arrest/Conviction/ Jail Sentence	1 <sup>st</sup> Felony Conviction	1 <sup>st</sup> Prison Sentence
			1 <sup>st</sup> Formal Probation Sentence	

### Cost of “Dan’s” Drug Use to Taxpayers

Over the 8 years since his first contact with CWS, “Dan” has cost taxpayers more than \$190,000. As Figure 1 shows, this number includes costs related to incarceration in jail and prison; interventions

<sup>1</sup> In 2006, SANDAG conducted a similar meth cost study in partnership with the MSF and San Diego Police Department. To view the October 2006 CJ Fax describing the results, go to <http://www.sandag.org/archives/>.

<sup>2</sup> Not included in the analysis are private costs, such as victim restitution, medical fees not covered by the County, as well as less tangible costs related to lost productivity and the financial and emotional toll drug use takes on loved ones.

<sup>3</sup> Methamphetamine Strike Force, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* infection

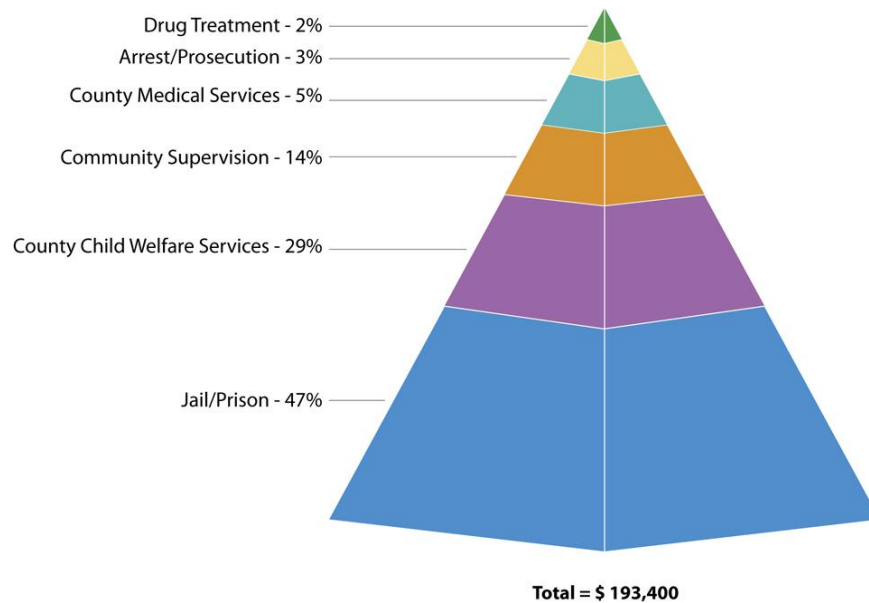
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by CWS; supervision in the community by probation and parole; County Medical Services; arrest, prosecution, and defense; and drug treatment. Most startling about these costs is how they differ in proportion – with incarceration making up almost half (47%) and treatment just 2 percent, which is partly a function of the fact “Dan” was never ordered into drug treatment by the court and only one time by CWS in 2003.

**Figure 1**  
**Incarceration Makes Up Almost Half of Costs for One San Diego County Meth Case<sup>5</sup>**



## Implications and Recommendations

While not necessarily representative of all meth users, “Dan” demonstrates how one addict can touch numerous public sectors costing taxpayers money. While there has been a 41 percent drop in meth-positive drug tests among adult arrestees from 2005 to 2009, it is clear from numerous indicators both locally and nationally that the demand for meth continues to exist and that those involved in its distribution will continue to seek ways to produce and distribute it. As such, it is important to remember that evidence-based practice has shown that incarcerating individuals without addressing underlying issues does not reduce recidivism in the long-term and will actually cost taxpayers more, not less.<sup>6</sup> While current budget realities cannot be denied, it is essential to acknowledge that while relapse is part of recovery, treatment may be a wiser investment than intervening after the problem has manifested into on-going criminal activity. For more information regarding the scope of methamphetamine use in San Diego County, referrals for service, and other useful information, please visit the MSF’s Web site at [www.no2meth.org](http://www.no2meth.org).

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<sup>5</sup> All dollar figures are in 2010 dollars. Cost data were either gathered in 2010 dollars or inflated using the Consumer Price Index.

<sup>6</sup> Roman, J., Brooks, L., Lagerson, E., Chalfin, A., and Tereshchenko, B. (2007). *Impact and Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Maryland Reentry Partnership Initiative*. Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center.