Study background

The NSW Sober Driver Program (SDP) is a state-wide education and relapse prevention program for repeat drink drive offenders who are convicted of two or more offences within five years. Unlike other education programs for drink drivers, participants are required to complete the program as part of their sentence. Corrective Services NSW Community Offender Services (COS) delivers around 100 SDP courses every year in 63 locations across the state. The SDP was piloted in 2002, and rolled out from June 2003. In 2004, ARTD Consultants were commissioned to undertake an independent evaluation of the SDP, the results of which are summarised here.

Study aims and research questions

The 2006 evaluation study (1) assessed the effectiveness of the implementation strategy of the SDP in reducing drink drive re-offence and (2) provided a cost benefit analysis to quantify the economic benefit of the program against its development and operating costs.

Method

The evaluation study combined the use of quasi-experimental and mixed methods.

(1) Quasi-experimental – Data from 149 matched participants enrolled in the SDP between 1 September 2004 to 30 June 2005 were used to quantitatively measure the impact of the SDP using pre and post comparisons.

(2) Mixed methods – 56 SDP participants were interviewed before, immediately after and four months after the SDP ended. Data was also gathered from interviews with 90 key stakeholders and from a post-implementation survey completed by 100 program facilitators. Six discussion groups with 68 participants were also held in rural/regional and metropolitan NSW.

Findings

The NSW Sober Driver Program was found to be an effective intervention that complements other sanctions for drink drivers. The evaluation study showed that the SDP is being implemented as intended, administered effectively and is well received by participants. In particular, the study found that:

• There was a 50% reduction in re-offending over a two-year period by participants compared to a control group. Offenders who completed the SDP were less likely to re-offend than those who did not participate in the program.

• Among drink drive offenders who are convicted of two or more offences within five years, existing sanctions (e.g. fines and licence loss) achieve recidivism rates of 10% after two years. The study showed that the SDP provides an additional effect and reduced recidivism rates to around 5 percentage points. This reduction equates to one less case of recidivism after two years for every 19 people in the target population.

• The cost benefit analysis estimated that between 2006 and 2009 the SDP would prevent 100 people from re-offending, saving the community some $1,731,000 in road safety terms.

Conclusion

The SDP is an effective education and relapse prevention program, which is accessible and appropriate to the target group of drink drive recidivists across NSW. SDP graduates are half as likely to re-offend as other recidivist drink drivers who do not attend the program, demonstrating the value of the program in reducing re-offending over and above the effect of sanctions such as fines and licence loss.

Comment on methodology

The rigour of the quasi-experimental design and the scope of the supporting evidence generated through the use of mixed data collection methods meant that the evaluation findings can be used with a high level of confidence.