

# Homeless Female Offenders Returning to the Community: Improving Hopeful Futures

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## Project Description

The goals of the study are to reduce drug and alcohol use and recidivism among homeless female offenders (HFOs) in California. To achieve these goals, our team of UCLA and UCSF researchers plan to utilize our successful community participatory approaches to refine a gender-sensitive intervention program, Female Ex-Offender Mentoring in Care (FEM-CARE), with the help of a community advisory board. This study is based upon our team's history of research promoting theoretically-based, culturally-sensitive nurse-led interventions that have resulted in significant reductions in drug and alcohol use among homeless persons, many of whom have had a history of incarceration. We will assess the impact of the FEM-CARE or Health Promotion (HP) control program on reduction of drug and alcohol use and recidivism.

Specific objectives include:

- Guided by a Community Advisory Board (CAB) made up of HFOs and addiction staff, further conceptualize our community-based program, FEM-CARE, to address the needs of HFOs enrolled in a residential drug treatment programs (RDT) and then refine the program in focus group discussions with 12 HFOs.
- Conduct a pilot randomized clinical trial (RCT) to assess the impact of the FEM-CARE program for 65 HFOs at six-month follow-up compared with 65 HFOs receiving a control Health Promotion (HP) program, in terms of a) self-reported and objective measures of drug and alcohol use; and b) prevalence of recidivism and number of days to first reincarceration.

## Significance

In the last decade, the numbers of incarcerated females has tripled, making women the most rapidly growing group of offenders in the United States. When compared to incarcerated males, female offenders have a higher rate of being sentenced for drug crimes. Moreover, they are often injection drug users (IDUs), have sexual partners who are IDUs, and are often forced into the sex trade for survival. As a result, female offenders are at higher risk of acquiring HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases than the general population of women. While the Los Angeles County Department of Probation (LAC-DP) has provided guidance for successful programs in its California Blueprint Master Plan for Female Offenders, the suggested strategies of enhancing empowerment, positive coping, and job skills, and providing peer-mentored approaches have not yet been implemented or evaluated. Recent formative research with HFOs has revealed a desire for peer role models to support and enhance knowledge of and access to healthcare, and to promote positive coping, stable housing, and job skills, and to reduce stigma and depressed mood; all of which can result in a novel program designed to reduce drug and alcohol use and recidivism. This foundation and strong community support we have garnered has lead to the design of our proposed intervention program.

**Project End Date:** May 2017