



Fiscal Impact of the Allegheny County Mental Health Court

John Engberg, Ph.D.

M. Susan Ridgely, J.D.

Michael Greenberg, J.D., Ph.D.

Susan Turner, Ph.D.

http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR439/

Study Funded by Public and Private Sources

- **Council of State Governments received grants from:**
 - **Staunton Farm Foundation**
 - **Commonwealth of Pennsylvania**
- **Contracted with RAND Corporation to conduct an independent, objective analysis:**
 - **RAND has over a decade of experience in drug court evaluation**
 - **Study team includes attorneys, psychologists, and an economist who have expertise in criminal justice and mental health**

Mental Health Courts Are Popular But Is There Evidence to Support Them?

- **To some observers, it seems that criminal justice facilities have become the *de facto* mental health system...**
- **But many still question whether incarceration is the appropriate response to the associated problems of mental illness and criminal behavior...**
- **Even if appropriate, is incarceration the most efficient and effective response?**
- **On the other hand, MH courts have developed more rapidly than the evidence to support them**

Main Goal of the Allegheny County MHC Program Is to Divert MI Offenders

- **Expedites case adjudication for individuals with mental illness who have committed misdemeanors or non-violent felonies**
- **Participation is voluntary and defendants waive their right to a trial on the merits of the case**
- **Mandates mental health treatment and support as a part of the court-ordered conditions**
- **Has served 400+ individuals since its inception**

The Challenge: Design a Small Study to Address Fiscal Impact

- **In order to complete the study in one year and on a limited budget:**
 - **Administrative data (no primary data collection)**
 - **Retrospective review**
 - **No comparison group**
 - **No data on outcomes**
- **To address some of these limitations, we take “two bites of the apple”**
 - **Create “counterfactuals” as comparison**
 - **Cost out service utilization pre and post (using MHC participants as their own comparison)**

Research Questions Focused on Costs

- **What are the criminal justice and treatment costs for MHC participants in the years prior to and during MHC participation?**
- **How do these costs compare with what would be expected from routine adjudication and processing for these individuals?**
- **What is the fiscal impact (net increase or net savings) of the MHC for Allegheny County and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania?**

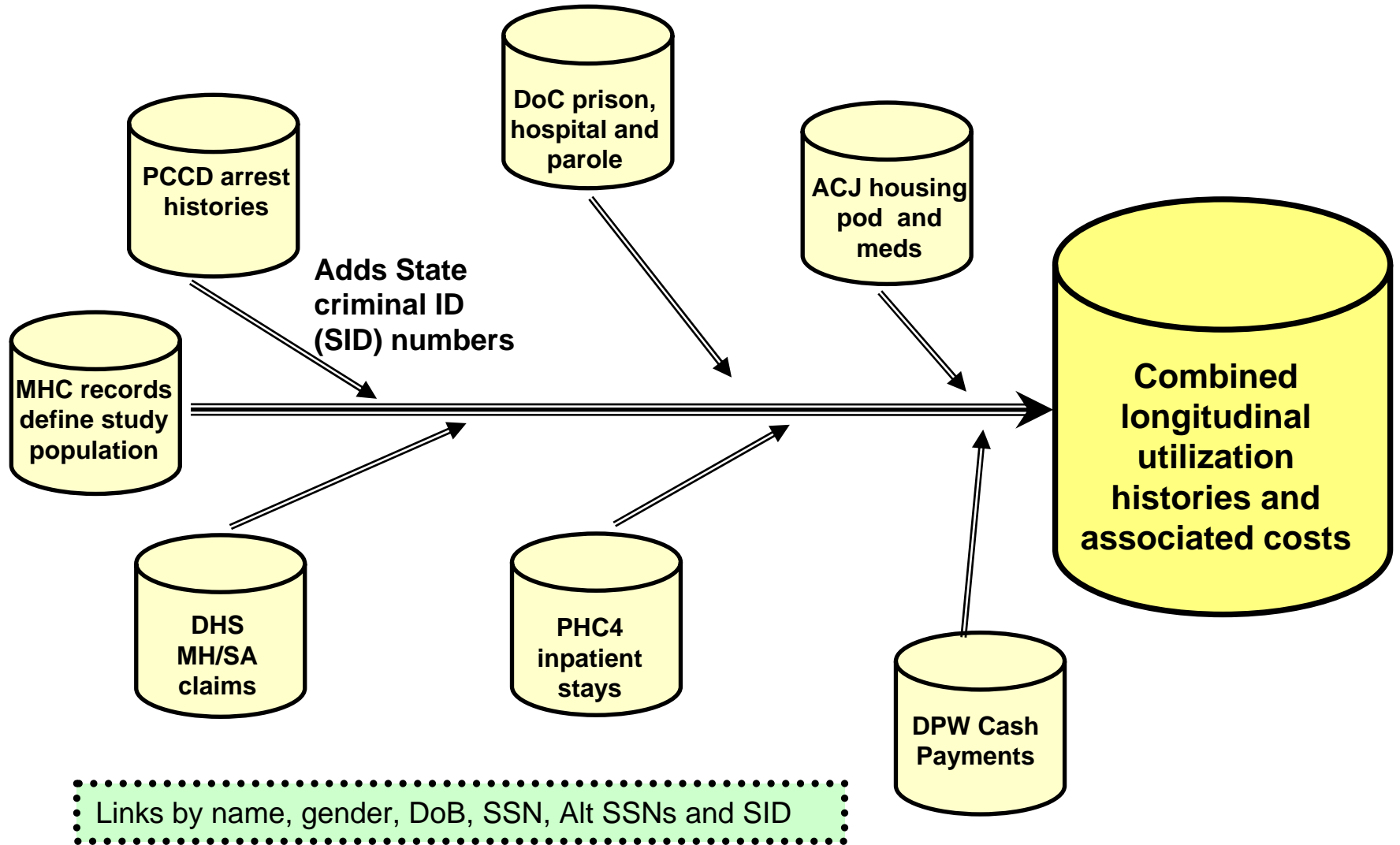
Methods Focus on Assigning Costs to Services

- **Create a detailed behavioral health and criminal justice service history from two years prior to MHC entry through the present**
- **Estimate the costs associated with service use**
- **Create a comparison for each MHC participant (assuming normal adjudication and processing)**
- **Estimate the costs associated with the comparison**
- **Estimate the fiscal impact as the cost difference**

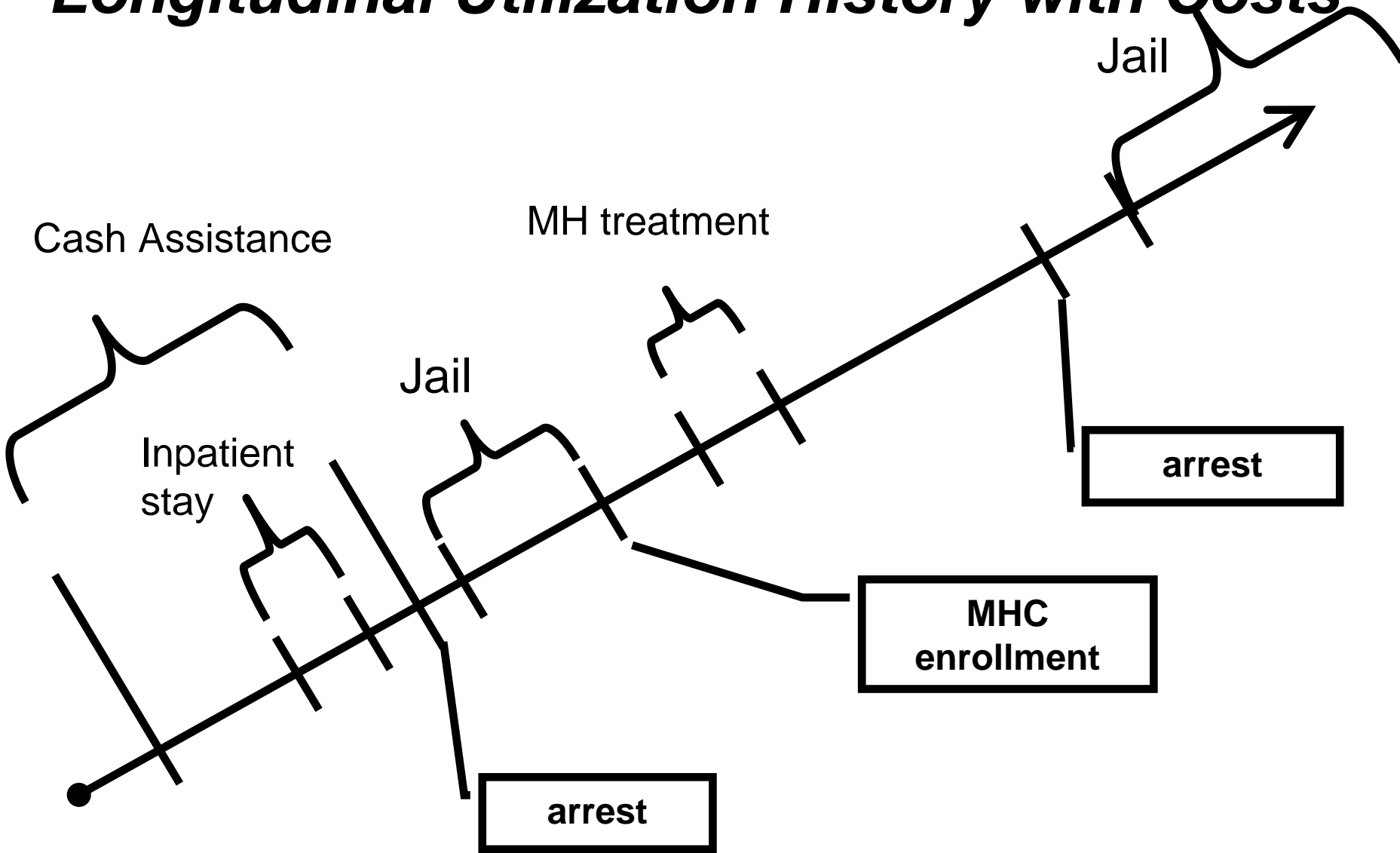
Administrative Data Are Coming From Seven State and County Agencies

- **Allegheny County Mental Health Court**
- **Allegheny County Department of Human Services (eCAPs)**
- **Allegheny County Jail**
- **Allegheny County District Attorney**
- **Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency**
- **Pennsylvania Department of Corrections**
- **Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare**

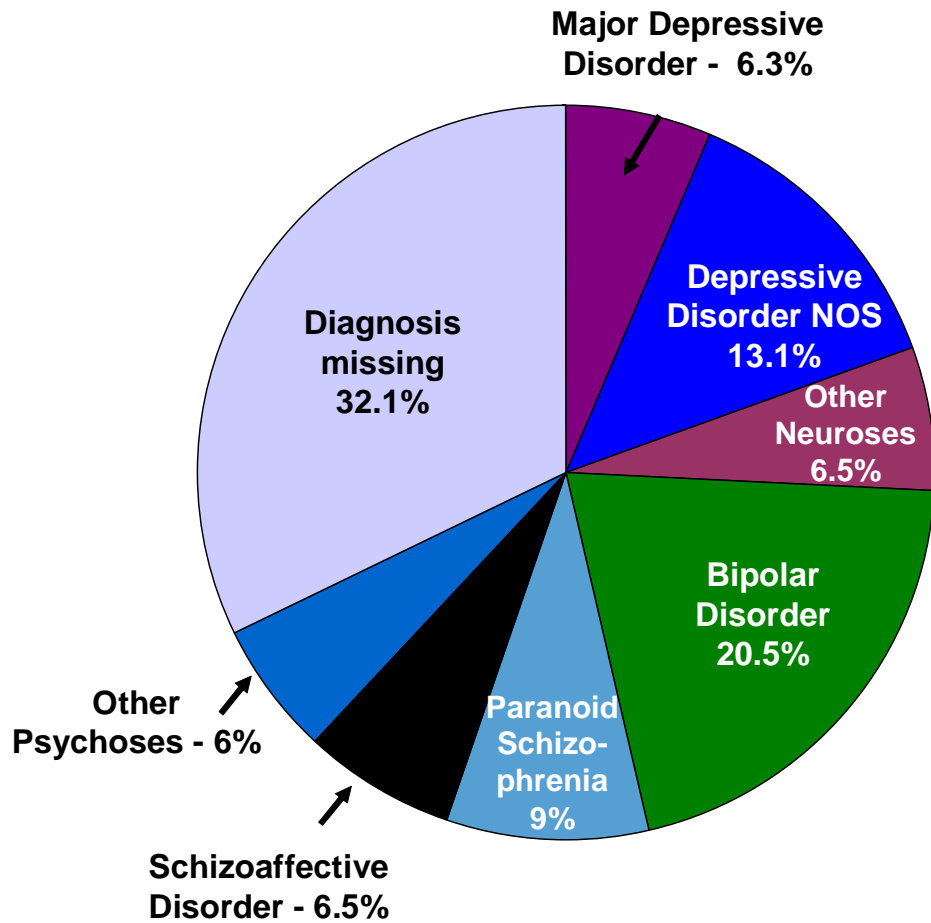
Building the Data File



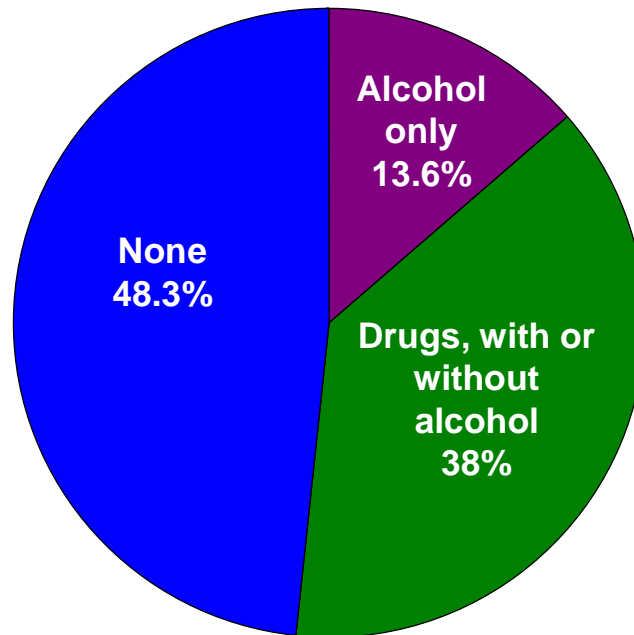
Longitudinal Utilization History with Costs



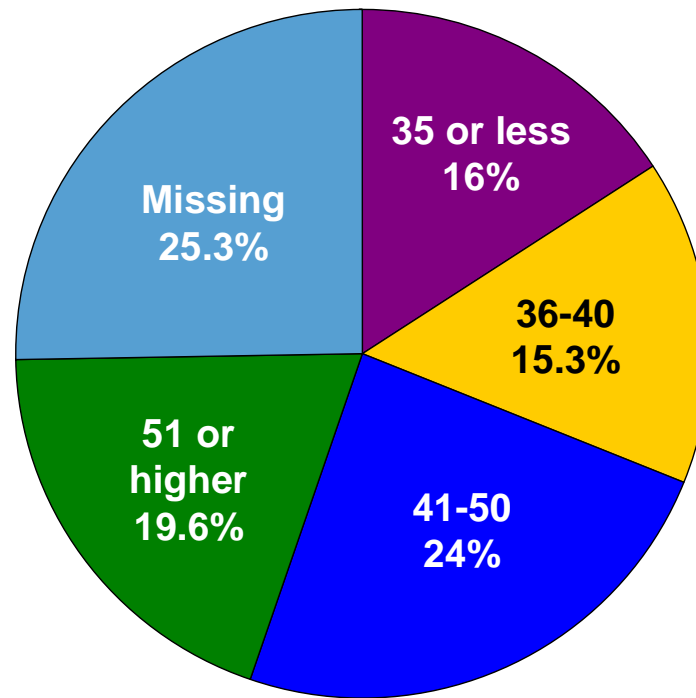
Participants Had a Wide Range of Diagnoses At MHC Entry



Approximately Half Reported Drug/Alcohol Use at Entry



Over Half Had GAF Score Less Than 50



Participants Had Prior Arrests and Substantial Prior Jail Time

In the two years prior to MHC entry

- **2.1 Arrests**
- **345 Days in Jail**
- **0.2 Days in State Prison**

Offense at MHC entry was a felony for 23%, but an additional 29% had an earlier felony on their record

The Public Cost Prior to MHC Entry was Substantial

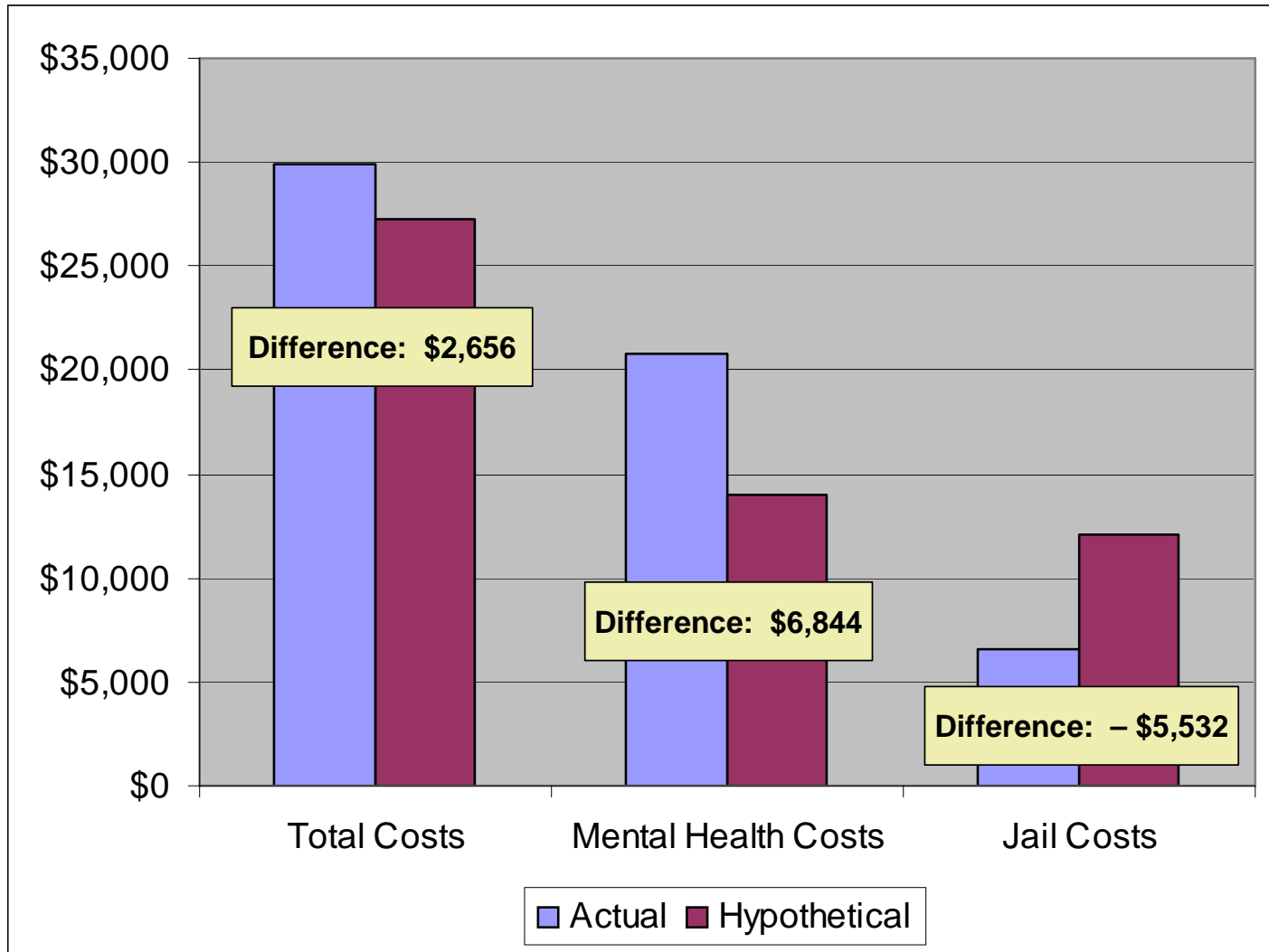
Average annual cost in two years before MHC entry

Jail	\$12,811
Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services	\$11,235
Arrests	\$2,257
Cash Assistance	\$363
Prison	\$7

Analytic Samples Are Similar to MHC Population

	Mental Health Court Population	Hypothetical Sentence Sample (4 quarter follow up)	Similar Event Sample (4 quarter follow up)	Similar Event Sample (8 quarter follow up)
N	352	88	199	66
Age (years)	37.4	37.2	37.5	37.5
Gender (% male)	62.0	56.8	63.8	63.6
Race (%)				
White	54.6	50.0	47.2	45.5
Black	41.2	47.7	50.8	50.0
Other	0.8	0	0.5	1.5
Unknown	2.8	2.3	1.5	3.0

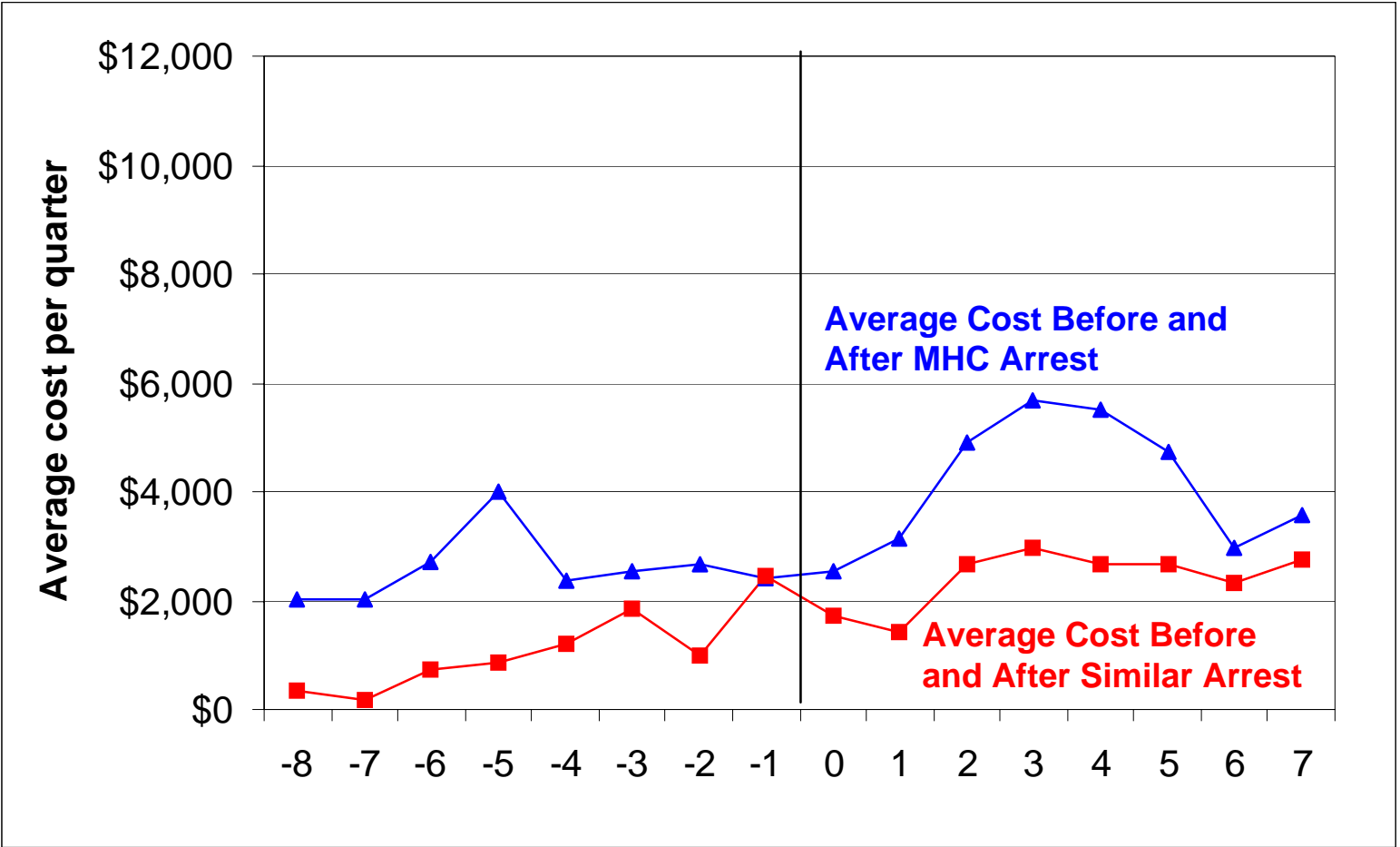
Counterfactual Analysis Shows That In First Year, Increase In MH Cost Was Approximately Offset By Decrease In Jail Cost



One Year Results Are Robust To Reasonable Variation In Assumptions

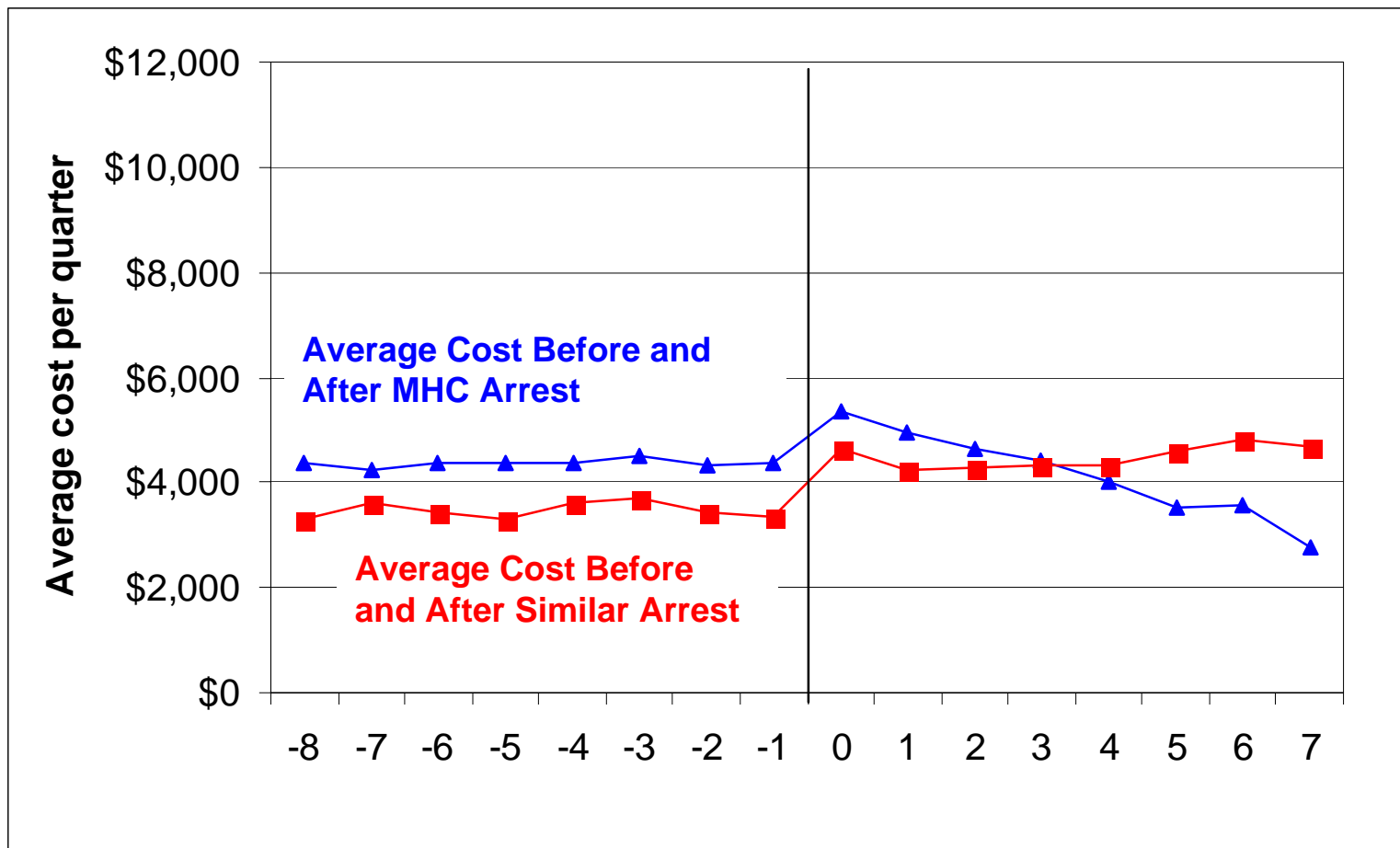
- **Primary analysis assumes MHC does not effect on recidivism nor MH/SA service use**
- **Sensitivity analyses assuming 10% reduction in recidivism or 10% increase in MH/SA does not substantially alter conclusion**
- **'Second bite of apple' - using cost growth surrounding prior arrest to predict cost in absence of MHC - yields similar result**

Pre/Post Comparison Using 2 Year Follow-Up Shows That Increase In MH/SA Costs Subsides...



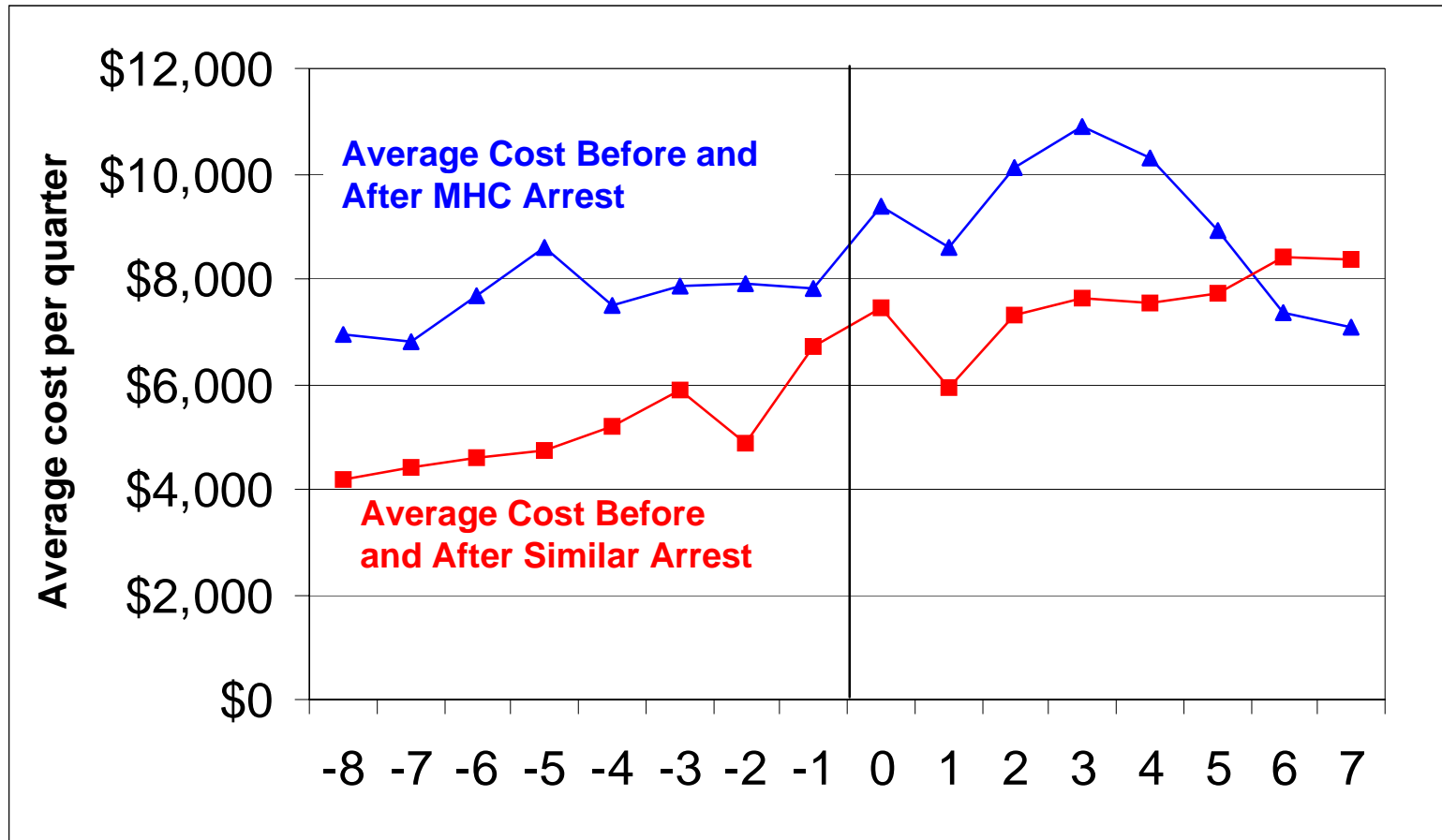
Quarters (Jail or arrest starts at beginning of quarter 0)

...And Jail Costs Drop Substantially In Second Year...



Quarters (Jail or arrest starts at beginning of quarter 0)

...Leading To Significantly Lower Total Costs By The End Of The Second Year



Quarters (Jail or arrest starts at beginning of quarter 0)

We Conclude That Allegheny County MHC Is A Success At Diverting Non-violent Offenders

- **Initial increase in MH/SA service cost approximately offset by decrease in jail cost**
- **Findings robust to variety of assumptions**
- **Two-year follow-up provides evidence of long run cost savings**

