

**CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA**

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# The Cost-Effectiveness of Electronic Monitoring

*Despite comparable recidivism rates, EM is not as cost-effective as traditional supervision.*

**Why we did this study**

The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) conducted a three-year national Electronic Monitoring (EM) Research Pilot to examine its effectiveness in promoting positive community outcomes for federal offenders while maintaining public safety. This report focuses on evaluating the cost-effectiveness of EM compared to traditional supervision (i.e., community supervision without EM) and whether EM demonstrates potential cost-savings relative to other management approaches (e.g., maintaining an offender in a Community Correctional Centre (CCC), or a community residential facility (CRF). In addition, the time Parole Officers (POs) spent on EM related activities was explored.

**What we did**

To allow for an estimation of costs and outcomes for a set time period, data was collected on a sample of 336 EM participants who became active on EM between April 1, 2017 and March 31, 2018. The sample of EM participants were compared to a control group of 336 offenders who were matched on demographic characteristics, offence and risk information, as well as release characteristics. To allow for a minimum of a one-year possible follow-up period for each offender, the two groups were compared on community supervision outcomes between April 1, 2017 and March 31, 2019, including suspensions, revocations, residency conditions, and frequency of contact.

To assess the amount of time POs spend on EM related activities, results from staff questionnaires were examined, in addition to EM alerts received by POs.

**What we found**

As one part of the cost-effectiveness analyses, this report compared the cost of EM to traditional supervision, demonstrating that EM was more expensive than supervision without the use of EM. With respect to outcomes, the EM participants had an equal number of suspensions and revocations compared to the control group. Combining the cost data with the outcome data, results from the cost-effectiveness analyses suggest that compared to traditional supervision, EM is more expensive but equally as effective in terms of reducing suspensions and revocations.

EM participants were significantly less likely to have a residency condition imposed on conditional release. EM may demonstrate potential cost-savings compared to the costs of maintaining an offender in a CCC or CRF if offenders for whom a residency condition would otherwise be imposed were instead supervised in the community with EM.

Considering the time POs spent on EM related activities, EM supervision appears to be associated with substantial additional time requirements involving device application and removal activities. Additionally, considering the number of alerts, analyses revealed that most POs received under 100 alerts per EM period, with the majority encompassing general alerts not related to the supervision conditions of offenders. Despite the additional time associated with EM, there were no differences in frequency of contact between EM participants and non-EM offenders.

**What it means**

In the context of EM as an additional discretionary supervision tool, the current study does not endorse it as a cost-effective approach to reducing recidivism. However, the findings of the overall pilot suggest that it offers added benefit over current practice in effectively supervising offenders who are on conditionally release. There may also be wider economic benefits associated with the use of EM that were not accounted for in the narrow cost-effectiveness methodology selected for the current study.

**For more information**

Smeth, A., Hanby, L., Ridha, T & Farrell MacDonald, S. (2019). *The Cost-Effectiveness of Electronic Monitoring*. (Research Report R-430). Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

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