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Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessments (RESEA) in Maryland—Plan for Annual Assessments with Incremental Improvements

Christopher J. O'Leary
W.E. Upjohn Insitute for Employment Research, oleary@upjohn.org

Gabrielle Pepin
W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, pepin@upjohn.org

Ting Zhang
The Jacob France Institute at the University of Baltimore

Upjohn Author(s) ORCID Identifier:

🆔 https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3372-7527

🆔 https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3156-0268

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Christopher J. O'Leary and Gabrielle Pepin
W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research

Ting Zhang
Jacob France Institute at the University of Baltimore

Submitted to:

Tiffany Robinson, Secretary of Labor
Maryland Department of Labor
500 N. Calvert Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

by:

Ting Zhang, Associate Director
Jacob France Institute
University of Baltimore
1420 N. Church Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

**Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessments (RESEA) in Maryland—
Plan for Annual Assessments with Incremental Improvements**

Executive Summary

Unemployment insurance (UI) exists to provide temporary partial wage replacement during periods of involuntary unemployment while beneficiaries are actively seeking reemployment. The reemployment effort required of UI beneficiaries, which balances the work disincentive of income replacement, helps to ensure that UI is social insurance rather than social welfare.

In 2017, Congress appropriated funding to provide reemployment services and eligibility assessments (RESEA) to UI beneficiaries. The legislation also required that states receiving RESEA conduct annual evaluations to produce causal evidence that reemployment services and eligibility assessments are effective.

For the state of Maryland, a process analysis and first impact analysis were done based on PY 2019 program activity. The PY 2019 impact evaluation was narrowly constrained by the availability of data but produced credible program impact estimates. The process analysis revealed areas for improving program administration and recording of data on program participants and services delivery. This plan for annual assessments with incremental improvements details intentions for the PY 2020 evaluation and outlines refinements and extensions to be undertaken in future evaluations.

Our PY 2019 evaluation design was driven by the available data, which included indicators of program participation but no information on referral to reemployment services programs. As in all states, Maryland assigns WPRS profiling scores, which measure the probability of UI benefit exhaustion, to all beneficiaries who are required to engage in an active search for reemployment; that is, UI beneficiaries who are neither union hiring hall members nor awaiting employer recall. Then, within each county, Maryland refers the 50 percent of UI beneficiaries determined most likely to exhaust their benefits to RESEA and the remainder to WPRS. However, our process analysis showed that distributions of profiling scores do not differ between RESEA and WPRS participants, and that observed proportions of UI benefits received are uncorrelated with profiling scores. In light of this, as a basis for this formative evaluation, we assumed that referrals to RESEA or WPRS amounted to random assignment of profiled beneficiaries, conditional on observable characteristics.

For the PY 2020 evaluation, we expect to receive data on all referrals to RESEA and WPRS as well as an expanded list of variables. Our evaluation plan in this report presents the main elements of a logic model for using improved data to provide a fuller evaluation of program and services impacts. We also outline anticipated ways that future annual RESEA evaluations can build on evidence about program and services impacts and special evaluations of program and services refinements and extensions.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of the RESEA Program

The Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessments (RESEA) program provides unemployment insurance (UI) eligibility assessments and reemployment services to UI beneficiaries. The RESEA program has four main purposes:

1) Reduce UI duration through improved employment outcomes.
2) Strengthen UI program integrity (reduce improper payments).
3) Align with objectives of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).
4) Establish RESEA as an entry point to other workforce system partners.

In 2018, Public Law 115-123 amended the Social Security Act (SSA) to establish permanent authorization for the RESEA program, enacting Section 306 of the SSA. The new SSA section requires a tiered-evidence approach for RESEA to encourage states to use evidence-based strategies and to conduct evaluations and build evidence for other interventions and service delivery strategies.

Interventions and strategies not backed by evidence (moderate or high causal evidence rating) must be under evaluation if used as part of RESEA. About RESEA customers:

- States may develop their own methods to target groups of UI claimants for RESEA.
- RESEA is no longer limited to UI beneficiaries identified as most likely to exhaust benefits by the state Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services (WPRS) model.
- RESEA now has the flexibility to target claimants from a variety of backgrounds or lengths of time receiving UI benefits.
- However, targeted claimant populations must be supported by local labor market information, economic trends, and other available data.

RESEA must include the following services:

- UI eligibility assessment, including review of work search activities, and referral to adjudication if an issue or potential issue is identified.
- Provision of labor market and career information, customized for the claimant.
- Enrollment in Wagner-Peyser Act–funded employment services.
- Support in the development of an individual reemployment plan.
- Information and access to reemployment services at American Job Centers (AJCs) and referrals to reemployment services and training.

The state RESEA must assure due process for UI beneficiaries:

- Procedures must be in place to provide claimants with proper notifications, including consequences of not attending.
- RESEA must reasonably reschedule services when UI beneficiaries have bona fide conflicts.
- The main outcomes measuring RESEA success are:
  - UI duration (weeks), UI cost (dollars), and UI exhaustion rate.
  - Reemployment and earnings (measured with quarterly UI wage records).

States are encouraged to propose additional outcomes that could provide early indications that the RESEA program is working as intended. Examples of outcomes that states might consider include increased participation in or completion of the RESEA program activities or the time to reemployment following the start of RESEA interventions.

1.2 Objectives of Annual Evaluations

The U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) stipulates in Unemployment Insurance Program Letter (UIPL) 1-20 that:

- "In carrying out a State program of reemployment services and eligibility assessments using grant funds awarded to the State under this section, a State shall use such funds only for interventions demonstrated to reduce the number of weeks for which program participants receive unemployment compensation by improving employment outcomes for program participants." (Pallasch 2019, p. 2)

- "Any intervention without a high or moderate causal evidence rating used by a State in carrying out a State program or reemployment services and eligibility assessments under this section shall be under evaluation at the time of use." (Pallasch 2019, p. 3)

In other words, a RESEA intervention (i.e., service) must have objective evidence of improving employment outcomes. Any new or otherwise unproven intervention must be evaluated as it is delivered, including the recording of appropriate qualitative and quantitative data regarding the intervention and its beneficiaries.

1.3 Policy Background

1.3.1 The UI program, RESEA, and related services in Maryland

Foundations for the federal-state UI program were set in the Social Security Act of 1935. The main purpose of UI is to provide temporary partial income replacement during involuntary unemployment while beneficiaries are actively seeking reemployment. By 1938, all states were paying UI benefits through state programs in conformity with federal requirements. Reemployment services to support return to work by UI beneficiaries were originally provided only by the Employment Service established under the Wagner-Peyser Act of 1933, which is funded by the federal unemployment tax.

The WPRS program was established in 1993 as an unfunded mandate. Under WPRS, UI beneficiaries most likely to exhaust their entitlements were provided services by local staff funded through federal job training programs (Job Training Partnership Act, Workforce Investment Act, and Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act). The federal Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 provided statutory funding for reemployment services to UI beneficiaries through RESEA.

1.3.2 Interaction of RESEA with other programs

The Maryland RESEA program is operated in coordination with the Maryland WPRS program.[1] The WPRS system was established nationwide following the 1993 enactment of Public Law 103-152, which authorized WPRS under Section 303(j) of the SSA. The law requires state employment security agencies to establish and operate a system of profiling all new claimants for regular UI benefits.[2] Profiling is designed to identify UI claimants who are most likely to exhaust their regular benefits so that they may be provided reemployment services early in their unemployment spells and make faster transitions to new employment.

States now have significant flexibility in program design and targeting UI claimants for participation. The permanently authorized RESEA program promotes and rewards new and innovative service delivery strategies and interventions. In the context of these changes and the program's potential growth in future years, states are strongly encouraged to revisit their service delivery and staffing designs to achieve RESEA goals most effectively. State workforce and UI agencies implementing RESEA also are encouraged to engage their State Workforce Boards to support these aims, especially in the furtherance of integrating the RESEA program into AJC service delivery and WIOA state plans.

- The WPRS system remains separate from RESEA. It is a stand-alone program authorized under Section 303(j) of the SSA.
- Historically, states operating RESEA were exempt from WPRS because participants in the two programs were the same.
- States not using the WPRS model to select customers for RESEA still must operate the WPRS program separately.

1.3.3 Maryland RESEA program and related research

To maintain continuous UI benefit receipt while unemployed, participation in two groups of activities is required of all RESEA-selected UI beneficiaries in Maryland. First, all RESEA-selected UI beneficiaries must participate in a group RESEA orientation session, followed by two additional reemployment services from an approved list within 45 days. The other activity is a UI eligibility assessment which is conducted one-on-one at the end of the group RESEA orientation. The orientation normally includes labor market information, a staff-assisted informal skills assessment, and development of an individual employment plan. For the additional services, Maryland RESEA participants may choose from a list of 10. The list includes résumé

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[1] In Maryland, WPRS is referred to as the Reemployment Opportunity Workshop (ROW).
[2] This section presents essential guidelines issued by USDOL in UIPL 8-20 (Pallasch 2020) as "Operating Guidance for Unemployment Insurance (UI) Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessments (RESEA)" and UIPL 7-19 (Conway 2019).

preparation, job interview referrals, referral to training, job fair participation, job search workshops, job finding clubs, adult literacy programs, reemployment skills (networking and training in Microsoft Office productivity programs), and pre-apprenticeship activities.

Many of the individual services provided to RESEA participants in Maryland have had evaluations listed in the Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research category of "job search assistance services found to have favorable impacts on all outcomes." The main references on effectiveness of RESEA service bundles are Klerman et al. (2019), who examined multistate administrative data, and Michaelides and Mueser (2018), who studied random trials in Nevada.

Causal evidence of effectiveness for job search assistance in the forms of labor market information (Maryland Workforce Exchange [MWE] code 107), staff-assisted assessment (108), individual employment plan (142), and résumé preparation assistance (115) was provided by Corson, Long, and Nicholson (1985) and Almandsmith, Adams, and Bos (2006). These two field experiments conducted in Charleston, South Carolina, and throughout Wisconsin involved random trials showing that reconnecting Wagner-Peyser (and workforce agency) employment services to UI beneficiaries promotes return to work and shortens durations of UI benefit receipt. Similar causal evidence is provided from another field experiment on job search assistance by Manoli, Michaelides, and Patel (2018) and from random trials in Texas by Bloom (1990). Job search assistance targeted by profiling-type models was found to be effective by Decker et al. (2000) in D.C. and Florida and by Dickinson et al. (1999) in a six-state study.

Causal evidence of effectiveness for individual employment plans was found in Nevada, Idaho, Illinois, and Florida by Michaelides et al. (2012). Causal evidence of the effectiveness of reemployment and eligibility assessments was reported by Poe-Yamagata et al. (2011). Causal evidence of the effectiveness of reemployment workshops and job search workshops was found in the New Jersey reemployment experiment (Corson et al. 1989; Anderson, Corson, and Decker 1991; Corson and Haimson 1996). Postsecondary productivity training in Maryland is short-term job skill training, mainly in computer software like Microsoft Excel and Word. In the course of learning to use these software programs, participants also draft and improve personal résumés. Causal evidence that such short-term skill development is effective was provided in the gold-standard Workforce Investment Act evaluation (McConnell et al. 2015).

1.4 Organization of the Report

This introduction summarizes the current federal regulations governing RESEA, including its evaluation mandate, and provides a brief background on the UI program. Also summarized are the conditions that led to the establishment of RESEA and interactions between RESEA and other employment programs. The next section discusses the data to be used for the PY 2020 evaluation of RESEA and how it differs from the PY 2019 evaluation data. The third section outlines a logic model and evaluation plan for the PY 2020 evaluation. Because of its importance to the evaluation, Section 3 describes some important aspects of how Maryland's WPRS profiling model was estimated and how it is used to assign UI beneficiaries to either RESEA or WPRS. The final section of this report provides a summary and conclusion, along with an overview of possible features of future Maryland RESEA evaluations. Any field experiments evaluating new features of RESEA services or referral mechanisms would require random

assignment and significant advance planning. Preliminary discussions for a Maryland UI field experiment will occur during the PY 2020 evaluation.[3]

2 DATA FOR ANALYSIS

The Maryland UI reemployment services plan requires all profiled UI beneficiaries to participate in either RESEA or WPRS. Profiling scores are sorted each week in each county. UI beneficiaries having scores in the top half of the week's profiling score distribution in each county are referred to RESEA while those with scores in the bottom half of the distribution are referred to WPRS.[4]

2.1 Lessons from the PY 2019 Evaluation

For the PY 2019 RESEA evaluation, the research team was provided data on all profiled UI beneficiaries. These data included a variable for the profiling score and indicator variables for participation in RESEA or WPRS. As documented in the process analysis report for this project (O'Leary et al. 2021), data for the PY 2019 evaluation did not include codes for the initial referral of UI claimants to either RESEA or WPRS. In addition, there appeared to be incomplete recording of services delivered by Maryland employment offices—also known as American Job Centers (AJCs). Because of this, our estimation of program effects assumed that UI beneficiaries coded as program participants received all services required to complete the program.

Since all profiled UI beneficiaries were assigned to either RESEA or WPRS, there was not a comparable group of profiled UI beneficiaries who were not referred to reemployment services. Therefore, there were no natural groups from which to construct matched pairs comparisons. The range and distribution of scores for UI beneficiaries participating in either RESEA or WPRS were similar, however, such that referral of profiled beneficiaries to either RESEA or WPRS did not appear different from random assignment. The research team used this fact as a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the RESEA services bundle relative to that of the WPRS services bundle. Program effects were estimated with controls for observable characteristics, even though UI beneficiaries in the two groups appeared to be similar.

Data limitations for the PY 2019 evaluation prohibited other possible causal analyses. Impact estimation based on matched pairs was not possible since available groups to draw matched samples from were not comparable to program participants. Impact estimation of separate services was not successful either in regressions or with matched pairs samples. Participation analysis, to control for self-selection in participation, was not possible since we did not have data on who was referred to RESEA or WPRS.

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[3] Maryland has previously conducted field experiments in UI. See for example Klepinger et al. (1998), who evaluated four alternative work search requirements in Maryland.

[4] This process was confirmed by Yolanda Cullen of Maryland Department of Labor (MDOL) in an email on August 3, 2022. Cullen received confirmation of the procedure from programmers with Geo Solutions, a contractor for MDOL.

Maryland UI claimants who are referred to RESEA must attend an initial orientation session at a Maryland AJC consisting of a group orientation followed by an individual eligibility assessment. At this initial session, they receive four services: Labor Market Information (MWE code 107), Staff-Assisted Assessment (108), Individual Employment Plan (142), and RESEA Orientation (193). In addition, they are coded as a RESEA referral (194), but this appears to be a participation code, not a referral code. Within two weeks of the orientation, participants must complete two additional RESEA services—selected in consultation with an MWE staff expert— from the list of approved services. If they do not complete the two additional services, they may face benefit interruption. The most popular additional services chosen in PY 2019 were Job Search Workshop (29 percent), Job Fair Participation (23 percent), and Résumé Preparation (20 percent).

WPRS has three required services: Labor Market Information (107), Job Search Workshop (21, 37, 104, 132, 160, 215), and Reemployment Services (138). Only one of these—Labor Market Information—is also compulsory for RESEA participants, although Job Search Workshop was one of the most popular additional RESEA services. Therefore, there is some overlap in the employment services received by RESEA and WPRS participants.

2.2 Data for the PY 2020 Evaluation

The RESEA program serves profiled UI beneficiaries. Our evaluation will use data on all profiled and nonprofiled UI beneficiaries in Maryland in PY 2020 to allow for participant and comparison groups. In particular, we will be provided data on all profiling scores and referrals to RESEA and WPRS. We will also receive data on earnings histories of Maryland workers, demographic characteristics of UI applicants and other reemployment service recipients, and data on all reemployment services provided.

Of special importance in 2020 were federal UI programs that went into force toward the end of PY 2020. These federal programs started in late March 2020 and came into full force in April 2020. These federal programs included Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC—$600 weekly supplement), Federal Emergency Unemployment Compensation (extended the duration of UI benefits in Maryland beyond 26 weeks), and Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA—provided to workers not eligible for regular state UI). Additionally, the federal government paid for work sharing UI benefits provided under approved short-time compensation (STC) plans. STC plan beneficiaries also received the weekly FUPC starting in late March 2020. Maryland state policy actions also affected UI participation and duration of benefits. In 2020 Governor Larry Hogan suspended work search requirements for UI beneficiaries and charging of benefits to employer accounts.[5] The Maryland UI work search requirement was suspended effective March 20, 2020, and reinstated July 4, 2021, for regular UI and July 18, 2021, for PUA beneficiaries.

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[5] On March 12, 2020, Governor Hogan signed an executive order providing the Maryland Secretary of Labor with authority to suspend certain UI legal requirements. Under that authority, Labor Secretary Tiffany Robison suspended UI work search requirements on March 20, 2020. Governor Hogan reinstated the work search requirements as of July 4, 2021, for regular UI claimants, and as of July 18, 2021, for PUA claimants. (Source: Barbara Bernstein, Maryland Department of Labor, email August 26, 2022.)

Our plan for estimation of PY 2020 RESEA causal impacts is based primarily on Maryland program administrative data. Data being provided for the evaluation are expected to be more complete than the PY 2019 data set. In particular, we expect to receive indicators of both referral to and participation in both RESEA and WPRS. The list of variables requested from Maryland program administrative files is given as Appendix A. The requested variables are drawn from six main sources:

2.2.1 Wage record data

Wage record data are based on employer quarterly reports on total wages paid to each employee during a calendar quarter. These data provide information on all employers paying UI covered wages, so they are a source of information on multiple employers in a quarter. Using these data, we are able to identify the industry of the employer paying wages, but for a particular worker we cannot distinguish whether multiple employers in a quarter are simultaneous or sequential.

2.2.2 UI claims and benefit year payment data

From the UI application for benefits, UI claims data provide demographics on applicants, including age, gender, race, ethnicity, educational attainment, location, and number of dependents. A UI benefit year starts on the date of claim and continues for 52 weeks from that date. This data set also provides benefit year data on benefit entitlement, the weekly benefit amount, the dollar value of the initial entitlement, the potential duration of benefits, the actual amount of benefits received, and the amount of benefits remaining on the claim at the end of the benefit year.

2.2.3 Weekly continued claims and payment data

Weekly payment data provide information on the amount of entitled compensation in a week and the amount of earnings reported (if any) in a week for which compensation is claimed.

2.2.4 Workforce program data—services data from Maryland Workforce Exchange

Workforce program data include codes of services provided and the date of the service. These codes are drawn from MWE and include data on participation in and completion of RESEA and WPRS.

2.2.5 Profiling model scores and variables

We expect to receive data on profiling scores assigned to UI beneficiaries, as well as the variables used to compute profiling scores. Data will also include indicators for referral to RESEA or WPRS and the dates of referrals to these programs.

2.2.6 Demographic data from Maryland Workforce Exchange

Job seekers must register to use the MWE online job search system. We will receive data on the demographic characteristics of MWE service participants, which they provide at the time of registration with MWE.

3 EVALUATION PLAN

3.1 Logic Model for the PY 2020 Impact Estimation

We will conduct a comparison-group design evaluation of the RESEA program to produce causal estimates of program effects on outcomes of interest. The following are essential elements of the logic model leading to our evaluation design:

- **Inputs.** Qualitative and quantitative data on RESEA procedures, participants, potential comparison observations, and factors affecting design possibilities.
- **Activities.** Discussions about RESEA and WPRS referral processes and services. Meetings with data system experts in the Maryland UI agency and software contractors at the MWE to obtain relevant administrative records and to transfer and receive administrative data files for analysis. Methodologies for impact estimation are described based on expectations for data to be delivered. If necessary, the actual estimation procedures will be adapted to accommodate any limitations in the data that are actually delivered.
- **Outcomes of interest.** We will use program administrative data to produce causal impact estimates on near-term program outcomes, including benefit year program outcomes and quarterly measures of reemployment and earnings: 1) dollars of UI compensation received, 2) weeks of UI received, 3) proportion exhausting UI benefit entitlement, 4) proportion of UI benefit entitlement received, 5) employment in the quarter following the benefit year begin date, 6) employment in any of the four quarters following the benefit year begin date, 7) average earnings in the four quarters following the benefit year begin date, 8) employment in the fourth quarter following the benefit year begin date, and 9) earnings in the fourth quarter following the benefit year begin date.

The ideal evaluation design to estimate causal impacts of the RESEA program would involve an experimental design and randomized controlled trials (RCT). An RCT is not an option at this late date. However, principles of random assignment inform our evaluation design, which is based on retrospective observational data. Our design options for the PY 2019 evaluation were limited by the lack of data on program assignment and the high nonparticipation rate among those who were assigned profiling scores. Even though we received data on all PY 2019 profiled Maryland UI beneficiaries, the group participating in neither RESEA nor WPRS did not provide a useful comparison group.

Our review of the Maryland WPRS profiling model performance in the PY 2019 process analysis report suggested no systematic differences in profiling scores between those attending RESEA and WPRS orientations (O'Leary et al. 2021). Furthermore, before controlling for services receipt, there was no correlation between profiling scores and the proportion of the UI benefit entitlement drawn in the benefit year. Consequently, we assumed that PY 2019 RESEA and WPRS attendees were as good as randomly assigned to their respective programs, conditional on observable characteristics.

Evaluating the effects of a program using a sample of individuals who all participated in the program yields an imperfect analysis because those who chose to participate may differ

significantly from those who did not. In our setting, in the absence of any services received, referred nonparticipants may have higher or lower reemployment probabilities than referred participants due to unobservable factors. If, for instance, unobservable factors were to play a role in determining RESEA or WPRS participation, then excluding nonparticipants could yield biased program impact estimates.

For the PY 2020 evaluation we expect to receive data on referral to RESEA or WPRS for profiled UI beneficiaries. Therefore, even if there is voluntary nonparticipation in services, we expect to be able to estimate "intention to treat" effects based on all profiled UI claimants who were *referred* to RESEA or WPRS. This is an improvement upon the PY 2019 evaluation for which we only received data on UI beneficiaries who *participated* in one of the two programs.[6]

3.2 Challenges and Opportunities from the Pandemic Context

We expect that data for the PY 2020 RESEA evaluation will be more complete than the PY 2019 data, but PY 2020 differs from PY 2019 in other important respects. Beginning in mid-March 2020 workplace lockdowns occurred in many states—including Maryland—due to the emergence of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).[7]

- Reflecting the effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19, Maryland Secretary of Labor Tiffany Robinson suspended the UI work search requirement on March 20, 2020. The suspension lasted until July 2021.
  - During the last three months of PY 2020 (April through June 2020), both RESEA and WPRS continued to operate, and referred UI claimants still were required to participate. However, UI beneficiaries were not required to actively seek reemployment.
  - Both RESEA and WPRS operated remotely with group events held via video conferencing and one-on-one services delivered via video conferencing or telephone calls with facilitators. In particular, the RESEA UI eligibility assessment was completed via a one-on-one telephone call or video chat after the group RESEA session.
  - RESEA beneficiaries worked with facilitators to develop individual reemployment plans, but the claimant was not required to perform the actions in the plan until work search requirements were reinstated in July 2021.
- The federal government began paying for all benefits under STC, or work sharing, in mid-March 2020. Hence, as benefit payments no longer increased employer UI tax rates, use of STC was probably higher than it otherwise would have been.
  - Claimants who start a benefit year as STC beneficiaries are employed, so they are neither profiled nor referred to RESEA or WPRS.
- The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020 (Public Law 16-136) was signed on March 27, 2020.

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[6] Our study design was influenced by the RESEA evaluation toolkit provided by Mills De La Rosa et al. (2021).

[7] Klerman et al. (2022) document how state RESEA programs across the nation changed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- o The CARES Act established Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC), which paid an additional $600 per week to UI beneficiaries and STC recipients beginning in April 2020.
- o The CARES Act established Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC), which extended the duration of UI benefits beyond regular state duration of 26 weeks by an additional 13 or 20 weeks. Some UI beneficiaries referred to RESEA or WPRS may have received PEUC.
- o The permanent UI Extended Benefits (EB) program also was triggered in early 2020, increasing the potential duration of Maryland UI benefits by 13 weeks.
- o The CARES Act established PUA for UI applicants not eligible for regular state UI benefits.
  - ▪ PUA beneficiaries were neither profiled nor referred to RESEA or WPRS.

Because of these PY 2020 UI program realities, we plan to divide our PY 2020 impact analysis of RESEA into two time periods. Since work search was suspended on March 20, 2020, and FPUC supplementary benefits were implemented on April 1, 2020, we plan to exclude claims filed between these dates from our analysis. We will first analyze data from July 2019 through February 2020. We will also estimate models that include data from both July 2019 through February 2020 and April 2020 through June 2020 to study effects of the new 2020 program features. Finally, we plan to perform two separate analyses for the second period (starting April 2020), one of regular UI beneficiaries and the other of PUA beneficiaries. The PUA analysis will document the duration patterns of benefit receipt by demographic and eligibility subgroups.

3.3 Estimation

The core estimates of RESEA program impacts for the PY 2020 period before UI work search requirements were suspended will be estimated relative to the WPRS program. Our plan is to estimate intention to treat effects using all referrals to RESEA and WPRS, controlling for observable characteristics. The model for estimating these effects is given as Equation (1).

3.3.1 Model assumptions

Since referrals to RESEA and WPRS are closely aligned in Maryland, we will estimate RESEA program impacts relative to those of WPRS. We currently assume that referral to these two programs was based on the WPRS profiling score, and we will assess the validity of this assumption in the evaluation. RESEA program impacts will be estimated conditional on observable characteristics and the WPRS profiling score. As noted above, the PY 2019 process analysis found that referral to RESEA and WPRS did not occur as expected: 1) the observed proportion of UI benefits received was uncorrelated with the profiling score, 2) distributions of profiling scores did not differ between RESEA and WPRS participants, and 3) demographic characteristics were not appreciably different between RESEA and WPRS participants. We will assess the performance of the WPRS profiling model and the accuracy of the program referral process in the PY 2020 evaluation.

3.3.2 Impact estimators

We plan to estimate outcomes of RESEA referrals relative to those of WPRS referrals in an ordinary least-squares (OLS) framework. Specifically, we will use the combined sample of

RESEA and WPRS referrals to estimate OLS models of program impacts, controlling for demographic characteristics, the WPRS profiling score, measures of prior earnings (UI base period), and fixed effects for county, calendar quarter of UI application, and NAICS industry code in the quarter of the benefit year begin date. We first will estimate the following model using data from the prepandemic time period:

(1) $Y_{ictm} = \beta RESEA_i + X_i C + \alpha_c + \alpha_t + \alpha_m + u_{ictm}$,

where Y_{ictm} is the outcome of interest for individual i in county c whose benefits began in month t and whose previous industry of employment is represented by NAICS code m. $RESEA_i$ equals 1 for UI beneficiaries referred to RESEA and 0 otherwise. X_i is a matrix including demographic characteristics, prior earnings, and the WPRS profiling score. α_c, α_t, and α_m represent county, quarter, and industry NAICS code fixed effects, respectively. U_{ictm} is the random error term. We will estimate models using standard errors that are robust to heteroskedasticity.

β is the parameter of interest and measures the effect of RESEA referral, relative to that of WPRS referral, on the outcomes of interest (Y_{ictm}): 1) benefit year UI compensation, 2) benefit year weeks of UI receipt, 3) proportion exhausting UI benefit entitlement (at least 90 percent of benefits drawn), 4) proportion of UI benefits received, 5) employment in the quarter following the benefit year begin date, 6) employment in any of the four quarters following the benefit year begin date, 7) average earnings in the four quarters following the benefit year begin date, 8) employment in the fourth quarter following the benefit year begin date, and 9) earnings in the fourth quarter following the benefit year begin date.

Next, we will pool data from both the prepandemic and pandemic time periods to study how outcomes vary across contexts. We will estimate the following model:

(2) $Y_{ictm} = \beta_1(RESEA_i*Pandemic_t) + \beta_2 RESEA_i + X_i C + \alpha_c + \alpha_t + \alpha_m + u_{ictm}$,

where $Pandemic_t$ equals 1 if the UI recipient was referred to RESEA or WPRS during April–June 2020 and 0 otherwise. The remaining variables are similar to those in Equation (1).

Under the assumption that outcomes for UI beneficiaries referred to RESEA and WPRS would have trended similarly over time in the absence of the COVID-19 pandemic, $\beta_1 + \beta_2$ captures differential effects of being referred to RESEA, relative to WPRS, during the pandemic time period. Hence, comparing results from Equations (1) and (2) will provide evidence on the additional (positive or negative) effects of RESEA that UI beneficiaries experienced in the pandemic context of remote operations, suspended work search requirements, and expanded and extended UI benefits.

Additionally, we plan to compare effects of RESEA across regular UI and PUA beneficiaries. To do so, we will estimate Equation (1) using data from the pandemic time period separately by UI beneficiary type.

3.4 Impacts of Particular Reemployment Services

In principle, estimating effects on UI and labor market outcomes of specific reemployment services given to RESEA and WPRS participants is possible, because there is some overlap in the reemployment services received by participants in the two programs. Nonetheless, estimated associations for specific services are not asserted to be causal impact estimates for two main sets of reasons:

1) RESEA and WPRS participants are supposed to receive distinct bundles of compulsory services. In practice, RESEA and WPRS participants often receive some of the same services. Hence, we rely on RESEA and WPRS participants who receive some but not all compulsory services to identify associations between particular services and outcomes. Individuals who do not receive all compulsory services may exhibit different unobservable characteristics than other RESEA and WPRS participants, and, therefore, results probably are not generalizable. Additionally, if differences in beneficiaries' unobservable characteristics would explain whether they receive some or all compulsory services, then any estimated effects of particular services would be endogenous. Furthermore, this discussion presumes recording of services received is complete and accurate for all participants and consistent across all 25 Maryland workforce areas.

2) In addition to their compulsory services, each RESEA participant, together with an AJC staff member, selects two additional services to receive at follow-up appointments. There almost certainly is self-selection into the additional services received, based on both the selection process and the UI beneficiary's decision about whether to attend the follow-up appointments at an AJC.

Considering these limitations, we believe that the estimated effects of the RESEA program stated in Equation (1) are considerably more objective and causal than estimated associations between particular reemployment services and outcomes. Nonetheless, as done in the PY 2019 impact evaluation, we will attempt to estimate impacts of individual reemployment services on UI program and employment and earnings outcomes. We will follow the methodology explained in O'Leary et al. (2022).

3.5 Robustness Checks

As a robustness check, to assess if observable characteristics of RESEA and WPRS participants appear to play any role in explaining results from Equation (1), we will estimate the model without including demographic control variables and fixed effects. Additionally, to assess the role of site-specific heterogeneity, we will estimate specifications in which we add program-county interactions to Equation (1). Finally, to assess the influence of self-selection in program participation, we will estimate program impacts of RESEA and WPRS using propensity score matched samples of program referral observations to other UI beneficiaries with similar characteristics, including gender, age, race, education, and prior earnings, not referred to either RESEA or WPRS.

3.5.1 Assessment of the WPRS profiling model

UI beneficiaries who are neither job attached nor union hiring hall members are all assigned WPRS profiling scores. The scores are intended to reflect increased likelihood of long duration UI benefit receipt or the probability of exhausting the full UI entitlement. Experts in the Maryland Department of Labor told us that every week in each county, profiled UI beneficiaries are sorted from high to low, with the top half of scores assigned to RESEA and the bottom half assigned to WPRS.[8] Since all profiled UI beneficiaries are assigned to either RESEA or WPRS, the possibilities for alternative comparison groups are limited. Therefore, the best strategy for estimating the effect of RESEA is relative to WPRS while controlling for observable characteristics in a regression model.

Knowing how the Maryland WPRS profiling model and referral mechanism work informs the evaluation of RESEA program impacts. Analysis of the PY 2019 profiling data suggested that profiling scores were neither positively correlated with UI benefit exhaustion rates, nor did RESEA participants have higher average profiling scores than WPRS participants. Profiling scores were clustered in the middle of the (0, 1) interval, with most values in the (0.4, 0.6) range. The bunching of scores in the middle of the distribution could be due to the grouping of variables in model estimation. Grouping involved combining categories of industry codes and occupation codes. This approach yields a single coefficient on the combined categories of characteristics. That is, combining variables restricts the coefficients to all be the same within the combined set. Such restrictions could cause a reduction in variation of the predicted probability of UI benefit exhaustion—the profiling score values. Consequently, the ability of the scores from the model to distinguish between beneficiaries is reduced.

We will assess performance of the profiling model by examining correlations between scores and observed duration of benefit receipt and exhaustion rates. We will also assess the success of referral procedures to send the top 50 percent of weekly scores within each county to RESEA and the bottom 50 percent to WPRS.

For the PY 2020 evaluation, we expect to receive data on all the profiling variables used in the current model. We did not receive data on these variables for the PY 2019 evaluation. If we receive data on the necessary variables, we will attempt to replicate the model and then compare simulated to actual referrals. We will also estimate an alternative WPRS model and check its predictive accuracy and range of predictions.

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[8] Email from Yolanda Cullen of the Maryland Department of Labor, August 3, 2022, describing the RESEA profiling and referral process in Maryland.

4 SUMMARY

4.1 Overview of the PY 2020 RESEA Evaluation Plan

The PY 2019 process and impact evaluations provided some important lessons about data collection and recording procedures. The main challenge of the PY 2019 evaluation was the lack of data on referrals to RESEA or WPRS. In response, the Maryland agency now records those data through the online Maryland Workforce Exchange (MWE) system. While those WME based data will not be available for the PY 2020 evaluation, the Maryland workforce agency will provide the needed data on all referrals to RESEA and WPRS through a third-party data services provider. Instead of relying only on participant data to estimate the effects of treatment on the treated, we expect to use data on all referrals to estimate the intention to treat, which should provide a better measure of program effects. The more complete data will also allow us to overcome any possible self-selection in program participation by producing estimates of intention to treat rather than treatment on the treated. We will use this approach for the PY 2020 evaluation, and we will replicate the main results of the PY 2019 impact evaluation using the improved data including all referrals.

Our analysis of Maryland WPRS profiling scores and participation in RESEA and WPRS showed that neither the model for computing scores nor the mechanism for referrals worked as expected. There was no correlation between scores and actual UI benefit exhaustions, and participants in RESEA, on average, did not have profiling scores that differed from WPRS participants. While the Maryland policy is to refer UI beneficiaries with the top half of scores to RESEA and the bottom half of scores to WPRS, that objective was not achieved in PY 2019. For PY 2020, we will check the usefulness of the profiling scores and the accuracy of the referral mechanism. If we receive all the necessary preclaim data, we will estimate a new profiling model as a possible approach for improving future referrals.

UI program changes in response to COVID-19 introduce several complexities into the PY 2020 evaluation. Since UI work search requirements were suspended in late March 2020 while RESEA and WPRS shifted to virtual services, the decision environment for UI beneficiaries in the first months of PY 2020 differed greatly from the last months. Consequently, we plan to conduct separate impact analyses for different time periods in PY 2020.

Furthermore, the array of available UI programs proliferated in early 2020. New federal programs increased weekly benefit amounts (FPUC) and extended potential durations (PEUC). The permanent federal-state EB program also extended benefit durations. The benefit charging rules for STC also improved for employers while benefits were enhanced for workers by FPUC. Finally, an entirely new category of eligible beneficiaries was created by PUA. We will attempt to account for each of these programs and benefit features in our PY 2020 Maryland RESEA evaluation. In situations where causal impact estimation is not practical, we will document differences in the observable characteristics of beneficiaries across different programs and program features available within the same time frames.

4.2 Strategies for Future Evaluations

Beyond the PY 2020 evaluation, all Maryland RESEA evaluations should benefit from the improved procedures for recording data on services and more accurate program referrals based on profiling scores. One important RESEA activity that is not currently recorded with a unique code is the UI eligibility assessment. It is implicitly captured within a bundle of services by the RESEA orientation code, but it is a distinct activity, different from other reemployment services, and is done one-on-one with beneficiaries after the group RESEA orientation has ended. Going forward, the UI eligibility assessment should be recorded as a distinct activity. This will emphasize its essential importance in the RESEA and will permit causal impact evaluations.

The PY 2021 RESEA evaluation must account for the end of FPUC and PEUC in July 2020, the addition of short-term reduced supplements in September 2020 (paid from Disaster Unemployment Assistance), and the resumption of smaller weekly UI supplements and added potential durations provided by the American Rescue Plan Act starting in March 2021. Thus, the PY 2021 evaluation must account for a series of on-off-on benefit changes, as well as the resumption of required work search for UI beneficiaries in July 2021.

For evaluations of RESEA beyond PY 2021, planning should start soon to identify options for improving RESEA by adding features that could improve participation and positive program outcomes. Some of these could be evaluated before full implementation by conducting randomized controlled trials (RCT)—the gold standard for program evaluation. Any RCT requires advance planning before the start of the fiscal year to define the treatment, data systems, and sample design necessary for a successful evaluation. Maryland has previously conducted successful RCT experiments (Klepinger et al. 1998). A simple RCT for RESEA could be planned with the Maryland Department of Labor. Options for an RCT might test new rules for selecting referrals, new ways of contacting selected referrals, different requirements for the location or method of completing services, different bundles of compulsory or optional services, and different time periods for completion of required services. Much would be learned from the process and the evaluation results. One successful RCT could lead to other field experiments on topics of particular policy interest.

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Appendix A

Data Request for PY 2020 Maryland RESEA Evaluation

MARYLAND DATA REQUEST

UI QUARTERLY WAGE RECORDS

A) Statewide quarterly wage record data (on all earners in Maryland) 2020Q1 to most recent data available. Starting 2020Q1 will provide some overlap because the last quarters in the previous extract were probably incomplete because of lags in employer reporting.

1. SSN (JFI will encrypt all SSNs before sharing data with Upjohn)
2. Year and quarter of observation
3. Employer ID reporting the wages
4. Total wages reported
5. NAICS industry code associated with employer reporting earnings

UI CLAIMS AND PAYMENT DATA

B) Unemployment insurance application and benefit year payment variables for UI benefit year begin dates (BYB) from July 1, 2017, to the most recently available data. This should include data on all UI applicants whether or not they ended up getting paid benefits.

1. SSN
2. Claim submit date
3. Benefit year begin date
4. Indicator for monetary eligibility (1=yes, 0=no)
5. Indicator for nonmonetary separation eligibility (1=yes, 0=no)
6. Weekly benefit amount before dependents allowance
7. Number of dependents
8. Weekly benefit amount including dependents allowance
9. UI compensation received during benefit year
    a. This is often different from the UI check/payment amount. It is defined as the weekly benefit amount minus deduction(s) for excluded income such as severance, minus any deduction for reported earnings, but before any third-party payments such as child support enforcement, federal and state taxes, offset for past overpayments, etc.
10. Total number of weeks receiving some UI compensation (could be > 26 weeks)
11. Base period earnings
12. Benefit year earnings reported on continued claims (full amount reported, not net of $50 disregard weekly)
13. Separating employer ID
14. First day of work with separating employer
15. Last day of work with separating employer
16. Occupation code for separating job
17. Separation reason code (final adjudicated code, send the new code list)
18. Number of base period employers (who will be charged)

19. Date of birth
20. Gender
21. Race
22. Ethnicity (Hispanic = 1, else = 0)
23. Educational attainment
24. Zip code (first 5 zip)
25. Zone code (last 4 zip)
26. County
27. JCR code (list of values)

C) Unemployment insurance weekly payment variables (continued claims) please provide data on claims with benefit year begin (BYB) dates from July 1, 2017, to the most recently available data. We need to get data on state regular UI benefits and any federal UI benefits. Federal benefits could include weekly supplements (FPUC = $600 in PY 2020), PEUC, and PUA. We also expect that the prefix or suffix will help identify work sharing (short-time compensation) benefit payments. Please advise if we need additional fields to receive these data.

1. Employee ID (SSN) (New system has claimant ID; we need SSNs)
2. Benefit year begin date (BYB)
3. Claim week ending date
4. Entitled compensation for the week (full entitled including third party payments)
   a. This is often different from the UI check/payment amount. It is defined as the weekly benefit amount minus deduction(s) for excluded income such as severance, minus any deduction for reported earnings, but before any third-party payments such as child support enforcement, federal and state taxes, offset for past overpayments, etc.
5. Amount of check issued for the week
6. Excluded income amount
7. Actual earnings reported for week (This variable should include amounts less than the $50 earnings disregard and should not subtract the $50 earnings disregard.)
8. *UI program type prefix (PUA, PEUC, EB, others)*
9. *UI program type suffix (UCFE, UCX, TAA, RTAA, STC (workshare), SEA, others)*
10. *Program code (four digit code Prasad suggested)*
    a. *If 10 is sufficient, we do not need 8 and 9.*
11. Federal tax withholding
12. State tax withholding
13. Child support withholding
14. Offset for overpayment
15. Nonpayment reason code (Paddy will check compatibility with past data)
16. Currently enrolled in school or training
17. Currently in commissioner approved training (1=yes, 0=no)

WORKFORCE PROGRAM (MWE) VARIABLES LISTS

D)   We are asking for all service receipt data, regardless of program affiliation, for MWE

Service recipients beginning July 1, 2017, to the present. This would include all MWE service recipients, whether a UI applicant or not, whether profiled or not, whether referred to ROW or RESEA, or not.

1. SSN (JFI will encrypt this before sharing with Upjohn)
2. Service code
3. Service code description
    a. To reduce repetition, this variable potentially could be sent in a separate file, such as Excel, that would show the service code and its corresponding description
4. Date service was scheduled
    a. This was missing for most observations in prior data
5. Date service was received
6. Indicator whether service was completed
    a. In prior data, this was 1 for all but 22 observations

E)   For all profiled UI claimants with benefit year begin dates, July 1, 2017, to the present:
- **Note:** Most of these variables we had previously requested but did not receive. These would be extremely helpful for the evaluation study if they are available.

1. SSN (JFI will encrypt this before sharing with Upjohn)
2. Benefit Year Begin date (BYB)
3. Profiling selection date
4. Profiling score
5. WPRS (ROW) referral indicator
6. Date of WPRS (ROW) referral (date letter was sent)
7. RESEA referral indicator
8. Date of RESEA referral (date letter was sent)
9. Excused from WPRS
    - 1 = before orientation, 2 = during orientation
10. Successfully completed WPRS
11. Excused from RESEA
    - 1 = before orientation, 2 = during orientation
12. Completed RESEA eligibility assessment
13. Satisfactorily passed RESEA eligibility assessment
14. Failed RESEA eligibility assessment
15. Successfully completed RESEA

F)   Demographic data collected at MWE registration. To evaluate the effects of separate WME services (as opposed to the bundle of RESEA services taken together) we would need data on demographic variables of all MWE customers. If the following variables, or other demographic characteristics data are collected at MWE registration, please provide data for MWE customers from, July 1, 2017, to present:

1. SSN (JFI will encrypt this before sharing with Upjohn)

2. Date of MWE registration
3. Date of birth
4. Gender
5. Race
6. Ethnicity (Hispanic = 1, else = 0)
7. Educational attainment
8. Current school or training enrollment
9. Zip code (first 5 zip)
10. Zone code (last 4 zip)
11. County
12. Occupation of most recent job