Utah SSDI '1 for 2' Benefits Project

Task 3:
Report - Measurement of Outcomes

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This report addresses the Utah responses to Task 3 in the scope of work of the Social Security Administration 1 for 2 Benefit Offset Demonstration Pilot Project In what follows we list the outcomes that will be studied in Utah and document the indicators and data sources that will be used for this purpose. Guiding the choice of outcomes to be studied is the overall outcome evaluation goal, represented in the fourth objective of the Utah project, of understanding for whom the 1 for 2 benefit offset is most effective. We summarize these questions below and in the next section address the indicators and data sources for addressing these questions. We proceed below by first summarizing the key questions for our outcome evaluation and then discuss how the outcomes in these key questions will be measured.

Key Questions for the Outcome Evaluation

Understanding for whom the policy intervention is most effective requires that we use the pilot effort to identify policy impacts on participants. There are, however, a range of relevant impacts to consider. We will estimate the aggregate policy impacts in terms of five types of outcomes: employment and income, attitudes about employment, awareness and use of available employment supports, use of public assistance, and health status and medical care.

We will also examine the disaggregated policy impacts on participants with different *individual characteristics*, including different disabilities and different capacities (e.g., education levels and work experience), from different *program models* (e.g., policy impact moderated by service model and prior program experience), and entering the project at different *time points* in their Trial Work Period and Extended Period of Eligibility. As part of this disaggregate analysis, the evaluation will also seek tentative answers as to why the policy is more effective in promoting work effort for some people and what remaining system barriers limit its impact. For each of these sets of questions, the goal will be to identify issues that will need to be considered in the national 1 for 2 benefit offset demonstration project.

Our approach to addressing these five types of outcomes and three ways of disaggregating outcomes are discussed now in more detail and presented below in the list of 30 questions. The first group of questions (Questions 1 through 5 below) consists of the primary outcomes of interest that follow from those listed in the Appendix of the Statement of Work. The second set (Questions 6-8) can be thought of as potential intermediate outcomes, wherein participants with work plans for financial self-sufficiency, more positive attitudes about work, and more realistic views of barriers to work are more likely to have more positive employment and income outcomes. The third set (Questions 9-13) addresses the impact of the policy change on utilization of employment support services. It is hoped that all participants, intervention and control, make more informed use of the Utah employment support programs that are available to them, but if, as seems likely, the intervention participants show the greatest increase in use, this difference needs to be documented. The fourth set (Questions 14-18) of impacts concerns receipt of public assistance. This is important to document as a decrease in other forms of public assistance would increase the estimated value of this project to the state of Utah and in broader dissemination. The fifth, and last, set (Questions 19-22) of aggregate impacts concerns health outcomes experienced by participants.

Following these questions about aggregate impacts, we list questions about how policy impacts are moderated by other factors. These moderating factors include: the demographic characteristics of participants (Questions 23-26), the services they received (Questions 27 & 28), and the timing of their entry into the project with regard to the number of months they have left in their Trial Work Period and their Extended Period of Eligibility (Questions 29 & 30).

Questions about Aggregate Policy Impact

A How does the policy affect the employment, wages, and income of participants?

(1) Do intervention group members attempt work at a higher rate than controls?

(2) Do intervention group members average more hours worked per week than controls?

(3) Do intervention group members earn more per month than controls?

(4) Do intervention group members attain a higher average monthly income than controls?

(5) Do intervention group members sustain their work attempts longer?

B. How does the policy affect the employment-related attitudes of participants?

(6) Do intervention group members develop work and career plans associated with greater financial self-sufficiency than controls?

(7) Do intervention group members develop more positive attitudes about work than controls?

(8) How do the attitudes of intervention group members about barriers to work change over time, as compared to controls

C. How does the policy affect utilization of Utah employment support services?

(9) How does utilization of Benefits Planning Assistance and Outreach (BPAO) services differ between intervention and control participants?

(10) How does utilization of the Utah Medicaid Buy-In program differ between intervention and control participants?

(11) How does utilization of Employment-related Personal Assistance Services (EPAS) differ between intervention and control participants?

(12) How does utilization of vocational rehabilitation services from USOR differ between intervention and control participants?

(13) How does utilization of mental health services differ between intervention and control participants?

D. How does the policy affect participation in public assistance programs?

(14) Do intervention group members leave SSDI cash benefits at a higher rate than controls?

(15) Do intervention group members receive lower SSDI cash benefits than controls?

(16) Do intervention group members make less use of food stamps than controls?

(17) Do intervention group members make less use of housing assistance than controls?

(18) Do intervention group members make less use of Medicaid assistance than controls?

E. How does the policy affect health status and health care?

(19) Do intervention group members report being in better health than controls?

(20) Do intervention group members have higher rates of private (including employer-subsidized) health insurance coverage than controls?

(21) Do intervention group members report greater access to medical care than controls?

(22) How do the self-reported health care costs of intervention group members differ from the controls?

Questions about Disaggregated Policy Impacts

F. How are policy impacts affected by participant characteristics

(23) What is the interaction between benefit offset and primary disability of participant?

(24) What is the interaction between benefit offset and participant work experience?

(25) What is the interaction between benefit offset and participant education level?

(26) What is the interaction between benefit offset and how long the participant has been receiving disability-related public assistance?

G. How are policy impacts affected by program mix?

(27) Are there differences in outcomes based on the service model?

(28) What is the interaction between benefit offset and the Ticket program?

H. How are policy impacts affected by timing of participation?

(29) Does the impact of the policy change increase during the intervention?

(30) Does the impact of the policy change depend on how far the participants are in their Trial Work Period and/or Extended Period of Eligibility?

The primary goal in estimating the aggregate policy impacts (Questions 1-22) is to confront in the Pilot Demonstration the problems in estimating overall impacts that might arise for the national 1 for 2 demonstration project and to identify possible solutions to those problems. It is essential, therefore to include the outcomes that are most relevant to federal and state policy analysts and policymakers.

Similarly, the goal in addressing the disaggregated impacts is to identify the most salient moderated relationships that should be considered in the national demonstration. For example, if, as expected, the 1 for 2 benefit offset is more effective with individuals with more substantial employment experience, it is important that the national demonstration be informed of that outcome as well as of the virtues of different ways of measuring employment experience.

Measurement of Outcomes

Answering these key questions requires that we measure the major work-related outcomes. Accordingly, an important part of Task 3 of this project is to clarify the indicators that we will use in measuring the outcomes described above and the sources of data for these indicators.

Overview of Data Sources

The Utah pilot will collect administrative data from agency records and participant self-report data through phone and mail surveys. The Utah agencies providing information will be the state Department of Health, Department of Workforce Services, and Utah State Office of Rehabilitation and two community mental health agencies.

As for self-report information, there will be an initial survey that is completed before participants are considered enrolled in the project. After participants are enrolled they will be contacted every six months during the pilot. The 6 and 18 month contacts will be fairly short surveys done by mail. The twelve-month contact will be a longer survey and will be conducted by telephone. This time period was selected because enrollment must end twelve months after the project begins, so the minimum number of months a person could be enrolled is twelve.

Measurement Plan

Table 1 provides a summary of outcome indicators and data sources. These are described below in sections corresponding to the sections in the table.

A. Measures of Employment & Income Outcomes

Work attempts are defined as applications for employment and will be measured in the self-report surveys (initial, mail, and telephone), as will be average hours worked per week, estimated hourly wages, and total monthly income. Quarterly earned income will be measured with wage data obtained from the Utah Department of Workforce Services Unemployment Insurance (UI) file. Sustained employment will be measured in two ways, one in terms of unbroken calendar quarters of recorded wage income and other in terms of self-reported unemployment.

B. Employment-Related Attitude Outcomes

All information regarding work plans, attitudes about work, and perceptions of work barriers will come from survey data. Each of these will be addressed in the initial survey, the mailed surveys, and the telephone surveys, but the initial and telephone surveys will address these in greater detail.

C. Employment Support Utilization Outcomes

Indicators of use of work incentive programs will be obtained from the BPAO database, the Department of Health Data Warehouse, and the USOR. Data on employment-related mental health services will be available for participants who are enrolled through the two mental health organizations that are included in this project.

D. Public Assistance Utilization Outcomes

Participation in and payment amounts for SSDI cash benefits will be derived from administrative data, as will be information on receipt of food stamps during the study period. Coverage by Medicaid will be addressed with data from the Utah Department of Health. Information on utilization of housing subsidies will come from the self-report surveys. Data on Medicaid expenditures for the intervention and control participants would be important for actuarial assessments of the overall cost of the 1 for 2 policy innovation. These individual-level data, however, are not available in Utah. Our understanding is that the data required for answering the question on Medicaid costs (Question 18 in our list) could be made available only through an agreement with CMS to have a current project with Mathematica address these information needs. While we believe the question about Medicaid costs is important, we will not attempt to address it if an SSA/CMS subcontract with Mathematica were not possible.

E. Health-Related Outcomes

Data on the health-related outcomes being studied will come exclusively from the self-report surveys. Participants' views of their current health statuses, of the difficulty in having access to quality medical care, and of their monthly medical expenses will be queried in the initial and telephone surveys. Measuring coverage of health care insurance will be addressed in initial and telephone surveys and in the mailed surveys.

F. Participant Characteristics Used to Differentiate Outcomes

The initial survey of participants (completed before group assignment) will include questions about participant characteristics (e.g., work history, education, and job responsibilities) that may help us understand who will benefit most from the 1 for 2 offset policy. Information about participant characteristics will also be obtained from administrative data. Aggregate impacts will be disaggregated based on these participant characteristics to examine which participants benefit most from the policy intervention.

G. Program Services Used to Differentiate Outcomes

Utah administrative data will differentiate participants in terms of the employment support services they have received, such as vocational rehabilitation services, benefits planning, and Medicaid Buy-In coverage. To the extent that participants have used the Ticket to Work option, that information will be used to distinguish participants. This information on program utilization will be used to examine which program services appear to support the effectiveness of the policy intervention.

H. Timing of Enrollment Used to Differentiate Outcomes

Reflecting both a characteristic of the participant and of the policy environment, participants will be distinguished in terms of how many months they have left of their Trial Work Period and Extended Period of Eligibility when they enroll in the benefit offset program. This information will help us understand how variations in these policy-defined periods influence efforts to return to work or to increase work effort.

CONCLUSION

This outcome report for the Utah 1 for 2 Benefit Protection Pilot Project is intended to convey our priorities in conducting a pilot outcome evaluation and explain how we intend to measure the outcomes associated with those priorities. As indicated above, our priorities are grounded in producing information on impacts and costs that would allow federal and state policymakers to assess the overall merit and worth of the 1 for 2 benefit offset policy intervention. Our measurement plan relies primarily on information currently available through state databases and planned surveys of participants. We believe, however, that continued dialogue among the four pilot demonstration states would yield additional opportunities to incorporate outcome data that would make our evaluations more useful for informing policy.