

# Using Administrative Data to for Policy Research

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# Introduction

- Want to demonstrate the usefulness of administrative data by discussing a project I worked on for Department of Labor that made use of administrative data
  - “Workforce Investment Act Non-Experimental Net Impact Evaluation”
  - Use this to illustrate problems and potential benefits from use of administrative data in this manner

# Overview of Project

- Project was a non-experimental evaluation of WIA
  - Experimental evaluation was launched at the same time
- Main findings:
  - Positive impact on earnings and employment for Adult Workers, very little impact for Dislocated Workers
  - For Adult workers benefit appears to exceed costs, not true for Dislocated Workers

# Impact of Study

- WIOA (WIA replacement) provides more flexibility for administrators to move money from the dislocated worker program to adult worker program
  - Especially important in periods with low unemployment such as prior to 2020
- Administrators responded by developing better ways to serve dislocated workers
  - See: [Helping Workers Displaced by the Covid-19 Economy – WSJ](#), Dec. 18, 2020
  - More focus on using data to better target training program and working with local businesses
  - Some evidence that these programs are now more successful
- Learned that states differ in who receives training services

# Advantages of Administrative Data

- Final report took 15 months to produce, cost \$1.5M.
- In contrast Randomized Control Trail (RCT) took over 10 years to complete (long after WIA had ended) and cost \$23M.
  - Results from RCT largely match our results.
  - Results also supported by Anderson, Holzer, Lane, Rosenbaum and Smith (2016)
- RCTs are important, but expensive. Using administrative data, if done well, can produce evidence much quicker and at much lower cost—and may be more likely to inform policy.

# Issues with Using Administrative Data

- Difficult (almost impossible) to conduct nation wide study
  - Asked for data from 50 states; got data from 12
  - Inconsistent data for comparison groups
  - Spent most of our time getting data into common format
- Needed data, such as UI wage record data, has become less available
- Often researchers do not obtain direct access to data but must work through an intermediary

# Other Work with Bigger Impacts

- Bruce Meyer's work at Census using admin data to improve measures of poverty
  - Demonstrated how affective transfer programs are in lifting people out of poverty
  - Provide better measures of income inequality
  - Missing state-level data on several program

# Other Work with Bigger Impacts

- Joint research between researchers at HUD and NCHS linking administrative and survey data to examine the impact of children's exposure to lead in public housing
- Administrative data can help improve programs and improve the lives of those being served
  - This idea largely embraced by businesses

# Ways to Move Forward

- Provide a centralized mechanism for researchers and policy makers to access federal and state-level administrative data (national secure data service)
  - Provide meta-data and synthesize format of data
  - Provide clear guidelines on who can apply for access and use a common application
  - Continue to pursue the most advanced technology and methods available for protecting privacy

# Ways to Move Forward

- Enhance interaction between program administrators and the research community
  - Research results need to be useful for program administrators
    - How to improve programs, not shutdown programs
    - Focus on results not methods
    - Timely, forward looking results
  - Demonstrate to policy-makers and program administrators how research can help
    - Recognize that majority of program administrators are interested in finding better ways to help people
  - Coleridge Initiative is a good start

# Ways to Move Forward

- Increase interaction and coordination between Federal and State policy makers
  - Particularly on programs that are a joint federal-state cooperation
- Discussion on what we mean when we say, “protect privacy” and what the goals are.