



Expanding Opportunities & Reducing Barriers to Work: Illinois Final Report

Evaluation of Pilot Projects to Promote Work and Increase State Accountability in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program



(Evaluation of USDA, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training Pilots)

May 2022

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May 2022

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Glossary

ABAWD	Able-bodied adult without dependents. 18- to 49-year-old adult who is not disabled and does not have dependents
ATIM	Accelerated Training in Manufacturing. A DCEO sector-focused training program
CAP	Community Assistance Provider
CARES Act	Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act. An economic stimulus bill signed into law on March 27, 2020 that implemented a variety of programs to address issues related to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic
CBO	Community-based organization
CDL	Commercial Driver's License
CMA	Certified medical assistant
CNA	Certified nursing assistant
CNC	Computer Numerically Controlled. Used to describe machining
Control group	A group of individuals enrolled in a SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) pilot that was eligible for services available through existing SNAP E&T programs if such programs were available to the control group in the pilot location
DCEO	The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
EPIC	Employment Opportunities, Personalized Services, Individualized Training, and Career Planning. The SNAP Employment and Training pilot implemented in Illinois
ESL	English as a Second Language
Food security	Having access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Individuals who experienced food access limitations due to lack of money or other resources are said to be food insecure
GED	General Education Development. A group of subject tests which, when passed, certify that the test taker has high school-level academic skills
HMO	Health maintenance organization
IDHS	The Illinois Department for Human Services
IEP	Individual employment plan
ISTEP	Individualized Services Training and Employment Plan
ITT	Intention-to-treat analysis. An analytical method where individuals are evaluated based on their initial random assignment group regardless of whether they received the treatment

JTED	Job Training and Economic Development. A DCEO workforce development program
LWIA	Local workforce investment area. A group of one or more counties that provide workforce development services
MIS	Management information system
NOCTI	The National Occupational Competency Testing Institute 21st Century Skills for Workplace Success assessment
OJT	On-the-job training
PPO	Preferred provider organization
Random assignment	An experimental technique for assigning individuals enrolled in a SNAP Employment and Training pilot into research groups (a treatment or control group)
Research group	A group of individuals enrolled in a SNAP Employment and Training pilot that was either eligible for enhanced services (a treatment group) or eligible for services available through existing SNAP E&T programs where available (a control group)
SIUCWD	The Southern Illinois University Center for Workforce Development
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. A Federal nutrition assistance program
SNAP E&T	A program that assists SNAP participants in obtaining employment by providing services, such as job search assistance, job skills training, education, work experience, or workfare, and supports, such as assistance with transportation and child care costs
SSI	Supplemental Security Income. A Federal income supplement program
TABE	Test of Adult Basic Education. A standardized placement test to assess academic readiness.
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. A Federal grant program designed to help needy families achieve self-sufficiency
Treatment group	A group of individuals enrolled in a SNAP Employment and Training pilot that was eligible for the enhanced set of services developed under the pilot
UI	Unemployment insurance. A Federal program to provide unemployment benefits to eligible workers
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
Very low food security	A severe form of food insecurity characterized by disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake
WIA	Workforce Investment Act Gold Standard Evaluation. The most recent national study of the Adult and Dislocated Worker program services conducted in 2012

WIC	Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children. A Federal assistance program that provides food, health care referrals, and nutrition education to low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children
Work registrant	SNAP participant who has not met any Federal exemptions from SNAP work requirements and is therefore required to register for work

Overview

This report presents findings from the evaluation of a SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) pilot—Employment Opportunities, Personalized Services, Individualized Training, and Career Planning (EPIC)—that was implemented in Illinois from March 2016 to February 2019. This was one of 10 pilots Congress authorized and funded as part of the Agricultural Act of 2014 to offer enhanced SNAP E&T services to assist SNAP participants in obtaining employment. The Illinois Department for Human Services (IDHS) enrolled 5,038 SNAP participants in the pilot, with roughly half randomly assigned to the EPIC group (eligible for enhanced services and any other employment and training services available in their communities) and the other half assigned to the control group (eligible for existing SNAP E&T programs in the State, if offered in their county, and employment and training services available in their communities). IDHS mostly targeted unemployed or underemployed work registrants. EPIC services were mandatory for most individuals (based on their county and circumstances) and available in 33 counties through service providers that offered individuals in EPIC access to career planning; substantive case management by a career navigator; basic education assistance with reading, math, and English as a Second Language; high school equivalency attainment services; occupational skills training; paid work experience; on-the-job training; subsidized work; job search and job readiness assistance; employment retention assistance; and support services.

IDHS was able to coordinate with other government agencies and a range of service providers in the community to create a network of services for their SNAP participants. Although the process was not always smooth and staff sometimes struggled to keep individuals engaged in services, EPIC evolved to meet the needs of EPIC group members. Despite these challenges, a wide variety of providers offered the necessary flexibility to meet the differing needs of individuals and as a result many individuals engaged in and completed skills training and work-based learning. EPIC group members were more likely than control group members to start an activity, complete an activity, and receive support services. However, their increased engagement did not lead to an increase in earnings over time. EPIC led to an increase in earnings in Year 3, based on earnings reported to the Unemployment Insurance system, but not in the earlier two years. EPIC reduced SNAP participation in Years 1 through 3. Because EPIC group members did not earn significantly more than control group members, the overall cost of implementing the pilot outweighed its benefits.

The potential for EPIC to have impacts on employment-related outcomes, such as earnings, was likely diminished by many EPIC group members not starting or completing employment or training-related activities and a small difference in rates of completion between the EPIC and control groups—the rates of starting these activities were higher for the EPIC group relative to the control group, but differences between groups in rates of completion were smaller than those for participation. Also, information provided through interviews with program staff, employers, and individuals enrolled in EPIC provides additional context for the impact findings. For example, staff indicated that improvements in the local labor market and economic conditions limited job openings for EPIC group members with low education levels or a lack of technical skills, certifications, or experience. EPIC group members also faced several barriers to starting or maintaining engagement in EPIC and employment, including a lack of work experience, technical skills or certifications, basic education, or workplace skills. Additionally, many individuals lacked childcare support, needed to take care of family members, had unstable home lives or housing, health issues, and past involvement with the criminal justice system. Transportation was also cited by some participants as a major challenge in finding and keeping a job.

Executive Summary

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the primary source of nutrition assistance for many individuals and families with low incomes. SNAP provides monthly benefits to help participants obtain adequate access to food; for some program participants, it also provides work supports through SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) programs to help them become economically self-sufficient. Although States are required to administer a SNAP E&T program, they have flexibility in determining and designing its services and activities. States typically offer SNAP participants some case management and support services, and a range of activities that include job search assistance or training, occupational skills training, and basic education.

Because SNAP E&T programs are so varied and are administered at the State or local level, information about the most effective approaches for helping SNAP participants gain skills and find work is limited. For this reason, as part of the Agricultural Act of 2014, Congress authorized and funded the SNAP E&T pilots to test innovative strategies for connecting SNAP participants with jobs that would increase their incomes and reduce their need for public assistance. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) awarded grants to 10 States—California, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington—which represented diverse service areas and populations. The pilots varied in whether they operated statewide or only in selected areas, and whether they focused on urban communities, rural communities, or both. The majority of individuals the pilots targeted were unemployed or underemployed and faced significant barriers to employment, such as being homeless or having a criminal history or substance use disorder. Pilots generally expanded the types and amounts of services provided through States' existing SNAP E&T programs. Services typically included (1) a comprehensive skills or clinical assessment to determine an individual's work readiness, skills, and barriers to employment; (2) case management services that developed and supported a detailed individualized work and barrier-reduction plan; and (3) support services,¹ such as transportation assistance, child care, housing assistance, and training or work supplies that helped reduce barriers to both engagement in the pilot and employment. The pilots also offered a range of employment and training-related activities, such as independent job search, job readiness training, job search assistance, basic education, occupational skills training, and work-based learning opportunities (such as subsidized employment, work experience, internships, and work study). Each pilot enrolled 3,000 to 7,000 individuals, for a total of 44,359 individuals across the 10 pilots.

Services are resources provided or administered to individuals, such as assessments, case management, and support services.

Activities are employment or training-related events in which individuals participate, such as job search assistance training, basic education, occupational skills training, or work-based learning.

The authorizing legislation also required a rigorous, longitudinal evaluation of the pilots to assess whether the innovative strategies they used were successful in connecting SNAP participants with jobs that increased their incomes and reduced their need for public assistance benefits. This report summarizes

¹ Referred to as participant reimbursements in the SNAP E&T program; however, for this report, we describe the package of services as support services.

evaluation findings for one State—Illinois.² It provides a detailed description of the pilot’s design and implementation and, using data for up to three years following random assignment, examines the services individuals received and assesses the effectiveness of those services in improving individuals’ outcomes. The report also includes findings from the cost-benefit analysis, which itemizes specific monetary costs and benefits of pilot services, and assesses whether the benefits of the services and activities offered through the pilot were large enough to offset their costs.

Illinois pilot background

In March 2016, the Illinois Department for Human Services (IDHS), which administers SNAP, began enrollment in Employment Opportunities, Personalized Services, Individualized Training, and Career Planning (EPIC), in 33 counties across the State’s seven local workforce investment areas (LWIAs). The 33 counties covered both rural and urban areas, with the majority of SNAP participants residing in Cook County, which includes the city of Chicago. From March 2016 to September 2017, IDHS enrolled 5,038 SNAP participants into the pilot, targeting two groups: unemployed or underemployed work registrants with low skills or limited work experience, including able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs); and individuals working 30 or more hours per week but needing skill upgrades.

The State’s existing SNAP E&T program offered light case management, access to adult basic education and General Education Development (GED) services, work experience, occupational skills training where available, and limited support services. In contrast, EPIC was intended to increase the intensity of the case management, provide more funding for training and support services, offer more diverse occupational skills training opportunities, and overall offer a broader array of services from a wider variety of service providers. As such, EPIC offered career planning, substantive case management by a career navigator, support services, basic education and GED services, occupational skills training, work experience, on-the-job training, subsidized work, job search training and assistance and job readiness assistance, and employment retention assistance. Similar to the existing SNAP E&T program, EPIC could be either mandatory or voluntary, depending on location and individuals’ circumstances, but the pilot generally focused on serving work registrants who were mandated to participate.

Evaluation overview

The evaluation included the following four components:

1. An *implementation analysis* that documented the context and operations of each pilot
2. A *participation analysis* that examined the characteristics, participation levels, and service paths of individuals in the pilots
3. An *impact analysis* that identified what works, and for whom, by examining impacts on employment and earnings; public assistance receipt; and other outcomes, such as food security, health, well-being, and housing
4. A *cost-benefit analysis* that estimated the return on each dollar invested in the pilots

The evaluation used an experimental research design in which individuals eligible for SNAP E&T who were enrolled into the pilot were randomly assigned into the EPIC group or a control group in roughly

² Similar reports for each pilot and a summary report are available at www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis.

equivalent numbers. Individuals assigned to the EPIC group were eligible for the enhanced set of services described above, whereas control group members were eligible for services available through the existing SNAP E&T program in the State, if offered. Individuals in both the EPIC and control groups continued to be eligible for any other employment and training services available in their communities.

Through random assignment, the two groups were, on average, similar across a range of characteristics at the time they enrolled in the pilot. They differed only in the services they subsequently were eligible to receive. This research design allows us to confidently attribute differences in outcomes between the groups to the EPIC services rather than other potential causes.

For the evaluation, we collected and analyzed several types of data, including the following:

- **Implementation data** from interviews with EPIC staff and EPIC group members to understand the planning and implementation of the pilot and provide context for other analyses
- **Administrative service use data** to describe participation in services and activities
- **Unemployment insurance (UI) wage records** to measure employment and earnings
- **SNAP administrative data** to measure participation in SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Medicaid, and the amount of SNAP and TANF benefits
- **12- and 36-month follow-up survey data** to provide additional information about individuals' service receipt, employment, and earnings, as well as food security, health, well-being, and housing status
- **Cost data** from grantees and providers, and time-use data to estimate the cost of services and net costs and benefits to individuals, the government, and society

EPIC overview

IDHS developed EPIC to offer SNAP participants additional opportunities to receive occupational skills training and industry-recognized credentials that could lead to better jobs and self-sufficiency, as well as to fulfill local labor market demand. IDHS also wanted to build on two local workforce development and sector-focused training programs and use the pilot to form new collaborations among agencies providing services. EPIC's two target groups reflected different goals. Unemployed or underemployed work registrants were targeted because they were the individuals who were thought to need additional education or technical skills or credentials in order to access entry-level or better jobs. Individuals working 30 hours or more per week, but requiring skill upgrades in order to achieve higher earnings, were targeted as IDHS viewed these individuals as sometimes overlooked in terms of services. In selecting the pilot counties, IDHS sought locations with diverse demographics, high unemployment rates, and industries with job opportunities, among other considerations.

IDHS administered EPIC and was responsible for pilot recruitment and enrollment and the monitoring of individuals' participation in EPIC. The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), a key partner, oversaw the delivery of EPIC services. DCEO contracted with 24 Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), 15 of which were in the Chicago area, to deliver EPIC services. The Southern Illinois University Center for Workforce Development (SIUCWD) operated, and trained staff on, the management information system platform adapted for use in EPIC.

The pilot began enrollment in March 2016. The pilot enrollment process required individuals interested in the pilot to undergo a series of assessments and career explorations before random assignment occurred.

Following random assignment, individuals assigned to the EPIC group were scheduled for an orientation at the EPIC service provider (a CBO) to which they had been matched before random assignment, based on assessment and career interest results. Post-orientation services could vary, depending on further assessments conducted at the CBO and the services available through that CBO. While EPIC originally set up three service models through which individuals would progress, EPIC service providers found that many individuals were interested only in immediate employment, and thus they went straight into job readiness, job search, and job placement activities without first participating in any occupational skills training programs or education services. As a result, EPIC pathways evolved and the service models were not strictly followed. However, all EPIC group members who at least attended an orientation at a CBO service provider received individualized case management services from an EPIC career navigator. Individuals assigned to the control group either were referred to the local service provider offering existing SNAP E&T, if it operated in that location, or were informed that they could access services that were available to anyone in the community.

Services and activities offered to EPIC group members included the following:

Education, training, and work-based learning. EPIC group members without the basic education skill level needed to enter a particular occupational skills training program were referred, immediately after random assignment, to an EPIC service provider that offered English as a Second Language (ESL), adult basic education, or high school equivalency certification services, as necessary. The CBOs either provided these services directly or referred individuals to other organizations in the community. Some of the occupational skills training programs also integrated adult basic education services into the training.

Occupational skills training was directly offered by the CBOs, or CBOs connected EPIC group members to community colleges or other local providers for training. EPIC offered a wide array of training programs, including for Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) and other medical certifications, culinary arts, carpentry, Commercial Driver's License (CDL), welding, Computer Numerically Controlled (CNC) machining, and administrative assistant skills. Some CBOs specialized in a particular training program, but most (especially those outside of the Chicago area) offered several different training program options. Occupational skills training programs ranged in length from about 6 to 20 weeks, depending on the program and service provider.

Some CBOs connected EPIC group members to work experience, on-the-job training (OJT), or subsidized work before, during, or after they received other services such as occupational skills training. Sometimes a work-based learning opportunity would be provided at the CBO service provider, while in other instances relationships CBOs had with employers would result in individuals being able to participate in OJT or work experience after the completion of occupational skills training—with the intent that the employer would eventually hire the individual.

Job readiness training, job search assistance, and job development services. These services, which varied by CBO service provider, included workshops or classes on computer or digital literacy, financial literacy, life skills, job readiness, and job search methods. Such services were provided before, during, or after occupational skill training or education services, depending on the CBO and an individual's situation and needs. Many CBOs, however, required all EPIC group members to complete a job readiness training course before they would provide other services. Individuals who found jobs could receive up to 90 days of EPIC retention services, which included continued regular communication with EPIC staff who would offer case management and support services.

Case management and support services. EPIC group members received case management from EPIC career navigators at the CBO service providers. Case management was intended to be more intensive, thorough, career-focused, and structured than in the existing SNAP E&T program. Along with assessing individuals' skills and interests, the career navigators helped individuals set goals, kept them on track to reach the goals, and assisted them in job search after they completed training programs.

While IDHS staff that conducted recruitment and enrollment could provide transportation to help EPIC group members travel to the CBO service providers, most support services were provided through the CBOs. There were no restrictions on the types of support that could be provided, but support often included transportation assistance, money for uniforms, tools or job equipment, eyeglasses, and job interview clothing, and referrals to other community resources. Some CBOs were able to offer support services above the \$1,000 per person EPIC funding cap, using resources from outside of EPIC.

Participation in EPIC services and activities

Over two-thirds of EPIC group members engaged in some type of service, meaning they started an assessment or an employment or training-related activity or received a support service provided by EPIC.³ Additionally, nearly two-thirds of EPIC group members (66 percent) started an employment or training-related activity. Individuals most commonly started job search (57 percent), occupational skills training (46 percent), post-employment services (31 percent), and work-based learning (30 percent). Fewer individuals participated in post-secondary education (15 percent) or basic education (12 percent; Table ES.1). Among individuals who started an activity, completion rates were highest for job search (73 percent) and lowest for postsecondary education (30 percent). Of those who completed education and training, 21 percent obtained a credential, certification, or degree (including GEDs).

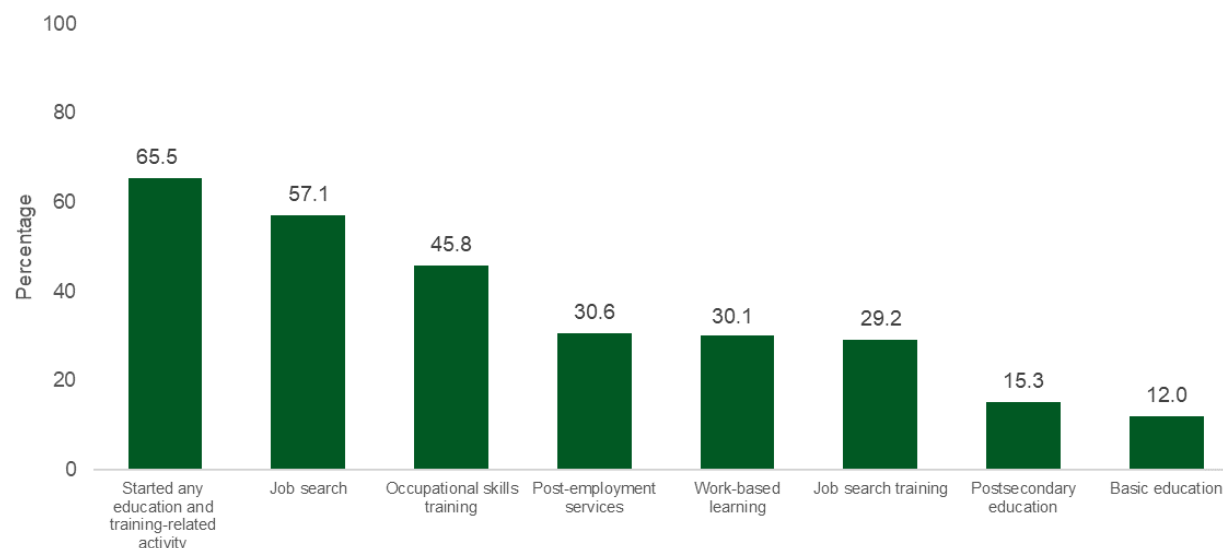
Nearly all EPIC group members, from a randomly selected sample of 200, had a least one contact with an EPIC career navigator (99 percent), and 57 percent received a support service.⁴ Among those who received a support, virtually all received transportation assistance. Fewer individuals received assistance with employment or occupational skills training supplies (7 percent).

Individuals spent over three months engaging in EPIC activities. Nearly three-quarters exited EPIC within their first year (72 percent), with most exiting in the first and second quarters. Most individuals exited before completing activities (38 percent) or because they were no longer eligible for SNAP (27 percent).

³ The measure does not include orientations, case management, or the creation of an ICP because individuals often engaged in these activities during their initial meeting with their CBO for the EPIC program but then did not return for more meaningful activities and services.

⁴ Data on engagement and contact with EPIC career navigators were not available from the administrative records and had to be collected from 12 months of case notes. These data were obtained only for a random subset of the full EPIC group.

Exhibit ES.1. About two-thirds of EPIC group members started an employment or training-related activity, with most starting job search or occupational skills training



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,504 EPIC group members.

Differences in service receipt for the EPIC and control groups

Whether EPIC impacted individuals' employment, earnings, and receipt of public assistance depends, in part, on whether there were differences between the EPIC and control groups in their receipt of services and their participation in and completion of activities. To provide context for the impacts of EPIC, we examined differences in service receipt between the two research groups.⁵ Data were collected in the 12- and 36-month follow-up surveys and captured all types of services and activities, regardless of whether they were provided through EPIC, through existing SNAP E&T, or were generally available in the community through programs such as WIOA or through community colleges, nonprofits, or other organizations.

During the three years following random assignment, the EPIC group was more likely than the control group to participate in job search training activities and in education and training activities. Seventy-five percent of the EPIC group participated in a job search training or assistance activity or in an education or training activity compared to 57 percent of the control group (Exhibit ES.2). In addition, the EPIC group was more likely than the control group to participate in job search training or assistance activities (18 percentage point difference) and education or training activities (22 percentage point difference). This significant difference between the EPIC and control groups in rates of participation was observed for all three years, even after EPIC services ended.

⁵ In this analysis, "service receipt" includes both services (assessments, case management, and support services) and employment and training-related activities.

Exhibit ES.2. Over a three-year period, the EPIC group participated in activities offered by EPIC or the community at higher rates than the control group



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

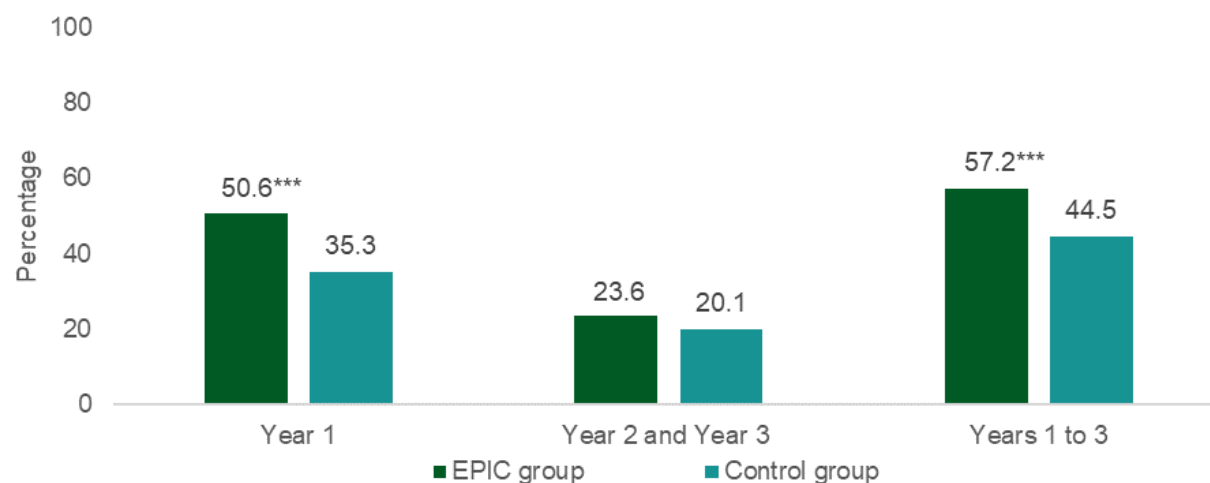
Notes: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 813 EPIC group members and 783 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

The EPIC group also participated at higher rates than the control group in all types of activities, including general job skills training (15 percentage point difference), occupational skills training (16 percent), and education (8 percentage point difference). Similarly, EPIC group members were more likely than the control group to complete these activities and receive an occupational certificate or license. Compared with individuals in the control group, individuals in the EPIC group were 17 percentage points more likely to complete an activity and 14 percentage points more likely to receive an occupational certificate or license.

EPIC group members were also more likely than the control group to receive case management (57 versus 45 percent; Exhibit ES.3). The difference between the two groups was largest and statistically significant in the first year following random assignment (15 percentage point difference). On average, EPIC group members had nearly twice as many contacts with an employment professional or case manager than control group members (nine versus five contacts).

Exhibit ES.3. EPIC group members were more likely than control group members to receive case management



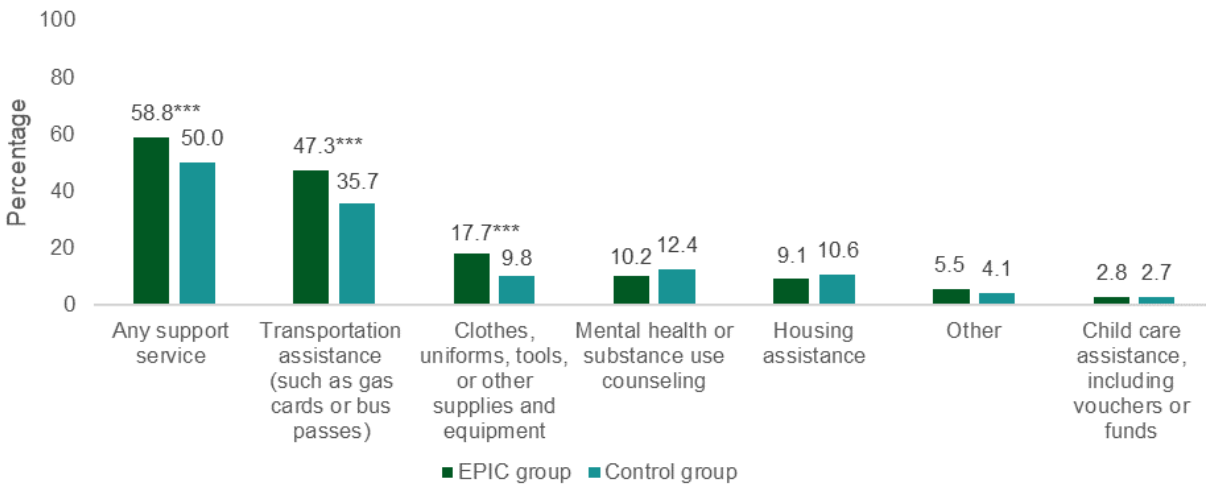
Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Notes: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 813 EPIC group members and 783 control group members. The 12-month survey requested information about receipt of case management services between the date of random assignment and the date of the 12-month interview. The 36-month survey requested information about receipt of case management services between the dates of the 12- and 36-month interviews. As a result, it is not possible to estimate receipt of assistance separately in Years 2 and 3.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

EPIC group members also were more likely than control group members to receive support services. About 59 percent of individuals in the EPIC group received a support service compared to 50 percent in the control group (Exhibit ES.4). The largest differences were for the receipt of transportation assistance and for clothes, uniforms, tools, or other supplies and equipment.

Exhibit ES.4. EPIC group members were more likely than control group members to receive support services



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

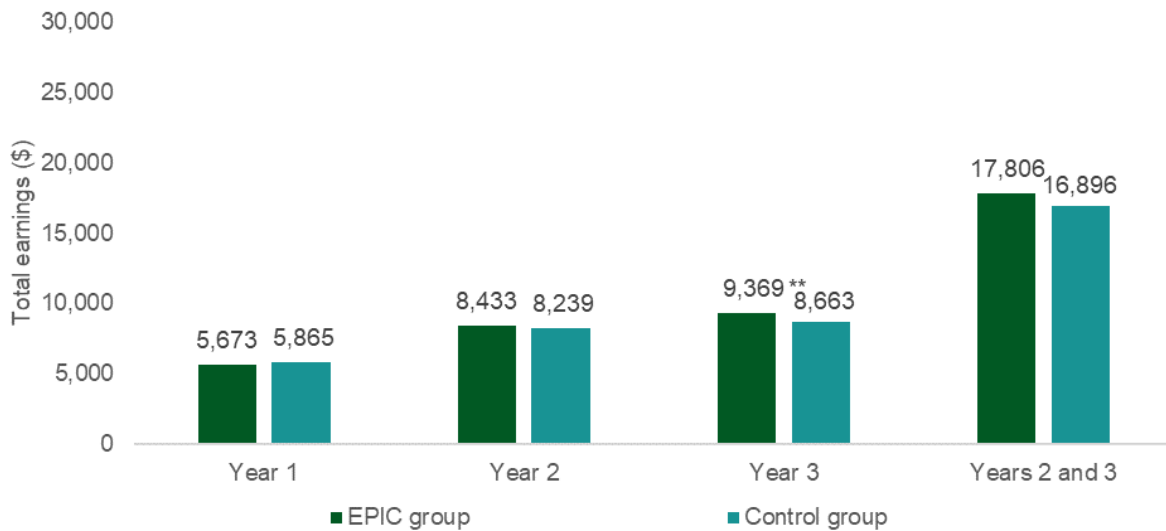
Note: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 813 EPIC group members and 783 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Impacts of EPIC on employment and SNAP participation outcomes

We estimated the impacts of EPIC on individual outcomes over the three years following random assignment. Before analyzing the data, we selected two primary outcomes: earnings (based on both the UI and survey data) and SNAP participation. Analyses of earnings and employment were based on both UI and survey data due to differences in data coverage or quality, or in the analysis samples and time periods covered in the data. Instead of focusing on outcomes in Year 3, we focused on those over a two-year period, consisting of Years 2 and 3 after random assignment. This approach balanced potential concerns about how the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected outcomes in Year 3 with measuring impacts on outcomes after individuals had sufficient time to participate in EPIC activities in Year 1. The estimated impacts on other outcomes are considered exploratory and are used to support findings for the earnings and SNAP participation outcomes by examining whether they had similar impacts.

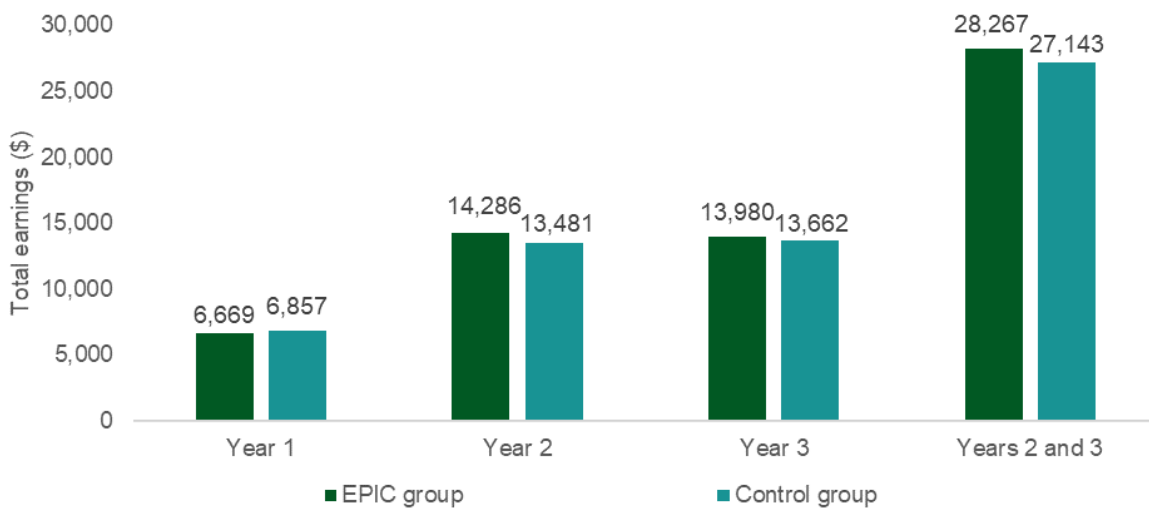
Earnings. Based on both UI and survey data, EPIC had no impact on earnings for Years 2 and 3 combined (Exhibits ES.5 and ES.6). The EPIC group had greater average earnings over the two-year period, relative to the control group, but neither difference was statistically significant. However, EPIC did lead to an increase in earnings in Year 3, according to UI data.

Exhibit ES.5. EPIC did not affect overall earnings during Years 2 and 3 (UI data)

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation UI wage records, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,503 EPIC group members and 2,509 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

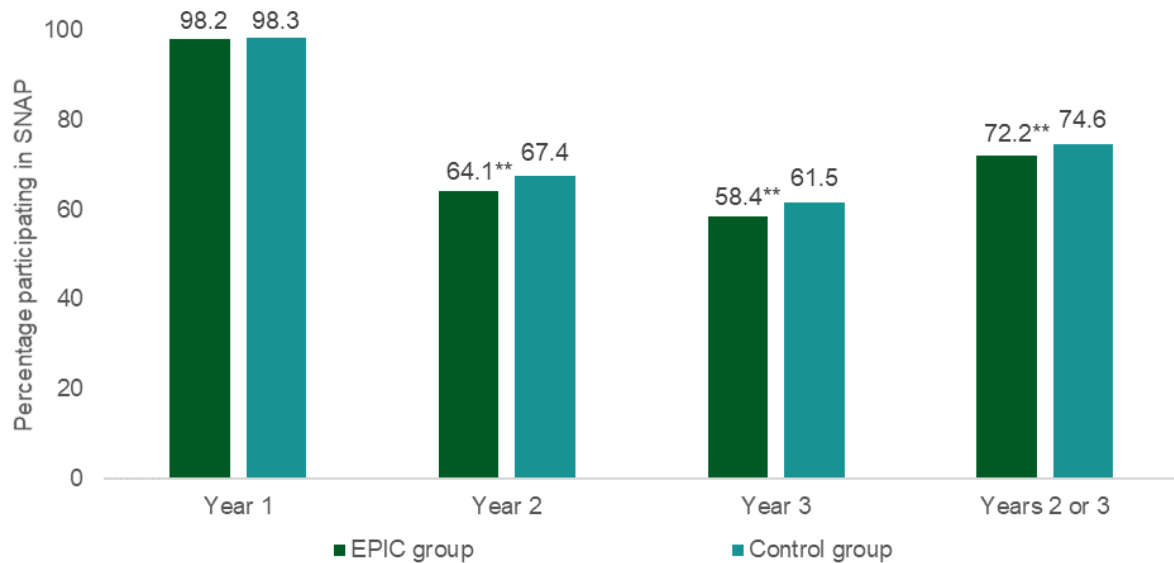
Exhibit ES.6. EPIC did not affect earnings (survey data)

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 813 EPIC group members and 783 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

SNAP participation. EPIC reduced SNAP participation. About 72 percent of EPIC group members participated in SNAP at some point during the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) after random assignment, compared with 75 percent of control group members (Exhibit ES.7). The impacts of EPIC on SNAP participation reflects reductions in receipt rates in most follow-up quarters, or from Quarter 3 through Quarter 12.

Exhibit ES.7. SNAP participation rates were lower for the EPIC group than the control group in Years 2 and 3

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation SNAP administrative data, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,503 EPIC group members and 2,509 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Employment, hours worked, and other job characteristics. Based on the survey data, EPIC led to a 6 percentage point increase in employment over the two-year period (83 percent for the EPIC group versus 77 percent for the control group). The largest impact was in Year 2 (7 percentage point increase); impacts were smaller and statistically insignificant in Years 1 and 3. These findings were not corroborated by the UI data—those data showed no significant difference between research groups in the employment rate across the two-year period (71 versus 70 percent).

Employment rates provide information about the percentage of individuals employed during a given time period but do not describe the extent or duration of employment. To assess these employment characteristics, we examined the average amount of time individuals were employed each year. Findings indicate that the two groups worked similar durations over the period. Both data sources showed that, relative to the control group, the EPIC group was employed for a similar number of quarters, using UI data, and a similar number of months, using survey data. Also, there was no impact of EPIC on hours worked over the full period, although the EPIC group was more likely to work full time at the 36-month survey. EPIC had no effects on the receipt of employer-provided benefits, such as health insurance, dental insurance, and tuition assistance or reimbursement, but employed EPIC group members were more likely than control group members to work in temporary or on-call jobs.

SNAP benefits and exit. EPIC led to a reduction in average SNAP benefits received, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the maximum benefit amount. Average SNAP benefit amounts for the EPIC group were \$140 less than those for the control group in Years 2 and 3.

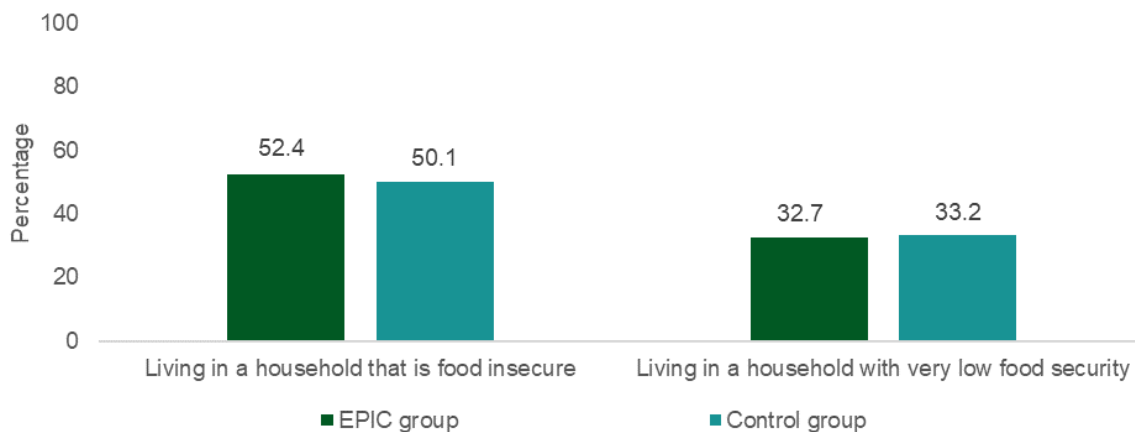
EPIC group members were also more likely to have exited SNAP across the three years relative to control group members—92 percent of the EPIC group exited SNAP at some point during the three years after random assignment, compared with 88 percent of the control group. Lower SNAP participation rates and

higher exit rates among the EPIC group may be related to the sanctioning of individuals for failure to engage in EPIC services. Individuals who exited SNAP included those who left and did not re-enter SNAP in the period, as well as those who left and re-entered before the end of the period. Thus, even though 8 percent of the EPIC group participated in SNAP for the full three years, SNAP participation in Quarter 12 was higher (48 percent), reflecting that individuals left and re-entered SNAP during the three-year period. The percentage of individuals who exited and then re-entered SNAP was similar for the EPIC and control groups (at about 66 percent), with about 36 percent of each group re-entering within 4 months of exit. However, individuals in the EPIC group had more SNAP participation spells than individuals in the control group (26 percent of EPIC group members had 3 or more spells, compared with 20 percent of control group members), suggesting a greater number of exits and re-entries.

Impacts of EPIC on other outcomes

Rates of food insecurity were similar in the EPIC and control groups (52 and 50 percent, respectively) (Exhibit ES.8). Rates of very low food security (a severe form of food insecurity) were also similar between groups (33 percent).

Exhibit ES.8. EPIC did not affect food insecurity



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 36-month survey, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 813 EPIC group members and 783 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

There were few statistically significant differences between the EPIC group and the control group for other outcome measures related to health, well-being, and housing status. About 20 percent of each research group screened positively for depression. Both research groups had similar levels of health and self-esteem, although the EPIC group did report somewhat higher self-efficacy scores. Just over half of each research group owned or rented a home or apartment (51 versus 53 percent), and the EPIC group was somewhat more likely to report living in group quarters (a statistically significant difference of less than 1 percentage point).

EPIC costs relative to benefits

EPIC costs. IDHS and its partners and providers reported spending \$16,323,517 from April 2015 to February 2019 on the planning and implementation of EPIC (\$279,680 during the planning period, \$2,343,380 for recruitment, and \$13,700,457 for EPIC services and activities). The FNS grant funded 74

percent of these costs, and partners and providers leveraged other funding sources for the remaining 26 percent. Administration costs accounted for 42 percent of total costs, including time for staff meetings, supervision, and other activities (\$6,774,100). Direct services accounted for 42 percent of total costs (\$6,926,356), with occupational skills training and work-based learning being the largest share of those costs.

Costs relative to benefits. In the cost-benefit analysis, we measured the difference in the average costs of all services received by EPIC and control group members—that is, the differential costs of EPIC services—and compared the differential costs of EPIC to the value of benefits received by EPIC group members. As in the analysis of services received, we considered costs associated with all services and activities, including those delivered by EPIC as well as community programs and organizations. This approach reflects the fact that impacts of EPIC on individuals' outcomes, such as earnings, were influenced by *all* services sample members received during the 36-month follow-up period, not just those received through EPIC.

Based on data from the survey, the estimated total costs of all EPIC group services were \$13,026,587 including costs for both direct services and ongoing administration (Exhibit VIII.4). This estimate is similar to the costs of EPIC services alone (\$13,700,457), which indicates that EPIC group members likely received few services from existing SNAP E&T or community programs and organizations while they were enrolled in EPIC. The services received by the control group measure what services would have been available to the EPIC group members if EPIC were not in place. The estimated costs of all services received by control group members were \$4,671,604 including costs for direct services and ongoing administration. On average, the total costs of all direct services and activities received by EPIC group members was \$4,869 per individual. The total costs of all services control group members received through existing SNAP E&T and the community were \$1,795, on average.

Estimates of the benefits received by EPIC group members reflect earnings and fringe benefits they accrued during the 36-month follow-up period. These data were obtained from the two sources of data used in the impact analysis: (1) UI wage records and (2) 36-month survey data. For the cost-benefit analysis, we used a framework to comprehensively list EPIC group benefits and costs relative to the control group from multiple perspectives, including those of (1) individuals enrolled in EPIC, (2) government and taxpayers, and (3) society as a whole—the sum of the other two perspectives. For each perspective, we estimated the net benefit (the difference between total benefits and total costs). A positive net benefit means the benefits outweighed the costs, whereas a negative net benefit means the costs outweighed the benefits. The net benefits of all services EPIC group members received were positive for EPIC group members but negative for government and taxpayers and for society during the 36-month follow-up period based on both data sources. The net benefit to society was negative by \$2,228 per EPIC group member according to UI wage records and by \$1,968 per EPIC group member according to 36-month survey data. These findings were robust to changes in assumptions about benefits and costs from all perspectives, such as the values of fringe benefits, taxes, and present values.

Main conclusions and discussion

The goal of the 10 SNAP E&T pilots was to test innovative strategies for increasing SNAP participants' employment and earnings and reducing their need for public assistance benefits. Through its comprehensive data collection and rigorous experimental design, this evaluation assessed whether EPIC—the innovative SNAP E&T program Illinois designed and implemented to target new and current SNAP work registrants—was effective in achieving these goals.

IDHS was able to coordinate with other government agencies and a range of service providers in the community to create a network of services for their SNAP participants. Although the process was not always smooth and staff sometimes struggled to keep individuals engaged in services, EPIC evolved to meet the needs of EPIC group members. Despite challenges getting EPIC group members to engage in services, EPIC group members were more likely than control group members to start an activity, complete an activity, and receive support services. However, increased engagement among EPIC group members did not lead to an increase in earnings over time. Because EPIC group members did not earn significantly more than control group members, the overall cost of implementing the pilot outweighed the benefits.

EPIC impacts in context of employment and training literature. The EPIC findings are consistent with the previous literature that has often found small or no labor market effects of employment and training programs for low-income populations offering similar services as EPIC. The literature suggests that programs serving low-income populations can typically engage individuals and increase their receipt of services relative to those received by the study control groups in their local areas. The differences for service receipt can be large, especially for receipt of occupational skills training and subsidized employment, translating into positive effects on the percentages of individuals who participate in training activities and the attainment of associated certificates and credentials. However, few of the studies have found that the programs lead to long-term increases in earnings or independence from public assistance (at least over the time period covered by many studies, which is typically less than four years).

There are notable exceptions, however, that show that the types of activities and services (such as occupational skills training, work-based learning, and support services) offered by EPIC could be effective. As a result, it is important to understand how take-up and completion of EPIC activities and receipt of services, as well as challenges experienced in implementation may have contributed to the evaluation findings.

Discussion of EPIC impacts. Although EPIC did not lead to increased earnings over the combined Year 2 and 3 period, it did successfully increase the percentages of individuals who received case management and support services, relative to the control group, as well as the percentage of individuals who participated in employment- or training-related activities. This is a notable accomplishment given the prevalence and extent of barriers faced by individuals who enrolled in the pilot—only 7 percent were employed at the time of random assignment and 23 percent did not have a high school diploma. The higher rates of receipt of case management and support services among EPIC group members, particularly transportation assistance, may have allowed individuals to overcome barriers associated not only with starting employment or training-related activities but with sustaining participation over time and ultimately completing the activity. Indeed, individuals in the EPIC group participated for more months than the control group and had higher completion rates. The mitigation of barriers for EPIC group members may have also contributed to their ability to continue participation in employment or training-related activities in the community, even after the EPIC service period ended.

EPIC also led to increased employment (based on survey data) in Years 2 and 3 combined suggesting that the greater service receipt and activity participation during that time increased the chances of finding a job. However, these jobs did not pay appreciably more than those obtained by the control group, resulting in no impacts on earnings over the combined Year 2 and 3 period.

The increase in earnings in Year 3, based on UI data, is encouraging and may reflect the steps taken to address challenges EPIC had in matching EPIC group members to particular occupational skills trainings

and providers. The increase may also reflect a delayed payoff to earlier occupational skills training participation. However, longer-term follow-up would be needed to assess this hypothesis.

EPIC also reduced participation SNAP. This reduction is likely related to higher rate of sanctioning for the EPIC group, relative to the control group, for failing to engage in pilot services. It may also be due in part to the increase in earnings in Year 3.

Additionally, despite higher rates of employment, unresolved barriers may have affected job retention or hindered opportunities to increase earnings. Information collected from pilot and provider staff underscores the degree to which EPIC group members faced significant barriers to EPIC participation and employment. Individuals often lacked work experience, technical skills or certifications, basic education, or workplace skills. Many individuals also lacked child care support, needed to take care of family members, had unstable home lives or housing, health issues, criminal justice backgrounds, substance use disorders, and transportation issues. Some EPIC group members reported in focus groups that transportation was the greatest challenge in finding and keeping employment. Transportation was particularly challenging to those who had to travel long distances to EPIC services or employment.

It is also possible that the impacts on outcomes such as earnings were diluted by the fact that, while the EPIC group was more likely than the control group to start and complete employment or training-related activities, the differences between research groups, particularly in skill-building activities, were not large enough to translate into impacts on outcomes. EPIC had challenges matching EPIC group members to the best fit services and providers. As a result, many individuals failed to engage or remain engaged in and complete substantive services such as occupational skills training. Moreover, many individuals were only interested in and only received placement services. Thus, these individuals did not increase their education or skill levels as EPIC had anticipated.

To assess this possibility, we compared impacts for individuals who did and did not start an employment or training-related activity. This exploratory analysis showed impacts on employment for individuals who started an activity, and no impact on employment and earnings for those who did not start an activity. We conducted a similar analysis for activity completion and found significant differences in earnings impacts based on survey data among EPIC group members who did and did not complete activities.

This evidence suggests that the take-up and completion of EPIC employment or training-related activities may have played a role in the lack of impacts on earnings and employment. Learning more about the barriers to starting and completing these activities would help identify which case management and support services were able to promote greater sustained participation in employment or training-related activities. This would also help to understand challenges faced by EPIC group members who participated in these activities, allowing program staff to adapt the content or delivery of these activities to have a greater impact. Also, understanding how receiving certifications, diplomas, degrees, or occupational licenses can differentially affect the prospect of employment for EPIC group members should also be explored.

Finally, staff indicated that improvements in the local labor market and economic conditions, with unemployment rates falling from over 6 percent at the start of the pilot to about 4 percent towards the end of pilot operations, limited job openings for EPIC group members with low education levels or a lack of technical skills, certifications, or experience. Staff also suggested that employers wanted both skills and experience. Some, although not all, of the most common occupations in the pilot areas likely required some level of technical or other skills.

When considering the overall findings from the EPIC pilot, there are a few additional factors that may have contributed to the results, including the following:

- **Earnings impacts may depend on the type of activities in which individuals participate.**

Individuals in the EPIC group were offered a wide range of services and activities. Earnings impacts may not be apparent for all EPIC group members, but this does not mean that specific activities such as occupational skills training or work-based learning are ineffective.

Assessing the effectiveness of services and activities separately and in combination would help to identify promising program components for improving outcomes. Because many EPIC group members participated in multiple activities, isolating the effect of a single type of activity can be challenging. It would be helpful to classify individuals who received different sets of services into mutually exclusive and distinct groups. For each group, describing participation in activities and estimating impacts on outcomes would help to identify specific services and activities, or combinations of them, that most effectively increase earnings and improve outcomes.

- **The COVID-19 pandemic which began during the 36-month follow-up survey period may have affected the magnitude of the impacts found in Year 3.** Outcomes measured in Year 3 for individuals who were randomly assigned in the pilot between April 2017 and September 2017 could have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which began to dramatically affect life in the United States in March 2020. We found evidence of employment-related impacts in Year 2, based on survey data, but not Year 3. It is possible that the pandemic attenuated the employment gains experienced by the EPIC group. In contrast, EPIC group members had higher earnings, based on UI data, in Year 3. This pattern suggests that the pandemic may have affected groups differentially, based on whether their employment was reported to the UI system or not. However, we cannot identify what the impacts would have been in the absence of the pandemic. Learning more about the effects of the pandemic on outcomes for each research group would deepen our understanding about EPIC's potential effects. For example, the pandemic likely affected individuals' outcomes differently based on their occupation if they were employed or the occupation they were training to enter. It would be useful to assess whether impacts on earnings and employment in Year 3 differed based on these factors.

- **EPIC costs were higher than the financial benefits of the program, reflecting the absence of an impact on earnings.** The absence of an impact on earnings is one of several reasons why the net benefit was negative. However, this negative net benefit primarily reflects the differential costs of EPIC group services, which were not offset by the benefits accrued through earnings and fringe benefits during the 36-month follow up period. When interpreting this finding, it is important to consider that EPIC services were new and experimental. The purpose of the SNAP E&T pilot was to test new approaches to services. EPIC targeted individuals with high barriers to engaging in services and obtaining employment, and IDHS led the development of new partnerships in their communities that did not exist previously. Even though the costs of planning and recruitment were excluded in considering the cost differential between EPIC and control group services, the costs of EPIC group services were likely higher for the three years of the pilot than they would have been if administered over a longer period of time. In addition, it is possible that some individuals realized benefits which do not appear in the cost-benefit analysis results – for example, increases in earnings that individuals earned after the observation period of 36-months, or unmeasured benefits such as changes in food security, health, or well-being.

Although outcomes for EPIC were mixed, SNAP E&T program administrators can learn from the implementation of EPIC. For example, flexibility and responsiveness to challenges enabled EPIC to exceed its enrollment targets. EPIC also illustrates the importance of having an adequate number of trained staff. For example, using existing IDHS staff to assess and match individuals with EPIC services and providers rather than hiring new staff with relevant qualifications led to significant challenges. Lastly, EPIC advocates for a strong MIS system that can facilitate collaboration and communication among partners and providers. WorkNet, the EPIC MIS, was critical to EPIC program management. It helped with tracking service participation and completion, monitoring overall engagement, and it served as a communication tool between partners, providers, and EPIC group members.

I. Introduction

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the primary source of nutrition assistance for many individuals and families with low incomes. SNAP provides monthly benefits to help participants obtain adequate access to food; for some program participants, it provides work supports through SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) programs to help them become economically self-sufficient. Although States are required to administer a SNAP E&T program, they have flexibility in designing and determining its services and activities. States typically offer participants assessments and support services and a range of activities including job search assistance or training, occupational skills training, and basic education.

Despite the importance of SNAP E&T programs, information about the most effective approaches that help SNAP participants gain skills and find work is limited. For this reason, as part of the Agricultural Act of 2014, Congress authorized and funded SNAP E&T pilots to test innovative strategies for connecting SNAP participants with jobs that would increase their incomes and reduce their need for public assistance benefits. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) awarded grants to 10 States—California, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington.⁶ This legislation also funded a rigorous, longitudinal evaluation of these pilots.

The pilots varied in their target populations, geographic reach, and the number of individuals enrolled. The majority of individuals the pilots targeted were unemployed or underemployed and had significant barriers to employment, such as being homeless or having a criminal justice history or substance use disorder. Some pilots operated statewide, whereas others operated in select areas of the State, such as counties, community college districts, or local workforce investment areas. Most pilots offered services in both rural and urban areas, but a few focused only on rural or urban communities. Each pilot enrolled 3,000 to 7,000 individuals for a total of 44,359 individuals across the 10 pilots.

Services are resources provided or administered to individuals, such as assessments, case management, and support services.

Activities are employment or training-related events in which individuals participate, such as job search assistance training, basic education, occupational skills training, or work-based learning.

The SNAP E&T pilots generally expanded the types and amounts of services provided through States’ existing SNAP E&T programs. Services typically included (1) a comprehensive skills or clinical assessment to determine an individual’s work readiness, skills, and barriers to employment; (2) case-management services that developed and supported a detailed individualized work and barrier-reduction plan; and (3) support services,⁷ such as transportation assistance, housing assistance, and training or work supplies (for example, uniforms, books, clothes, or tools) that helped reduce barriers to both engagement in the pilot and employment. The pilots also offered a range of employment and training-related activities,

⁶ SNAP in California is administered by the counties. The FNS grant was awarded to the State SNAP agency and the State oversaw the pilot, but only Fresno County conducted and primarily administered it. We refer to the Fresno pilot as “California.”

⁷ Referred to as participant reimbursements in the SNAP E&T program; however, for this report, we describe the package of services as support services.

such as independent job search, job readiness training, job search assistance, basic education, occupational skills training, and work-based learning opportunities (such as subsidized employment, work experience, internships, and work-study).

The activities the pilots offered generally were more expansive than those offered under existing SNAP E&T programs, which in most States tended to focus on less intensive independent job search and job search assistance. Moreover, while the pilots were operating, existing SNAP E&T programs could not fund some of the activities and services the pilots provided, such as subsidized employment,⁸ substance use disorder counseling, and mental health counseling. Appendix A provides a summary of each pilot's characteristics including the target population, pilot location, and pilot start and end dates, and Appendix B provides more detail about the SNAP E&T program and work requirement policies.

This report summarizes evaluation findings for one State—Illinois.⁹ It provides a detailed description of the pilot's design and implementation, the services individuals received, and the effectiveness of those services in improving individuals' outcomes. The report also includes findings from the cost-benefit analysis, which itemizes specific monetary costs and benefits of pilot services and assesses whether the benefits of the services and activities offered through the pilot were large enough to justify their costs.

A. Overview of Illinois' pilot

Illinois began enrollment in its pilot, Employment Opportunities, Personalized Services (EPIC), in March 2016 in 33 counties across the State's seven local workforce investment areas (LWIAs). The pilot served both rural and urban areas, with the majority of SNAP participants residing in Cook County, which includes the city of Chicago. In the year before Illinois began EPIC enrollment, the unemployment rate in the 33 pilot counties averaged 6.2 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019).

Exhibit I.1. EPIC locations



The Illinois Department for Human Services (IDHS) administers SNAP and the existing SNAP E&T program in Illinois. The existing SNAP E&T program offered light case management, access to adult basic education and GED services, unsubsidized work experience and EarnFare (in which individuals work for the value of their SNAP benefits and can work additional hours for pay), occupational skills training where available, and limited support services. In contrast, for EPIC, IDHS partnered with the Southern Illinois University Center for Workforce Development (SIUCWD) and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), which, in turn, contracted with 24 Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to offer EPIC services to SNAP participants based on their needs and backgrounds, career interests, and local labor market demand. EPIC offered career planning; substantive case

management by a career navigator; basic education assistance with reading, math, and English as a Second Language; high school equivalency attainment services; occupational skills training; paid work

⁸ The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-334) made subsidized employment an allowable SNAP E&T component; the final rule published in January 2021 (FNS 2021) permitted States to begin offering it as an E&T component in March 2021.

⁹ Similar reports for each pilot and a summary report are available at www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis.

experience; on-the-job training; subsidized work; job search and job readiness assistance; employment retention assistance; and support services (Exhibit I.2).

Exhibit I.2. Pilot characteristics

Characteristics	
Pilot operation period	March 2016 to February 2019
Location	33 (out of 102) counties across seven LWIAs LWIA 3: Stephenson, Winnebago, Boone counties LWIA 7: Cook County LWIA 14: Knox, Warren, Henderson, McDonough, Hancock, Schuyler, Adams, Brown, Pike counties LWIA 15: Stark, Peoria, McLean, Marshall, Fulton, Mason, Tazewell, Woodford counties LWIA 19: Macon, DeWitt counties LWIA 24: St. Clair, Clinton, Washington, Monroe, Randolph counties LWIA 25: Perry, Jackson, Jefferson, Franklin, Williamson counties
Grantee agency	Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)
Key partners	Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) Southern Illinois University Center for Workforce Development (SIUCWD)
Key providers	24 Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)
Target population	I) Unemployed or underemployed work registrants with low skills or limited work experience, including Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs), and II) individuals working 30 or more hours per week but needing skill upgrades
Number enrolled from March 2016 through September 2017	5,038
Program type	Mandatory and voluntary ^a
Existing SNAP E&T program	No existing SNAP E&T services were available in 18 pilot counties; in the other 15 pilot counties (including Cook County), Illinois offered limited services through its existing SNAP E&T program. Services included access to adult basic education and GED services, occupational skills training where available, unsubsidized work experience and EarnFare, and limited support services
Key EPIC services	Assessment and career exploration Case management Adult basic education and GED services Occupational skills training Work-based learning (paid work experience, on-the-job training, subsidized work) Job readiness and job search assistance Job retention services Support services (transportation assistance, uniforms and work-related supplies etc.)

^aMost of the individuals enrolled in the pilot in Illinois (in both the EPIC and control groups) were mandatory work registrants.

LWIA= local workforce investment areas

Similar to the existing SNAP E&T program, EPIC could be either mandatory or voluntary, depending on location and individuals' circumstances, but the pilot generally focused on serving work registrants who were mandated to participate.¹⁰

From March 2016 to September 2017, EPIC enrolled 5,038 individuals in the pilot. Individuals enrolled were randomly assigned in roughly equivalent numbers into a treatment group (that received enhanced services; referred to as “the EPIC group”) and a control group (that received only services that were available to anyone in the community). IDHS continued providing EPIC services until February 2019.

B. Evaluation of SNAP E&T pilots

The evaluation included the following four components:

1. An *implementation analysis* that documented the context and operations of each pilot
2. A *participation analysis* that examined the characteristics, participation levels, and service paths of individuals in the pilots
3. An *impact analysis* that identified what works and for whom by examining impacts on employment and earnings, public assistance receipt, and other outcomes such as food security, health, well-being, and housing
4. A *cost-benefit analysis* that estimated the return on each dollar invested in the pilots

The evaluation of each pilot used an experimental research design in which individuals eligible for SNAP E&T who were enrolled in the pilot were randomly assigned into treatment and control groups that were offered differing arrays of services. Random assignment ensures that any differences in outcomes between the two groups are a result of the enhanced services and are not driven by the differences in the characteristics of the individuals who did and did not receive those services. Treatment group members were eligible for the enhanced set of services developed under the pilot, and control group members were eligible for services available through existing SNAP E&T programs in the State; both the treatment and control groups continued to be eligible for any other services available in their communities. Through random assignment, the treatment and control groups within a pilot were, on average, similar across a range of characteristics at the time they enrolled. They differed only in the services they subsequently were eligible to receive.

FNS published an evaluation report that presented interim findings in Illinois for each component of the evaluation (Hamilton et al. 2021). The implementation and cost analyses described the planning and early implementation periods of the pilot, and the participation and impact analyses focused on the 12-month period following random assignment for those enrolled through 2017. We reported these findings for the 5,038 individuals who enrolled in the pilot. The interim report described several notable findings:

¹⁰ Work registrants are SNAP participants who have not met any Federal exemptions from SNAP work requirements and are therefore required to register for work. Federal exemptions apply to individuals who are younger than 16 or older than 59; physically or mentally unfit for employment; subject to and complying with work requirements for another program; a caretaker of a dependent child younger than 6 or an incapacitated individual; participating in a drug or alcohol treatment and rehabilitation program; employed at least 30 hours a week; or enrolled at least half time in a recognized school or training program.

- **Implementation.** EPIC services were successfully provided by 24 community-based organizations (CBOs). EPIC's customized management information system helped partners and providers manage pilot enrollment and coordinate and provide services, and the administrators of key EPIC partner and provider organizations worked well with each other. Pilot staff had challenges matching EPIC group members to CBOs that best aligned with individuals' skills and interests. Additionally, the three planned service models were found to not meet the needs of many EPIC group members, so EPIC service flows evolved to accommodate several alternative pathways.
- **Participation.** Slightly over two-thirds of individuals in the EPIC group completed the first step in EPIC by attending an orientation at a CBO, and almost all of these individuals subsequently participated in an E&T-related activity and received assistance in looking for work, attended job search training workshops, received instruction in adult basic education or preparation for a high school equivalency certificate, enrolled in short-term occupational skills training, or began work-based learning. Slightly under half of EPIC group members participated in education or training as one of their activities, and slightly more participated in job search assistance. About one-fifth of the EPIC group received a credential or certification. Most individuals who attended an orientation left EPIC within six months.
- **Impact.** Although the EPIC group was more likely than the control group to participate in job search assistance or training activities, occupational skills training, and general job skills training, EPIC generally did not affect employment. EPIC also did not affect SNAP participation in the first half of the follow-up but did lead to a reduction in participation in SNAP in the second half.

This final evaluation report builds on the interim report to provide more conclusive evidence about the effectiveness of the pilot's services. The full effects of the enhanced services may not have materialized during the short-term, 12-month follow-up period examined in the interim report, especially for some individuals still receiving services at the 12-month point. Therefore, this report focuses on individuals' outcomes over a period of up to 36 months after random assignment, allowing an assessment of relatively longer-term impacts including, for some individuals, those measured after IDHS stopped providing services in February 2019. Finally, the implementation and cost analyses in the interim report described the planning and early implementation periods of the pilots but did not cover the full period during which the State offered services and incurred costs. This report expands the implementation analysis to include the full period during which the pilot was implemented and discusses the potential for sustainability and replicability. It also builds on the interim cost analysis to determine the net benefit (relative to costs) of providing EPIC services.

C. Organization of this report

The remainder of this report is organized as follows:

- Chapter II presents the data and methodology used to conduct the analyses in the evaluation.
- Chapter III describes how enrollment changed over time and the characteristics of the individuals who enrolled.
- Chapter IV describes the pilot's planning and implementation, the ways in which its implementation differed from the original design, challenges experienced, and responses to these challenges. It also describes the sustainability and replicability of EPIC.

- Chapter V presents findings from the participation analysis, which describe the services that individuals in the EPIC group received.
- Chapter VI describes differences in the services received by the EPIC group and the control group.
- Chapter VII presents findings from the impact analysis, which describes the impact of EPIC on employment, earnings, benefit receipt, and other outcomes.
- Chapter VIII describes the costs of services the EPIC group received and compares the costs and benefits of these services.
- Chapter IX offers conclusions.
- Appendix A describes the primary characteristics of the 10 pilots; Appendix B provides background on SNAP E&T and work requirements; and Appendices C to H present detailed findings from the analyses described in Chapters V through VIII as well as additional subgroup analyses.

II. Data and methodology

This chapter describes the sources of the data we collected for the evaluation and how we used them in the analyses. We discuss how we obtained the data and the types of information each source contained. We also explain which individuals we included in each analysis and the methods we used to address the evaluation's research objectives. A technical supplement in a separate volume describes the data and methodology in detail (Dotter et al. 2022).¹¹

A. Data sources

We collected data to support the evaluation from a variety of sources:

1. **Baseline registration form.** After obtaining study consent, pilot intake staff collected baseline information about individuals in the pilot. This included their demographic characteristics, employment histories, and receipt of public assistance. We collected baseline data for all EPIC and control group members.
2. **Implementation data.** Most of the implementation data were collected during three rounds of site visits to Illinois. The site visits collected information about implementation, challenges, and lessons learned during different periods of pilot operation:
 - Round 1 (August 2016): The planning and early implementation periods.
 - Round 2 (May 2017): The first full year of pilot operations.
 - Round 3 (September and October 2018): The last year of pilot operations as well as planning for the end of the pilot and sustainability of pilot services.

We also collected information during technical assistance and monitoring site visits and telephone calls throughout the planning and service delivery periods.

During the last round of implementation data collection, the site visits included interviews with staff from IDHS and State-level staff, SNAP eligibility staff, and EPIC service provider staff; structured observations of service provider operations; in-depth interviews with two EPIC group members who participated in activities and received services; one focus groups that included 10 EPIC group members who had stopped participating or engaging in EPIC services.

3. **Administrative service use data.** IDHS and their partners and providers collected and shared administrative data that documented the types of training, education, and services they provided to EPIC group members and, where applicable, to control group members. The administrative data analyzed for this report included information on service receipt from the date of random assignment for each individual through either the last known date of service or the end of EPIC service period (February 2019).
4. **Unemployment insurance wage records.** Data on employment status and earnings were obtained from State unemployment insurance (UI) wage records. We obtained data for each individual in the pilot with earnings for eight quarters (two years) before the date of random assignment and for 12

¹¹ The supplement provides additional information about the analysis approach, including details on the study design, analytic weights, approach to addressing missing data, and the impact estimation approach.

quarters after random assignment. The data contain earnings amounts for each quarter, which we also used to construct indicators of quarterly employment status.

5. **SNAP administrative data.** IDHS provided SNAP administrative caseload data. These were used to construct measures of receipt of public assistance (SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF], and Medicaid), SNAP and TANF benefit amounts, and income. We also used these data to characterize individuals' recent history of SNAP participation. Monthly data were provided for all individuals in the pilot from one year before random assignment through December 2020.
6. **12- and 36-month follow-up surveys.** The 12- and 36-month follow-up surveys are important sources of service receipt and outcomes data examined in this report. We conducted telephone surveys about 12 months after random assignment (2,431 EPIC and control group members). We also conducted telephone surveys about 36 months after random assignment among individuals who responded to the 12-month survey (1,596 EPIC and control group members). The 12-month survey asked for information about individuals' service receipt, employment, and earnings in the 12 months after random assignment. The 36-month survey asked for similar information for the period of time between the 12- and 36-month surveys. These surveys provided data for measures of household food security status, health, well-being, and housing status around the time of the interview. The survey data complemented the UI wage records and provided more detail on individuals' employment and earnings, including the number of jobs they held over time, the job start date and end date (if applicable), and characteristics of the job such as hours worked per week, weekly earnings, job type, fringe benefits, and occupation.
7. **Cost data.** To estimate EPIC costs, we collected data from cost workbooks completed by IDHS and partners and providers through the end of the EPIC service period. The workbooks were the basis for calculating total costs and describing the categories of costs for the EPIC group, including those for staff, direct services, supplies and equipment, and overhead and operations. In addition, to estimate the total cost of each type of service, we administered a time-use survey to collect data on the percentage of time direct service providers spent on each type of service for EPIC group members. As described in the technical supplement, we used data from other sources to estimate the costs of control group services and the dollar values of benefits included in the cost-benefit analysis.

B. Analysis approach

The findings presented in this report are based on a comprehensive set of analyses.

1. Implementation analysis

The implementation analysis summarizes and synthesizes the data collected through the site visits and during technical assistance and monitoring. The analysis focused mainly on the data collected from formal interviews, but the information from technical assistance and monitoring was incorporated into findings where appropriate. Information from the focus groups and case studies is included to provide context; however, these data were collected from small numbers of EPIC group members and employers and the experiences and opinions of these individuals are not necessarily representative of the entire EPIC group or all employers.

We organized the data by topic, interviewee, and pilot office, to facilitate analysis by type of respondent (for example, IDHS or provider) and pilot location within the State. For the report, we developed tables

and synthesized information across respondents to describe the flow of services and how they changed over time, the challenges staff faced, and the lessons learned.

2. Participation analysis

The participation analysis uses administrative service use data recorded by service providers to summarize engagement and participation in services following random assignment for EPIC group members (control group members were not included in this analysis). The data measured individuals' receipt of services and participation in pilot activities during the entire period in which individuals could have been engaged in services (March 2016 through February 2019). All individuals enrolled in EPIC are included in the main analysis presented in the report.

We created timelines for each EPIC group member to describe when they started to receive services and, if services were completed, end dates. This allowed us to estimate the order in which individuals typically proceeded through activities and the length of time they spent in each activity and in EPIC overall.

3. Analysis of differences in service use between EPIC and control groups

This analysis statistically compares receipt of services among EPIC and control group members over the 36 months following random assignment. Comparing the differences in service use between EPIC and control groups provides context for understanding impacts on employment, earnings, and receipt of public assistance.

The analysis is primarily based on 12- and 36-month survey data, which are available for both EPIC and control group members who were randomly assigned through September 2017.¹² The 12-month survey data provide information on service receipt and participation in activities from the date of random assignment through approximately 12 months later, while the 36-month survey provides similar information from the date of the 12-month interview through approximately 36 months after random assignment. These 12- and 36-month survey data were combined to form a single longitudinal data file that describes, for each member of the EPIC and control groups, the employment-related services and education and training activities they participated in during the 36-month period following random assignment, including type and duration.¹³ The survey data capture any type of service received, regardless of whether it was provided through EPIC, existing SNAP E&T, or through providers in the community such as Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), community colleges, nonprofits, or other organizations.¹⁴

¹² The analysis also uses administrative data analyzed in the participation analysis, when information on the use of specific services is available for both EPIC and control group members, to present several statistics in Appendix E.

¹³ The activities measured in the survey included (1) job search assistance or job search training and (2) education and occupational skills training. Job search assistance or job search training activities included those that helped individuals with resume writing, interviewing, and networking. Education and occupational skills training activities included education in the form of adult basic education or General Education Development (GED) courses, ESL classes, or college courses; occupational skills training programs that prepared individuals for specific occupations; general job skills training programs that help individuals learn widely-applicable job skills and ready them for work; and work-based learning activities, such as paid or unpaid internships and apprenticeships.

¹⁴ At the time the pilot was operating, SNAP E&T services, available to the control group, were offered in 15 of the 33 pilot counties.

We compared regression-adjusted averages of measures of service receipt for the EPIC and control groups. To improve the precision of the estimates, the regressions controlled for the characteristics of individuals as measured at the time of random assignment, including demographic characteristics such as age, educational attainment, and number of children in the household, and economic characteristics such as employment status and earnings. The observations were weighted to ensure that the differences were representative of all individuals enrolled in the pilot in Illinois. The weights were constructed to reflect the random assignment process, the survey design, and survey nonresponse. We used t-tests to determine whether service receipt differences between the EPIC and control groups were statistically significant.

4. Analysis of impacts on employment and well-being outcomes

To estimate how EPIC affected individuals' outcomes, we compared the average outcomes of the EPIC group and control group over the 36 months following random assignment. Because, on average, EPIC and control group members' baseline characteristics were the same at the time of random assignment (see Chapter III and Appendix C), differences in their outcomes after random assignment can be attributed to differences in the services offered to individuals in each group.

We used three data sources to measure outcomes: (1) UI wage records, (2) SNAP administrative data, and (3) 12- and 36-month follow-up survey data. The outcomes examined include employment status, earnings, and job characteristics such as hours worked and occupation. Employment and earnings were measured by quarter and year using the start and end dates of jobs reported in the surveys. Household food security was measured over the 30 days before each survey period, whereas health, well-being, and housing status were generally measured at the time of each survey interview.

Outcomes related to earnings and employment were analyzed using both UI wage records and survey data. Findings for these parallel analyses may differ because of differences in data coverage or quality, or differences in analysis samples and time periods covered in the follow-up data. For example, UI wage records are not subject to the recall error that is a potential problem in surveys. However, UI wage records do not cover all types of jobs, exclude jobs in certain industries, do contain information on job characteristics, and are subject to other reporting errors.¹⁵ The omissions are nontrivial, and workers in sectors with no or partial coverage in UI wage records comprise about 10 percent of U.S. employment (Kornfeld and Bloom 1999; Hotz and Scholz 2002). Additionally, UI wage records do not cover workers who are casually employed, such as day laborers or part-time helpers, and exclude most cash-only work and work that is part of the "gig economy" (Abraham et al. 2018; Katz and Krueger 2016, 2019). Survey data also have limitations. In addition to the potential for recall error, these data were not available for everyone enrolled in the pilot because some individuals did not respond to the survey. Also, the characteristics and experiences of individuals who responded to the survey may differ from those who did not respond.¹⁶ Finally, we note that even though there are differences between the data sources, each should provide unbiased estimates of the impacts of EPIC on the outcomes they measure because the EPIC and control groups were balanced along individual characteristics at the time of random assignment.

¹⁵ In particular, UI wage records do not cover self-employed workers, railroad employees, workers in service for relatives, most agricultural labor, some domestic service workers, and part-time employees of nonprofit organizations (U.S. Department of Labor 2014).

¹⁶ An analysis of differences between survey responders and non-responders, as well as differences between research groups, in terms of individual characteristics is presented in the technical supplement.

With an experimental design, unbiased impact estimates are attainable from the differences between average outcomes of the EPIC and control groups. We estimated impacts on outcomes by comparing regression-adjusted averages for each research group to improve the precision of estimates and adjust for small baseline differences between groups that may have arisen by chance, for survey nonresponse, or for missing administrative records data. Regressions controlled for the characteristics of individuals as measured at the time of random assignment.¹⁷ We used t-tests to determine whether there were significant differences between the EPIC and control groups that were unlikely to have occurred purely by chance.¹⁸

We calculated average outcomes for research groups by applying weights to each observation to help ensure that estimated differences between research groups were representative of all individuals enrolled in the pilot in Illinois. These weights were constructed to reflect the random assignment process and, for analyses based on the survey data, to adjust for survey nonresponse bias based on observable characteristics recorded prior to random assignment.

We estimated the impact of EPIC on many outcomes and across several subgroups, performing statistical tests for each. However, the likelihood that some estimates are found statistically significant simply by chance increases with the number of estimates tested, potentially leading to the false discovery of impacts not really caused by EPIC. To help guard against this problem, known as multiple comparisons bias, we selected two primary (confirmatory) outcomes before analyzing the data: (1) earnings (based on both the UI wage records and survey data) and (2) SNAP participation in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) after random assignment. We defined the primary outcomes over this period of available data because many EPIC group members were expected to be engaged in education and training in the first year, which could have reduced their opportunity for employment during that time. Although it is typical to examine longer-term effects of employment and training programs on outcomes by using a time period farthest from when individuals participated in activities, we did not consider Year 3 outcomes among our primary outcomes due to concerns about the adverse effects of COVID-19 on individuals' outcomes in that year. (For about 43 percent of individuals who were randomly assigned, the COVID-19 pandemic took place during their third year after random assignment [with the start of the pandemic defined by the nationwide enactment of the CARES Act on March 27, 2020].) Although EPIC's effect on employment was important to assess in the evaluation, we excluded employment from the set of primary outcomes due to our focus on the two-year period (Years 2 and 3); the rate of employment is a more suitable outcome when measuring impacts over a narrower period of time such as a month or quarter. For example, employment was included as a primary outcome for the interim evaluation of this study, which focused on the fourth quarter from random assignment only. In the final evaluation, we used the estimated impacts on employment and other outcomes, as well as for subgroups, to support findings for the primary outcomes

¹⁷ The full set of characteristics and additional information on the selection of these characteristics can be found in the technical supplement.

¹⁸ Analyses in this report test for statistical significance at the 0.01, 0.05, and 0.10 levels. The 0.10 level was used because the evaluation is assessing the effectiveness of new interventions for which there is no prior evidence of effectiveness for SNAP participants. A more stringent statistical significance threshold is often used when evaluating ongoing programs for which there is an established literature on program effects based on prior studies. Using a more stringent statistical significance threshold in the current evaluation would have reduced statistical power and limited our ability to identify and highlight promising sets of services offered through the pilots. By using a 0.10 statistical significance level, the evaluation aims to build knowledge in the field of workforce development for SNAP participants, on which future SNAP E&T evaluations can expand and eventually apply more stringent tests of effectiveness once programs and service models have been established for a longer period of time.

by examining whether they fit within a pattern of similar impacts. We view these analyses as exploratory, providing policy-relevant but less rigorous evidence about the effects of EPIC. This information could be valuable for continuous program improvement and identifying potential hypotheses for more rigorous examination in the future

5. Cost analysis

The cost-benefit analysis compares the benefits individuals enrolled in EPIC received in dollar terms through changes in earnings and public assistance with the costs of the services provided during the EPIC service period. The analysis estimates the extent to which the benefits exceeded the costs of providing services to the EPIC group compared with the benefits and costs of providing services to the control group. In this section, we present the methods used for the cost-benefit analysis.

Description of costs. For the cost-benefit analysis, we estimated three groups of costs: (1) the costs of EPIC; (2) the costs of all services provided to EPIC group members through EPIC and the community; and (3) the costs of all services provided to control group members through existing SNAP E&T and the community. For each group of costs, we estimated the total costs, costs by service type (such as case management or education), and costs per individual. The difference between the costs of all services EPIC and control group members received is the basis for the cost-benefit analysis.

Costs of EPIC. The costs of the EPIC included those for planning, recruiting, and delivering services. We based the estimates of EPIC costs on cost data provided by IDHS and partners and providers with direct subcontracts through the FNS grant. These data were reported through standardized cost workbooks submitted for the planning period and on a quarterly schedule during service delivery. IDHS, DCEO, SIU, and 23 other partners and providers each submitted workbooks with their own cost information. They submitted workbooks for the planning period (April 2015–March 2016) and for 11 quarterly service delivery periods (April 2016–February 2019) through the end of services and closeout activities, which occurred in February 2019.

- **Total costs.** The workbooks captured data on a set of four core cost categories, or cost ingredients, including staff, direct services, supplies and equipment, and overhead and operating costs. These costs included those paid for with FNS grant funds and those paid for with funds leveraged from other sources. We used the cost ingredients to build an estimate of the total costs of EPIC by summing them across the four cost categories.¹⁹
- **Costs by service type.** In addition to the cost workbooks, a web survey collected data on the percentage of time provider staff spent on key services for EPIC group members—for example, management, assessments, and job readiness or life skills workshops (such as a job club or job readiness training). We allocated the costs of (1) staff, (2) supplies and equipment, and (3) overhead and operating costs to direct service costs using the percentage of time staff reported spending on these key direct services.
- **Costs per individual.** To estimate the costs of serving the average individual and the range of costs for serving all EPIC group members through EPIC, we used individual-level data on participation in services to attribute a cost to each service in which the individual engaged. We used administrative

¹⁹ The ingredient, or build-up, methodology used for the cost data collection and analysis has been used in similar evaluations of public workforce programs and is detailed in Levin, Henry M., and Patrick J. McEwan. *Cost-Effectiveness Analysis: Methods and Applications*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2001.

service use data collected by IDHS and partners and providers on participation in EPIC services only. We used data on the unit (or per-service) cost of EPIC services to estimate the total cost of services for each individual in the administrative service use data. We then estimated the mean cost of services for an individual.

Costs of all services received by EPIC group members. In addition to estimating the costs of EPIC, we estimated the cost of *all* services that EPIC group members received from the EPIC and the community. We used the costs of all EPIC group services in the cost-benefit analysis because the benefits EPIC group members could have accrued through changes in employment and earnings were a product of all services in which they participated during the follow-up period, not just the EPIC services.

- **Total costs, costs by service type, and costs per individual.** We estimated the costs of all services EPIC group members received per individual using the same method we used to estimate the per individual costs of EPIC. We used individual-level data on participation in services to attribute a unit cost to each service in which each individual engaged and estimated the mean and range of costs per individual. We summed the individual-level estimates to get an estimated total cost of all services EPIC group members received.

We used the unit costs of EPIC services and individual-level participation data from the 12- and 36-month follow-up surveys to estimate the costs of all services EPIC group members received. We chose to use the survey data to estimate the cost differentials between the EPIC and control groups because, unlike the administrative service use data, the survey data were collected for both the EPIC and control groups. In addition, these data reflect all services both groups received, thus maximizing the comparability of the two sets of service costs.

Costs of all services received by control group members. Most grantees were unable to report detailed information on costs for the services received by control group members. As a result, we estimated the costs of all services control group members received using recently published data on the costs of similar services offered through the WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker programs. Services for the control group were generally similar to or a subset of WIOA services, including case management, assessments, job clubs, job readiness training, independent job search (called resource room visits), education, occupational skills training, work-based learning, and support services. For case management and all employment and training-related activities, we used cost data from the WIA (Workforce Investment Act) Gold Standard Evaluation, which were collected using the same methodology as this evaluation and the same workbook and cost ingredients (staff, direct service, supply and equipment, and overhead and operating costs).²⁰ For cost estimates of support services, we used 2018 FNS-583 form data on reported costs of support services in existing SNAP E&T programs. We adjusted the cost estimates to 2016 dollars to facilitate a direct comparison with EPIC group cost workbook estimates, which we also adjusted to 2016 dollars.

- **Total costs, costs by service type, and costs per individual.** We used the same method to estimate the costs of all control group services that we used to estimate the costs of all EPIC group services.

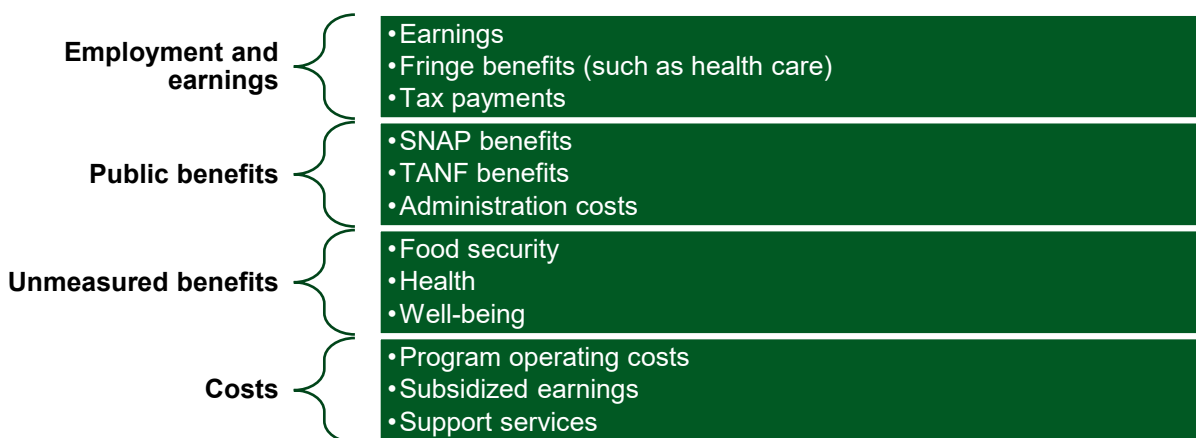
²⁰ The WIA Gold Standard Evaluation is the most recent national study of the Adult and Dislocated Worker program services, conducted in 2012 and with findings published in 2016. WIA was reauthorized in 2014 under the WIOA. Although WIOA made important changes to the workforce system, it did not significantly change the basic set of services offered, nor who was eligible to receive them. We refer to the WIA Gold Standard Evaluation as WIA because that was the name of the authorization at the time the data were collected.

We attributed the WIOA unit cost of each service to individual-level data on participation in the services control group members reported receiving existing SNAP E&T services and the community in the 12- and 36-month follow-up survey data. We estimated the mean and range of costs per individual and summed the individual-level estimates overall and by service type to estimate the costs of all services control group members received.

Approach to cost-benefit analysis. The cost-benefit analysis used a framework to present a comprehensive listing of EPIC group benefits and costs, relative to the control group, from three perspectives: (1) individuals enrolled in EPIC, (2) government and taxpayers, and (3) society as a whole, which represents the sum of the other two perspectives. The framework is similar to an accounting ledger, listing benefits and costs as dollar values that could be positive from one perspective or negative (a cost) from another. All costs and benefits are expressed as the difference between the EPIC group and the control group, and reflect all services those individuals received during the 36-month follow-up period.

Measures of costs and benefits. Given FNS' and Congress's goals for the SNAP E&T pilots, the primary benefits of interest were (1) increased earnings (through increased employment), which reflect individuals' increased productivity from participating in services; and (2) reduced need for public assistance benefits, such as SNAP or TANF (Exhibit II.1). Additional benefits to government and taxpayers, as well as society, include taxes that individuals pay as part of their post-service employment and reductions in public assistance benefits. The primary costs of interest include costs for operating program services and providing subsidized earnings and support services to individuals while they are engaged in services. While operating costs and resources provided to individuals are a cost to government and taxpayers, the latter are a benefit to individuals.

Exhibit II.1. Measures of costs and benefits



Although we can attribute a dollar value to benefits such as earnings, fringe benefits like health care, or SNAP benefits, there are other benefits and costs associated with changes in employment and earnings that are more difficult to value. Changes in the rates of food insecurity and well-being (such as improved housing or health status or lower rates of depression) are important outcomes that could be associated with a change in employment and earnings. It is challenging to quantify the dollar value of these benefits reliably—for example, it is difficult to attribute a dollar value to a one-point change on the depression or food security scales used to assess the presence and extent of these issues. Outcomes such as a change in depression or food security might have more value than can be represented by a change in earnings or expenditures, given the relationship of those outcomes to overall and long-term health and well-being. In addition, there are other potential costs to individuals related to employment, such as changes in child

care or transportation needs. We did not make assumptions about the values of these benefits or costs because they could influence estimates with a high degree of uncertainty. However, it is important to recognize the potential value of these costs and benefits to individuals, government and taxpayers, and society.

Costs and benefits by perspective. The findings of the cost-benefit analysis depend on the perspective from which the costs and benefits are considered. For example, an increase in tax payments because of an increase in employment and earnings is a cost to individuals but a benefit to government and taxpayers. We considered variation in the costs and benefits by perspective:



Individuals enrolled in the EPIC group could have realized benefits from increased post-program earnings and incurred costs from decreased benefit receipt. Individuals did not incur costs for services but benefitted from receiving subsidized wages and support services while receiving services.



Government and taxpayers (meaning everyone other than individuals) paid costs to fund the services and could have realized benefits from increased taxes from individuals and decreased benefit receipt and program administration costs.



Society as a whole experienced the overall effect of the costs and benefits to individuals and government and taxpayers. Costs or benefits to society were the sum of the costs and benefits to individuals and government and taxpayers. For example, if taxes were a cost to individuals and a benefit to government and taxpayers, there would be a net neutral (zero) benefit to society.

Summary measures. To estimate the net benefit, we took the difference between total benefits and costs for each perspective. A negative net benefit is a net cost from that perspective. We also estimated the return to society on each dollar invested by estimating the ratio of benefits to costs. A benefit-cost ratio greater than 1 suggests that overall benefits of all EPIC group services exceeded their costs. A benefit-cost ratio less than 1 suggests that the benefits of all EPIC group services, relative to the services EPIC group members would have received otherwise, did not outweigh their costs within the 36-month follow-up period. In other words, the costs exceeded the benefits realized.

Accounting for benefits accruing later than costs. The costs of services were incurred during the time when individuals were enrolled in services, but the benefits of those services likely did not accrue fully until a later date. We adjusted the costs and benefits in two ways to make their dollar values comparable during the baseline year of 2016, when EPIC started incurring service costs and individuals started accruing benefits.

- **Price deflator.** To account for inflation, we used the implicit gross national product price deflator from the Bureau of Economic Analysis to convert costs and benefits occurring in later years into constant 2016 dollars.
- **Discount rate:** A dollar in the baseline year was worth more than a dollar in later years because it could have been invested and earned interest. To account for this effect, we used a discount rate to convert all costs and benefits incurred in later years into constant 2016 dollars based on the 30-year Treasury bond rate on January 1, 2016 (approximately when EPIC started), which was 2.98 percent.

Sensitivity analyses. Like most cost-benefit analyses, our estimates required many assumptions. We examined the sensitivity of our findings to changes in these assumptions to assess whether our results were robust to these changes. We assessed whether our results differed for each of the following changes:

- **Alternative discount rates.** We used an alternative Treasury bond rate to assess the sensitivity of estimates to different rates of return through the discount rate. We tested the sensitivity of our findings to using alternative discount rates of 2 percent and 4 percent.
- **Alternative fringe benefit rates.** We used an alternative fringe benefit rate to assess the sensitivity of estimates to the assumption that the average fringe benefits were worth 20.9 percent of earnings (according to the Department of Labor’s National Compensation Survey). We tested the sensitivity of our findings to using fringe rates that were decreased and increased by 5 percent of earnings.
- **Alternative tax rates.** We used a single marginal tax rate based on the mean earnings impact and characteristics of individuals in EPIC at enrollment. Because individuals’ effective tax rates could vary based on their earnings and other deductions, we tested the sensitivity of our findings to using tax rates that were decreased and increased by 5 percent.
- **Alternative assumption that subsidized earnings are not included in UI wage record estimates of earnings.** We assumed that subsidized earnings provided to individuals engaged in work-based learning activities were reported to State UI agencies and were included in UI wage record estimates of earnings. It is possible that not all providers reported subsidized earnings to State UI agencies. We tested the sensitivity of our findings to the alternative assumption that subsidized earnings were *not* included in UI wage record estimates of earnings, but instead were a direct transfer benefitting individuals. We assumed subsidized earnings were included in 36-month survey estimates of self-reported earnings.
- **Alternative assumption that treatment group members only received services through EPIC.** The main analysis assumes that EPIC group members received additional services outside of EPIC through existing SNAP E&T and the community during the pilot period. We use data from the 12- and 36-month follow-up surveys to estimate service receipt for EPIC group members and assume any difference in estimate costs of EPIC and all services EPIC group members received based on the survey is attributed to services received outside of EPIC. Survey data are self-reported and could over or underestimate the services that EPIC group members received. This sensitivity analysis uses the alternative assumption that EPIC group members only received services through EPIC and estimates the net benefits using these alternate estimates of costs.

6. Subgroup analysis

For many of these analyses, we examine subgroups that may have been affected differently by the services offered to the EPIC group.

Subgroups defined by baseline characteristics. We analyze a subset of service use and impacts among groups of individuals defined by their status at the time of enrollment, such as the presence of children in the household, work experience, income, age, and presence of severe barriers to employment. For all subgroup analyses, we conducted F-tests to assess research group differences in service receipt or impacts across subgroups. These findings are included in the appendices.

Subgroups defined by the timing of pilot enrollment. We analyzed a subset of service use and impacts by enrollment time period. We divided individuals into two groups based on when they were enrolled in the pilot; those enrolled before and after the midway point of the pilot’s full enrollment period (March 2016 to November 2016 versus December 2016 to September 2017). The mid-enrollment distinction is meant to capture differences between earlier and later cohorts independent of how specific pilot operations changed over time. There could have been changes both within and outside of the pilot that contributed to

differences in outcomes before and after the mid-enrollment point, including shifts in local labor market demand, changes in implementation policies or practices, or characteristics of individuals. We used t-tests to determine whether the magnitude of differences between EPIC and control groups varied across enrollment periods.

Subgroups defined by whether individuals started or completed activities. The main findings presented in this report do not differentiate between individuals enrolled in the pilot who participated in activities and those who did not. These estimates provide information about impacts that can be expected for all SNAP participants to whom EPIC activities were offered. However, because some individuals did not engage in EPIC or start an activity, these estimates mask how well individuals who actually participated in EPIC activities may have fared. For this reason, we conducted additional analyses to examine impacts among SNAP participants who actually engaged in the pilot and participated in activities.

We grouped activities into (1) job search or job search training activities (consisting mostly of independent job search) and (2) education or training activities (consisting of occupational skills training, basic education [GED class and the National Career Readiness Certificate], and work-based learning). We estimated differences in service receipt between EPIC and control groups and impacts on outcomes among individuals who started a pilot activity compared with those who did not and among those who completed a job search or job search training activity or completed an education or training activity compared to those who started but did not complete an activity.

To conduct this non-experimental analysis, we used a rich set of baseline data collected from all individuals enrolled in the pilot to estimate EPIC group members' propensity for starting an activity using regression-based predictive models. These models were then used to predict control group members' propensities to start an activity had they been in the EPIC group. The resulting propensity scores were then used to define subgroups of individuals in each research group based on the percentages of the EPIC group that started an activity. We repeated this process for EPIC group members who did not start an activity, completed an employment or training activity, completed a job search or job search training activity, or started but did not complete an activity.²¹

C. Study limitations

This SNAP E&T pilots evaluation used an experimental design, rigorous analysis methods, and a multi-faceted longitudinal data set to assess whether the pilots were effective in connecting SNAP participants with jobs that increased their incomes and reduced their need for public assistance benefits. Because individuals were randomly assigned to EPIC and control groups, we can confidently attribute differences in outcomes between the groups to EPIC services rather than to differences in the characteristics of the two groups when they enrolled in the pilot, such as differences in education, work readiness, and barriers to employment.

Nonetheless, the evaluation has several methodological limitations:

1. Survey nonresponse may lead to potential bias in estimates of service receipt and outcomes.

Data collected from the 12- and 36-month follow-up surveys play an important role in understanding differences between the EPIC and control groups in receipt of services available through SNAP E&T

²¹ Additional information regarding these procedures can be found in the technical supplement which accompanies the report.

and in the community, as well as in estimating impacts on employment, earnings, and food security and well-being outcomes. With the exception of employment and earnings data in the UI wage records, much of this information is not available through other data sources. Even when it is, there are fundamental differences between UI and survey data in the types of jobs covered and the information available to assess job quality. However, because survey data were collected from individuals 12 and 36 months after random assignment, a nontrivial percentage of individuals enrolled in the pilot were not located via telephone or residential address and, thus, could not participate in the survey. (The response rates of the 12- and 36-month surveys were 59 and 66 percent, respectively.) As a result, differences in the characteristics of individuals who responded and did not respond to the survey could differ between EPIC and control groups. If this were true, it would bias the estimates of pilot impacts. To address this possibility, we performed a comprehensive nonresponse bias analysis using information collected before random assignment and constructed and applied survey weights based on these analyses to ensure that findings are representative of all individuals who enrolled in the pilot.

2. **Having incomplete control group data in the cost-benefit analysis led to the use of estimated costs of control group services.** The cost-benefit analysis compares the costs of EPIC group services with their counterfactual—those services individuals would have received in the absence of the EPIC group services. Most grantees were unable to report detailed information on costs for the services received by control group members, so we estimated those costs using the unit costs of services that were similar to those the control group received, using data from a recently published evaluation of the WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker program. As a result, the difference in the costs of services represented in the cost-benefit analysis could be over- or underestimated.
3. **The assessment of the effectiveness of the pilots on individuals who participated in activities was not based on an experimental research design.** The subgroup analysis examining differences in pilot impacts among individuals who did and did not start or complete an activity is important for assessing pilot effectiveness among individuals who engaged in the pilot. However, an important limitation of this analysis is that it is not based on an experimental design. The experimental design randomly assigned individuals who enrolled in the pilot to the EPIC group or the control group. Individuals in the EPIC group chose whether to start an activity and/or complete one based on factors that we could not necessarily observe. Thus, since individuals were not randomly assigned to start or complete activities, there is a risk that the factors predisposing an individual to greater participation in activities may influence their likelihood of gaining employment or earning higher wages, independent of their starting or completing an activity. To account for this potential bias, we used a rich set of baseline data available for all individuals enrolled in the pilot to generate weights that balanced the characteristics of EPIC group members who started or completed an activity and control group members who would have had a high propensity to start or complete an activity had they been in the EPIC group, thereby reducing the risk of selection bias.

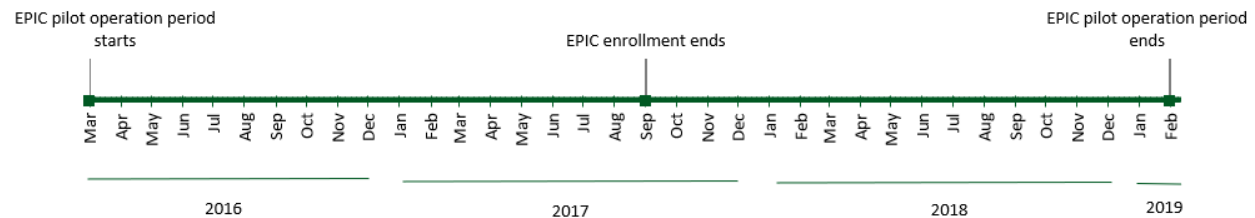
III. EPIC enrollment and characteristics

This chapter describes patterns of enrollment in the pilot and the local economic context in which the pilot operated. It also describes the characteristics of enrolled individuals at the time of random assignment and compares the characteristics of those who enrolled in the pilot earlier to the characteristics of those who enrolled later.

A. Patterns of enrollment

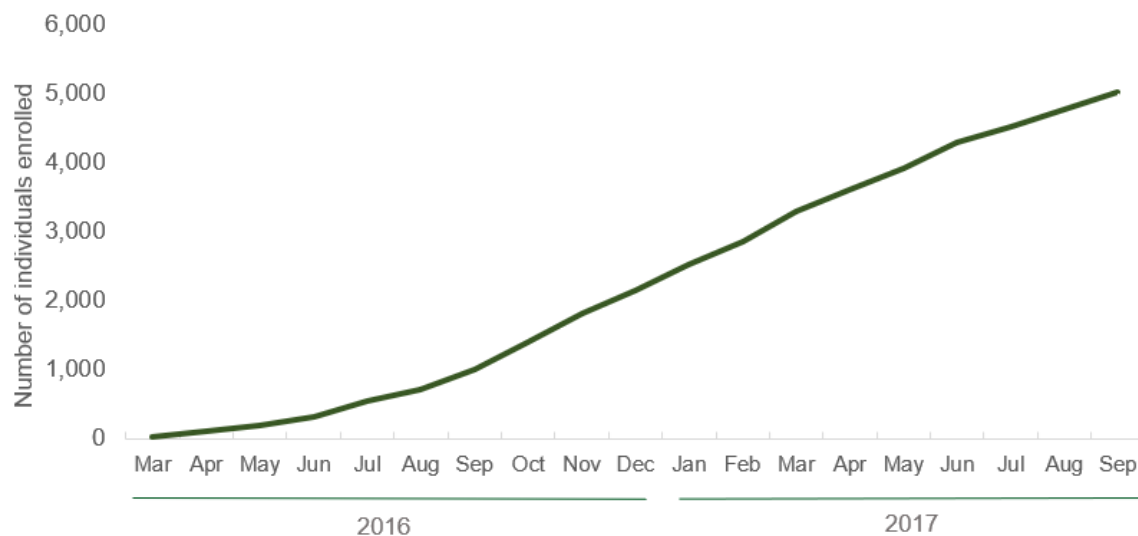
From March 2016 to September 2017, Illinois enrolled 5,038 individuals in the pilot (Exhibit III.1). SNAP participants who enrolled in the pilot were randomly assigned in roughly equivalent numbers to the EPIC group and a control group. The number of individuals enrolled increased steadily over time, averaging about 213 individuals per month in 2016 and 319 individuals per month in 2017 (Exhibit III.2).

Exhibit III.1. Overview of pilot enrollment



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation enrollment data (March 2016 to February 2019).

Exhibit III.2. Cumulative number of individuals enrolled in each month of the enrollment period



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation enrollment data (March 2016 to September 2017).

Note: All values are numbers of individuals enrolled and include both EPIC and control group members. Individuals enrolled in the pilot include all EPIC and control group members who completed baseline enrollment registration and did not subsequently revoke their consent to participate in the evaluation of the pilot (5,012 out of the 5,038 enrolled individuals).

B. Local economic context in the EPIC pilot area over time

The counties in which EPIC operated experienced relatively low and falling unemployment rates, with average monthly unemployment falling from about 6.5 percent to about 4 percent at the end of 2018. There was a slight increase in the unemployment rate in the final months of pilot operation (Exhibit III.3). During the first year and a half of the pilot operation (March 2016 to July 2017), the average monthly unemployment rate was between 4.8 and 6.5 percent. From August 2017 until the pilot stopped offering services in February 2019, unemployment hovered between 4.8 and 5.5 percent.

Exhibit III.3. Local unemployment rate in Illinois's pilot area for each month of pilot operation



Common occupations among the general population in the region of the pilot remained generally consistent from 2016 through 2019 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2020). The most common occupations throughout this period were office and administrative support such as customer service representatives, receptionists, administrative assistants and office clerks; sales and related occupations such as cashiers and retail salespersons; food preparation and serving related occupations such as fast food and counter workers, waiters and waitresses, and cooks and cafeteria workers; and transportation and material moving occupations such as delivery truck drivers, passenger vehicle drivers, and workers in the airline industry (Exhibit III.4).

Exhibit III.4. Common occupations and median wages in Illinois's pilot area over time

Wage (hourly in dollars)	2016	2019
Office and Administrative Support Occupations	16.69	18.41
Sales and Related Occupations	13.48	14.47
Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	9.64	10.99
Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	14.56	15.80
Production Occupations	16.04	-
Management Occupations	-	50.35

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Note: Data in this table represent the five most common jobs in 2016 and 2019 based on the total number of employees in the pilot area. The areas included in this table (Nonmetropolitan northwest Illinois, Nonmetropolitan west central Illinois, Nonmetropolitan south Illinois, St. Louis, Bloomington, Carbondale-Marion, Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, Decatur, Peoria, and Rockford) are defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and may not fully align with the areas of Illinois in which the pilot was offered.

C. Characteristics of enrolled individuals

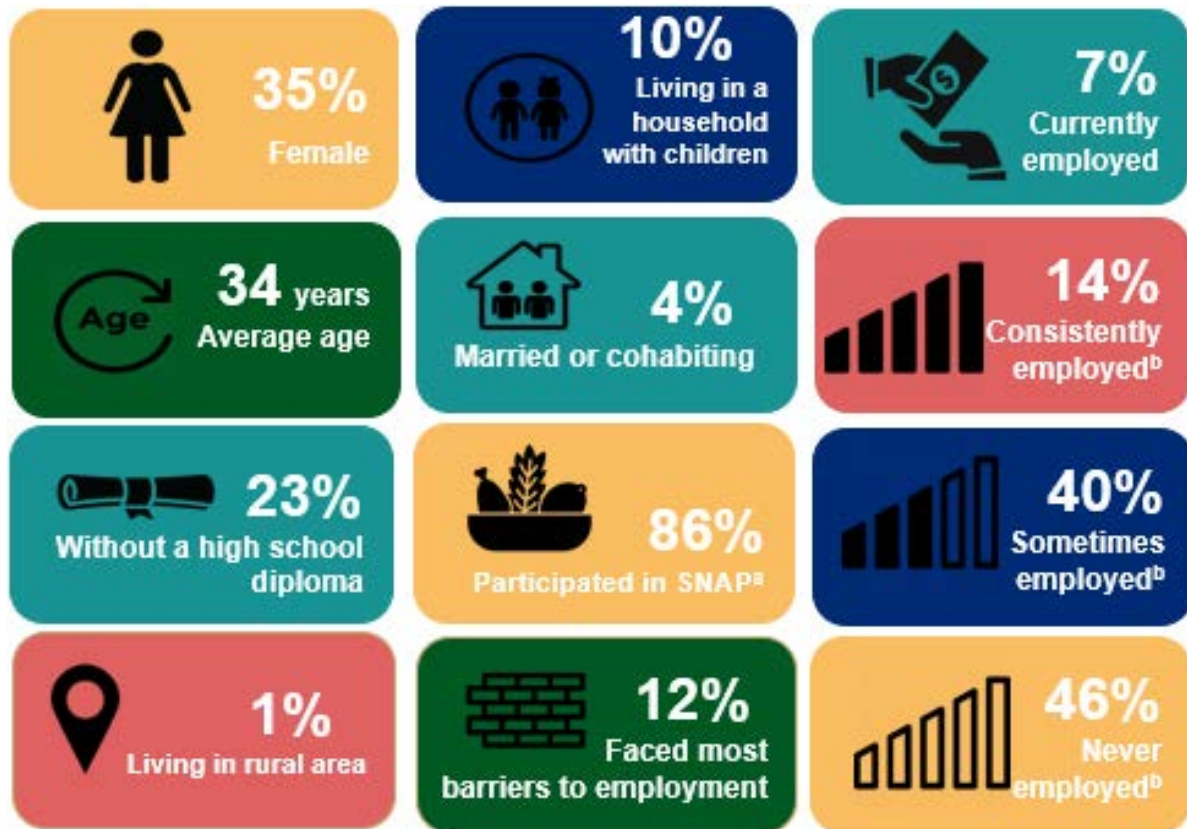
The baseline registration form captured demographic, residential, and economic characteristics at the time of random assignment for individuals who enrolled in the pilot. Exhibit III.5 and Appendix Table C.1 show the key characteristics of enrolled individuals. The majority of enrollees were Black or African American (63 percent); a majority were male (65 percent). The average age was 34, with 76 percent between 25 and 49 years old, and 20 percent between 18 and 24 years old. Almost one-quarter did not have a high school diploma or equivalent education. Most individuals (96 percent) lived in a metropolitan area;²² most lived in households without children (90 percent).

The majority of individuals had been employed at some point (90 percent), but only 7 percent were employed at the time of random assignment (Exhibit III.5). Only about 14 percent were employed consistently in the two years preceding random assignment, meaning they were employed for at least seven out of the preceding eight quarters, whereas 46 percent either were not employed or were employed for only one of the preceding eight quarters.

We also assessed individuals' barriers to employment based on whether they completed high school and if they were employed in the 12 months before random assignment. Although 88 percent faced the fewest or moderate numbers of barriers, 12 percent faced the most barriers, defined as not being employed in the past 12 months and not completing high school or the equivalent.

Most individuals (86 percent) had participated in SNAP in the year before enrolling in the pilot. A total of 21 percent participated for one to six months of the year, and slightly less than two-thirds (65 percent) participated for more than six months.

²² Urbanicity is measured using the Economic Research Service's 2010 Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) codes. Rural areas are defined as small urban clusters of 2,500 to 9,999 people or areas in which most commuters in the area commuted to a small urban cluster. This definition includes areas outside of urbanized areas and urban clusters.

Exhibit III.5. Baseline characteristics of individuals enrolled in the pilot

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation baseline information registration form (March 2016 to September 2017 data).

Note: All values are percentages unless otherwise noted. Individuals enrolled in the pilot through September 2017 include all EPIC and control group members who completed baseline enrollment registration and did not subsequently revoke their consent to participate in the evaluation of the pilot (5,012 out of the 5,038 enrolled individuals).^a Participated in SNAP reflects any SNAP participation in the year before random assignment based on SNAP administrative records. All individuals who enrolled into the pilot were required to be on SNAP at the time of random assignment.

^b Employment experience is defined using UI wage record data for the two years before random assignment. "Consistently employed" includes individuals who were employed for at least 7 out of 8 quarters preceding random assignment.

"Sometimes employed" includes individuals who were employed for 2 to 6 quarters preceding random assignment. "Never employed" includes individuals who were employed for at most 1 quarter preceding random assignment.

D. Characteristics of individuals who enrolled earlier versus later

Some analyses in this report examine differences in service receipt and impacts between individuals who were enrolled earlier versus later in the enrollment period. Below we summarize differences in baseline characteristics of EPIC group members in these two groups of individuals.

Overall, there were few statistically significant differences between earlier and later enrollees in the EPIC group. Later enrollees were more likely than earlier enrollees to be Hispanic (15 versus 10 percent) and less likely to be White (18 versus 22 percent; Appendix Table C.3). Later enrollees were also more likely to have received a high school diploma or equivalent education (63 versus 58 percent). Later enrollees were more likely to live in metropolitan areas than earlier enrollees (97 versus 94 percent). In addition, later enrollees in the EPIC group were slightly less likely than earlier enrollees to have participated in SNAP in the year before random assignment (94 versus 98 percent).

IV. Implementation analysis

In this chapter, we describe the implementation of the EPIC pilot based on qualitative analysis of data collected through staff interviews, focus groups, and case studies of individuals in EPIC. Data presented in this chapter were collected during the pilot planning, implementation, operational, and close-out periods, from March 2015 through February 2019 (Exhibit IV.1 provides a pilot timeline).

Exhibit IV.1. Pilot timeline

Pilot activity	Date
Grant awarded	March 2015
Enrollment began	March 2016
Enrollment ended	September 2017
Services ended	February 2019

In the following sections, we provide information about the pilot background and describe the planning and early implementation process. We then detail services and operations, including the recruitment and enrollment processes; control group services and pathways; and EPIC group services and pathways, management and collaborations, service receipt patterns, barriers among EPIC group members, staffing, and performance reporting. We also discuss the sustainability and replicability of EPIC services after the pilots ended, and summarize the key findings discussed in this chapter. Unless otherwise noted, each section describes the policies implemented, not what was planned.

A. Pilot background

Several things motivated IDHS to collaborate with DCEO, SIUCWD, the Illinois Community College Board, and the Illinois Workforce Innovation Board (State WIOA program) to apply for the SNAP E&T pilot grant. The two State agencies, IDHS and DCEO, were looking to offer additional opportunities for occupational skills training and industry-recognized credentials that could lead to better jobs and self-sufficiency for SNAP participants, based on individuals' needs, backgrounds, and career interests, as well as fulfill local labor market demand. They also wanted to build upon a DCEO workforce development program called Job Training and Economic Development (JTED) and a DCEO sector-focused training program called Accelerated Training in Manufacturing (ATIM). In addition, they were interested in using Illinois WorkNet (WorkNet), the management information system (MIS) platform that had been developed for ATIM. Last, IDHS and DCEO wanted to form a new collaboration in order to “break down silos” of the services being provided by each organization.

Services to be made available through EPIC included personal assistance from an EPIC career navigator; basic education assistance with reading, math, and English as a Second Language (ESL); high school equivalency attainment services; occupational skills training; paid work experience; on-the-job training; subsidized work; job search and job readiness assistance; employment retention assistance; and support services.²³ Based on interests and needs, EPIC staff matched individuals with an occupational skills training and, in areas with more than one EPIC provider, a provider. EPIC was intended to serve EPIC

²³ Paid work experience is a short-term opportunity in which individuals receive income and gain experience working in a professional workplace environment. On-the-job training is a similar opportunity but includes a formal training component provided at the workplace.

group members based on one of three EPIC service models that were designed to provide different levels of assistance depending on individuals' education and work experience. Model one provided individuals with adult basic education along with occupational skills training; model two offered occupational skills training and education activities to obtain a high school equivalency credential; and model three was intended to assist individuals with work experience and obtaining advanced occupational skills training credentials for upward mobility.

The EPIC service models, relative to existing SNAP E&T services, included more intensive case management, a wider array of occupational skills training opportunities, and more funding for occupational skills training and support services. In addition, EPIC offered a wider variety of providers.

IDHS and its partners and providers implemented EPIC in 33 counties across 7 of Illinois' 26 LWIAs covering at least part of the 5 IDHS regions. About half of the pilot counties (15) offered existing SNAP E&T services (some of which had only started offering those services at the same time the pilot was beginning enrollment), and about half (18) did not. Around 90 percent of control group members resided in a county where existing SNAP E&T services were available during the pilot; the majority of these individuals were in Cook County (the most populous county in the pilot).²⁴ IDHS and its partners chose pilot locations with diverse demographics and considered the poverty rate, the unemployment rate, the projected economic growth rate, the proportion of residents with high school diplomas or high school equivalency certifications, and the industries most in demand.

IDHS and its partners proposed to serve two target groups in EPIC: (1) Unemployed or underemployed work registrants with low skills or limited work experience, including ABAWDs, who may have needed a high school diploma or equivalent education credential, additional basic education support, and technical skills in order to access entry-level employment and (2) SNAP participants who were working 30 hours or more per week but required a skills upgrade in order to achieve higher earnings. With approval from FNS, IDHS and its partners set a goal to have 75 percent of those enrolled in the pilot be work registrants, and 25 percent be SNAP participants working 30 hours or more per week.

The target population included SNAP participants who did not have SNAP E&T participation requirements (voluntary participants and non-work registrants). However, the pilot primarily targeted mandatory SNAP E&T work registrants (work registrants who are required to register for work and participate in SNAP E&T services as a condition of eligibility for receiving SNAP benefits). This priority reflected the pilot's expectation for Cook County, which primarily served mandatory SNAP E&T work registrants, to enroll the largest percentage of individuals in the pilot.²⁵

B. Pilot planning and implementation

IDHS collaborated with DCEO and SIUCWD to implement EPIC. IDHS provided management and oversight, conducted pilot recruitment and enrollment, and monitored EPIC group members for

²⁴ Actual enrollment in existing SNAP E&T was not guaranteed, due to a limited number of available slots.

²⁵ Mandatory SNAP E&T work registrants have to meet work requirements in order to continue receiving SNAP benefits. Work requirements included registering for work at the time of application and every 12 months thereafter; participating in a E&T program if assigned by the State agency; participating in a workfare program if assigned by the State agency; providing information on employment status; reporting to an employer if referred by the State agency; accepting a bona fide offer of suitable employment; and not voluntarily quitting a job without good cause or reducing work hours to less than 30 hours per week.

noncompliance. DCEO and IDHS selected 24 CBOs to deliver EPIC services (EPIC providers)—15 in Cook County and 1 to 2 in each of the other pilot locations. DCEO contracted with the CBOs and monitored their performance. DCEO also provided training to all EPIC staff, including IDHS pilot recruitment and enrollment staff and CBO EPIC provider staff. SIUCWD provided general support during the planning process and made extensive modifications to WorkNet. During the pilot, SIUCWD staff operated WorkNet and provided ongoing system training and support to all EPIC staff.

In March 2015, IDHS, DCEO, and SIUCWD administrators (EPIC administrators) began planning for the pilot. During this phase, they refined the pilot design, finalized the pilot recruitment and enrollment process, selected EPIC providers, and trained EPIC staff. Additionally, EPIC administrators customized the WorkNet system, which EPIC staff used to implement the enrollment process, facilitate implementation of EPIC service delivery, manage EPIC, and facilitate communication.

The pilot was initially scheduled to begin enrollment in January 2016 but was delayed until March 2016 due to a variety of factors. In sum, delays in finalizing the enrollment process; fully defining EPIC services, policies, and procedures; and recruiting providers caused delays in finalizing a marketing and recruitment plan, in hiring and training staff, and ultimately in finalizing WorkNet.

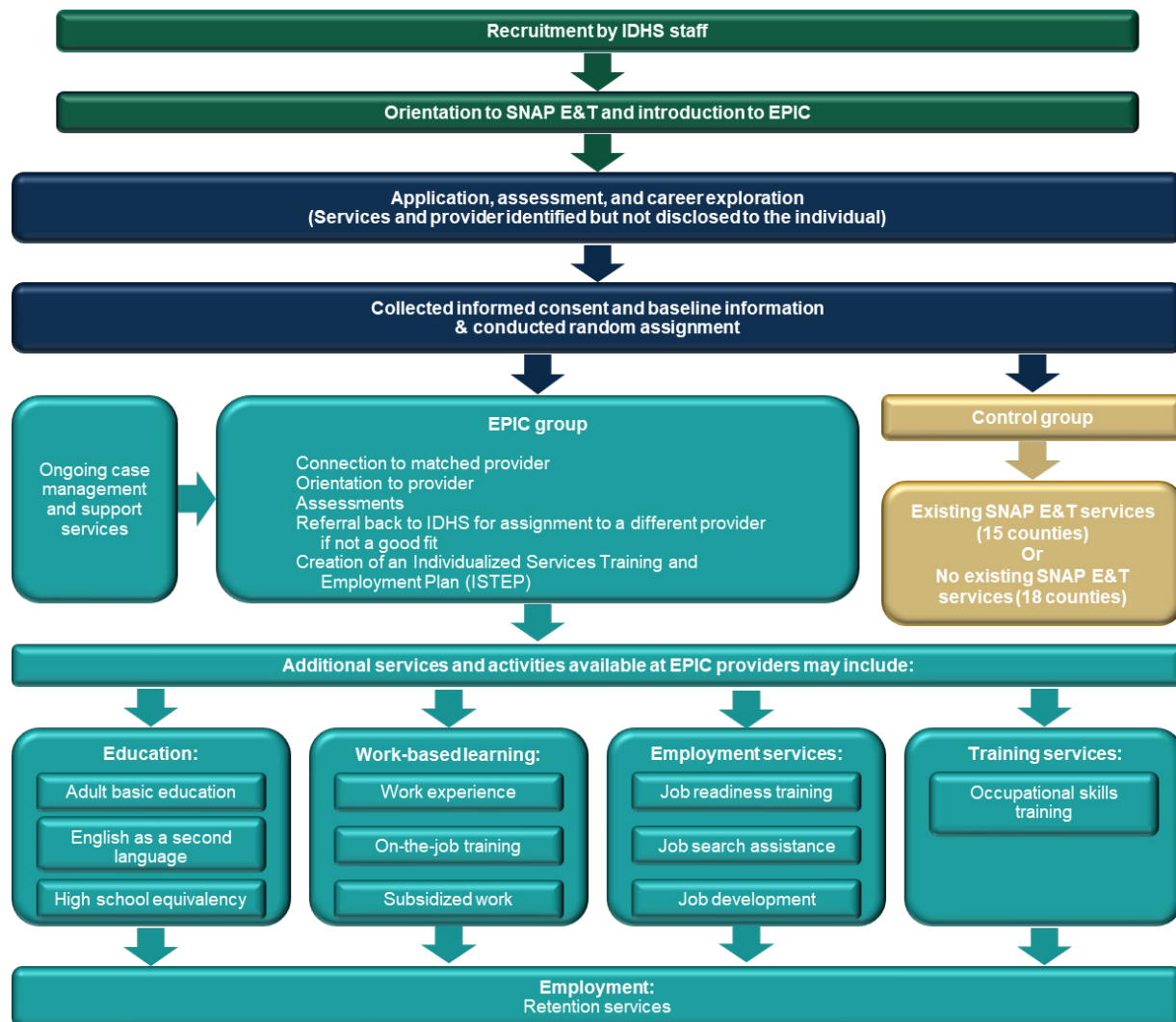
Additionally, key IDHS administrator staff left during the planning phase and IDHS did not hire staff for other key positions until December 2015. As a result, none were present for most of the planning. Some staff reported that this caused the planning team to lack knowledge of IDHS SNAP policy and procedures, such as those concerning the sanctioning process for noncompliance, which resulted in sanctioning protocols not being as thoroughly integrated into systems and procedures as they could have been at the start.

For more information about pilot planning and implementation, please see the Expanding Opportunities & Reducing Barriers to Work: Illinois Interim Report (Hamilton 2021).

C. Pilot services and operations

The pilot enrollment process included applications, assessments, and career exploration before random assignment into the EPIC group or control group. As shown in Exhibit IV.2, recruited individuals attended orientations, completed assessment and career exploration activities, and consulted with IDHS pilot recruitment and enrollment staff (called “enrollment staff” in the rest of this chapter) to identify needed services. Enrollment staff then obtained consent, collected baseline information, and randomly assigned individuals to the EPIC group or the control group and referred individuals to the appropriate provider. Enrollment staff referred individuals assigned to the EPIC group to the EPIC provider to which they had been matched before random assignment. If an individual received a control group assignment, enrollment staff referred them to the local existing SNAP E&T provider or informed them that they could access services available to anyone in their community.

EPIC services and service pathways varied, depending on the individual and the provider, but all EPIC group members received personalized case management assistance from an EPIC career navigator. EPIC providers first introduced individuals to the available EPIC services and then conducted assessments and created a training and employment plan. After this, the order in which providers offered EPIC services or individuals completed services varied. Additionally, the availability of EPIC services varied slightly depending on the provider. Moreover, the three service models described earlier were less prescriptive than originally planned, and individuals followed pathways outside the models.

Exhibit IV.2. Pilot flow and pathways**1. Recruitment and enrollment**

Individuals receiving SNAP benefits learned about the pilot and EPIC services in a variety of ways, including from the IDHS website, marketing materials (such as brochures, posters, and flyers) that IDHS distributed internally and externally, and from IDHS partner organizations. IDHS staff also informed SNAP participants of the pilot during regularly scheduled communications, including the SNAP application and recertification process. All pilot enrollment office locations used monthly lists of pilot-eligible ABAWDs to identify individuals to call and send letters to, inviting them to an orientation. However, recruitment and outreach strategies and efforts also differed somewhat depending on whether the individuals being recruited were mandatory SNAP E&T work registrants. For example, Cook County required mandatory SNAP E&T work registrants to attend a SNAP E&T orientation to learn about EPIC services if they were newly applying for SNAP benefits or were a current SNAP participant but not actively engaged in existing SNAP E&T services. As a result, Cook County did not need to actively conduct extensive pilot outreach to meet their enrollment target; instead, they were able to rely on enrolling a percentage of the individuals who showed up for the required orientation.

The pilot exceeded its enrollment target of 5,000 and enrolled a total of 5,038 individuals by September 2017 but had some early recruitment challenges. Several enrollment staff reported difficulties inciting individuals' interest in EPIC services and getting them to go through pilot enrollment. Staff noted a variety of reasons for this, including that some individuals simply never showed up for orientation and others dropped out during enrollment because they felt the process was too long. Staff also suggested that the prospect of losing their SNAP benefits was not enough of a motivator for mandatory work registrants who were not interested in participating. Additionally, many staff reported that individuals wanted immediate employment rather than EPIC services. Most of these challenges were more commonly reported in pilot locations in smaller, more rural counties that did not serve mandatory SNAP E&T work registrants. After a slow start to enrollment in these locations, EPIC administrators revised the recruitment plan. To reach more people, EPIC administrators included additional outreach outside of the IDHS enrollment offices through hanging posters and distributing flyers in places such as community organizations, churches, barbershops, homeless shelters, food banks, and train stations.

Cook County, which had a pilot enrollment target of more than 3,500 individuals, also initially faced recruitment challenges. At first, pilot recruitment and enrollment activities were concentrated in one IDHS office on the south side of Chicago. This office was not easily accessible for individuals who resided in the various communities across the county, which likely limited the number of individuals showing up for orientation. To increase access and enrollment, EPIC administrators added seven new pilot enrollment locations spread throughout Cook county in summer 2016 and identified additional IDHS staff to assist with pilot recruitment and enrollment. EPIC administrators also designated additional IDHS offices to recruit and refer individuals to the eight pilot enrollment offices. Although these changes required additional staff training and resources, EPIC administrators reported that they resulted in an increase in enrollment and in the diversity of the individuals in the pilot. More than one Cook County provider noted that referrals from EPIC increased after the expansion of enrollment offices.

After recruitment, individuals attended an orientation to EPIC services. Then, interested and eligible individuals completed pre-random assignment enrollment activities to help determine services and a provider in the event that the individual was randomly assigned to the EPIC group. Individuals created a WorkNet profile and completed application, assessment, and career exploration activities to provide information about their education, employment history, interests, goals, and potential limitations or obstacles (for example, whether they could stand for several hours). Based on this information, WorkNet automatically identified potential occupational skills trainings for the individual.²⁶ Without identifying the EPIC providers, WorkNet then prompted individuals to rank the recommended trainings. Finally, enrollment staff, in consultation with the individual, determined the best occupational skills training based on interest, limitations, and needs. The enrollment staff then used their best judgement (including considerations of the proximity to individuals' residences or public transportation options) to match the individual to a provider that offered the chosen occupational skills training (again without identifying the CBO to the individual). Depending on the enrollment location, there may have been several provider options for a single training (such as in Cook County) or as few as one provider option.

²⁶ In addition to the basic pilot eligibility criteria (eligible for SNAP, 18 years or older, and residing in a county in the pilot), certain occupational skills trainings had additional entry requirements. If individuals indicated that they did not have a high school diploma or equivalent, for example, WorkNet filtered the potential trainings (and providers) to ones that offered adult basic education or General Education Diploma (GED) services.

The above pre-random assignment enrollment process was a result of changes and refinements in response to initially encountered challenges and unintended consequences. For example, EPIC administrators removed the National Occupational Competency Testing Institute 21st Century Skills for Workplace Success assessment (NOCTI), an in-depth assessment tool, from the enrollment process in summer 2016. Enrollment staff planned to use the NOCTI to help determine an individual's EPIC service model pathway but learned that EPIC providers still administered the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) after enrollment and before providing services because they felt the NOCTI assessment was not a reliable gauge of preparedness. In addition, the lengthy NOCTI often resulted in the entire enrollment process being stretched over two days. EPIC administrators indicated that the removal of the NOCTI resulted in fewer individuals dropping out during the enrollment process.

Additionally, the challenge of successfully matching individuals to occupational skills training and EPIC providers led to other early modifications. Enrollment staff did not have the necessary knowledge of each EPIC provider's occupational skills training requirements (such as attendance requirements or a required job readiness course) to provide sufficient guidance to individuals about selecting training. This was especially challenging in Cook County where there were about 50 different occupational skills trainings offered across the 15 different providers. EPIC provider staff said enrollment staff referred some individuals who were not committed to starting or ready for training and this led to disengagement or a lack of participation. One EPIC career navigator reported a frequent disconnection between individuals' education or past experience and the service prerequisites. A few EPIC group members who participated in a focus group said because they were not interested in any of the occupational skills training options, they simply selected the training suggested by enrollment staff knowing that they might not fully engage.

Unsuccessful matches were especially challenging and time consuming for the providers if the poorly matched EPIC group member did not meet the criteria for, or were not interested in, any of the EPIC provider's other training options as an alternative. In these cases, the provider had to refer the individual back to IDHS. Unsuccessful matches also hindered providers' abilities to meet the performance benchmarks stipulated in their agreement with DCEO.

To reduce the frequency of unsuccessful matches, EPIC administrators organized informational sessions for enrollment staff to learn about the providers' occupational skills trainings including the entry criteria and service participation requirements and expectations. EPIC administrators also revised the enrollment process and modified WorkNet to reduce the burden on enrollment staff in summer 2016. The modified WorkNet system provided more provider information to individuals during intake and better filtered occupational skills training options and providers based on an individual's responses to questionnaires and assessments. For instance, as a result of questionnaire revisions and system modifications, WorkNet more accurately filtered the list of available trainings if an individual did or did not have a driver's license or criminal justice history.

Although matches improved following these modifications, some of the above challenges remained. Some providers noted that IDHS sometimes still referred individuals who lacked knowledge about the provider's services and participation requirements, did not meet minimum education levels, or were not a good fit due to significant barriers such as substance use disorders.

2. Control group services and pathways

The availability of existing SNAP E&T services for control group members depended on the individual's county of residence. Immediately following random assignment, control group members who resided in 1

of the 18 counties that did not offer an existing SNAP E&T program were informed that they could access any other services available to anyone in their community—such as those offered at an American Job Center. Control group members who resided in 1 of the 15 counties that did offer an existing SNAP E&T program were referred to the existing SNAP E&T provider in their respective area (or, if slots were not available, individuals were told they could access any other services available to anyone in their community).

The existing SNAP E&T services were more limited than those offered in EPIC. Individuals had an IDHS caseworker who provided basic case management services, including help with developing an individualized employment plan (IEP), help addressing barriers to participation through support services such as childcare and transportation assistance, and referrals to community services. One provider noted in 2018 that they were no longer permitted to provide assistance with purchasing uniforms or tools under the existing SNAP E&T service. Caseworkers typically conducted monthly follow-up appointments, including job retention check-ins at 30, 60, and 90 days following employment.

Access to education activities included high school equivalency certification and adult basic education but access to, and funding for, occupational skills training was limited. Staff said existing SNAP E&T services were intended to help individuals find a job with the skills they already had. Existing SNAP E&T providers said in order to provide occupational skills training they had to leverage funding from outside sources such as WIOA. Individuals only had access to unsubsidized work experience in public or nonprofit entities. In Cook County, however, individuals could earn cash assistance and gain work experience for up to a maximum of \$294 per month through EarnFare. Some soft skills and life skills services were available through job readiness and job search activities but only when provided in conjunction with another allowable activity (such as basic education, technical training, EarnFare, work experience, or job retention).

Five of the existing SNAP E&T providers were also EPIC providers. Although these providers were expected to serve individuals according to EPIC group or control group status, interviews with staff suggested that the services actually offered to individuals in the two research groups did not always differ widely (beyond the availability of funding, as mentioned above).

3. EPIC group services and pathways

Immediately following random assignment, enrollment staff referred EPIC group members to the provider to which they had been matched before random assignment. The first appointment with the provider was usually an orientation to introduce the services and review participation requirements and expectations. Depending on the provider, some assessments were part of the orientation. Some providers also had additional orientations for specific occupational skills trainings. Following orientation, EPIC group members met with an EPIC career navigator to begin or continue the post-enrollment service assessment process. The length of the orientation and assessment process varied, from a reported four hours to more than a day.

All EPIC providers conducted further assessments to identify needs and determine appropriate services, but these assessments varied across providers. In some cases, providers used assessments to determine whether the individual was a good fit for and met the necessary criteria for the selected occupational skills training. For example, most providers used the TABE to identify education levels and determine service pathways. Some providers also required a drug test and verified the individual had a clean driver's license record, which was necessary for commercial driver's license (CDL) training enrollment. EPIC provider

also conducted assessments, such as the Work Readiness Index assessment and mental health assessments, to help identify potential obstacles to participation and employment. At the conclusion of initial assessment activities, an Individualized Services Training and Employment Plan (ISTEP) was created.

As described previously, the pilot design included three EPIC service models. However, use of these models became less prescriptive as the pilot evolved and EPIC services were not constrained to one of these models. Additionally, few individuals enrolled with interest of pursuing service model three, which was meant to serve employed individuals seeking additional certifications and advancement. Although WorkNet factored in service model considerations (such as the need for adult basic education or GED services) when filtering and matching individuals to potential occupational skills trainings and providers, the enrollment process did not generate enough information to finalize a service model pathway as originally planned. One reason for this was the removal of the NOCTI assessment from the enrollment process, which led to a less rigorous pre-random assignment assessment. As a result, the decision about what services to offer an individual was made by the provider after that provider conducted further assessments. For example, one provider said if an individual had a low TABE score, they sometimes went straight to direct job placement. Other providers had high school credential and/or minimum TABE score requirements for some occupational skills trainings and offered remedial education to help increase basic education skills.

As indicated in Exhibit IV.1, individuals could take several different pathways toward employment. Although some individuals may have progressed through services according to one of the service models, many did not. EPIC providers found that individuals were often only interested in immediate employment and thus went straight to job readiness, job search, and job placement activities without participating in any occupational skills trainings or education activity. EPIC, however, was not intended to serve individuals interested only in job placement, which posed challenges. Many providers did not want to provide placement services until EPIC group members completed other services such as job readiness classes—they wanted to ensure they only referred job-ready individuals to employers. This sometimes led to disengagement if the individual was not interested or willing to participate in these other services. In some instances, the provider referred the individual back to the enrollment staff for a referral to a different provider that did not have these types of specific service participation requirements.

Individuals chose their preferred occupational skills training during the pre-random assignment enrollment process, but the exact services they received depended on the provider. For example, not every provider offered the same services. Additionally, providers varied how or when they provided some services. As noted above, some providers required individuals to complete certain activities as a prerequisite to other services. Other providers offered additional services beyond those they agreed to provide for EPIC. This mainly included additional support services but sometimes included other services that the CBO offered through other funding sources. The rest of this section describes EPIC services in detail.

Education. EPIC group members without the basic skill level needed to enter a particular occupational skills training were referred to an EPIC provider that offered ESL services, adult basic education, or options to attain a high school equivalency certification, as necessary. Some occupational skills trainings integrated adult basic education into the training. EPIC providers either provided these services directly or referred individuals to, or contracted with, other organizations or agencies in the community.

Occupational skills training. EPIC focused on providing short-term occupational skills training in high-demand and high-growth industries that led to industry-recognized credentials, such as the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) credential and the Computer Numerically Controlled (CNC) machining credential. Occupational skills training was expected to be a central component of EPIC and to distinguish EPIC services from control group services. EPIC providers directly offered—or connected EPIC group members to other institutions (for example, local providers or community colleges) that offered a wide array of trainings including, but not limited to, CNA training and other medical certifications, culinary arts, carpentry, CDL, welding, CNC machining, and administrative assistant. Some providers specialized in one occupational skills training, while most of the providers (such as those outside of Cook County) offered several different training options. Occupational skills trainings ranged from about 6 to 20 weeks, depending on the type of training and provider. Additionally, some trainings were self-paced and thus the start time and duration varied by individual. However, other trainings were cohort based and/or had set start and end dates throughout the year.

Work-based learning. Some EPIC providers connected EPIC group members to work experience, on-the-job training (OJT), or subsidized work before, during, or after they received other services or participated in other activities such as occupational skills training. The types of work-based learning opportunities and the duration of these activities varied by provider. A few EPIC providers offered work-based learning opportunities with the provider itself. Other providers had a relationship with employers and would connect individuals to eight-to-ten-week OJT or work experience opportunities after occupational skills training—with the intent that the employer would hire the individual upon completion. Another provider offered eight weeks of paid work experience (\$10/hour for 20 hours/week) using funds from a separate grant. Some providers sought out short term work-based learning opportunities to keep individuals engaged while they waited for occupational skills training to start.

An EPIC group member's experience

One EPIC group member was able to translate his work-based learning experience into a permanent full-time position with the same employer.

Before enrolling in the pilot, he had been out of work for over a year due to an injury. He was interested in immediate employment and had a diverse work history but had found it difficult to obtain a job on his own. Shortly after applying for SNAP benefits he was notified by letter that he was eligible for EPIC. He contacted IDHS, enrolled in the EPIC pilot, and was referred to a local provider for construction training.

He attended two weeks of job search at the provider during which he set up an email account and developed a resume. He was then placed in a paid work-based learning experience. He worked alongside a skilled maintenance worker for two months who oversaw the upkeep of rental properties and a commercial office facility. He learned how to repair faulty plumbing, install electrical wiring, build out an office space, put up drywall, and more. Based on the experience gained on the job and his performance, he was able to translate this work-based learning experience into a permanent position.

At the time of the interview, he had been promoted to the position of maintenance supervisor. He credited his time with the employer as life changing. He now earns enough to cover his living costs, including owning a car to get to work, and no longer receives SNAP benefits. He was extremely satisfied with his EPIC experience and the skills he obtained. He said he communicated with his career navigator almost daily and attributed the level of support he received to helping him get back on his feet.

Employment services. EPIC providers offered job readiness training, job search assistance, job development, and other various short-term employment services to EPIC group members, although the exact services, as well as the availability of those services, varied by provider. Services included workshops or classes on computer literacy, digital literacy, financial literacy, life skills, job readiness, and job search. All EPIC group members had access to certain parts of WorkNet—which included, for example, the online Employment 101 pre-employment services course—but providers also convened job clubs and provided connections to employment. These services were provided before, during, or after occupational skills training or education activities, depending on the provider and the individual’s situation and needs. Many providers required all individuals to complete a job readiness training course before providing other services. Some providers had job developers or other specialized employment services staff that worked with EPIC group members and built relationships with employers. Some of these employment staff specialized in helping individuals with criminal justice backgrounds. At one provider, employment coaches conducted assessments after an individual completed training to identify employment interests and requirements and helped individuals develop a resume. At another provider, job developers sometimes set up job interviews for individuals and asked the employer whether there was anything that she/he could do to help the job seeker. This sometimes gave the EPIC group member helpful insider information about the employer’s needs and wants. Providers received EPIC funds based on placement rate benchmarks which incentivized a focus on placement services.

EPIC provider staff indicated that local labor market and economic conditions had improved in the last year of the pilot. Staff said there were job openings but that the improved conditions made it harder for EPIC group members with low education levels, lack of skills, or lack of experience. Some staff suggested skills training was not sufficient because certain employers also wanted experience—something they said many EPIC group members lacked.

Case management. Case management services, provided by EPIC career navigators at the provider, were intended to be intensive, thorough, career focused, and structured. Career navigators worked with EPIC group members to assess their skills and interests, set goals, help keep them on track to accomplish goals, and help them get a job after completing occupational skills training. One EPIC administrator said, “Career navigation requires both the [EPIC] staff and the [individual] to be more engaged and more proactive” than the case management in the existing SNAP E&T program, and the career navigator is there to “help the [individual] navigate to the goal” and to support them to overcome any challenges. However, one provider said case management services are almost the same for EPIC and the existing SNAP E&T program.

EPIC did not have requirements for the intensity of case management, but career navigators and EPIC group members said they kept in regular contact. For example, some career navigators asked or required individuals to contact them weekly or bi-weekly via telephone, text, or email—or even more often if the individual was working through challenges. Other career navigators met in-person with individuals when they picked up their transportation assistance. Career navigators said that in addition to helping individuals overcome any obstacles and providing support services, they also kept in contact to monitor and hold individuals accountable for their attendance and punctuality in occupational skills training. One provider used a point system to monitor attendance and encouraged compliance by attempting to simulate a work environment. Individuals clocked in and out every day and had to submit time off requests if needed. EPIC providers that used external occupational skills trainings often received regular attendance and progress reports from the training provider.

Support services. Enrollment staff offered transportation assistance to help EPIC group members travel to the EPIC providers, but most support services were delivered by providers. EPIC career navigators provided a range of support services (there were no restrictions on what kind of support services they could provide), including transportation assistance; housing assistance; and assistance with obtaining uniforms, tools or job equipment, eyeglasses, and job interview clothing. At least one provider offered child care on site and, as needed, another provider co-enrolled EPIC group members in a program that included child care funds. Providers also referred individuals to outside resources for services such as substance use disorder counseling and criminal record expungement.

In response to challenges and concerns regarding increased barriers affecting EPIC participation, EPIC administrators increased the total cap on support services from \$500 to \$1,000 in Spring 2017 so that EPIC group members could get additional assistance. Some providers offered additional support services by using funding from sources outside of EPIC. Others noted that providing support services was contingent upon the EPIC group member having demonstrated engagement and progress. This may explain why a few EPIC group members indicated in focus groups that they were unaware that EPIC provided financial assistance for transportation.

Retention. After an EPIC group member became employed, EPIC providers continued regular communication to offer case management and support services. One provider engaged EPIC group members one week following the placement followed by bi-weekly contact until about 45 days post placement. Thereafter, staff only made periodic contacts as needed. In some cases, EPIC provider staff said they also contacted employers on behalf of an individual to find out how the individual was performing, for example, or to help resolve an issue. All providers offered 90 days of retention services, but at least one provider offered retention services for up to 180 days, for which they used funding from outside the pilot.

4. EPIC services management, partnerships, and communication

The collaboration between IDHS, DCEO, SIUCWD, and the EPIC providers was viewed positively by partner and provider staff. Many staff acknowledged that it was challenging for the different organizations to work together on such a complex initiative but thought it had worked relatively well, with each organization bringing its expertise and perspective. After the beginning of pilot enrollment, IDHS assumed the overall management role, but day-to-day management was directly supervised at the local IDHS offices or EPIC providers. The IDHS project manager monitored the enrollment staff but as a contracted employee the IDHS project manager did not have the authority to make key decisions and did not have any supervisory authority over the enrollment staff. Additionally, the IDHS project manager did not have any supervisory authority over the IDHS regional office managers that the pilot relied on to help monitor the enrollment staff. DCEO administrators monitored the performance of EPIC providers, and SIUCWD staff managed the WorkNet system and data aspects of the project and monitored data entry and service completion via WorkNet.

Of the 24 EPIC providers, 6 stopped participating before the end of the pilot. Some CBOs closed and others left due to a lack of steady referrals. One CBO left because the EPIC administrators discovered some fiscal issues. Late in the pilot (mid 2018), the second largest pilot location (Rockford) lost its only provider—it went out of business—and IDHS and its partners did not find a replacement provider. This left the portion of the EPIC group members that remained active with no access to EPIC services in that

area.²⁷ IDHS staff referred individuals to WIOA program providers in the area, but this included a different set of services than was offered under EPIC.

EPIC administrators reported that frequent, scheduled communication was an important part of the collaboration. EPIC staff participated in a weekly call that included key administrators from each of the partners, a weekly call for all of the IDHS administrators and regional supervisors involved in the pilot, and a DCEO-led biweekly webinar for the enrollment staff and the EPIC provider staff. Many staff reported high satisfaction with webinars. The WorkNet system was a primary means of communication, especially for EPIC provider staff and enrollment staff to communicate about a particular individual, as necessary. Automatic messaging tools were built into WorkNet. For example, if an EPIC group member became SNAP ineligible (and thus ineligible for EPIC services), an email and a WorkNet message were sent to the enrollment staff, the EPIC career navigator, and the EPIC group member. Also, once enrollment staff scheduled an individual for the initial appointment with the provider in WorkNet, WorkNet sent an email to the individual and a message to the EPIC provider. Staff could also use WorkNet to trigger a message or email to other staff.

Some staff reported initial challenges but said that relationships between IDHS and the providers significantly improved as EPIC matured. For example, staff suggested that certain aspects of communication between the organizations could have been stronger. EPIC provider staff reported that it was hard to get responses from enrollment staff regarding questions about policy or procedures, particularly regarding sanctioning for noncompliance. Some staff appreciated DCEO staff's ability to help facilitate effective communication and collaboration among the partners and providers.

5. EPIC group service and participation trends

The length of time over which EPIC group members received EPIC services varied, depending on the individual, the occupational skills training, the individual's educational needs, and EPIC provider requirements. EPIC did not stipulate limits on the amount of time an individual could receive EPIC services, but some providers had their own guidelines. As an example, some occupational skills trainings were 20 weeks, but total service receipt length was sometimes longer if an individual was required to also attend job readiness classes or needed to address educational deficiencies. One provider offered three weeks of job readiness training, five weeks of occupational skills training (including job search and job development), and then six months of post-employment services. At some providers, individuals exited after 90 days of employment; at other providers, individuals exited after 120 days of employment.

Drop-off points and exits. Several staff reported that they faced challenges with getting or keeping EPIC group members engaged in EPIC services. As noted previously, this was sometimes because of provider participation requirements in activities that the individual was not interested in completing, or because the individual was not interested in occupational skills training and only wanted placement services in order to obtain immediate employment. One EPIC career navigator explained that if individuals started occupational skills training, they usually stayed engaged; however, sometimes individuals had to wait for the occupational skills training to start, and this caused disengagement. A few EPIC group members who participated in a focus group mentioned this challenge. This sometimes happened, for example, because the provider needed to wait for more students to fill a class or because a new class only started at set

²⁷ EPIC enrolled a total of about 275 EPIC group members in the Rockport pilot area.

intervals. Some EPIC providers used this time to offer other activities or services, such as job readiness training, to keep individuals engaged.

Some EPIC providers required individuals to complete services or activities (such as job readiness training) before, after, or during occupational skills training, and if individuals did not want to take part in these other services or activities, they sometimes became disengaged. This was often the case with individuals who needed immediate employment. Some individuals could not afford to go without a paycheck for the duration of occupational skills training (and potentially other required activities), so they would seek employment, and once they started a job, they became disengaged; some providers utilized paid work experience to mitigate this issue. If an individual started working (full time or part time), they were more likely to have EPIC activity attendance issues. A few EPIC group members who participated in a focus group mentioned this challenge. One of these individuals said, “Every day I think to myself, ‘Can I stick it out until [the end of training]?’ It is difficult. All I am doing is creating debt.”

Dropouts occurred at different points in the pilot flow. One EPIC administrator reported that there was a large drop-off between enrollment and the first appointment with the EPIC provider, and then significant drop-off following that first appointment. An EPIC career navigator reported that about 30 percent of the individuals referred to that provider never showed up for the first appointment, and another 20 percent attended the first appointment but then dropped out afterwards. One EPIC administrator estimated that only about “50 percent of those who start will finish.”

After enrollment ended in September 2017, IDHS and its partners and providers focused their attention on re-engaging individuals that dropped off at various points for various reasons. For example, they established a process in which each month staff reached out to individuals who appeared on a list of those who remained SNAP eligible or who lost eligibility but later became eligible for SNAP benefits again. Sometimes IDHS referred re-engaged individuals to a different provider in an effort to better match their interests. However, despite staff efforts, they faced challenges re-engaging individuals after they left EPIC. Staff noted several reasons for the re-engagement challenges, including unstable home lives, health issues, and low education levels that would require remedial classes delaying the start of occupational skills training. Towards the end of the pilot implementation period, staff became constrained in its re-engagement efforts because there were few occupational skills training options that an individual could complete in the remaining months left of EPIC services.

As noted above, mandatory SNAP E&T work registrants had to participate in services in order to continue receiving SNAP benefits if they lived in a county that offered existing SNAP E&T services.²⁸ If a mandatory SNAP E&T work registrant failed to comply with EPIC service participation requirements (without good cause), EPIC provider staff were responsible for indicating this in WorkNet and then the enrollment staff were responsible for implementing the conciliation appointments and possible sanctions.²⁹ For example, individuals in noncompliance first attended a conciliation appointment. Both EPIC provider staff and enrollment staff had the responsibility to re-engage the individual. If the

²⁸ Mandatory SNAP E&T work registrants who lived in one of the 18 counties that did not offer existing SNAP E&T services and chose to participate in the pilot were not subject to conciliation or sanctioning if they failed to engage in services. These individuals were considered exempt, and participation in SNAP E&T services in this case was considered “voluntary.”

²⁹ A mandatory SNAP E&T work registrant can provide a “good cause” reason, such as illness or incapacity, for failure to comply with SNAP E&T program requirements.

individual failed to attend the conciliation appointment, they then were subject to sanctioning and disqualification from SNAP benefits for three months, after which they could reapply.

The SNAP sanctioning process was challenging in EPIC, due to a lack of clarity regarding the policy and procedures and the roles and responsibilities of the enrollment staff versus the EPIC provider staff. In addition, poor communication between the enrollment staff and EPIC providers likely contributed to the challenge. For example, some staff at IDHS and the EPIC providers reported that after entering updates in WorkNet, their counterparts (at either IDHS or an EPIC provider) would not respond or take action. In response to this challenge, EPIC administrators created a policy and procedures document in December 2016 detailing the sanctioning policy and staff responsibilities and encouraged all staff to work together to address noncompliance. EPIC administrators also implemented monthly “staffings,” in which EPIC provider staff and enrollment staff discussed each individual case. Overall, these staffings seemed to be effective but they were also extremely time consuming. Initially, the provider met in person with staff from all referring IDHS offices in one location, but changes required the providers to instead go to each IDHS office separately. Service provider staff said these staffings sometimes required staff to lose several hours of their day to travel time and this “got in the way of serving” individuals. Eventually, EPIC administrators allowed providers serving fewer than five EPIC group members to conduct staffings over the phone.

Participation trends. EPIC provider staff cited many different challenges that individuals confronted in engaging with EPIC services or in obtaining or maintaining employment, including a lack of work experience, technical skills or certifications, basic education, or workplace skills. Additionally, staff said many individuals needed to take care of family members; had unstable home lives or housing, health issues, criminal justice histories, substance use disorders, or transportation issues; or lacked child care support. A few EPIC group members who participated in a focus group indicated that transportation was the greatest challenge in finding and keeping employment. EPIC provided several support services, such as transportation assistance, to help mitigate some of these barriers. Sometimes, however, individuals did not have access to public transportation or to a car. Exacerbating the transportation issue was the long distance that some individuals had to travel via car or public transportation to get to an EPIC provider. A few EPIC group members who participated in a focus group mentioned this challenge. They talked about having to travel long distances to receive services and noted that they sometimes had to travel to multiple locations; this was likely because the occupational skills training was at a different provider than the EPIC provider from which they received case management and other EPIC services. In response to these challenges and concerns, EPIC administrators increased the total cap on support services from \$500 to \$1,000 in spring 2017.

Lack of engagement was reported to be more prevalent among individuals who volunteered to enroll without any participation requirements than among individuals who were mandatory SNAP E&T work registrants. This sentiment aligned with the reasons a few EPIC group members who participated in a focus group gave for agreeing to participate in the pilot. Rather than saying that they wanted to participate in occupational skills training, they stressed that they were required to participate in SNAP E&T services to continue receiving SNAP benefits.

6. Staffing

Turnover among IDHS administrators and delays in hiring replacements made oversight and coordination challenging. Two key IDHS administrators involved in planning the pilot, one of whom oversaw all the regional IDHS offices, left IDHS and were not immediately replaced. Additionally, consistent turnover

among enrollment staff hindered relationships and communication with the providers and required EPIC administrators to spend a significant amount of time providing ongoing training on WorkNet and EPIC processes and policies.

Separately, enrollment staff struggled to balance their regular responsibilities with the new pilot recruitment and enrollment responsibilities. For example, staff faced challenges matching individuals to services and providers. As such, EPIC administrators suggested that, in retrospect, it might have been better to have hired workforce development staff to conduct pilot recruitment and enrollment. Alternatively, they suggested they could have provided more substantial training to better prepare the IDHS staff for the additional workload required by the pilot.

Some providers also had staffing challenges. For example, one provider lost a career navigator because the lack of EPIC referrals led to a lack of work. Other providers said they needed additional career navigators, but the budget precluded them from hiring any.

7. Performance management

As noted elsewhere, WorkNet was a comprehensive MIS that EPIC staff used to capture individual-level and aggregate-level data from the enrollment process through to EPIC exit. Staff also used WorkNet to monitor individuals' and EPIC providers' performance. For example, staff tracked enrollment in WorkNet and used reports to help identify enrollment drop-off points, such as orientation no-shows. Additionally, EPIC provider staff entered and updated EPIC group member service participation information. Capturing this data allowed all EPIC staff to use WorkNet service participation and completion reports to monitor individuals' progress, noncompliance among mandatory SNAP E&T work registrants, and provider performance. WorkNet was also critical communication tool between staff. EPIC administrators said the data allowed them to identify connections between credentials and employment as well as to monitor for sector trends that could influence future service provisions.

WorkNet was generally viewed as very helpful. Many staff reported that it contained a great deal of information about EPIC group members and that it was helpful that staff from the various partners and providers involved in the pilot also had access to that information in real-time. Staff said WorkNet helped them organize their caseload, easily monitor EPIC group member status, and provided helpful reminders. However, staff also reported some issues and challenges with WorkNet. For example, during enrollment it required additional updates and changes, and it continued to undergo modifications throughout the pilot, mostly to account for policy and procedure updates. Thus, though EPIC administrators provided extensive training to staff on how to use WorkNet, including on an ongoing basis, some staff reported challenges keeping up with the system changes. In addition, many staff reported that it was very time-consuming to enter all of the required information and it diverted them from serving individuals, especially because they needed to enter data into multiple systems; in addition to WorkNet, staff usually needed to document information in other IDHS or CBO systems.³⁰

³⁰ Starting in 2018, WorkNet was used to capture control group member participation in existing SNAP E&T as well.

D. Sustainability and replicability

Staff reflections regarding their experience implementing EPIC and their insights regarding EPIC's sustainability and replicability are summarized below.

- **Need strong systems for collaboration and communication among partners and providers.** Staff said EPIC has created a community of communication and collaboration. They attributed some of this to WorkNet, characterizing it as a useful source of information on the individuals participating in EPIC services and said it was a valuable tool to facilitate communication among the EPIC partners and providers. Staff believed a system like WorkNet, that helps track and share data and serves as a communication tool, is essential to sustaining effective collaboration between State agencies and local CBO providers. At the same time, some providers indicated room for increasing and strengthening communication, especially regarding IDHS policy and procedures such as those related to sanctioning. Staff also suggested that provider involvement in planning discussions could be helpful.
- **Staffing is critical and requires substantial effort.** Staff suggested the need for continued attention to IDHS staffing. For example, they learned that they needed to anticipate and prepare for a significant amount of time dedicated to hiring and training staff due to high turnover. However, staff also suggested that having a more well-defined job description for the enrollment staff position and even having additional dedicated IDHS staff to focus on engagement and re-engagement issues could reduce turnover. IDHS staff felt like their plates were completely full and that the work related to EPIC was an added burden.
- **Develop a better system for integrating IDHS and SNAP policy.** EPIC providers found that navigating IDHS and SNAP policy was challenging and time-consuming. Staff reported that some policies were confusing. For example, staff said that there was confusion (even at the State level) about the distinction between ABAWDs and work registrants. Staff also reported that policies, such as the one that stipulated that paid work experience could make an individual ineligible for SNAP and thus ineligible for EPIC, did not align with the goals of workforce development. Sanctioning policy and procedures were especially challenging for all staff. EPIC providers wanted to focus on engaging everyone and providing services without regard for SNAP eligibility, but mandatory E&T participation requirements created an added consideration. Staff stressed the importance of having a good understanding of policy from the start but suggested that a short pilot planning period that did not include the providers made this difficult. Staff also noted that the ongoing changes in the policies contributed to challenges. Staff said that clear roles and responsibilities need to be established as well as a less burdensome method of tracking and communicating individuals' program participation status.
- **Increase initial engagement efforts.** Staff noted that individuals who show up for the first appointment with a provider are more likely to engage and those who do not are more likely to drop-off completely. Thus, staff suggested increased efforts to ensure individuals attend the first appointment with the providers. Additionally, staff suggested that better connections between individuals participating in EPIC and a provider are more likely to result in increased engagement. Staff said incorporating a reverse referral system would help ensure better connections and increased engagement.
- **Better aligning individuals to providers and occupational skills trainings.** Almost all staff mentioned the need to increase upfront assessments and screening. Staff suggested using dedicated

staff from a third-party partner or the service provider to conduct the upfront assessment and screening rather than IDHS staff.

Staff stressed that individuals should only be referred to those providers that can provide the services that match the individuals needs and interests. For example, some providers offer robust support services to address barriers such as substance use disorders while others expect to immediately enroll individuals into training. Thus, individuals that are not ready to begin training should be referred to a provider that has the capacity to support them and help stabilize them so they can begin training. Additionally, if an individual does not have a GED or the needed level of basic education skills, they should not be referred to occupational skills training that has education requirements unless the provider also offers those services. Similarly, staff said individuals who are only interested in immediate employment should be referred to providers that offer those services. Staff also suggested that the provider location and travel distances be considered when making the referral to avoid circumstances where an individual has to travel hours to get to the provider.

Staff also noted the importance of fully informing individuals about the providers and their services before making a referral. Staff said individuals must understand all expectations and participation requirements to ensure engagement. For example, some providers require individuals to complete soft skills training prior to occupational skills training and if the individual is not interested in doing so, they should not be referred to that provider.

E. Key implementation analysis findings

Key findings from the implementation analysis are summarized below.

- **Using existing IDHS staff, as opposed to hiring new staff with relevant qualifications, for pilot recruitment and enrollment led to early and ongoing challenges.** The pilot added enrollment responsibilities to existing IDHS staff leading to workload and understaffing issues that contributed to a slow start to enrollment. In addition, the use of staff who were initially unfamiliar with the SNAP E&T program as well as with the various EPIC services and EPIC provider expectations and requirements contributed to an ongoing central challenge: how to best match individuals to particular occupational skills trainings and providers (especially in Cook County, which had the largest number of providers).
- **Given the evaluation constraints on the originally proposed pilot enrollment design, the pilot had to develop alternate methods of assessing and matching individuals to services.** Evaluation concerns with providing individuals who could end up in the control group with too much service option information before random assignment put limitations on the thoroughness of the planned upfront information dissemination. In addition, more extensive assessments, for example, including the TABE, likely would have helped improve the matches between individuals and the occupational skills trainings and providers. Instead, more rigorous screening and assessment did not occur until after individuals were randomly assigned to the EPIC group and referred to an EPIC provider.
- **The flexibility offered by the pilot allowed staff to respond to challenges, helping it to exceed enrollment targets.** EPIC administrators were responsive to pilot recruitment and enrollment issues and changed and improved procedures over time in order to address challenges. For example, EPIC administrators increased the number of enrollment offices, removed ineffective and time-consuming assessments, and altered the enrollment process to improve pilot operations.

- **Having a robust and comprehensive MIS was critical to facilitating collaboration and communication between partners and providers.** WorkNet helped facilitate implementation of pilot enrollment and EPIC service delivery. WorkNet allowed for centralized and accessible means of collaboration and communication for all EPIC staff and facilitated collaboration around engaging and serving individuals as well as monitoring participation and executing noncompliance sanctions.
- **Allowing EPIC to evolve enabled it to meet the needs of all EPIC group members.** The pilot design included three EPIC service model pathways, but these pathways became less prescriptive as EPIC evolved. Rather than the enrollment staff definitively identifying each person's service model pathway before random assignment, service pathways were determined by the providers after more rigorous assessments. As a result, some individuals were served outside the service models entirely. For example, though it was not initially an intended pathway, EPIC also assisted individuals with finding immediate employment rather than first participating in occupational skills training and education activities for those who wanted immediate employment or could not afford to forgo employment while participating in time-intensive occupational skills trainings.

V. Participation Analysis

In this chapter, we present findings on the services that EPIC group members received and the employment or training-related activities in which they chose to participate. Using the administrative service use data recorded by service providers, we examine overall engagement in EPIC, the types of activities in which individuals participated, the order in which they typically proceeded through them, and how long they spent in each type of activity. The chapter also presents details about participation in education, occupational skills training, and work-based learning activities; support services received; receipt and intensity of case management services; and the timing of and reasons for exiting EPIC. In addition, to account for potential differences in the implementation and availability of services for those enrolled at different times, we estimated several service receipt measures by enrollment timing to describe differences in participation between those who enrolled in the pilot earlier compared to those who enrolled later.³¹ Appendix D contains additional data on the characteristics of those who did or did not complete activities and a discussion of service receipt among subgroups, based on characteristics at the time of random assignment, as indicated in the baseline registration form.

A. Participation in EPIC

During the enrollment process, individuals worked with IDHS staff to pick a CBO that would provide them with services if they were assigned to the EPIC group. Once assigned, individuals were scheduled for an initial meeting with their CBO to learn about the provider's services and expectations, and, in some cases, begin the intake assessment process. At a subsequent meeting, EPIC group members worked with their provider's EPIC career navigator to either continue or begin the CBO's intake assessment process. Although the assessment process varied by CBO, EPIC group members were commonly assessed using the TABE, Work Readiness Index, or other mental health assessments. EPIC group members finished the intake process by working with their career navigator to complete the ISTEP. Following the intake process, EPIC group members received any of the following services from their service provider: (1) education, (2) occupational skills training, (3) work-based learning, (3) employment services consisting of job search, job search training, and social services, (4) personalized case management, (5) support services, and (6) post-employment services. The services EPIC group members actually received varied depending on the services provided by their CBO and the interests and needs of the individual.

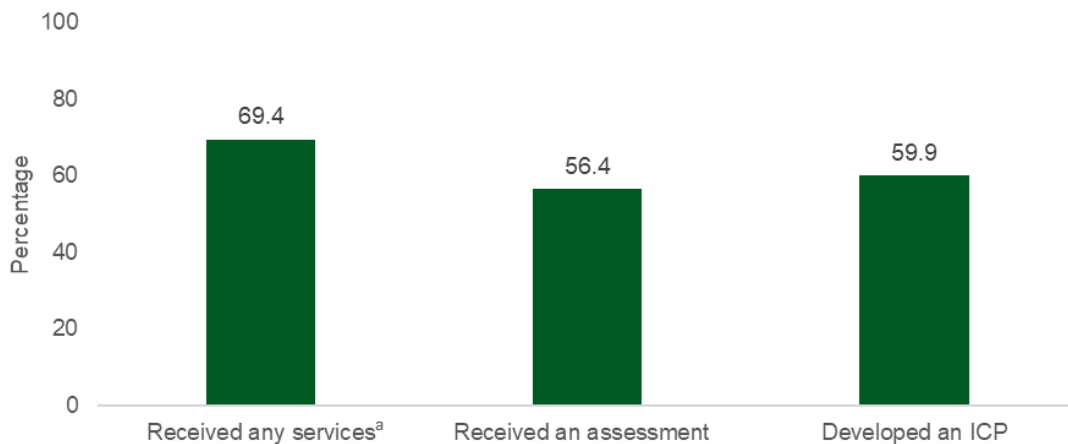
After random assignment, most EPIC group members received services and completed assessments.

³¹ The EPIC pilot enrollment spanned over a roughly 18-month period but the service period was fixed. Consequently, the service period for individuals who enrolled later was shorter than for those who enrolled earlier. For example, individuals who enrolled in 2016 could have received services up to 36 months. In contrast, those who enrolled in 2017 could only receive services up to 27 months. This range is large across the entire pool of EPIC group members (Appendix Table D.1), but all of the group (100 percent) had a potential window of at least 12 months in which to receive services, and more than half (57 percent) was enrolled early enough to allow for 24 months of services. However, the actual participation rates show that only 27 percent of EPIC group members participated in services for 12 months, and 7 percent participated for 24 months. Therefore, the variation in service period does not appear to have affected actual participation in services (Appendix Table D.1).

1. Overall engagement in EPIC

Most individuals in the EPIC group (69 percent) received services, meaning they started an assessment or an employment or training-related activity or received a support service provided by EPIC (Exhibit V.1).³² EPIC group members who did receive services either successfully attended their intake appointments and then were assessed or engaged with other activities offered by their service provider or received support services from IDHS following random assignment. When comparing the baseline characteristics (age, gender, race and ethnicity, education, employment status, and presence of children in the household) of individuals who did and did not receive services, we find few differences between the two groups; the same was true for individuals who did and did not receive an assessment (Appendix Table D.11). For example, women were more likely to receive services than men, and individuals with a post-secondary education degree and those in households without children were less likely to be assessed than their subgroup counterparts.

Exhibit V.1. Percentage of EPIC group members who engaged in services



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,504 EPIC group members.

^a "Received any services" measures engagement in activities, including assessments, employment or training-related activities, and support services; the measure does not include orientations, case management, and developing an individual career plan (ICP), because individuals often engaged once to meet with a case manager or develop an ICP, but then did not return for more meaningful activities and services.

ICP = Individual career plan

Length and timing of engagement. On average, individuals in the EPIC group who engaged in services spent about five months (160 days) in the pilot (Appendix Table D.4). Overall, most individuals began receiving services within the first quarter after random assignment (64 percent), with the remaining individuals mainly engaging between Quarters 2 and 3 (Appendix Table D.5).

³² The measure does not include orientations, case management, or the creation of an ICP because individuals often engaged in these activities during their initial meeting with their CBO for the EPIC program but then did not return for more meaningful activities and services.

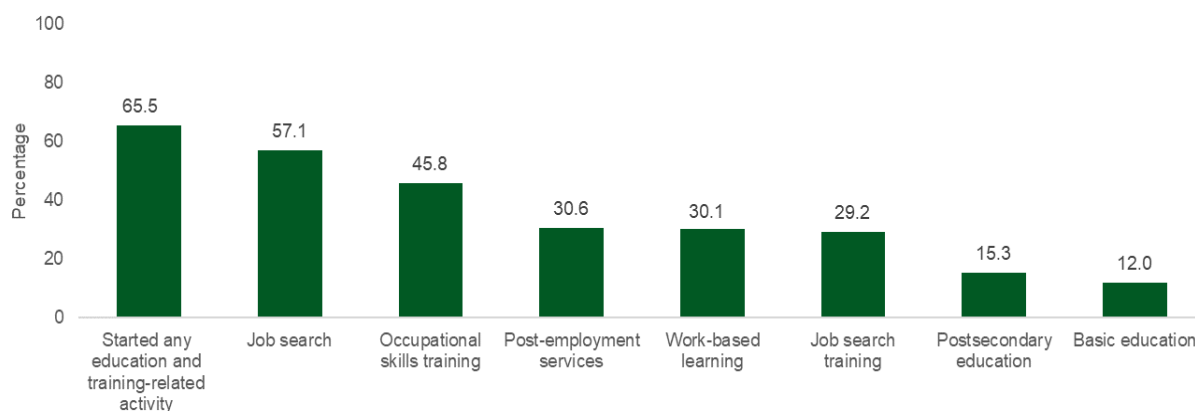
2. Engagement in activities

As mentioned above, most EPIC group members received some services offered by the EPIC program. A similar proportion of the EPIC group (66 percent) started an employment or training-related activity (Exhibit V.2). Individuals most commonly started job search (57 percent) activities and nearly half of group members started occupational skills training (46 percent). Fewer individuals participated in post-employment services (31 percent), work-based learning (30 percent), job search training (29 percent), and post-secondary and basic education (15 and 12 percent, respectively).

Most EPIC group members participated in an activity and most of those who started one completed it. Job search activities were most commonly started and completed.

Among those who started an activity, 77 percent of individuals completed at least one activity (Appendix Table D.2). However, completion rates varied by type of activity. Most individuals participating in job search, post-employment services, and job search training completed them (73, 67, and 66 percent, respectively), while other activities had lower completion rates ranging from 30 percent (post-secondary education) to 51 percent (occupational skills training; Exhibit V.3). There were a few significant differences among the characteristics of those who did and did not complete the most popular activities (Appendix Table D.12). For example, males, Black, non-Hispanic individuals, and those without a high school diploma or equivalency certificate were less likely to complete a job search activity than their subgroup counterparts.

Exhibit V.2. Percentage of EPIC group members who started an activity



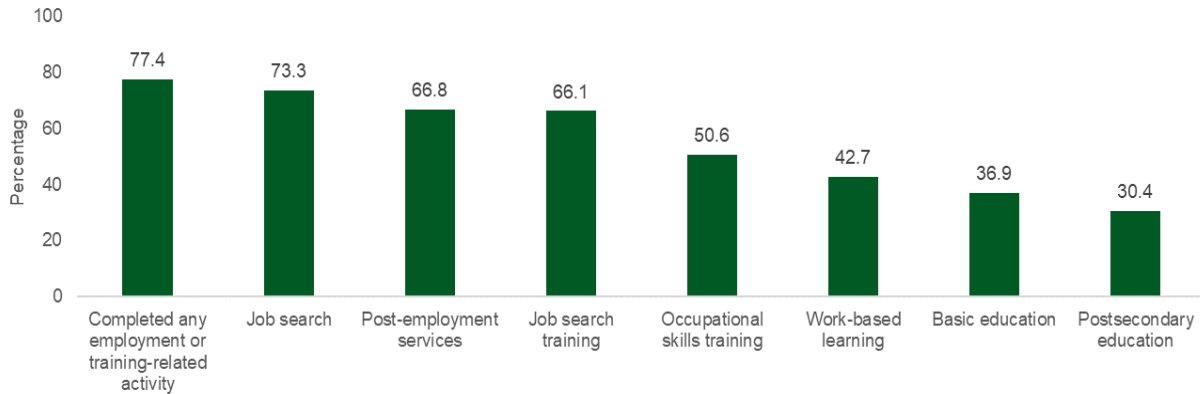
Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,504 EPIC group members.

Length and timing of engagement. Individuals in the EPIC group who started an activity spent an average of two to three months participating, depending on the activity (Appendix Table D.4). Individuals spent the most time in post-employment services (83 days) and the least in job search (48 days). Individuals tended to spend, on average, two to three months in other common activities such as work-based learning and occupational skills training (72 and 63 days, respectively). Although most individuals started an activity in the first quarter after random assignment (57 percent), the remaining 8 percent started activities between Quarters 2 and 6 (Appendix Table D.5). There was more variation in the timing of activity completion—the largest percentage of those who started an activity completed it in the first

quarter (35 percent), but many also completed activities in Quarter 2 (8 percent), and the remaining completed activities in Quarters 3 to 8 (7 percent).

Exhibit V.3. Percentage of EPIC group members who completed an activity, among those who started one



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,504 EPIC group members.

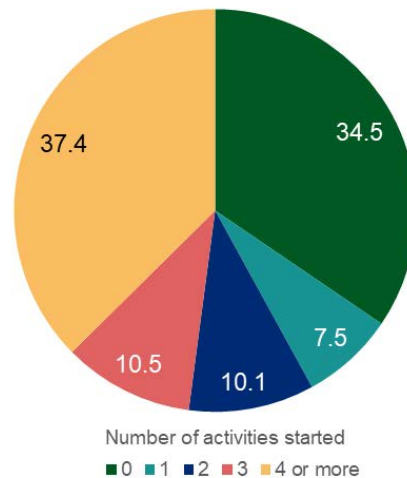
Number and order of activities. Exhibit V.4 shows that a large proportion of EPIC group members did not start an employment or training-related activity (35 percent). By contrast, those who engaged in EPIC tended to start multiple activities, with 37 percent of EPIC group members engaging in four or more activities. Many individuals who participated in employment or training-related activities started multiple activities on the same day (40 percent; Appendix Table D.4). These individuals most frequently started a combination of job search, occupational skills training, and job search training on the same day. EPIC group members who started their activity sequence with just one activity commonly started job search first (33 percent; Appendix Table D.4). Fewer individuals first started occupation skills training (9 percent), basic education (5 percent), post-employment services (4 percent), or work-based learning (3 percent). EPIC was not intended to serve individuals who were only interested in job placement. However, many EPIC group members' interest in and need for immediate employment led them straight to employment services. Among those who participated in just one activity, nearly half participated in job search (48 percent). Other EPIC group members who only participated in one activity commonly participated in basic education (14 percent), post-employment services (13 percent), and occupational skills training (10 percent; Appendix Table D.4).

Service providers anticipated that EPIC group members would receive employment services in conjunction with other non-employment related services. Depending on the service provider and the individual's situation and needs, employment services were offered before, during, or after other services. Two of the most frequent combinations of activities include job search and a non-employment related EPIC activity. Most EPIC group members who participated in more than one activity participated in both occupational skills training and job search (72 percent), and nearly half of EPIC group members who participated in more than one activity participated in work-based learning and job search (Appendix Table D.4). In general, among individuals who started more than one activity, there was a period of longer than two months between starting the first activity and then starting the second one (72 and 78 days, respectively).

Earlier versus later enrollment. Because some service and EPIC policies changed over time, we examined whether there were differences in start and completion rates of employment or training-related

activities for those who were enrolled in the pilot earlier versus later. There were several differences between groups. For example, those who enrolled in the pilot later were less likely than those who enrolled earlier to start an employment or training-related activity (7 percentage point difference), specifically occupational skills training and post-secondary education (6 percentage point difference for both; Appendix Table D.3). Those who enrolled in the pilot later were also less likely than those who enrolled earlier to complete post-secondary education (2 percentage point difference) and work-based learning (5 percentage point difference).

Exhibit V.4. Number of activities started by EPIC group members (percentage)



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,504 EPIC group members.

B. Education, occupational skills training, and work-based learning

In this section, we explore in more detail EPIC group members' participation in education, occupational skills training, and work-based learning activities. The section also describes the types of work-based learning in which individuals participated.³³

Education, occupational skills training, and work-based learning were core components of the EPIC model. Over half of EPIC group members (55 percent) participated in one of these three activities (Appendix Table D.6). About one third of EPIC group members completed any education, occupational skills training, and work-based learning activity (31 percent).

1. Education and occupational skills training

Some EPIC group members participated in post-secondary or basic education activities (15 and 12 percent, respectively; Appendix Table D.2). However, data from the WorkNet system suggests that none of these individuals were working to obtain their GED (Appendix Table D.6). Instead, EPIC group

³³ Details about the types of occupational skills training EPIC group members started and completed, as well as any degrees or certifications they earned were not captured in the WorkNet system and as a result are not presented in this section.

members that started education activities may have started adult basic education or English as a Second Language (ESL) activities.

Nearly half of EPIC group members (46 percent) participated in some type of occupational skills training (Appendix Table D.2). Additionally, less than a quarter (21 percent) of EPIC group members received a certification or credential (Exhibit V.5). EPIC group members earned certification and credentials between Quarters 1 and 8, but most earned them within the first three quarters (nine months) after random assignment (18 percent; Appendix Table D.5).

About half of EPIC group members started occupational skills training and 21 percent earned an occupational skills training credential or certification.

Exhibit V.5. Percentage of EPIC group members who started and completed any occupational skills training, education, or work-based learning activity and received a credential

Outcome	EPIC group
Started any occupational skills training, education, or work-based learning activity (%)	54.8
Completed any occupational skills training, education, or work-based learning activity (%)	30.5
Received an occupational skills training credential or certification (%)	20.6
Sample size	2,504

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

2. Work-based learning

Some of the 24 providers connected EPIC group members to work-based learning opportunities at the service provider or with an external employer. Nearly one third of EPIC group members engaged in some type of work-based learning activity (Exhibit V.6). Providers offered different types of work-based learning opportunities that could be paid or unpaid, although sometimes these details were not captured in the WorkNet system. Paid work experience was the most common type of work-based learning in which individuals participated (56 percent).³⁴ EPIC group members also participated in work experience opportunities that were recorded without the specification of paid or unpaid (43 percent), on-the-job training (35 percent), and unpaid work experience (24 percent). Less than half of individuals who started work-based learning completed it (43 percent); those who started spent an average of 5 to 12 weeks in the work-based learning opportunity.

EPIC group members participating in work-based learning most commonly engaged in paid work experience.

³⁴ Information about how much individuals earned through their work-based learning positions was not captured in the WorkNet system.

Exhibit V.6. Percentage of EPIC group members who participated in work-based learning and average amount of weeks spent in work-based learning

Type of service	EPIC group
Started work-based learning (%)	30.1
Type of work-based learning, among those who started (%)	
Paid work experience	56.2
Unspecified work experience	43.1
On-the-job training	34.7
Unpaid work experience	23.5
Completed work-based learning (%)	12.9
Completed work-based learning, among those who started (%)	42.7
Average number of weeks spent in work-based learning, by type of work-based learning, among those who started	
Paid work experience	8.9
Unspecified work experience	7.8
On-the-job training	4.6
Unpaid work experience	12.4
Sample Size	2,504

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

C. Support services³⁵

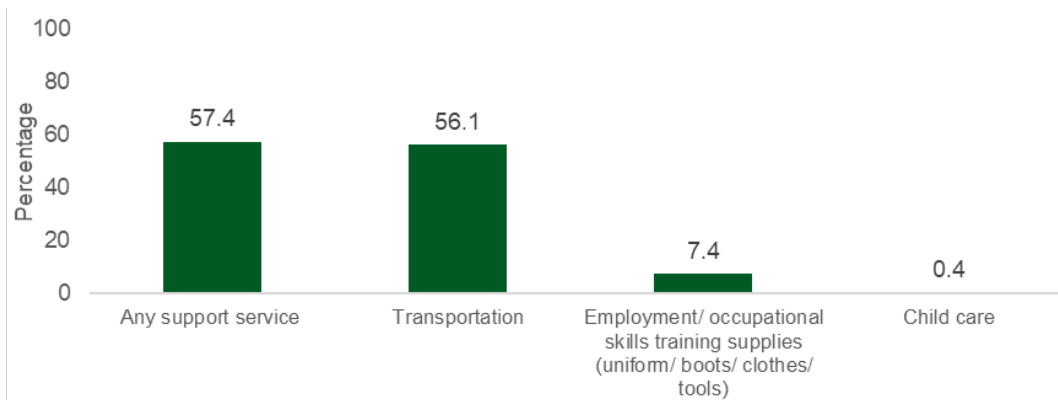
EPIC group members could receive transportation assistance from IDHS staff; however, most support services were provided by the CBOs. Over half of EPIC group members received at least one support service (57 percent). Most of these individuals received transportation assistance (56 percent; Exhibit V.7). Fewer individuals received assistance with employment or occupational skills training-related supplies (7 percent) and child care (less than 1 percent). Most individuals started receiving support services in the first and second quarters after random assignment (43 and 6 percent, respectively), whereas the remaining individuals first received a support service in Quarters 3 through 8 (Appendix Table D.5).

More than half of EPIC group members received a support service.

Individuals who received a support service received some type of support service for two months, on average (Appendix Table D.7).³⁶ They received transportation assistance for the longest periods of time (two months). Individuals received assistance with employment or occupational skills training-related supplies and child care for an average of one month, meaning these supports were likely one-time payments.

³⁵ The amount of support services paid per person was not recorded in the WorkNet system. However, implementation research findings presented in Chapter IV reveal that EPIC group members could receive up to \$1,000 in support services. Some service providers were also able to leverage other funding streams to provide EPIC group members with additional support services.

³⁶ Receipt is not necessarily in consecutive months.

Exhibit V.7. Percentage of EPIC group members who received support services

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,504 EPIC group members.

Support services in relation to other measures. We assessed whether participation in EPIC and employment or training-related activities differed for those who did and did not receive a support service. On average, individuals who received a support service remained in EPIC for 122 days longer than those who did not (Appendix Table D.7). In addition, 85 percent of individuals who started an employment or training-related activity received a support service, compared with only 6 percent of those who did not start an activity. A large majority of individuals who completed an activity (86 percent) also received a support service. This difference likely reflects that those who completed activities were in EPIC longer (which resulted in receipt of more monthly assistance).

Earlier versus later enrollment. There is a significant difference in support service receipt between those who enrolled in the pilot earlier (60 percent) versus those who enrolled later (56 percent; Appendix Table D.3).

D. Case management

The EPIC model was designed to provide intensive, thorough, career focused, and structured case management services to EPIC group members. Case management services were provided by EPIC career navigators who worked with individuals to assess their skills and interests, set goals, help keep them on track to accomplish goals, and help them to get a job.

Estimates of engagement and contact with EPIC career navigators were calculated using 12 months of case note data for a randomly selected sample of 200 EPIC group members. Exhibit V.8 shows that most individuals in the sample (99 percent) had at least one contact with a career navigator. On average, individuals who had any contact with their career navigator had 13 contacts during the 12 months after random assignment. Contacts between career navigators and EPIC group members mostly occurred in person (36 percent), by letter³⁷ (27 percent), or telephone (26 percent), although some

Almost all EPIC group members were in contact with a career navigator and had an average of 13 contacts during the follow up period.

³⁷ Letter contacts include conciliation appointment notice letters sent by mail and letters sent by mail to notify EPIC group members of upcoming appointments.

contacts also occurred by email, text, or social media (12 percent). The average number of contacts per month ranged from less than one to two during the first year, with nearly half of contacts occurring in Quarter 1 (Appendix Table D.5).

Exhibit V.8. Amount and type of EPIC group members' contacts with career navigators^a

Type of service	Amount and type of contact
EPIC members with any contact (%)	98.5
Average number of contacts per person (#)	12.4
Average number of contacts per person, among those with a contact (#)	12.5
Average number of contacts per person per month, among those with a contact (#)	1.0
Among contacts, type of contact (%)	
In person	35.7
Telephone	25.7
Electronic (email, text, social media)	11.6
Letter	26.6
Sample size	200

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

Note: Data in this table represent all contacts that career navigators documented between themselves and individuals in EPIC. Some of these contacts included indirect communications (such as mailing documents to an individual), but even these contacts likely provided a needed service that helps the individual. We did exclude some contacts, such as leaving a phone message or sending mass mailings, where applicable. NA indicates the grantee or provider were not able to provide the data.

^a Contact measures are calculated during 12 months of follow up data for a randomly selected sample of 200 EPIC group members.

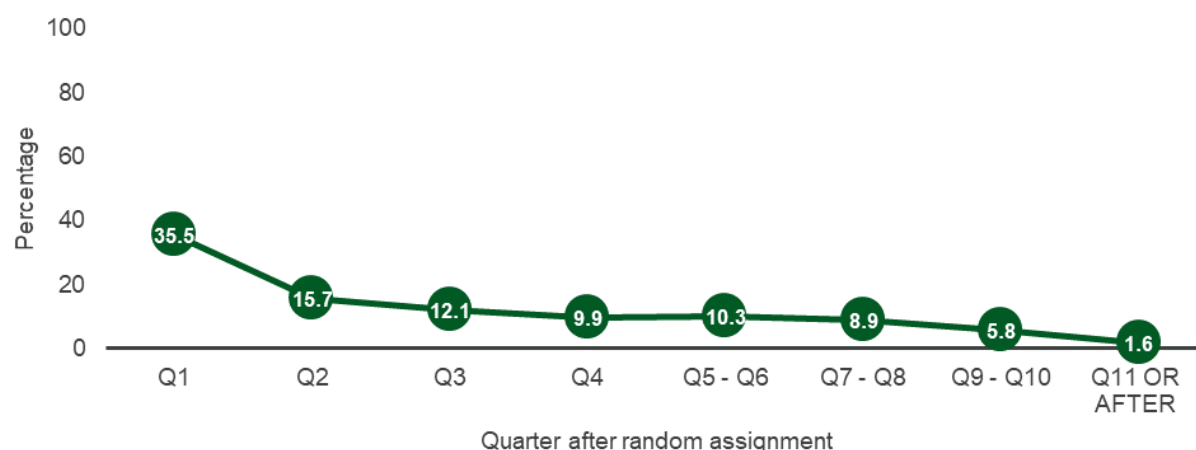
Earlier versus later enrollment. We found no significant differences across enrollment periods in the overall rate of contact with a career navigator (Appendix Table D.3).

E. Extent and timing of EPIC exits

Nearly three-quarters of EPIC group members (73 percent) exited EPIC during their first year after random assignment; 19 percent left in their second year, and the remaining 7 percent left in their third year (Exhibit V.9). Most individuals left in the first and second quarters after random assignment (36 and 16 percent, respectively). Among those who exited within 3 months, 20 percent received a support service, compared to 50 percent of those who exited within 12 months (Appendix Table D.9). A majority of EPIC group members exited after they participated in an employment or training-related activity (64 percent); nearly a third (32 percent) of those who exited later re-entered EPIC.

Almost three-quarters of individuals exited EPIC within their first year after random assignment; under 10 percent exited in the third year.

There were few differences in the characteristics of those who left EPIC early (within Quarter 1) and those who left later (after Quarter 1). Those who exited earlier were more likely to be male (8 percentage point difference) and in a household without children (3 percentage point difference; Appendix Table D.10).

Exhibit V.9. Percentage of EPIC group members who exited within each quarter

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,504 EPIC group members.

Most EPIC group members exited before completing services (38 percent) or because they were no longer eligible for SNAP (27 percent; Exhibit V.10). Possible reasons EPIC groups members could have lost SNAP eligibility include failing to engage with EPIC services if they were mandatory SNAP E&T work registrants or increasing earnings to above 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. We found similar patterns of exit associated with loss of SNAP benefits using SNAP administrative data; 24 percent of EPIC group members exited SNAP in the month before, the month of, or the month after exit from EPIC; Appendix Table D.9).

Nearly a quarter of EPIC group members reported leaving because they found employment. We found similar employment patterns around the time of exit from EPIC using UI wage data. About 33 percent were already employed at the time of exit (at least three months before exit) and 27 percent started employment around the time of exit (between two months before to two months after the exit date). Forty percent did not become employed around the time of exit (Appendix Table D.9). The group of EPIC group members who exited the program because they found employment may not include the 33 percent who were employed while in EPIC and decided to leave the program because of changes in hours, wages, or satisfaction with their current job.

Exhibit V.10. Percentage of EPIC group members who exited, by reason

Exits	EPIC group
Left before completing	38.2
Ineligible to continue	26.8
Exited due to employment	24.2
Still active	10.0
Completed	0.8
Sample size	2,504

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

VI. Differences in service receipt for the EPIC and control groups

In this chapter, we describe how EPIC and control group members differed in their receipt of services, based on participation in EPIC, existing SNAP E&T, or other services and programs available in communities. Understanding differences in services receipt is important for interpreting findings about the impacts of EPIC on employment, earnings, and receipt of public assistance (discussed in Chapter VII). Impacts on these outcomes are unlikely to occur without a meaningful difference in the services received by the EPIC and control groups.

In presenting findings, we begin with a description of differences between the research groups in participation in job search training or assistance activities and education or training activities. We also examine differences in participation in specific components of education or training activities, including general job skills training, occupational skills training, education, and work-based learning activities.³⁸ We then examine differences between the two groups in rates of completion, the amount of time spent in different activities, receipt of case management and support services, and sanction rates. (We discuss how these differences varied across a select number of subgroups in Appendix E.) Unless noted otherwise, participation in activities and receipt of services are measured over the 36-month period after random assignment.

A. Differences between research groups in participation in activities

Individuals in the EPIC group participated in activities at higher rates than individuals in the control group. Seventy-five percent of the EPIC group participated in a job search training or assistance activity or education or training activity compared to 57 percent of the control group (Exhibit VI.1). Relative to individuals in the control group, individuals in the EPIC group were more likely to participate in job search training or assistance activities (18 percentage point difference) and education or training activities (22 percentage point difference).

Relative to the control group, the EPIC group was more likely to participate in job search training activities or education or training activities during the three years following random assignment.

³⁸ The survey collected information on education or training activities or programs. For simplicity, we refer to them as “activities” in this chapter.

Exhibit VI.1. Participation in any EPIC, existing SNAP E&T, or community-offered services

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

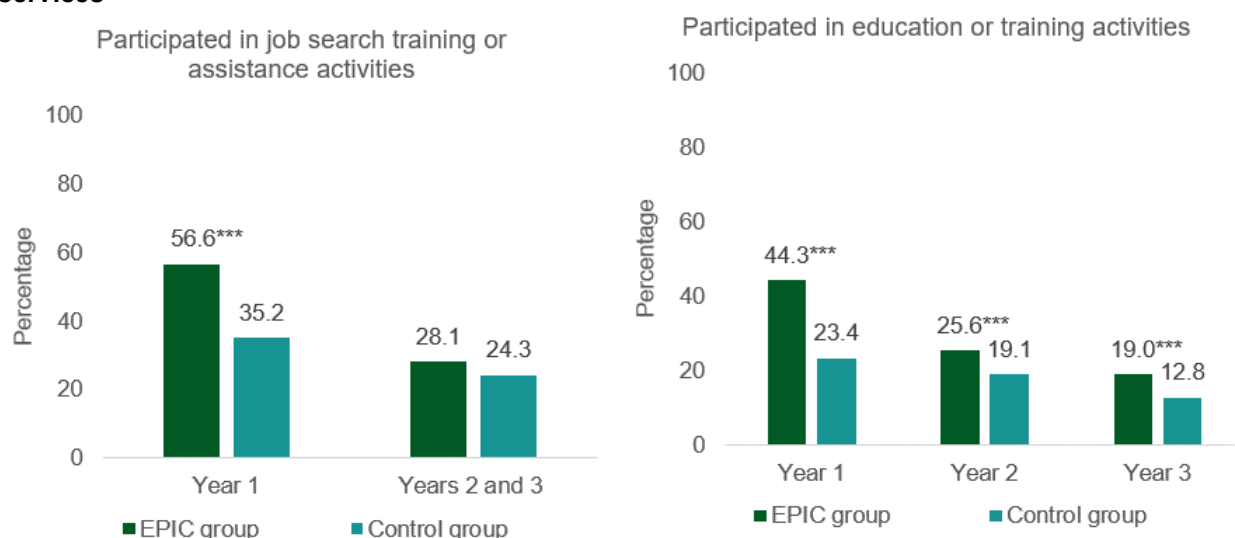
Note: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 813 EPIC group members and 783 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Differences in service receipt between the EPIC group and the control group were largest in the first year after random assignment and decreased in size over time (Exhibit VI.2). For example, in Year 1, there was a 21 percentage point difference between the EPIC and control groups in participation in education or training activities. By Year 3, this difference had decreased to 6 percentage points. The difference in the final quarter of the three-year observation period (Quarter 12), was a positive and statistically significant 2 percentage points. Notably, although the average individual in the EPIC group participated in the pilot for about five months, a difference in service receipt remained for all three years after random assignment. Even after Illinois stopped providing EPIC services, EPIC group members continued receiving services in the community at higher rates than control group members. The difference between the EPIC and control groups in the percentage of individuals who participated in an education or training activity was 22 percentage points before the pilot ended and 5 percentage points after it ended (Appendix Table E.2a). Many individuals started these activities before the pilot ended. The differences between the two groups in rates of participation for individuals randomly assigned earlier in the pilot period were similar, or not statistically significantly different, from differences for those randomly assigned later (Appendix Table E.10).

There remained a strong difference between the EPIC and control groups in rates of participation in education and training activities for all three years, even after the end of the service period.

Exhibit VI.2. Time trends in participation in EPIC, existing SNAP E&T, or community-offered services



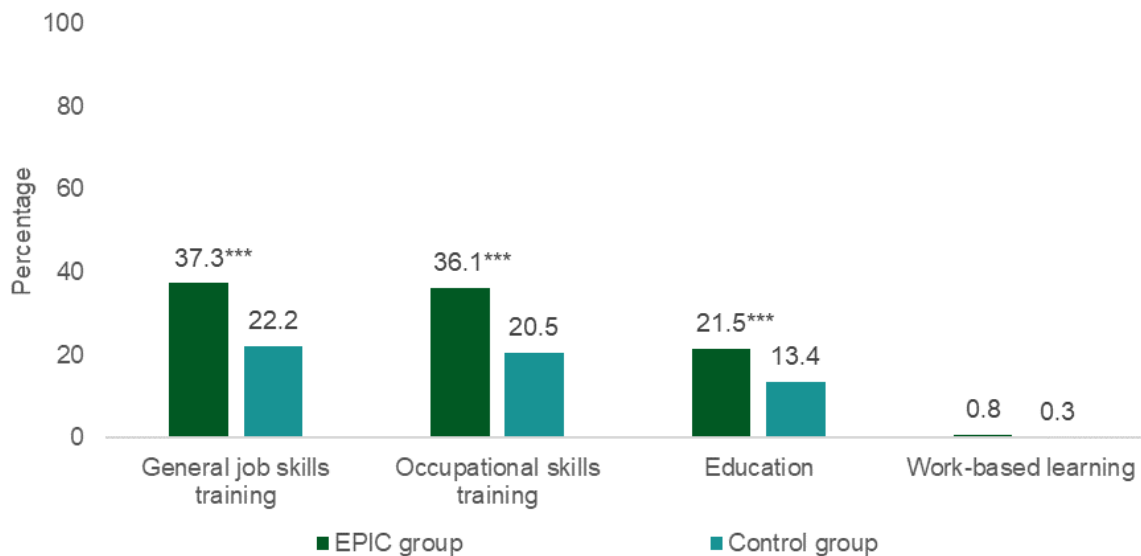
Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Note: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 813 EPIC group members and 783 control group members. The 12- and 36-month surveys collected the start and end dates for participation in education or training programs, but not for participation in job search training or assistance activities. As a result, annual estimates of participation in job search training and assistance activities cannot be estimated separately for Years 2 and 3 after random assignment.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

EPIC group members were more likely than control group members to start specific components of education or training activities (Exhibit VI.3). The largest differences between the two groups were for occupational skills training (16 percentage point difference), general skills training (15 percentage point difference), and education (8 percentage point difference). There was no difference in rates of participation in work-based learning.

The EPIC group had higher rates of participation than the control group in most types of activities, including general job skills training, occupational skills training, and education.

Exhibit VI.3 Participation in specific EPIC, existing SNAP E&T, or community-offered services

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Note: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 813 EPIC group members and 783 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

B. Differences between research groups in activity completion

In addition to being more likely than the control group to start education and training activities, the EPIC group was also more likely to complete them (Exhibit VI.4). Overall, EPIC group members were 17 percentage points more likely than control group members to complete any type of education or training activity.

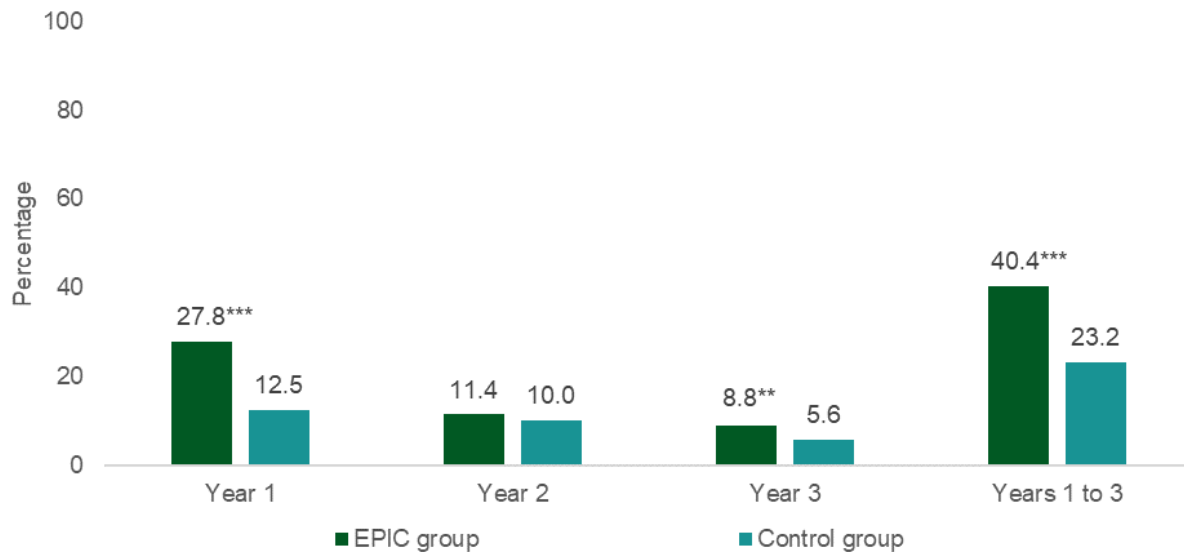
Differences between the two groups in rates of completion were largest in the first year after random assignment (15 percentage point difference), and relatively small in the second year (1 percentage point difference, which is not statistically significant), and the third year (3 percentage point difference; Exhibit VI.4). Differences in completion rates across research groups were similar for individuals who were randomly assigned earlier in the enrollment period and those who were randomly assigned later in the period. Some individuals—8 percent of EPIC group members and 7 percent of control group members—reported they were still engaged in an activity at the time of the 36-month follow-up survey (Appendix Table E.3). Individuals engaged in an activity at the time of the 36-month survey were most commonly still in occupational skills training, as reported by 5 percent of each research group.

Individuals in the EPIC group also were more likely than those in the control group to complete each type of activity, such as general job skills training (11 percentage point difference) and occupational skills training (13 percentage point difference; Appendix Table E.3). There was no statistically significant difference between the two groups in rates of completion of work-based learning activities, in part reflecting the small percentages of individuals who started these activities.

Individuals in the EPIC group spent, on average, about two months longer in activities than individuals in the control group (five versus three months Appendix Table E.3). EPIC group members also spent about

6 hours more per week in activities than control group members (10 hours versus 4 hours). In each of the three years following random assignment, the EPIC group spent more time per year and more hours per week in activities, relative to the control group.

Exhibit VI.4. Percentage of EPIC group members who completed education or training activities, by year after random assignment



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

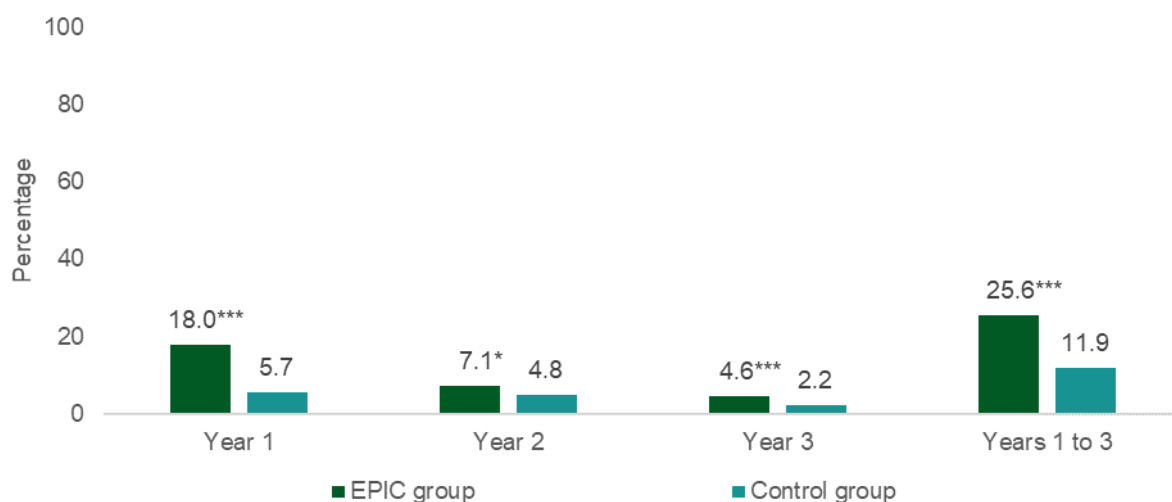
Note: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 813 EPIC group members and 783 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Individuals in the EPIC group were also more likely than those in the control group to receive an occupational certificate or license (14 percentage point difference; Exhibit VI.5). There was a significant difference in the percentage of individuals who received one in each year following random assignment. Notably, the difference in Year 3 was 2 percentage points, suggesting that some individuals in the EPIC group were more likely than those in the control group to continue to receive one even after the pilot ended.

EPIC group members also were more likely than control group members to complete activities and earn an occupational certificate or license.

The differences between the two groups in rates of completion or receipt of an occupational certificate or license were similar for individuals randomly assigned earlier versus later in the enrollment period (Appendix Table E.10).

Exhibit VI.5. Percentage of EPIC group members who received an occupational certificate or license, overall and by year

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Note: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 813 EPIC group members and 783 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

C. Differences between research groups in receipt of case management and support services

EPIC group members were more likely than control group members to receive case management services, including career counseling and one-on-one assistance from employment professionals or case managers (13 percentage point difference; Exhibit VI.6). The difference between the two groups was largest in the first year following random assignment (15 percentage point difference). The difference in receipt of case management services was similar for individuals randomly assigned earlier in the enrollment period, relative to those assigned later (Appendix Table E.10).

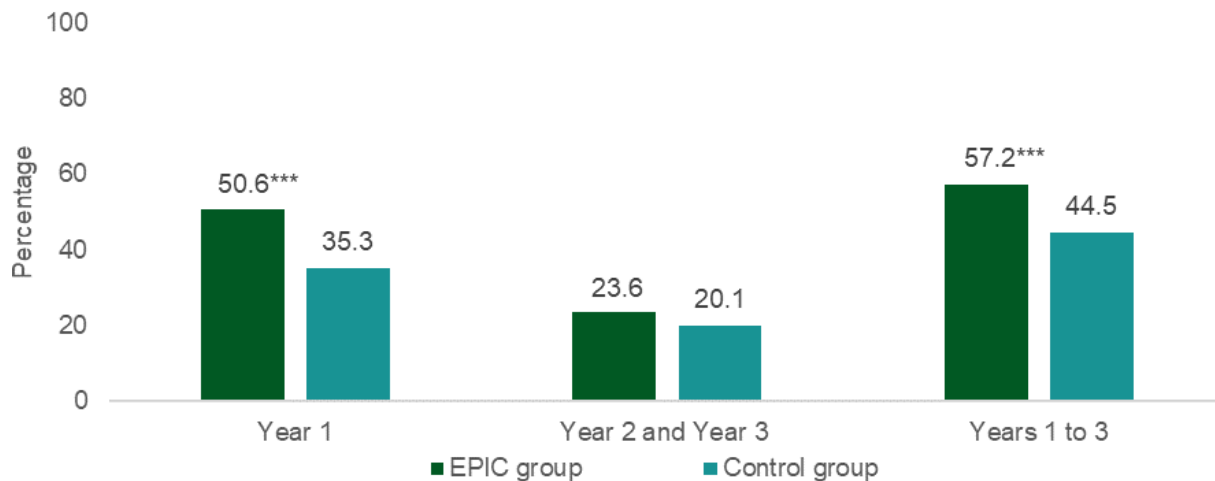
EPIC group members were more likely than control group members to receive case management and support services.

On average, EPIC group members also had four additional contacts with an employment professional or case manager relative to control group members (nine versus five contacts; Appendix Table E.6). There were no differences in mode of contact (in person or by phone) between the research groups.

EPIC group members also were more likely than control group members to receive support services. About 59 percent of individuals in the EPIC group received a support service compared to 50 percent in the control group (Exhibit VI.7). The largest differences between the two groups were observed for transportation assistance (47 versus 36 percent), and clothes, uniforms, tools, or other supplies and equipment (18 versus 10 percent). There were no statistically significant differences between the EPIC group and control group in receipt of child care assistance, housing assistance, mental health or substance use counseling, and other support services.

Individuals in the EPIC group were more likely than those in the control group to receive support services in the first year following random assignment but not in the subsequent two years. Differences between the two groups in the receipt of support services were similar for individuals randomly assigned earlier in the enrollment period, compared with later.

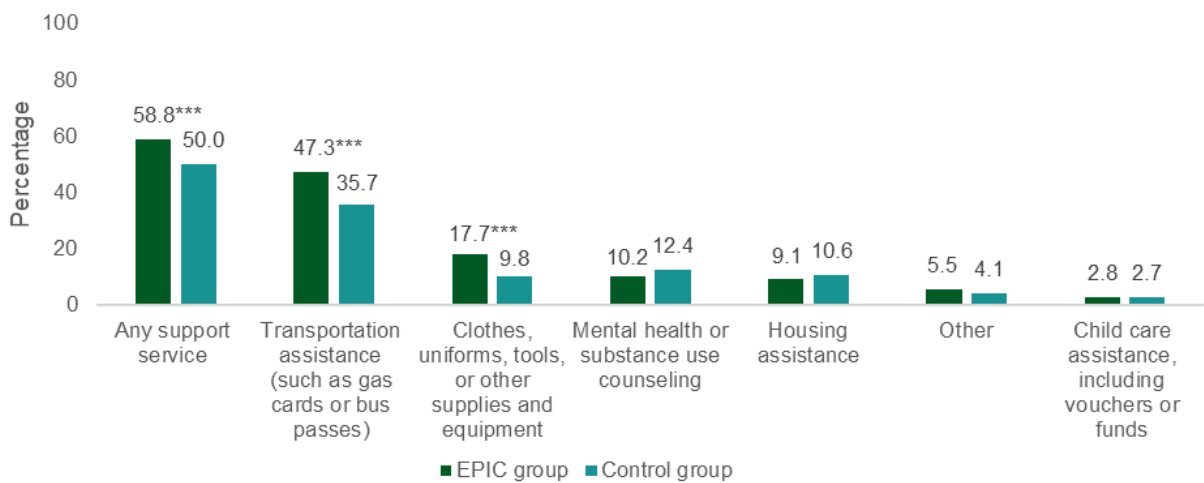
Exhibit VI.6. Receipt of case management through EPIC existing SNAP E&T, or community-offered programs, overall and by year



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Note: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 813 EPIC group members and 783 control group members. The 12-month survey requested information about receipt of case management between the date of random assignment and the date of the 12-month interview. The 36-month survey requested information about receipt of case management between the dates of the 12- and 36-month interviews. As a result, it is not possible to estimate receipt of assistance separately in Years 2 and 3.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Exhibit VI.7. Receipt of support services through EPIC, existing SNAP E&T, or community-offered programs, overall and by type

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Note: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 813 EPIC group members and 783 control group members. “Other” support services include food support, medical support, assistance with utility bills, and additional miscellaneous supports.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

D. Differences between research groups in sanction rates

Most individuals enrolled in the Illinois pilot, both the EPIC and control groups, were mandatory SNAP E&T work registrants and could be sanctioned for noncompliance; that is, their SNAP benefits could be suspended for a set period of time if they did not meet the State’s SNAP E&T work registrant requirements. EPIC could affect the incidence of sanctioning in several ways. If EPIC career navigators had smaller caseloads than case managers in the existing SNAP program, they might have been able to monitor EPIC group members’ participation more closely than was possible for case managers’ monitoring of the control group. Thus, if individuals in the pilot did not perform activities that met the State’s work requirements, sanctions might be more likely for the EPIC group than for the control group. In addition, with more resources available to fund program slots in EPIC, as opposed to the existing SNAP E&T program, EPIC group members might have had more activities required of them than control group members, thus increasing EPIC group members’ opportunities to be in noncompliance, relative to those of control group members. Alternatively, if EPIC group members viewed their interactions with EPIC career navigators as helpful and were more likely to view EPIC services as engaging and valuable than control group members viewed their existing SNAP E&T services, participation could be more consistent in the EPIC group than in the control group, resulting in fewer sanctions in the EPIC group.

Data from the SNAP benefits administrative files indicate that about 40 percent of EPIC group members were sanctioned during the follow-up period, and they were more likely than control group members to be sanctioned (by 11 percentage points; Appendix Table E.15). The differences in sanction rates between the two groups were 8 percentage points in Year 1, 11 percentage points in Year 2, and 6 percentage points in Year 3.

VII. Impacts on employment, earnings, receipt of public assistance, and well-being

In this chapter, we examine whether the generally higher rates of engagement and service receipt among individuals in EPIC, as described in Chapter VI, translated into impacts on employment, earnings, receipt of public assistance, and key measures of well-being, including food security, health, well-being, and housing. We also examine whether impacts differed according to whether individuals started or completed EPIC activities. In Appendix F, we present information about how impacts on employment, earnings, receipt of public assistance, and food security varied across subgroups.

As described in Chapter II, we focus on impacts in the two-year period consisting of Years 2 and 3 after random assignment. We aim to balance any concerns about how the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected outcomes in Year 3 with measuring impacts on outcomes beyond Year 1 following random assignment after many individuals had time to participate in EPIC activities.

A. Impacts of EPIC on labor market outcomes

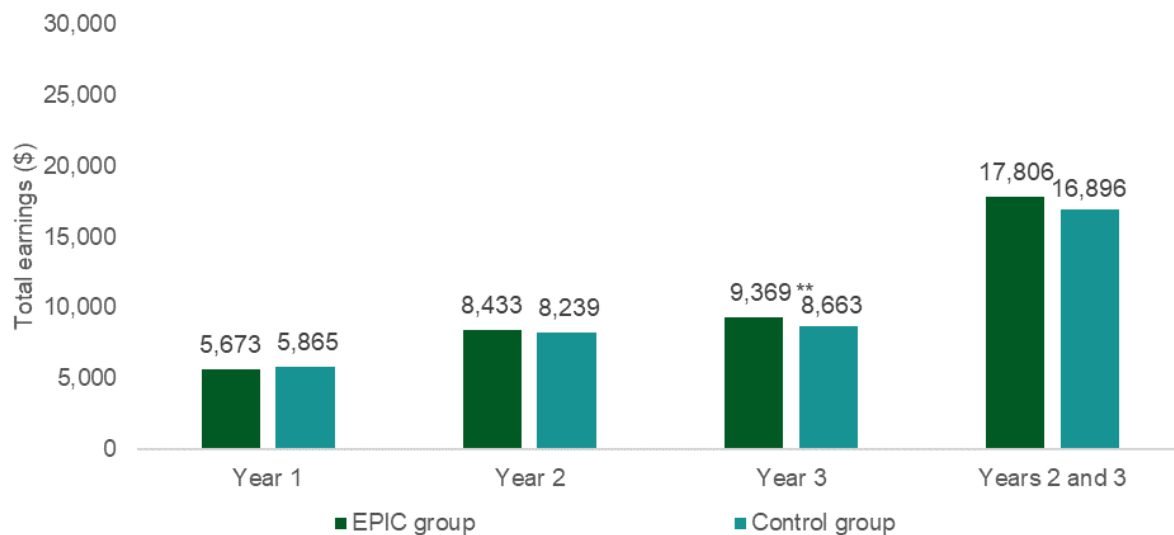
This section presents impacts on key labor market outcomes. Outcomes from both UI wage records and survey data were measured by year and quarter after random assignment. Some outcomes based on the survey data were measured at the time of the survey, approximately 36 months after random assignment.³⁹

1. Impacts on earnings, employment, and hours worked

Earnings. Based on both UI and survey data, the EPIC group had greater average earnings over the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) relative to the control group, but these differences were not statistically significant. Based on UI data, EPIC had no impacts on earnings in Years 1 or 2 but did lead to an increase in earnings in Year 3 (Exhibit VII.1). According to survey data, EPIC had no effect on earning in any follow-up year (Exhibit VII.2). Both research groups experienced increases in average earnings over time.

³⁹ For survey-based outcomes, we defined the quarter after random assignment as the first three months after the month of random assignment. The months included in this quarter sometimes differed from the calendar quarter, which we used to define the first quarter after random assignment for outcomes based on UI wage records.

Exhibit VII.1. Total earnings based on UI wage records, by year

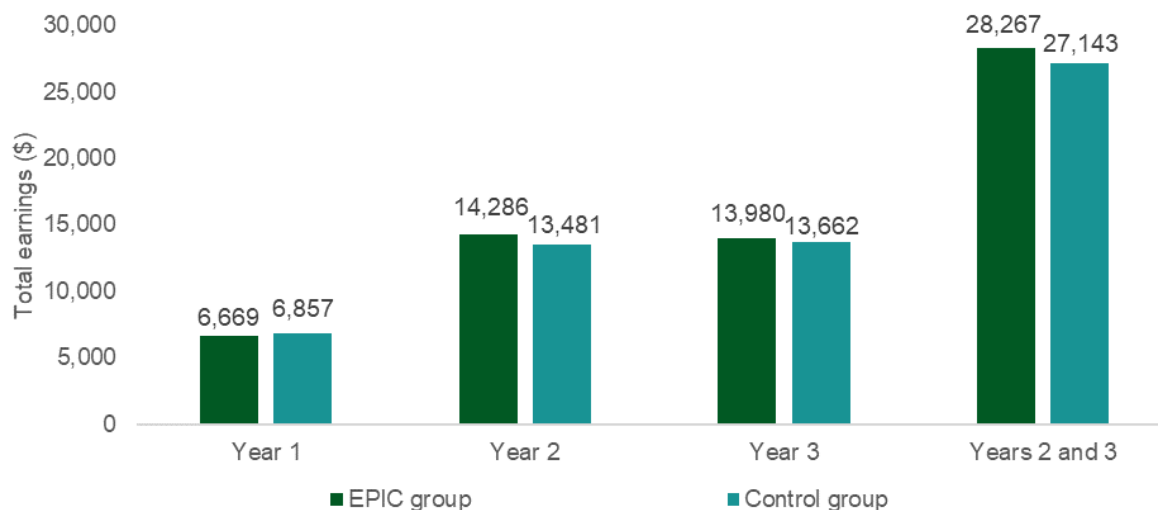


Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation UI wage records, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,503 EPIC group members and 2,509 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Exhibit VII.2. Total earnings based on survey data, by year



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

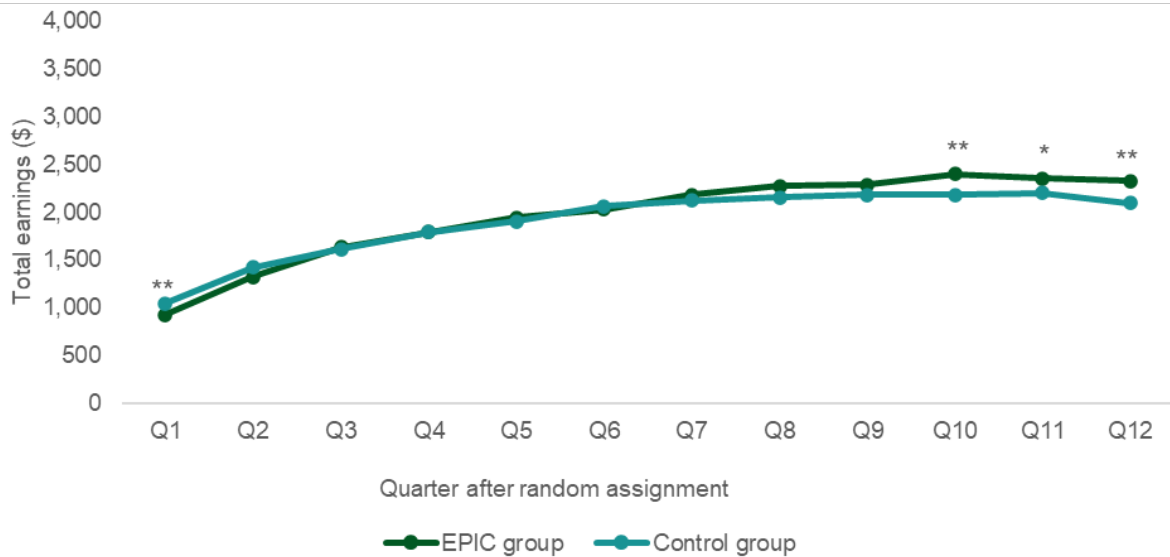
Note: Estimates are based on data from 813 EPIC group members and 783 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Based on both UI data and survey data, there were a few statistically significant differences between the research groups in earnings in any quarter (Exhibits VII.3 and VII.4). For the UI data, impacts on earnings occurred in Quarters 1, 10, 11, and 12. For the survey data, an impact on earning was detected for Quarter 5. Based on UI data, there was an impact of the pilot on earnings for individuals who were randomly

assigned later in the enrollment period (Appendix Table F.19). There were no impacts on earnings based on either data source for earlier enrollees.

Exhibit VII.3. Total earnings based on UI wage records, by quarter

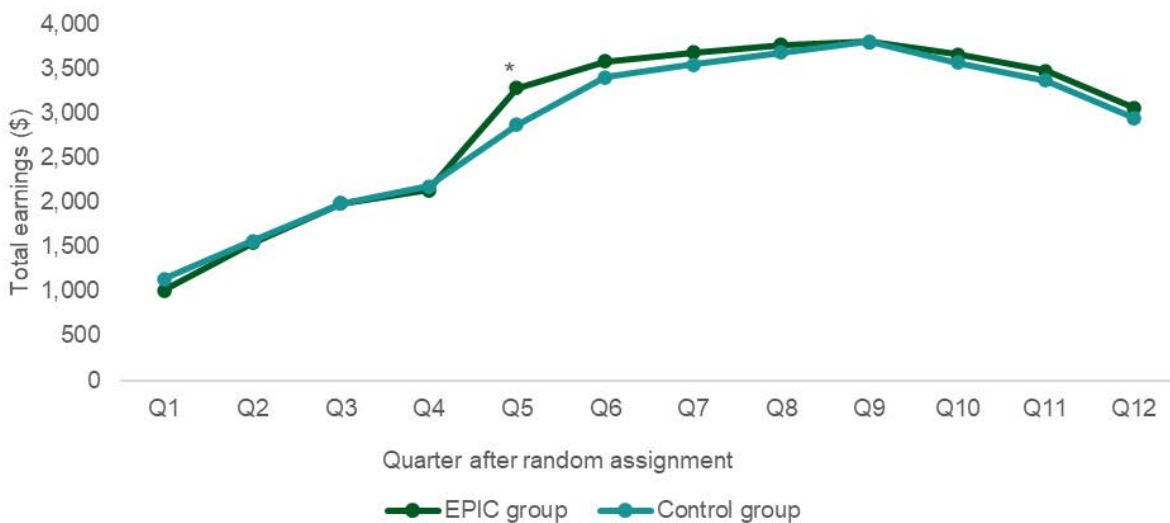


Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation UI wage records, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,503 EPIC group members and 2,509 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Exhibit VII.4. Total earnings based on survey data, by quarter



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

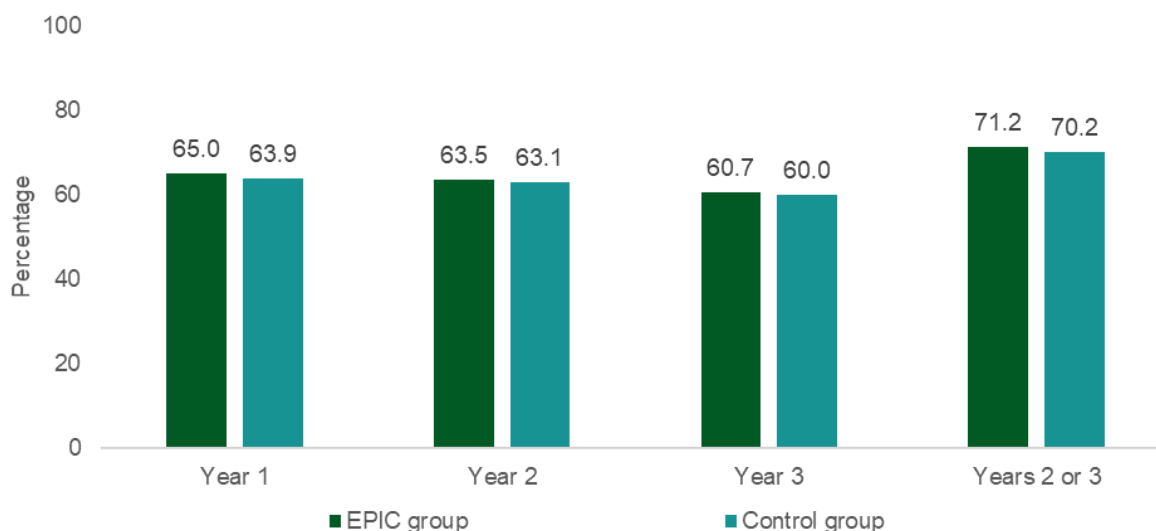
Note: Estimates are based on data from 813 EPIC group members and 783 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Employment. Based on the UI data, EPIC did not increase employment in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3; Exhibit VII.5). There were no impacts in any individual year, although the increase in employment

observed for the full three-year period was statistically significant (80 versus 78 percent; Appendix Table F.2). Quarterly impacts were observed in Quarter 1 (a negative impact of 3 percentage points) and Quarter 12 (a positive impact of 3 percentage points), but there were no statistically significant effects in the other quarters (Appendix Table F.2).

Exhibit VII.5. Employment rates based on UI wage records, by year



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation UI wage records, weighted data.

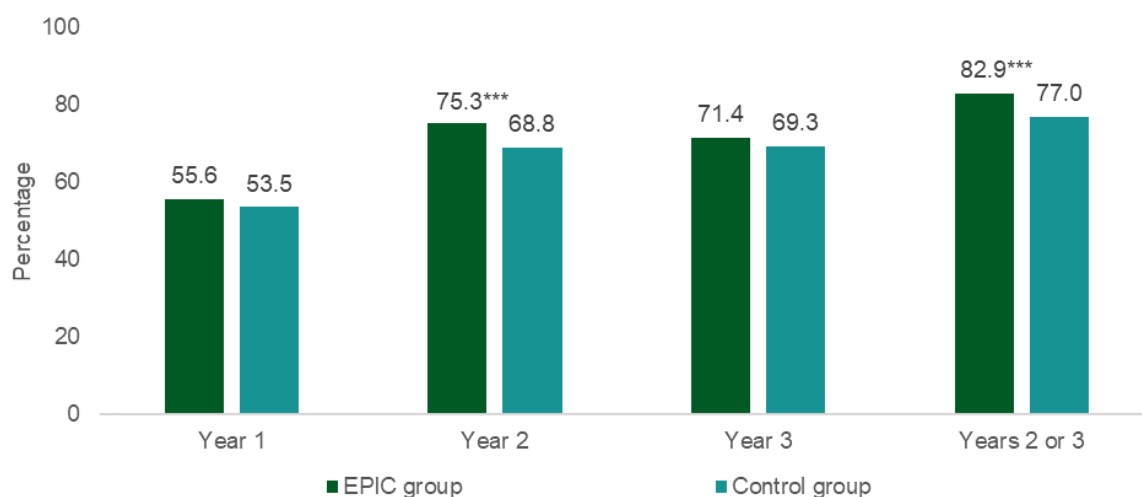
Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,503 EPIC group members and 2,509 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

The survey data show that EPIC increased employment rates in Year 2 and for the combined Year 2 and Year 3 period (83 versus 77 percent; Exhibit VII.6). Similar to findings based on UI data, there was a positive effect on employment rates in Quarter 12 (of 6 percentage points), but no effects in other quarters (Appendix Table F.4). Similar to the findings for earnings, there was an impact on employment for individuals randomly assigned later in the pilot based on UI data (Appendix Table F.19). There were no impacts for individuals randomly assigned earlier based on either data source.

In both the UI and survey data, employment rates for both research groups generally increased across the first eight to nine quarters and then began to decrease.

EPIC led to an increase in employment in the two-year period following random assignment, from Year 2 to 3, based on survey data.

Exhibit VII.6. Employment rates based on survey data, by year

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 813 EPIC group members and 783 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Employment rates provide information about the percentage of individuals who were employed during a given time period but do not describe the extent or duration of employment. To assess these employment characteristics, we examined the average number of quarters (UI data) and months (survey data) individuals were employed each year. Despite the presence of some positive impacts on employment rates in both data sources, the EPIC group did not work more quarters/month per year than the control group during the follow-up period (Appendix Tables F.2 and F.4).

Hours worked. Among all individuals randomly assigned, those in the EPIC group worked roughly the same number of hours per week as those in the control group (Appendix Table F.5). The one exception is an increase in hours worked in Quarter 5 (19 versus 17 hours, for a statistically significant impact of 2 hours). This impact is consistent with the positive impact on earnings observed in the survey data in Quarter 5. EPIC group members worked an average of 10 hours per week in Year 1 and increased to 18 hours per week in Year 3. Similarly, control group members worked an average of 10 hours per week in Year 1 and increased to 17 hours per week in Year 3.

2. Impacts on characteristics of current jobs

Exhibit VII.7 presents characteristics of jobs individuals held at the time of the 36-month survey.⁴⁰ This information was available only for individuals employed at the time of the 36-month survey (50 percent of the EPIC group and 46 percent of the control group). For this reason, the measures in Exhibit VII.7 are non-experimental, and the results do not represent the causal effects of EPIC on job characteristics.

⁴⁰ The survey captured information about the jobs at which individuals were working at the time the survey was conducted (their “current job”). If individuals were working two or more jobs, they were asked to report on the one at which they worked the most hours.

Exhibit VII.7. Characteristics of current jobs among individuals employed at the time of the 36-month survey

Characteristic (%)	EPIC group	Control group	Difference
Employed at the time of the 36-month survey interview	49.5	45.6	4.0
Hours worked per week			
Less than 20	21.9	24.3	-2.4
21 to 34	18.4	23.7	-5.3
35 or more (employed full time)	59.4	51.7	7.7*
Average	34.3	32.7	1.6
Weekly earnings			
\$1 to \$499	54.3	55.0	-0.6
\$500 to \$999	41.0	36.3	4.7
\$1,000 to \$1,499	3.3	6.7	-3.4*
\$1,500 to \$2,000	1.4	2.0	-0.6
\$2,000 and above	0.0	0.0	0.0
Benefits available at job			
Any benefit	74.5	74.3	0.2
Health insurance or HMO/PPO plan	63.7	64.9	-1.2
Dental insurance	50.8	52.4	-1.6
Paid vacation	50.8	54.8	-4.0
Paid holidays	53.7	54.9	-1.2
Paid sick leave	45.1	44.7	0.4
Any paid time off	64.8	67.0	-2.3
Pension or retirement benefits	47.1	48.7	-1.7
Tuition assistance or reimbursement	21.2	28.9	-7.7**
Type of employment			
Regular full or part time	76.7	77.6	-0.9
Temporary or on call	11.7	5.5	6.2**
Self-employed or independent contractor or consultant	9.2	12.1	-2.9
Day laborer	2.3	4.7	-2.4
Occupation			
Transportation and material moving	17.9	16.7	1.1
Personal care and service	6.0	9.3	-3.3
Sales	8.3	6.7	1.6
Office and administrative support	6.3	7.9	-1.6
Food preparation and serving	5.4	7.9	-2.5
Production	8.1	5.7	2.4
Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance	4.4	4.2	0.2
Construction and extraction	3.7	3.6	0.1
Healthcare support	2.7	2.8	-0.1
Protective service	5.0	2.2	2.8**
Sample size	457	418	

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 36-month survey, weighted data.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

HMO = health maintenance organization; PPO = preferred provider organization.

Among individuals who were employed at the time of the 36-month survey, EPIC group members and control group members held jobs with somewhat different characteristics. In both research groups, just over half of individuals were employed full time, and a similar percentage earned less than \$500 per week (Exhibit VII.7). Employed EPIC group members were more likely than control group members to work full time (59 versus 52 percent). The majority of employed individuals in both research groups received at least one employer-offered benefit. There were few differences between the group in job benefits, except for tuition assistance or reimbursement (21 versus 29 percent). Most employed individuals in both research groups were regular status employees working full time or part time. Employed EPIC group members were more likely to work in temporary or on-call jobs than control group members (12 versus 6 percent). Common occupations included transportation and moving, personal care and service, and sales. With the exception of the EPIC group being more likely than the control group to be employed in protective services jobs, occupations were similar across research groups.

3. Impacts on changes in earnings and employment over time

The findings presented above describe employment, earnings, and hours worked in each quarter and year since random assignment. Although these findings allow us to assess changes in the average value of the outcomes over time across all EPIC or control group members, they obscure changes over time for each individual. In this section, we examine these types of changes or “dynamics” in employment, earnings, hours worked, and job characteristics.

As presented in Exhibit VII.5 and Appendix F.2, based on UI data, employment rates were somewhat higher for the EPIC group during the period, with a statistically significant increase observed when measured over the full three-year period. Data on employment dynamics show that the EPIC group experienced more unemployment spells than the control group (38 percent of the EPIC group experienced two or more unemployment spells over the period, compared with 36 percent of the control group; Appendix Table F.20). This pattern was similar for individuals based on their employment status at the time of random assignment.

As presented in Exhibit VII.6, based on the survey data, employment rates were higher for EPIC group members than control group members in Years 2 and 3 combined. However, data on employment dynamics indicate that the EPIC group was more likely to experience a job loss during the period than the control group (70 versus 66 percent; Appendix Table F.22). Consistent with this finding, they also experienced more unemployment spells over the period (54 percent of EPIC group members experience two or more unemployment spells, compared with 46 percent of the control group).⁴¹ Despite having more unemployment spells, more individuals in the EPIC group who were not employed at the time of the 12-month survey were employed at the time of the 36-month survey, suggesting that the EPIC group had a higher likelihood than the control group of finding a job. About 36 percent of EPIC group members who were not employed at the time of the 12-month survey were employed at the time of the 36-month survey, compared with 28 percent of control group members.

At the time of both the 12- and 36-month surveys, most employed individuals in both research groups worked a single job (Appendix Table F.23). About 37 percent of the EPIC group had one job at the time of the 12-month survey; 2 percent had two jobs. At the time of the 36-month survey, these percentages

⁴¹ Because these estimates are based only on individuals who were employed at some point in the period and thus at risk of experiencing a job loss, they are not experimental impacts.

were 46 and 3 percent, respectively. For the control group, 36 percent had one job and 3 percent had two jobs at the time of the 12-month survey. At the time of the 36-month survey, these percentages were 40 and 3 percent, respectively. EPIC led to an increase of 6 percentage points in the number of individuals holding one job at the 36-month interview, matched by a reduction in the percentage holding no job.

Exhibit VII.7 shows that EPIC had a few impacts on job characteristics around the time of the 36-month survey in the area of full-time status and temporary or on-call status. Survey data show some changes in the distributions of these characteristics from the 12-month to the 36-month survey (Appendix Table F.24). The EPIC group generally had similar earnings and benefits as the control group at the time of the 12-month interview. By the 36-month interview, they were less likely to earn less than \$500 per week and more likely to receive benefits.

The most common occupations at the time of the 12-month survey generally were similar to the most common ones at the time of the 36-month survey.

4. Conclusions

EPIC did not lead to an increase in average earnings in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) based on UI or survey data, although the UI data did show an increase in earnings in Year 3, with statistically significant increases in earnings in the final three quarters. EPIC led to increased employment over the period according to both data sources, although the effects were larger and more consistent in the survey data. There were no effects on hours worked per week in any year.

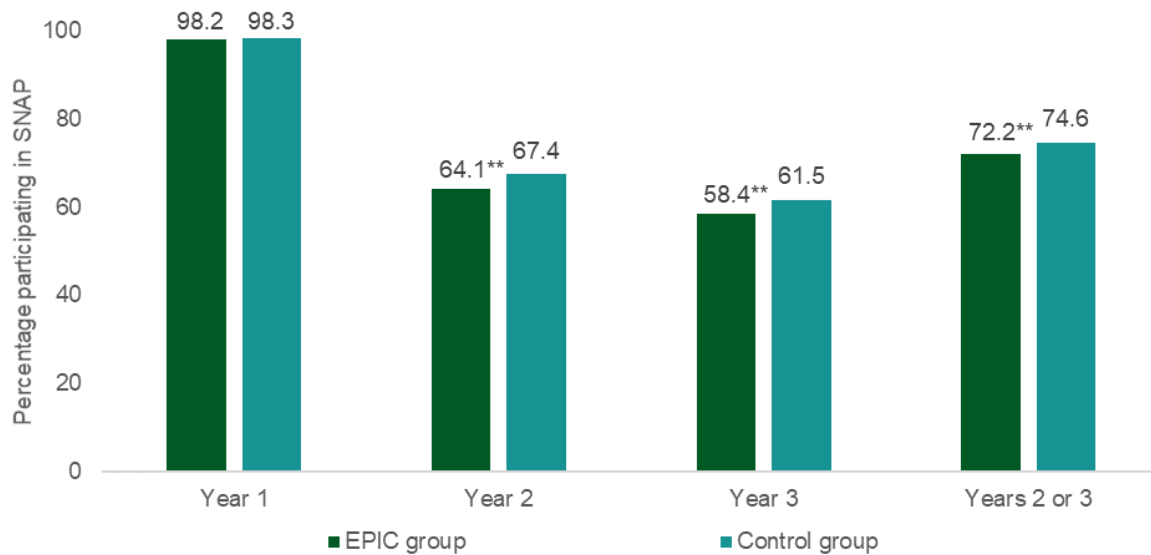
B. Impacts of EPIC on receipt of public assistance

This section presents findings on the impact of EPIC on the receipt of public assistance, as measured by SNAP administrative records and survey data. Most of the outcomes measuring receipt of SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid are based on the administrative data and were measured for each year and quarter after random assignment. Receipt of other forms of public assistance are based on survey data and capture receipt during Year 1 and during Years 2 and 3 combined after random assignment.

1. Impacts on SNAP participation

EPIC led to a statistically significant reduction in the likelihood of participating in SNAP in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) after random assignment. About 72 percent of EPIC group members and 75 percent of control group members participated in SNAP during this period (Exhibit VII.8). The impacts of EPIC on SNAP participation reflects reductions in receipt rates in most follow-up quarters, or from Quarter 3 through Quarter 12 (Appendix Table F.8). SNAP participation rates fell for both research groups over time, although more rapidly for the EPIC group. About 98 percent of the control group participated in SNAP in Year 1, for example, compared with 67 percent in Year 2 and 62 percent in Year 3. Impacts on SNAP participation were similar for individuals who were randomly assigned earlier or later in the enrollment period (Appendix Table F.19).

EPIC reduced SNAP participation in Years 2 and 3 following random assignment.

Exhibit VII.8. SNAP participation rates based on SNAP administrative data, overall and by year

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation SNAP administrative data, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,503 EPIC group members and 2,509 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

The impacts of EPIC on the average SNAP benefits received, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the maximum benefit amount, were similar to those on SNAP participation rates. Average SNAP benefit amounts for the EPIC group were \$140 less than those for the control group for Years 2 and 3 (Exhibit VII.9). Average SNAP benefit amounts were lower for the EPIC group than the control group in most follow-up quarters and most differences were statistically significant (Appendix Table F.9).

Looking at SNAP benefit amounts received as a percentage of the maximum possible benefit (based on SNAP unit size) provides a better comparison across SNAP units of different sizes than the nominal benefit amounts. The findings for benefits received as a percentage of the maximum possible benefit were the same as for nominal benefits. EPIC group members received, on average, about 5 percent less of the maximum possible benefit compared to the control group in Years 2 and 3 (Exhibit VII.9). For both research groups, most of the decrease in the percentage of the maximum possible benefit received over time can be attributed to individuals exiting SNAP. For example, among the EPIC group, the percentage of the maximum benefit amount received decreased by about 22 percentage points between Years 1 and 3. During this same period, the percentage of EPIC group members participating in SNAP decreased by about 40 percentage points (Appendix Table F.8).

On average, the EPIC group members participated in SNAP for fewer months than control group members over the follow-up period (a reduction of about 2 months; Exhibit VII.10). EPIC group members were also more likely to have exited SNAP across the three years relative to control group members—92 percent of the EPIC group exited SNAP at some point during the three years after random assignment, compared with 88 percent of the control group. Individuals who exited SNAP included those who left and did not re-enter SNAP in the period, as well as those who left and re-entered before the end of the period. Thus, even though 8 percent of the EPIC group participated in SNAP for the full three years, SNAP participation in Quarter 12 was higher (48 percent), reflecting that individuals left and re-entered SNAP during the three-year period (Appendix Table F.8). The percentage of individuals who

exited and then re-entered SNAP was similar for the EPIC and control groups (at about 66 percent), with about 36 percent of each group re-entering within 4 months of exit (Appendix Table F.25). However, individuals in the EPIC group had more SNAP participation spells than individuals in the control group (26 percent of EPIC group members had 3 or more spells, compared with 20 percent of control group members), suggesting a greater number of exits and re-entries.

Exhibit VII.9. Impacts on average monthly SNAP benefit amount based on SNAP administrative data, overall and by year

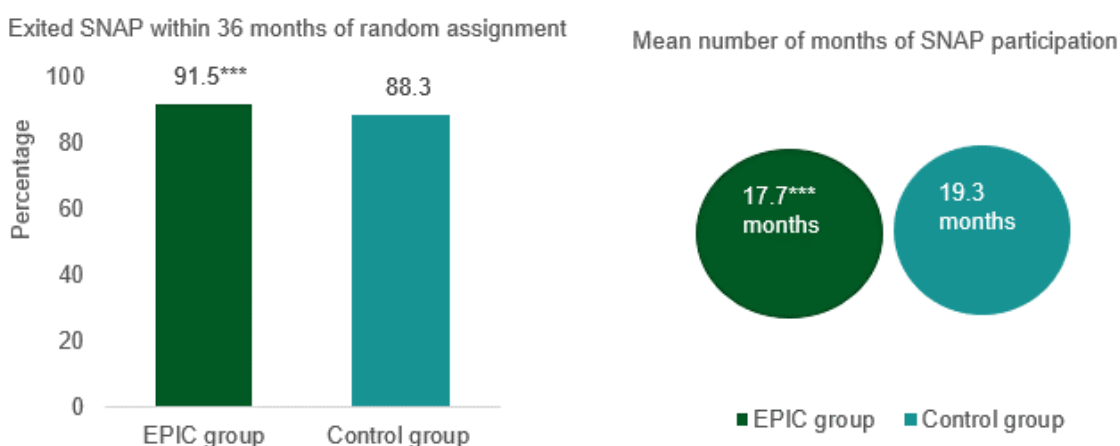
Average SNAP benefits	EPIC group	Control group	Difference
Average SNAP benefits received (\$)			
Year 1	1,559	1,572	-13
Year 2	1,019	1,119	-100***
Year 3	1,047	1,087	-40
Years 2 and 3	2,066	2,206	-140**
Average monthly SNAP benefits received as a percentage of maximum benefit amount ^a			
Year 1	58.2	60.2	-2.0**
Year 2	35.5	41.7	-6.2***
Year 3	35.8	39.6	-3.8***
Years 2 and 3	35.7	40.7	-4.9***
Sample size	2,503	2,509	

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation SNAP administrative data, weighted data.

^a Maximum household SNAP benefit amounts normalized by household size.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Exhibit VII.10. SNAP exit rates and mean number of months of SNAP participation based on SNAP administrative data



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation SNAP administrative data, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,503 EPIC group members and 2,509 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

2. Impacts on TANF and other forms of public assistance

Impacts on TANF participation were estimated using SNAP administrative data. A small percentage of each research group participated in TANF in each year (Appendix Table F.10). EPIC led to increased participation in TANF, relative to the control group, in Year 1 (a difference of less than 1 percentage point), but no effects in Years 2 or 3. The same was true for TANF benefit amounts, which were about \$3 more for the EPIC group in Year 1, but not significantly different from the control group for Years 2 and 3 (Appendix Table F.10). EPIC generally had few effects on Medicaid participation, with the exception of reductions in receipt in Quarters 6 and 7.

Using the survey data, we also estimated impacts of EPIC on receipt of other forms of public assistance, including receipt of general assistance; UI; Supplemental Security Income (SSI); Section 8, Housing Choice Vouchers, or Public Housing Assistance; Medicaid; and the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).⁴² There were generally no impacts on the receipt of these forms of public assistance during the three-year period (Appendix Table F.11). However, individuals in the EPIC group were about 3 percentage points less likely than those in the control group to receive unemployment insurance in Year 1. The most commonly received benefit among both research groups was Medicaid (about 70 percent).

3. Conclusions

EPIC reduced participation in SNAP. The differences between research groups were statistically significant in Years 2 and 3. EPIC also led to a reduction in SNAP benefit amounts over the follow-up period—both nominally and as a percentage of the maximum benefit amount. EPIC led to a small increase in TANF participation in Year 1, but no effects in later years. EPIC had few impacts on the receipt of other public assistance.

C. Impacts of EPIC on food security, health, well-being, and housing status

This section presents findings on EPIC's impacts on food security, health, well-being, and housing status, as reported in the survey data. Most of these outcomes reflected individuals' circumstances at the time of the 36-month follow-up survey. An exception was food security status, which was reported based on the 30 days before the survey.⁴³

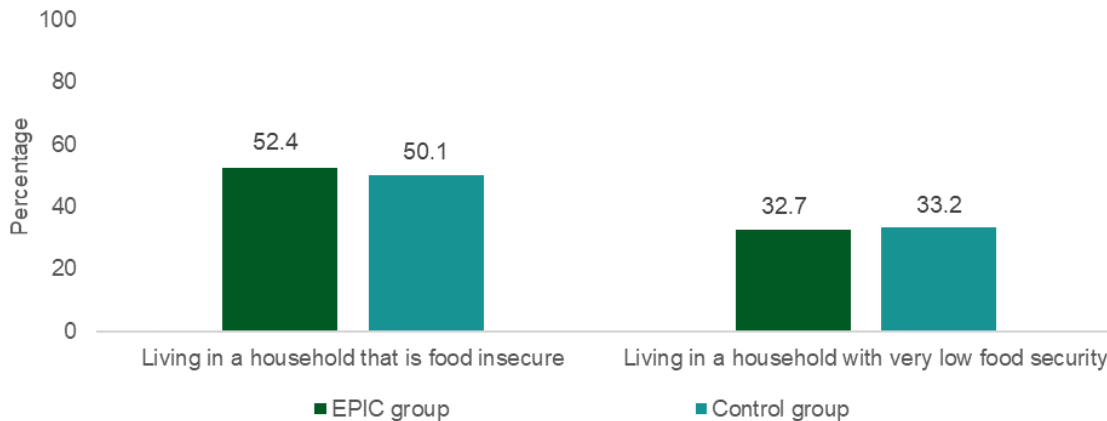
The EPIC and control groups had similar rates of food insecurity. About 52 percent of EPIC group members lived in a food insecure household compared to 50 percent of control group members (Exhibit VII.11). There were also no statistically significant differences in the rates of very low food security (a

⁴² Because the 36-month survey requested information about receipt of public assistance benefits between the 12- and 36-month survey interviews, it was not possible to separately estimate receipt of public assistance in Years 2 and 3.

⁴³ Food security is having access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Individuals who experience food access limitations due to lack of money or other resources are said to be food insecure. Those who cannot afford enough to eat may experience a particularly severe form of food insecurity where at times one or more household member experiences reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns referred to as very low food security. The outcomes of food insecurity and very low food security are based on responses to 10 questions about difficulty meeting basic food needs due to lack of money to be spent on food. Individuals who affirmed at least 3 out of 10 questions were classified as food insecure; those who affirmed at least 6 were classified as having very low food security.

severe form of food insecurity; 33 percent for both groups). There were no differences in impacts on food insecurity among individuals who were randomly assigned earlier versus later in the pilot (Appendix Table F.19).

Exhibit VII.11. Impacts on food security, based on 36-month survey data



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 36-month survey, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 813 EPIC group members and 783 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Among individuals who were food insecure at the time of the 12-month survey, those in the EPIC group were just as likely as those in the control group to be food insecure at the time of the 36-month interview (Appendix Table F.27). There also were no distinguishable differences between research groups in the percentage of individuals who had very low food security at both the 12-month and 36-month interviews (59 percent for both research groups). Together, these findings suggest that both research groups experienced similar changes in food security status between the 12- and 36-month interviews.

There were few statistically significant differences between the EPIC group and the control group for other outcome measures related to health, well-being, and housing status (Appendix Table F.12). About 20 percent of each research group screened positively for depression. Both research groups had similar levels of health (34 percent of the EPIC group versus 33 percent of the control group reported having very good or excellent health at the time of the survey) and self-esteem. The EPIC group did report somewhat higher self-efficacy scores (3.5 versus 3.4 score). Just over half of each research group owned or rented a home or apartment (51 versus 53 percent), and the EPIC group was somewhat more likely to report living in group quarters (1.2 versus 0.5 percent).

D. Impacts of EPIC on employment, earnings, and SNAP participation among individuals who started or completed an employment or training-related activity

The findings presented in Sections A, B, and C do not differentiate between individuals enrolled in the pilot who participated in activities and those who did not. In the evaluation literature, this approach often is called an “intention-to-treat” (ITT) analysis. Impact estimates based on an ITT analysis provide information about expected effects for all SNAP participants to whom pilot activities were offered. However, because some individuals did not engage in the pilot or start an activity, ITT findings mask how well individuals who did participate may have fared. In this section, we present results of analyses that differentiate individuals in the EPIC group who did and did not engage in EPIC and participated in

activities. This analysis, often referred to as a “treatment-on-the-treated” analysis, provides insights about how greater engagement in pilot activities may have translated into different participation experiences and, ultimately, into different impacts.⁴⁴

We assessed engagement in activities in three ways:

1. Comparing individuals who started an activity to those who did not
2. Comparing individuals who started and completed a job search or job search training activity to those who started but did not complete an activity
3. Comparing individuals who started and completed an education or training activity to those who started but did not complete one⁴⁵

Earnings and employment. Based on both UI and survey data, there were no impacts on earnings for individuals who started an activity or those who did not start one in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3; Exhibit VII.12). In both data sources, there were positive impacts on employment in the two-year period for individuals who started an activity but no impact for those who did not start one. Based on UI data, EPIC led to a 5 percentage point increase in employment in the two-year period (72 versus 68 percent) among individuals who started an activity, and no statistically significant difference among individuals who did not start an activity (70 versus 72 percent). Based on survey data, EPIC led to a 13 percentage point increase in employment in the two-year period (84 versus 71 percent) among individuals who started an activity; employment rates in the two-year period were similar among individuals who did not start an activity (81 versus 82 percent).

EPIC led to increased employment in Years 2 and 3 for individuals who started an activity but not for those who did not start one.

Based on both the UI and survey data, there was a significant impact of EPIC on employment and earnings in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) for individuals who completed education or training activities, but no impacts on employment or earnings for individuals who started but did not complete an activity and for those who completed job search or job search training activities (Appendix Tables F.14 and F.16). The pattern of findings suggests that completion of an education or training activity may have played a role in connecting individuals to meaningful employment.

⁴⁴ Because individuals in EPIC chose whether to start an activity and/or complete one based on factors we could not necessarily observe, the findings presented in this section are nonexperimental. The results do not represent the causal effects of EPIC on outcomes.

⁴⁵ There are many ways to quantify the extent to which those enrolled in the pilot engaged in activities—for example, the number of workshops in which someone participated, the number of hours an individual spent in an occupational skills training program, or the number of basic education courses an individual completed over time. Our approach for measuring engagement in pilot activities balanced the objectives of contrasting groups with well-defined, policy-relevant differences in participation across pilots with limiting the number of groups so that each analysis group had a sufficient number of individuals to yield informative estimates.

Exhibit VII.12. Impacts on total earnings and annual employment rates in Years 2 and 3, based on UI wage records and survey data, by whether individuals started an employment or training-related activity

Outcome	Started an activity			Did not start an activity		
	EPIC group	Control group	Difference	EPIC group	Control group	Difference
Total earnings (\$)						
Based on UI data	17,813	16,877	936	17,647	16,908	766
Based on survey data	27,668	25,262	2,405	27,955	28,481	-526
Employment rate (%)						
Based on UI data	72.1	67.7	4.3***^	70.1	71.9	-1.8
Based on survey data	83.8	70.8	13.0***^^	80.8	81.5	-0.7

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 36-month survey, weighted data. SNAP employment and training evaluation UI wage records, weighted data.

Note: Estimates based on survey data are from 401 EPIC group members and 332 control group members who started an activity; and 412 EPIC group members and 451 control group members who did not start one. Estimates based on UI data are from 1,036 EPIC group members and 1,033 control group members who started an activity; and 1,467 EPIC group members and 1,476 control group members who did not start one.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

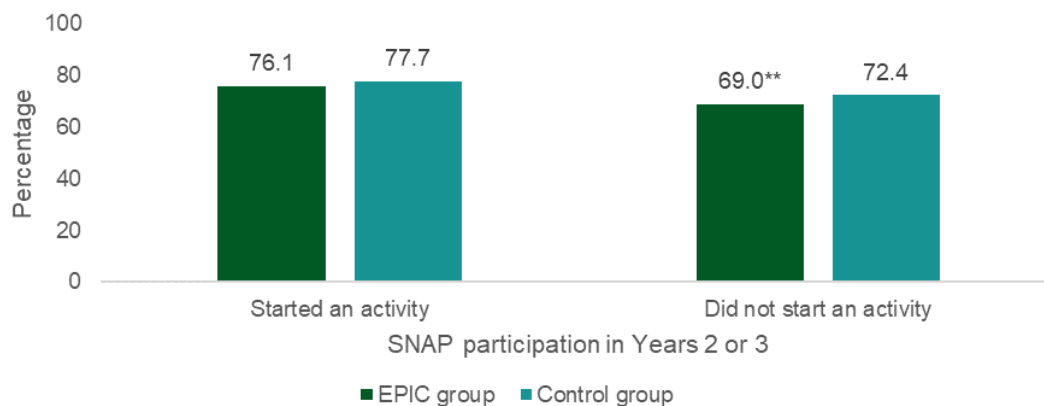
^^/^/^ Significantly different from individuals who did not start an activity at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

SNAP participation. There were some impacts on SNAP participation in the two-year period according to whether individuals started an activity, but no impacts according to whether they completed one (Exhibit VII.13 and Appendix Tables F.17 and F.18). Among individuals who did not start an activity, EPIC group members were less likely to participate in SNAP in the two-year period, compared to control group members (69 versus 72 percent). This reduction likely reflects the sanctioning of individuals who did not engage in the program. There were no differences in SNAP participation rates among individuals who started an activity, individuals who started but did not complete activities, individuals who completed education or training activities, and individuals who completed job search training or assistance activities.

For both those who started activities and individuals who did not start activities, EPIC reduced the average length of time individuals spent on SNAP and the average monthly SNAP benefits they received as a percentage of the maximum benefit amount (Appendix Table F.17). Among those who did not start activities, EPIC also led to a decrease in the total amount of SNAP benefits received over the two-year period.

The effects of EPIC on the length of time spent on SNAP, monthly benefits received as a percentage of the maximum benefit amount, and total benefits received varied across groups of individuals who did not complete activities, completed education or training activities, or completed job search training or assistance activities (Appendix Table F.18). Among those who started but did not complete activities and those who completed job search training or assistance activities, EPIC reduced the average length of time individuals spent on SNAP, the average monthly SNAP benefits they received as a percentage of the maximum benefit amount, and the total amount of SNAP benefits they received over the two-year period. Among those who completed education or training activities, EPIC had no effect on time spent on SNAP or benefits received.

Exhibit VII.13. SNAP participation rates based on SNAP administrative data, by whether an individual started an activity



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation SNAP administrative data, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 1,036 EPIC group members and 1,033 control group members who started an activity; and 1,467 EPIC group members and 1,476 control group members who did not start one.

***/**/* Difference between the EPIC group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

^^^/^^/^ Significantly different from individuals who did not start an activity at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

VIII. Analysis of the costs and benefits of EPIC group and control group services

In this chapter, we build on the findings from the impact analysis by comparing the benefits that individuals received in dollar terms through changes in earnings and public assistance with the costs of the services provided. This cost-benefit analysis describes the extent to which the benefits exceeded the costs of providing services to the EPIC group when compared with the benefits and costs of providing services to the control group (referred to as the *net benefit*). The net benefit provides context for how well EPIC group outcomes (benefits) offset the costs of administering the services. We calculate the net benefits from the perspectives of the individuals enrolled in EPIC and of government and taxpayers. The benefit to society is the sum of the net benefits to the other two perspectives.

We first describe the costs of EPIC, including those for planning, recruiting, and delivering services. We then present the estimated costs of all services provided to EPIC group members through EPIC, existing SNAP E&T, and the community and the costs of all services provided to control group members through existing SNAP E&T and the community. We estimate the costs of all services because any benefits individuals experienced through increases in employment and earnings are the result of all of the services they received during the follow-up period, not just those offered through EPIC. We then present the findings from the cost-benefit analysis and estimate the net benefit of services provided to the EPIC group, compared with services provided to the control group. We conducted sensitivity analyses to test the robustness of our findings to changes in key assumptions and present those findings together with the cost-benefit analysis. All costs and the dollar values of benefits presented in this chapter have been adjusted to 2016 dollars, as this was the year that EPIC started providing services and individuals started accruing benefits.

A. Description of the costs of EPIC

This section provides detail on the total costs of EPIC services, EPIC services by type, and the average cost of EPIC services per individual.

1. Total costs of EPIC

FNS awarded IDHS a grant of \$21,858,000 to develop and provide EPIC services. IDHS and its partners and providers reported spending \$16,323,517 on planning, recruiting, and delivering EPIC services (Exhibit VIII.1).⁴⁶

These costs included \$279,680 for planning (2 percent of total costs) and \$2,343,380 for recruitment (14 percent). EPIC service costs—for ongoing administration and delivering direct services—were \$13,700,457, which was 84 percent of total costs.⁴⁷ Ongoing administration, which included time for staff

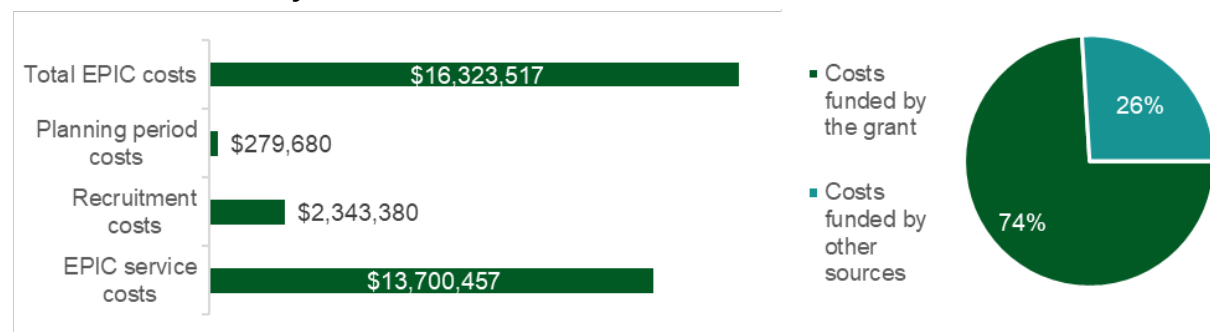
EPIC cost a total of \$16,323,517, with service costs accounting for 84 percent of this amount.

⁴⁶ The costs for planning and recruiting affected both EPIC and control group members, whereas the costs for operating EPIC services affected the EPIC group only.

⁴⁷ Service costs included costs of both ongoing administration and delivering direct services and activities. Ongoing administration costs included time for staff meetings, supervision, and other activities. Direct service costs included time staff spent providing services and activities to individuals, including time for tasks such as writing case notes or (continued)

meetings, supervision, and other activities, cost \$6,774,100 (42 percent of total costs). Direct service costs represented the remaining \$6,926,356 (42 percent, not shown). The FNS grant funded 74 percent of total costs, or \$12,080,965; 26 percent, or \$4,242,552 were leveraged from other sources.

Exhibit VIII.1. Summary of EPIC costs



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation actual reported costs by EPIC grantee, partners, and providers, 2015–2019; and SNAP employment and training evaluation survey of direct service provider time use, 2016–2018.

Note: The planning period was considered to encompass the time between when IDHS and their partners began designing EPIC (after grant award) and EPIC started enrolling individuals (April 2015 to March 2016). Quarterly workbooks reported the costs of the planning period, and recruitment and EPIC services following the start of EPIC. We estimated the breakdown of recruitment, EPIC direct service, and ongoing administration costs using data from a time-use survey of direct service provider staff. All costs are presented in 2016 dollars.

Appendix Table G.2 summarizes costs through February 2019 by cost category, including (1) staff costs (including volunteer time), (2) partner and provider direct service costs, (3) supply and equipment costs, and (4) overhead and operating costs. IDHS and EPIC partners and providers reported spending \$7,259,903 on staff costs and \$4,607,224 on direct services for partners and providers. An additional \$4,607,224 covered other overhead and operating costs. The remaining costs (\$183,293) covered supply and equipment costs. The FNS grant covered the majority of all costs (74 percent). Funding from other sources was used primarily for facilities and utilities and staff, accounting for 81 percent of the facilities and utilities costs (\$2,362,127) and 21 percent of staff costs (\$1,483,939).

2. Costs of EPIC services, by type of service

Service costs accounted for most of EPIC expenditures. We estimated the costs of specific types of services offered through EPIC, including those of ongoing administration and direct services. The two largest service expenditures for EPIC services were for occupational skills training, which accounted for \$3,464,709 or 21 percent of total EPIC costs, and work-based learning, which accounted for \$2,230,803 or 14 percent of total EPIC costs (Exhibit VIII.2). Job readiness or life skills workshop and case management each accounted for 13 percent of total costs.

recording administrative data, and direct costs for resources such as textbooks or support services. Both ongoing administration and direct service costs included the costs of staff, supplies and equipment, overhead, facilities, and indirect costs.

Exhibit VIII.2. Costs of EPIC services, by service type

	Total service costs	Percentage of total
Total costs	\$16,323,517	100.0
Recruitment costs	\$2,343,380	14.4
Planning period costs	\$279,680	1.7
Total EPIC service costs ^a	\$13,700,457	83.9
Assessments	\$1,559,675	9.6
Case management ^b	\$2,124,397	13.0
Job readiness or life skills workshop	\$2,165,609	13.3
Education	\$267,351	1.6
Occupational skills training	\$3,464,709	21.2
Support services	\$1,091,218	6.7
Work-based learning	\$2,230,803	13.7
Other direct service contracts ^c	\$796,695	4.9

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation actual reported costs by EPIC grantee, partners, and providers, 2015–2019; and SNAP employment and training evaluation survey of direct service provider time use, 2016–2018.

Note: The estimated costs of case management, job readiness or life skills workshop, and assessments include costs for staff, supplies and equipment, and overhead and operating costs, which were allocated using the average percentage of time spent on these activities in the time-use survey. We assumed the reported costs of support services, other direct service contracts, work-based learning, occupational skills training, and education already include costs for staff, supplies and equipment, or overhead and operating costs. Other direct service contracts included a contract to support collection of case management and participation data. We assumed these costs were either built into those payments or the associated staff time and costs fell under case management. All costs are presented in 2016 dollars.

^a Total EPIC service costs included the costs of direct services and ongoing administration.

^b Case management included one-on-one meetings with EPIC group members and time spent on case notes or referrals.

^c Other direct service contracts for the EPIC group included a contract to support collection of case management and participation data. This is the actual cost reported for other direct service contract costs (which covered EPIC group services only).

3. Costs of EPIC services, per individual

EPIC group members each received different combinations of services through EPIC based on their needs and interests. As a result, the costs of serving each EPIC group member varied based on the number and types of services in which they participated. Exhibit VIII.3 describes the cost of EPIC services per individual. We separately present costs of operating EPIC from the costs of resources that were provided directly to EPIC group members—subsidized earnings provided to individuals for activities such as work-based learning; and support services provided to offset the costs of participation in EPIC, such as transportation or training supplies.⁴⁸

EPIC services cost an average of \$5,477 per individual.

⁴⁸ Operating costs included all service costs other than those provided directly to individuals through subsidized earnings or support services. These costs represent the time and resources required to deliver services.

The total estimated costs of EPIC services per individual ranged from \$907 to \$11,090, but were \$5,477 per EPIC group member, on average. These costs were primarily for operating EPIC (\$4,847); \$423 was allocated to the costs of subsidized earnings provided to individuals while in EPIC; and \$207 was allocated to support services provided to individuals while they were in EPIC.

Exhibit VIII.3. Costs of EPIC services per EPIC group member

Per individual costs of services	Mean
Total EPIC service costs	\$5,477
EPIC operating costs ^a	\$4,847
Subsidized earnings while in EPIC	\$423
Support services while in EPIC	\$207
Sample size	2,504

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation actual reported costs by EPIC grantee, partners, and providers, 2015–2019; SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data

Note: The costs of services per EPIC group member are the means of the individual-level estimates of the costs of services for each EPIC group member based on the services they received and the per individual costs by service type. The estimated mean costs per EPIC group member include all individuals who enrolled in EPIC, including those who disengaged soon after enrollment and those who participated in multiple services over a longer period. All costs are presented in 2016 dollars. Cost of EPIC services per EPIC group member: standard error \$73; range \$907–\$11,090; confidence interval \$4,705–\$4,990.

^a EPIC operating costs are the estimated costs of direct services including the ongoing administration cost. We included the costs of any supplies and equipment incurred during the planning period in this estimate because those materials directly benefitted EPIC group members once service delivery began. No other planning period or recruitment costs are included.

B. Difference in costs of all services received by the EPIC and control group members

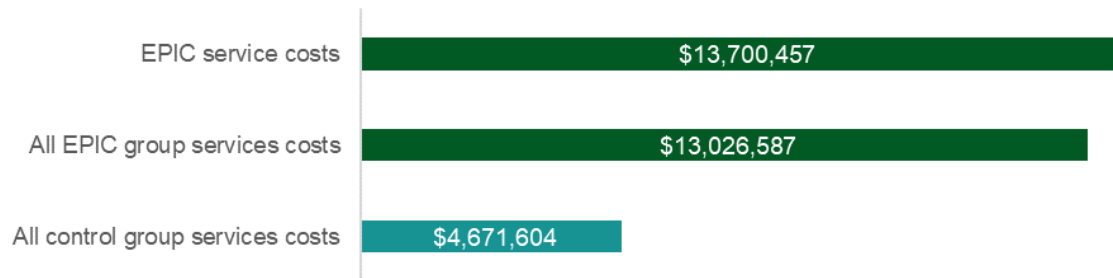
Whereas Section A describes the costs to IDHS and its partners and providers for developing EPIC and providing services to EPIC group members, this section describes the costs of *all* services the EPIC group members received through EPIC, existing SNAP E&T, and the community during the EPIC service period. In the cost-benefit analysis, we use the difference in the average costs of all services EPIC group members received per individual through EPIC, existing SNAP E&T, and the community and control group members received per individual through existing SNAP E&T, and the community and compare these costs to benefits. We use these differences in costs because impacts of EPIC on individuals' outcomes such as earnings, were influenced by all services the sample members received during the 36-month follow-up period not just those received by the EPIC group through EPIC. In this section, we present estimates of the total costs of all services EPIC and control group members received and examine service cost differentials overall, by service type, and per individual.

1. Total costs of all EPIC group and control group services

Based on data from the 12- and 36-month follow-up survey, the estimated total cost of all EPIC group services was \$13,026,587, including costs for direct services and ongoing administration (Exhibit VIII.4). This estimate is similar to the cost of EPIC services alone (\$13,700,457) which suggests that EPIC group

members likely received few services from existing SNAP E&T and community-offered sources while they were enrolled in EPIC.⁴⁹

Exhibit VIII.4. Total cost of all EPIC group and control group services



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation actual reported costs by EPIC grantee, partners, and providers, 2015–2019; and SNAP employment and training evaluation survey of direct service provider time use, 2016–2018; WIA Gold Standard Evaluation cost estimates 2012; FNS-583 data 2018; SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Note: The estimates were calculated as the product of the costs per EPIC group member for each type of direct service and the number of EPIC group members who received each type of direct service in the SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36- month survey data. Control group cost estimates were calculated as the product of the WIA costs per individual for each type of direct service and the number of control group members who received each type of direct service in the SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36- month survey data. All costs are presented in 2016 dollars.

The cost-benefit analysis assesses whether the enhanced EPIC services were effective enough to offset the difference in costs between the services the EPIC and control groups received. The services the control group received measure what services would have been available to the EPIC group members if EPIC were not in place. In 15 of the pilot counties, including Cook County, control group members had access to limited SNAP E&T programs as well as community services. In the remaining 18 pilot counties, the control group had access only to services available within the community because Illinois' existing SNAP E&T program was not implemented statewide at the time of the evaluation. The estimated cost of all control group services received was \$4,671,604, including costs for direct services and ongoing administration (Exhibit VIII.5). This was about a third of the cost of all EPIC group services.

2. Costs of all EPIC and control group services, by type of service

The difference between EPIC and control group costs of all services could reflect multiple factors, including how many services individuals received, how long the average individual spent in a given type of service or in services overall, or how much staff time or other resources those services required. Exhibit VIII.5 presents the estimated costs of key EPIC and control group services, by type of service.

⁴⁹ The difference between the costs of the EPIC services in Section A and the costs presented for EPIC group members in this section could reflect services that EPIC group members received outside of EPIC, but also could reflect the difference between administrative records of service use and each individual's recollection of services they received during the follow-up period. We examined the sensitivity of our findings to the use of these different data sources and found variation in reported participation in services by type, but the overall costs of services for the EPIC group are similar and do not change the results of the cost-benefit analysis.

- **All EPIC group services.** Case management and job readiness or life skills workshops were the largest expenditures among all of the services that EPIC group members received through EPIC, existing SNAP E&T, and the community. Job readiness or life skills workshops accounted for \$5,077,347 or 39 percent of total service costs while case management accounted for \$2,262,146 or 17 percent of total costs. Assessments, work-based learning, and support services accounted for smaller shares of service costs—12, 11 and 9 percent, respectively.
- **All control group services.** Case management and work-based learning were the largest expenditures among all of the services that control group members received through existing SNAP E&T and the community. Case management accounted for \$2,374,171 or 51 percent of total service costs, and work-based learning accounted for \$1,099,562 or 24 percent of total service costs. Education, support services, and occupational skills training represented smaller shares of total service costs—15, 6, and 3 percent, respectively.

Job readiness and life skills workshops were the highest cost for EPIC group members (39 percent of service costs) but were among the lowest costs for the control group (2 percent of service costs). The costs of case management were among the highest expenditures for the EPIC and control groups (accounting for 17 and 51 percent of service costs, respectively). Work-based learning was among the largest costs for the control group (24 percent of service costs) but was one of the smaller shares of EPIC group services (11 percent of service costs).

Exhibit VIII.5. Costs for the EPIC and control groups, by service type

	All EPIC group services		All control group services	
	Total service costs	Percentage of total	Total service costs	Percentage of total
Total service costs ^a	\$13,026,587	100.0	\$4,671,604	100.0
Assessments	\$1,613,312	12.4	\$15,721	0.3
Case management ^b	\$2,262,146	17.4	\$2,374,171	50.8
Job readiness or life skills workshop	\$5,077,347	39.0	\$72,556	1.6
Education	\$143,896	1.1	\$676,786	14.5
Occupational skills training	\$444,675	3.4	\$159,746	3.4
Support services	\$1,202,336	9.2	\$273,063	5.8
Work-based learning	\$1,486,180	11.4	\$1,099,562	23.5
Other direct service contracts ^c	\$796,695	6.1	--	--

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation actual reported costs by EPIC grantee, partners, and providers, 2015–2019; SNAP employment and training evaluation survey of direct service provider time use, 2016–2018; WIA Gold Standard Evaluation cost estimates 2012; FNS-583 data 2018; and SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Note: Cost estimates by service type were calculated as the product of the costs per individual for each type of direct service and the number of EPIC or control group members who received each type of service according to survey data on participation. Hyphens indicate that there were no costs associated with the service type, according to the data on participation in services for this estimate, which came from SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys. All costs are presented in 2016 dollars.

^a Total service costs include the costs of direct services and ongoing administration.

^b Case management includes one-on-one meetings with EPIC or control group members and time spent on case notes or referrals.

^c Other direct service contracts for the EPIC group included a contract to support collection of case management and participation data. This is the actual cost reported for other direct service contract costs (which covered EPIC group services only).

3. Costs of all EPIC and control group services per individual

EPIC and control group members each received different combinations of services, and the costs of serving each individual varied based on the number and types of services in which they participated. In addition to providing context on the costs required to provide these types of services to individuals, the per individual costs of all EPIC and control group services are the basis for the cost differentials used in the cost-benefit analysis.

All services EPIC group members received through EPIC and the community cost \$4,869 per individual, on average.

Using data from the survey, Exhibit VIII.6 describes the cost of all services EPIC and control group members received during the EPIC service period, per individual. We present operating costs separately from the costs of resources that were provided directly to EPIC and control group members—subsidized earnings provided to individuals for activities like work-based learning, and support services provided to offset the costs of participation in services, such as transportation or training supplies.

Exhibit VIII.6. Costs of all services per EPIC and control group member

	All EPIC group services	All control group services
Total service costs	\$4,869	\$1,795
Operating costs ^a	\$4,390	\$1,248
Subsidized earnings while in services	\$265	\$438
Support services while in services	\$214	\$109
Sample size	2,504	2,509

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation actual reported costs by EPIC grantee, partners, and providers, 2015–2019; SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data; WIA Gold Standard Evaluation cost estimates 2012; and SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Note: The cost of services per EPIC and control group member are the means of the individual-level estimates of the costs of services for each EPIC and control group member based on the services they received and the per individual costs by service type. All costs are presented in 2016 dollars. Cost of all EPIC services per EPIC group member: standard error \$86; range \$907–\$11,090; confidence interval \$4,221–\$4,558. Cost of all control group services per control group member: standard error \$113; range \$0–\$31,515; confidence interval \$1,026–\$1,470.

^a Operating costs are the estimated cost of direct services including the ongoing administration cost.

The cost of all services EPIC group members received (from EPIC, existing SNAP E&T, and the community) ranged from \$907 to \$11,090 but were about \$4,869 per EPIC group member, on average. The largest component of this cost was operating costs, which were \$4,390. The costs of subsidized earnings and support services accounted for a smaller share of the overall cost—\$265 and \$214, respectively.

All services control group members received through the community cost \$1,800 per individual, on average.

The cost of all services control group members received from existing SNAP E&T and the community ranged from \$0 to \$31,515 but were about \$1,795 per control group member on average. Operating costs accounted for the largest share of this cost (\$1,248) and subsidized earnings and support services represented smaller shares (\$438 and \$109, respectively). The cost of all services per control group member was just over one third of the cost of all services per EPIC group member, on average.

C. Cost-benefit analysis of EPIC group services

The purpose of the cost-benefit analysis is to estimate the benefits in dollar terms relative to the dollar costs of providing services. This section presents the findings of the cost-benefit analysis. We present results using the two sources of data on benefits used in the impact analysis: (1) UI wage records and (2) 36-month survey data.⁵⁰ The cost-benefit analysis uses a framework to present a comprehensive listing of EPIC group benefits and costs relative to the control group from multiple perspectives, including those of (1) individuals enrolled in EPIC, (2) government and taxpayers, and (3) society as a whole, which represents the sum of the other two perspectives. The primary cost-benefit finding from each perspective was the net benefit (the difference between total benefits and total costs). A positive net benefit means the benefits outweighed the costs, whereas a negative net benefit means the costs outweighed the benefits. In addition, we estimated the ratio of benefits to costs, which describes the return to society on each dollar invested. We also describe how our results differed according to changes in these assumptions for each of the cost-benefit accounting frameworks presented below.

1. Costs and benefits of all services for EPIC group members, based on UI wage records

The net benefit of services for the EPIC group compared to the control group were positive for EPIC group members but negative for government and taxpayers during the 36-month follow-up period (Exhibit VIII.7). This resulted in an overall negative net benefit to society. The benefit-cost ratio, or return on investment to society, was 0.25. These results emerged because

*The net benefits of all services EPIC group members received were **positive** for EPIC group members but **negative** for government and taxpayers and for society during the 36-month follow-up period (UI wage records).*

the differences in the cumulative earnings of EPIC and control group members during the 36-month follow-up period did not offset the costs of the services, on average. The services benefitted EPIC group members through support service payments while they were in services, which contributed to a net benefit to individuals, but these services were a cost to government and taxpayers in the same amount.

- **Society.** On average, all EPIC group services cost society \$2,228 more per individual than control group services per individual. This difference primarily reflects the differential costs of EPIC group services, which were not offset by the benefits accrued through earnings and fringe benefits during the 36-month follow-up period.
- **EPIC group members.** On average, EPIC group members received a net benefit of \$553, compared with the control group. Cumulative earnings accounted for most of the benefits to EPIC group members, who earned \$600 more than control group members did over the 36-month follow-up period. We assumed any subsidized earnings received while participating in work-based learning activities were included in the \$600 difference in earnings. The EPIC group also benefitted from higher fringe benefits and support services compared to the control group (by \$125 and \$105, respectively). EPIC group members paid \$145 more in taxes than the control group, on average. In

⁵⁰ We included impacts on cumulative earnings and SNAP and TANF benefit receipt in the cost-benefit analysis even if they were not statistically significant. These estimates are the best information we have on the qualitative differences in outcomes between the two groups. We noted statistically significant impacts where they were present in the exhibits.

addition, EPIC group members received lower SNAP benefits (\$136) and a similar amount of TANF benefits (\$5 more), compared to the control group.

Exhibit VIII.7 Benefits and costs associated with EPIC services or community-offered services, for the EPIC group compared to the control group, UI wage records

	Perspective		
	EPIC group members	Government and taxpayers	Society
Benefits (\$)			
Employment and earnings			
Earnings (UI wage records)	600	0	600
Fringe benefits	125	0	125
Tax payments	-145	145	0
Use of public benefits			
SNAP benefits	-136**	136	0
TANF benefits	5	-5	0
Reduced administration costs	0	16	16
Total benefits	448	293	741
Costs (\$)			
Net operating costs ^a	0	-3,142	-3,142
Net subsidized earnings while in services ^b	0	173	173
Net support services while in services ^b	105	-105	0
Total costs	105	-3,074	-2,968
Net benefit (\$)	553	-2,781	-2,228
Benefit-cost ratio			0.25

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation UI wage records, weighted data; SNAP administrative data; SNAP employment and training evaluation actual reported costs by EPIC grantee, partners, and providers, 2015–2019; SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data; WIA Gold Standard Evaluation cost estimates, 2012; and SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Notes: Earnings, SNAP benefits, and TANF benefits are the impact estimates presented in Chapter VII. The net benefit is the difference between total benefits and total costs. A negative net benefit is a net cost. The benefit-cost ratio is the quotient of the total benefits and total costs. A benefit-cost ratio greater than one represents greater benefits than costs; a number less than one suggests fewer benefits than costs. All benefits and costs are presented in 2016 dollars. The standard error of the cost per EPIC group member is \$73 and of the cost per control group member is \$109.

^a This estimate is the difference between EPIC and control group costs per individual. This value excluded planning period costs but included the costs of supplies and equipment incurred during the planning period that supported ongoing services once they started.

^b Subsidized earnings and support services directly benefit individuals while they are enrolled in services. We assumed the subsidized earnings benefitting individuals were reflected in the earnings impacts presented as the first row in the benefits section of the exhibit. All earnings presented in the first row in the benefits section of the exhibit are included in the fringe and tax estimates, though we do not know the extent to which subsidized earnings would have translated into these benefits in practice. These subsidized earnings are offset by the costs to government and taxpayers, which is represented in the second row of the costs section of the exhibit. We presented the support services as a benefit (positive transfer) to individuals under the third row of the cost section of the exhibit and these support services are offset by the costs to government and taxpayers in the same row. Both subsidized earnings and support services are assumed to have a net neutral (zero) benefit to society because the benefits are offset by the costs.

***/**/* Difference in earnings between the EPIC group and control group significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

- **Government and taxpayers.** Providing EPIC group services cost government and taxpayers \$2,781 more per individual, on average, than providing control group services. This difference was due mostly to the costs of providing services (including EPIC, existing SNAP E&T, and community

services), which cost more than control group services by an average of \$3,074, including \$3,142 in operating costs. This cost was offset in part due to higher costs of subsidized earnings for the control group than the EPIC group (by \$173). EPIC group members also received lower amounts of SNAP benefits, relative to control group members, which was a savings to government and taxpayers in benefit allotments (\$136, on average) and administration costs (\$16).

We conducted sensitivity analyses to test the robustness of our findings based on UI wage records to changes in key assumptions, including (1) the values of benefits associated with increases in earnings, such as fringe benefits and taxes; (2) the values of costs and benefits when accounting for factors such as inflation and present value; (3) the assumption that subsidized earnings were reported to State UI agencies and are reflected in earnings impacts; and (4) the services EPIC group members received were primarily through EPIC and not from existing SNAP E&T and the community. These results were robust to changes in all of our key assumptions about benefits and costs from all perspectives (Appendix Tables G.10–G.12). The costs to the government and taxpayers always outweighed the benefits to the EPIC group members, so there was a negative net benefit to society regardless of changes in assumptions, ranging from \$2,135 to \$2,844 per individual. The EPIC group services led to a positive net benefit for individuals based on changes to all assumptions related to fringe benefits, taxes, and discount rates. Estimated net benefits per individual ranged from \$338 to \$583. Assuming that subsidized earnings were *not* included in UI wage records resulted in a net benefit of \$380 per individual, compared to \$553. EPIC group services resulted in a negative net benefit to government and taxpayers regardless of changes to key assumptions, ranging from \$2,473 to \$3,390 per individual.

2. Costs and benefits of all services for EPIC group members, according to 36-month survey data

The findings based on 36-month follow-up survey data were similar to those based on UI wage records. The net benefits of all EPIC group services were positive for EPIC group members but negative for government and taxpayers and for society during the follow-up period (Exhibit VIII.8). The benefit-cost ratio, or return on investment to society, was 0.34.

*The net benefits of all services EPIC group members received were **positive** for EPIC group members but were **negative** for government and taxpayers and for society during the 36-month follow-up period, according to survey data.*

According to survey data, the increases in cumulative earnings for the EPIC group, relative to the control group, were similar to those reported in UI wage records. Similar to the results based on UI wage data, the benefits of EPIC group services did not offset the costs of those services during the follow-up period, on average.

- **Society.** EPIC group services cost society \$1,968 more than control group services per individual. This estimated negative net benefit according to survey data was similar to that according to UI wage records data. This negative net benefit was driven by program operating costs for the government and taxpayers that were not offset by the benefits to EPIC group members during the 36-month follow-up period.
- **EPIC group members.** According to survey data, EPIC group members received a net benefit of \$752, relative to the control group. The EPIC group had higher cumulative earnings and fringe benefits compared to the control group (by \$815 and \$170, respectively). We assumed any subsidized earnings received while participating in work-based learning activities were included in the difference in earnings. EPIC group members paid \$207 more in taxes than control group members, on average.

Other benefits and costs to individuals were the same as those in the findings based on UI wage records, with support services accounting for a benefit of \$105, and lower SNAP benefits and similar TANF benefits, compared to the control group.

Exhibit VIII.8. Benefits and costs associated with EPIC services, existing SNAP E&T, or community-offered services, for the EPIC group compared to the control group, 36-month survey data

	Perspective		
	EPIC group members	Government and taxpayers	Society
Benefits (\$)			
Employment and earnings			
Earnings (survey data)	815	0	815
Fringe benefits	170	0	170
Tax payments	-207	207	0
Use of public benefits			
SNAP benefits	-136**	136	0
TANF benefits	5	-5	0
Reduced administration costs	0	16	16
Total benefits	646	355	1,001
Costs (\$)			
Net operating costs ^a	0	-3,142	-3,142
Net subsidized earnings while in services ^b	0	173	173
Net support services while in services ^b	105	-105	0
Total costs	105	-3,074	-2,968
Net benefit (\$)	752	-2,719	-1,968
Benefit-cost ratio			0.34

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data; SNAP administrative data; SNAP employment and training evaluation actual reported costs by EPIC grantee, partners, and providers, 2015–2019; SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data; and WIA Gold Standard Evaluation cost estimates, 2012.

Notes: Earnings, SNAP benefits, and TANF benefits are the impact estimates presented in Chapter VII. The net benefit is the difference between total benefits and total costs. A negative net benefit is a net cost. The benefit-cost ratio is the quotient of the total benefits and total costs. A benefit-cost ratio greater than one represents greater benefits than costs, and a number less than one suggests fewer benefits than costs. All benefits and costs are presented in 2016 dollars. The standard error of the cost per EPIC group member is \$73 and of the cost per control group member is \$113.

^a This estimate is the difference between EPIC and control group costs per individual. This value excluded planning period costs but included the costs of supplies and equipment incurred during the planning period that supported ongoing services once they started.

^b Subsidized earnings and support services directly benefit individuals while they are enrolled in services. We assumed the subsidized earnings benefitting individuals were reflected in the earnings impacts presented as the first row in the benefits section of the exhibit. All earnings presented in the first row in the benefits section of the exhibit are included in the fringe and tax estimates, though we do not know the extent to which subsidized earnings would have translated into these benefits in practice. These subsidized earnings are offset by the costs to government and taxpayers, which is represented in the second row of the costs section of the exhibit. We presented the support services as a benefit (positive transfer) to individuals under the third row of the cost section of the exhibit and these support services are offset by the costs to government and taxpayers in the same row. Both subsidized earnings and support services are assumed to have a net neutral (zero) benefit to society because the benefits are offset by the costs.

***/**/* Difference between EPIC group and control group significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

- **Government and taxpayers.** Government and taxpayers experienced a cost of \$2,719 per individual for providing all EPIC group services, based on survey data. Government and taxpayers experienced a benefit of \$207 more in tax refunds, per EPIC group member compared with control group members. As presented in the UI wage record findings, providing services cost government and taxpayers an average of \$3,074 more per EPIC group member, compared to control group members, and these costs were not offset by benefits to government and taxpayers during the 36-month follow-up period.

We conducted a similar set of sensitivity analyses to test our key assumptions based on survey data, including (1) the values of benefits associated with increases in earnings, such as fringe benefits and taxes; (2) the values of costs and benefits when accounting for factors like inflation and present value; and (3) the services EPIC group members received that were primarily through EPIC and not from existing SNAP E&T and the community. These results were robust to changes in all of our key assumptions about benefits and costs from all perspectives (Appendix Tables G.10–G.12). EPIC group services led to a negative net benefit for society regardless of changes in assumptions, ranging from \$1,874 to \$2,584. EPIC group members experienced a net benefit from EPIC group services based on changes to all assumptions related to fringe, taxes, and discount rates. Estimates of net benefits to EPIC group members ranged from \$711 to \$792. Government and taxpayers faced a negative net benefit for EPIC group services regardless of changes to key assumptions, ranging from \$2,608 to \$3,328.

IX. Conclusion

The goal of the 10 SNAP E&T pilots was to test innovative strategies to increase SNAP participants' employment and earnings and reduce their need for public assistance benefits. Through its comprehensive data collection and rigorous experimental design, this evaluation assessed whether EPIC—the innovative SNAP E&T program Illinois designed and implemented targeting new and current SNAP work registrants—was effective in achieving these goals. This final report presents findings from several inter-related analyses. Findings from the implementation analysis describe the planning and implementation of the pilot, its services and operations, and the components that may be sustainable or replicable. Findings from the participation and impact analyses describe receipt of services, participation in activities, and impacts on individuals' outcomes for up to three years after enrollment. Finally, the cost-benefit analysis describes the costs of services and compares the benefits of receiving services to the costs of providing these services. This chapter summarizes and discusses key findings from all these analyses.

A. Summary of findings

IDHS was able to coordinate with other government agencies and a range of service providers in the community to create a network of services for their SNAP participants. Although the process was not always smooth and staff sometimes struggled to keep individuals engaged in services, EPIC evolved to meet the needs of EPIC group members. Despite challenges getting EPIC group members to engage in services, EPIC group members were more likely than control group members to start an activity, complete an activity, and receive support services. However, increased engagement among EPIC group members did not lead to an increase in earnings over time. Because EPIC group members did not earn significantly more than control group members, the overall cost of implementing the pilot outweighed the benefits. These findings are described in more detail below. We also provide additional context for these findings in Section C.

1. EPIC implementation

IDHS collaborated with DCEO, SIUCWD, the Illinois Community College Board, and the Illinois Workforce Innovation Board (State WIOA program) to develop EPIC because they were looking to offer additional opportunities for occupational skills training and industry-recognized credentials that could lead to better jobs and self-sufficiency for SNAP participants. Based on interests and needs, EPIC staff matched individuals with an occupational skills training and a provider. The pilot design included three EPIC service model pathways, depending on the individual and provider, but these pathways became less prescriptive as EPIC evolved. Rather than the enrollment staff definitively identifying each person's service model pathway before random assignment, service pathways were determined by the providers after more rigorous assessments. There were some challenges to engaging EPIC group members in services. First, some individuals were often only interested in immediate employment and either did not show up to the service provider for the first appointment or became disengaged later if they were required to participate in other services before job placement. In other cases, there were challenges in matching individuals to occupational skills training, given limited information on provider requirements and prerequisites and the significant barriers some individuals faced. Finally, in some cases individuals had to wait to participate in occupational skills training because the classes did not start right away. Despite these challenges, a wide variety of providers offered the necessary flexibility to meet the differing needs of individuals and as a result many individuals engaged in and completed occupational skills training and work-based learning.

2. Service receipt among EPIC group members

Over two-thirds of individuals randomly assigned to the EPIC group engaged in some type of service, meaning they started an assessment or an employment or training-related activity or received a support service provided by EPIC.⁵¹ Additionally, nearly two-thirds of EPIC group members (66 percent) started an employment or training-related activity, such as job search or occupational skills training, after they completed intake and assessments. Among individuals who started an activity, completion rates were highest for job search (73 percent) and lowest for postsecondary education (30 percent). Of those who completed education and training, 21 percent obtained a credential, certification, or degree (including GEDs).

Virtually all EPIC group members in a randomly selected sample of 200 EPIC group members had a least one contact with an EPIC career navigator (99 percent), and 57 percent received a support service. Among those who received a support, virtually all received transportation assistance. Fewer individuals received assistance with employment or occupational skills training supplies (7 percent).

Individuals spent over three months engaging in EPIC activities. Nearly three-quarters exited EPIC within their first year (72 percent), with most exiting in the first and second quarters. Most individuals exited before completing activities (38 percent) or because they were no longer eligible for SNAP (27 percent).

3. Differences between EPIC and control groups in service receipt

The ability of EPIC to impact employment, earnings, and individuals' receipt of public assistance benefits depends, in part, on whether there are differences between the EPIC and control groups in receipt of services and in participation in and completion of employment or training-related activities. Relative to the control group, the EPIC group was more likely to participate in job search training activities and in education and training activities during the three years following random assignment. According to the survey data, rates of participation in these activities were 18 and 22 percentage points higher, respectively, among the EPIC group, relative to the control group. These differences existed despite the finding that just over half of control group members participated in job search training activities or in education and training activities. The significant difference between the EPIC and control groups in rates of participation was observed for all three years, even after EPIC services ended. The EPIC group also had higher rates of participation than the control group in most types of activities, including general job skills training, occupational skills training, and education.

EPIC group members also were more likely than control group members to complete an activity. Overall, EPIC group members were 17 percentage points more likely than control group members to complete any type of education or training activity. Differences between the two groups in rates of completion were largest in the first year after random assignment than in the second and third years. Relative to the control group, the EPIC group spent, on average, about two months longer in activities and six hours more per week in activities. The EPIC group was more likely than the control group to receive an occupational certificate or license (14 percentage point difference).

⁵¹ The measure does not include orientations, case management, or the creation of an ICP because individuals often engaged in these activities during their initial meeting with their CBO for the EPIC program but then did not return for more meaningful activities and services.

The EPIC group was more likely than the control group to receive case management (13 percentage point difference). The EPIC group was also more likely than the control group to receive support services (9 percentage point difference). The largest differences between the two groups were observed for transportation assistance (47 versus 36 percent).

4. Impacts of EPIC on individuals' outcomes

The findings from the analyses of the two primary outcomes in the second and third year after random assignment show that EPIC did not lead to an increase in earnings based on either the UI wage data or survey data but did reduce rates of SNAP participation. Based on UI data, EPIC led to an increase in earnings in Year 3, but not in the earlier two years. Related analyses of employment based on the UI wage data showed that EPIC did not increase the percentage of individuals who were employed, relative to the control group, in any follow-up year. However, survey data show an increase in employment in Year 2 (7 percentage points) and Years 2 and 3 combined (6 percentage points). There were few differences in impacts on earnings or employment in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) across subgroups defined by age, employment history, presence of children in the household, and household income. The one exception is that there were large, positive effects on employment and earnings based on survey data for the group with the most barriers to employment, and these impacts were statistically significantly different from impacts for individuals with moderate or few barriers.

EPIC reduced the percentage of individuals that participated in SNAP throughout the three-year follow-up period. SNAP participation rates decreased each quarter after random assignment, but more rapidly for individuals in the EPIC group, resulting in lower participation rates in Year 2 (by 3 percentage points) and in Year 3 (by 3 percentage points). These findings were generally consistent across subgroups, with the exception that the largest reductions in participation rates were among individuals in households with children. As noted earlier, the reduction in SNAP participation may be related to sanctioning of individuals who did not engage in pilot services.

Because these findings do not differentiate between individuals enrolled in the pilot who participated in activities and those who did not, they provide information about expected effects among all SNAP participants if they were offered activities similar to those included in EPIC. However, because some individuals did not engage in the pilot or start an activity, these findings mask how well individuals who participated in EPIC activities may have fared. Analyses that compared outcomes for EPIC group members based on whether they started at least one activity showed that greater engagement in EPIC activities translated into different participation experiences and, ultimately, to different impacts. Among individuals who started an activity, EPIC led to an increase in employment, based on both UI and survey data. In addition, effects were largest among those who started and completed an education and training activity, relative to those who started but did not complete an activity and relative to those who started and completed a job search and job search training activity.

Changes to EPIC policies or procedures after the pilot began did not affect EPIC's impact on starting an activity or completion rates. Analyses compared impacts among individuals who were randomly assigned earlier versus later in the enrollment period, after an increase in the number of enrollment offices in Cook County and an increase in the amount of support services from \$500 to \$1,000. Based on UI data, there was a positive impact of EPIC on employment and earnings for those who were assigned later in the enrollment period, but no impact for those enrolled before the mid-point. Differences in impacts across time periods were not statistically significant.

5. EPIC costs and cost-benefit analyses

IDHS and its partners and providers reported spending \$16,323,517 from April 2015 to December 2019 on the planning and implementation of EPIC (\$279,680 during the planning period, \$2,343,380 for recruitment, and \$13,700,457 for EPIC services). The FNS grant funded 74 percent of these costs; partners and providers leveraged other funding sources for the remaining 26 percent. The cost-benefit analysis compares the benefits individuals received through earnings and public assistance with the average costs of *all* services EPIC and control group members received per individual. The costs of all services EPIC group members received through EPIC, existing SNAP E&T services, or the community were similar to the costs of EPIC (\$13,026,587 or \$4,869 per individual, on average). The costs of all services control group members received through existing SNAP E&T and the community were about a third of the costs of all services EPIC group members received (\$4,671,604 or \$1,795 per individual, on average).

EPIC group benefits and costs relative to the control group are presented from multiple perspectives, including those of (1) individuals enrolled in EPIC, (2) government and taxpayers, and (3) society as a whole, which represents the sum of the other two perspectives. The net benefits of EPIC group services were negative for society during the 36-month follow-up period according to UI wage records and 36-month follow-up survey data (by \$2,228 and \$1,968 respectively). EPIC group services led to a net benefit for individuals due to higher earnings and receipt of support services while in services (\$553 and \$752, respectively). However, the services EPIC group members received were a larger cost to government and taxpayers (\$2,781 and \$2,719, respectively), compared to the benefits. The benefits did not offset the costs of the services, on average, during the 36-month follow-up period.

B. Placing findings in the context of the workforce evaluation literature

The EPIC study findings are consistent with the previous literature that has often found small or no labor market effects of employment and training programs for low-income populations offering similar services as EPIC. Comprehensive literature reviews are provided in Barnow and Smith (2015), Card et al. (2018), Vollmer et al. (2017), and Goger et al. (2020). This literature covers a range of employment and training activities and support services offered by both ongoing programs as well as grant programs similar to EPIC, using impact designs with rigorous control (or comparison) groups.

The literature suggests that programs serving low-income populations can typically engage individuals and increase their receipt of services relative to those received by the study control groups in their local areas. These differences can be large, especially for the receipt of occupational skills training and subsidized employment, translating into positive effects on the percentages of individuals who participate in training activities and the attainment of associated certificates and credentials. However, few of the studies have found that the programs lead to long-term increases in earnings or independence from public assistance (at least over the time period covered by the studies, which is typically less than four years).

There are notable exceptions, however, that show that the types of activities and services (such as occupational skills training, work-based learning, and support services) offered by EPIC could be effective. McConnell et al. (2021) found using nationally representative samples from a randomized control trial that had access to WIOA intensive services—one-on-one staff assistance such as assessments, coaching, career counseling, and service referrals—increased earnings by about 15 percent over a three-year follow-up period and yielded benefits that exceeded costs from the perspective of society. This evaluation, however, found no earnings effects of WIOA-funded occupation skills training.

Further, several reviews of the existing literature on the role of supportive services in employment and training programs suggest that low-income populations receiving supportive services, in combination with technical training and other ancillary services, such as case management, can have more positive employment and earnings outcomes compared to groups that do not receive such wraparound services (Davis et al. 2013; Gueron and Hamilton 2002; Maguire et al. 2010; U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2014). Another notable exception is the random assignment evaluation of STEP Forward (Walter et al. 2017) which found that the impacts of subsidized employment offered to the treatment group continued into the fourth year, well after the subsidies had ended. Similarly, Reed et al. (2012) found statistically significant positive impacts of registered apprenticeships, even nine years after program entry.

The literature also suggests that interventions that *combine* several strategies to help low-income individuals find and keep jobs appear more effective than any *single* strategy (Vollmer et al. 2017). Further, “meta-analyses”—that use regressions to combine and analyze impacts from different studies—find that total program effects are more than the sum of the effects of each of the program’s strategies. Thus, implementation and other factors that affect how well multiple components of a program are operationalized and delivered are crucial determinants of a program’s success. Relatedly, the literature has consistently found considerable diversity in program impacts across individuals (females and the long-term unemployed tend to experience larger benefits) and across labor market conditions (programs are less likely to show positive effects during periods of economic growth), but the patterns are not always consistent across studies.

Overall, the observed increases in the rates of take-up and completion of EPIC activities and receipt of services, and the lack of earning impacts for EPIC fit within the broader related literature. Although comparing the findings in this evaluation to those in the literature is informative, it is important to consider that differences in target populations, local economies, and varied experiences in implementing activities and services available in a pilot or program make it challenging to form direct comparisons to other studies. The next section provides context for the evaluation findings from this perspective.

C. Discussion

Although EPIC did not lead to increased earnings over the combined Year 2 and 3 period, it did successfully increase the percentages of individuals who received case management and support services, relative to the control group, as well as the percentage of individuals who participated in employment- or training-related activities. This is a notable accomplishment given the prevalence and extent of barriers faced by individuals who enrolled in the pilot—only 7 percent were employed at the time of random assignment and 23 percent did not have a high school diploma. The higher rates of receipt of case management and support services among EPIC group members, particularly transportation assistance, may have allowed individuals to overcome barriers associated not only with starting employment or training-related activities but with sustaining participation over time and ultimately completing the activity. Indeed, individuals in the EPIC group participated for more months than the control group and had higher completion rates. The mitigation of barriers for EPIC group members may have also contributed to their ability to continue participation in employment or training-related activities in the community, even after the EPIC service period ended.

EPIC also led to increased employment (based on survey data) in Years 2 and 3 combined suggesting that the greater service receipt and activity participation during that time increased the chances of finding a

job. However, these jobs did not pay appreciably more than those obtained by the control group, resulting in no impacts on earnings over the combined Year 2 and 3 period.

The increase in earnings in Year 3, based on UI data, is encouraging and may reflect the steps taken to address challenges EPIC had in matching EPIC group members to particular occupational skills trainings and providers. The increase may also reflect a delayed payoff to earlier occupational skills training participation. However, longer-term follow-up would be needed to assess this hypothesis.

EPIC also reduced participation SNAP. This reduction is likely related to higher rate of sanctioning for the EPIC group, relative to the control group, for failing to engage in pilot services. It may also be due in part to the increase in earnings in Year 3.

Additionally, despite higher rates of employment, unresolved barriers may have affected job retention or hindered opportunities to increase earnings. Information collected from pilot and provider staff underscores the degree to which EPIC group members faced significant barriers to EPIC participation and employment. Individuals often lacked work experience, technical skills or certifications, basic education, or workplace skills. Many individuals also lacked child care support, needed to take care of family members, had unstable home lives or housing, health issues, criminal justice backgrounds, substance use disorders, and transportation issues. Some EPIC group members reported in focus groups that transportation was the greatest challenge in finding and keeping employment. Transportation was particularly challenging to those who had to travel long distances to EPIC services or employment.

It is also possible that the impacts on outcomes such as earnings were diluted by the fact that, while the EPIC group was more likely than the control group to start and complete employment or training-related activities, the differences between research groups, particularly in skill-building activities, were not large enough to translate into impacts on outcomes. EPIC had challenges matching EPIC group members to the best fit services and providers. As a result, many individuals failed to engage or remain engaged in and complete substantive services such as occupational skills training. Moreover, many individuals were only interested in and only received placement services. Thus, these individuals did not increase their education or skill levels as EPIC had anticipated.

To assess this possibility, we compared impacts for individuals who did and did not start an employment or training-related activity. This exploratory analysis showed impacts on employment and earnings for individuals who started an activity, and few or negative impact on employment and earnings for those who did not start an activity. We conducted a similar analysis for activity completion and found significant differences in impacts among EPIC group members who did and did not complete activities.

This evidence suggests that the take-up and completion of EPIC employment or training-related activities may have played a role in the lack of impacts on earnings. Learning more about the barriers to starting and completing these activities would help identify which case management and support services were able to promote greater sustained participation in employment or training-related activities. This would also help to understand challenges faced by EPIC group members who participated in these activities, allowing program staff to adapt the content or delivery of these activities to have a greater impact. Also, understanding how receiving certifications, diplomas, degrees, or occupational licenses can differentially affect the prospect of employment for EPIC group members should also be explored.

Finally, staff indicated that improvements in the local labor market and economic conditions, with unemployment rates falling from over 6 percent at the start of the pilot to about 4 percent towards the end of pilot operations, limited job openings for EPIC group members with low education levels or a lack of

technical skills, certifications, or experience. Staff also suggested that employers wanted both skills and experience. Some, although not all, of the most common occupations in the pilot areas likely required some level of technical or other skills.

When considering the overall findings from the EPIC pilot, there are a few additional factors that may have contributed to the results, including the following:

- **Earnings impacts may depend on the type of activities in which individuals participate.** Individuals in the EPIC group were offered a wide range of services and activities. Earnings impacts may not be apparent for all EPIC group members, but this does not mean that specific activities such as occupational skills training or work-based learning are ineffective.

Assessing the effectiveness of services and activities separately and in combination would help to identify promising program components for improving outcomes. Because many EPIC group members participated in multiple activities, isolating the effect of a single type of activity can be challenging. It would be helpful to classify individuals who received different sets of services into mutually exclusive and distinct groups. For each group, describing participation in activities and estimating impacts on outcomes would help to identify specific services and activities, or combinations of them, that most effectively increase earnings and improve outcomes.

- **The COVID-19 pandemic which began during the 36-month follow-up survey period may have affected the magnitude of the impacts found in Year 3.** Outcomes measured in Year 3 for individuals who were randomly assigned in the pilot between April 2017 and September 2017 could have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which began to dramatically affect life in the United States in March 2020. We found evidence of employment-related impacts in Year 2, based on survey data, but not Year 3. It is possible that the pandemic attenuated the employment gains experienced by the EPIC group. In contrast, EPIC group members had higher earnings, based on UI data, in Year 3. This pattern suggests that the pandemic may have affected groups differentially, based on whether their employment was reported to the UI system or not. However, we cannot identify what the impacts would have been in the absence of the pandemic. Learning more about the effects of the pandemic on outcomes for each research group would deepen our understanding about EPIC's potential effects. For example, the pandemic likely affected individuals' outcomes differently based on their occupation if they were employed or the occupation they were training to enter. It would be useful to assess whether impacts on earnings and employment in Year 3 differed based on these factors.

- **EPIC costs were higher than the financial benefits of the program, reflecting the absence of an impact on earnings.** The absence of an impact on earnings is one of several reasons why the net benefit was negative. However, this negative net benefit primarily reflects the differential costs of EPIC group services, which were not offset by the benefits accrued through earnings and fringe benefits during the 36-month follow up period. When interpreting this finding, it is important to consider that EPIC services were new and experimental. The purpose of the SNAP E&T pilot was to test new approaches to services. EPIC targeted individuals with high barriers to engaging in services and obtaining employment, and IDHS led the development of new partnerships in their communities that did not exist previously. Even though the costs of planning and recruitment were excluded in considering the cost differential between EPIC and control group services, the costs of EPIC group services were likely higher for the three years of the pilot than they would have been if administered over a longer period of time. In addition, it is possible that some individuals realized benefits which do not appear in the cost-benefit analysis results – for example, increases in earnings that individuals

earned after the observation period of 36-months, or unmeasured benefits such as changes in food security, health, or well-being.

Although outcomes for EPIC were mixed, SNAP E&T program administrators can learn from the implementation of EPIC. For example, flexibility and responsiveness to challenges, such as increasing the number of enrollment offices in Cook County to address access point barriers and removing ineffective and time-consuming assessments from the enrollment process, enabled EPIC to exceed its enrollment targets. EPIC also illustrates the importance of having an adequate number of trained staff. For example, using existing IDHS staff to assess and match individuals with EPIC services and providers rather than hiring new staff with relevant qualifications led to significant challenges. Lastly, EPIC advocates for a strong MIS system that can facilitate collaboration and communication among partners and providers. WorkNet, the EPIC MIS, was critical to EPIC program management. It helped with tracking service participation and completion, monitoring overall engagement, and it served as a communication tool between partners, providers, and EPIC group members.

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