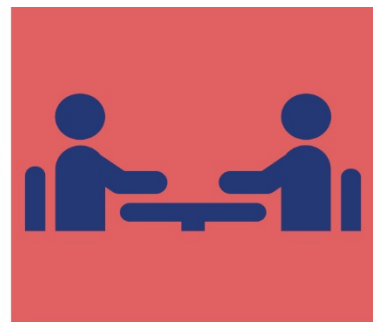




Expanding Opportunities & Reducing Barriers to Work: Virginia Final Report

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

Non-Discrimination Statement

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.



Expanding Opportunities & Reducing Barriers to Work: Virginia Final Report

May 2022

Jonathan Bigelow, James Mabli, Cynthia Miller, Brandon Hawkins, Stephen Freedman, Kelsey Schaberg, Gretchen Rowe, and Julie Hartnack

Submitted to:

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Food Nutrition Service
1320 Braddock Place
Alexandria, VA 22314
Project Officer: Anita Singh
Contract Number: AG-3198-B-15-0002

Submitted by:

Mathematica
955 Massachusetts Avenue, Suite 801
Cambridge, MA 02139
Telephone: 617.301.8997
Project Director: James Mabli
Reference Number: 50142

Suggested citation

Jonathan Bigelow, James Mabli, Cynthia Miller, Brandon Hawkins, Stephen Freedman, Kelsey Schaberg, Gretchen Rowe, and Julie Hartnack. (2022). Expanding Opportunities & Reducing Barriers to Work: Virginia Final Report. Prepared by Mathematica, Contract No. AG 3198-B-15-0002. Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support.

Disclaimer

The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and should not be construed to represent any official USDA or U.S. Government determination or policy.

Contents

Acknowledgements	vi
Glossary	viii
Overview	x
Executive Summary	xi
I. Introduction	1
A. Overview of Virginia’s pilot	2
B. Evaluation of SNAP E&T pilots	4
C. Organization of this report	5
II. Data and methodology	6
A. Data sources	6
B. Analysis approach	7
C. Study limitations	17
III. EleVAte enrollment and characteristics	19
A. Patterns of enrollment	19
B. Local economic context in the EleVAte pilot area over time	20
C. Characteristics of enrolled individuals	21
D. Characteristics of individuals who enrolled earlier versus later	23
IV. Implementation analysis	24
A. Pilot background	24
B. Pilot planning and implementation	25
C. Pilot services and operations	27
D. Sustainability and replicability	37
E. Key implementation analysis findings	38
V. Participation analysis	41
A. Participation in EleVAte	41
B. Education, occupational skills training, and work-based learning	45
C. Support services	47
D. Case management	49
E. Extent and timing of EleVAte exits	50

VI. Differences in service receipt for the EleVAte and control groups	52
A. Differences between research groups in participation in activities	52
B. Differences between research groups in activity completion	55
C. Differences between research groups in receipt of case management and support services	57
VII. Impacts on employment, earnings, receipt of public assistance, and well- being	60
A. Impacts of EleVAte on labor market outcomes	60
B. Impacts of EleVAte on receipt of public assistance	67
C. Impacts of EleVAte on food security, health, well-being, and housing status	71
D. Impacts of EleVAte on employment, earnings, and SNAP participation among individuals who started or completed an employment or training- related activity	72
VIII. Analysis of the costs and benefits of EleVAte group and control group services	75
A. Description of the costs of EleVAte	75
B. Difference in costs of all services received by the EleVAte and control group members	78
C. Cost-benefit analysis of EleVAte group services	82
IX. Conclusion	88
A. Summary of findings	88
B. Placing findings in the context of the workforce evaluation literature	91
C. Discussion	92
References	95

Exhibits

I.1	EleVAte locations	2
I.2	Pilot characteristics.....	3
II.1	Measures of costs and benefits	14
III.1	Overview of pilot enrollment	19
III.2	Cumulative number of individuals enrolled in each month of the enrollment period.....	19
III.3	Local unemployment rate in Virginia’s pilot area for each month of pilot operation	20
III.4	Common occupations and median wages in Virginia’s pilot area over time	21
III.5	Baseline characteristics of individuals enrolled in the pilot.....	22
IV.1	Pilot timeline	24
IV.2	Pilot flow and pathways	27
V.1	Percentage of EleVAte group members who engaged in services.....	42
V.2	Percentage of EleVAte group members who started an activity.....	43
V.3	Percentage of EleVAte group members who complete an activity, among those who started one	44
V.4	Number of activities started by EleVAte group members (percentage)	45
V.5	Percentage of EleVAte group members who started any occupational skills training and the five most common types of training.....	46
V.6	Percentage of EleVAte group members who earned the five most common credentials, among those who received a credential	47
V.7	Percentage of EleVAte group members who received support services, by type.....	48
V.8	Amount of support services received among those who received support services	48
V.9	Description of contacts with ACCs and counselors among EleVAte group members	49
V.10	Percentage of EleVAte group members who exited within each quarter	50
V.11	Percentage of EleVAte group members who exited, by reason	51
VI.1	Participation in any EleVAte, existing SNAP E&T, or community-offered services	53
VI.2	Time trends in participation in EleVAte, existing SNAP E&T, or community-offered services.....	54

VI.3	Participation in specific EleVAte, existing SNAP E&T, or community-offered services	55
VI.4	Percentage of EleVAte group members who completed education or training activities, by year after random assignment	56
VI.5	Percentage of EleVAte group members who received an occupational certificate or license, overall and by year	57
VI.6	Receipt of case management through EleVAte existing SNAP E&T, or community-offered programs, overall and by year	58
VI.7	Receipt of support services through EleVAte, existing SNAP E&T, or community-offered programs, overall and by type	59
VII.1	Total earnings based on UI wage records, by year	61
VII.2	Total earnings based on survey data, by year	61
VII.3	Total earnings based on UI wage records, by quarter	62
VII.4	Total earnings based on survey data, by quarter	62
VII.5	Employment rates based on UI wage records, by year	63
VII.6	Employment rates based on survey data, by year	64
VII.7	Characteristics of current jobs among individuals employed at the time of the 36-month survey	65
VII.8	SNAP participation rates based on SNAP administrative data, overall and by year	68
VII.9	Impacts on average monthly SNAP benefit amount based on SNAP administrative data, overall and by year	69
VII.10	SNAP exit rates and mean number of months of SNAP participation based on SNAP administrative data	70
VII.11	Impacts on food security, based on 36-month survey data	71
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	73
VII.13	SNAP participation rates based on SNAP administrative data, by whether an individual started an activity	74
VIII.1	Summary of EleVAte costs	76
VIII.2	Costs of EleVAte services, by service type	77
VIII.3	Costs of EleVAte services per EleVAte group member	78
VIII.4	Total costs of all EleVAte group and control group services	79
VIII.5	Costs for the EleVAte and control groups, by service type	80
VIII.6	Costs of all services per EleVAte and control group member	81

VIII.7	Benefits and costs associated with EleVAte services or community-offered services, for the EleVAte group compared to the control group, UI wage records.....	83
VIII.8	Benefits and costs associated with EleVAte, existing SNAP E&T, or community-offered services, for the EleVAte group compared to the control group, 36-month survey data	86

Acknowledgements

This report was prepared for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) by Mathematica and MDRC. It would not have been possible without the contributions of many individuals and organizations whose guidance, information, and efforts were critical to the Evaluation of SNAP E&T pilots and the successful completion of this report. We are especially grateful to the individuals who participated in the SNAP E&T pilots, particularly those individuals who completed surveys and participated in focus groups. We also want to give special thanks to the staff members of the State agencies who implemented the SNAP E&T pilots as well as the partners and service providers. Staff from these organizations worked with us to implement the evaluation, provided important information and data, and participated in interviews. We also acknowledge contributions from staff at Insight Policy Research, who played a role in the implementation site visits and led the collection of SNAP administrative data; and Decision Information Resources, who assisted in data collection for the 12-month survey of individuals enrolled in the pilots.

We also are extremely appreciative of the staff at FNS Office of Policy Support (OPS) and FNS Office of Employment and Training (OET) for providing ongoing guidance and feedback on evaluation plans and for reviewing this report. In particular we thank the evaluation's FNS project officer, Anita Singh, as well as her predecessors in this role, Wesley Dean and Danielle Deemer. For this particular evaluation site, we are indebted to Marcie Foster, the current OET liaison for Virginia.

The many individuals who contributed to the evaluation and this report are shown below, under their respective organizations in alphabetical order.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support (OPS) and FNS Office of Employment and Training (OET)

Kristen Corey (OPS)	Leigh Gantner (OET)	Loretta Robertson (OET)
Wesley Dean (fmr. OPS)	Rachel Gragg (OET)	Anita Singh (OPS)
Danielle Deemer (fmr. OPS)	Moirra Johnston (OET)	Kaila Wilson (fmr. OET)
Marcie Foster (OET)	Kathryn Law (OPS)	Jackie Windfeldt (fmr. OET)

Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS), Virginia Community College System (VCCS), and Virginia Employment Commission (VEC)

Ann Beverly (VEC)	Debra McDonald (VEC)	Randall Stamper (VCCS)
Jenny Carter (VCCS)	Rush McDorman (VEC)	Susan Stine (VDSS)
Cynthia Finley (VCCS)	Scott Murrah (VCCS)	Yvonne Thayer (fmr. VCCS)
Angela Lawhorne (fmr. VCCS)	Faye Palmer (VDSS)	
	Jeffery Thomas (VDSS)	

Members of the Technical Working Group

Ed Bolen (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities)	David Greenberg (University of Maryland, Baltimore County)	Jeffrey Smith (University of Wisconsin-Madison)
Stacy Dean (fmr. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities)	Alma Salazar (fmr. Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce)	Whitney Smith (JP Morgan Chase Foundation)
Amy Ellen Duke-Benfield (National Skills Coalition)		

Mathematica

Jeremy Berman	Julie Hartnack	Kelley Monzella
Rachel Bleiweiss-Sande	Leah Jennings	Nora Paxton
Felita Buckner	Kristen Joyce	Allison Pinckney
Jim Cameron	Miranda Kharsa	Milena Raketic
Molly Cameron	Wamaitha Kiambuthi	Linda Rosenberg
Barbara Carlson	Patrick Lavallee	Gretchen Rowe
Laura Castner	Cathy Lu	Betsy Santos
Sharon Clark	Timothy Luyster	Peter Schochet
Mason DeCamillis	Julia Lyskawa	Leah Shiferaw
Amy Defnet	James Mabli	Dan Thal
Dallas Dotter	Kim McDonald	Andy Weiss
Mary Kay Fox	Effie Metropoulos	Dan Welsh
William Garrett		

MDRC

Zuleka Abakoyas	Anastasia Korolkova	Stephanie Rubino
Jonathan Bigelow	Cynthia Miller	Kelsey Schaberg
Alla Chaplygina	Frieda Molina	Ebony Scott
Stephen Freedman	David Navarro	Susan Scrivener
Barbara Goldman	Keith Olejniczak	Diane Singer
Gayle Hamilton	Nikki Ortolani	Makenzi Sumners
Brandon Hawkins	Liza Paudel	Kemar Taylor
Richard Hendra	Alexandra Pennington	Betsy Tessler
Gloriela Iguina-Colón	Natasha Piatnitskaia	Donna Wharton-Fields

We also want to acknowledge the report reviewers and editors at Mathematica and additional reviewers at MDRC, the staff at the Mathematica's Survey Operations Center, the entire research team's efforts in conducting field research and analyzing the qualitative data as well as the efforts to collect, process, and analyze the quantitative data, and the hard work and additional support from research assistants and administrative assistants.

Glossary

ABAWD	Able-bodied adult without dependents. 18- to 49-year-old adult who is not disabled and does not have dependents
ABE	Adult Basic Education
ACC	Adult career coach
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
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
CPR	Cardiopulmonary resuscitation
DCSE	Division of Child Support Enforcement
DSS	The Virginia Department of Social Services
EleVAte	The SNAP Employment and Training pilot implemented in Virginia
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
ICP	Individual career 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
JSTP	Job Skills Training Program. A component of the EleVAte program which offered enrollment in short-term occupational skills training courses coordinated by the community colleges, plus Moral Reconciliation Therapy
LWIA	Local workforce investment area. A group of one or more counties that provide workforce development services
MIS	Management information system
MRT	Moral Reconciliation Therapy. A group-based cognitive-behavioral therapy and life skills program facilitated by a certified counselor
NCP	Non-custodial parent. A parent who does not have physical custody of his or her child

PIVA	PluggedIn Virginia. A component of the EleVAte program which offered more advanced, longer-term occupational skills training courses packaged with online and classroom-based, career-contextualized adult-education instruction to support the attainment of a high school equivalency credential.
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)
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
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
VCCS	The Virginia Community College System
VDSS	The Virginia Department of Social Services
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—EleVAte—that was implemented in Virginia from March 2016 to December 2018. 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 Virginia Department of Social Services (DSS) enrolled 5,027 SNAP participants in the pilot, with roughly half randomly assigned to the EleVAte 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 services and any other employment and training services available in their communities). EleVAte was offered to SNAP participants, which includes work registrants and ABAWDS. EleVAte services were voluntary and available in 24 localities through service providers that offered individuals in EleVAte a mix of assessments and career counseling, case management, online digital literacy and basic computer skills training, job readiness training, group counseling, adult basic education and GED services, occupational skills training leading to certified credentials, and support services. Individuals were placed into one of three service components based on their assessed reading proficiency level and were then eligible to receive specific services.

DSS was able to coordinate with the Virginia Community College System (VCCS), the lead service provider and partner in the development of the pilot, to create a network of services for its SNAP participants. The pilot effort encountered many challenges during implementation, and various assumptions regarding the service needs of SNAP participants played out differently after service delivery began. However, SNAP participants enrolled into the EleVAte group were described by staff as motivated to participate in short-term occupational skills training courses leading to industry-recognized credentials. Despite challenges getting many EleVAte group members to engage in services through to completion, EleVAte group members were more likely than control group members to start an activity, complete an activity, and receive support services. Increased engagement among EleVAte group members led to an increase in earnings over time, although only based on survey data. EleVAte also led to an increase in SNAP participation, although only in Year 2. Despite the positive effect on earnings, the overall cost of implementing the pilot outweighed its benefits.

The increase in earnings, although only found in the survey data, is an accomplishment given the prevalence and extent of barriers faced by individuals who enrolled in the pilot. These findings likely reflect the fact that EleVAte led to increases of over 20 percentage points in the percentage of individuals who participated in and completed employment or training-related activities relative to the control group. In addition, effects may have been driven by the large increase in the receipt of transportation assistance, allowing individuals to overcome barriers associated not only with starting employment or training-related activities, but also sustaining participation over time and ultimately completing the activity. On the other hand, several factors may have dampened impacts and limited positive findings only to survey data. Many staff and participants remarked that the availability of employment opportunities in some of these rural areas was limited. Transportation and childcare were also identified as key barriers to participation and employment. Finally, participants noted that completion of an occupational skills training course did not automatically result in employment, and some staff suggested that a greater emphasis on job development may have improved the employment prospects for individuals who completed the EleVAte program.

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, Virginia, 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 justice background or a 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—Virginia.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.

Virginia pilot background

In March 2016, the Virginia Department of Social Services (DSS), which administers SNAP, began enrollment in EleVate SNAP E&T in 24 localities (i.e., independent cities and counties) within seven community college regions in the Tidewater, south-central, and far southwest areas of the State. The 24 localities covered both rural and urban areas, with the majority of SNAP participants in the Tidewater region, including the cities of Norfolk and Hampton. From March 2016 to June 2018, DSS and its partners enrolled 5,027 SNAP participants into the pilot, with the pilot open to any SNAP participant, including able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) and other work registrants.

The State’s existing SNAP E&T program was voluntary, and at the time of the pilot was not available in all localities. It offered basic case management, support services, limited access to education and training services delivered by local providers, and referrals to other services in the community (for example, to the local workforce development center). In contrast, EleVate was intended to provide more comprehensive case management, soft skills training and job search assistance, dedicated and more expansive support services, and enhanced education and training opportunities. Participating in EleVate services was voluntary and participants were offered assessments and career counseling, online digital literacy and basic computer skills training, job readiness training, group counseling, adult basic education and GED services, and occupational skills training leading to certified credentials. Individuals were placed into one of three service components based on their assessed reading proficiency level and were then eligible to receive specific services.

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 EleVate group or a control group in roughly equivalent numbers. Individuals assigned to the EleVate group were eligible for the enhanced set of services developed under the pilot, whereas control group members were eligible for services through the

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

existing SNAP E&T program, where available, in the State. Individuals in both the EleVAte 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 EleVAte 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 EleVAte staff and EleVAte 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

EleVAte overview

DSS and its partners developed EleVAte as a way to better serve ABAWDs, with the expectation that participation in EleVAte services could constitute qualifying activities, should an ABAWD become time-limited in a pilot locality. This would allow the individual to continue to receive both SNAP benefits and EleVAte services. To select localities in which to situate the pilot, DSS and State-level administrators from the Virginia Community College System (VCCS)—the lead provider of EleVAte services—initially marketed the pilot to the executives of all the community colleges in Virginia. DSS then solicited interest among the locally-administered DSS agencies in the regions of the seven interested community colleges. In the end, 22 local DSS agencies, serving 24 localities, participated in the pilot.

State-level DSS administered EleVAte and local DSS agencies had primary responsibility for recruiting and enrolling SNAP participants into the pilot, in collaboration with community college staff. VCCS (a State-level organization) was the service provider lead, while EleVAte staff based at seven community colleges delivered and coordinated services in tandem with staff from Virginia's regional Adult Basic Education (ABE) providers and other training providers.

EleVAte was structured to have three service components available based on individuals' baseline educational functioning levels and training interests. This followed from the planners' assumption that a significant share of ABAWDs and other work registrants would need to improve their literacy and numeracy skills in order to participate successfully in occupational skills training. The pilot also assumed that many individuals enrolled in the pilot would lack a high school equivalency credential and would be interested in pursuing one. All service components included a common set of career coaching, digital literacy training, and soft skills/job readiness services. In addition, participants would engage in one of three service components:

1. **EleVAte Virginia Online**, expected to last 6 to 8 weeks, which offered customized, self-paced online basic adult education blended with in-person instruction from supervising adult education staff to improve individuals' math and reading skills before they would be eligible for further services
2. **Job Skills Training Program (JSTP)**, expected to last 8 to 12 weeks, which offered enrollment in short-term occupational skills training courses coordinated by the community colleges, plus Moral Reconnection Therapy (MRT), a group-based cognitive-behavioral therapy and life skills program facilitated by a certified counselor
3. **PluggedIn Virginia (PIVA)**, expected to last 6 to 8 months, which offered more advanced, longer-term occupational skills training courses packaged with online and classroom-based, career-contextualized adult-education instruction to support the attainment of a high school equivalency credential

Individuals reading between the 3rd and 5th grade were eligible for EleVAte Virginia Online; those reading between the 5th and 8th grade levels were eligible for JSTP or EleVAte Virginia Online; and those reading at or above the 8th grade level were eligible for all three service components, including PIVA.

The pilot began enrollment in March 2016. The enrollment process required individuals interested in the pilot, before random assignment, to be tested for reading proficiency, informed of their service component eligibility, and assessed for interest in pursuing the EleVAte services for which they were eligible. Following random assignment, individuals assigned to the EleVAte group were scheduled for an orientation session at a community college, after which they completed further assessments and worked with college-based staff to develop their service plans.

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

Soft skills and job search training and assistance. After orientation and assessments, most EleVAte group members were assigned to participate in online, self-paced trainings. (Individuals reading between the 3rd and 5th grade were first assigned to adult basic education services.) The online services—which were composed of digital literacy, soft skills, and job readiness training modules—were offered in labs at the community colleges and were supplemented with group and/or individualized workshops and career coaching.

Occupational skills training. Individuals expecting to start some occupational skills training options in the JSTP or PIVA components experienced wait periods before training courses began. Although the anticipated service sequence called for individuals to begin the above-described online, self-paced trainings at the same time as occupational skills training, some individuals completed the online services significantly ahead of the start of their training and others deferred participation in the online services if their training start date was close. While EleVAte group members could initially enroll into a variety of existing occupational skills training courses at the community colleges, financial considerations ultimately led EleVAte to offer only stand-alone, EleVAte-only training courses in fewer occupations. Training options varied by community college. Across the colleges training was commonly offered in the health professions (for example, pharmacy technician, certified nursing assistant, medical assistant), the building trades (for example, HVAC technician, electrical groundsman), information technology (for example, A+, Network+), and transportation (for example, commercial driver's license/truck driving).

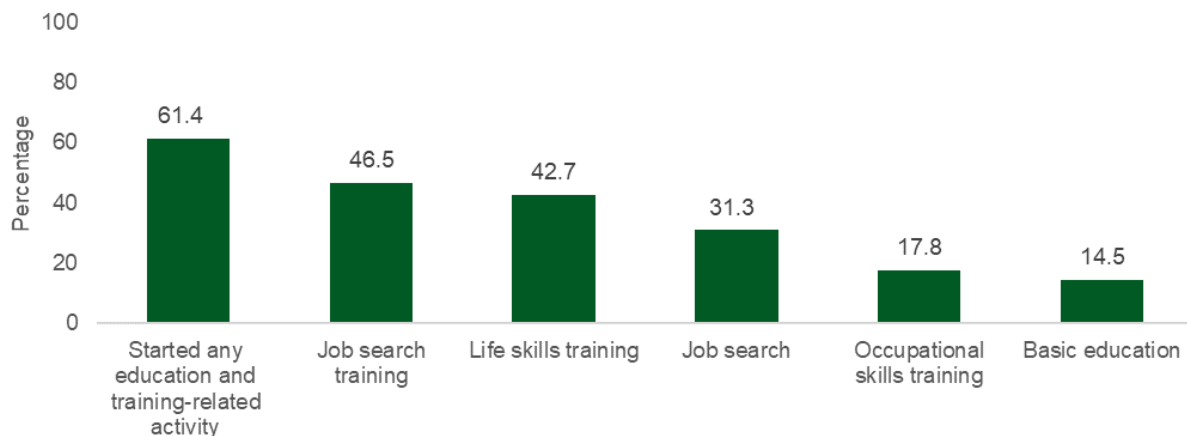
Case management, support services, and the MRT program. All individuals in the EleVAte group were eligible to receive supports for participation and to mitigate barriers to employment. Adult career coaches and counselors at the community colleges provided supports and referrals to other programs (for example,

for mental health services). Financial support services were available to cover costs relating to transportation, textbooks, rent emergencies, eyeglasses, work clothing, tools, and other expenses. In addition, EleVAte counselors facilitated Moral Reconnection Therapy group sessions, which typically lasted a few hours per week and were structured around independently-completed readings, self-assessments, and reflective activities that were then discussed within the group. Many EleVAte staff believed that this was one of the most successful services offered in EleVAte.

Participation in EleVAte services and activities

Most individuals in the EleVAte group engaged in some type of service, meaning they started an assessment or an employment or training-related activity³ or received a support service provided by EleVAte. However, only just over half of EleVAte group members (61 percent) ultimately started an employment or training-related activity. Individuals most commonly started job search training (47 percent) and life skills training (43 percent); fewer participated in job search (31 percent) and occupational skills training (18 percent; Exhibit ES.1). Among individuals who started an activity, completion rates were highest for job search (100 percent) and lowest for basic education (14 percent). About 63 percent of those who started an education or training-related activity completed it. About 14 percent of EleVAte group members obtained a credential, certification, or degree (including GEDs).

Exhibit ES.1. Just over half of EleVAte group members started an employment or training-related activity, with most starting job search training and life skills training



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

Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,512 EleVAte group members.

Almost all EleVAte group members in a randomly selected subsample of EleVAte group members had at least one contact with an adult career coach or counselor (94 percent), and 50 percent received a support service. Among those who received a support, virtually all received transportation assistance. Fewer individuals received assistance with commodities, such as eyeglasses or clothing (12 percent) and housing and utility payments (7 percent). On average, EleVAte group members who received support services received a total of \$360 in support service payments.

³ The measure does not include orientations, case management, or the creation of an EleVAte service plan.

Individuals spent an average of three months engaging with EleVAte activities. More than three-quarters exited EleVAte within their first year (78 percent), with most exiting in the first or second quarters. Many individuals exited before completing services or because they never attended EleVAte orientation.

Differences in service receipt for the EleVAte and control groups

Whether EleVAte impacted individuals' employment, earnings, and receipt of public assistance depends, in part, on whether there were differences between the EleVAte and control groups in their receipt of services and their participation in and completion of activities. To provide context for the impacts of EleVAte, we examined differences in service receipt between the two research groups.⁴ 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 EleVAte, 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 EleVAte group was more likely than the control group to participate in job search training activities and in education and training activities. Seventy-six percent of the EleVAte 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 EleVAte 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 (23 percentage point difference). This significant difference between the EleVAte and control groups in rates of participation was observed for Year 1, but not for Years 2 and 3.

The EleVAte group also participated at higher rates than the control group in all types of activities, including general job skills training (22 percentage point difference), occupational skill training (19 percentage point difference), education (8 percentage point difference), and work-based learning (less than 1 percentage point difference). Similarly, EleVAte 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 EleVAte group were 21 percentage points more likely to complete an activity and 20 percentage points more likely to receive an occupational certificate or license.

EleVAte group members were also more likely than the control group to receive case management (44 versus 39 percent; Exhibit ES.3). However, the difference between the two groups was statistically significant only in the first year following random assignment (6 percentage point difference); On average, EleVAte group members had two more contacts with an employment professional or case manager than control group members (five versus three contacts).

⁴ 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 EleVAte group participated in activities offered by EleVAte or the community at higher rates than the control group

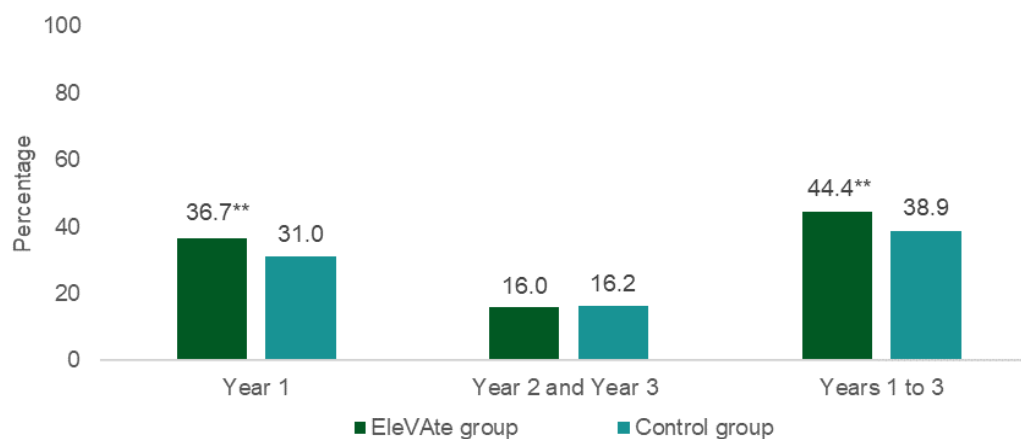


Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Notes: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 779 EleVAte group members and 744 control group members.

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

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



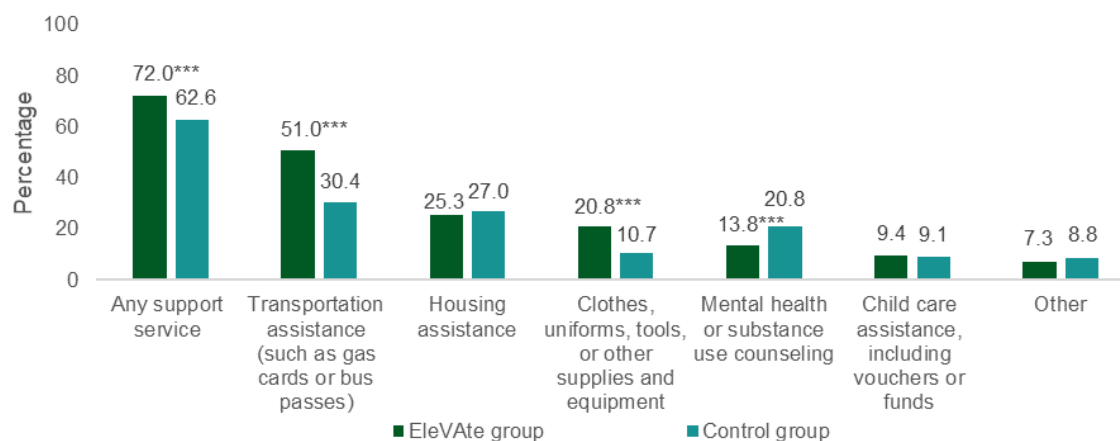
Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Notes: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 779 EleVAte group members and 744 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 EleVAte group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

EleVAte group members also were more likely than control group members to receive support services. About 72 percent of individuals in the EleVAte group received a support service compared to 63 percent in the control group (Exhibit ES.4). The largest differences were for the receipt of transportation assistance and for receipt of clothes, uniforms, tools, or other supplies and equipment.

Exhibit ES.4. EleVAte 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.

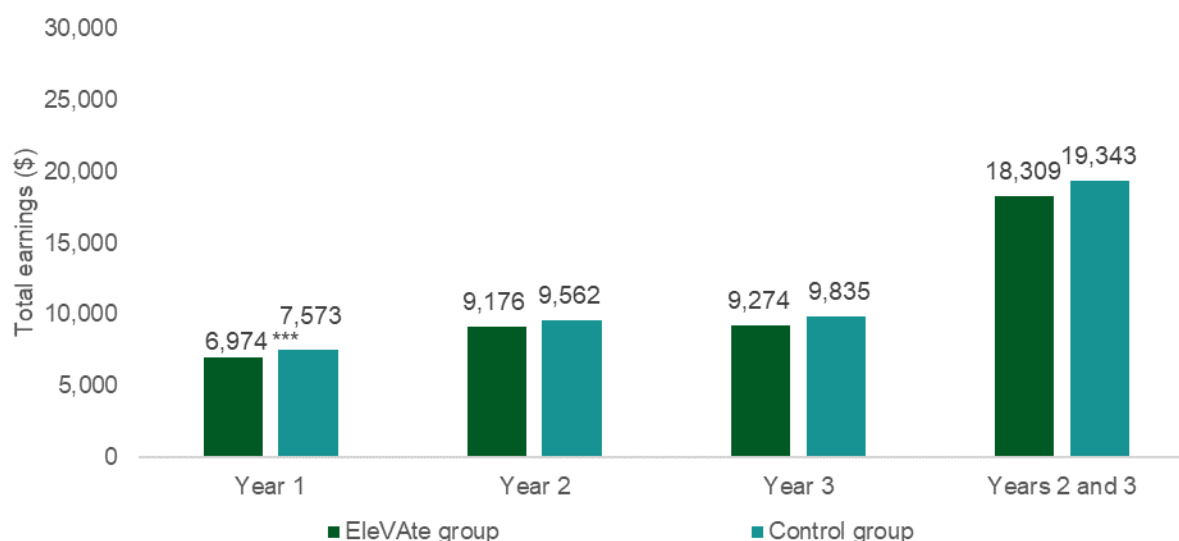
Note: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 779 EleVAte group members and 744 control group members.

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

Impacts of EleVAte on employment and SNAP participation outcomes

We estimated the impacts of EleVAte on individual outcomes over the three years following random assignment. Before analyzing the data, we selected two primary (confirmatory) outcomes: earnings (based on both the UI and survey data) and SNAP participation. 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 EleVAte 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.

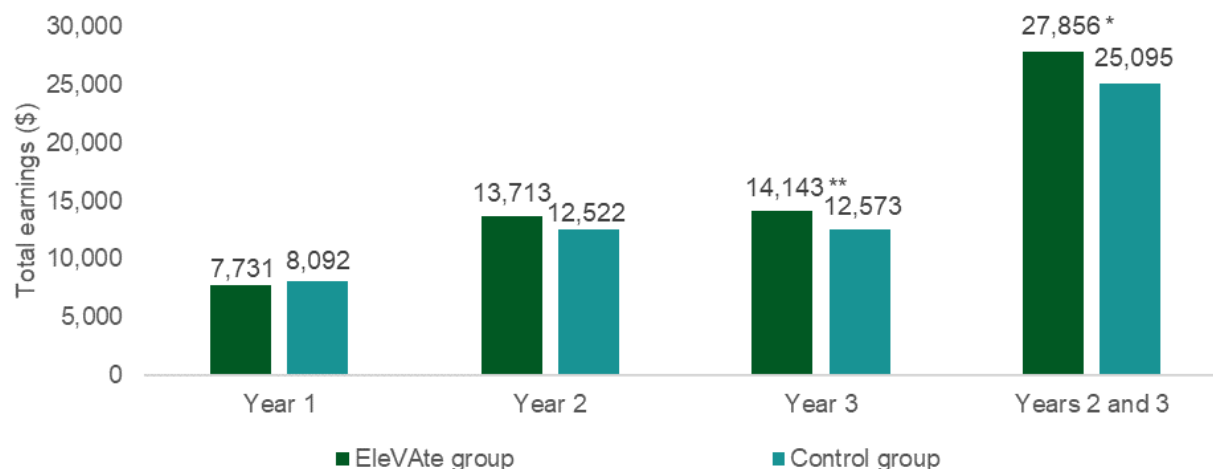
Earnings. EleVAte led to increased earnings in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) based on survey data, but not UI data (Exhibits ES.5 and ES.6). The survey data show positive effects on earnings, emerging later in the follow-up period. The EleVAte group had higher earnings than the control group in Year 3 and for the combined Years 2 and 3 period. Based on UI data, in contrast, EleVAte led to a reduction in earnings in Year 1, and no statistically significant impacts in Years 2 and 3.

Exhibit ES.5. EleVAte did not affect earnings, except for a negative effect in Year 1 (UI data)

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

Note: Estimates are based on data from 1,925 EleVAte group members and 1,911 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EleVAte group and control group is significantly different from zero at the .01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Exhibit ES.6. EleVAte led to an increase in earnings (survey data)

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

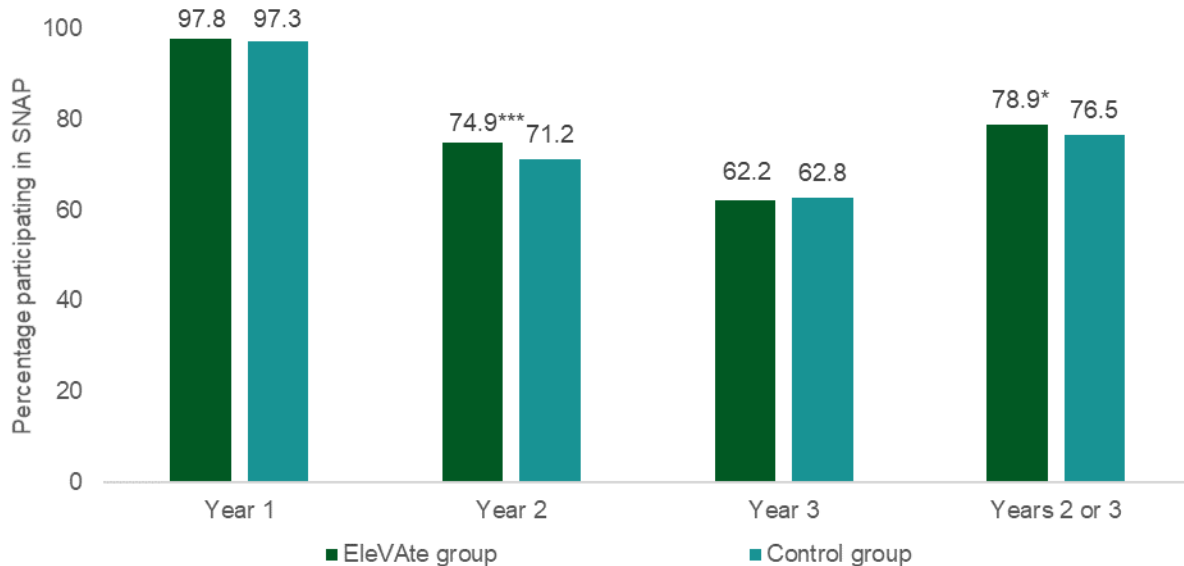
Note: Estimates are based on data from 779 EleVAte group members and 744 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EleVAte group and control group is significantly different from zero at the .01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

SNAP participation. EleVAte increased SNAP participation. About 79 percent of EleVAte group members and 77 percent of control group members participated in SNAP at some point during the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) after random assignment (Exhibit ES.7). This impact of EleVAte on SNAP

participation reflects an increase in Year 2 of about 4 percentage points and no impact in Year 3. SNAP participation rates for both groups decreased from about 98 percent in Year 1 to 63 percent in Year 3.

Exhibit ES.7. SNAP participation rates were higher for the EleVAte group than the control group in Year 2 and for Years 2 and 3 combined



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

Note: Estimates are based on data from 1,925 EleVAte group members and 1,911 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EleVAte 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 UI data, EleVAte had no effect on employment over Years 2 and 3 combined (74 percent for the EleVAte group versus 75 percent for the control group). These findings were corroborated by the survey data, showing no difference between the two groups in employment rates.

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 were generally similar to those for rates of employment. Both data sources showed that, relative to the control group, the EleVAte group was employed for more time in Years 1 and 2 but not in Year 3. Also, there was no impact of EleVAte on hours worked or on the characteristics of jobs among the employed. The majority of employed individuals in both research groups received an employer-offered benefit, but those in the EleVAte group were just as likely as employed control group members to receive any employer-offered benefits, as well as specific benefits such as health insurance, dental insurance, and tuition assistance or reimbursement.

SNAP benefits and exit. The impacts of EleVAte on the average SNAP benefits received, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the maximum benefit amount, were generally similar to those on SNAP participation rates, although there were no statistically significant impacts on these outcomes over the combined Year 2 and 3 period. Average SNAP benefit amounts for the EleVAte group were \$168

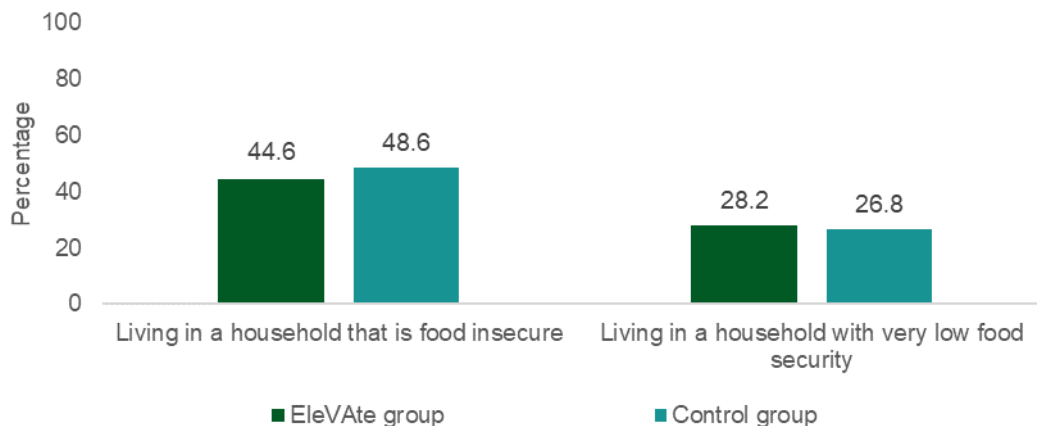
greater than those for the control group in Year 1, but the differences were smaller and not statistically significant by Year 3.

The EleVAte and control groups had similar likelihoods of exiting SNAP across the three years following random assignment—72 percent of each group exited SNAP at some point during this period. Individuals who exited SNAP included those who left and did not re-enter SNAP in the three-year period, as well as those who left and re-entered before the end of the period. Thus, even though 28 percent of the EleVAte group participated in SNAP for the full three years, SNAP participation at the end of this period was higher (51 percent), reflecting that individuals left and re-entered SNAP during the three-year period. These patterns of exiting and re-entering SNAP resulted in both research groups having roughly similar numbers of SNAP spells. About 65 percent of the EleVAte group had a single SNAP spell (meaning they either remained on SNAP for the full three-year period or exited and did not re-enter), 29 percent had two spells, and 6 percent had three or more spells. For the control group, these percentages were 63, 28, and 9, respectively. The EleVAte group was less likely to experience three or more spells (3 percentage point difference).

Impacts of EleVAte on other outcomes

Rates of food insecurity were similar in the EleVAte and control groups. About 45 percent of EleVAte group members were food insecure, compared to 49 percent of control group members (Exhibit ES.8). Rates of very low food security (a severe form of food insecurity) were also similar between groups (28 versus 27 percent).

Exhibit ES.8. EleVAte did not affect food insecurity



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

Note: Estimates are based on data from 779 EleVAte group members and 744 control group members.

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

There were no statistically significant differences between the EleVAte group and the control group for other outcome measures related to health, well-being, and housing status. About 25 percent of each research group screened positively for depression. Both groups had similar levels of health and self-esteem and self-efficacy scores. The majority of each research group owned or rented a home or apartment (71 percent), and similar percentages of each group were homeless (about 2 percent).

EleVAte costs relative to benefits

EleVAte costs. DSS and its partners and providers reported spending \$14,800,044 from July 2015 to December 2019 on the planning and implementation of EleVAte (\$281,527 during the planning period, \$103,687 for recruitment, and \$14,414,829 for EleVAte services and activities). The FNS grant funded 98 percent of these costs, and partners and providers leveraged other funding sources for the remaining 2 percent. Administration costs accounted for 6 percent of total costs, including time for staff meetings, supervision, and other activities (\$876,627). Direct services accounted for 92 percent of total costs (\$13,538,202), with job readiness or life skills workshops and case management being the largest share of those costs.⁵

Costs relative to benefits. In the cost-benefit analysis, we measured the difference in the average costs of all services received by EleVAte and control group members—that is, the differential costs of EleVAte services—and compared the differential costs of EleVAte to the value of benefits received by EleVAte group members. As in the analysis of services received, we considered costs associated with all services and activities, including those delivered by EleVAte as well as community programs and organizations. This approach reflects the fact that impacts of EleVAte 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 EleVAte.

Based on data from the survey, the estimated total costs of all EleVAte group services were \$13,766,053, including costs for both direct services and ongoing administration (Exhibit VIII.4). This estimate is similar to the costs of EleVAte services alone (\$14,414,829), which indicates that EleVAte group members likely received few services from community programs and organizations while they were enrolled in EleVAte. The services received by the control group measure what services would have been available to the EleVAte group members if EleVAte were not in place. The estimated costs of all control group services received by the EleVAte group members were \$4,794,514, including costs for direct services and ongoing administration. On average, the total costs of all direct services and activities received by EleVAte group members was \$5,046 per individual. The total costs of all services control group members received through existing SNAP E&T and the community were \$1,822, on average.

Estimates of the benefits received by EleVAte 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 EleVAte group benefits and costs relative to the control group from multiple perspectives, including those of (1) individuals enrolled in EleVAte, (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 EleVAte group members received were negative for EleVAte group members according to UI wage records, but positive according to survey data. Net benefits were 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 \$4,894 per EleVAte group

⁵ VCCS reported the costs of all services from Community Colleges as service contracts. It is possible that some of the costs recruitment and ongoing administration are included among these service contract costs, which are counted as direct service costs.

member according to UI wage records and by \$617 per EleVAte group member according to 36-month survey data. The findings based on UI wage records 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 EleVAte—the innovative SNAP E&T program Virginia designed and implemented to target new and current SNAP work registrants—was effective in achieving these goals.

DSS and VCCS were able to launch EleVAte pilot programs offering a range of services in seven community college areas, recruiting SNAP participants from 24 localities in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The pilot effort encountered many challenges during implementation, and various key assumptions regarding the service needs of SNAP participants—including the expectation that significant numbers of ABAWDs could be recruited into the pilot—played out differently after service delivery began. However, SNAP participants enrolled into the EleVAte group were described by staff as motivated to participate in short-term occupational skills training courses leading to industry-recognized credentials offered by EleVAte. Despite challenges getting many EleVAte group members to engage in services through to completion, EleVAte group members were more likely than control group members to start an activity, complete an activity, and receive support services. Increased engagement among EleVAte group members did lead to an increase in earnings over time, although only based on survey data. Because EleVAte group members did not earn significantly more than control group members, the overall cost of implementing the pilot outweighed the benefits.

EleVAte impacts in context of employment and training literature. The EleVAte study findings add to 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 EleVAte. 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, of which EleVAte is one, showing that the types of activities and services offered by EleVAte (such as occupational skills training coupled with support services) offered by EleVAte can be effective. It is important to understand how take-up and completion of EleVAte activities and receipt of services, as well as challenges experienced in implementation may have contributed to the evaluation findings.

Discussion of EleVAte impacts. EleVAte increased earnings relative to the control group based on survey data, but there was no impact on earnings based on UI data. EleVAte did not increase employment rates over the period, but did increase weekly hours worked in Year 3, which may explain the increase in earnings reported in the survey. The increase in earnings is an accomplishment given the prevalence and

extent of barriers faced by individuals who enrolled in the pilot—only 28 percent were employed at the time of random assignment, and 20 percent did not have a high school diploma.

Several factors may help explain why EleVAte group members earned more than control group members. First, EleVAte led to increases of about 20 percentage points in participation in and completion of employment or training-related activities and in the receipt of occupational certificates or licenses. Second, these credentials were received from community college training programs. Staff noted that employers were often eager to hire those with occupational skills offered by EleVAte, something that may have been especially true in the more rural areas. EleVAte was offered in seven regions representing a mix of more urban areas in the southeastern “Tidewater” region and rural areas in south-central Virginia stretching to the Appalachian foothills. Many staff and individuals interviewed remarked that the availability of employment opportunities in some of these rural areas was limited, although staff reasoned that employers may have been more motivated to hire from community college training programs in these areas.

Third, EleVAte led to an increase in the receipt of transportation assistance. Transportation barriers were identified by staff and participants in all areas and may have especially hindered participation in EleVAte in rural areas. The provision of this service may have allowed individuals to overcome barriers associated not only with starting employment or training-related activities, but also sustaining participation over time and ultimately completing the activity.

Finally, EleVAte’s individualized approach to scaffolding service participation and completion through the use of learning labs staffed with adult basic education instructors may have resulted in higher rates of activity participation and completion. Staff closely monitored individuals’ progression through individually-tailored training curricula and targeted instructional support as soon as needs were identified. Although not all EleVAte services were offered in these labs, the ability of individuals to participate in many of EleVAte’s service components may have further promoted the attachment of individuals to the program services.

Other information collected from pilot and provider staff highlighted considerations for program improvement. For example, some staff called for more emphasis on job development. EleVAte group members noted that completion of an occupational skills training course did not automatically result in employment, and staff suggested that a greater emphasis on job development may have improved the employment prospects for individuals who completed the EleVAte program. Some college staff also noted that certain occupational skills training programs, such as in the health professions, were inappropriate for individuals with past involvement in the criminal justice system due to employment ineligibility. Finally, some SNAP participants in focus groups observed that employers, regardless of the area, were known to discriminate against people of color, who made up a majority of pilot participants.

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

- **Earnings impacts might depend on the type of activities in which individuals participated.** Individuals in the EleVAte group were offered a wide range of services and activities. There were earnings impacts for all EleVAte group members, but impacts may differ for specific activities, such as occupational skills training or work-based learning. Assessing the effectiveness of services and activities separately and in combination would help to identify promising practices for improving outcomes. Because many EleVAte 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 increase earnings and improve outcomes most effectively.

- **The COVID-19 pandemic may have hindered our ability to capture the full extent of impacts in Year 3.** Outcomes measured in Year 3 for participants who were randomly assigned in the pilot between April 2017 and December 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 impacts on earnings in Year 3 based on survey data, and no effects in any year, based on UI data. In addition, EleVAte had no impacts on employment rates, according to both data sources. It is possible that the pandemic impacted the EleVAte and control group differently, lessening the possibility of employment impacts and diminishing the size of the impact on earnings. 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 how long to expect earnings increases following participation in EleVAte activities. 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.
- **Despite a positive impact on earnings for the EleVAte group relative to the control group, the net benefit of EleVAte relative to the control group was negative.** This primarily reflects the differential costs of EleVAte group services, which were not offset by the benefits accrued through earnings and fringe benefits during the 36-month follow-up period. When interpreting these findings, it is important to consider that EleVAte services were new and experimental. The purpose of the SNAP E&T pilot was to test new approaches to services. Even though we excluded the costs of planning and recruitment in considering the cost differential between EleVAte and control group services, the costs of EleVAte 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.

Overall, a key lesson from the EleVAte pilot for SNAP E&T program administrators is that the community college system (in this case the Virginia Community College system) could and should continue to target SNAP participants in the future as a population that has “the most to gain” from its service offerings. Many staff remarked positively on the EleVAte model at the conclusion of the service period and would heartily recommend that other areas implement similar offerings, although they also recommended more time for implementation given the early challenges. EleVAte staff also emphasized the value of providing transportation supports and quickly attaching individuals to occupational skills training courses. For their part, DSS staff invested significantly in new approaches to offering education and training services to SNAP participants, efforts that emphasized face-to-face engagement in community settings over more traditional and passive marketing. Although EleVAte will not be continued due to a lack of resources, at the time that services were ending, some colleges were considering retaining some elements of the pilot services—such as Moral Reconation Therapy and expanded support services—and DSS and VCCS were exploring smaller-scale partnership to continue offering services to serve SNAP participants.

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 faced significant barriers to employment, such as being homeless or having a criminal justice background 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.

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 services⁷, 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

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.

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.

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).

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—Virginia.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 Virginia's pilot

Virginia began enrollment in its pilot, EleVAte in March 2016 in 24 localities (i.e., independent cities and counties) within seven community college regions in the Tidewater, south-central, and southwest areas of the State (Exhibit I.1). The pilot served both rural and urban areas, with the majority of SNAP participants residing in Tidewater region, including the cities of Norfolk and Hampton. In the year before Virginia began EleVAte enrollment, the unemployment rate in the 24 localities averaged 5.1 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019).

Exhibit I.1. EleVAte locations

College Region	Virginia Localities (Virginia has both independent cities and counties)
Tidewater Community College	Chesapeake City, Norfolk City, Portsmouth City, Suffolk City, Virginia Beach City
Thomas Nelson Community College	Hampton City, Newport News City
Southside Virginia Community College	Charlotte County, Prince Edward County, Brunswick County, Halifax County, Greenville County, Emporia City, Nottoway County
Danville Community College	Danville City, Pittsylvania County
Piedmont Virginia Community College	Albemarle County, Greene County, Charlottesville City
Virginia Highlands Community College	Smyth County, Washington County, Bristol City
Patrick Henry Community College	Henry County, Martinsville City

The Virginia Department of Social Services (DSS) administers SNAP and the existing SNAP E&T program in Virginia (Exhibit I.2). The existing SNAP E&T program was voluntary but, at the time of the

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.

pilot, it was not available in all localities. It included limited case management, support services, and referrals to services in the community, for example, to the local workforce development center.

DSS, in collaboration with the Virginia Community College System (VCCS), developed EleVAte to provide more comprehensive case management, support services, and education and training opportunities, tailored to the reading and math proficiency levels of SNAP participants, than those available in the existing SNAP E&T program. EleVAte services were voluntary and were offered to SNAP participants, including but not limited to ABAWDs—adults ages 18 to 49 who are not disabled and have no dependents—and other work registrants.¹⁰ It offered a mix of assessments and career counseling, case management, online digital literacy and basic computer skills training, job readiness training, group counseling, adult basic education and GED services, occupational skills training leading to certified credentials, and support services. Individuals were placed into one of three service components based on their assessed reading proficiency level and were then eligible to receive specific services.

From March 2016 to June 2018, Virginia enrolled 5,027 individuals into the pilot. Individuals enrolled were randomly assigned in roughly equivalent numbers to a treatment group (eligible for enhanced services or any other services in the community; referred to as the EleVAte group) and a control group (eligible for existing SNAP E&T services, if available, and any other services in the community). DSS continued providing services until December 2018.

Exhibit I.2. Pilot characteristics

Characteristic	
Pilot operation period	March 2016 to December 2018
Location	24 localities served by 22 DSS agencies and 7 community colleges
Grantee agency	Virginia Department of Social Services (DSS)
Key provider	Virginia Community College System (VCCS)
Target population	SNAP recipients, including but not limited to ABAWDs and work registrants
Number enrolled	5,027
Program type	Voluntary
Existing SNAP E&T program	No existing SNAP E&T services were available in 12 localities; In the other 12 localities, control group members could receive limited case management, job search assistance, and support services
Key EleVAte services	Career counseling Intensive case management Digital literacy Job readiness training Group counseling Adult basic education and GED services Occupational skills training leading to certified credentials Extensive support services

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.

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 into 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 in 2021 that presented interim findings in Virginia 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 most of the individuals (3,836, or 76 percent) who eventually enrolled in the pilots.

The interim report described several notable findings:

- **Implementation.** Despite initial challenges, viable strategies for recruiting SNAP participants into the pilot were put into place. Keeping individuals engaged was an additional challenge, especially for individuals who were assigned to complete online digital literacy, soft skills, and job readiness training in labs while waiting for occupational skills training courses to begin.
- **Participation.** Eighty-five percent of individuals in the EleVAte group completed the first step in the sequence of pilot services and activities, by attending an orientation at a community college. About 61 percent of all EleVAte group members subsequently participated in an E&T-related activity, such as by receiving assistance looking for work, attending job search training or life skills workshops, receiving online or in-person instruction in adult basic education or preparation for a high school equivalency certificate, or enrolling in short-term occupational skills training. Fewer EleVAte group members than originally anticipated by EleVAte planners – less than one-fifth – participated in education or training. More frequently, they participated in job search assistance activities or life skills training.

- **Impact.** Although the EleVAte group was more likely than the control group to participate in job search assistance or training activities and in education and occupational skills training, the EleVAte group worked and earned less than control group members and had a greater likelihood of participating in SNAP than control group members, within the first year after individuals enrolled.

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 DSS stopped providing services in December 2018. In addition, the final evaluation report includes participation and impact analyses for all individuals who enrolled in the pilot, including those who enrolled in 2018. 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 its sustainability and replicability. It also builds on the interim cost analysis to determine the net benefit (relative to costs) of providing EleVAte 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 EleVAte.
- Chapter V presents findings from the participation analysis, which describe the services that individuals in the EleVAte group received.
- Chapter VI describes differences in the services received by the EleVAte group and the control group.
- Chapter VII presents findings from the impact analysis, which describe the impact of EleVAte on employment, earnings, benefit receipt, and other outcomes.
- Chapter VIII describes the costs of services the EleVAte group received and compares the costs and benefits of those services.
- Chapter IX offers conclusions.
- Appendix A describes the primary characteristics of the 10 pilots; Appendix B provides more detail about the SNAP E&T program and work requirement policies; 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 EleVAte and control group members.
2. **Implementation data.** Most of the implementation data were collected during three rounds of site visits to Virginia. The site visits collected information about implementation, challenges, and lessons learned during different periods of pilot operation:
 - Round 1 (September 2016): The planning and early implementation periods.
 - Round 2 (July 2017): The first full year of pilot operations.
 - Round 3 (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 Round 3, the site visits included interviews with staff from DSS, VCCS, and EleVAte service providers; structured observations of service provider operations; in-depth interviews with two EleVAte group members who participated in activities and received services; two focus groups that included either EleVAte group members who engaged in services or those who did not.

3. **Administrative service use data.** DSS, local agencies, and their partners and providers collected and shared administrative data that documented the types of training, education, and services they provided to EleVAte 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 EleVAte's service period (December 2018).
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, for at least 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 for individuals randomly assigned through September 2017, and for at least 8 quarters after random assignment for individuals randomly assigned after September 2017. The data contain earnings amounts for each quarter, which we also used to construct indicators of quarterly employment status.

5. **SNAP administrative data.** DSS 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 with individuals enrolled in the pilot through December 2017 (2,241 EleVAte and control group members). We also conducted telephone surveys about 36 months after random assignment among individuals who responded to the 12-month survey. 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 EleVAte costs, we collected data from cost workbooks completed by DSS and partners and providers through the end of the EleVAte service period. The workbooks were the basis for calculating total costs and describing the categories of costs for the EleVAte 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 EleVAte 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 EleVAte participants and the experiences and opinions of these individuals are not necessarily representative of the entire EleVAte group.

We organized the data by topic, interviewee, and pilot office, to facilitate analysis by type of respondent (for example, DSS or provider) and pilot location within the State. 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 EleVAte 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 December 2018). All individuals enrolled in the pilot are included in the main analysis presented in the report. However, to understand service receipt patterns in the group of individuals on which the impact analysis is based, we re-estimate several participation analyses in the appendix using individuals who were randomly assigned through December 2017 (Appendix Table D.1).¹²

We created timelines for each EleVAte 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 EleVAte overall.

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

This analysis statistically compares receipt of services among EleVAte and control group members over the 36 months following random assignment. Comparing the differences in service use between EleVAte 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 EleVAte and control group members who were randomly assigned through December 2017.¹³ 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 EleVAte 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.¹⁴ The survey data capture any type of service received,

¹² Due to the limitation of available data, the main impact analyses restrict the individuals included to those who were randomly assigned through December 2017 so we have a long enough period to analyze 36-month outcomes.

¹³ The analysis also uses administrative data analyzed in the participation analysis, when information on the use of specific services is available for both EleVAte and control group members, to present several statistics in Appendix E.

¹⁴ 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 (*continued*)

regardless of whether it was provided through EleVAte, existing SNAP E&T, or through providers in the community such as Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), community colleges, nonprofits, or other organizations.

We compared regression-adjusted averages of measures of service receipt for the EleVAte 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 Virginia before the end of 2017. 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 EleVAte and control groups were statistically significant.

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

To estimate how EleVAte affected individuals' outcomes, we compared the average outcomes of the EleVAte and control groups over the 36 months following random assignment. Because, on average, EleVAte 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 status 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.

Impacts for most outcomes were estimated for individuals randomly assigned through December 2017. However, because UI wage records were available only through September of 2020, estimates of impacts on employment and earnings measured using UI wage data include only individuals randomly assigned through September 2017.

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 not contain information on job

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.

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

Further, the time periods for which data are available differ for the UI and survey data, which means that analysis samples for 36 months of follow-up are different for the two data sources. Survey data include individuals who were randomly assigned from March 2016 through December 2017, whereas UI wage records for EleVAte include individuals who were randomly assigned from March 2016 through September 2017. The shorter time frame for the UI wage records reflects a typical lag in the availability of these administrative data that is associated with employer reporting schedules and the need for State agencies to process data after they have been reported by employers. Finally, we note that even though there are differences between the data sources, each should provide unbiased estimates of the impacts of EleVAte on the outcomes they measure because the EleVAte and control groups were balanced along individual characteristics at the time of random assignment.

With an experimental design, unbiased impact estimates are attainable from the differences between average outcomes of the EleVAte 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 EleVAte and control groups that were unlikely to have occurred purely by chance.¹⁸

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.

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.

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 Virginia. 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 EleVAte 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 EleVAte. 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 EleVAte 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 58 percent of individuals who were randomly assigned through December 2017, 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 EleVAte'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 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 EleVAte. 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 EleVAte received in dollar terms through changes in earnings and public assistance with the costs of the services provided during the EleVAte service period. The analysis estimates the extent to which the benefits exceeded the costs of providing services to the EleVAte 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 EleVAte; (2) the costs of all services provided to EleVAte group members through EleVAte 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 EleVAte and control group members received is the basis for the cost-benefit analysis.

Costs of EleVAte. The costs of EleVAte included those for planning, recruiting, and delivering services. We based the estimates of EleVAte costs on cost data provided by DSS 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. DSS and VCCS each submitted workbooks with their own cost information. They submitted workbooks for the planning period (March 2015–March 2016) and for 12 quarterly service delivery periods (April 2016–December 2018) through the end of services and closeout activities, which occurred in June 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 EleVAte 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 EleVAte 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 EleVAte group members through EleVAte, we used individual-level data on participation in services to attribute a cost to each service in which the individual engaged. We used administrative service use data collected by DSS and partners and providers on participation in EleVAte services only. We used data on the unit (or per-service) cost of EleVAte 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 EleVAte group members. In addition to estimating the costs of EleVAte, we estimated the cost of *all* services that EleVAte group members received from EleVAte and the community. We used the costs of all EleVAte group services in the cost-benefit analysis because the benefits EleVAte 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 EleVAte services.

- **Total costs, costs by service type, and costs per individual.** We estimated the costs of all services EleVAte group members received per individual using the same method we used to estimate the per individual costs of EleVAte. 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 EleVAte group members received.

We used the unit costs of EleVAte services and individual-level participation data from the 12- and 36-month follow-up surveys to estimate the costs of all services EleVAte group members received. We chose

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.

to use the survey data to estimate the cost differentials between the EleVAte and control groups because, unlike the administrative service use data, the survey data were collected for both the EleVAte 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 EleVAte 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 EleVAte group services. We attributed the WIOA unit cost of each service to individual-level data on participation in the services control group members reported receiving through 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.

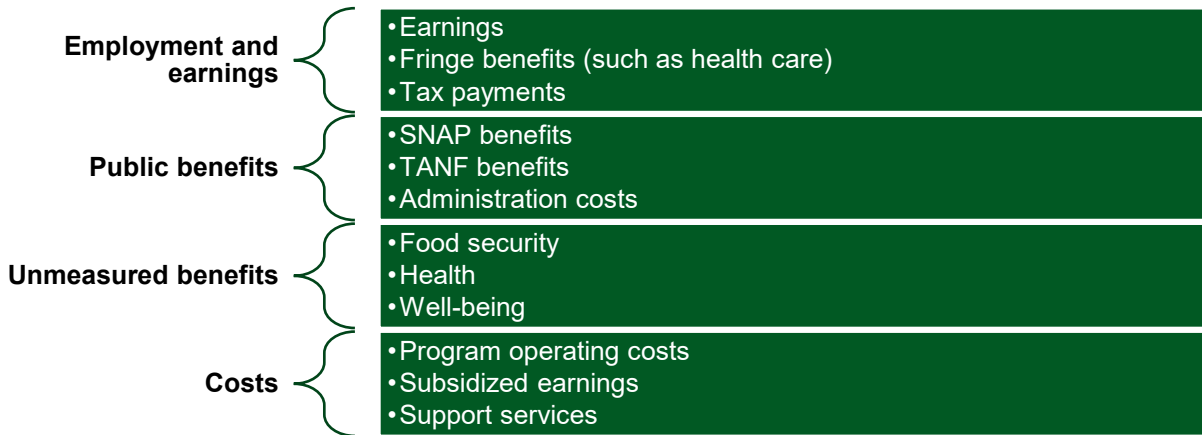
Approach to cost-benefit analysis. The cost-benefit analysis used a framework to present a comprehensive listing of EleVAte group benefits and costs, relative to the control group, from three perspectives: (1) individuals enrolled in EleVAte, (2) government and taxpayers, and (3) society as a whole, 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 EleVAte 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.2). Additional benefits to government and taxpayers, as well as society, include taxes that individuals pay as part of their post-service employment

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.

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 EleVAte 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 EleVAte group services exceeded their costs. A benefit-cost ratio less than 1 suggests that the benefits of all EleVAte group services, relative to the services EleVAte 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 EleVAte 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 EleVAte 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 EleVAte 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 EleVAte.** The main analysis assumes that EleVAte group members received additional services outside of EleVAte through existing SNAP E&T and the community during the pilot service period. We use data from the 12- and 36-month follow-up surveys to estimate service receipt for EleVAte group members and assume any difference in estimated costs of EleVAte and all services EleVAte group members received based on the survey is attributed to services received outside of EleVAte. Survey data are self-reported and could over or underestimate the services that EleVAte group members received. This sensitivity analysis uses the alternative assumption that EleVAte group members only received services through EleVAte 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 EleVAte 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 enrolled through December 2017 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 April 2017 versus May 2017 to December 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 participants. We used t-tests to determine whether the magnitude of differences between EleVAte 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 EleVAte activities were offered. However, because some individuals did not engage in EleVAte or start an activity, these estimates mask how well individuals who actually participated in EleVAte 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 EleVAte 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 EleVAte 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 EleVAte group. The resulting propensity scores were then used to define subgroups of individuals in each research group based on the percentages of the EleVAte group that started an activity. We repeated this process for EleVAte 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 pilot evaluation used an experimental design, rigorous analysis methods, and a multifaceted 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 EleVAte and control groups, we can confidently attribute differences in outcomes between the groups to EleVAte services rather than to differences in the characteristics of the two groups when they enrolled into the pilot, such as differences in education, work readiness, and barriers to employment.

Nonetheless, the evaluation has several methodological limitations:

- 1. Some analyses do not include all individuals who enrolled in the pilot.** We have about three years of follow-up data for most, but not all, individuals who enrolled into the pilot. Because the reporting and data collection schedules did not always align, we had to limit some analyses to a subset of the individuals enrolled in the pilot. For example, survey data were collected only from individuals who were randomly assigned through December 2017. Similarly, although UI wage records were collected for all individuals who were randomly assigned, individuals who were randomly assigned later in the enrollment period contribute less than three years of data to the analysis. Thus, it is possible that analyses that included a full three years of data for all individuals who were randomly assigned might produce different findings. We assessed the sensitivity of our findings to these limitations by using

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

the UI wage records for all individuals who were randomly assigned to estimate 2-year impacts of the pilot on outcomes and compared these impacts to those for individuals who were randomly assigned through September 2017—those for whom we had 3-year observation periods. Our findings were robust to this restriction, suggesting that the need to restrict the populations included in some analyses did not affect the main conclusions of the evaluation.

2. 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 EleVAte and control groups in receipt of services available through SNAP E&T 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 70 and 68 percent, respectively.) As a result, differences in the characteristics of individuals who responded and did not respond to the survey could differ between EleVAte 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 into the pilot.

3. 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 EleVAte group services with their counterfactual—those services individuals would have received in the absence of the EleVAte 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.

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 EleVAte group or the control group. Individuals in the EleVAte 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 EleVAte 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 EleVAte group, thereby reducing the risk of selection bias.

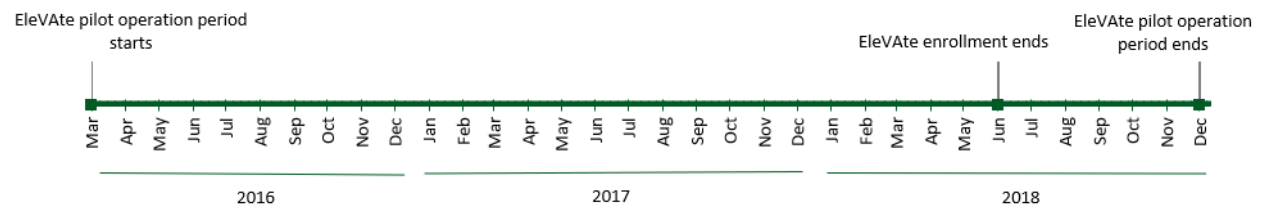
III. EleVAte enrollment and characteristics

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

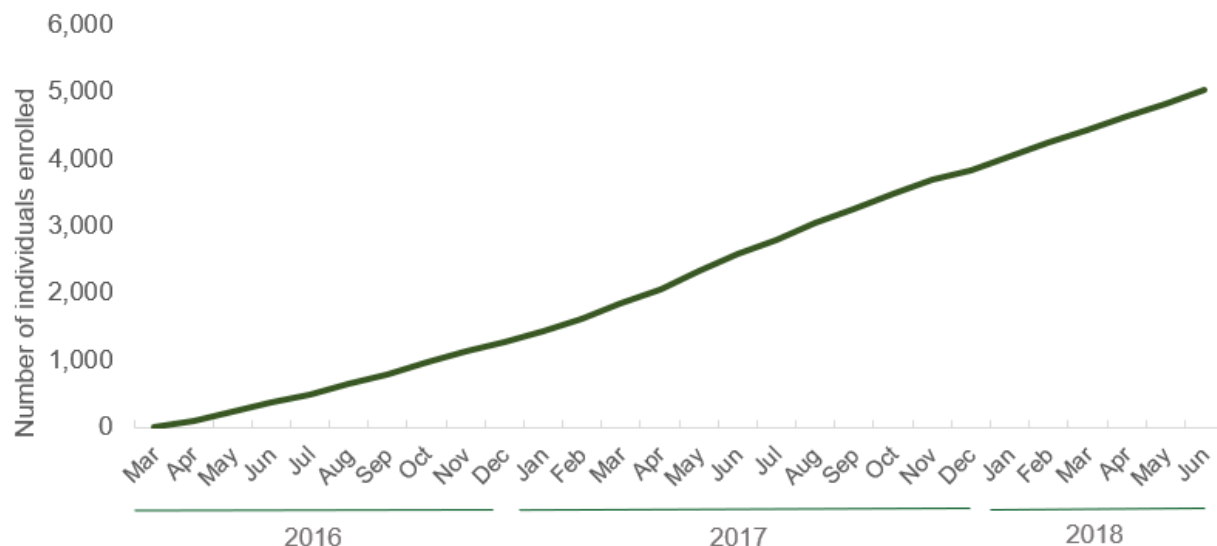
From March 2016 to June 2018, Virginia enrolled 5,021 individuals into the pilot (Exhibit III.1). SNAP participants who enrolled in the pilot were randomly assigned in roughly equivalent numbers to the EleVAte group and a control group. The number of individuals enrolled increased steadily over time, averaging about 127 individuals per month in 2016, 214 individuals per month in 2017, and 198 individuals per month in 2018 (Exhibit III.2).

Exhibit III.1. Overview of pilot enrollment



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation enrollment data (March 2016 to December 2018).

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 June 2018).

Note: All values are numbers of individuals enrolled and include both EleVAte and control group members. Individuals enrolled in the pilot include all EleVAte and control group members who completed baseline enrollment registration and did not subsequently revoke their consent to participate in the evaluation of the pilot (5,021 out of the 5,027 enrolled individuals).

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

The counties in which EleVAte operated experienced relatively low and falling unemployment rates, with average monthly unemployment falling from 4 to 5 percent at the beginning of the pilot period to about 3 percent by the end (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 3.9 and 4.9 percent. From August 2017 until the pilot stopped offering services in December 2018, unemployment hovered between 2.9 and 4.4 percent.

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



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics Local Area Unemployment Statistics (March 2016 to December 2018).

Note: All values are average monthly unemployment rates across the counties in which the pilot operated.

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; education, training, and library occupations such as teachers and librarians; 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 Virginia's pilot area over time

Wage (hourly in dollars)	2016	2019
Office and Administrative Support Occupations	15.27	16.58
Sales and Related Occupations	10.92	12.15
Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	9.79	10.08
Education, Training, and Library Occupations	22.91	26.25
Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	14.50	14.66

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 southwest Virginia, Nonmetropolitan southside Virginia, Nonmetropolitan northwest Virginia, Charlottesville, and Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News) are defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and may not fully align with the areas of Virginia 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 individuals who enrolled from March 2016 to December 2017—the individuals on whom many of this report's analyses are based.²² About three quarters of these enrollees were Black or African American (71 percent) and a majority were female (74 percent). The average age was 37, with 69 percent between 25 and 49 years old, and 13 percent between 18 and 24 years old. About 20 percent did not have a high school diploma or equivalent education.

Most individuals (75 percent) lived in a metropolitan area;²³ 11 percent were married or cohabiting. Just over half lived in households with children.

The majority of individuals had been employed at some point (94 percent), but only 28 percent were employed at the time of random assignment (Exhibit III.5). About 32 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 33 percent either were not employed or were employed for only one of the preceding eight quarters.

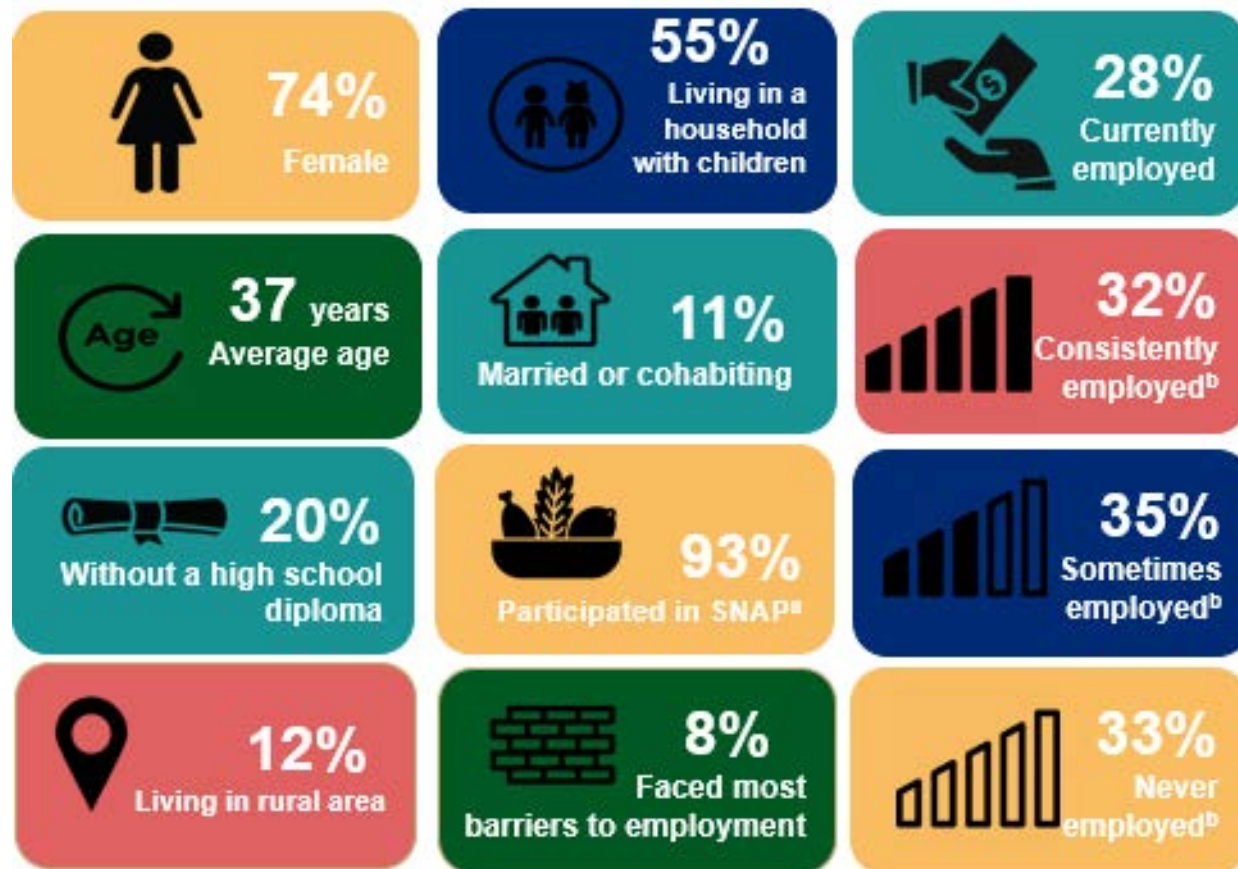
We also assessed individuals' barriers to employment based on whether they completed high school and if they were employed in the 12 months before random assignment. A total of 92 percent faced the fewest or moderate numbers of barriers and almost 8 percent faced the most barriers, defined as not being employed in the past 12 months and not completing high school or the equivalent.

²² Compared to analyzing outcomes for all enrolled individuals, analyzing them for individuals who were randomly assigned through December 2017 allows for a longer period of about three years in which to observe service receipt and impacts on outcomes. As shown in Appendix Table C.1, the characteristics of this group of individuals were similar to those for all individuals who enrolled in the pilot.

²³ 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.

Most individuals (93 percent) had participated in SNAP in the year before enrolling in the pilot. About a quarter of individuals participated for one to six months of the year, and over two-thirds (69 percent) participated for more than six months.

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



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

Note: All values are percentages unless otherwise noted. Individuals enrolled in the pilot through December 2017 include all EleVAte and control group members who completed baseline enrollment registration and did not subsequently revoke their consent to participate in the evaluation of the pilot (3,836 out of the 5,021 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 EleVAte group members in these two groups of individuals.

Later enrollees in the EleVAte group were on average younger than earlier enrollees (35 years versus 38 years) and more likely to be Black or African American (74 versus 70 percent; Appendix C.4). Later enrollees were more likely to have a high school diploma or equivalent (68 percent versus 59 percent), be employed at random assignment (31 percent versus 25 percent), live in a metropolitan area (81 versus 69 percent), and live in households with children (62 percent versus 50 percent). Overall, the later enrollees faced fewer barriers to employment compared to earlier enrollees.

The percentage of individuals who participated in SNAP in the year before random assignment was similar between later enrollees in the EleVAte group and earlier enrollees in the EleVAte group (92 percent versus 94 percent).

IV. Implementation analysis

In this chapter, we describe the implementation of the EleVAte SNAP E&T pilot based on qualitative analysis of data collected through staff interviews, focus groups, and case studies of individuals in EleVAte SNAP E&T. Data presented in this chapter were collected during the pilot planning, implementation, operational, and close-out periods, from March 2015 through December 2018. (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	June 2018
Services ended	December 2018

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 recruitment and enrollment processes; control group services and pathways; and EleVAte group services and pathways, management and collaborations, services receipt patterns, barriers among EleVAte group members, staffing, and performance reporting. We also discuss the sustainability and replicability of EleVAte services after the pilots ended and summarize the key findings discussed in this chapter. Unless otherwise noted, each section describes the services or program policies that were implemented, not what was planned.

A. Pilot background

EleVAte was designed to offer a package of adult education, employment, and training services to SNAP participants served by local DSS agencies in seven community college regions—particularly ABAWDs, including non-custodial parents (NCPs), and other work registrants. The colleges spanned urban and rural communities across the Commonwealth’s coastal Tidewater region, stretched west across south-central Virginia, and reached into the Appalachian foothills. DSS spearheaded EleVAte in close collaboration with VCCS,²⁴ which was the lead service provider agency. Seven community colleges in tandem with staff from Virginia’s regional Adult Basic Education (ABE) providers were to provide and coordinate EleVAte services.

Although many of the entities that pooled efforts to plan and implement the pilot had previously established relationships, the pilot called for the formation of new programmatic relationships and service flows to serve populations that the college or ABE systems had not systematically targeted. These collaborations resulted from the process DSS and VCCS leadership used to solicit executives at the nearly two dozen community colleges in Virginia to participate in the pilot before developing a pilot proposal. DSS followed this solicitation with a second phase of outreach wherein it would ask locally administered

²⁴ In this chapter, DSS and VCCS refer to the State-level social services and community college systems (respectively). These agencies are distinct from *local* DSS agencies and community colleges that delivered services.

DSS agencies in the service regions of the seven interested community colleges to sign on to the pilot if FNS awarded funding to DSS.

EleVAte services were patterned after existing occupational skills training, adult education, and employment services programs offered by DSS, VCCS, and the Virginia Department of Education but not necessarily targeting SNAP participants. The services were selected following a day-long convening of workforce development, community college, and social services stakeholders to identify the needs of ABAWDs. The proposed EleVAte services were to feature a common set of career coaching, digital literacy training, and soft skills/job readiness services, with individuals also participating in three distinct education and/or occupational skills training-focused service components depending on their baseline educational functioning levels²⁵ and training option interests:

EleVAte Virginia Online offered customized, self-paced online adult education blended with in-person instruction from supervising adult education staff to individuals who would benefit from improving their math and reading skills before being eligible to participate in further services.

The Job Skills Training Program (JSTP) offered enrollment in short-term occupational skills training courses coordinated by the community colleges plus Moral Reconnection Therapy (MRT), a group-based cognitive-behavioral therapy and life skills program facilitated by a certified counselor.

PluggedIn Virginia (PIVA) offered more advanced, longer-term occupational skills training courses packaged with online and classroom-based, career-contextualized adult-education instruction. Participation would culminate with a capstone project and the attainment of a General Education Development (GED) or equivalent secondary education credential, in addition to other occupational skills credentials, depending on the course.

DSS's decision to pursue the pilot opportunity was motivated generally by its perception that the resources available through its existing SNAP E&T program were insufficient to serve large numbers of SNAP participants as intensively as was desired. DSS was further motivated by concerns that the time-limited nature of many ABAWDs' receipt of SNAP benefits gave them a short window to access services before losing eligibility. The pilot's services were to be designed so that participating in them could constitute qualifying activities, enabling time-limited ABAWDs to continue to receive both SNAP benefits and EleVAte services. Another factor in the selection of this target population was the recognition that many NCPs are ABAWDs. If they received SNAP benefits, they could potentially benefit from co-enrollment in EleVAte services under Virginia's existing Family Engagement Program, which offers alternatives to incarceration for NCPs who owe child support. Stakeholders in the community college system were enthusiastic about creating a pathway into its services for community members with more disadvantages than their typical students.

B. Pilot planning and implementation

Planning for EleVAte implementation began in April 2015 at the State level and quickly expanded to include regional stakeholders. The DSS manager of workforce development oversaw the pilot and managed early coordination with the local DSS agencies. During the planning phase, the VCCS assistant vice chancellor for career pathways and workforce programs coordinated day-to-day planning for the pilot among the seven community colleges and their service providers. DSS and VCCS each eventually

²⁵ See Section C for detail on the eligibility requirements of the occupational skills training services.

added a full-time pilot manager position and other staff devoted to supporting State-level pilot planning and operations. The EleVAte staffing model at each of the seven community colleges included:

- One or more adult career coaches (ACCs), who would provide or coordinate orientation, assessment, case management, job search, and retention services for all individuals;
- Part-time ABE instructors, who would coordinate online learning in computer labs—including participation in the online soft-skills and digital literacy modules—and provide supplementary instruction for students engaged in EleVAte Virginia Online and PIVA;
- A full-time counselor, who would facilitate group MRT sessions with individuals participating in JSTP and advise them on non-pilot services that might support them in mitigating barriers to participation and employment;
- Full-time pilot coordinators, who would oversee staff and manage operations locally; and
- Occupational skills training instructors—some based at the community colleges or hired as needed by the pilot, and others employed by subcontracted training providers—who would teach in-person occupational skills training courses.

During the planning period, some of the colleges developed unique approaches to staffing in response to specific needs or opportunities. For example, Tidewater Community College—which was projected to have the largest EleVAte caseloads—engaged three part-time ACCs, whereas other areas employed one full-time ACC.

DSS services, including SNAP, are locally administered in Virginia, and decisions to participate in the pilot were ultimately made by local agency leaders in the seven community college regions after outreach from State-level DSS staff. Although most of the DSS agencies in these regions were initially interested in the pilot, several agencies dropped out during the planning phase. In the end, 22 local DSS agencies serving 24 localities²⁶ participated. Through part-time “coordinator” staff dedicated to the pilot, DSS agencies took primary responsibility for promoting the pilot opportunity among ABAWDs and work registrants, in collaboration with staff based at the local community college. A key source of variation across the DSS agencies that ultimately joined the pilot was the presence of an existing SNAP E&T program; 12 of the 24 localities offered SNAP E&T programs, all of which were voluntary.

In reflecting on the planning period, interviewed staff remarked positively on the extent of the teaming that occurred between various types of stakeholders at the local and State levels, yet they also shared various challenges or missed opportunities in the lead-up to the beginning of enrollment into EleVAte. Central staff at VCCS shared that more cross-college convenings of staff during the planning period would have been helpful, as well as increased VCCS engagement with leadership at Tidewater Community College around the expectations and requirements of operationalizing the pilot because that college saw the most delays at the local level. By 2017, staff frustration with the delays in beginning pilot enrollment had given way to the realization, in retrospect, that more time to plan, hire, and train staff would have led to smoother early implementation and earlier recognition of the many challenges that

²⁶ A “locality” in Virginia may refer either to a county or to an independent city, each of which is an equivalent polity. To illustrate, the City of Charlottesville is an independent city surrounded geographically by Albemarle County, but each has a unique DSS agency. An alternate arrangement could have one agency serving two localities, as with the City of Martinsville and surrounding Henry County.

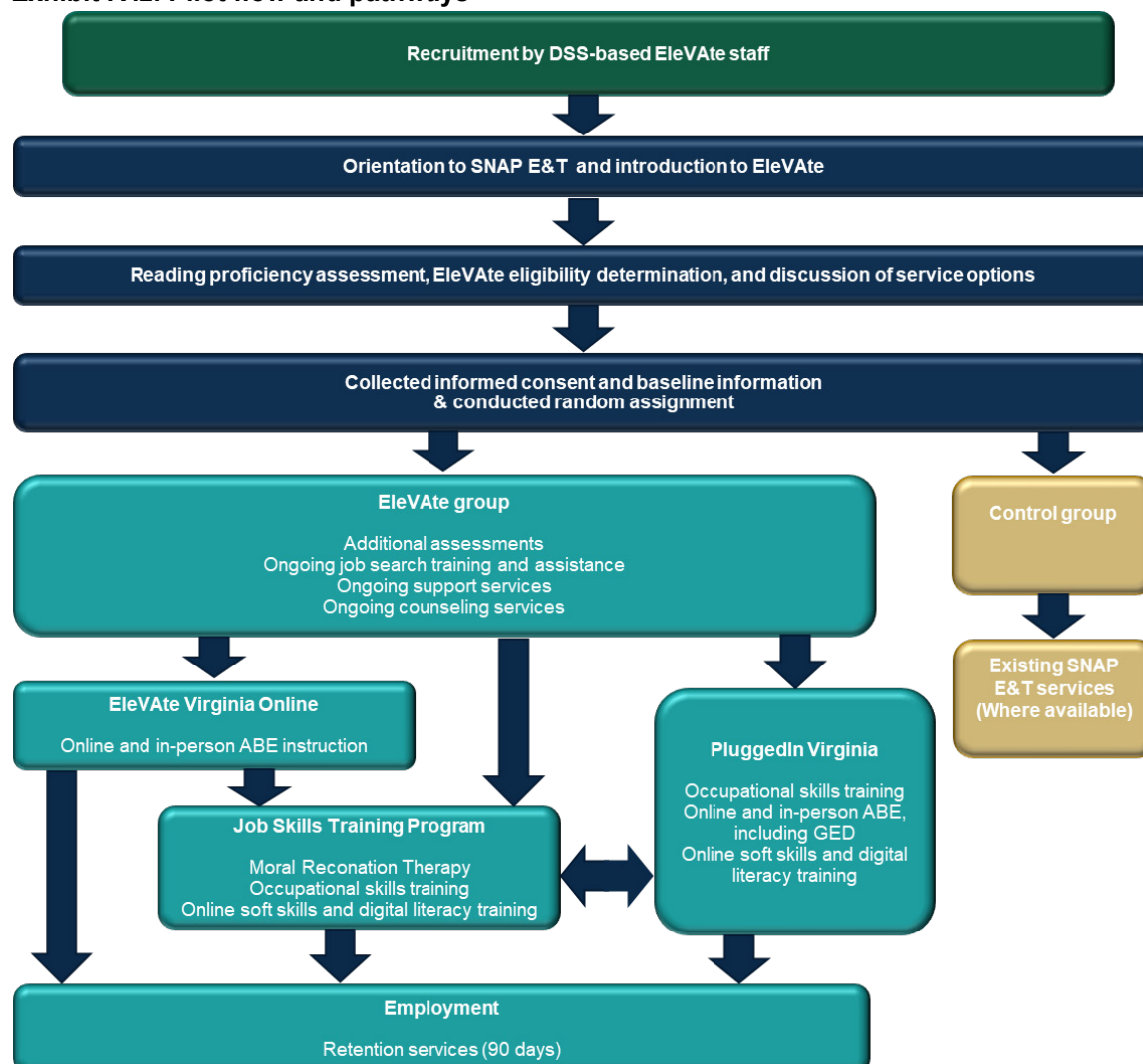
were encountered after beginning enrollment. However, staff acknowledged that it would have been impossible to anticipate all the challenges the pilot would face in actual implementation.

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

C. Pilot services and operations

SNAP participants typically learned of the EleVate pilot via recruitment efforts by DSS agencies. Interested SNAP participants were assessed for reading proficiency and those who met the minimum 3rd grade reading level qualification were randomly assigned to EleVate SNAP E&T (the treatment group) or to the control group, which could access existing SNAP E&T services, where available. As Exhibit IV.2 shows, following random assignment, individuals assigned to the EleVate group were assessed and worked with college-based ACCs to identify their service plans, including occupational skills training options (if eligible). Unless they were assigned to receive EleVate Virginia Online ABE services based on their reading proficiency score, individuals were typically first placed into online soft skills and digital literacy training while waiting for occupational training courses or other group-based services to begin.

Exhibit IV.2. Pilot flow and pathways



1. Recruitment and enrollment

DSS coordinator staff were primarily responsible for recruiting individuals into the pilot. This process included promoting the pilot opportunity and, usually, signing up eligible SNAP participants for group-based pilot orientation sessions. These sessions, which were typically conducted in collaboration with DSS and college-based EleVAte staff, provided information about available EleVAte services, described the evaluation of the pilot and random assignment, and assessed individuals for reading proficiency using the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). Prospective enrollees were informed of their potential EleVAte service options based upon their reading proficiency scores, as follows:

- Individuals reading between the 3rd and 5th grade were eligible for EleVAte Virginia Online;
- Individuals reading between the 5th and 8th grade levels were eligible for JSTP and EleVAte Virginia Online; and
- Individuals reading at or above the 8th grade level were eligible for all service components,²⁷ including PIVA.

Individuals were informed of their service options in a short, individualized session following the reading assessment. Staff asked prospective enrollees whether they were interested in pursuing the pilot opportunity and to identify the eligible services that best fit their interests (if there were multiple options, based on their reading proficiency assessment). If they were interested in pursuing EleVAte services, individuals were asked to provide consent for pilot participation and were randomly assigned to receive either the EleVAte services for which they were eligible²⁸ or existing resources in their community—which could include existing SNAP E&T services, if available. After random assignment, individuals assigned to the EleVAte group were scheduled for an orientation session at a college and control group members were informed of the resources they could access in their communities.

The pilot initially planned to serve mostly ABAWDs, allowing for up to 15 percent of other work registrants to enter the pilot. After the pilot began enrollment, most DSS agencies experienced significant challenges recruiting ABAWDs interested in EleVAte services in numbers sufficient to meet pilot enrollment targets. DSS had not previously targeted ABAWDs at such a scale, and ABAWDs's participation in existing SNAP E&T services was voluntary. Many ABAWDs who were identified and scheduled for orientation failed to appear. Moreover, the initial recruitment method of mailing letters describing the pilot to ABAWDs may have been ill-suited to a population of SNAP participants that many staff described as “transient.” Because of these challenges, DSS received clarification from FNS that they could expand the target population due to challenges with recruitment. In 2016, DSS continued to recruit ABAWDs but also allowed general work registrants and others receiving SNAP benefits to enroll in the pilot, if they were between 18 and 59 years old, were not receiving TANF or SSI benefits, and had reading levels above the 3rd grade.

²⁷ Although individuals eligible for JSTP and PIVA were eligible for EleVAte Virginia Online services, only a small number chose to focus on upskilling their reading or math before proceeding with JSTP services.

²⁸ Random assignment to either EleVAte or the control group was further stratified by the service component in which each enrollee was most interested in from those that their reading proficiency score allowed. However, after random assignment, individuals assigned to the EleVAte group could opt to participate in a different service component upon further consideration, if their reading proficiency allowed.

The methods that DSS staff used to recruit individuals into the pilot also evolved. The practice of mailing letters to work registrants identified in DSS’s SNAP eligibility system and of posting flyers and posters describing the pilot was typically unsuccessful in generating interest sufficient to meet local enrollment targets.²⁹ At the same time, some local DSS agencies—although in less populous areas with lower targets—found success using in-person marketing in communities with concentrations of SNAP participants at, for example, retail stores, bus stops, or other locations that staff felt SNAP participants might frequent. In response to these challenges and emerging best practices, DSS pilot leadership invested aggressively in building the recruitment capacity of the local DSS agencies and staff. They provided formal trainings on sales and marketing techniques conducted by trainers outside of the pilot and offered direct technical assistance during site visits to local agencies. What resulted in many areas was a multifaceted recruitment effort that, in addition to the passive marketing via mailed letters and posted flyers, included but was not limited to:

- Promotion of the pilot by staff who were providing existing SNAP E&T services, where offered;
- Active marketing to SNAP participants by SNAP eligibility workers during other interactions, such as benefit certifications and recertifications;
- Promotion of the pilot by local DSS staff at events attended by people likely to be receiving SNAP such as job fairs; these events were identified through discussions between DSS agencies and community institutions; and,
- Promotion of the pilot in prisons by DSS staff to individuals soon to be released, many of them NCPs.³⁰

Finally, to enroll individuals into the pilot in a more agile fashion, many DSS coordinators were trained to administer the TABE reading assessments—a task largely conducted by ABE instructors and some ACCs—and to conduct enrollment outside of scheduled group orientations, often individually.

Although staff expected recruitment to be challenging given the aggressive targets set for the pilot and each DSS agency, the challenge of building and maintaining recruitment capacity surpassed expectations. Staff described the process of developing successful recruitment approaches as requiring a shift in the mindset prevalent in DSS agencies, whose staff were not accustomed to conducting proactive community outreach to promote services and whose leadership may have not adequately anticipated the level of effort that would be required to promote the pilot opportunity.

2. Control group services and pathways

Upon being assigned to the control group, individuals were provided information about existing community resources—including existing SNAP E&T services, where available. They were given an information sheet that listed resources available in their communities and were encouraged to use 211, DSS’s centralized online and telephone resource for individuals seeking services. In areas with existing SNAP E&T programs, referrals to and enrollment in the programs was not automatic; rather, individuals

²⁹ Enrollment targets had in fact already been lowered, with FNS’s approval, because of a reassessment of EleVAte’s overall enrollment goal by DSS during the planning period.

³⁰ The DSS Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE) was a partner in the pilot, and although promotion of EleVAte services to NCPs did not constitute a high-volume referral pathway to the pilot, staff reported that some NCPs were served by the pilot and that DSS provided regular reports to DCSE describing their participation.

assigned to the control group could independently seek to enroll in services. DSS staff described both State and local resources for existing SNAP E&T as limited, and there were no significant changes to or expansions of existing SNAP E&T during the pilot implementation period. Where existing SNAP E&T was an option for control group members, they were not automatically enrolled or offered services. However, it is likely that many control group members did explore this service option, given the role local DSS agencies played in pilot recruitment.

Staff described existing SNAP E&T programs as typically consisting of one DSS case manager conducting screening for barriers, providing referrals to existing community resources, and coordinating support services. As an example, staff at the Newport News DSS agency—covering a locality that enrolled about 15 percent of the total number of individuals enrolled in the pilot—described existing SNAP E&T services as focused on providing case management in support of job search. Individuals were asked to register at and engage in employment services with the Peninsula Workforce Development Center, the regional WIOA-funded employment services agency.³¹ If individuals were unsuccessful in their job searches, existing SNAP E&T could fund short-term training or coordinate volunteer work experience but funding to cover these services was limited. Overall, Newport News DSS staff estimated that its average annual existing SNAP E&T caseload ranged from 25 to 30 individuals, most of whom received only support services. These staff also reported that the existence of the pilot had not significantly increased enrollment into existing SNAP E&T—despite the pilot recruitment effort that might have increased interest in SNAP E&T—and that most people who had initially expressed interest in SNAP E&T missed their first appointments and failed to engage in the program.

In a few settings, control group members were able to access existing iterations of the services that EleVAte services were patterned after, but staff believed that few control group members enrolled in these services. For instance, DSS offered a version of the online adult education services like EleVAte Virginia Online through the existing SNAP E&T program, but not to individuals with reading proficiency scores as low as those of some pilot enrollees. Tidewater Community College continued to offer the non-pilot version of the JSTP, and non-pilot versions of PIVA were available in some areas. Staff reported that factors such as limited enrollment slots, rigorous eligibility screening processes in non-pilot PIVA, and program tuition costs likely limited the ability of control group members to enroll in these programs.

3. EleVAte group services and pathways

Typically, within one week of the arrival at the community colleges for orientation and intake with ACCs, all EleVAte group members completed multiple assessments:

- Career interests, values, and aptitudes were identified using assessments completed by individuals in VCCS's online Virginia Wizard system;
- Math proficiency skills were assessed using the TABE to complement the reading proficiency assessment completed before pilot enrollment and to inform any ABE service provision; and
- Screening for barriers such as anxiety, depression, external stressors, substance use disorders, and family problems was conducted using the Employee Assistance Program Inventory.

³¹ The Virginia Community College System administers adult WIOA services in the State, with community colleges serving as the local provider of these services.

The results of these assessments were used to develop EleVAte service plans and to inform each individual's selection of which EleVAte service component to enroll in if they were eligible for more than one. These assessments also informed the selection of occupational skills trainings courses if individuals were eligible for those services. Upfront orientation and assessment activities were consistent across colleges, but there was some variation in how they were fielded. For example, some colleges offered individualized intake into EleVAte services, while others conducted intake via group sessions.

Service components. EleVAte offered services via three service components. In addition to component-specific occupational skills training and ABE services, individuals were assigned to complete other activities and received other supports common to all service components. Some of these were delivered via online training modules, and others were delivered in-person, either individually or in group settings. These components included the soft skills and employment services and counseling and support services we describe in later sections.

The three service components were:

- **EleVAte Virginia Online**, which targeted individuals who were reading between the 3rd and 5th grade levels. Individuals enrolled in this component completed online adult basic education training modules geared toward improving math and reading skills. Each individual completed a customized curriculum developed from within a common set of training products,³² selected by staff at the remote service provider that was tasked by DSS to oversee and monitor the services centrally. After completing the curriculum, individuals were eligible to receive other EleVAte services if they qualified upon reassessment of reading proficiency. The projected time individuals in this component would spend in EleVAte was six to eight weeks.
- **JSTP**, which targeted individuals reading between the 5th and 8th grade levels and involved enrollment in selected occupational skills training courses offered by the community college or through a contracted training provider. Individuals were also assigned to complete a sequence of the MRT program, a group-based, self-paced cognitive-behavioral intervention designed to help individuals identify the ways in which their thought-processes, behaviors, and interpersonal relationships may influence their ability to achieve long-term goals. The projected time individuals in this component would spend in EleVAte was eight to 12 weeks.
- **PIVA**, which served individuals reading at or above the 8th grade level and offered more advanced occupational skills training at the colleges or through contracted service providers. Individuals in this component were also offered adult education to support receipt of a high school equivalency credential. It included online, self-paced training modules³³ with in-person instructional support provided in learning labs by ABE instructors. The projected time individuals in this component would spend in EleVAte was six to eight months.

These distinct service components were envisioned to be “stackable” and completed sequentially by individuals enrolled in the pilot, conditional on their qualifying for additional services upon reassessment using the TABE. Some colleges chose occupational training options in both JSTP and PIVA to be complementary in this regard—for example, a foundational welding course in JSTP could be followed by

³² The online learning products used in this component were Burlington English for reading and literacy and IXL for math.

³³ The pilot used the GED Academy product for this service option.

a welding course in PIVA. Staff interviews suggested that some individuals did graduate from one service component and move to another, especially from the relatively short EleVAte Virginia Online service sequence to the JSTP after improving their skills in reading and math.

Soft skills and job search training and assistance. After the initial orientation and assessment phase, most individuals in the EleVAte group—except those in EleVAte Virginia Online, whose first focus would be ABE services—were assigned to participate in online, self-paced soft skills services. If individuals were interested in certain occupational skills training courses that were starting soon, enrollment in those courses was typically prioritized over the self-paced online components, which could be completed in parallel with or after occupational skills instruction. These online services were offered in dedicated “learning lab” facilities at the colleges. These labs were usually staffed by ABE instructors who monitored and assigned student activities and supplemented online learning with in-person instruction, as necessary.

These services consisted of:

- **Online digital literacy training.** Students completed work toward Microsoft’s Digital Literacy Certificate, covering topics such as interacting with hardware and devices, consuming and modifying digital content, and communicating online.
- **Soft-skills and job readiness training.** Students completed a series of online training modules³⁴ on topics such as applied math and locating information in common workplace documents with the goal of their obtaining the National Career Readiness Certificate.
- **Job search training and assistance.** ACCs provided students with job search training and supports including resume review, interview preparation, and job search assistance. These services could be delivered in individualized meetings in some cases, but ACCs more frequently delivered these services in group workshops that supplemented online learning.
- **Post-employment supports.** Staff provided follow-up supports for up to 90 days post-employment, and a job retention incentive of \$40 was processed at the 90-day “still employed” milestone.

Staff reported that many EleVAte group members were not enthusiastic about engaging with the online soft-skills services and found the occupational skills training services more appealing. Staff observed that many individuals were frustrated about having to wait for the occupational skills training courses to begin and having to participate in online trainings that were not directly tied to an occupation. Furthermore, most staff with knowledge of these services also expressed that, although the soft-skills credentials earned from these services were intended to enhance employability, they did not believe that employers valued the credentials in making hiring decisions.

Some EleVAte group members interviewed at one college echoed these staff observations. They reported additional frustration that job search and career coaching services were not robust enough, noting that it was the responsibility of the individuals in EleVAte to be proactive in seeking supports from the ACCs. Moreover, these individuals felt that EleVAte lacked direct connections to employers that might have facilitated placement into jobs or other services that individuals thought might be helpful to them and wished were offered, such as work-based learning opportunities.

³⁴ The pilot used the ACT WorkKeys curriculum for soft skills instruction.

Support, counseling, and MRT services. All individuals in the EleVAte group were eligible to receive the following other services designed to support participation and to mitigate barriers to employment:

- **Financial support services.** EleVAte group members were eligible for financial assistance, based on need, capped at \$560, \$840, and \$1,680 for individuals in EleVAte Virginia Online, JSTP, and PIVA, respectively—which helped individuals cover costs such as textbooks, transportation (for example, gas cards and bus passes), car repairs, tolls, rent emergencies (one-time, capped at \$500, and used only in select cases), utilities, eyeglasses, minor dental work, clothing, tools, and child care (but not all-day child care costs).
- **Counseling and supports.** The ACCs and counselors provided case management, plus referrals to outside resources or programs, such as mental health services.
- **MRT.** The MRT program was structured around the independent completion of readings, self-assessments, and reflective activities in a workbook organized into “steps.” Upon completion of a step, individuals presented and discussed their work with others in group sessions facilitated by an EleVAte counselor. These group sessions typically lasted a few hours per week, with individuals either presenting to the group on their independent work in the MRT workbook or engaging with other individuals who were presenting.

Counselors were not intended to offer one-on-one counseling support for all individuals in the EleVAte group, but rather these staff focused on facilitating MRT sessions for individuals in JSTP. Staff reported that participation rates and engagement among individuals participating in MRT could be high, and most staff reported believing that this service was one of the most successful services offered by the pilot. One college did ultimately shift away from offering MRT in favor of individualized counseling and life skills coaching because it had difficulties forming cohorts for the MRT group sessions and found it challenging to effectively facilitate sessions that included both men and women.

Occupational skills training. Upon beginning enrollment, it became apparent to the colleges that the timing of enrollment did not sync with the beginning of many occupational skills training courses. Individuals expecting to start many occupational skills training options in JSTP and PIVA experienced variable wait periods before beginning selected courses. Although the standard service sequence called for individuals to begin self-paced, online job readiness and digital literacy training at the same time as occupational skills training, some individuals completed these services with time to spare before the start of their classroom-based occupational skills training. Others who were enrolled in EleVAte close to the start of courses, enrolled in skill training courses rapidly, and some may have deferred participation in online services. Some individuals disengaged early from online learning without engaging significantly or at all, while many more, according to staff, disengaged from EleVAte after participating in only some of the online learning services available.

In addition, the pace of enrollment did not always enable the creation of occupational skills training cohorts such that the cohorts consisted exclusively of EleVAte group members and all individuals in the cohorts could begin training receipt at the same time. As a result, each college co-enrolled EleVAte group members into existing occupational skills training courses rather than running stand-alone EleVAte training courses. Although this early adaptation increased the number of occupational skills training options available to EleVAte group members, it meant that the pilot had to pay for course tuition plus the associated overhead costs. This requirement increased the costs of occupational skills training far beyond the original budget assumptions. Training expenditures were driven higher by the fact that the numbers of EleVAte group members who were eligible for the two service components that included occupational

skills training far exceeded initial projections. Although not all EleVAte group members in these two components registered for occupational skills training, pilot leadership determined that occupational skills training costs needed to stay within the original budget parameters. DSS's response to this challenge was to reduce the number of occupational skills training options and to offer only stand-alone EleVAte training courses. The colleges implemented this change in January 2017 by adopting one or more of the following approaches: (a) hiring pilot-funded instructors as needed to teach courses, (b) contracting with local occupational skills training providers to offer courses to EleVAte group members, or (c) offering occupational skills training via online instructional platforms.

The EleVAte occupational skills training options varied by college region, based on labor market demand and colleges' pre-existing resources, such as specialized equipment and facilities. Across the colleges, most options available to EleVAte group members were in the health professions (for example, pharmacy technician, certified nursing assistant, medical assistant), the building trades (for example, HVAC technician, electrical groundsman), information technology (for example, A+, Network+), and transportation (for example, commercial driver's license/truck driving). Most of these training options took place in person, but some were online and self-paced.

Adult Basic Education. ABE services—offered to individuals in EleVAte Virginia Online and PIVA—were offered via a set of online, self-paced learning modules customized for each individual based on their TABE results. ABE instructors based in the learning labs worked with their students to become comfortable with the modules, monitored their progress, assigned new work when modules were completed, and supplemented instruction with ad hoc individual or group instruction as needed. Staff would also regularly re-administer TABE assessments to gauge student progress and, for students in remedial online learning, determine whether sufficient progress had been made to progress to JSTP services. Staff shared that many students did “graduate” to next-level service delivery.

Key assumptions regarding low educational attainment and the literacy and numeracy of the target population did not play out as expected. The more advanced population served by the pilot challenged service delivery in myriad ways. The intervention model assumed that remedial adult education services would see the largest enrollment of the three service components. This assumption was based on the expectation that a significant share of ABAWDs and other work registrants would lack the literacy and numeracy skills needed to engage successfully in occupational skills training. EleVAte planners also expected that a large share of the population reading above an 8th grade level—expected to be the smallest share of enrollees—would lack a high school equivalency credential and would be interested in adult education in support of a secondary credential. After EleVAte began enrollment, it became apparent that few of the enrollees read below a 5th grade level, and many of those who did were typically English-language learners and/or were uninterested in participating in ABE services, which was also not anticipated. Vastly more individuals were reading above the 8th grade level, and many of them already held at least a high school diploma or equivalent credential. As such, EleVAte Virginia Online had low enrollment relative to expectations and many pilot PIVA enrollees did not need or choose to participate in GED preparation. Ultimately, a significant share of PIVA-eligible enrollees opted to participate in JSTP after finding its occupational skills training options (plus MRT) more appealing than the PIVA options; the attraction was often because those options required a shorter time commitment. Others simply accessed PIVA services other than the GED preparation.

4. EleVAte SNAP E&T services management, partnerships, and communication

Ongoing communication between DSS and the lead provider agency, VCCS, occurred through regular project management meetings, ad hoc meetings on specific matters, and frequent email communication. Staff from both agencies described communication as frequent, open, and consistently constructive. VCCS monitored pilot operations centrally, receiving monthly narrative and budget reports on pilot implementation and holding conference call check-ins with the coordinators managing operations at all seven community colleges. These calls initially occurred weekly and switched to monthly for the majority of colleges after the early implementation period. Tidewater Community College, which served the largest share of EleVAte group members and experienced various planning and implementation challenges, especially regarding staff turnover, continued to have weekly check-in meetings with VCCS well into the implementation period. VCCS staff routinely visited colleges in person to check in and collaborate with staff on operational issues.

A full-time pilot staff member at DSS spent a significant amount of time in the field visiting local DSS agencies and colleges working to assess and continuously improve pilot recruitment operations. Staff described this technical assistance as important to ensuring productive working relationships between the local DSS agencies and the EleVAte-involved colleges. Many staff reported smooth communication between local DSS and the college-based EleVAte staff after service flows and working relationships were established early in implementation. They cited the degree of relationship management and coordination required by some of the community colleges that had large numbers of EleVAte group members and many stakeholders involved in recruitment and service delivery—for example, colleges with more than two or three DSS agencies feeding individuals to colleges—as challenging.

5. EleVAte group service and participation trends

Drop-off points and exits. Staff observed that many individuals were disappointed upon being assigned to participate in online soft skills services before beginning occupational skills training courses, which were considered more appealing. Other individuals were disappointed that the available occupational skills training options did not align with their own career aspirations. Staff cited all these factors, plus the urgency that many individuals felt to find work and increase their income, as driving program attrition. Staff reported that attrition was high after some initial service receipt—for example, attendance at orientation, assessment, or some online learning. Moreover, they reported that only a small share of disengaged individuals returned to the program after staff made attempts at reengagement. High attrition rates and the difficulty of forming cohorts likely impeded the colleges from widely implementing features of the pilot that were far downstream from enrollment, such as the PIVA capstone.

EleVAte group members interviewed in focus groups described having to wait for a specific training course to begin as dispiriting. One individual also shared that rigid course meeting schedules made fitting class attendance into busy lives difficult and suggested that offering multiple meetings of each training course—for instance, in both the morning and evening—might offer more flexibility. Others echoed the day-to-day challenges of participating, citing coordinating childcare as a major challenge to participating in a program like EleVAte. Indeed, respondents noted that balancing family and employment schedules with EleVAte services could be quite difficult and that both the availability and timeliness of support services were often insufficient to meet their needs. Despite barriers to participating in EleVAte, most participants interviewed who had exited from EleVAte found some value in the program and would recommend it to others. However, many individuals interviewed acknowledged that completing

occupational skills training did not automatically translate into finding a well-paying job, and participants of color underscored that they felt marginalized and discriminated against by local employers.

Participation trends. Staff reported various barriers to both employment and participation among EleVAte group members. Staff most often reported that individuals had difficulties securing transportation and childcare. Because EleVAte originally focused on ABAWDs, costs for child care were not initially available as an allowed support service in EleVAte. Most staff described EleVAte group members as having limited transportation options to and from EleVAte service locations, and many college staff mentioned difficulties faced by individuals who lived in more remote areas where public transportation was not available. Some EleVAte staff noted that financial supports could be used for auto repair expenses for such individuals, but not all owned cars. Other material hardships reported by staff included utility or rent arrears. In addition, one city served by EleVAte, Charlottesville, was noted to have particularly high housing costs relative to the incomes of EleVAte group members. Unstable home and social environments, including homelessness, also hindered the ability of some individuals to persist in occupational skills training courses through to completion.

Staff also cited medical and mental health issues as barriers to participation and self-sufficiency. One counselor shared that many individuals in the pilot “don’t believe in themselves because they’ve never had someone believe in them.” Some college-based staff expressed that they had never served populations as disadvantaged as the individuals who were in EleVAte. One service provider shared that working with EleVAte group members required staff to have “loving hearts but firm hands.” One ABE instructor described a successful campaign raising money from her colleagues to support a major dental operation for an EleVAte group member who found difficulty focusing in the classroom due to severe and persistent pain in her teeth.

A common barrier to employment cited by staff and by interviewed EleVAte group members at one college was past involvement in the criminal justice system. Indeed, some of the occupational training fields that were a focus of the pilot, such as health care, ruled out participation by individuals with a criminal justice history. Other barriers cited by interviewed EleVAte group members included the lack of a driver’s license—for which they reported no support was available—and an overall lack of employment experience.

6. Staffing

Staff turnover at different levels occurred during pilot implementation, and the effects of this turnover depended on the circumstance and context, although turnover increased as the end of pilot operations neared. Some DSS agencies experienced attrition among the part-time coordinator staff responsible for recruitment, which was generally attributed to the part-time nature of the positions, and this became a more prevalent challenge as the pilot entered its final year of recruitment. At six of the 22 DSS agencies recruiting participants the departure of a DSS coordinator at an agency responsible resulted in the agency deciding not to seek a replacement for the position and to stop referring additional individuals to the pilot. To accommodate this loss of capacity, other local DSS agencies were encouraged to increase their enrollment. Some colleges had turnover in key positions toward the end of the pilot implementation period, with some staff securing permanent employment at the college or elsewhere, and in most cases these positions were filled. Finally, the overall pilot coordinator at DSS retired from her position in July 2018, with another senior DSS team member who had been involved in the pilot taking on her responsibilities.

One college—Tidewater Community College, serving the most populous region among those participating in the pilot—had significant staffing challenges over the course of pilot planning and implementation. By mid-2017, it was apparent that the staffing plan at the college did not adequately anticipate the high numbers of individuals who were referred from the five DSS agencies recruiting for EleVAte in Tidewater’s region. In response, in mid-2017 VCCS and the college planned to significantly increase the number of ACCs and ABE instructors at the college.

Overall, there was a great deal of variation in the levels of staff satisfaction with the pilot among staff at local DSS agencies and the colleges. Overall, DSS and VCCS staff were generally pleased with the progress that had been made. Most staff based at the colleges reported that implementing EleVAte was much easier as recruitment numbers improved, operational systems matured, and staff had more of a sense of pride in being part of an evaluation or pilot after the early implementation period. However, staff at colleges in regions with larger enrollment targets expressed some dissatisfaction with the large size of their caseloads. By mid-2017, many college staff were concerned with the persistently high levels of attrition among EleVAte group members that they were seeing. Staff satisfaction at DSS agencies seemed to be lower in locations where the existing SNAP E&T program was not available; staff pointed out that individuals in these locations enrolled in the pilot because they were attracted by the promise of robust services but, if assigned to the control group, they could not access any services or supports through SNAP E&T.

7. Performance management

VCCS customized an existing case management database, the Virginia Wizard, for use by the pilot in tracking pilot enrollment and service delivery data. This system was not ready for deployment until six months after pilot enrollment began; during those initial first six months, staff used manual data tracking systems and later keyed these data into Wizard. The Wizard system features web-based data entry, with reports prepared centrally from the database by the pilot’s VCCS data manager.

Most system reports described participation in aggregate, by college and for the pilot overall. Other analyses to provide more refined participation information and to inform continuous improvement were implemented on an ad hoc basis when staff requested. Staff suggested that, initially, the college staff viewed Wizard data as primarily a compliance activity; but by mid-2017, VCCS was increasingly using participation data to engage with the colleges to continuously improve service delivery, to develop custom reports for monitoring by DSS, and, within the Tidewater Community College region, for local DSS agencies to monitor specific bottlenecks—for example, how much time had elapsed for individuals between referral and placement into training services.

Other data systems were developed outside of Wizard, such as an Excel template for use in tracking support service utilization by EleVAte group members.³⁵

D. Sustainability and replicability

The EleVAte SNAP E&T pilot planned to cease all program activities by the end of December 2018, with a few training courses wrapping up in January 2019. Staff respondents reported that pilot services could not be sustained due to a lack of available State SNAP E&T funding. However, respondents shared that

³⁵ Data tracking control group members’ possible participation in SNAP E&T services, or the provision of support services associated with this participation, do not exist.

some colleges intended to incorporate some aspects of EleVAte, such as MRT and expanded support services, into ongoing offerings. In Late 2018, DSS and VCCS were discussing the possibility of again offering some EleVAte-like services to subsets of SNAP participants at some point in the future, though on a smaller scale, using State resources.

In considering what it would take to replicate EleVAte, or a program like it, again, staff shared the following reflections:

- **Focusing on providing training in occupational skills to SNAP participants in high-demand professions is likely to enhance their economic prospects and those of employers.** Despite implementation challenges and concerns regarding the original assumptions built into the pilot model, many respondents believed that the EleVAte program could help to improve the economic circumstances of EleVAte group members by training them to enter high-demand occupations. One senior community college leader shared that although serving EleVAte group often required different and more intensive supports than other students in comparable programs, SNAP participants like those served by EleVAte “had the most to gain” from those programs. Other staff emphasized the high demand in certain industries given the low-unemployment conditions in which the pilot was offering. One rural college leader shared that “we could run [Commercial Driver’s License] classes 24/7 and still not have enough people” to fill those jobs.
- **Flexible and responsive approaches to service provision are likely to keep more individuals engaged.** Many staff, citing the difficulty of disbursing financial supports like transportation subsidies, emphasized that being able to meet the needs of EleVAte members quickly was critical to promoting their participation. Moreover, some respondents described the EleVAte model as “rigid” in its approach to serving SNAP participants, with one college leader recommending that programs like EleVAte first “see where people are, and then see what the program can do for them.”
- **Invest robustly in supportive, wraparound services.** Staff respondents repeatedly emphasized the necessity of financial supports to help EleVAte group members participate fully and consistently in their activities. Many staff also said that taking a flexible approach to budgeting supports, without caps on assistance for individuals, would have improved participation in EleVAte, since the neediest individuals exhaust their support services funds quickly, while others never reach the cap on supports. Additionally, some respondents emphasized the role of providing emotional supports—described by one counselor as “hand-holding”—to participants who are discouraged or distracted from participating. One respondent observed that in seeking to serve populations with barriers to participation and employment, program operators should not expect to simply “pay for classes” to realize desired outcomes.
- **Be aware of the nuances of the program’s local context.** One senior VCCS executive observed that urban and rural contexts could influence program operations and participation in myriad ways. For instance, while transportation challenges can be more severe in outlying areas, community colleges in rural locations may be especially visible in smaller or underserved communities, enhancing the prospects for recruitment and participation. Moreover, although less populous areas likely have fewer employers, those employers may be more willing to partner with social or education programs to gain access to labor, whereas employers in urban areas inherently have more options to find workers.

E. Key implementation analysis findings

Key findings from the implementation analysis are as follows:

- **Implementing EleVAte entailed close coordination among multiple organizations at the local and State level.** EleVAte staff at all levels emphasized the importance of teaming and coordination across administrative units that had different missions, different objectives, and varying staff capacity. From the early planning stages, this required significant investments in time to understand how different processes and systems would work together and ongoing monitoring and coordination throughout the pilot process. The experience in some college regions suggests that one risk of intense cross-institutional coordination may be inattention to the internal operations within each administrative unit.
- **Investments in new staff practices at local DSS offices were necessary to drive success in pilot recruitment and enrollment.** In addition to expanding the pilot's eligibility to enable the recruitment of SNAP participants who were not ABAWDs early into pilot implementation, local DSS offices and EleVAte staff based at community colleges worked creatively to identify new recruitment approaches to identifying SNAP participants in large enough numbers to meet pilot enrollment targets. By the end of the pilot, local DSS staff had received training in sales and marketing, plus one-on-one support from State DSS staff to implement best practices, which increasingly emphasized individualized (as opposed to group), face-to-face recruitment outside of DSS offices and on-the-spot pilot enrollment.
- **Individuals served by EleVAte were higher-skilled, more credentialed, and more interested in short-term occupational skills training than originally planned.** Far fewer individuals than expected tested into EleVAte Virginia Online program component, which emphasized adult basic education services before individuals could move on to participate in occupational skills training. In addition, fewer individuals than expected required or desired instruction that would lead to the receipt of a GED or equivalent secondary education credential. Staff felt that EleVAte members generally preferred to participate in short-term occupational skills training activities that matched their career interests and could connect them to job opportunities in the near term.
- **Rapidly connecting individuals to occupational skills training courses was identified as a strategy for promoting participation in EleVAte.** Keeping individuals engaged in EleVAte services through to completion was a challenge. Staff observed that because occupational skills training activities were among the most desired by individuals enrolled into EleVAte, they were more inclined to become frustrated and exit the program if beginning those activities was not possible soon after they enrolled.
- **EleVAte staff placed a high value on the transportation supports offered by the program .** Transportation was the most prevalent barrier to participation that EleVAte group members faced, especially in the rural areas of Virginia, and staff felt that the transportation supports provided—usually gas cards or bus passes, but also car repairs in some cases—were invaluable to promoting participation in EleVAte. Staff emphasized that being able to rapidly provide support services was crucial to their effectively meeting individuals' needs and noted that a shift towards using centralized procurement systems at VCCS—away from individual college systems—created delays in providing supports.
- **Moral Reconation Therapy (MRT) activities were seen as highly effective at motivating EleVAte group members.** Several staff viewed MRT as one of the best aspects of the pilot project, and although it was initially only offered to Job Skills Training Program members, one college began offering it to members enrolled in EleVAte Virginia Online. Staff said that it was useful for people to discuss their life experiences, learn of others' similar experiences, and plan how to move forward. Notably, one college provided more individualized counseling services, drawing on MRT methods,

and viewed individualized counseling as a key approach to promoting individual participation at that college.

V. Participation analysis

In this chapter, we present findings on the services that EleVAte 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 EleVAte, 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 EleVAte. In addition, to account for potential differences in the implementation and availability of services for individuals who 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.³⁶ Appendix D contains additional data on the characteristics of those who did or did not complete EleVAte 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 EleVAte

After individuals were assigned to the EleVAte group, they were scheduled for orientation and intake with an adult career coach (ACC) at a local community college providing EleVAte services. Within one week of orientation and intake, EleVAte group members completed multiple assessments including (1) an assessment in VCCS's online Virginia Wizard system that assessed career interests, values, and aptitudes, (2) the TABE to gauge math proficiency skills, and (3) the Employee Assistance Program Inventory to screen for barriers such as anxiety, depression, external stressors, substance use disorders, and family problems. The results of these assessments were used to develop EleVAte service plans and determine which of the three EleVAte service components (EleVAte Virginia Online, JSTP, and PIVA) the individual would initially enroll in, if they were eligible for more than one component.

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

Depending on the service component, EleVAte group members were eligible to receive some or all of the following EleVAte activities provided by the community colleges or a contracted training provider: (1) job search and career coaching with ACCs, (2) job search training including digital literacy training and online training modules that led to the obtainment of the Career Readiness Certificate (CRC), (3) case

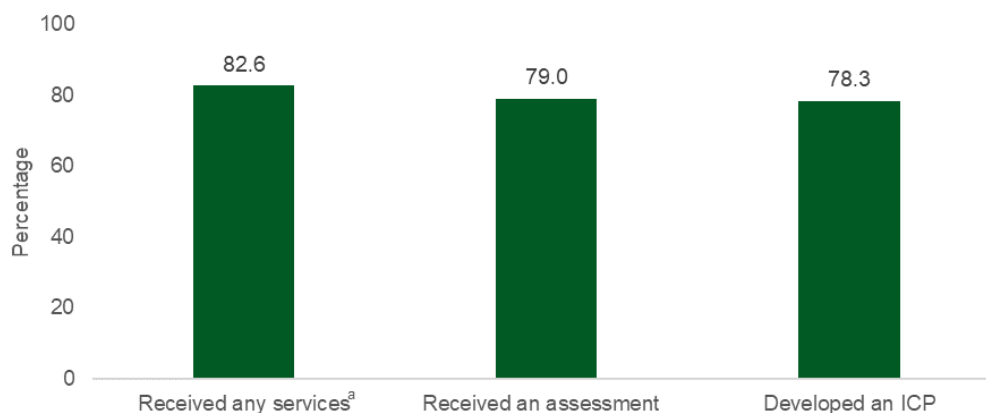
³⁶ The pilot enrollment covered a 28-month period but the service period was fixed. Consequently, the service period for individuals who enrolled later was shorter than for those who enrolled earlier. For example, individuals who enrolled in 2016 could have received services up to 34 months. In contrast, those enrolled in 2017 could only receive services up to 24 months; those who enrolled in 2018 could only receive services for up to 12 months. This range is large across the entire pool of EleVAte group members (Appendix table D.2), but most group members (80 percent) had a potential window of at least 12 months in which to receive services and more than half (55 percent) were enrolled early enough to allow for 18 months of services. However, the actual participation rates show that only 22 percent of the EleVAte group members participated in services for 12 months, and 8 percent participated for 18 months. Therefore, the variation in service period does not appear to have affected actual participation in services (Appendix Table D.2).

management, (4) support services, (5) post-employment or retention services, (6) online and classroom-based adult basic education, (7) life skills training including MRT and (8) occupational skills training.

1. Overall engagement in EleVAte

Most individuals in the EleVAte group (83 percent) received services, meaning they started an assessment or an employment or training-related activity or received a support service offered by EleVAte (Exhibit V.1).³⁷ EleVAte group members who received services successfully attended orientation and intake and then proceeded to engage with other EleVAte services, such as assessments and employment and training-related activities, offered by the community colleges. When comparing the baseline characteristics (age, gender, race and ethnicity, education, employment status, and presence of children in household) of individuals who did and did not receive services, we find a few differences between the two groups; the same was true for individuals who did and did not receive an assessment (Appendix Table D.12). For example, males, individuals without a high school diploma or equivalency credential, and individuals unemployed at random assignment were less likely to receive services than their subgroup counterparts.

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



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

Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,512 EleVAte group members.

ICP = individual career plan

^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 EleVAte services plan because individuals often engaged once to meet with a case manager or develop an EleVAte service plan, but then did not return for more meaningful activities and services.

Length and timing of engagement. On average, individuals in the EleVAte group who engaged in services spent about three months (88 days) in the pilot (Appendix Table D.5). Overall, most individuals began receiving services within the first quarter after random assignment (82 percent), with the remaining individuals mainly engaging between Quarters 2 and 3 (Appendix Table D.6).

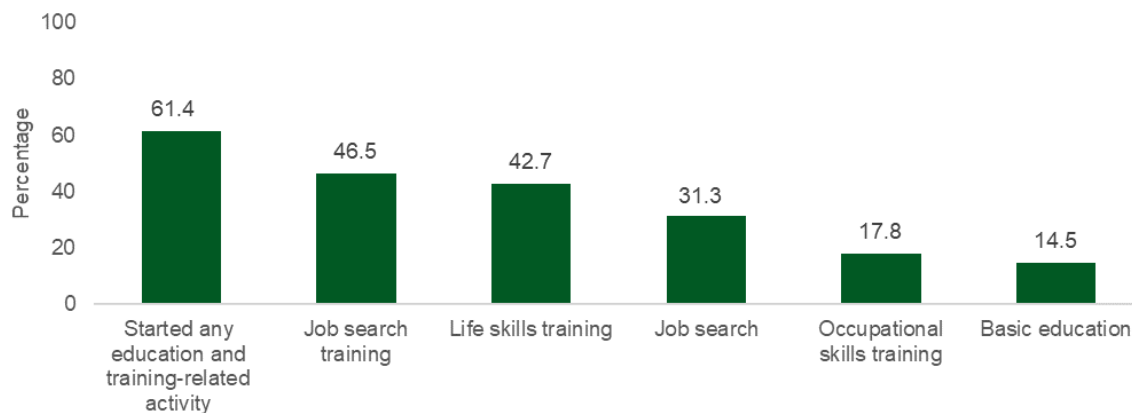
³⁷ The measure does not include orientations, case management, or the creation of an EleVAte service plan, which indicated which of the three EleVAte service components the individual would initially enroll in.

2. Engagement in activities

Despite a high overall rate of engagement, not all EleVAte group members who received any services started an employment or training-related activity after they completed intake and assessments (61 percent; Exhibit V.2). As mentioned in Chapter IV, individuals in all three service components were expected to receive life skills and employment services and counseling. Most EleVAte group members who started an employment or training-related activity started job search training (47 percent), life skills training (43 percent), and job search (31 percent). Fewer individuals participated in activities that were each only offered through two of the three distinct EleVAte service components such as occupational skills training (18 percent) and basic education (15 percent).

More than half of EleVAte group members participated in an activity and most of those who started one completed it. Job search training and life skills training activities were most commonly started.

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

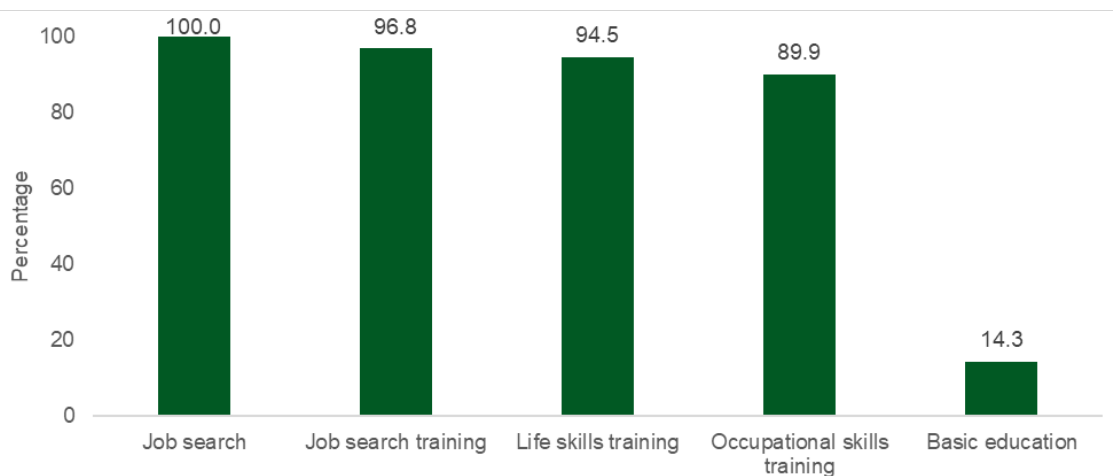


Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,512 EleVAte group members.

Among those who started any activity, 94 percent of individuals completed at least one activity (Appendix Table D.3).³⁸ However, completion rates varied by type of activity. Most individuals participating in job search training (97 percent) and life skills training (95 percent) completed the activities and all individuals participating in job search completed it. Most individuals that started occupational skills training also completed it (90 percent). By contrast, basic education had a much lower completion rate (14 percent; Exhibit V.3). There were a few significant differences among those who did and did not complete the most popular activities (Appendix Table D.13). Individuals with a high school diploma or GED, for example, were more likely to complete occupational skills training than those with lower education levels.

³⁸ High rates of activity completion may, in part, be driven by assumptions made to handle incomplete data from the Virginia Wizard, the VCCS case management database that was used by the pilot to track enrollment and service delivery. For many activities, the Virginia Wizard did not have a completion status field, so the presence of an activity end date was assumed to indicate activity completion.

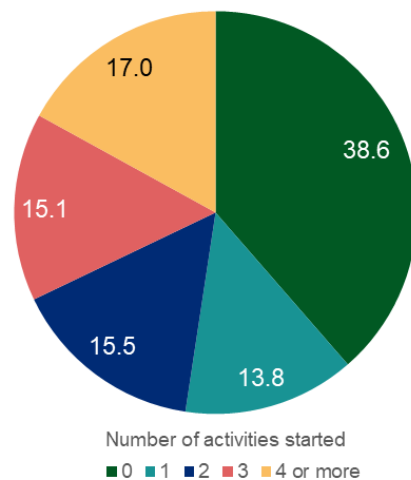
Exhibit V.3. Percentage of EleVAte group members who complete an activity, among those who started one

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

Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,512 EleVAte group members.

Length and timing of engagement. Individuals in the EleVAte group who started an activity spent an average of a few days to six months participating, depending on the activity. Individuals spent the most time in basic education (181 days). Individuals also spent a substantial amount of time in occupational skills training (90 days). EleVAte group members spent less time in activities such as job search training (53 days), life skills training (36 days), and job search (5 days; Appendix Table D.5). Although most individuals started an employment or training-related activity in the first quarter after random assignment (56 percent), 5 percent started activities in Quarter 2 and the remaining 1 percent started activities between Quarters 3 and 6 (Appendix Table D.6). There was much more variation in the timing of activity completion—the largest percentage of those who started an activity completed it in the first quarter (44 percent), but many also completed activities in Quarters 2 and 3 (9 and 3 percent, respectively), and the remaining 2 percent completed them between Quarters 4 and 6.

Number and order of activities. In line with the findings from Chapter IV, Exhibit V.4 shows that most EleVAte group members either did not start an employment or training-related activity (39 percent) or engaged in just one activity (14 percent). EleVAte group members who started their activity sequence with just one activity commonly started life skills training (30 percent) or job search training (19 percent). Many EleVAte group members who participated in employment or training-related activities started multiple activities on the same day (23 percent). These individuals frequently started job search training and life skills training. Individuals in the JSTP and PIVA components were usually assigned to first participate in online, self-paced soft skills and employment services while they waited for occupational skills trainings to begin. Fewer individuals first started with basic education (12 percent), which was the case if they were assigned to the EleVAte Virginia Online component. About 10 percent of individuals started with occupational skills training, which was the case if their enrollment coincided with the start of an occupational skills training course. Among those who participated in just one activity, the majority participated in life skills training or job search training (29 and 28 percent, respectively), followed by basic education and occupational skills training (20 and 15 percent, respectively; Appendix Table D.5).

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

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

Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,512 EleVAte group members.

For EleVAte group members who participated in more than one activity, the most common combination of activities was job search training and life skills training (75 percent), followed by job search training and job search (57 percent), and job search and life skills training (50 percent). In general, among individuals who started more than one activity, there was a period of a month to three months between starting the first activity and then starting the second one (Appendix Table D.5).

Earlier versus later enrollment. Because some service and EleVAte 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. Generally, we found no significant differences in the overall rates of starting or completing activities. However, those who enrolled in the pilot later were less likely than those who enrolled earlier to start or complete occupational skills training (6 percentage point difference for both), to start or complete basic education (13 and 3 percentage point differences, respectively), and to start job search training (4 percentage point difference; Appendix Table D.4). Because occupational skills training and basic education generally took longer to complete than other activities, those who enrolled later may have been discouraged from starting activities they could not finish before the pilot ended.

B. Education, occupational skills training, and work-based learning³⁹

In this section, we explore education and occupational skills training activities in more detail. The section describes the types of education and occupational skills training EleVAte group members started and completed, as well as any degrees or certifications they earned.

Each of the three EleVAte service components offered either education, occupational skills training, or both activities. Over a quarter (28 percent) of EleVAte group members started any occupational skills

³⁹ Work-based learning was not explicitly offered through any of the three EleVAte service components. As a result, only a few individuals engaged in this activity. The few individuals that started work-based learning completed the activity (Appendix Table D.7).

training, education, or work-based learning activity. Additionally, about 63 percent of the individuals that started an occupational skills training, education, or work-based learning activity (18 percent of all EleVAte group members) completed it (Appendix Table D.7).

1. Education and occupational skills training

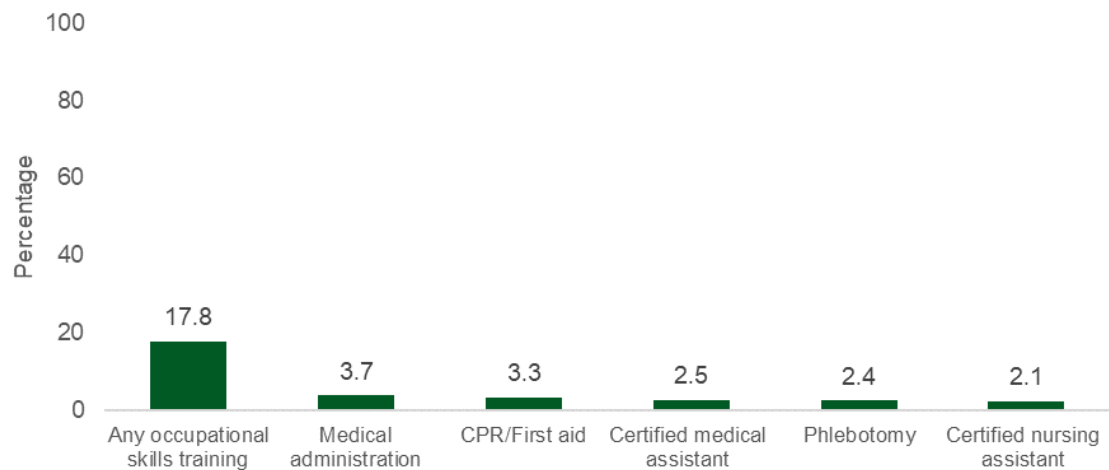
EleVAte group members could receive education through two of the three service components (EleVAte Virginia Online and PIVA). However, only 15 percent of EleVAte group members participated in education activities and only 3 percent of EleVAte group members were working to obtain their high school equivalency certificate. This suggests that most EleVAte group members who started education activities were participating in adult basic education (Appendix Table D.7).

About 14 percent of EleVAte group members earned an occupational skills training credential or certification—many of which were in the health profession.

Occupational skills training could be accessed through the JSTP and PIVA service components. However, less than one fifth of EleVAte group members participated in some type of occupational skills training (Exhibit V.5). Individuals had many choices for occupational skills training. The five most common types of training started were all in the health profession and included medical administration, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first aid, certified medical assistant (CMA), phlebotomy, and certified nursing assistant (CNA). These five types of training accounted for over half of the trainings started.

Among those who started and occupational skills training, the completion rate was highest for those starting CPR and first aid (100 percent), followed by CNA (89 percent), phlebotomy (89 percent), medical administration (86 percent), and CMA (86 percent).

Exhibit V.5. Percentage of EleVAte group members who started any occupational skills training and the five most common types of training



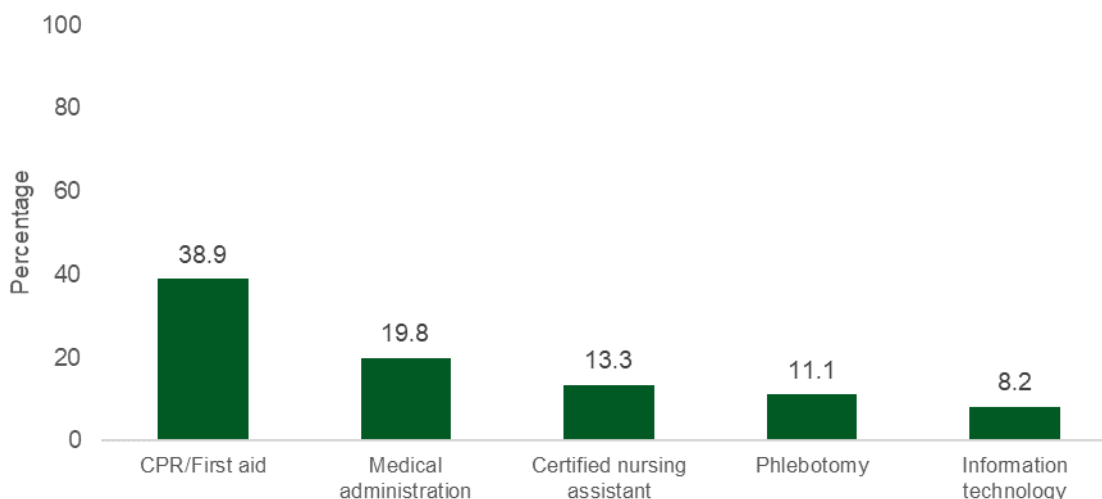
Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,512 EleVAte group members.

CPR = Cardiopulmonary resuscitation

Many of the individuals who completed an occupational skills training program received a certification or credential (14 percent of all EleVAte group members; Appendix Table D.7). The five most common credentials earned were for CPR and first aid (39 percent), medical administration (20 percent), CNA (13 percent), phlebotomy (11 percent), and information technology (8 percent; Exhibit V.6). EleVAte 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 (Appendix Table D.6).

Exhibit V.6. Percentage of EleVAte group members who earned the five most common credentials, among those who received a credential



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

Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,512 EleVAte group members.

CPR = Cardiopulmonary resuscitation

C. Support services

Half of EleVAte group members received at least one support service. Most of these individuals received transportation assistance including help with car repair, toll, and parking payments and gas and bus passes (48 percent; Exhibit V.7). Fewer individuals received assistance with commodities such as eyeglasses or clothing (12 percent), rent or utility payments (7 percent), employment or training-related supplies (3 percent), books (2 percent), medical care (2 percent), child care (less than 1 percent). Most individuals started receiving support services within their first quarter after random assignment (44 percent), 4 percent first received a support service in Quarter 2, and the remaining 2 percent of individuals first received a support service in Quarters 3 through 6 (Appendix Table D.6).

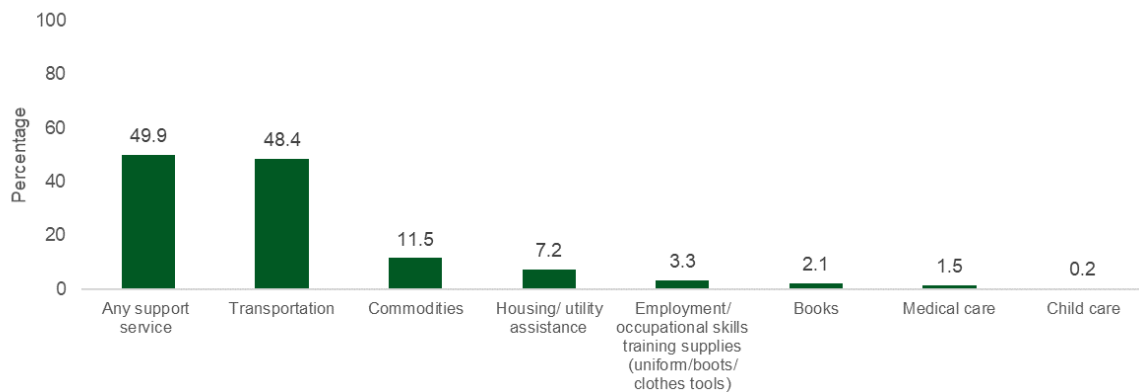
Half of EleVAte group members received a support service, receiving a total of \$360 on average.

Individuals who received a support service received some type of support service in four months, on average.⁴⁰ They received transportation assistance for the longest period of time (three months).

⁴⁰ Receipt is not necessarily in consecutive months.

Individuals received other types of support services for an average of a month. This suggests that many individuals may have received multiple types of support services.

Exhibit V.7. Percentage of EleVAte group members who received support services, by type



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

Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,512 EleVAte group members.

On average, EleVAte group members who received support services received a total of \$360 in support service payments (Exhibit V.8). Average total amounts by type of support service were largest for rent and utility assistance (\$436) and child care (\$404), although very few EleVAte group members received child care. The total average amounts for other support services were lower, ranging from \$103 (books) to \$248 (transportation).

Exhibit V.8. Amount of support services received among those who received support services

Type of service	Average amount
Average total amount of support services paid per person (\$)	360
Housing/utility assistance	436
Child care	404
Transportation	248
Commodities	167
Medical care	165
Employment/occupational skills training supplies (uniform/boots/ clothes/tools)	138
Books	103
Sample size	2,512

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

Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,512 EleVAte group members.

Support services in relation to other measures. We assessed whether participation in EleVAte 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 EleVAte for 60 days longer than those who did not (Appendix Table D.8). In addition, 68 percent of individuals who started an employment or training-related activity received a support service, compared with only 21 percent of those who did not start an activity. Most individuals who completed an activity (70 percent) received a support service. Among individuals who received a support service, the average amount received was \$360. Within this group, individuals who started an employment or training-related activity, and those who completed an activity, received higher amounts (\$411 and \$418; Appendix Table D.8). This

difference likely reflects that those who started activities were in EleVAte longer (which resulted in more monthly assistance).

Earlier versus later enrollment. Those who enrolled in the pilot later were less likely to receive support services than those who enrolled earlier (47 percent compared to 55 percent; Appendix Table D.4).

D. Case management

EleVAte group members received one-on-one case management from ACCs and counselors who were staffed by the seven community colleges providing EleVAte services. Estimates of receipt of case management from counselors and ACCs were calculated using 12 months of case note data for a randomly selected sample of 200 EleVAte group members enrolled between March 2016 and December 2017.

Exhibit V.9 shows that most individuals in the sample (94 percent) had at least one contact with an ACC or counselor. On average, individuals who had any contact

Almost all EleVAte group members were in contact with an ACC or counselor and had an average of 9 contacts during the 12-month follow up period.

with an ACC or counselor had nearly 9 contacts during the 12 months after random assignment. The majority of these contacts were by telephone (43 percent) or in person (28 percent), although some contacts occurred by letter⁴¹ (17 percent) or by email, text, or social media (12 percent).⁴²

Exhibit V.9. Description of contacts with ACCs and counselors among EleVAte group members

Type of service	EleVAte group
Any contact (%)	94.0
Average number of contacts per person (#)	8.3
Average number of contacts per person, among those with a contact (#)	8.8
Average number of contacts per person per month, among those with a contact (#)	0.7
Average total time in case management contact, among those with a contact (minutes) ^a	NA
Among contacts, type of contact (%)	
In person	28.0
Telephone	42.9
Electronic (email, text, social media)	12.3
Letter	16.7
Sample size	200

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

Note: Data in this table represents all contacts that case managers documented between themselves and individuals in EleVAte. In some cases, this could include contact that was not direct communication (such as mailing documents to an individual), but even this is likely a needed service that helps the individual. We did exclude 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 EleVAte group members enrolled between March 2016 and December 2017.

^b The number of minutes represents the total amount of time each individual was in contact with their case manager among all contacts, averaged across all individuals who had a contact.

⁴¹ Letter contacts include attendance commitment letters, failure to attend letters, and pre-exit letters sent by mail.

⁴² It is important to note that this analysis was done for a randomly selected sample of 200 EleVAte group members.

The average number of contacts per month ranged from less than one to five during the first year, with over half of contacts occurring in Quarter 1 (Appendix Table D.6).

Earlier versus later enrollment. Those who enrolled in the pilot later were more likely to have contact with an ACC or counselor than those who enrolled earlier (98 percent compared to 90 percent; Appendix Table D.4).

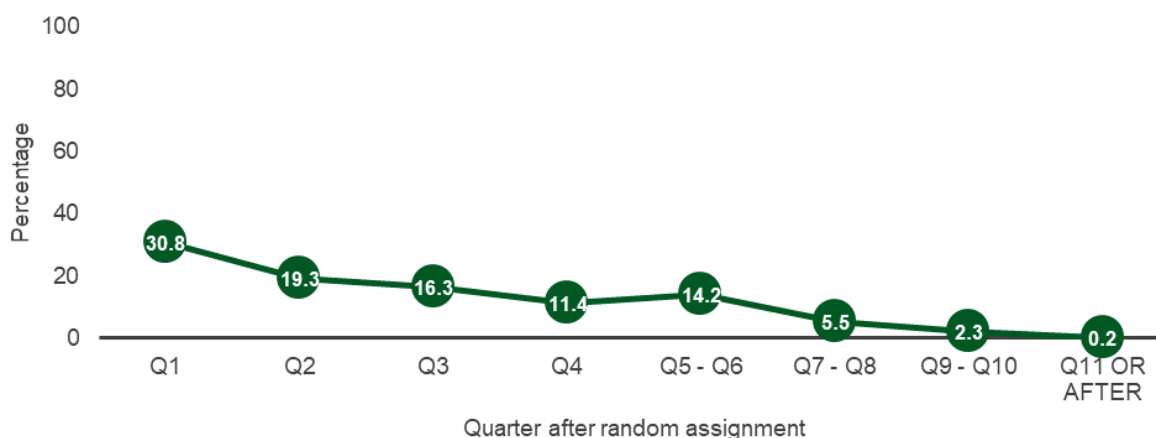
E. Extent and timing of EleVAte exits

More than three-quarters of EleVAte group members (78 percent) exited EleVAte during their first year after random assignment; 20 percent left in their second year, and the remaining 3 percent left in their third year (Exhibit V.10). Half of all individuals left in the first and second quarters after random assignment (31 and 19 percent; respectively) and 16 and 11 percent left EleVAte in Quarters 3 and 4, respectively. Among those who exited within 3 months, 23 percent received a support service, compared to 43 percent of those who exited within 12 months (Appendix Table D.10). More than half of EleVAte group members exited after they participated in an employment or training-related activity (60 percent); only a small percentage (14 percent) of those who exited re-entered EleVAte (Appendix Table D.10).

Over three-quarters of individuals exited EleVAte within their first year after random assignment.

There were only a few differences in the characteristics of those who left EleVAte early (within Quarter 1) and those who left later (after Quarter 1). Those who exited earlier were more likely to be male (6 percentage point difference), be 18 to 24 years old (4 percentage point difference), have less than a high school education (4 percentage point difference), and be unemployed at the time of random assignment (4 percentage point difference; Appendix Table D.11).

Exhibit V.10. Percentage of EleVAte group members who exited within each quarter



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

Note: Estimates are based on data from 2,512 EleVAte group members.

A significant proportion of EleVAte group members chose to exit before completing services (discontinued services; 35 percent; Exhibit V.11). EleVAte staff reported that EleVAte group members commonly left the program because they were disappointed upon being assigned to initially participate in online soft skills services or learning that the occupational skills trainings offered did not align with their

career aspirations. The providers did not track loss of SNAP as a reason for exit, but using SNAP administrative data, only 11 percent of EleVAte group members exited SNAP in the month before, the month of, or the month after their exit from EleVAte. This finding indicates that most EleVAte exits were not associated with losing SNAP benefits.

EleVAte staff also cited that many EleVAte group members left the program because they felt an urgency to find work and increase their incomes. Nine percent of EleVAte group members reported leaving because they found employment. We found slightly higher employment rates around the time of exit from EleVAte using UI data. About 54 percent were already employed at the time of exit (at least three months before exit), and 15 percent started employment around the time of exit (between two months before to two months after the exit date). Thirty-two percent did not become employed around the time of exit (Appendix Table D.10). The group of EleVAte group members who exited the program because they found employment may not include others in the 54 percent who were employed while in EleVAte and decided to leave the program because of changes in hours, wages, or satisfaction with their current job.

Exhibit V.11. Percentage of EleVAte group members who exited, by reason

Exits	EleVAte group
Discontinued services	34.6
Other ^a	27.3
Never attended orientation	11.9
Exited due to EleVAte ending	9.0
Exited due to employment	8.5
Completed	7.6
Became ineligible for SNAP or pilot	1.0
Sample size	2,512

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

^aRepresents that no exit reason was coded.

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

In this chapter, we describe how EleVAte and control group members differed in their receipt of services based on participation in EleVAte, 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 EleVAte 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 EleVAte 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.⁴³ We then examine differences between the two groups in rates of completion, the amount of time spent in different activities, and receipt of case management and support services. (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 EleVAte group participated in activities at higher rates than individuals in the control group. Seventy-six percent of the EleVAte 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 EleVAte group were more likely to participate in job search training or assistance activities (18 percentage point difference) and education or training activities (23 percentage point difference).

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

⁴³ 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 EleVAte, existing SNAP E&T, or community-offered services



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

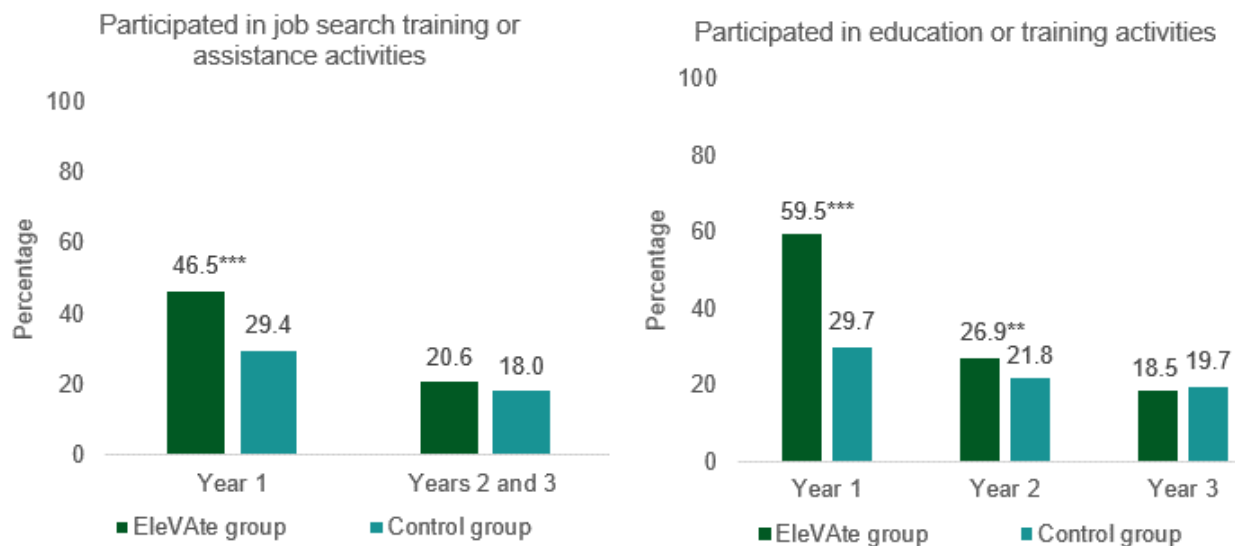
Note: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 779 EleVAte group members and 744 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EleVAte 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 EleVAte 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 17 percentage point difference between the EleVAte group and control group in participation in job search training or assistance activities, a difference that was small and statistically insignificant in Years 2 and 3. Similarly, there were differences in participation in education or training activities of 30 percentage points and 5 percentage points in Years 1 and 2, respectively. By Year 3, this difference had decreased to a statistically insignificant -1.3 percentage points. In addition, there was no difference in service receipt between the EleVAte group and the control group after the pilot ended, indicating that EleVAte group members were just as likely as control group members to receive services in the community. The difference between the EleVAte and control groups in the percentage of individuals who participated in an education or training activity was 26 percentage points before the pilot ended and a statistically insignificant -4 percentage points after it ended (Appendix Table E.2a). The differences between the two groups in rates of participation for individuals randomly assigned earlier in the pilot period were similar to those randomly assigned later (Appendix Table E.10).

Difference between the EleVAte and control groups in rates of participation in education or training activities occurred in the first two years after random assignment.

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



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

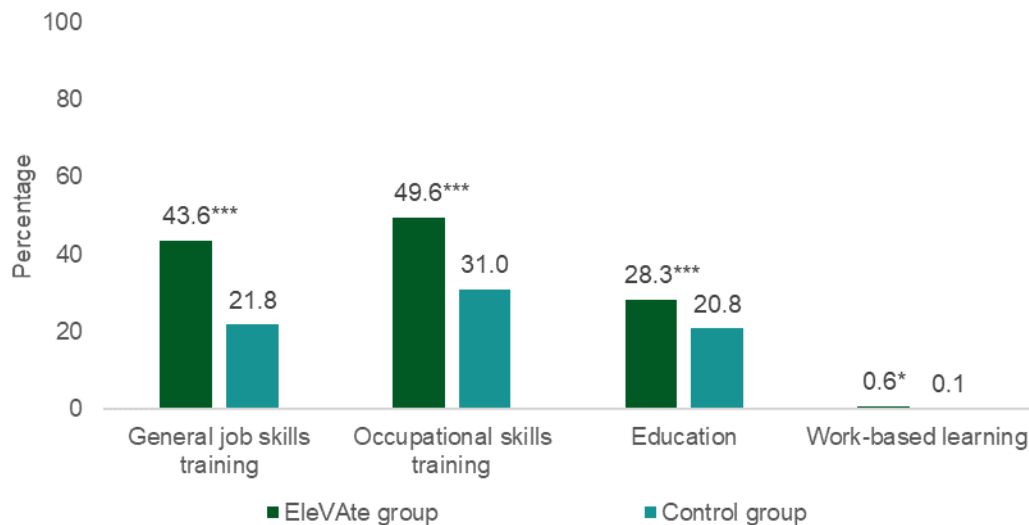
Note: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 779 EleVAte group members and 744 control group members. The 12- and 36-month surveys collected the start and end dates for participation in education or training programs, but not for participation in job 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 EleVAte group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

EleVAte 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 general job skills training (22 percentage point difference), occupational skills training (19 percentage point difference), and education (8 percentage point difference). There was a small difference in rates of participation in work-based learning (less than 1 percentage point).

The EleVAte group had higher rates of participation than the control group in all types of activities, including general job skills training, occupational skills training, education, and work-based learning.

Exhibit VI.3. Participation in specific EleVAte, 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 779 EleVAte group members and 744 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EleVAte 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

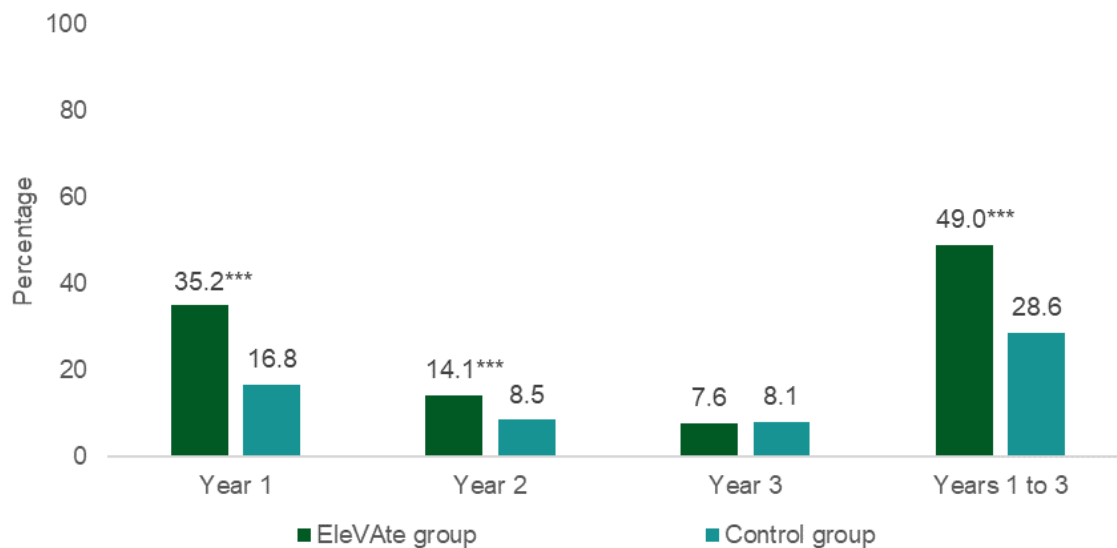
In addition to being more likely than the control group to start education and training activities, the EleVAte group was also more likely to complete them (Exhibit VI.4). Overall, EleVAte group members were 21 percentage points more likely to complete any type of education or training activity.

Differences between the two groups in rates of completion were largest in the first year after random assignment (18 percentage point difference) and grew smaller in the second year (6 percentage point difference; Exhibit VI.4). Rates were not different in the third year. Some individuals—8 percent of EleVAte group members and 10 percent of control group members—reported that they were still engaged in an activity at the time of the 36-month follow-up survey. 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 EleVAte group members and 7 percent of control group members.

Individuals in the EleVAte group were also more likely than those in the control group to complete each type of activity, such as general job skills training (16 percentage point difference) and occupational skills training (17 percentage point difference; Appendix Table E.3). There was a small and statistically insignificant difference between the two groups in rates of completion for work-based learning activities, in part reflecting the small percentages of individuals who started these activities.

Individuals in the EleVAte group spent, on average, about two months longer in activities than individuals in the control group (seven versus four months, with rounding; Appendix Table E.3). EleVAte group members also spent about 6 hours more per week in activities than control group members (11 hours versus 6 hours, with rounding). In each of the three years following random assignment, the EleVAte group spent more time in activities, relative to the control group—more months in the first year and more hours per week in each of the three years.

Exhibit VI.4. Percentage of EleVAte 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.

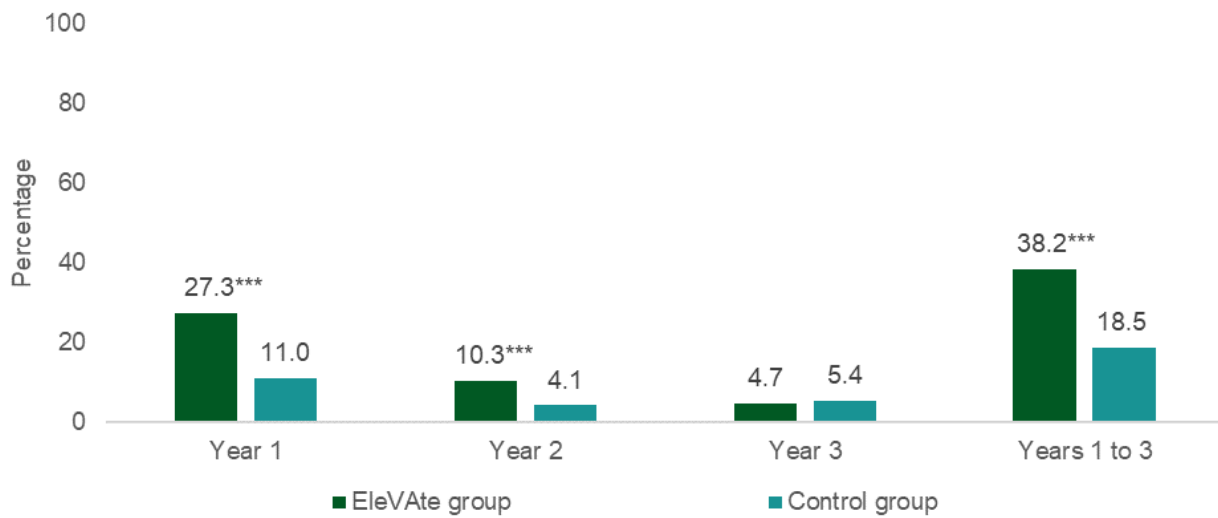
Note: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 779 EleVAte group members and 744 control group members.

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

Individuals in the EleVAte group were more likely than those in the control group to receive an occupational certificate or license (38 versus 19 percent; Exhibit VI.5). There was a significant difference in the percentage of individuals who received one in Year 1 and Year 2 following random assignment, but not in Year 3.

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

Exhibit VI.5. Percentage of EleVAte 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 779 EleVAte group members and 744 control group members.

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

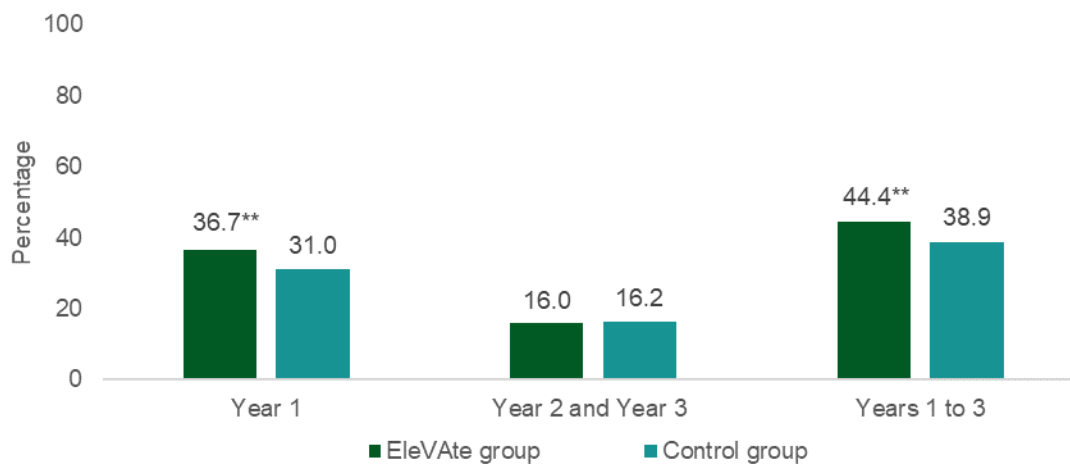
The differences between the two groups in rates of completion or receipt of an occupational certificate or license were similar for individuals randomly assigned earlier versus later in the enrollment period (Appendix Table E.10). The differences between the EleVAte and control groups in the average length of time spent on all activities was also similar for individuals enrolled earlier in the period compared with later.

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

EleVAte 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 (6 percentage point difference; Exhibit VI.6). The difference between the two groups was statistically significant only in the first year following random assignment (6 percentage point difference). The difference in receipt of case management services also was larger for the EleVAte group, relative to the control group, for individuals randomly assigned earlier in the enrollment period (Appendix Table E.10).

On average, EleVAte group members had two additional contacts with an employment professional or case manager relative to control group members (five versus three contacts; Appendix Table E.6). There were few statistically significant differences in mode of contact (in person versus by phone) between the two groups; however, the EleVAte group was more likely than the control group to communicate mostly by phone in the second and third years.

Exhibit VI.6. Receipt of case management through EleVAte 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 779 EleVAte group members and 744 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.

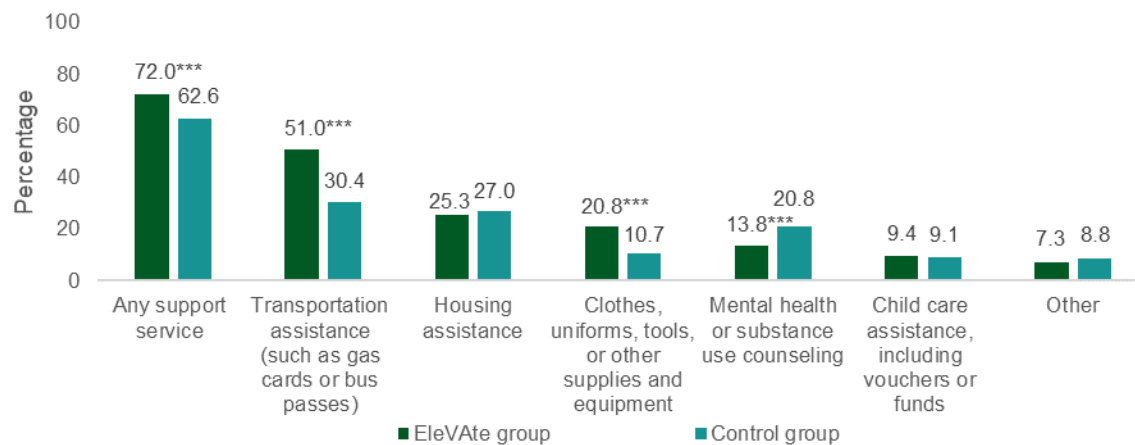
***/**/* Difference between the EleVAte group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

EleVAte group members were also more likely than control group members to receive support services. About 72 percent of individuals in the EleVAte group received a support service compared to 63 percent in the control group (Exhibit VI.9). The largest differences between the two groups were observed for transportation assistance (51 versus 30 percent) and clothes, uniforms, tools, or other supplies and equipment (21 versus 11 percent). There were no statistically significant differences between the EleVAte and control group in receipt of housing assistance or child care assistance. Control group members were more likely to receive mental health or substance use counseling (14 versus 21 percent).

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

Individuals in the EleVAte 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 were larger for individuals randomly assigned earlier versus later in the enrollment period.

Exhibit VI.7. Receipt of support services through EleVAte, 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 779 EleVAte group members and 744 control group members. “Other” included assistance with payment of utilities such as electricity, phone, heat, or gas; food assistance; and assistance with medical care.

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

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 EleVAte, 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 EleVAte 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 EleVAte activities.

A. Impacts of EleVAte on labor market outcomes

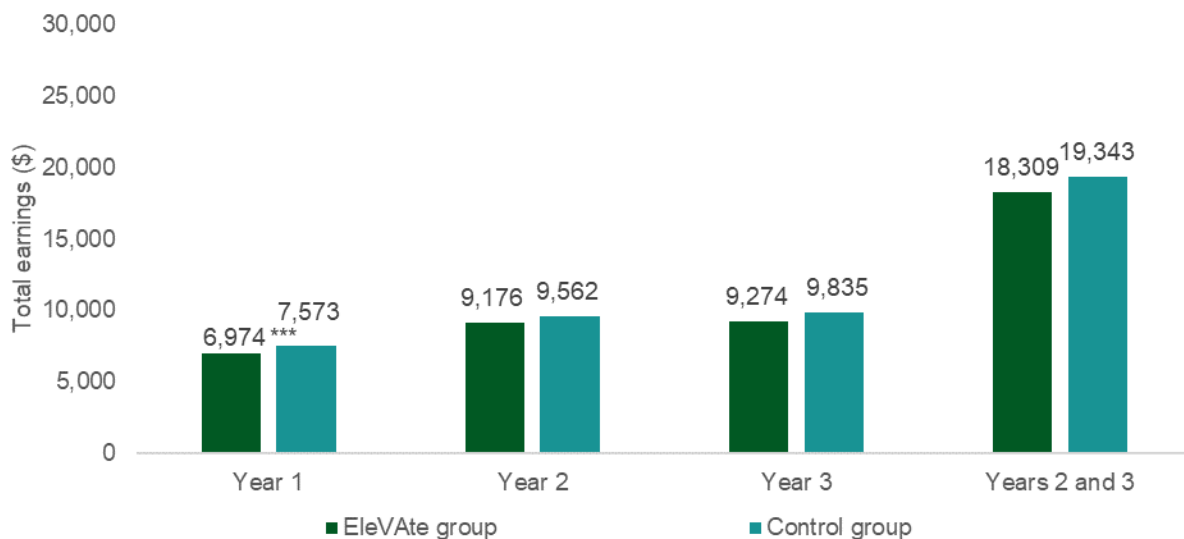
This section presents impacts on key labor market outcomes. Outcomes from both UI wage records and survey data were measured by year and quarter after random assignment. Some outcomes based on the survey data were measured at the time of the survey, approximately 36 months after random assignment.⁴⁴

1. Impacts on earnings, employment, and hours worked

Earnings. EleVAte led to increased earnings in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) based on survey data, but not UI data. Based on UI data, EleVAte significantly decreased earnings in Year 1 but had no impact on earnings in Years 2 or 3 (Exhibit VII.1). The survey data, in contrast, show positive effects on earnings, emerging later in the follow-up period. The EleVAte group had higher earnings than the control group in Year 3 (a difference of \$1,570) and for the combined Years 2 and 3 period (a difference of \$2,761; Exhibit VII.2) Based on each data source, both research groups experienced increases in average earnings over time.

⁴⁴ 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

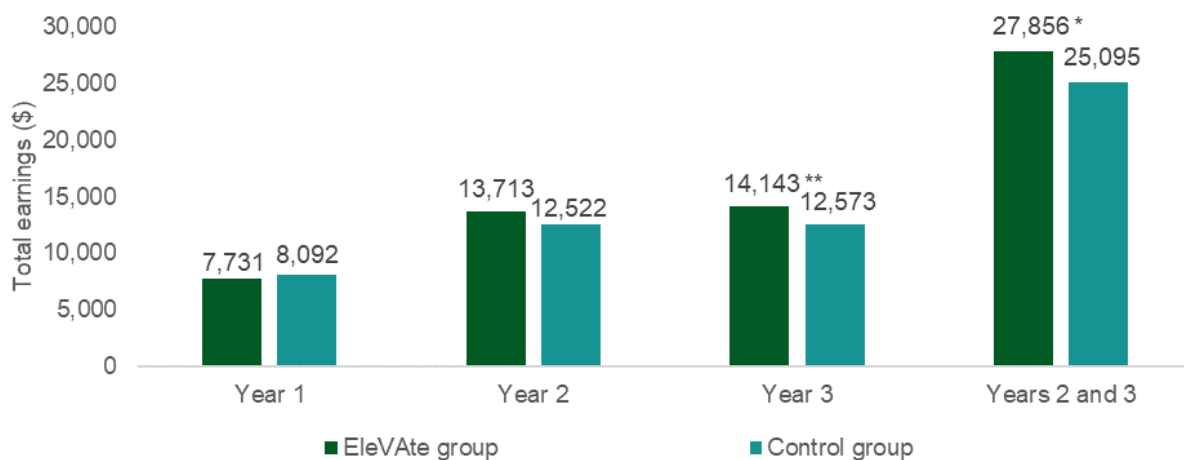


Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation UI wage records, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 1,925 EleVAte group members and 1,911 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EleVAte group and control group is significantly different from zero at 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.

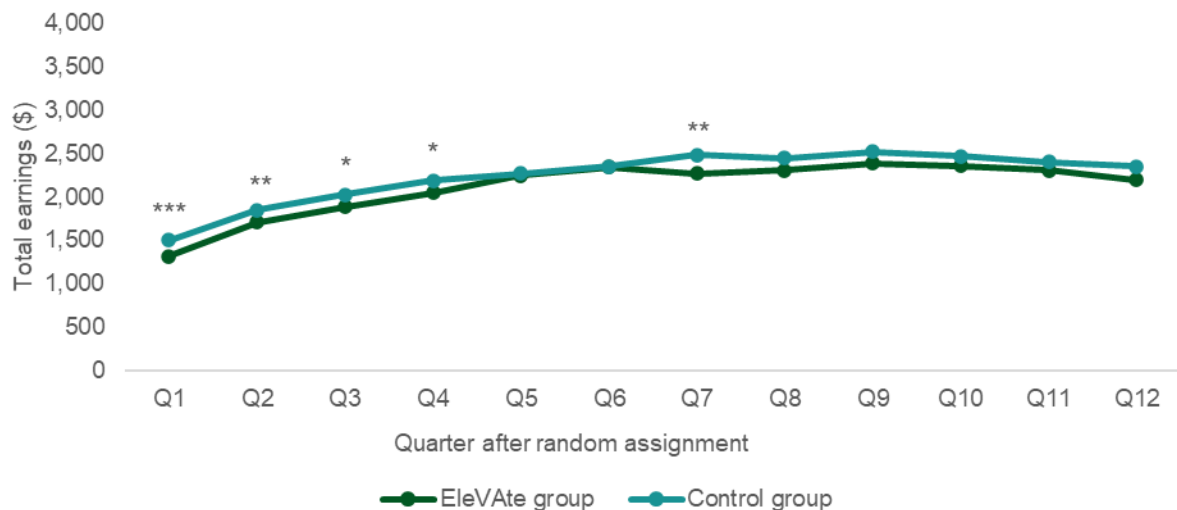
Note: Estimates are based on data from 779 EleVAte group members and 744 control group members.

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

Data on quarterly earnings show reductions in earnings in the first four quarters after random assignment based on UI data, and few statistically significant differences after that point (p -value = 0.053 in Quarter 3; p -value = 0.079 in Quarter 4; Exhibit VII.3). Survey data show that earnings began increasing more rapidly for the EleVAte group in Year 2, with statistically significant differences in earnings in Quarters 8 through 11 (p -value = 0.068 in Quarter 11; Exhibit VII.4). Effects on employment and earnings were generally similar for individuals who were randomly assigned earlier versus later in the enrollment period

(Appendix Table F.19). Based on survey data, there was an impact of EleVAte on earnings for individuals randomly assigned later in the pilot but not those randomly assigned earlier. This difference in impacts was not statistically significant.

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

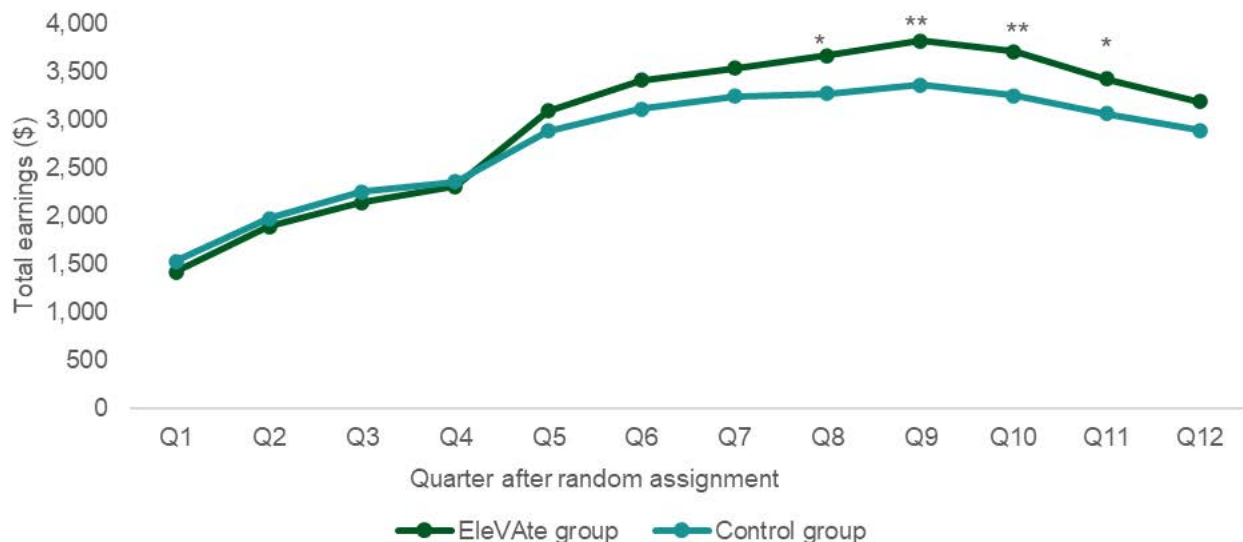


Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation UI wage records, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 1,925 EleVAte group members and 1,911 control group members.

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

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



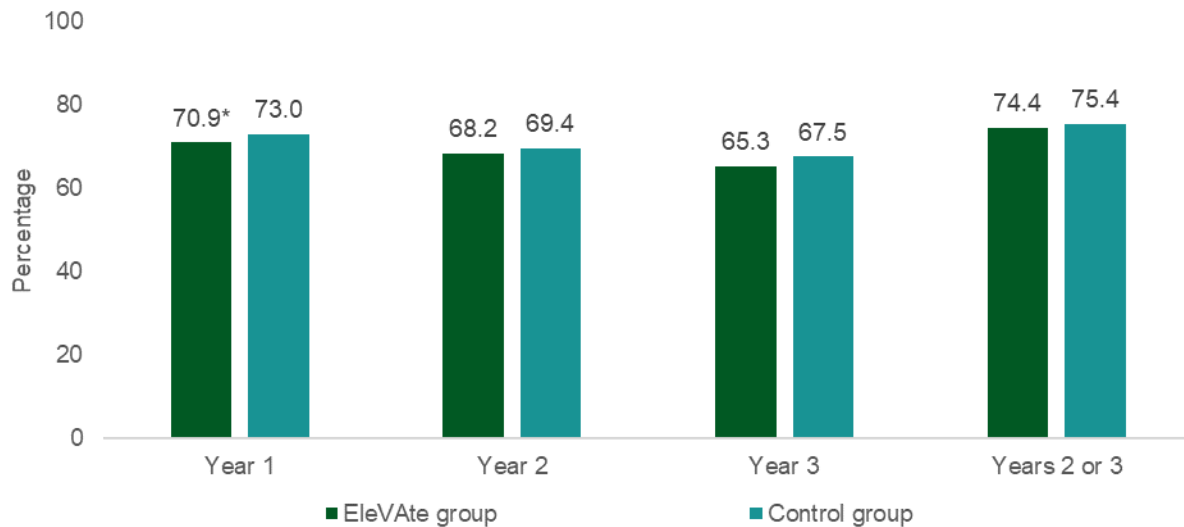
Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 779 EleVAte group members and 744 control group members.

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

Employment. Based on the UI data, EleVAte had no effect on employment in the final two-year period (74 percent for the EleVAte group versus 75 percent for the control group; Exhibit VII.5). As with effects on earnings, EleVAte reduced employment in Year 1 by about 2 percentage points (p -value = 0.080). Quarterly impacts were observed largely in the first year (Quarters 1 through 4), although there were statistically significant reductions in employment in Quarters 7 and 12 (Appendix Table F.1).

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 1,925 EleVAte group members and 1,911 control group members.

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

There were no differences between research groups in the employment rate across the two-year period from Year 2 to 3 based on the survey data (80 percent for both groups; Exhibit VII.6). Similar to findings based on UI data, the EleVAte group had lower employment than the control group in Year 1 (59 versus 65 percent), but there were no impacts in later years. Differences in employment rates were observed in the survey data for Quarters 3 and 4 but grew smaller and were not statistically significant in later quarters (Appendix Table F.4). The impact of EleVAte on employment was similar for individuals randomly assigned earlier and later in the enrollment period (Appendix Table F.19).

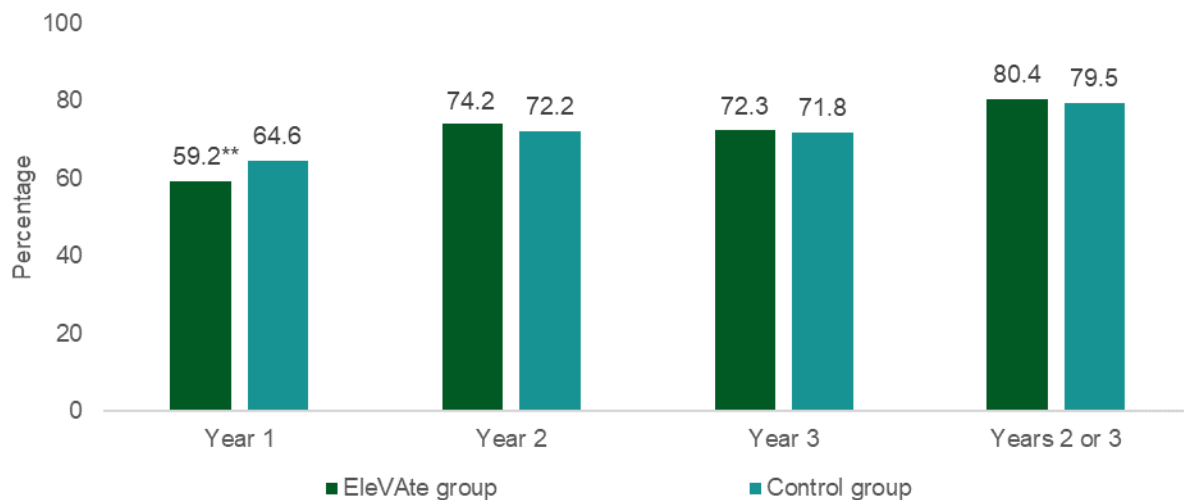
EleVAte had no effect on employment in the two-year period from Year 2 to 3 based on UI data and survey data. There was a reduction in employment in Years 1, but not in Years 2 or 3.

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

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 (Appendix Tables F.2 and F.4). Findings were generally similar to those for rates of employment. The UI data showed that, relative to the control group, the EleVAte group

was employed for fewer quarters per year over the three-year period. Survey data showed no statistically significant differences in any year.

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 779 EleVAte group members and 744 control group members.

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

Hours worked. Among all individuals randomly assigned, those in the EleVAte group worked more hours per week during the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) than those in the control group (22 versus 20 hours; Appendix Table F.5). EleVAte group members worked an average of 14 hours per week in Year 1 and increased to 21 hours per week in Year 3. Control group members worked an average of 15 hours per week in Year 1 and increased to 19 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.⁴⁵ This information was available only for individuals employed at the time of the 36-month survey (52 percent of the EleVAte group and 51 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 EleVAte on job characteristics.

⁴⁵ 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 (%)	EleVAte group	Control group	Difference
Employed at the time of the 36-month survey interview	52.3	50.7	1.6
Hours worked per week			
Less than 20	15.0	17.9	-2.9
21 to 34	25.2	26.3	-1.1
35 or more (employed full time)	59.6	55.9	3.8
Average	34.6	33.2	1.4*
Weekly earnings			
\$1 to \$499	71.6	68.1	3.5
\$500 to \$999	27.0	28.8	-1.7
\$1,000 to \$1,499	0.2	2.9	-2.6**
\$1,500 to \$2,000	0.7	0.3	0.4
\$2,000 and above	0.4	0.0	0.4
Benefits available at job			
Any benefit	73.4	70.2	3.2
Health insurance or HMO/PPO plan	62.8	58.9	3.9
Dental insurance	54.5	52.4	2.2
Paid vacation	50.4	50.8	-0.4
Paid holidays	53.6	49.0	4.6
Paid sick leave	43.6	40.6	3.0
Any paid time off	63.3	61.6	1.6
Pension or retirement benefits	49.0	49.9	-0.8
Tuition assistance or reimbursement	29.2	26.4	2.8
Type of employment			
Regular full or part time	80.2	84.8	-4.6
Temporary or on call	6.7	6.4	0.3
Self-employed or independent contractor or consultant	12.2	7.0	5.2**
Day laborer	0.9	1.8	-1.0
Occupation			
Office and administrative support	9.8	13.3	-3.4
Health care support	12.3	10.2	2.1
Personal care and service	10.6	9.0	1.5
Sales	9.4	10.9	-1.5
Food preparation and serving	7.8	8.5	-0.7
Transportation and material moving	6.5	7.5	-1.0
Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance	6.5	6.5	0.0
Management	4.5	3.0	1.5
Production	2.7	2.4	0.3
Educational instruction and library	1.8	3.0	-1.2
Sample size	501	475	

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

***/**/* Difference between the EleVAte group and control group is significantly different from zero at 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, EleVAte group members and control group members held jobs with generally similar characteristics, although there were a few differences. In both research groups, about two-thirds of individuals were employed full time, and about 70 percent earned less than \$500 per week (Exhibit VII.7). Employed EleVAte individuals worked on average just over one hour per week more than control group individuals, and they were slightly less likely to earn between \$1,000 and \$1,500 per week. The majority of employed individuals in both research groups received at least one employer-offered benefit, and EleVAte had no effect on these outcomes. Most employed individuals in both research groups were regular status employees working full time or part time. Employed individuals in the EleVAte group were more likely than those in the control group to report being self-employed (12 versus 7 percent). Common occupations included office and administrative support, health care support, and personal care and services. Occupations were similar between the two 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 EleVAte 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, based on UI data, employment rates were lower for the EleVAte group than the control group for most of the follow-up period, although several of the quarterly differences were not statistically significant. Consistent with this finding, the EleVAte group was less likely to be consistently employed over the period and more likely to have experienced at least one unemployment spell (19 percent of the EleVAte group did not experience an unemployment spell, compared with 23 percent of the control group; Appendix Table F.20). The impact on experiencing at least one employment spell was larger for individuals who were employed at the time of random assignment than those who were not employed.

As presented in Exhibit VII.6, survey data showed that employment rates were lower for the EleVAte group than the control group in Year 1 but similar for the two research groups in Years 2 and 3 combined. Data on employment dynamics show no differences between the two groups in terms of employment consistency, job loss, and unemployment spells (Appendix Table F.21).⁴⁶ On average, both research groups experienced similar numbers of unemployment spells, with just under 50 percent experiencing one spell during this period and about 40 percent experiencing two or more spells (Appendix Table F.22). In addition, similar percentages of individuals in each research group not employed at the time of the 12-month survey were employed at the time of the 36-month survey, indicating that the likelihood of finding a job was similar for both groups (34 versus 28 percent).

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 45 percent of the EleVAte group had one job at the time of the 12-month survey; 3 percent had two jobs. At the time of the 36-month survey, these percentages were 48 and 5 percent, respectively. For the control group, 48 percent had one job and 4

⁴⁶ 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.

percent had two jobs at the time of the 12-month survey. At the time of the 36-month survey, these percentages were 47 and 4 percent, respectively.

Exhibit VII.7 shows that EleVAte generally had a few impacts on job characteristics around the time of the 36-month survey. There were also relatively few changes in the distributions of these characteristics from the 12-month to the 36-month survey (Appendix Table F.24). The EleVAte group was more likely than the control group to work in health care support occupations at the 12-month interview and less likely to work in office and administrative supports jobs at the 36-month interview.

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

EleVAte did not lead to an increase in average earnings in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) based on UI data but did lead to an increase in earnings based on survey data, with statistically significant increases in earnings in the two-year period and in later follow-up quarters.⁴⁷ Based on both UI and survey data, EleVAte led to reduced employment in Year 1, but few effects after that point. The survey data also showed an increase in average hours worked per week during Year 3.

B. Impacts of EleVAte on receipt of public assistance

This section presents findings on the impact of EleVAte 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 is based on survey data and capture receipt during Year 1 and during Years 2 and 3 combined after random assignment.

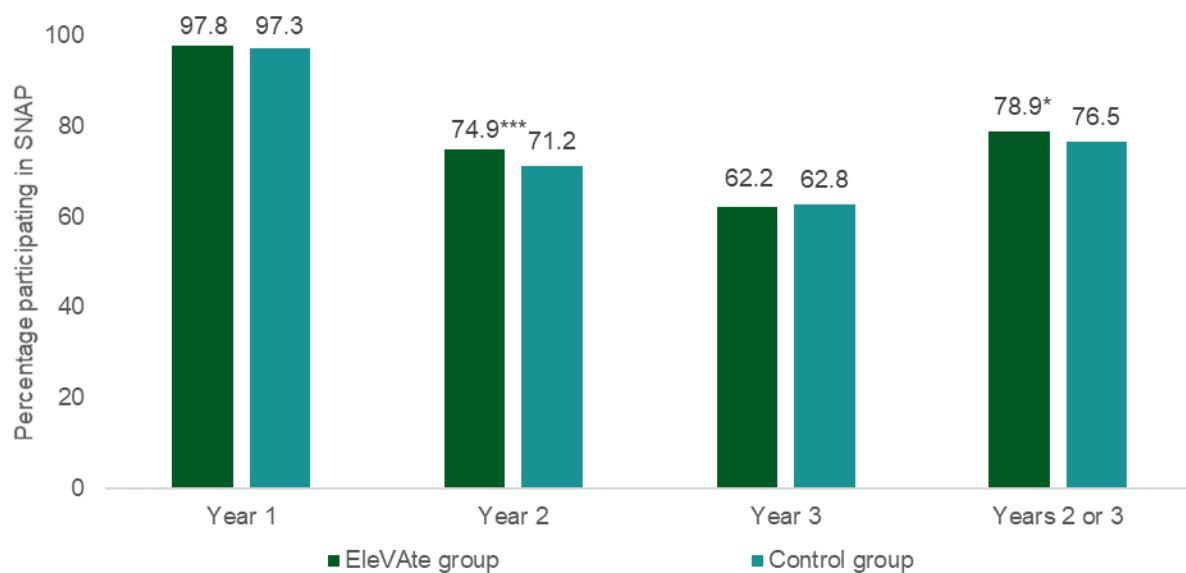
1. Impacts on SNAP participation

EleVAte lead to a statistically significant increase in the likelihood of participating in SNAP in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) after random assignment (p -value = 0.061). About 79 percent of EleVAte group members and 77 percent of control group members participated in SNAP during this period (Exhibit VII.8). This impact of EleVAte on SNAP participation reflects impacts through the first half of Year 2. After that point, receipt rates were similar for the two research groups. For example, 75 percent of individuals in the EleVAte group participated in SNAP in Year 2, compared with 71 percent of individuals in the control group. By Year 3, participation rates were similar (62 versus 63 percent). Statistically significant differences across groups in SNAP participation rates were observed for Quarters 2 through 6 (Appendix Table F.8). The impact of EleVAte on SNAP participation was similar for individuals who were randomly assigned earlier and later in the pilot (Appendix Table F.19).

EleVAte increased SNAP participation in Years 2 and 3 combined.

⁴⁷ The analyses for employment and earnings presented above measured outcomes over a three-year period and were based on individuals randomly assigned through September 2017 based on UI data and December 2017 based on survey data. The findings based on UI data for individuals randomly assigned through September 2017 were similar to those based on UI data for all individuals who were randomly assigned.

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 1,925 EleVAte group members and 1,911 control group members.

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

The impacts of EleVAte on the average SNAP benefits received, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the maximum benefit amount, were generally similar to those on SNAP participation rates, although there were no statistically significant impacts on these outcomes over the combined Year 2 and 3 period. There were increases through Quarter 6 and few effects after that point. Average SNAP benefit amounts for the EleVAte group were \$168 greater than those for the control group in Year 1, but the differences were smaller and not statistically significant by Year 3 (Exhibit VII.9). Average SNAP benefit amounts were \$33 to \$52 higher for the EleVAte group than the control group in the first six quarters but smaller and not statistically significant in Quarters 7 to 12 (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. EleVAte group members received, on average, about 4 percent more of the maximum possible benefit compared to the control group in Year 1 (67 versus 63 percent), but differences between the EleVAte and control groups were smaller and not statistically significant by Year 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 EleVAte group, the percentage of the maximum benefit amount received decreased by about 25 percentage points between Years 1 and 3. During this same period, the percentage of EleVAte group members participating in SNAP decreased by about 36 percentage points (Appendix Table F.8).

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

Average SNAP benefits	EleVAte group	Control group	Difference
Average SNAP benefits received (\$)			
Year 1	3,186	3,018	168***
Year 2	2,307	2,218	89
Year 3	2,128	2,103	25
Years 2 and 3	4,435	4,321	114
Average monthly SNAP benefits received as a percentage of maximum benefit amount ^a			
Year 1	66.9	63.2	3.7***
Year 2	46.3	44.2	2.0*
Year 3	41.8	41.5	0.3
Years 2 and 3	44.0	42.9	1.2
Sample size	1,925	1,911	

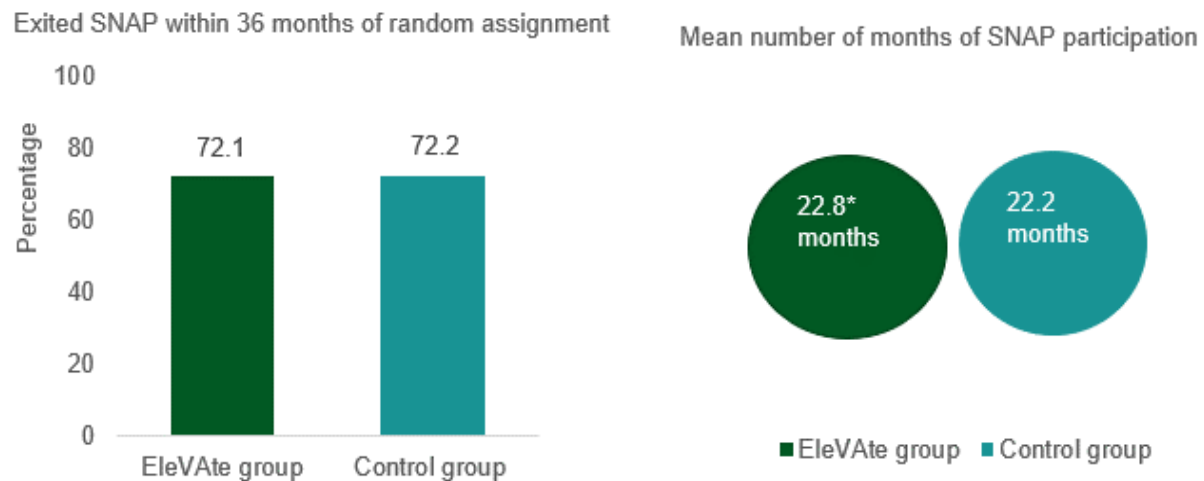
Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation SNAP administrative data, weighted data.

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

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

On average, the EleVAte and control groups participated in SNAP for a similar number of months in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3). Each group participated in SNAP for 13 of the 24 months, on average, during this period (Appendix Table F.25). Driven by increases in participation in Year 1, the EleVAte group participated in SNAP for about one more month on average over the full three-year period (23 versus 22 months; Exhibit VII.10). EleVAte group members had similar likelihoods of exiting SNAP across the three years relative to control group members—72 percent of each group exited SNAP at some point during the three years after random assignment. 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 28 percent of the EleVAte group participated in SNAP for the full three years, SNAP participation in Quarter 12 was higher (51 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 EleVAte and control groups (48 versus 51 percent, respectively), with about 25 percent of each group re-entering within 4 months of exit (Appendix Table F.25). Despite similar exit and reentry rates, the EleVAte group was less likely than the control group to have three or more SNAP participation spells during the period (6 versus 9 percent). (A single spell consists of remaining on SNAP for the full three-year period or exiting and not re-entering.)

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 1,925 EleVate group members and 1,911 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EleVate 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). EleVate led to a reduction in TANF participation of 2 percentage points in Year 3. Across all three years, EleVate led to a decrease of 1 percentage point in TANF participation. There were few statistically significant differences in TANF benefit amounts (Appendix Table F.10).

Using the survey data, we also estimated impacts of EleVate 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).⁴⁸ There were generally no impacts on the receipt of these forms of public assistance in Year 1, in Years 2 and 3, or during the three-year period (Appendix Table F.11). However, individuals in the EleVate group were about 4 percentage points less likely than those in the control group to receive Medicaid during Years 2 and 3 (72 and 76 percent, respectively).

3. Conclusions

EleVate led to an increase in SNAP participation. The differences between research groups were positive and statistically significant for the first six quarters but became smaller and statistically insignificant after that point. Similarly, EleVate also led to an increase in SNAP benefit amounts in the first half of the three-year follow-up period. In contrast, over the three-year period, there was a 1 percentage point

⁴⁸ 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.

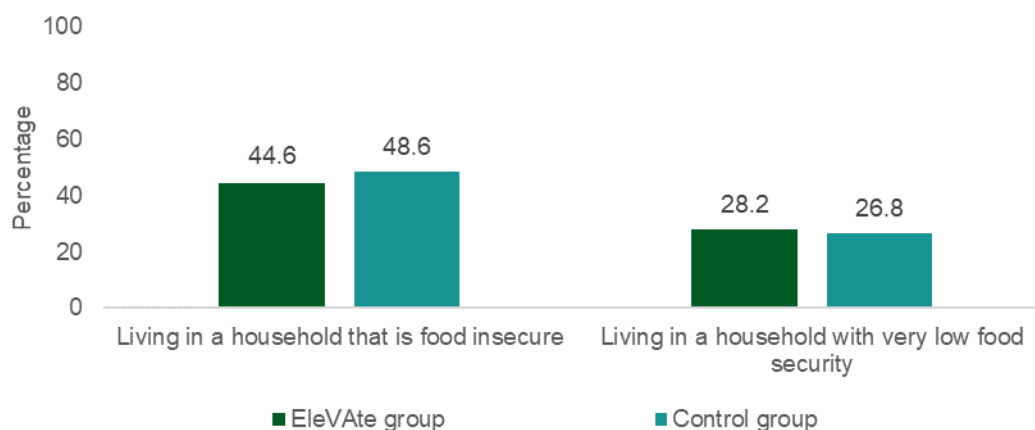
decrease in the rate of TANF participation among EleVAte group members, but few impacts on the receipt of other public assistance.

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

This section presents findings on EleVAte’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.⁴⁹

The EleVAte and control groups had similar rates of food insecurity. About 45 percent of EleVAte group members were food insecure compared to 49 percent of control group members (Exhibit VII.11). There were also no statistically significant differences in the rates of very low food security (a severe form of food insecurity; 28 versus 27 percent). 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 779 EleVAte group members and 744 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the EleVAte 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 EleVAte group were more likely than those in the control group to be food secure at the time of the 36-month interview (39 percent of the EleVAte group was food insecure at the 12-month point and food secure at the 36-month point, compared with 32 percent of the control group; Appendix Table F.27). There were

⁴⁹ 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.

also 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 (56 versus 53 percent).

There were no statistically significant differences between the EleVAte group and the control group for other outcome measures related to health, well-being, and housing status (Appendix Table F.12). About 25 percent of each research group screened positively for depression. Both research groups had similar levels of health (31 percent of the EleVAte group versus 28 percent of the control group reported having very good or excellent health at the time of the survey) and self-esteem and self-efficacy scores. The majority of each research group owned or rented a home or apartment (71 percent), and similar percentages of each group were homeless (about 2 percent).

D. Impacts of EleVAte 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 EleVAte group who did and did not engage in EleVAte and participate 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.⁵⁰

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 one⁵¹

⁵⁰ Because individuals in EleVAte 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 EleVAte on outcomes.

⁵¹ 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.

Earnings and employment. Based on UI data, there were differences in impacts on earnings in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) for individuals who started an activity compared to those who did not start one (Exhibit VII.12). Effects on earnings in the two-year period based on UI data were positive but not statistically significant for those who started an activity and negative and statistically significant for those who did not start an activity. Differences in effects across the two groups were statistically significant. Based on survey data, EleVAte had a positive and statistically significant impact on earnings in the two-year period for individuals who started an activity, and no significant effect for those who did not start one. Differences in effects across the two groups were not statistically significant based on survey data.

Based on survey data, EleVAte led to increased earnings in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) for individuals who started an activity, but no impact for those who did not start one. This difference across groups was not statistically significant.

EleVAte had no impact on employment rates in the two-year period for individuals who started an activity or those who did not start one, according to both UI and survey data (Exhibit VII.12). However, the difference in effects on employment across the two groups was statistically significant based on survey data

EleVAte had no impact on employment rates in the two-year period for individuals who started an activity or those who did not start one, according to both UI and survey data (Exhibit VII.12). However, the difference in effects on employment across the two groups was statistically significant based on survey data

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		
	EleVAte group	Control group	Difference	EleVAte group	Control group	Difference
Total earnings (\$)						
Based on UI data	19,863	19,895	-32 ^	15,968	18,347	-2,379**
Based on survey data	28,121	24,470	3,652**	26,391	26,239	152
Employment rate (%)						
Based on UI data	75.8	76.1	-0.3	71.3	74.2	-2.9
Based on survey data	81.2	78.8	2.4 ^	76.2	80.9	-4.7

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

Note: UI-based estimates are based on data from 1,194 EleVAte group members and 1,202 control group members who started an activity; and 731 EleVAte group members and 709 control group members who did not start one. Survey-based estimates are based on data from 545 EleVAte group members and 478 control group members who started an activity; and 234 EleVAte group members and 266 control group members who did not start one.

***/**/* Difference between the EleVAte 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.

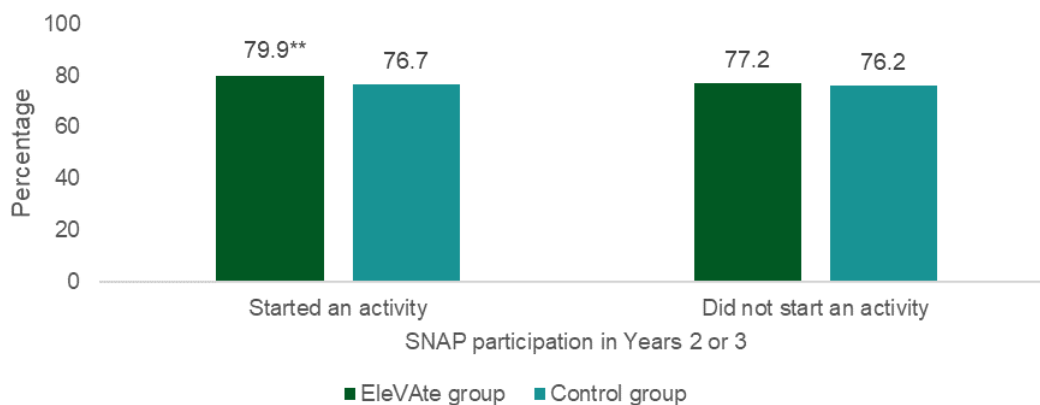
Based on UI data, there are some differences in effects on earnings by completion status (Appendix Table F.14). Effects on earnings in Years 2 and 3 combined were negative and statistically significant for individuals who started but did not complete an activity, and positive and statistically insignificant for those who did complete an education or training activity or a job search or job search assistance activity. This difference in impacts on earnings across completion groups was statistically significant. Based on the survey data, there were no statistically significant impacts on earnings for those who started but did

not complete an activity and positive and statistically significant effects for those who completed an activity. However, these impacts did not differ statistically across completion groups (Appendix Table F.16).

There were few effects on employment based on completion status, based on UI and survey data (Appendix Table F.14 and F.16).

SNAP participation. There was a positive impact on SNAP participation in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) among individuals who started an activity (in other words, the SNAP participation rate for the EleVAte group was higher than the rate for the control group) and no impacts among individuals who did not start one (Exhibit VII.13). However, this difference across groups was not statistically significant. There was no statistically significant impact of EleVAte on SNAP participation in the two-year period among individuals who started but did not complete any activity, nor among those who completed an education or training activity. There was a positive impact on SNAP participation for individuals who completed job search or job search training activities. This difference across completion groups was statistically significant.

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 1,194 EleVAte group members and 1,202 control group members who started an activity; and 731 EleVAte group members and 709 control group members who did not start one.

***/**/* Difference between research groups 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 EleVAte 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 EleVAte 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 EleVAte group outcomes (benefits) offset the costs of administering the services. We calculate the net benefits from the perspectives of the individuals enrolled in EleVAte and of government and taxpayers. The benefit to society is the sum of the net benefits from the other two perspectives.

We first describe the costs of EleVAte, including those for planning, recruiting, and delivering services. We then present the estimated costs of all services provided to EleVAte group members through EleVAte, 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 EleVAte. We then present the findings from the cost-benefit analysis and estimate the net benefit of services provided to the EleVAte 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 EleVAte started providing services and individuals started accruing benefits.

A. Description of the costs of EleVAte

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

1. Total costs of EleVAte

FNS awarded DSS a grant in the amount of \$22,330,000 to develop and provide EleVAte services. VDSS and its partners and providers reported spending a total of \$14,800,044 on planning, recruiting, and delivering EleVAte services (Exhibit VIII.1).⁵² These costs included \$281,527 for planning (2 percent of total costs) and \$103,687 for recruitment (1 percent). EleVAte service costs—for ongoing administration and delivering direct services—were \$14,414,829, which was 97 percent of total costs.⁵³ Ongoing administration, which included time for

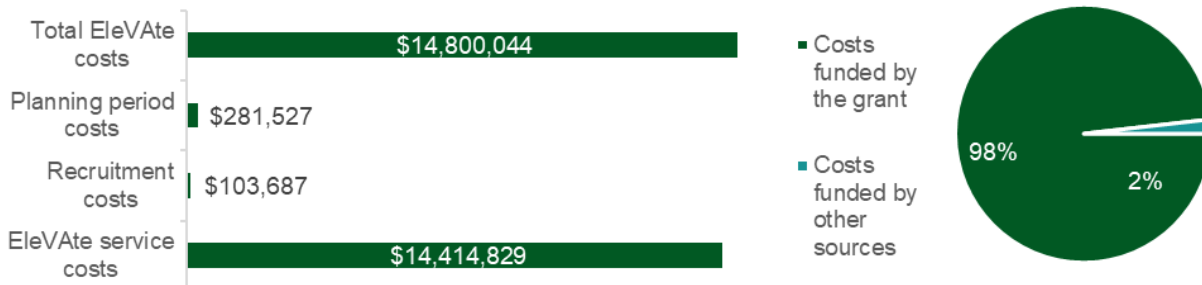
EleVAte cost a total of \$14,800,044, with service costs accounting for 97 percent of this amount.

⁵² The costs for planning and recruiting affected both EleVAte and control group members, whereas the costs for operating EleVAte services affected the EleVAte group only.

⁵³ 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 (continued)

staff meetings, supervision, and other activities, cost \$876,627 (6 percent of total costs). Direct service costs accounted for the remaining \$13,538,202 (92 percent, not shown). The FNS grant funded 98 percent of total costs, or \$14,534,453; 2 percent, or \$265,591 was leveraged from other sources.

Exhibit VIII.1. Summary of EleVAte costs



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

Notes: The planning period was considered to encompass the time between when DSS and their partners began designing EleVAte (after grant award) and EleVAte started enrolling individuals (March 2015 to March 2016). Quarterly workbooks reported the costs of the planning period, and recruitment and EleVAte services following the start of EleVAte. We estimated the breakdown of recruitment, EleVAte 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 December 2018 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. Over 90 percent of all costs covered direct services for partners and providers (\$13,592,641). DSS and EleVAte partners and providers reported spending \$923,117 on staff costs and \$277,724 on overhead and operating costs. The remaining costs (\$6,562) covered supply and equipment costs. The FNS grant covered almost all costs. Funding from other sources was used primarily for staff and direct service costs, accounting for 15 percent of the total staff costs (\$133,839) and 1 percent of the total direct service costs (\$129,523).

2. Costs of EleVAte services, by type of service

Service costs accounted for most of EleVAte expenditures. We estimated the costs of specific types of services offered through EleVAte, including those of ongoing administration and direct services. The two largest service expenditures for EleVAte services were for job readiness or life skills workshops, which accounted for \$9,921,749 or 67 percent of total EleVAte costs, and case management, which accounted for \$1,574,801 or 11 percent of total EleVAte costs (Exhibit VIII.2). Occupational skills training and

time staff spent providing services and activities to individuals, including time for tasks such as writing case notes or 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. VCCS reported the costs of all services from the Community Colleges as service contracts. It is possible that some of the costs of recruitment and ongoing administration are included in these service contract costs, which are counted as direct service costs.

education accounted for smaller shares of total EleVAte costs — 10 percent and 4 percent of total EleVAte costs, respectively.

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

	Total service costs	Percentage of total
Total costs	\$14,800,044	100.0
Recruitment costs	\$103,687	0.7
Planning period costs	\$281,527	1.9
Total EleVAte service costs ^a	\$14,414,829	97.4
Assessments	\$114,064	0.8
Case management ^b	\$1,574,801	10.6
Job readiness or life skills workshop	\$9,921,749	67.0
Education	\$636,279	4.3
Occupational skills training	\$1,461,081	9.9
Support services	\$610,136	4.1
Work-based learning	--	--
Other direct service contracts ^c	\$96,720	0.7

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

Notes: 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. Hyphens indicate that there were no costs associated with the service type. All costs are presented in 2016 dollars.

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

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

^c Other direct service contracts for the EleVAte 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 EleVAte group services only).

3. Costs of EleVAte services, per individual

EleVAte group members each received different combinations of services through EleVAte based on their needs and interests. As a result, the costs of serving each EleVAte group member varied based on the number and types of services in which they participated.

Exhibit VIII.3 describes the cost of EleVAte services per individual. We separately present costs of operating EleVAte from the costs of resources that were provided directly to EleVAte group members—support services provided to offset

EleVAte services cost an average of \$5,741 per individual.

the costs of participation in EleVAte, such as transportation or training supplies.⁵⁴

The total estimated costs of EleVAte services per individual ranged from \$634 to \$13,209 but averaged \$5,741 per EleVAte group member. These costs were almost entirely allocated to the costs of operating EleVAte (\$5,513), with the remaining \$228 allocated to support services provided to individuals while they were in EleVAte.

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

Per individual costs of services	Mean
Total EleVAte service costs	\$5,741
EleVAte operating costs ^a	\$5,513
Support services while in EleVAte	\$228
Sample size	2,512

Sources: SNAP employment and training evaluation actual reported costs by EleVAte grantee, partners, and providers, 2015-2019; SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data

Notes: The cost of services per EleVAte group member are the means of the individual-level estimates of the costs of services for each EleVAte group member based on the services they received and the per individual costs by service type. The estimated mean costs per EleVAte group member include all individuals who enrolled in EleVAte, including those who disengaged soon after enrollment and those who participated in multiple services over a longer period of time. All costs are presented in 2016 dollars. Cost of EleVAte services per EleVAte group member: standard error \$88; range \$634–\$13,209; confidence interval \$5,341–\$5,685.

^a EleVAte operating costs are the estimated cost 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 EleVAte 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 EleVAte and control group members

Whereas Section A describes the costs to VDSS and their partners and providers for developing EleVAte and providing services to EleVAte group members, this section describes the costs of *all* services the EleVAte group members received through EleVAte, existing SNAP E&T services, and the community during the EleVAte service period. In the cost-benefit analysis, we use the difference in the average costs of all services EleVAte and control group members received per individual through EleVAte, existing SNAP E&T services, or the community and compare these costs to benefits. We use these differences in costs because the impacts of EleVAte 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 EleVAte group through EleVAte. In this section, we present estimates of the total costs of all services EleVAte and control group members received and examine service cost differentials overall, by service type, and per individual.

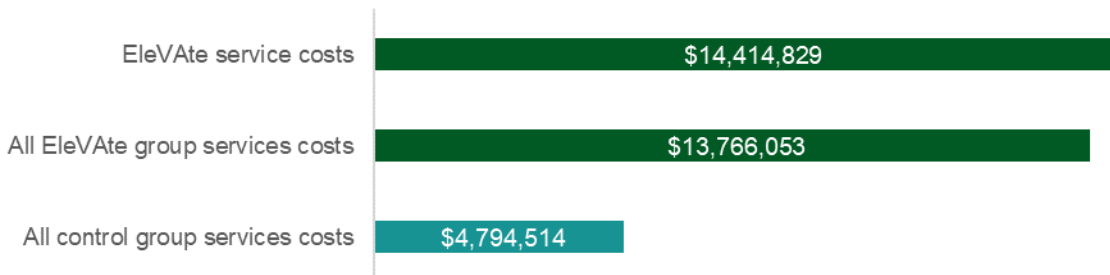
1. Total costs of all EleVAte group and control group services

Based on data from the 12- and 36-month follow-up survey, the estimated total cost of all EleVAte group services was \$13,766,053, including costs for both direct services and ongoing administration (Exhibit

⁵⁴ 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.

VIII.4). This estimate is similar to the cost of EleVAte services alone (\$14,414,829), which suggests that EleVAte group members likely received few services from existing SNAP E&T or community-offered sources while they were enrolled in EleVAte.⁵⁵

Exhibit VIII.4. Total costs of all EleVAte group and control group services



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation actual reported costs by EleVAte 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: The estimates were calculated as the product of the costs per EleVAte group member for each type of direct service and the number of EleVAte 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 EleVAte services were effective enough to offset the difference in costs between the services the EleVAte and control groups received. The services the control group received measure what services would have been available to the EleVAte group members if EleVAte were not in place. The control group only had access to services available through existing SNAP E&T, which was available in some counties, or to services available within the community. The estimated cost of all control group services received was \$4,794,514, including costs for direct services and ongoing administration (Exhibit VIII.4). This about one-third of the cost of all EleVAte group services.

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

The difference between EleVAte 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

⁵⁵ The difference between the costs of the EleVAte services presented in Section A and the costs presented for EleVAte group members in this section could reflect services that EleVAte group members received outside of EleVAte, 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 that there is variation in reported participation in services by type, but the overall costs of services for the EleVAte group are similar and do not change the results of the cost-benefit analysis.

of service or in services overall, or how much staff time or other resources those services required. Exhibit VIII.5 presents estimated costs of key EleVAte and control group services, by type of service.

- **All EleVAte group services.** Job readiness or life skills workshops and case management were the largest expenditures among all of the services that EleVAte group members received through EleVAte, existing SNAP E&T services, and the community. Job readiness or life skills workshop accounted for \$9,818,630 or 71 percent of total service costs; and case management accounted for \$1,579,691 or 12 percent of total service costs. Support services and education and represented smaller shares — 6 and 5 percent of total service costs, respectively.
- **All control group services.** Education and case management were the largest expenditures among all of the services that control group members received through the community. Education accounted for \$1,768,908 or 37 percent of total service costs, and case management accounted for \$1,376,291 or 29 percent of total service costs. Work-based learning, support services, and occupational skills training represented smaller shares total service costs — 23, 5, and 5 percent, respectively.

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

	All EleVAte group services		All control group services	
	Total service costs	Percentage of total	Total service costs	Percentage of total
Total service costs ^a	\$13,766,053	100.0	\$4,794,514	100.0
Assessments	\$71,646	0.5	\$11,632	0.2
Case management ^b	\$1,579,691	11.5	\$1,376,291	28.7
Job readiness or life skills workshop	\$9,818,630	71.3	\$56,471	1.2
Education	\$697,268	5.1	\$1,768,908	36.9
Occupational skills training	\$643,161	4.7	\$253,491	5.3
Support services	\$858,937	6.2	\$245,007	5.1
Work-based learning	--	--	\$1,082,713	22.6
Other direct service contracts ^c	\$96,720	0.7	--	--

Sources: SNAP employment and training evaluation actual reported costs by EleVAte 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; and SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Notes: 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 EleVAte 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 survey data. 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 EleVAte or control group members and time spent on case notes or referrals.

^c Other direct service contracts for the EleVAte 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 EleVAte group services only).

The costs of most services were higher for the EleVAte group than the control group. Job readiness or life skills workshops, case management, support services, and occupational skills training costs were higher for the EleVAte group than the control group (\$9,818,630 compared to \$56,471 for job readiness or life skills workshops; \$1,579,691 compared to \$1,376,291 for case management; \$858,937 compared to \$245,007 for support services; and \$643,161 compared to \$253,491 for occupational skills training).

However, the cost of education was substantially lower for the EleVAte group than the control group (\$697,268 compared to \$1,768,908 for education). There were no work-based learning costs for the EleVAte group, but they accounted for a cost of \$1,082,713 for the control group.

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

EleVAte 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 EleVAte and control group services are the basis for the cost differentials used in the cost-benefit analysis.

Using data from the survey, Exhibit VIII.6 describes the cost of all services EleVAte and control group members received during the EleVAte service period, per individual. We present operating costs separately from the costs of the resources that were provided directly to EleVAte and control group members, including subsidized earnings provided to individuals for activities

All services EleVAte group members received through EleVAte, existing SNAP E&T services, and the community cost \$5,046 per individual, on average.

such as work-based learning (which only control group members reported receiving), and support services provided to offset the costs of participation in services, such as transportation or training supplies.

The costs of all services that EleVAte group members received (from EleVAte, existing SNAP E&T services, and the community) ranged from \$634 to \$13,209 but averaged \$5,046 per EleVAte group member. The largest component of this cost was operating costs, which were \$4,726. Support services accounted for a small share of the overall cost (\$320).

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

	All EleVAte group services	All control group services
Total service costs	\$5,046	\$1,822
Operating costs ^a	\$4,726	\$1,293
Subsidized earnings while in services	\$0	\$432
Support services while in services	\$320	\$98
Sample size	2,512	2,509

Sources: SNAP employment and training evaluation actual reported costs by EleVAte 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: The cost of services per EleVAte and control group member are the means of the individual-level estimates of the costs of services for each EleVAte 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.

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

Cost per EleVAte group member: standard error \$158; range \$634–\$13,209; confidence interval \$4,416–\$5,037.

Cost per control group member: standard error \$133; range \$0–\$29,478; confidence interval 1,032–\$1,554.

The costs of all services control group members received ranged from \$0 to \$29,478 but averaged \$1,822 per control group member. Operating costs accounted for the largest share of this cost (\$1,293) and subsidized earnings and support services represented smaller shares (\$432 and \$98, respectively). The cost of all services per control group member was about one-third of the cost of all services per EleVAte group member, on average.

All services control group members received through regular SNAP E&T, where available, and the community cost \$1,822 per individual, on average.

C. Cost-benefit analysis of EleVAte 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.⁵⁶ The cost-benefit analysis uses a framework to present a comprehensive listing of EleVAte group benefits and costs, relative to the control group, from multiple perspectives, including those of (1) individuals enrolled in EleVAte, (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. The benefit cost ratio is the quotient of the total benefit and the absolute value of the total costs. 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 EleVAte group members, based on UI wage records

The net benefit of services for the EleVAte group compared to the control group were negative for EleVAte group members and the 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 -0.63. The net benefit for EleVAte group members was lower than for control group members during the 36-month follow-up period, which compounded the higher cost of EleVAte services. The services benefitted EleVAte group members through support service payments while they were in services, but this was a smaller amount than the difference in earnings, and these services were a cost to government and taxpayers in the same amount.

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

⁵⁶ 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.

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

	Perspective		
	EleVAte group members	Government and taxpayers	Society
Benefits (\$)			
Employment and earnings			
Earnings (UI wage records)	-1,542**	0	-1,542
Fringe benefits	-322	0	-322
Tax payments	631	-631	0
Use of public benefits			
SNAP benefits	252**	-252	0
TANF benefits	-26	26	0
Reduced administration costs	0	-28	-28
Total benefits	-1,008	-885	-1,892
Costs (\$)			
Net operating costs ^a	0	-3,433	-3,433
Net subsidized earnings while in services ^b	0	432	432
Net support services while in services ^b	222	-222	0
Total costs	222	-3,224	-3,002
Net benefit (\$)	-785	-4,109	-4,894
Benefit-cost ratio			-0.63

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation UI wage records, weighted data; SNAP administrative data; SNAP employment and training evaluation actual reported costs by EleVAte 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 the absolute value of the 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 EleVAte group member is \$88 and \$133 per control group member.

^a This estimate is the difference between EleVAte and control group costs per individual. This value excludes planning period costs but includes 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 assume the subsidized earnings benefitting individuals are 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 present 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 EleVAte group and control group significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

- **Society.** On average, all EleVAte group services cost society \$4,894 more per individual than control group services did. This difference primarily reflects the differential costs of EleVAte group services,

which were not offset by the benefits accrued by individuals through tax savings and support services during the 36-month follow up period.

- **EleVAte group members.** On average, EleVAte group members experienced a negative benefit of \$785, compared with the control group. EleVAte group members received \$631 more through tax refunds compared to control group members during the 36-month follow up period. However, EleVAte group members earned significantly less over the same period (by \$1,542, compared to control group members). The EleVAte group benefitted from support service payments that were \$222 higher than control group members received. EleVAte group members received higher SNAP benefits (\$252), which were offset in part by lower TANF benefits (\$26), compared to the control group.
- **Government and taxpayers.** Government and taxpayers experienced a negative net benefit of \$4,109 per individual, on average, to provide EleVAte group services. This difference was due mostly to the costs of providing services (including EleVAte, existing SNAP E&T, and community services), which were more expensive than control group services by an average of \$3,224, including \$3,433 in operating costs and \$222 in support services. EleVAte group members did not receive any subsidized earnings during the follow-up period, so there was a savings to government and taxpayers of \$432 in subsidized earnings over what was spent on the control group, who did receive them. EleVAte group members received higher amounts of SNAP benefits than control group members did, which was a cost to government and taxpayers in benefit allotments (\$252, on average) and administration costs (\$28).

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 EleVAte group members received were primarily through EleVAte 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 EleVAte group members, so there was a negative net benefit to society regardless of changes in assumptions, ranging from \$4,733 to \$5,680 per individual. The EleVAte group services led to a negative net benefit for individuals based on changes to all assumptions related to fringe, taxes, and discount rates. Estimated negative net benefits per individual ranged from \$314 to \$877. Assuming that subsidized earnings were *not* included in UI wage records resulted in a negative net benefit of \$1,217 per individual, compared to \$785.⁵⁷ EleVAte group services resulted in a negative net benefit to government and taxpayers regardless of changes to key assumptions, ranging from \$4,031 to \$4,803 per individual.

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

The findings based on 36-month follow-up survey data were different than those based on UI wage records. The net benefits of all EleVAte group services were positive for EleVAte group members, according to survey data, but remained negative for government and taxpayers and society during the

⁵⁷ In this case, there would have been a cost of \$432 in subsidized earnings for EleVAte group members because they did not receive the subsidized earnings that the control group did.

follow-up period (Exhibit VIII.8). The benefit-cost ratio, or return on investment to society, was 0.79. According to survey data, EleVAte group members earned more over the follow-up period than the control group did, in contrast to the findings based on UI wage records. When accounting for these differences in earnings, the net benefits of EleVAte group services to society came closer to offsetting the costs of those services, but remained negative.

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

- **Society.** EleVAte group services cost society \$617 more than control group services per individual. This estimated negative net benefit based on survey data was lower than the negative net benefit according to UI wage records primarily because of the difference in reported earnings for EleVAte group members (EleVAte group members earned \$1,996 more according to survey data, whereas control group members earned \$1,542 more according to UI wage records). Higher earnings benefitted EleVAte group members but did not offset the costs of services to society during the 36-month follow-up period.
- **EleVAte group members.** According to survey data, EleVAte group members received a net benefit of \$1,389, relative to the control group. The EleVAte group had higher cumulative earnings and fringe benefits compared to the control group (by \$1,996 and \$417, respectively). EleVAte group members owed \$1,472 more in tax payments than the control group did, on average. Other benefits and costs to individuals were the same as those presented in the findings based on UI wage records, with support services accounting for a small benefit to EleVAte group members (\$222 more than control group members). In addition, EleVAte group members received significantly higher SNAP benefits and lower TANF benefits, compared to the control group.
- **Government and taxpayers.** Government and taxpayers experienced a negative net benefit of \$2,006 per individual for providing all EleVAte group services, based on survey data. The increase in earnings by EleVAte group benefitted government and taxpayers through an increase in tax payments, by \$1,472 per individual on average. As presented in the UI wage record findings, providing services cost government and taxpayers an average of \$3,224 more per EleVAte 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.

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

	Perspective		
	EleVAte group members	Government and taxpayers	Society
Benefits (\$)			
Employment and earnings			
Earnings (survey data)	1,996	0	1,996
Fringe benefits	417	0	417
Tax payments	-1,472	1,472	0
Use of public benefits			
SNAP benefits	252**	-252	0
TANF benefits	-26	26	0
Reduced administration costs	0	-28	-28
Total benefits	1,166	1,218	2,385
Costs (\$)			
Net operating costs ^a	0	-3,433	-3,433
Net subsidized earnings while in services ^b	0	432	432
Net support services while in services ^b	222	-222	0
Total costs	222	-3,224	-3,002
Net benefit (\$)	1,389	-2,006	-617
Benefit-cost ratio			0.79

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 EleVAte 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 the absolute value of the 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 EleVAte group member is \$88 and of the cost per control group member is \$133.

^a This estimate is the difference between EleVAte and control group costs per individual. This value excludes planning period costs but includes 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 assume the subsidized earnings benefitting individuals are 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 present 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 EleVAte group and control group significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

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 EleVAte group members received were primarily through EleVAte 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). EleVAte group services led to a negative net benefit for society, ranging from \$517 to \$1,403. EleVAte group members experienced a net benefit from EleVAte group services, ranging from \$1,289 to \$1,949. Government and taxpayers faced a negative net benefit for EleVAte group services, with the amount of the negative net benefit ranging from \$1,906 to \$2,700.

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 EleVAte—the innovative SNAP E&T program Virginia 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

DSS and VCCS were able to launch EleVAte pilot programs offering a range of services in seven community college areas, recruiting SNAP participants from 24 localities in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The pilot effort encountered many challenges during implementation, and various key assumptions regarding the service needs of SNAP participants—including the expectation that significant numbers of ABAWDs could be recruited into the pilot—played out differently after service delivery began. However, SNAP participants enrolled into the EleVAte group were described by staff as motivated to participate in short-term occupational skills training courses leading to industry-recognized credentials offered by EleVAte. Despite challenges getting many EleVAte group members to engage in services through to completion, EleVAte group members were more likely than control group members to start an activity, complete an activity, and receive support services. Increased engagement among EleVAte group members led to an increase in earnings over time, although only based on survey data. However, the overall cost of implementing the pilot outweighed its benefits compared to the control group. These findings are described in more detail below. We also provide additional context for these findings in Section B.

1. EleVAte implementation

EleVAte represented a significant expansion of SNAP E&T beyond its existing capacity in Virginia. Although some pilot areas offered limited existing SNAP E&T services, many did not. Using seven community colleges to coordinate three different programs offering differing combinations of Adult Basic Education instruction, occupational skills training, career coaching, a cognitive-behavioral group-based counseling program, and support services, DSS and VCCS expanded the service offerings available to SNAP participants in the 24 localities where enrollment was offered. Despite initial challenges and adjustments to enrollment practices, pilot policies and, notably, occupational skills training options, EleVAte staff were able to recruit, enroll, and offer EleVAte services to large numbers of SNAP participants. This entailed significant interagency communication at the local and State levels, the creation of new bundles of activities—many of which were online and completed with in-person instructor support in “learning labs” located at the community colleges—and an expanded set of support services designed to promote participation provided by community colleges that were unique to EleVAte group members. Although barriers to participation resulted in many EleVAte group members exiting the program before completion, pilot staff noted some success in supporting individuals through to

completion of their sequence of activities and into employment. In focus groups, many “disengaged” participants voiced their appreciation for the program and would recommend it to peers.

2. Service receipt among EleVAte group members

Most individuals randomly assigned to the EleVAte group engaged in some type of service (83 percent), meaning they started an assessment or an employment or training-related activity⁵⁸ or received a support service provided by EleVAte. However, only slightly more than half of EleVAte group members (61 percent) ultimately started an employment or training-related activity, such as job search or life skills training, after they completed intake and assessments. Among individuals who started an activity, completion rates were highest for job search (100 percent) and lowest for basic education (14 percent). About 14 percent of individuals obtained a credential, certification, or degree (including GEDs).

Almost all EleVAte group members in a randomly selected sample of 200 EleVAte group members enrolled between March 2016 and December 2017 had at least one contact with an ACC or counselor (94 percent), and 50 percent received a support service. Among those who received a support, virtually all received transportation assistance. Fewer individuals received assistance with commodities (12 percent) and housing and utility payments (7 percent). On average, EleVAte group members who received support services received a total of \$360 in support service payments.

Individuals spent an average of three months engaging with EleVAte activities. More than three-quarters exited EleVAte within their first year (78 percent), with most exiting in the first or second quarters. Many individuals exited before completing services (35 percent) or because they never attended EleVAte orientation (12 percent), and about 9 percent exited because they found employment.

3. Differences between EleVAte and control groups in service receipt

The ability of EleVAte to impact employment, earnings, and individuals’ receipt of public assistance benefits depends, in part, on whether there are differences between the EleVAte 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 EleVAte 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 23 percentage points higher, respectively, among the EleVAte group, relative to the control group. These differences existed despite the finding that more than half of control group members participated in job search training activities or in education and training activities. The significant difference between the EleVAte and control groups in rates of participation was observed for the first two years. The EleVAte group also had higher rates of participation than the control group in all types of activities, including general job skills training, occupational skills training, education, and work-based learning.

EleVAte group members were also more likely than control group members to complete an activity. Overall, EleVAte group members were 21 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 EleVAte group spent, on average, about two months longer in activities

⁵⁸ The measure does not include orientations, case management, or the creation of an EleVAte service plan.

and six hours more per week in activities. The EleVAte group was more likely than the control group to receive an occupational certificate or license (20 percentage point difference).

The EleVAte group was more likely than the control group to receive case management (6 percentage point difference). The EleVAte 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 (51 versus 30 percent).

4. Impacts of EleVAte on individuals' outcomes

The findings from the analyses of the two primary outcomes in the second and third year after random assignment show that EleVAte led to an increase in earnings based on survey data, but not UI data, and increased SNAP participation. The impact on earnings over this period, based on survey data, was \$2,997. In contrast, the EleVAte group had lower earnings than the control group over this period based on UI data, although this difference was not statistically significant. Related analyses of employment based on the UI wage data and survey data showed that EleVAte reduced the percentage of individuals who were employed, relative to the control group, in Year 1, but not in later years. Although there were no differences in the later years in employment rates, the EleVAte group did work more hours per week than the control group in Year 3, which may have contributed to the positive impacts on earnings in the survey data. With one exception, there were no differences in impacts on earnings or employment in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) across subgroups defined by barriers to employment, employment history, presence of children in the household, and household income. However, effects on earnings based on survey data were largest for younger individuals (under age 25) and negative for the oldest group (age 50 and older).

SNAP participation rates were higher over the combined Year 2 and 3 period for the EleVAte group relative to the control group by 2 percentage points, reflecting increases in participation through the middle of Year 2. After that point, the differences between the groups became small and statistically insignificant. This pattern of findings is not consistent with the positive impact on earnings observed in the survey data, although it is consistent with the negative impacts on employment observed early in the follow-up period, according to both data sources. These findings were generally consistent across subgroups.

Changes to EleVAte policies or procedures after the pilot began did not affect the likelihood of EleVAte group members starting or completing activities. Analyses that compared impacts among individuals who were randomly assigned earlier versus later in the enrollment period showed that there were impacts on survey-based earnings for individuals assigned later in the period, after changes were made that reduced the number of occupational training courses available to EleVAte group members and made adjustments to reduce the time gap between enrollment in the pilot and starting an occupational training course.

5. EleVAte costs and cost-benefit analyses

DSS and its partners and providers reported spending \$14,800,044 from July 2015 to December 2018 on the planning and implementation of EleVAte (\$281,257 during the planning period, \$103,687 for recruitment, and \$14,414,829 for EleVAte services). The FNS grant funded almost all costs (98 percent). The cost-benefit analysis compares the benefits individuals received through earnings and public assistance with the average costs of all services EleVAte and control group members received per individual. The costs of all services EleVAte group members received through EleVAte, existing SNAP E&T services, or the community were similar to the costs of EleVAte (\$13,766,053, or \$5,046 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 EleVAte group members received (\$4,794,514 or \$1,822 per individual, on average).

EleVAte group benefits and costs relative to the control group are presented from multiple perspectives, including those of (1) individuals enrolled in EleVAte, (2) government and taxpayers, and (3) society as a whole, which represents the sum of the other two perspectives. The net benefits of EleVAte 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 \$4,894 and \$617 respectively). EleVAte group services led to a negative net benefit for individuals due to lower earnings according to UI wage records (by \$785), but they reported higher earnings and experienced a positive net benefit according to survey data (by \$1,389). However, the services EleVAte group members received were a larger cost to government and taxpayers (\$4,109 and \$2,006, 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 EleVAte study findings add to 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 EleVAte. Comprehensive literature reviews are provided in Barnow and Smith (2015), Card et al. (2017), 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 EleVAte, 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. 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 support services in employment and training programs suggest that low-income populations receiving support 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. We are not aware of identified patterns of effects for evaluations conducted in rural areas similar to EleVAte pilot settings.

Overall, the observed increases in the rates of take-up and completion of EleVAte activities and receipt of services, along with the positive impacts on earnings add to and 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

EleVAte increased earnings relative to the control group based on survey data, but there was no impact on earnings based on UI data. EleVAte did not increase employment rates over the period, but did increase weekly hours worked in Year 3, which may explain the increase in earnings reported in the survey. The increase in earnings is an accomplishment given the prevalence and extent of barriers faced by individuals who enrolled in the pilot—only 28 percent were employed at the time of random assignment, and 20 percent did not have a high school diploma.

Several factors may help explain why EleVAte group members earned more than control group members. First, EleVAte led to increases of about 20 percentage points in participation in and completion of employment or training-related activities and in the receipt of occupational certificates or licenses. Second, these credentials were received from community college training programs. Staff noted that employers were often eager to hire those with occupational skills offered by EleVAte, something that may have been especially true in the more rural areas. EleVAte was offered in seven regions representing a mix of more urban areas in the southeastern “Tidewater” region and rural areas in south-central Virginia stretching to the Appalachian foothills. Many staff and individuals interviewed remarked that the availability of employment opportunities in some of these rural areas was limited, although staff reasoned that employers may have been more motivated to hire from community college training programs in these areas.

Third, EleVAte led to an increase in the receipt of transportation assistance. Transportation barriers were identified by staff and participants in all areas and may have especially hindered participation in EleVAte in rural areas. The provision of this service may have allowed individuals to overcome barriers associated not only with starting employment or training-related activities, but also sustaining participation over time and ultimately completing the activity.

Finally, EleVAte's individualized approach to scaffolding service participation and completion through the use of learning labs staffed with adult basic education instructors may have resulted in higher rates of activity participation and completion. Staff closely monitored individuals' progression through individually-tailored training curricula and targeted instructional support as soon as needs were identified. Although not all EleVAte services were offered in these labs, the ability of individuals to participate in many of EleVAte's service components may have further promoted the attachment of individuals to the program services.

Other information collected from pilot and provider staff highlighted considerations for program improvement. For example, some staff called for more emphasis on job development. EleVAte group members noted that completion of an occupational skills training course did not automatically result in employment, and staff suggested that a greater emphasis on job development may have improved the employment prospects for individuals who completed the EleVAte program. Some college staff also noted that certain occupational skills training programs, such as in the health professions, were inappropriate for individuals with past involvement in the criminal justice system due to employment ineligibility. Finally, some SNAP participants observed in focus groups that employers, regardless of the area, were known to discriminate against people of color, who made up a majority of pilot participants.

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

- **Earnings impacts might depend on the type of activities in which individuals participated.** Individuals in the EleVAte group were offered a wide range of services and activities. There were earnings impacts for all EleVAte group members, but impacts may differ for specific activities, such as occupational skills training or work-based learning. Assessing the effectiveness of services and activities separately and in combination would help to identify promising practices for improving outcomes. Because many EleVAte 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 increase earnings and improve outcomes most effectively.
- **The COVID-19 pandemic may have hindered our ability to capture the full extent of impacts in Year 3.** Outcomes measured in Year 3 for participants who were randomly assigned in the pilot between April 2017 and December 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 impacts on earnings in Year 3 based on survey data, and no effects in any year, based on UI data. In addition, EleVAte had no impacts on employment rates, according to both data sources. It is possible that the pandemic impacted the EleVAte and control group differently, lessening the possibility of employment impacts and diminishing the size of the impact on earnings. 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 how long to expect earnings increases following participation in EleVAte activities. 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.

- **Despite a positive impact on earnings for the EleVAte group relative to the control group, the net benefit of EleVAte relative to the control group was negative.** This primarily reflects the differential costs of EleVAte group services, which were not offset by the benefits accrued through earnings and fringe benefits during the 36-month follow-up period. When interpreting these findings, it is important to consider that EleVAte services were new and experimental. The purpose of the SNAP E&T pilot was to test new approaches to services. Even though we excluded the costs of planning and recruitment in considering the cost differential between EleVAte and control group services, the costs of EleVAte 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.

Overall, a key lesson from the EleVAte pilot for SNAP E&T program administrators is that the community college system (in this case the Virginia Community College system) could and should continue to target SNAP participants in the future as a population that has “the most to gain” from its service offerings. Many staff remarked positively on the EleVAte model at the conclusion of the service period and would heartily recommend that other areas implement similar offerings, although they also recommended more time for implementation given the early challenges. EleVAte staff emphasized the value of providing transportation supports and quickly attaching individuals to occupational skills training courses. For their part, DSS staff invested significantly in new approaches to offering education and training services to SNAP participants, efforts that emphasized face-to-face engagement in community settings over more traditional and passive marketing. Although EleVAte will not be continued due to a lack of resources, at the time that services were ending, some colleges were considering retaining some elements of the pilot services—such as Moral Reconation Therapy and expanded support services—and DSS and VCCS were exploring smaller-scale partnership to continue offering services to serve SNAP participants.

References

- Abraham, Katharine G., John C. Haltiwanger, Kristin Sandusky, and James R. Spletzer. "Measuring the Gig Economy: Current Knowledge and Open Issues." NBER Working Paper No. 24950. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2018.
- Barnow, B.S., and J. Smith. "Employment and Training Programs." In *Economics of Means-Tested Transfer Programs in the United States, Vol. II*, edited by R.A. Moffitt. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015, pp. 127–234.
- Card, David, Jochen Kluve, and Andrea Weber. "Active Labour Market Policy Evaluations: A Meta-Analysis." *Economic Journal*, vol. 120, no. 548, 2010, pp. F452–F477.
- Card, David, Jochen Kluve, and Andrea Weber. "What Works? A Meta Analysis of Recent Active Labor Market Program Evaluations." *Journal of the European Economic Association*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2018, pp. 894–931.
- Cronquist, Kathryn. "Characteristics of USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2018." Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, 2019. Available at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/research-analysis>.
- D'Amico, Ronald, Kate Dunham, Verenice Chavoya-Perez, Deborah Kogan, Melissa Mack, Marian Negoita, Anne Paprocki, Sheena McConnell, and Linda Rosenberg. "Providing Public Workforce Services to Job Seekers: Implementation Findings on the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs." Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, 2015.
- Davis, L.M., R. Bozick, J.L. Steele, J. Saunders, and Jeremy N.V. Miles. "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults." Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013.
- Dotter, Dallas, Kelley Monzella, James Mabli, Barbara Carlson, Julie Hartnack, Peter Schochet, Mason DeCamillis, Dan Thal, Leah Shiferaw, Amy Defnet, Nora Paxton, and Stephen Freedman. "Expanding Opportunities & Reducing Barriers to Work: Final Report Technical Supplement." Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, 2022. Available at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/research-analysis>.
- Goger, Annelies, Mikia Manley, Jonah Deutsch, Melissa Mack, Kate Dunham, and Peter Schochet. "The Trade Adjustment Assistance Program: An Evidence Scan of Services and Innovations." Report submitted to the Chief Evaluation Office, U.S. Department of Labor. Washington, DC: Mathematica, September 2020.
- Gueron, Judith M., and Gayle Hamilton. "The Role of Education and Training in Welfare Reform." Welfare Reform and Beyond Policy Brief No. 20. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2002.
- Hamilton, Gayle, James Mabli, Jonathan Bigelow, Stephen Freedman, Kelsey Schaberg, Gretchen Rowe, Richard Hendra, and Julie Hartnack. "Expanding Opportunities & Reducing Barriers to Work: Virginia Interim Report." Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, 2021. Available at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/research-analysis>.
- Hotz, V. Joseph, and John Karl Scholz. "Measuring Employment and Income Outcomes for Low Income Populations with Administrative and Survey Data." In *Studies of Welfare Populations: Data Collection and Research Issues*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2002.

- Katz, Lawrence F., and Alan B. Krueger. “The Rise and Nature of Alternative Work Arrangements in the United States, 1995–2015.” NBER Working Paper No. 22667. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2016.
- Katz, Lawrence F., and Alan B. Krueger. “Understanding Trends in Alternative Work Arrangements in the United States.” NBER Working Paper No. 25425. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2019.
- Kornfeld, Robert, and Howard S. Bloom. “Measuring Program Impacts on Earnings and Employment: Do Unemployment Insurance Wage Reports from Employers Agree with Surveys of Individuals?” *Journal of Labor Economics*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1999, pp. 168–197.
- Maguire, S., J. Freely, C. Clymer, M. Conway, and D. Schwartz. “Tuning In to Local Labor Markets: Findings from the Sectoral Employment Impact Study.” Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures, 2010.
- McConnell, Sheena, Peter Z. Schochet, Dana Rotz, Ken Fortson, Paul Burkander, and Annalisa Mastri. “The Effects of Assistance from Employment Counselors Provided by the Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs: Findings from a Nationally Representative Randomized Controlled Trial.” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, April 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.22305>.
- Reed, Debbie, Albert Y. Liu, Rebecca Kleinman, Annalisa Mastri, Davin Reed, Samina Sattar, and Jessica Ziegler. “An Effectiveness Assessment and Cost-Benefit Analysis of Registered Apprenticeship.” Report for the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration. Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, July 2012.
- U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. “What Works in Job Training: A Synthesis of the Evidence.” Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014.
- Vollmer, L., A. Mastri, A. Maccarone, and E. Sama-Miller. “The Right Tool for the Job: A Meta-Regression of Employment Strategies’ Effects on Different Outcomes.” Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, 2017.
- Walter, Johanna, David Navarro, Chloe Anderson, and Ada Tso. “Testing Rapid Connections to Subsidized Private Sector Jobs for Low-Income Individuals in San Francisco: Implementation and Early Impacts of the STEP Forward Program.” OPRE Report #2017-103. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017.