Expanding Opportunities & Reducing Barriers to Work: Illinois Interim Report

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

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GLOSSARY

ABAWD	Able-bodied adult without dependents. 18- to 49-year-old adult who is not disabled and does not have dependents
ATIM	Accelerated Training in Manufacturing. A DCEO sector-focused training program
CAP	Community Assistance Provider
CBO	Community-based organization
CDL	Commercial Driver's License
CMA	Certified Medical Assistant
CNA	Certified Nursing Assistant
CNC	Computer Numerically Controlled. Used to describe machining
Control group	A group of individuals enrolled in a SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) pilot that was eligible for services available through existing SNAP E&T programs if such programs were available to the control group in the pilot location
DCEO	The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
EPIC	Employment Opportunities, Personalized Services, Individualized Training, and Career Planning. The SNAP Employment and Training pilot implemented in Illinois
ESL	English as a Second Language
Food security	Having access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Individuals who experienced food access limitations due to lack of money or other resources are said to be food insecure
GED	General Education Development. A group of subject tests which, when passed, certify that the test taker has high school-level academic skills
IDHS	The Illinois Department for Human Services
IEP	Individual employment plan
ISTEP	Individualized Services Training and Employment Plan
JTED	Job Training and Economic Development. A DCEO workforce development program
LWIA	Local workforce investment area. A group of one or more counties that provide workforce development services
MIS	Management information system

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

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OVERVIEW

This report presents interim findings from the evaluation of a SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) pilot—EPIC—that was implemented in 33 Illinois counties (including Cook County, which encompasses Chicago) from March 2016 to February 2019. This was one of 10 pilots Congress authorized and funded as part of the Agricultural Act of 2014 to offer enhanced SNAP E&T services to assist SNAP participants in obtaining employment. The Illinois Department for Human Services (IDHS) enrolled 5,038 SNAP participants into the pilot, with half randomly assigned to be eligible for the enhanced services (the EPIC group) and the other half eligible for existing SNAP E&T services (the control group). IDHS targeted two groups: work registrants, including able-bodied adults without children (ABAWDs), and individuals working 30 or more hours per week but needing skills upgrades. For the majority of individuals in the pilot, participation in EPIC services (or, for the control group, in existing E&T services) was mandatory. EPIC services included career planning and case management, basic education services, occupational skills training, work experience, on-the-job training, job search training and assistance, job readiness training, and employment retention assistance.

Key interim findings from the four evaluation components covered in the report, which examines the experiences of all individuals enrolled in the pilot, include:

- **Implementation.** EPIC services were ably provided by 24 Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). EPIC's customized Management Information System helped partners and providers manage pilot enrollment and coordinate and provide services, and the administrators of key EPIC partner and provider organizations worked well with each other. Effectively matching EPIC group members to CBOs that provided services in line with individuals' skills and interests was one challenge. Another challenge was that the originally-planned three service models were found to not meet the needs of many EPIC group members, so EPIC service flows evolved to accommodate several alternative service pathways.
- **Participation.** Slightly over two-thirds of individuals in the EPIC group completed the first step in EPIC, by attending an orientation at a CBO, and almost all of these individuals subsequently participated in an E&T-related activity and received assistance in looking for work, attended job search training workshops, received instruction in adult basic education or preparation for a high school equivalency certificate, enrolled in short-term occupational skills training, or began work-based learning. A little under half of EPIC group members participated in education or training as one of their activities, and slightly more participated in job search assistance. About one-fifth of the EPIC group received a credential or certification. Most individuals who attended an orientation left EPIC within six months.
- **Impact.** Although the EPIC group was more likely than the control group to participate in job search assistance or training activities, occupational skills training, and general job skills training, EPIC generally did not affect employment. Early in the one-year follow-up period, EPIC group members worked and earned less than control group members but there were no differences between the two groups in subsequent quarters. EPIC did not affect SNAP participation in the first half of the follow-up but did lead to a reduction in the likelihood of EPIC group members participating in SNAP in the second half. These findings do not imply

that EPIC ultimately will not be effective in increasing employment, as longer-term results are needed to fully assess its impacts.

- **Cost.** IDHS and its partners and providers reported spending a total of about $10 million from April 2015 to December 2017 on the planning and early implementation of EPIC. About a third of the costs were for direct services, with occupational skills training and job readiness workshops as the largest of these costs. Direct service costs likely will represent an even larger share of total costs when 2018 and 2019 expenditures are analyzed and reported.

This report presents an early assessment of EPIC's effects. A final report will present outcomes over a longer follow-up period and examine the benefits of the pilot's enhanced services relative to its costs. In doing so, the final report will provide more conclusive evidence about EPIC's effectiveness.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the primary source of nutrition assistance for many low-income people. By providing a monthly benefit to spend on food, the program aims to ensure that SNAP participants have adequate access to enough food to lead healthy, active lives. For some in the program, it also provides work supports to help them become economically self-sufficient. SNAP's Employment and Training (E&T) program 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.

Despite the importance of SNAP E&T, information about approaches that most effectively connect SNAP participants to gainful employment is limited. For this reason, as part of the Agricultural Act of 2014, Congress authorized and funded pilots to test innovative strategies in the SNAP E&T program. In 2015, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), awarded grants to 10 States—California, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington—which represented diverse areas and populations. Pilots varied in whether they operated statewide, versus in select areas of a State, and whether they focused on urban communities, rural communities, or both. The majority of individuals the pilots targeted were work registrants[1] who were unemployed or underemployed and had significant barriers to employment, such as being homeless or having a criminal history or substance use disorder. Pilots also varied in the services they offered, but services typically included a skills and/or clinical assessment that determined individuals' work readiness, skills, and barriers to employment; case-management services that developed and supported a detailed and individualized work and barrier-reduction plan for individuals; and support services, such as transportation, housing, and training and work supplies that supported individuals' involvement in activities designed to reduce barriers to employment. Offered services also included a range of E&T activities, such as job readiness training, basic education, occupational skills training, and subsidized employment, although not every pilot offered all of these services. Each pilot enrolled 3,000 to 7,000 individuals for a total of 44,359 individuals across the 10 pilots. Funding for the pilots included a rigorous, longitudinal evaluation to assess whether the services offered through the pilots connected SNAP participants with jobs that would increase their incomes and reduce their need for nutrition assistance benefits.

This interim report focuses on one State—Illinois. It provides a detailed description of the pilot's design and implementation and, using data for a one-year follow-up period, examines the services individuals received, and presents findings about the short-term effectiveness of the

[1] 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.

pilot's services. A final report will provide more comprehensive and conclusive evidence about the effectiveness of Illinois' pilot services, by examining individuals' experiences over a longer (three-year) follow-up period and examining the benefits of the pilot's enhanced services relative to their costs.

Illinois pilot background

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

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

Evaluation overview

The evaluation includes the following four components:

1. An ***implementation analysis*** that documents the context and operations of each pilot;
2. A ***participation analysis*** that examines the characteristics, participation levels, and service paths of individuals in the pilots;
3. An ***impact analysis*** that identifies 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; and

4. A ***cost analysis*** that estimates the costs of pilot services.[2]

The evaluation used an experimental research design in which individuals eligible for SNAP E&T who were enrolled into the pilot were randomly assigned into the EPIC group or a control group in roughly equivalent numbers. Individuals assigned to the EPIC group were eligible for the enhanced set of services described above, whereas control group members were eligible for services available through the existing SNAP E&T program in the State, if offered. Through random assignment, the groups were similar when they enrolled into the pilot, on average, in all aspects. They differed only in the services they subsequently were eligible to receive. This design allows the evaluation to confidently attribute differences in outcomes between the groups to the enhanced SNAP E&T services rather than to other potential causes.

Data sources used in the evaluation include administrative service use data to describe engagement and participation in services; 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; and 12-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. The evaluation also used implementation data collected from interviews with pilot staff and EPIC group members, and grantee-provided cost data and time-use data to estimate the cost of services and service components.

EPIC overview, service receipt, and costs

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

IDHS administered EPIC and was responsible for pilot recruitment and enrollment and the monitoring of individuals' participation in EPIC. The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), a key partner, oversaw the delivery of EPIC services. DCEO contracted with 24 Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), 15 of which were in the Chicago

[2] The final reports will include additional analyses for two of the study components. The participation analysis will also assess whether the presence of the pilots affected people's decisions to apply for SNAP or to continue to receive SNAP benefits. The cost analysis will also include a cost-benefit analysis which estimates the return on each dollar invested in the pilots.

area, to deliver EPIC services. The Southern Illinois University Center for Workforce Development (SIUCWD) operated, and trained staff on, the management information system platform adapted for use in EPIC.

The pilot began enrollment in March 2016. The pilot enrollment process required individuals interested in the pilot to undergo a series of assessments and career explorations before random assignment occurred. Following random assignment, individuals assigned to the EPIC group were scheduled for an orientation at the EPIC service provider (a CBO) to which they had been matched before random assignment, based on assessment and career interest results. Post-orientation services could vary, depending on further assessments conducted at the CBO and the services available through that CBO. While EPIC originally set up three service models through which individuals would progress, EPIC service providers found that many individuals were interested only in immediate employment, and thus they went straight into job readiness, job search, and job placement activities without first participating in any occupational skills training programs or education services. As a result, EPIC pathways evolved and the service models were not strictly followed. However, all EPIC group members who at least attended an orientation at a CBO service provider received individualized case management services from an EPIC career navigator. Individuals assigned to the control group either were referred to the local service provider offering existing SNAP E&T, if it operated in that location, or were informed that they could access services that were available to anyone in the community.

The following provides details about the planned services, receipt of specific services, and costs of providing services during the interim period:

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

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

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

individuals being able to participate in OJT or work experience after the completion of occupational skills training—with the intent that the employer would eventually hire the individual.

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

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

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

Extent of EPIC service receipt. According to IDHS administrative service use data, over two-thirds of EPIC group members engaged in EPIC after random assignment, meaning that they completed the first step in EPIC by attending a program orientation at a CBO. About 64 percent of all EPIC group members subsequently participated in an E&T-related activity, and received assistance in looking for work, attended job search training workshops, received instruction in adult basic education or preparation for a high school equivalency certificate, enrolled in short-term occupational skill training, or began work-based learning within 12 months of random assignment. Participation in job search assistance activities was common, and individuals often started out in this type of activity: Over half of EPIC group members participated in job search activities and over a quarter participated in job search training. A little over a quarter of the EPIC group also entered some type of work-based learning arrangement. Along with job search, or as their only activity, somewhat under half of EPIC group members attended occupational skills training. About one-tenth participated in basic education activities. Half of the individuals who started occupational skills training completed it, but less than one-third of the individuals who started basic education completed it. Nineteen percent of EPIC group members received a credential or certification.

Nearly all EPIC group members were contacted by their EPIC career navigator at least once; the average number of contacts per person was 12. More than half of EPIC group members received at least one support service, most often to defray transportation costs. EPIC group members engaged in EPIC for an average of about three months. Nearly three-quarters of EPIC group members exited from EPIC within the 12-month follow-up period, and most who attended an orientation at a CBO left EPIC within six months. Because EPIC services were available only to SNAP participants, many exits from EPIC may have reflected exits from SNAP.

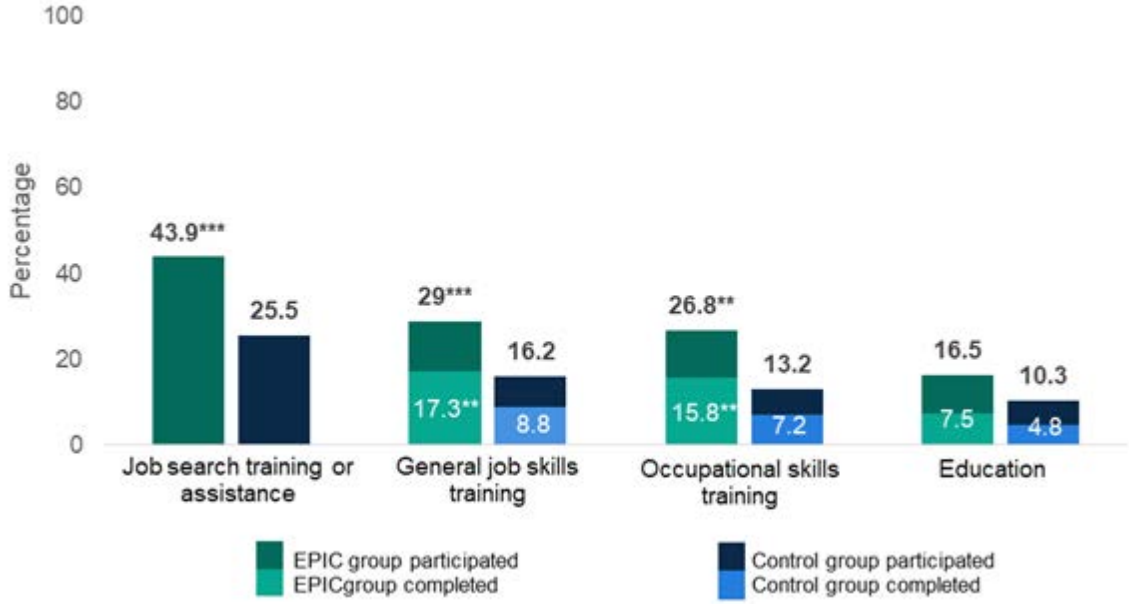
Pilot costs. IDHS and its partners and providers reported spending $9,845,000 from April 2015 to December 2017 on the planning and implementation of EPIC ($280,000 during the planning period and $9,566,000 on service delivery). The FNS grant funded 78 percent of these costs, and partners and providers leveraged other funding sources for the remaining 22 percent. About 59 percent of the costs during the planning period and first 21 months of operations were related to administration, including planning and development, management and oversight, and recruitment and enrollment ($5,854,000). The remaining 41 percent of costs were for direct services, with occupational skills training and job readiness or life skills workshops being the largest costs. The proportion of the total budget that is represented by direct service costs will likely increase over time.

Differences in service receipt for the EPIC and control groups

To provide context for the impacts of EPIC, we examined differences in service receipt between the research groups based on survey data. These data capture any type of service received, regardless of whether it was provided through EPIC or existing SNAP E&T, or whether it was generally available in the community, through programs such as WIOA or through community colleges, nonprofits, or other organizations. Without a meaningful service differential between the EPIC and control groups, impacts on labor market and public assistance outcomes are unlikely to result.

According to the survey data, service receipt rates were higher for individuals in EPIC, relative to the control group. During the 12-month follow-up period considered in this interim report, the EPIC group was more likely than the control group to participate in job search assistance or training activities and in education and occupational skills training. Sixty-three percent of the EPIC group participated in one of these activities compared with 45 percent of the control group. The EPIC group also had higher rates of participation than the control group in almost all activities examined in the analysis. Differences between the EPIC and control groups were found for participation in job search assistance and training activities, occupational skills training, general job skills training, and education (16, 14, 13, and 6 percentage point differences, respectively; Exhibit ES.1).

Exhibit ES.1. Rates of participation in services were higher for the EPIC group than the control group



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12-month follow-up survey, weighted data.

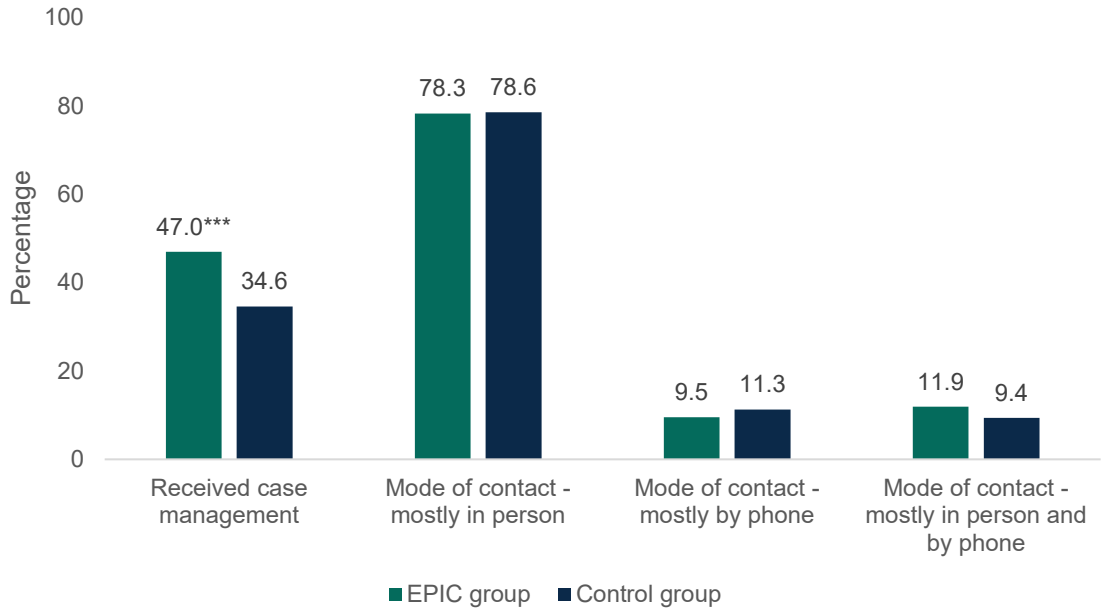
Note: The full length of each bar represents the participation rate and the lower portion of each bar represents the completion rate. There is no completion rate available for job search training or assistance.

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

EPIC group members were more likely than those in the control group to complete an activity, by 13 percentage points (not shown). EPIC group members also were more likely than control group members to receive an occupational certificate or license: 16 percent of EPIC group members did so compared with 6 percent of control group members (10 percentage point difference [not shown]). Among those who started an activity, a little over half of individuals in both research groups completed them.

EPIC group members also were more likely than control group members to receive career counseling or one-on-one assistance from an employment professional or case manager. According to the survey data, which takes into account case management provided through EPIC, existing SNAP E&T, or any other programs in the community, 47 percent of EPIC group members received counseling or one-on-one assistance compared with almost 35 percent of control group members (12 percentage point difference) (Exhibit ES.2).

Exhibit ES.2. EPIC group members were more likely than control group members to receive case management

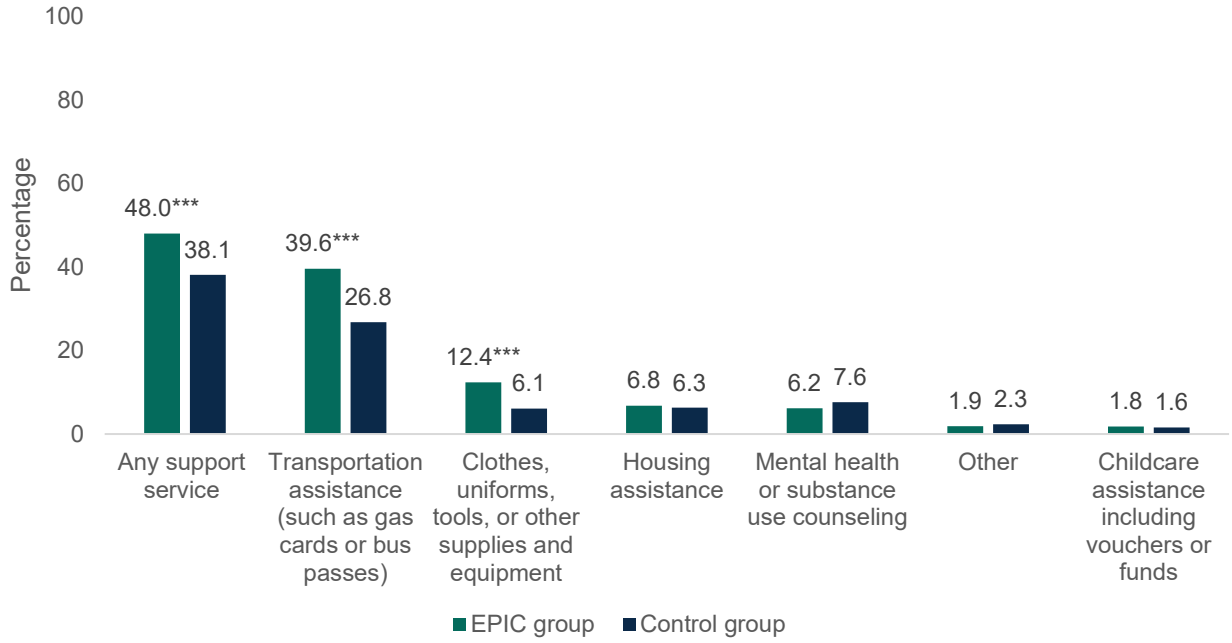


Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12-month survey, weighted data.

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

EPIC group members also were more likely than control group members to receive support services. Forty-eight percent of individuals in the EPIC group received a support service compared with 38 percent in the control group (Exhibit ES.3). The largest differences were for the receipt of transportation assistance and assistance with clothes, uniforms, tools, and other supplies and equipment.

Exhibit ES.3. EPIC group members were more likely than control group members to receive supportive services, particularly assistance with transportation and work supplies and equipment



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

Note: Transportation assisstance includes supports such as gas cards or bus passes. Childcare assistance includes vouchers or funds. "Other" included assistance with payment of utilities such as electricity, phone, heat, or gas; food assistance; and assistance with medical care.

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

Impacts of EPIC on employment and SNAP participation

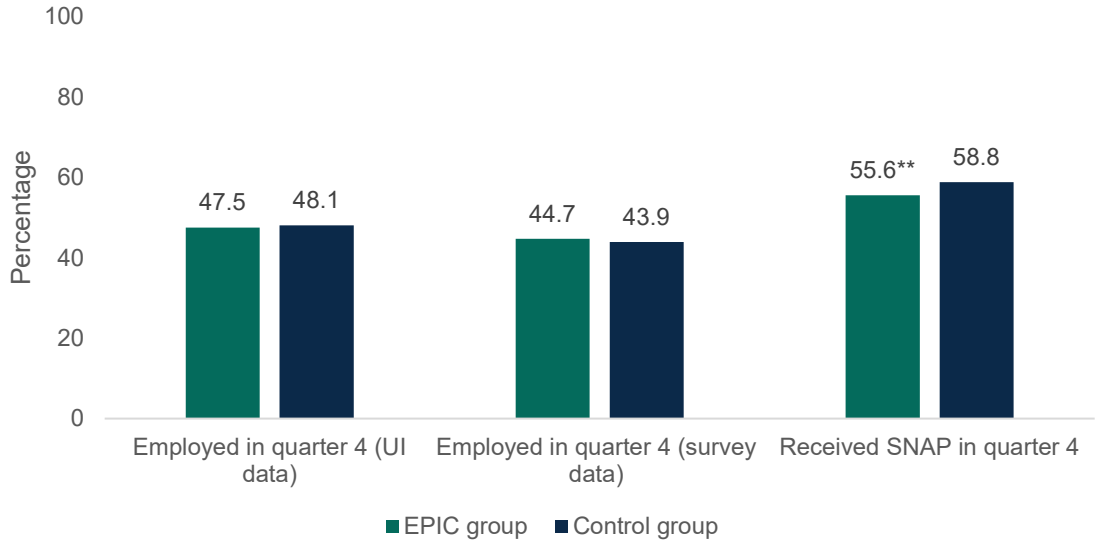
We estimated the impacts of EPIC on individual outcomes over the 12 months following random assignment. Before analyzing the data, we selected two primary (confirmatory) outcomes: employment (based on both the UI and survey data) and SNAP participation—both in the fourth quarter after random assignment, which is the most recent observed quarter. The primary outcomes were defined over the final quarter of available data because many EPIC group members were expected to be engaged in education and training shortly after random assignment, thus possibly reducing their opportunity to be employed during those early quarters.[3] The estimated impacts on other outcomes are considered exploratory and are used to support

[3] Although the level of earnings was an important outcome in the evaluation, we excluded it from the set of primary outcomes due to the generally greater variation in earnings as opposed to employment, which results in lower statistical power when identifying an impact on earnings relative to employment. Effects on earnings are important to assess because they can affect both SNAP participation status and food security.

findings for the Quarter 4 employment and SNAP participation outcomes by examining whether they have similar impacts.

Employment and SNAP participation in Quarter 4. EPIC did not lead to a statistically significant increase above control group levels in employment in Quarter 4 using either the UI wage records or the survey data (Exhibit ES.4). Based on the UI data, about 48 percent of individuals in both research groups were employed in Quarter 4, and about 44 percent were employed based on the survey data. EPIC did reduce SNAP participation in Quarter 4 by a statistically significant amount: 56 percent of EPIC group members participated in SNAP compared with 59 percent of control group members.

Exhibit ES.4. EPIC did not affect Quarter 4 employment but did lead to a decrease in Quarter 4 SNAP participation



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation UI wage records, weighted data, SNAP employment and training evaluation 12-month survey, weighted data, SNAP employment and training evaluation SNAP administrative data, weighted data.

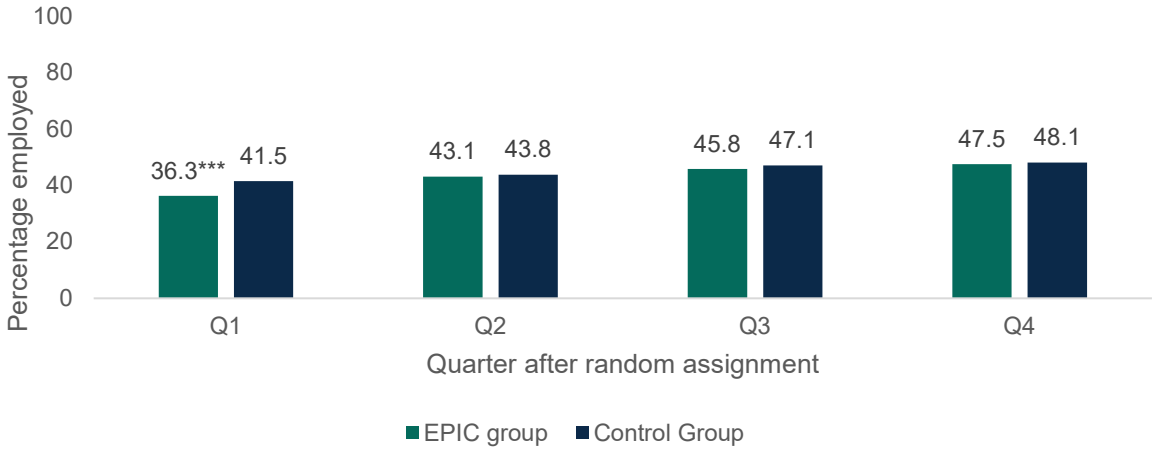
***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

Analyses of employment in Quarters 1, 2, and 3 provided information about changes in these measures throughout the year following random assignment. In Quarter 1, EPIC group members were less likely to be employed than control group members based on both data sources (Exhibits ES.5 and ES.6). For example, based on the survey data, around 25 percent of EPIC group members and 29 percent of control group members were employed in Quarter 1. In Quarters 2 and 3, the differences in employment rates were not statistically significant using either data source.

Earnings, hours worked, and other job characteristics. In the UI data, there were negative and statistically significant differences in average earnings between the EPIC group and the

control group in Quarters 1 and 2. For example, in Quarter 1, on average, the EPIC group earned $213 less than the control group. In Quarters 3 and 4, the earnings differences were not statistically significant based on either data source. For example, according to the UI data, the EPIC group earned an average of $1,800 in Quarter 4 compared to average earnings of $1,765 for the control group. EPIC group members worked about 1 hour per week less than control group members, on average, in Quarter 1, but there were no statistically significant impacts in average hours worked per week in later quarters. There were generally no differences in the characteristics of jobs among the employed.

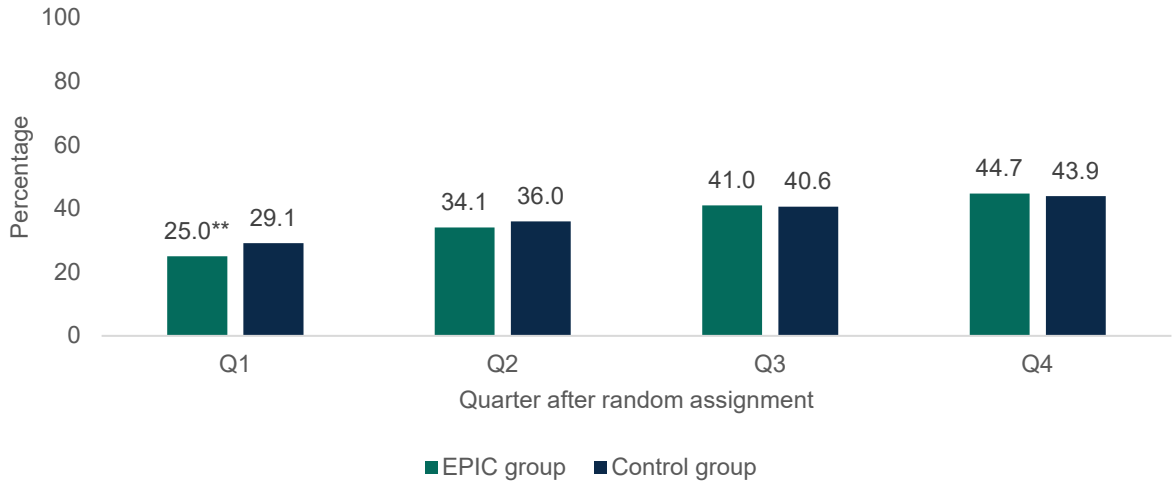
Exhibit ES.5. EPIC decreased employment in follow-up quarter 1 and did not have an effect on employment in follow-up quarters 2, 3, and 4, based on UI data



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

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

Exhibit ES.6. EPIC decreased employment in follow-up quarter 1 and did not have an effect on employment in follow-up quarters 2, 3, and 4, based on survey data

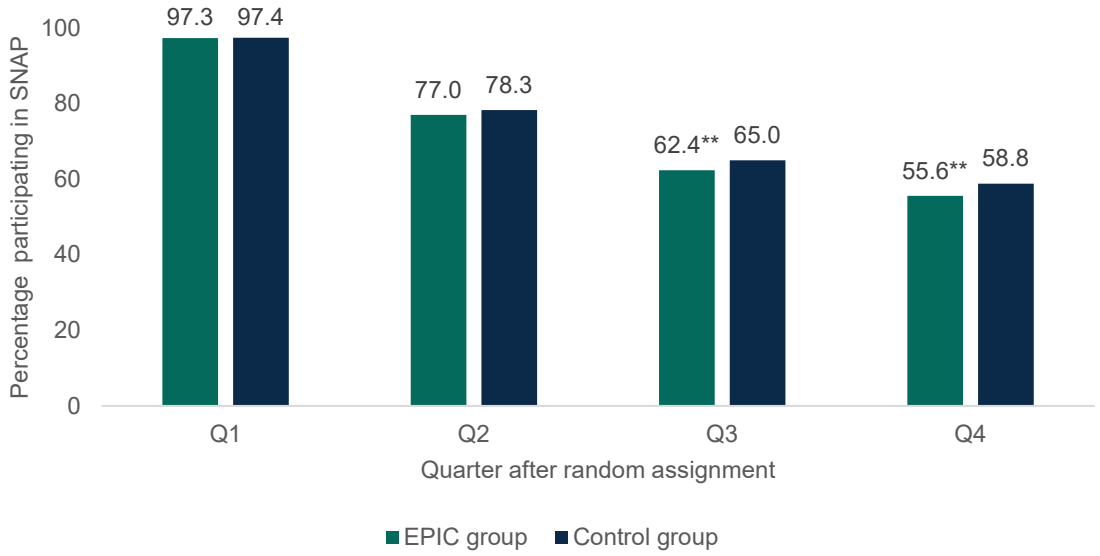


Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12-month survey, weighted data.

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

SNAP participation, benefits, and exit. EPIC led to a reduction in SNAP participation in Quarter 4. About 56 percent of EPIC group members participated in SNAP in Quarter 4 compared to 59 percent of control group members (Exhibit ES.7). Impacts of EPIC on SNAP participation reflect larger decreases over time in the rate of SNAP participation for the EPIC group than for the control group. For example, between Quarters 1 and 4, SNAP participation rates decreased from 97 to 56 percent among EPIC group members—a 42 percentage point change—and from 98 to 59 percent among control group members—a 39 percentage point change. In Quarters 3 and 4, EPIC group members were less likely to participate in SNAP than control group members. These differences in SNAP participation rates were both statistically significant.

Exhibit ES.7. EPIC decreased SNAP participation in follow-up quarters 3 and 4



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

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

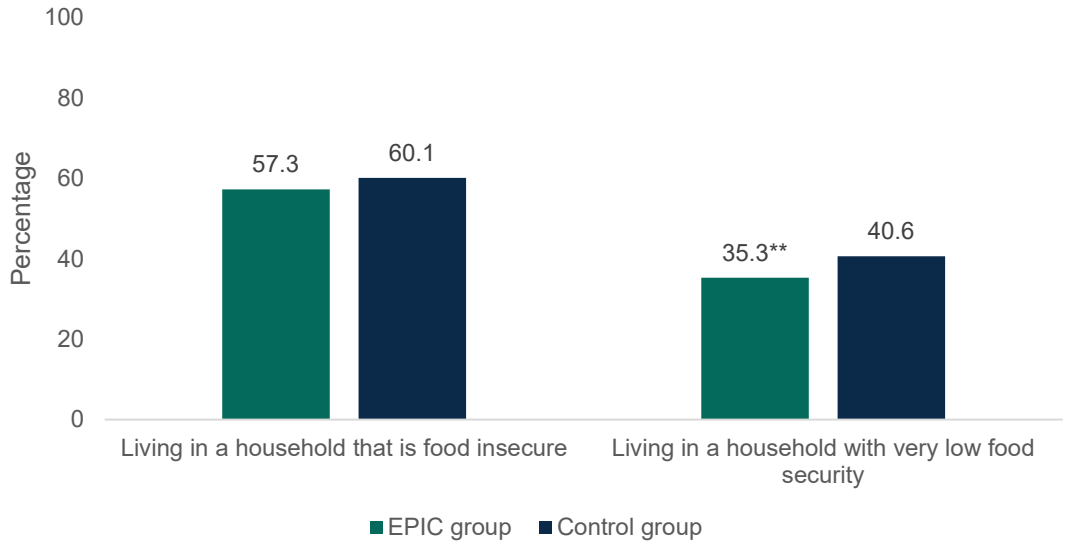
EPIC group members were more likely than control group members to have exited SNAP at least once within the 12 months after random assignment: 75 percent of EPIC group members exited SNAP, a statistically significant increase of 6 percentage points over the control group average. The percentage of individuals who exited SNAP within the 12 months after random assignment includes those who left and did not re-enter SNAP within the 12-month follow-up period, as well as those who left and re-entered before the end of the period. Thus, even though 25 percent of the EPIC group participated in SNAP for the full year, SNAP participation in Quarter 4 was higher (56 percent), reflecting that individuals left and re-entered SNAP by Quarter 4.

In Quarter 1, average SNAP benefit amounts were significantly higher (by $17) for EPIC group members than for control group members. In Quarter 4, the impact on average SNAP benefit amounts was negative and statistically significant. For both research groups, average SNAP benefit amounts were highest in Quarter 1 and decreased in each subsequent quarter, reflecting exits from SNAP over time.

Impacts on other outcomes

There were few impacts of EPIC on other outcomes. EPIC group members and control group members had similar rates of food insecurity. About 57 percent of EPIC group members reported being food insecure compared with 60 percent of control group members (Exhibit ES.8). However, EPIC group members were less likely than control group members to have experienced very low food security—a severe form of food insecurity. Thirty-five percent of EPIC group members reported very low food security, a statistically significant 5 percentage point reduction from the control group average.

Exhibit ES.8. EPIC reduced the likelihood of living in a household with very low food security



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

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

Among the other outcomes, there were generally no statistically significant differences between the EPIC group and control group. One exception was for the measure of depression. About 18 percent of EPIC group members screened positive for depression, a statistically significant 4 percentage points less than the rate for control group members. Outside of EPIC increasing TANF by a small but statistically significant amount in two quarters, there were no impacts on other types of public assistance benefits, including Medicaid coverage, throughout the follow-up period.

Main conclusions and next steps

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. Although there was a meaningful contrast between the EPIC and control groups in take-up of services, particularly job search assistance and occupational skills training, EPIC did not lead to an increase in employment in Quarter 4. However, EPIC led to lower participation in SNAP for EPIC group members relative to control group members during Quarter 4 of the 12-month follow-up period.

The findings related to SNAP participation make sense given several observed patterns of changes over the first year for EPIC and control group members. Conceptually, SNAP E&T services are designed to increase individuals' employment and earnings and, thus, reduce their need for SNAP or other public assistance. Although EPIC did not increase employment or earnings by a statistically significant amount, EPIC led to reductions in SNAP participation in

Quarters 3 and 4. Notably, EPIC group members were more likely than control group members to have been sanctioned for noncompliance. Data from the SNAP benefits administrative files indicated that 11 percent of EPIC group members and 7 percent of control group members were sanctioned at some point during the 12-month follow-up period. Differences were concentrated in Quarters 2, 3, and 4 (2, 3, and 3 percentage point differences, respectively). This may have contributed to some of the reduction in SNAP participation observed later in the follow-up period.

These overall findings do not imply that EPIC will not be effective in achieving its goal of increasing employment and reducing the need for public assistance in the longer term. In fact, past studies of workforce programs have shown that it can take more than a year before economic impacts emerge (Card et al. 2010, 2018; D'Amico et al. 2015). Indeed, a substantial share of EPIC group members participated in training and education in early quarters, likely displacing employment during this period. Results from the longer-term follow-up period to appear in the final evaluation report, which will extend to up to three years from random assignment, are needed to assess the full effects of EPIC.

Whether EPIC will have a longer-term impact on employment and SNAP participation depends, in part, on the degree to which EPIC and control group members differ in their take-up of services and in their completion of them, and whether these differences provide longer-run benefits. Usually this is especially true for occupational skills training and education, particularly if individuals acquire a credential or certificate. The findings in this report suggest that there was a contrast in service participation between individuals in the EPIC and control groups. Relative to the control group, the EPIC group was more likely to participate in job search training activities and in occupational skills training and education, and to receive a certificate or license, during the 12-month follow-up period.

In conclusion, this interim report presents a preliminary assessment of the effects of EPIC. The findings cover only the first year following random assignment for each individual. Furthermore, the report's cost findings cover only the pilot planning and early implementation periods. For this reason, the short-term outcomes presented in this report do not capture the full potential effects of EPIC on individuals' outcomes. Notably, some individuals (12 percent of EPIC group members) were still receiving services through EPIC or other programs when 12-month survey outcomes were measured. In addition, EPIC continued to provide services to individuals in 2018 and 2019. A final report will present outcomes over a period of up to 36 months after random assignment and examine the benefits of the pilots' enhanced services relative to their full costs, thereby providing comprehensive and conclusive evidence about the effectiveness of EPIC.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the primary source of nutrition assistance for many low-income people. By providing a monthly benefit to spend on food, the program aims to ensure that SNAP participants have adequate access to enough nutritious food to lead healthy, active lives. For some in the program, it also provides work supports to help them become economically self-sufficient. SNAP's Employment and Training (E&T) program 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.

Despite the importance of SNAP E&T, information about approaches that most effectively connect SNAP participants to gainful employment is limited. For this reason, as part of the Agricultural Act of 2014, Congress authorized and funded the SNAP E&T pilots. These pilots enable the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) and 10 States to test innovative strategies to connect SNAP participants with jobs that increase their incomes and reduce their need for public assistance benefits. This legislation also funded a rigorous, longitudinal evaluation of these pilots.

This report focuses on one State—Illinois—and provides a detailed description of the pilot's design and implementation, the services individuals received, and findings about the short-term effectiveness of the pilot's services. In the remainder of this chapter, we provide an overview of all 10 pilots (Section A) and the evaluation (Section B), describe the strategies Illinois sought to implement and the characteristics of individuals enrolled in the pilot (Section C), and summarize the data sources and analytic approach used in conducting the evaluation (Sections D and E). We conclude the chapter by presenting a road map to the subsequent chapters of this report (Section F).

A. Background of all 10 pilots

In 2015, FNS awarded grants to California, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington, which represented and served diverse areas and populations. (Appendix Table A.1). The service areas varied across pilots, with some operated statewide and others operated in select areas of a State, such as counties, community college districts, or local workforce investment areas (LWIAs). They also varied in the geography in which they operated, with some focusing just on rural communities, some just on urban communities, and some serving both. Each pilot enrolled 3,000 to 7,000 individuals for a total of 44,359 individuals across the 10 pilots.

The majority of individuals the pilot targeted were work registrants[4] who were unemployed or underemployed, but most pilots targeted subsets of this population. Some pilots focused on able-

[4] 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

bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs)—18- to 49-year-old adults who are not disabled and do not have dependents. Other pilots focused on groups with significant barriers to employment such as individuals who experience homelessness, have a criminal history, or have a substance use disorder.

The services available varied across pilots, but they typically included (1) a comprehensive skills and/or clinical assessment that determines individuals' work readiness, skills, and barriers to employment; (2) case-management services that develop and support a detailed individualized work and barrier-reduction plan for the individual; and (3) support services, such as transportation, housing, and training or work supplies (for example, uniforms, books, clothes, or tools) that support individuals' involvement in activities designed to reduce barriers to employment. Offered services also included a range of E&T activities, such as job readiness training, basic education, occupational skills training, and subsidized employment. Under current statutes, existing SNAP E&T programs are not permitted to fund some of the activities and services the pilots provided, such as subsidized employment, substance use disorder counseling, and mental health counseling. Appendix B provides additional details about SNAP E&T and SNAP work requirements.

B. Objectives of the evaluation

The evaluation includes the following four components:

1. An ***implementation analysis*** that documents the context and operations of each pilot;
2. A ***participation analysis*** that examines the characteristics, participation levels, and service paths of individuals in the pilots;
3. An ***impact analysis*** that identifies 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; and
4. A ***cost analysis*** that estimates the costs of pilot services.[5]

A challenge for any impact analysis is that individuals who receive services might differ from those who do not receive services. This makes it difficult to determine whether differences in outcomes are a result of the services or are driven by the pre-existing differences between individuals who did and did not receive services. To overcome this challenge, 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. Treatment group members were eligible for the

for another program; caretakers 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.

[5] The final reports will include additional analyses for two of the study components. The participation analysis will also assess whether the presence of the pilots affected people's decisions to apply for SNAP or to continue to receive SNAP benefits. The cost analysis will also include a cost-benefit analysis which estimates the return on each dollar invested in the pilots.

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. Through random assignment, the groups were, on average, similar in all respects when they enrolled into the pilot. They differed only in terms of the services they subsequently were eligible to receive. This design allowed the evaluation to confidently attribute differences in outcomes between the two groups to the enhanced services rather than to other potential causes.

The reports being issued at this time present interim findings for each evaluation component. The implementation and cost analyses describe the planning and early implementation periods of the pilots, but do not cover the full period in which services were offered and costs were incurred. Similarly, the findings in the participation and impact analyses are based on services received and outcomes measured during the approximate 12 months after each individual entered the pilot, from the start of enrollment (which ranged from January to April 2016 across the pilots) through the end of 2017. In addition, these findings are reported for most of the individuals (87 percent) eventually enrolled in the pilots. The full effects of the enhanced services may not have materialized during this short-term, 12-month follow-up period, especially for some individuals who were still receiving services at the 12-month point. In addition, some pilots continued to enroll individuals in 2018 and provide services in 2018 and 2019. The pilots' final reports will provide more conclusive evidence about the ultimate effectiveness of the pilots' services. These reports will examine the experiences of all individuals enrolled in the pilots and will follow their outcomes over a period of up to 36 months after random assignment. The final reports will also examine the benefits of the pilots' services relative to their costs.

C. Overview of Illinois EPIC

Illinois began enrollment in Employment Opportunities, Personalized Services, Individualized Training, and Career Planning (EPIC) in March 2016. EPIC was offered in 33 counties across the State's seven LWIAs (Exhibit I.1). The pilot served both rural and urban populations, with the majority of individuals residing in Cook County, which includes the city of Chicago. The year before Illinois began EPIC enrollment, the unemployment rate in the 33 counties averaged 6.2 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019).

Exhibit I.1. Pilot locations

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

career interests, and local labor market demand. EPIC offered career planning; substantive case management by a career navigator; basic education assistance with reading, math, and English as a Second Language; high school equivalency attainment services; occupational skills training; paid work experience; on-the-job training; subsidized work; job search and job readiness assistance; employment retention assistance; and support services (Exhibit I.2).

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

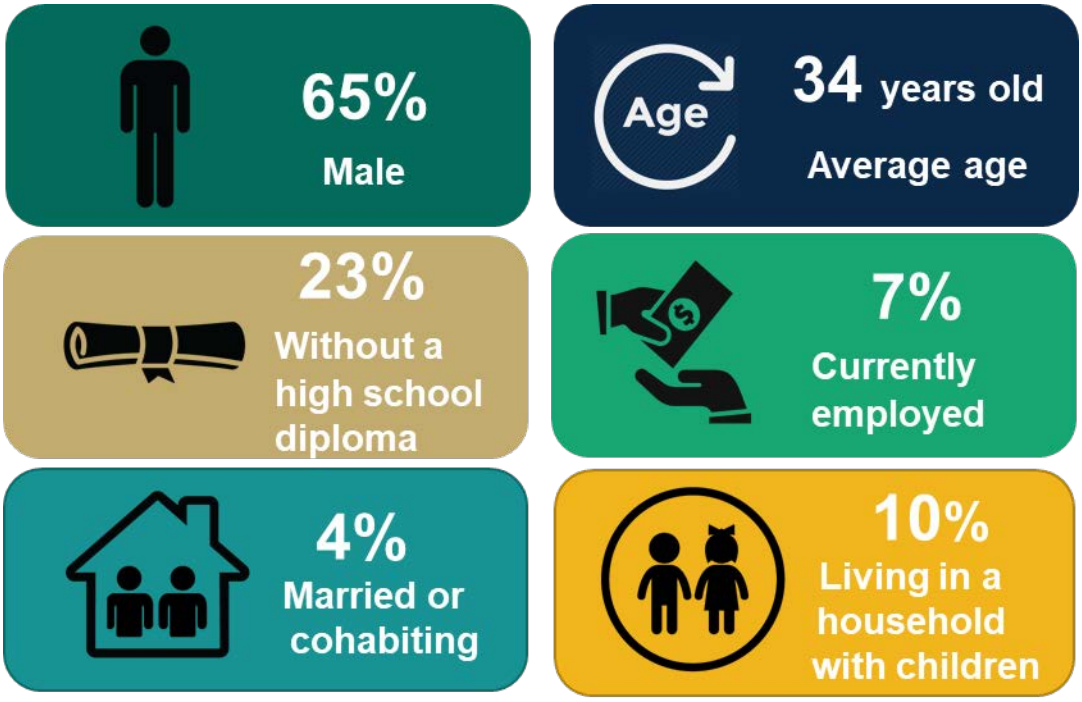
Exhibit I.2. Pilot characteristics

Characteristics	
Pilot operation period	March 2016 to February 2019
Location	33 (out of 102) counties across seven LWIAs LWIA 3: Stephenson, Winnebago, Boone counties LWIA 7: Cook County LWIA 14: Knox, Warren, Henderson, McDonough, Hancock, Schuyler, Adams, Brown, Pike counties LWIA 15: Stark, Peoria, McLean, Marshall, Fulton, Mason, Tazewell, Woodford counties LWIA 19: Macon, DeWitt counties LWIA 24: St. Clair, Clinton, Washington, Monroe, Randolph counties LWIA 25: Perry, Jackson, Jefferson, Franklin, Williamson counties
Grantee agency	Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)
Key partners and providers	Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), Southern Illinois University Center for Workforce Development (SIUCWD), and 24 Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) (providers)
Target population	I) Unemployed or underemployed work registrants with low skills or limited work experience, including ABAWDs, and II) individuals working 30 or more hours per week but needing skill upgrades.
Number enrolled from March 2016 through September 2017	5,038
Program type	Mandatory and voluntary[a]
Existing SNAP E&T program	No existing SNAP E&T services were available in 18 pilot counties; in the other 15 pilot counties (including Cook County), Illinois offered limited services through its existing SNAP E&T program. Services included access to adult basic education and GED services, occupational skills training where available, unsubsidized work experience and EarnFare, and limited support services.
Key EPIC services	EPIC offered assessment and career exploration; case management; adult basic education, and GED services; occupational skills training; paid work experience, on-the-job training, and subsidized work; job readiness and job search assistance, job retention services; and support services (transportation assistance, uniforms and work-related supplies etc.)

[a]Most of the individuals enrolled in the pilot in Illinois (in both the EPIC and control groups) were mandatory work registrants.

From March 2016 to September 2017, EPIC enrolled 5,038 individuals into the pilot.[6] Interested SNAP participants were randomly assigned in roughly equivalent numbers into a treatment group (referred to as the EPIC group) and a control group. Exhibit I.3 displays the characteristics of all individuals who enrolled in the pilot from March 1, 2016, to September 30, 2017 (see Appendix Table C.1). The characteristics represent individuals' statuses at the point of random assignment. The majority of individuals were male, and a majority were black or African American; individuals were age 34, on average. Very few were married or cohabiting, and only 10 percent lived in households with children. About 77 percent of individuals had a high school diploma or equivalent. Almost all individuals enrolled in the pilot had been employed at some point prior to enrollment (90 percent), but few were employed at the time of random assignment.

Exhibit I.3. Baseline characteristics of individuals enrolled in the pilot



Source: SNAP E&T baseline information registration form (March 2016 through September 2017 data).

Note: All values are percentages unless otherwise noted. Individuals in the pilot consist of all EPIC and control group members who completed a baseline enrollment registration and did not subsequently choose to revoke their consent to participate in the evaluation. (n=5,012).

This report focuses on individuals who enrolled in the pilot through September 2017, at which point EPIC had completed pilot enrollment. IDHS continued providing EPIC services until February 2019. The final report will include analysis of data through the end of pilot operations.

D. Data sources

Data to support the evaluation were collected from multiple sources:

[6] Illinois ended its pilot enrollment in September 2017.

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. Baseline data were collected for all EPIC and control group members.
2. **Implementation data.** The implementation data analyzed for this report were collected during two rounds of site visits in August 2016 and May 2017. The site visits included interviews with IDHS and State-level staff, SNAP eligibility staff, and EPIC service provider staff; structured observations of service provider operations; in-depth interviews with EPIC group members; and focus groups with individuals enrolled in EPIC. We also used information obtained during technical assistance and monitoring site visits and telephone calls conducted during the planning period and throughout the interim analysis period.
3. **Administrative service use data.** IDHS and their partners and providers collected and shared administrative data that documented the types of training, education, and services they provided to EPIC group members and, where applicable, to control group members. The administrative data analyzed for this report included information on service receipt from the date of random assignment for each individual through either the last known date of engagement or September 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 and for four quarters after random assignment (through March 2018) – for individuals who were randomly assigned from March 2016 through March 2017. The data contain earnings amounts for each quarter, which we also used to construct indicators of quarterly employment status.
5. **SNAP administrative data.** IDHS provided SNAP administrative caseload data. These data 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, and 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 2018. This report uses data through September 2018.
6. **12-month follow-up survey.** The 12-month follow-up survey provided information on service receipt and outcomes. We conducted telephone surveys with individuals enrolled in the pilot (2,431 EPIC and control group members in Illinois). The survey asked for information about individuals' service receipt, employment, and earnings in the 12 months after random assignment. It also asked for information on food security, health, well-being, and housing status.
7. **Cost data.** To estimate EPIC costs, we collected data from cost workbooks completed by IDHS and partner and provider staff and from time-use surveys. The workbooks were the basis for calculating total costs and describing the categories of costs for the EPIC group, including costs for staff, direct services, supplies and equipment, and overhead and operations. A staff time-use survey helped estimate the costs of service components by

accounting for how staff responsible for providing direct services to EPIC group members spent their time.

For the final evaluation analysis, we will collect additional follow-up data from several of these sources. These include a second follow-up survey administered about 36 months after random assignment for the same set of individuals who responded to the 12-month survey, and UI wage records and SNAP administrative data through mid- to late 2020 for all individuals enrolled in the pilot. We will present findings from the analyses of these data in the final report. The final report also will include implementation data from a third round of site visits conducted in fall 2018 and administrative service use data and cost data obtained through the end of EPIC's service period (February 2019 in Illinois). The final report also will present a benefit-cost analysis that will compare final costs for EPIC and control group services (including estimates of costs per person) with final EPIC benefits, from the perspectives of individuals, government, and society.

E. 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 site visits as well as technical assistance and monitoring telephone calls to describe pilot planning and operations that occurred from the start of the pilot through June 2017. We organized the data by topic, interviewee, and pilot office, to facilitate analysis by type of respondent (for example, grantee or partner) and pilot location within the State.
2. **Participation analysis.** The participation analysis uses administrative service use data to summarize engagement and participation in services over the 12 months following random assignment for all EPIC group members randomly assigned. We created timelines for each EPIC group member to describe when they started to receive services and, if services were completed, the end dates. This allowed us to estimate the order in which individuals typically proceeded through activities and the overall length of time they spent in EPIC.
3. **Analysis of differences in service use between EPIC and control groups.** This analysis statistically compares receipt of services among EPIC and control group members over the 12 months following random assignment. Understanding the differences in service use between treatment and control groups provides context for understanding the impacts on employment, earnings, and receipt of public assistance. The analysis is primarily based on 12-month survey data, which are available for both EPIC and control group members. It also uses administrative data analyzed in the participation analysis, when information on the use of specific services is available for both EPIC and control group members.
4. **Analysis of impacts on employment and well-being outcomes.** We estimated impacts of EPIC on individual outcomes over the 12 months following random assignment using UI wage records, SNAP administrative data, and 12-month survey data. Examined outcomes include employment, SNAP participation, and earnings, as well as receipt of public assistance other than SNAP, food security, health, well-being, and housing. With the exception of the analysis of earnings and employment based on UI wage record data, impacts

are estimated for all individuals randomly assigned. Due to differences in data availability, analyses for Illinois that use UI wage records assess impacts for individuals randomly assigned through March 2017. With an experimental design, unbiased impact estimates are attainable from the differences between average outcomes of the treatment and control groups. However, we used regression procedures that controlled for individual characteristics that were highly predictive of the outcomes. We chose these procedures 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.[7]

5. **Cost analysis.** Using data on costs provided by IDHS and partners and service providers, we used the "ingredient" approach to build up total EPIC cost estimates from all reported direct and in-kind costs. We also collected and used data on the percentage of time direct service staff spent on key activities and services to estimate the cost of specific services.

For many of these analyses, we examined subgroups that may have been affected differently by the services offered to the EPIC group. We analyzed impacts and service use for groups of individuals defined by their status at the time of enrollment, such as the presence of children in the household, work experience, age, and the presence of severe barriers to employment. These findings for the subgroup analysis are included in the appendices.

F. Organization of this report

The remainder of this report is organized as follows:

1. Chapter II describes the planning and implementation of the pilot, the ways in which its implementation differed from the original design, challenges experienced, and responses to these challenges.
2. Chapter III presents findings from the participation analysis, describing the services that individuals in the EPIC group received during their first year after random assignment.
3. Chapter IV describes differences between EPIC and control groups in terms of receipt of services.
4. Chapter V presents findings from the analysis of the impact of EPIC on employment, earnings, benefit receipt, and other outcomes.

[7] 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.

5. Chapter VI describes the costs of services EPIC group members received from IDHS and the partner and provider organizations.
6. Chapter VII offers conclusions and more fully describes what the final evaluation report will include.

Appendices C to G present findings from auxiliary analyses and for subgroups. A technical supplement in a separate volume includes appendices that describe the data and methodology in more detail.[8]

[8] The supplement provides additional information about the analysis approach and detailed tables of the findings. Specifically, we describe our analytical approach, including additional details on the study design, analytic weights, approach to addressing missing data due to survey-item nonresponse, and impact estimation approach.

II. IMPLEMENTATION ANALYSIS

This chapter summarizes and synthesizes the analysis of qualitative implementation data collected during the planning and early implementation periods of the pilot, from March 2015 through June 2017 (Exhibit II.1 provides a pilot timeline). It describes pilot planning and EPIC operations and provides context for the quantitative data presented in later chapters. We conducted interviews with IDHS and partner administrator-level staff, SNAP eligibility staff, IDHS staff responsible for pilot recruitment and enrollment, CBO EPIC service provider staff, and existing SNAP E&T provider staff. We also conducted focus groups with individuals in the EPIC group and case studies of two EPIC group members to better understand their experiences. (This included interviews with individuals, observation of activities, and interviews with EPIC staff working directly with the individuals.) Information from the focus groups and case studies is included, as well as information we obtained during technical assistance activities, to provide context. These data were collected from a small number of individuals and so their experiences and opinions are not necessarily representative of all individuals in the EPIC group.

Exhibit II.1. Pilot timeline

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

In Section A of this chapter, we provide information about the pilot background. In Section B, we describe the planning and early implementation process. In Section C, we detail the services and operations including: the recruitment and enrollment process, control group services and pathways, and EPIC group services and pathways, pilot management, partner and provider coordination, patterns of service receipt, barriers to participation, staffing, and performance reporting. Finally, in Section D, we summarize the key findings discussed in this chapter.

A. Pilot background

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

ATIM. Last, IDHS and DCEO also wanted to form a new collaboration in order to "break down silos" of the services being provided by each organization.

Services to be made available through EPIC included personal assistance from an EPIC career navigator; basic education assistance with reading, math, and English as a Second Language (ESL); high school equivalency attainment services; occupational skills training; paid work experience; on-the-job training; subsidized work; job search and job readiness assistance; employment retention assistance; and support services. Based on interests and needs, individuals were matched with an occupational skills training program and, in areas with more than one EPIC service provider, a service provider.[9] EPIC was intended to serve EPIC group members based on one of three EPIC services models that were designed to provide different levels of assistance depending on individuals' education and work experience. Model one provided individuals with basic adult education services along with occupational skills training; model two offered occupational skills training and education services to obtain a high school equivalency credential; and model three was intended to assist individuals with work experience and obtaining advanced occupational skills training credentials for upward mobility.

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

The pilot was implemented in 33 counties across 7 of Illinois's 26 LWIAs and covered at least part of the 5 IDHS regions. About half of the pilot counties (15) offered existing SNAP E&T services (some of which had only started offering those services at the same time the pilot was beginning enrollment), and about half (18) did not. Around 90 percent of control group members resided in a county where existing SNAP E&T services were available during the pilot; the majority of these individuals were in Cook County (the most populous county in the pilot).[10]

IDHS and its partners chose pilot locations with diverse demographics and considered the poverty rate, the unemployment rate, the projected economic growth rate, the proportion of residents with high school diplomas or high school equivalency certifications, and the industries most in demand. The largest urban LWIA in Illinois, which consists of the city of Chicago and surrounding communities (Cook County), was selected because it is diverse, it had high unemployment rates, it included communities of low-skilled and low-income populations, and it had the potential to offer job opportunities in several industries. The other selected counties included a range of small to midsized cities in both rural and urban settings that also had concentrations of low-skill and low-income populations, with some areas having higher-than-average unemployment rates.

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

[10] However, actual enrollment in existing SNAP E&T was not guaranteed, due to a limited number of available slots.

IDHS and its partners proposed to serve two target groups in EPIC: (1) Unemployed or underemployed work registrants with low skills or limited work experience, including ABAWDs, who were thought to need a high school diploma or equivalent education credential, additional basic education support, and technical skills in order to access entry-level employment and (2) SNAP participants who were working 30 hours or more per week but required a skill upgrade in order to achieve higher earnings. IDHS and its partners chose this second group of non-work registrants, according to one IDHS administrator, because they felt that individuals in this group were sometimes overlooked. However, EPIC primarily focused on enrolling work registrants. IDHS and its partners initially had a work registrant enrollment goal of least 85 percent of the SNAP participants enrolled in the pilot, as required by the FNS grant, and sought to enroll no more than 15 percent of the second group. In April 2016, however, IDHS and its partners requested and received approval from FNS to increase the proportion of SNAP participants who were working 30 hours or more per week to 25 percent.

Although the target population included SNAP participants who did not have SNAP E&T participation requirements (voluntary participants as well as non-work registrants), overall the pilot primarily targeted mandatory SNAP E&T work registrants (work registrants who are required to register for work and participate in SNAP E&T services as a condition of eligibility for receiving SNAP benefits) because Cook County was expected to enroll the largest percentage of individuals into the pilot and it primarily served mandatory SNAP E&T work registrants.[11]

B. Pilot planning and implementation

The implementation of the pilot was a collaborative effort between three key partners: IDHS, DCEO, and SIUCWD. IDHS provided management and oversight, was responsible for pilot recruitment and enrollment, and monitored participation in services for noncompliance. DCEO contracted with 24 CBOs to deliver EPIC services (EPIC service providers) and was responsible for monitoring CBO performance and providing training to all pilot staff (IDHS pilot recruitment and enrollment staff and CBO EPIC service provider staff). SIUCWD provided general support during the planning process and made extensive modifications to WorkNet. During the pilot, SIUCWD staff operated WorkNet and provided ongoing system training and support to all pilot staff.

In March 2015, administrators from IDHS, DCEO, and SIUCWD formed a planning team, and SIUCWD convened meetings and facilitated and documented the pilot design decisions. The process allowed all the key players to get on the same page about both the scope of the project and its details. Administrators reported that the collaboration between IDHS and DCEO

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

generally worked well; they viewed the experience as helpful for building a relationship that would last even after the pilot.

The planning phase involved finalizing the pilot design and pilot recruitment and enrollment process and modifying the WorkNet system accordingly, selecting EPIC service providers, and training all pilot staff. A main focus was identifying potential challenges in how IDHS policy and procedures could affect the pilot recruitment and enrollment process, participation in EPIC services, the process of sanctioning EPIC group members, pilot staff responsibilities, and the structure and functionality of WorkNet. The pilot design was ultimately integrated into WorkNet so that the system could be used to implement the pilot enrollment process, facilitate implementation of EPIC service delivery, manage the pilot, and facilitate communication among pilot staff.

Incorporating the evaluation design into the pilot's originally planned enrollment process required IDHS and its partners to redesign the process during the planning phase. IDHS and its partners initially anticipated a rigorous assessment process before enrollment in order to help match individuals with EPIC services, but the evaluators cautioned against this approach. The evaluators were concerned that providing detailed information about the EPIC service providers (such as the CBO name) before enrollment created the potential for individuals in the control group to learn about, and access, services the same as those available in EPIC. A more limited assessment process was agreed to. Administrators later said that absent the evaluation, they would not have restricted the information individuals were given before enrollment.

To select the EPIC service providers, DCEO wrote and released a request for applications. DCEO and IDHS then selected 24 of the 45 CBOs that applied, after considering each CBO's organizational and staffing structure, current services (including occupational skills training they would offer or connect individuals to), costs, outcomes, and location. Fifteen CBOs were selected in the Cook County area, and the remaining pilot locations had one or two service providers each. Most of the CBOs began working with IDHS and DCEO for the first time as part of EPIC, but five of the selected CBOs were currently or had previously partnered with IDHS to provide existing SNAP E&T services. Due to a delay in executing the Illinois State budget, EPIC could not immediately finalize grants with the CBOs. However, in order to lessen the delay, administrators moved forward with the service provider selection process and started making arrangements with the selected service providers in anticipation of executed agreements. The DCEO-established agreements provided performance-based grants to CBOs, where up-front funding paid for 50 percent of the costs of staff and services and the remaining funds were to be released based on the CBOs successfully meeting performance benchmarks.

To staff the pilot, IDHS and its partners used a mix of existing and newly hired staff. In addition to the DCEO administrator who was involved since applying for the pilot grant, DCEO hired a consultant around the time pilot enrollment began to provide ongoing EPIC training and support. IDHS administrator staff, including a project manager, a research liaison, an administrative assistant, and an accountant, were hired specifically for the pilot during the planning phase. However, none of these IDHS staff were hired before December 2015, and thus, none were present for most of the planning. Two key IDHS administrators left before or during the planning

and beginning of enrollment of the pilot (including the IDHS grant proposal writer), so DCEO played a leading role during that time and SIUCWD provided project management assistance. Some staff reported that this loss caused the planning team to lack knowledge of IDHS SNAP policy and procedures, such as those concerning the sanctioning process for noncompliance, which resulted in sanctioning protocols not being as thoroughly integrated into systems and procedures as they could have been at the start. Looking back, one administrator noted that it would have been beneficial to have one of the IDHS existing SNAP E&T enrollment supervisors involved in the pilot planning discussions.

Administrators debated which staff would be responsible for conducting pilot recruitment and enrollment, but they eventually decided that existing IDHS SNAP E&T staff in Cook County and IDHS SNAP eligibility workers in the other pilot locations around the state would take on this new responsibility, even though some of the eligibility workers were unfamiliar with basic SNAP E&T policy and procedures. In-person training was then provided to the IDHS staff on how to conduct pilot enrollment and on using WorkNet.

The CBOs used existing staff or newly hired individuals to provide EPIC services. Some CBO staff worked on EPIC part time in conjunction with other responsibilities, whereas staff at some CBOs were fully dedicated to working with EPIC group members. All EPIC service providers had at least one EPIC career navigator, but staffing varied by provider. For example, job developers, employment specialists, employment counselors, public benefits staff, financial literacy staff, computer literacy staff, occupational skills training instructors, or job readiness instructors also directly provided EPIC services at some service providers. EPIC career navigators were provided an initial in-person training on EPIC services and on how to document service participation, or lack of participation, in WorkNet.

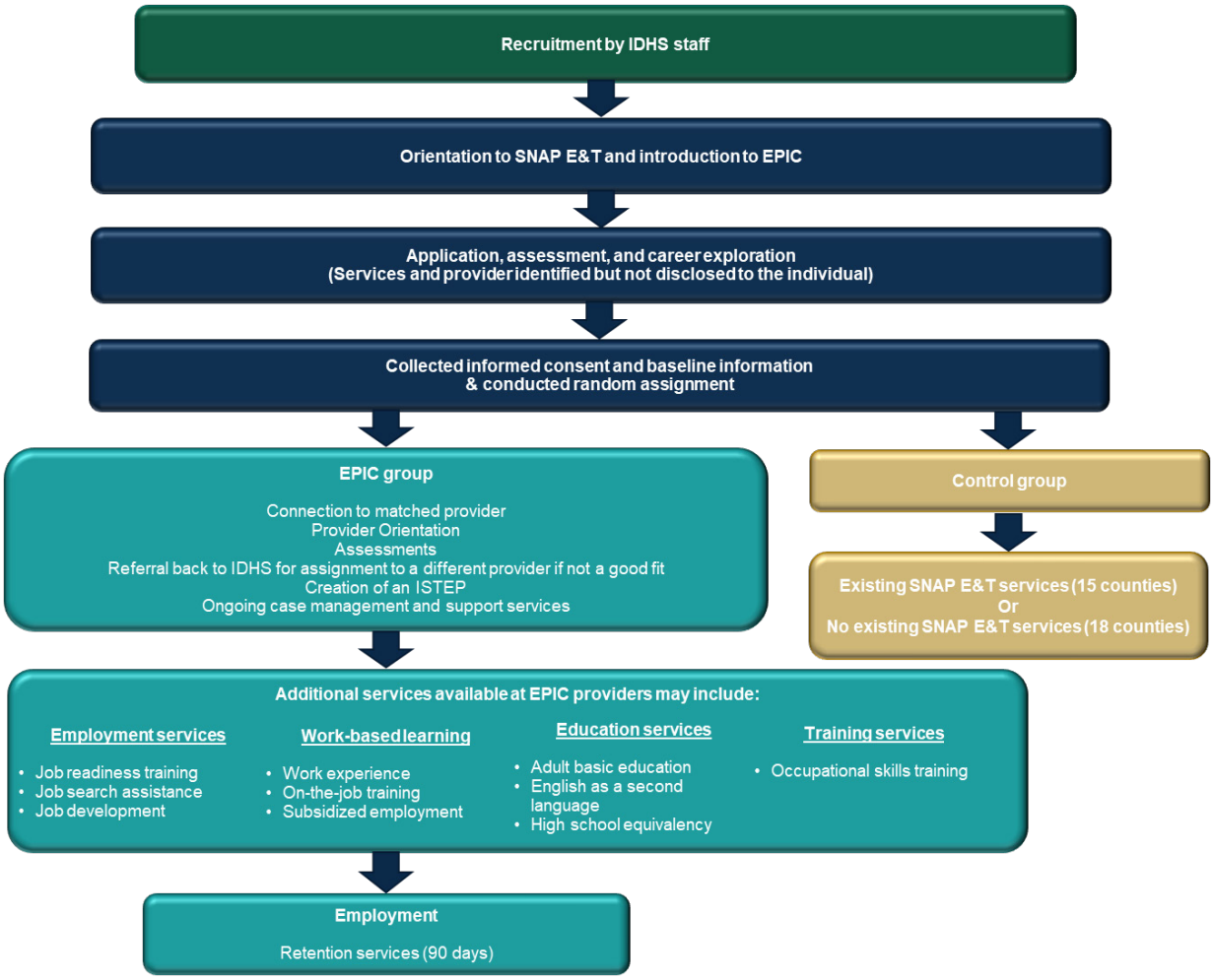
The pilot was initially scheduled to begin enrollment in January 2016, but as mentioned previously, a variety of factors contributed to a delayed start of enrollment in March 2016. In sum, delays in finalizing the enrollment process, fully defining EPIC services, policies, and procedures, and recruiting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

C. Pilot services and operations

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

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

Exhibit II.2. Pilot flow and pathways



1. Recruitment and enrollment

Individuals receiving SNAP benefits were informed of or learned about the pilot and EPIC services in a variety of ways, including from the IDHS website and marketing materials (such as brochures, posters, and flyers) that were distributed internally and externally. SNAP participants were also informed of or learned about the pilot from IDHS staff during regularly scheduled communications, including the SNAP application and recertification process, as well as from IDHS partner organizations. All pilot enrollment office locations used monthly lists of pilot-

eligible ABAWDs to identify individuals to call and send letters to, inviting them to orientation. However, recruitment and outreach strategies and efforts also differed somewhat depending on whether the pilot enrollment location served counties that offered existing E&T services and whether the individuals being recruited were mandatory SNAP E&T work registrants. For example, Cook County required mandatory SNAP E&T work registrants to attend a SNAP E&T orientation to learn about EPIC services if they were newly applying for SNAP benefits or were a current SNAP participant but not actively engaged in existing SNAP E&T services. As a result, Cook County did not need to actively conduct pilot outreach in order to meet their enrollment target; instead, they were able to rely on enrolling a percentage of the individuals who showed up for the required orientation.

Several enrollment staff reported challenges in getting individuals interested in EPIC services and getting them to go through pilot enrollment. Staff noted a variety of reasons for this, including that some individuals simply never showed up for orientation and others dropped out during enrollment because they felt the process was too long. However, many staff reported that individuals wanted immediate employment rather than EPIC services. Most of these challenges were more commonly reported in pilot locations in smaller, more rural counties that did not serve mandatory SNAP E&T work registrants. After a slow start to enrollment in these areas, in order to reach more people, administrators revised the recruitment plan to include additional outreach outside of the IDHS enrollment offices, through hanging posters and distributing flyers in places such as community organizations, churches, barbershops, homeless shelters, food banks, and train stations.

Cook County, which had a pilot enrollment target of more than 3,500 individuals, also initially faced recruitment challenges. At first, pilot recruitment and enrollment activities were concentrated in one IDHS office on the south side of the city of Chicago that was not easily accessible for individuals who resided in the various communities across the county, which likely limited the number of individuals who showed up for orientation. In order to increase access and have the number of enrollment staff necessary to meet the enrollment targets, in summer 2016 administrators added seven pilot enrollment locations spread throughout the county and identified additional IDHS staff to assist with pilot recruitment and enrollment. Administrators also designated additional IDHS offices to recruit and refer individuals to the eight pilot enrollment offices. Although these changes required additional staff training and resources, administrators reported that they increased the recruitment and enrollment numbers and the diversity of the individuals in the pilot. Later, a second enrollment office was also added in one of the central Illinois pilot locations. Despite some early recruitment challenges, the pilot exceeded its enrollment target of 5,000 and enrolled a total of 5,038 individuals by September 2017.

After being recruited, individuals first attended an orientation to EPIC services, and then interested and eligible individuals completed pre-random assignment enrollment activities to help determine services and a service provider in the event that the individual was randomly assigned to the EPIC group. Individuals created a WorkNet profile and completed application, assessment, and career exploration activities to provide information about their education, employment history, interests, goals, and potential limitations or obstacles (for example, whether

they could stand for several hours). Based on this information, WorkNet automatically identified potential occupational skills training programs for the individual.[12] Without identifying the EPIC service providers, WorkNet then prompted individuals to rank the recommended training programs. Finally, enrollment staff, in consultation with the individual, determined the best training program based on interest, limitations, and needs. The enrollment staff then used their best judgement (including considerations of the proximity to individuals' residences or public transportation options) to match the individual to a service provider that offered the chosen occupational skills training program (again without identifying the CBO to the individual). Depending on the enrollment location, there may have been several service provider options for a single training program (such as in Cook County) or as few as one service provider option.

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

The above enrollment process was also a result of changes administrators made to attempt to remedy the ongoing challenge of successfully matching individuals to occupational skills training programs and EPIC service providers. In order to provide guidance to individuals on ranking and ultimately selecting an occupational skills training program, enrollment staff needed to have knowledge of each training program's requirements as well as the EPIC service provider's participation requirements (such as attendance requirements or a required job readiness course). This, however, was challenging, especially in Cook County where there were about 50 different occupational skills training programs offered at one or more of the 15 different service providers. EPIC service provider staff reported receiving referred individuals who were not committed to the training program to which they were assigned, and said that this led to disengagement or a lack of participation. One EPIC career navigator said that there was a frequent disconnect between individuals' education or past experience and the service prerequisites. A few EPIC group members who participated in a focus group mentioned that there were no occupational skills training program options that they were interested in, so they just selected the one that staff suggested, knowing that they might end up not being interested in completing the training. Unsuccessful matches made it challenging for the service providers to serve referred individuals, especially if the EPIC group members did not meet the criteria for, or

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

were not interested in, any of the provider's other services. Such unsuccessful matches also made it challenging for the service providers to meet the performance benchmarks in their agreements with DCEO.

To reduce the frequency of unsuccessful matches, administrators made adjustments in summer 2016 to the enrollment process and to WorkNet to create additional automatic filtering. These refinements reduced the burden on enrollment staff to know about multiple training programs at multiple providers. Administrators increased the amount and type of information provided to individuals during the enrollment activities, and added and modified enrollment questions in order to allow for a more comprehensive filtering of services and service providers based on responses. For instance, responses to questions about having a driver's license or criminal history were added or updated to filter the list of available training programs based on entry or participation criteria. In addition to updating the enrollment process, the administrators organized informational sessions for enrollment staff to learn about the entry criteria and participation expectations of each training program and service provider. Although matches did become more successful as the pilot matured, these matching challenges remained.

2. Control group services and pathways

The availability of existing SNAP E&T services for control group members depended on the individual's county of residence. Immediately following random assignment, control group members who resided in 1 of the 18 counties that did not offer an existing SNAP E&T program were informed that they could access any other services available to anyone in their community—such as those offered at an American Job Center. Control group members who resided in 1 of the 15 counties that did offer an existing SNAP E&T program were referred to the existing SNAP E&T service provider in their respective area (or, if slots were not available, individuals were told they could access any other services available to anyone in their community).

The existing SNAP E&T services were more limited than those offered in EPIC. Individuals had an IDHS caseworker who provided basic case management services, including help with developing an individualized employment plan (IEP), help addressing barriers to participation through support services such as childcare and transportation assistance, and referrals to community services. Caseworkers typically conducted monthly follow-up appointments, including job retention check-ins at 30, 60, and 90 days following employment. Access to, and funding for, occupational skills training services was limited. Access to education services included high school equivalency certification and adult basic education. Individuals only had access to unsubsidized work experience in public or nonprofit entities. In Cook County, however, individuals could earn cash assistance and gain work experience for up to a maximum of $294 per month through EarnFare. Some soft skills and life skills services were available through job readiness and job search activities but only when provided in conjunction with another allowable activity (such as basic education, technical training, EarnFare, work experience, or job retention).

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

3. EPIC group services and pathways

Immediately following random assignment, EPIC group members were referred to the occupational skills training program and service provider to which they had been matched before random assignment. The first appointment with the service provider was usually an orientation to introduce the services and expectations. Depending on the service provider, some assessments were part of the orientation. Some service providers also had additional orientations for specific occupational skills training programs. Following orientation, EPIC group members met with an EPIC career navigator to begin or continue the post-enrollment service assessment process.

All EPIC service providers conducted further assessments, but these assessments varied across providers. In some cases, assessments were used to determine whether the individual was a good fit for the service provider and met certain criteria that were necessary for the selected occupational skills training program. For example, the majority of service providers used the TABE to identify education levels and determine service pathways. Some service providers also needed to verify whether the individual had a clean driver's license record, which was necessary to enroll in commercial driver's license (CDL) training. Assessments, such as the Work Readiness Index assessment and mental health assessments, were also conducted to help identify potential obstacles to participation and employment. At the conclusion of initial assessment activities, an Individualized Services Training and Employment Plan (ISTEP) was created. The length of the orientation and assessment process varied, from a reported four hours to a couple of days.

As described previously, the pilot design included three EPIC service models, but EPIC did not provide EPIC services only in direct connection to one of these models. In addition, EPIC did not serve a large number of employed individuals seeking additional certifications and advancement through service model three. The use of these models became less prescriptive as the pilot evolved. Although WorkNet was programmed to automatically filter potential occupational skills training programs and service provider matches according to certain aspects of the service models (such as the need for adult basic education or GED services), enrollment staff did not necessarily finalize a service model pathway. One reason for this was that the removal of the NOCTI assessment from the enrollment process led to a pre-random assignment assessment that was less rigorous than planned. As a result, the final decision of what services were offered and provided was moved to after the individual was assessed by the service provider.

As indicated in Exhibit II.1, individuals could take several different pathways toward employment. Although some individuals may have progressed through services according to one of the service models, many did not. EPIC service providers found that many individuals were interested only in immediate employment and thus went straight to job readiness, job search, and

job placement activities without participating in any occupational skills training programs or education services. EPIC, however, was not intended to serve individuals interested only in job placement, which posed challenges. Many service providers did not want to provide placement services until EPIC group members completed other services such as job readiness classes; these service providers wanted to ensure that they were referring only job-ready individuals to employers. This sometimes led to disengagement if the individual was not interested or willing to participate in these other services. In some instances, the service provider was able to refer the individual back to the enrollment staff for a referral to a different service provider that did not have these types of specific service participation requirements.

Individuals decided on their preferred occupational skills training program during the pre-random assignment enrollment process, but the exact services they could receive were confined to the boundaries of what their assigned service provider offered and required. (As noted above, some service providers required individuals to complete certain activities as a prerequisite to other services.) In addition to EPIC services, some providers also offered services that went beyond what they were contracted to provide for EPIC. This mainly included additional support services but also may have included any services that the CBO normally offered through other funding sources. The rest of this section describes the specific services offered as part of EPIC.

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

Training. EPIC focused on providing short-term occupational skills training in high-demand and high-growth industries that led to industry-recognized credentials, such as the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) credential and the Computer Numerically Controlled (CNC) machining credential. Occupational skills training was expected to be a central component of EPIC and to distinguish EPIC services from control group services. EPIC service providers directly offered—or connected EPIC group members to other institutions (for example, local providers or community colleges) that offered—a wide array of training programs including, but not limited to, CNA training and other medical certifications, culinary arts, carpentry, CDL, welding, CNC machining, and administrative assistant. Some service providers specialized in one training program, while most of the service providers (such as those outside of Cook County) offered several different training program options. Training programs ranged from about 6 to 20 weeks, depending on the occupational skills training program and service provider.

Work-based learning. Some EPIC service providers connected EPIC group members to work experience, on-the-job training (OJT), or subsidized work before, during, or after they received other services such as occupational skills training. At least one EPIC service provider provided work-based learning opportunities with the service provider itself, and another service provider had a relationship with several employers and would connect individuals to OJT or work

experience opportunities after occupational skills training—with the intent that the employer would hire the individual upon completion.

An EPIC group member's experience

One EPIC group member completed a rigorous four-week job readiness class that met for six hours every day. The class covered topics such as anger management, self-control in the workplace, learning to be prompt, resume writing, and interviewing skills. She liked that the class was intense, and she said that if "something was confusing, they broke it down."

At the time of the interview, she was about to start a paid work experience opportunity with the EPIC service provider as a receptionist. She was excited about having the opportunity to start work at a small, familiar place before going back to work "outside in the real world." But her goal was to start a business, and in addition to working, she was starting a 12-week business management training course that met once a week.

Before enrolling in the pilot, she and her two children were living with her cousin. She had been recently incarcerated for three years, but she had a GED and some experience working in restaurants. She reported that, in the past, she had worked part-time jobs and become disappointed with the amount of money she earned. This led her to engage in "fast money" activities that resulted in incarceration. While incarcerated, she started a culinary arts program but was not able to complete her certification due to budget cuts.

She was required to participate in SNAP E&T and decided to enroll in the pilot for a chance to receive EPIC services, which she thought offered more options and could pay more for occupational skills training, including business management training. She was also familiar with the service provider and a program they offered to individuals with a criminal history. She had previously completed that program and believed it had value if she was committed, and she reported that "[this time] I'm ready and I'm tired of being incarcerated and missing out on my life. Now I know I am ready to start on my life."

She spoke very highly of EPIC and reported that EPIC helped her by providing bus passes, clothing, and financial coaching. Most of all, she valued the supportive atmosphere created by service provider staff. EPIC service provider staff described her as "very driven" and as having "strong leadership skills."

Employment services. EPIC service providers offered job readiness training, job search assistance, job development services, and other various short-term services to EPIC group members, although the exact services, as well as the availability of those services, varied by service provider. Services included workshops or classes on computer literacy, digital literacy, financial literacy, life skills, job readiness, and job search. All EPIC group members had access to certain parts of WorkNet—which included, for example, the online Employment 101 pre-employment services course—but service providers also convened job clubs and provided connections to employment. These services were provided before, during, or after occupational skills training or education services, depending on the service provider and the individual's situation and needs. Many service providers required all individuals to complete a job readiness training course before providing other services. At one service provider, job developers

sometimes set up job interviews for individuals and asked the employer whether there was anything that she/he could do to help the job seeker. This sometimes gave the EPIC group member helpful insider information about the employer's needs and wants.

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

Support services. Enrollment staff could provide transportation assistance to help EPIC group members travel to the EPIC service providers, but most support services were provided by service providers. EPIC career navigators provided a range of support services (there were no restrictions on what kind of support services they could provide), including transportation assistance; money for uniforms, tools or job equipment, eyeglasses, and job interview clothing; and referrals to outside resources. At least one service provider also offered child care on site. The cap on the amount of money that could be provided to an individual for support services was $1,000. Some service providers were able to offer additional support services because they used funding from sources outside of EPIC.

Retention. Once an EPIC group member became employed, EPIC service providers continued regular communication to offer case management and support services. In some cases, EPIC service provider staff said they also contacted employers on behalf of an individual to find out how the individual was performing, for example, or to help resolve an issue. All service providers were expected to offer 90 days of retention services, but at least one service provider said they offered retention services for up to 180 days, for which they would have had to use funding from outside the pilot.

4. Management, collaboration, and communication for EPIC service provision

The collaboration between IDHS, DCEO, SIUCWD, and the EPIC service providers was viewed positively by partner and provider staff. Many staff acknowledged that it was challenging for the different organizations to work together on such a complex initiative but thought it had worked relatively well, with each organization bringing its expertise and perspective. After the beginning of pilot enrollment, IDHS stepped into more of a management role, overall, but day-to-day management was directly supervised at the local IDHS offices or EPIC service providers. The IDHS project manager monitored the IDHS recruitment and enrollment staff, and DCEO administrators monitored the performance of EPIC service providers. SIUCWD staff managed the WorkNet system and data side of the project and monitored data entry and service completion via WorkNet.

The agreements with the 24 EPIC service providers were all maintained over the course of the pilot, with the exception of one CBO in Cook County that decided to end its participation in EPIC in spring 2017. This was due to a lack of steady referrals, which put financial constraints on the CBO; it needed a steady revenue stream to stay in business.

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

Some staff noted that certain aspects of communication between the organizations could have been stronger. For example, EPIC service provider staff reported that it was hard to get responses from enrollment staff regarding questions about policy or procedures, particularly regarding sanctioning for noncompliance.

5. EPIC group service and participation trends

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

Drop-off points and exits. Several pilot staff reported that they faced challenges with getting or keeping EPIC group members engaged in EPIC services. As noted previously, this was sometimes because of service provider participation requirements in activities that the individual was not interested in completing, or because the individual was not interested in occupational skills training and only wanted placement services in order to obtain immediate employment. One EPIC career navigator explained that if individuals started a training program, they usually stayed engaged; however, sometimes individuals had to wait for the occupational skills training

program to start, and this caused disengagement. A few EPIC group members who participated in a focus group mentioned this challenge. This sometimes happened, for example, because the provider needed to wait for more students to fill a class or because a new class only started at set intervals. Some EPIC service providers used this time to offer other services, such as job readiness training, in order to keep individuals engaged.

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

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

As noted above, mandatory SNAP E&T work registrants were required to participate in services in order to continue receiving SNAP benefits if they lived in a county that offered existing SNAP E&T services.[13] If a mandatory SNAP E&T work registrant failed to comply with EPIC service participation requirements (without good cause), EPIC service provider staff were responsible for indicating this in WorkNet and then the enrollment staff were responsible for implementing the conciliation appointments and possible sanctions.[14] For example, individuals in noncompliance were first required to attend a conciliation appointment. Both EPIC service provider staff and enrollment staff were responsible to try to re-engage the individual. If the individual failed to attend the conciliation appointment, they then were subject to sanctioning and disqualification from SNAP benefits for three months, after which they could reapply.

The SNAP sanctioning process was challenging in EPIC, due to a lack of clarity regarding the policy and procedures, and a lack of clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of the

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

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

enrollment staff versus the EPIC service provider staff, in part for reasons described in the section B. In addition, poor communication between the enrollment staff and EPIC service providers likely contributed to the challenge. For example, some staff at IDHS and the EPIC service providers reported that they would enter updates in WorkNet but their counterparts (at either IDHS or at an EPIC service provider) would not respond or take action. In response to this challenge, administrators created a policy and procedures document in December 2016 detailing the sanctioning policy and staff responsibilities, and encouraged all staff to work together to address noncompliance. Monthly "staffings," in which EPIC service provider staff and enrollment staff met in person to discuss individual cases, were also implemented.

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

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

6. Staffing

Turnover among IDHS administrators and delays in hiring replacements made oversight and coordination challenging. Two key IDHS administrators involved in planning the pilot, one of whom oversaw all the regional IDHS offices, left IDHS and were not immediately replaced. In addition, the IDHS project manager was a contracted employee who did not have the authority to make key decisions and did not have direct authority over the IDHS staff, including the enrollment staff and the IDHS regional managers that the pilot relied on to help supervise and monitor the enrollment staff.

Enrollment staff struggled to balance their regular responsibilities with the new pilot recruitment enrollment responsibilities, and there was consistent turnover among this group, which required ongoing pilot training. Staff turnover, coupled with the challenges staff faced in matching individuals to services and service providers, led administrators to suggest that, in retrospect, it might have been better to have hired workforce development staff to conduct recruitment and enrollment, or to have provided more substantial training to have better prepared the IDHS staff for the additional workload required by the pilot.

Many staff reported that the initial training before the beginning of pilot enrollment seemed too heavily focused on using WorkNet, or on how to implement pilot enrollment or EPIC services using the WorkNet system, rather than on how to deliver the actual services or on SNAP E&T policy and procedures. All staff received additional and ongoing training through webinars, especially as the pilot evolved, which required updates to WorkNet. Many staff said they would have liked more in-person training, a sentiment that was echoed in the results of a survey that DCEO fielded to staff, which led to additional in-person training sessions. For example, enrollment staff received additional training on matching individuals to the best-fit occupational skills training programs and services providers. EPIC service provider staff also later received training on EPIC services such as case management training (how to serve hard-to-serve customers or customers with barriers) to help create some consistency of services across the providers. All staff were also provided with training on how to keep individuals engaged in EPIC services and reengage them.

7. Performance management and reporting

As noted elsewhere, WorkNet was a comprehensive MIS that was used to capture individual-level and aggregate-level data from the enrollment process through to EPIC exit. Staff used WorkNet to monitor individuals' progress, compliance among mandatory SNAP E&T work registrants, and EPIC service providers' performance. Staff also used WorkNet to communicate with each other. EPIC service provider staff were expected to enter and update individual-level data, including all EPIC group member service participation information. WorkNet reports were then used to help identify drop-off points, such as orientation no-shows. In addition, preprogrammed WorkNet reports on service participation and completion were used for monitoring purposes, including monitoring for noncompliance.

Although WorkNet was generally viewed as very helpful—many staff reported that it contained a great deal of information about EPIC group members, and that it was helpful that staff from the various partners and providers involved in the pilot also had access to that information—staff also reported some issues and challenges. As noted previously, when the pilot began enrollment, WorkNet still needed additional updates and changes, and it continued to undergo modifications throughout the pilot, mostly to account for policy and procedure updates. Also, though extensive training was provided to staff on how to use WorkNet, including on an ongoing basis, some staff reported that keeping up with the changes in the system was challenging. In addition, many staff reported that it was very time-consuming to enter all of the required information and it diverted them from serving individuals, especially because they needed to enter data into multiple

systems; in addition to WorkNet, staff usually needed to document information in other IDHS or CBO systems.[15]

D. Key implementation analysis findings

Key findings from the implementation analysis are summarized below.

- **Using existing IDHS staff for recruitment and enrollment led to early and ongoing challenges.** The pilot added responsibilities for IDHS staff; IDHS pilot recruitment and enrollment staff had concerns about workload and about being understaffed, which contributed to a slow start to enrollment. In addition, the use of staff who were initially unfamiliar with the SNAP E&T program as well as with the various EPIC services and service provider expectations and requirements contributed to an ongoing central challenge: how to best match individuals to particular occupational skills training programs and service providers (especially in Cook County).
- **The originally proposed pilot enrollment design was constrained by the evaluation.** Evaluation concerns with providing individuals who could end up in the control group with too much service option information before random assignment put limitations on the thoroughness of the planned up-front information dissemination. In addition, more extensive assessments, for example, including the TABE, likely would have helped improve the matches between individuals and the occupational skills training programs and service providers. Instead, more rigorous screening and assessment did not occur until after individuals were randomly assigned to the EPIC group and referred to an EPIC service provider.
- **The pilot was flexible and responsive to challenges.** Administrators were responsive to recruitment and enrollment issues and changed and improved procedures over time in order to address challenges and unintended consequences. For example, administrators increased the number of enrollment offices, removed ineffective and time-consuming assessments, and overall altered the enrollment process following the beginning of pilot enrollment to improve pilot operations. This resulted in the pilot exceeding enrollment targets and mitigating other issues.
- **WorkNet facilitated collaboration and communication.** WorkNet was a robust and comprehensive MIS that helped facilitate implementation of pilot enrollment and EPIC service delivery. WorkNet allowed for centralized and accessible means of collaboration and communication for all pilot staff and facilitated collaboration around engaging and serving individuals as well as monitoring participation and executing noncompliance sanctions.
- **EPIC's original, predefined service models did not meet the needs of all EPIC group members, and so EPIC evolved.** The pilot design included three EPIC service model pathways, but these pathways became less prescriptive as EPIC evolved. Rather than the enrollment staff definitively identifying each person's service model pathway before random assignment, service pathways were determined by the service providers after more rigorous

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

assessments. As a result, some individuals were served outside the service models entirely. For example, though it was not initially an intended pathway, EPIC also assisted individuals with finding immediate employment rather than first participating in occupational skills training and education services, for those who wanted immediate employment or could not afford to forgo employment while participating in time-intensive occupational skills training programs.

III. PARTICIPATION ANALYSIS

Chapter II described the potential services available to the EPIC group, and this chapter presents findings on the services individuals actually received. The chapter describes overall engagement in services among individuals in the EPIC group, as well as the types of activities in which they engaged, the order in which they typically proceeded through activities, and how long they spent in activities and EPIC overall. The chapter also provides details about the level and type of support services and the intensity of case management EPIC group members received, and the level and timing of exits from EPIC.

All of the findings in this chapter are based on administrative service use data recorded in the Illinois WorkNet database by IDHS staff and by CBO-based EPIC career navigators. Data in WorkNet start with the collection of individuals' occupational skills training type and provider preferences shortly before random assignment and continue through each individual's completion of EPIC services or EPIC exit.

For this report, we analyzed engagement in services over a 12-month period following random assignment for each individual randomly assigned into the EPIC group between March 2016 (when pilot enrollment began) and September 2017 (when pilot enrollment ended). The final report will include analysis of the entire period in which these individuals could have been engaged in services (through February 2019).

In Section A of this chapter, we provide information about overall engagement and activities for EPIC group members. In Section B, we discuss participation in occupational skills training, education, and work-based learning. We provide information about the support services individuals received in Section C, discuss the case management services received in Section D, and describe exits from EPIC and the timing of those exits in Section E. Additional data on the characteristics of those who completed or did not complete activities and on engagement and service receipt by subgroup are included in Appendix D.

Key findings:

- After random assignment, 69 percent of EPIC group members engaged in EPIC, meaning that they completed the first step in EPIC by attending a program orientation at a CBO.
- About 64 percent of EPIC group members subsequently participated in employment and training-related activities. They received assistance in looking for work (job search), attended job search training workshops, received instruction in adult basic education or preparation for a high school equivalency certificate, enrolled in short-term occupational skills training, or began work-based learning. Some EPIC group members also received post-employment job retention services, primarily counseling by career navigators.
- Consistent with the EPIC program design, a relatively large proportion of EPIC group members (43 percent) attended occupational skills training or, less often, post-secondary education (14 percent). In addition, 11 percent participated in basic education. Half of the individuals who started occupational skills training completed it, but less than one-third of

the individuals who started basic or post-secondary education completed it. Nineteen percent of EPIC group members received a credential or certification.

- More than half (54 percent) of EPIC group members received at least one support service, most often to defray the cost of transportation to and from EPIC activities or employment. With few exceptions, EPIC did not provide emergency assistance for food, clothing, or eyeglasses, or to pay rent or utility bills.
- Nearly all EPIC group members were contacted by their EPIC career navigator at least once. Overall, the average number of contacts per person during the 12 months following random assignment was 12.
- Nearly three-fourths of EPIC group members exited EPIC within their first year. On average, EPIC group members engaged in EPIC for about three months.

A. Engagement in EPIC

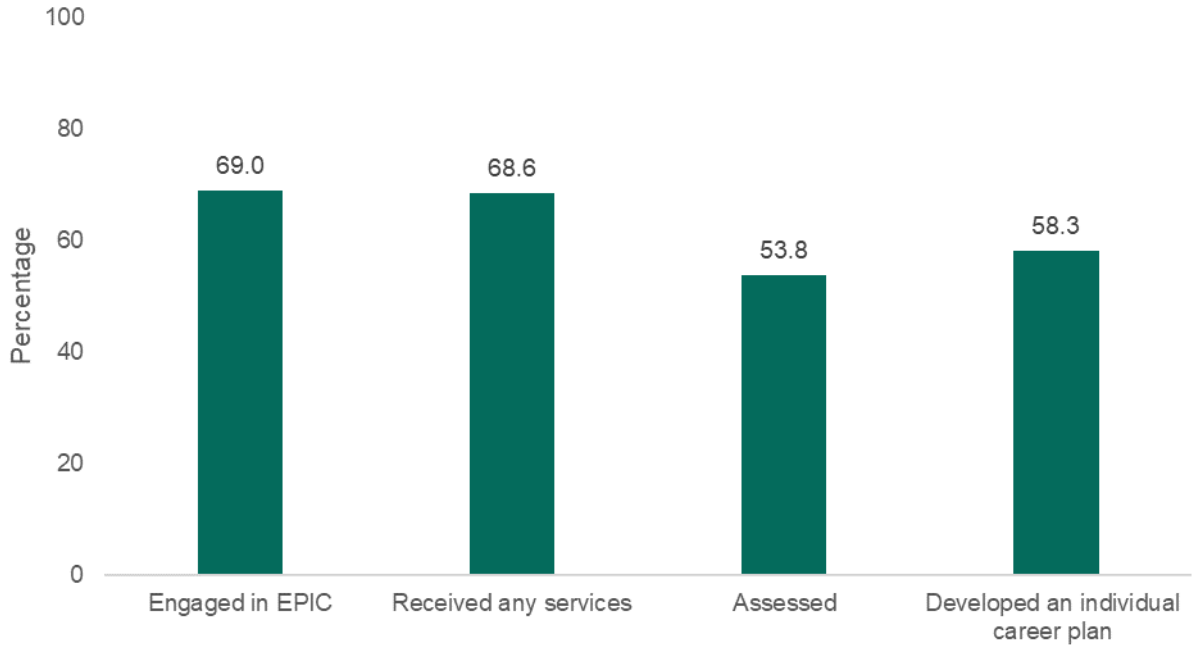
Immediately following random assignment, IDHS staff scheduled EPIC group members for their first appointment with an EPIC service provider (CBO). During their first meeting at the CBO, EPIC group members typically received an orientation to EPIC's services and expectations, underwent additional assessments, and worked with their career navigator to complete an ISTEP. Then, they were referred to a short-term occupational skills training program that matched their skills and career interests, if available; otherwise, they were assigned to basic education, work-based training, or job search assistance.

The remainder of this section describes engagement in EPIC overall, as well as participation in specific activities offered to EPIC group members.

1. Overall engagement in EPIC

Most EPIC group members (69 percent) engaged in EPIC during the first year following enrollment, meaning that they at least attended an EPIC orientation at a CBO, received case management services, completed one or more program assessments, completed an ISTEP, received support services, or participated in EPIC employment and training-related activities (Exhibit III.1). About 31 percent of EPIC group members never attended orientation at a CBO, and thereby did not engage in EPIC. To understand whether there were any differences in the types of individuals who did and did not engage in services or complete assessments and an ISTEP, we compared the characteristics of these two groups (age, gender, race and ethnicity, education, employment status, and presence of children in the household) at the time of random assignment. Findings are presented in Appendix Table D.7.

Exhibit III.1. Percentage of individuals in EPIC group who engaged in EPIC and intake services



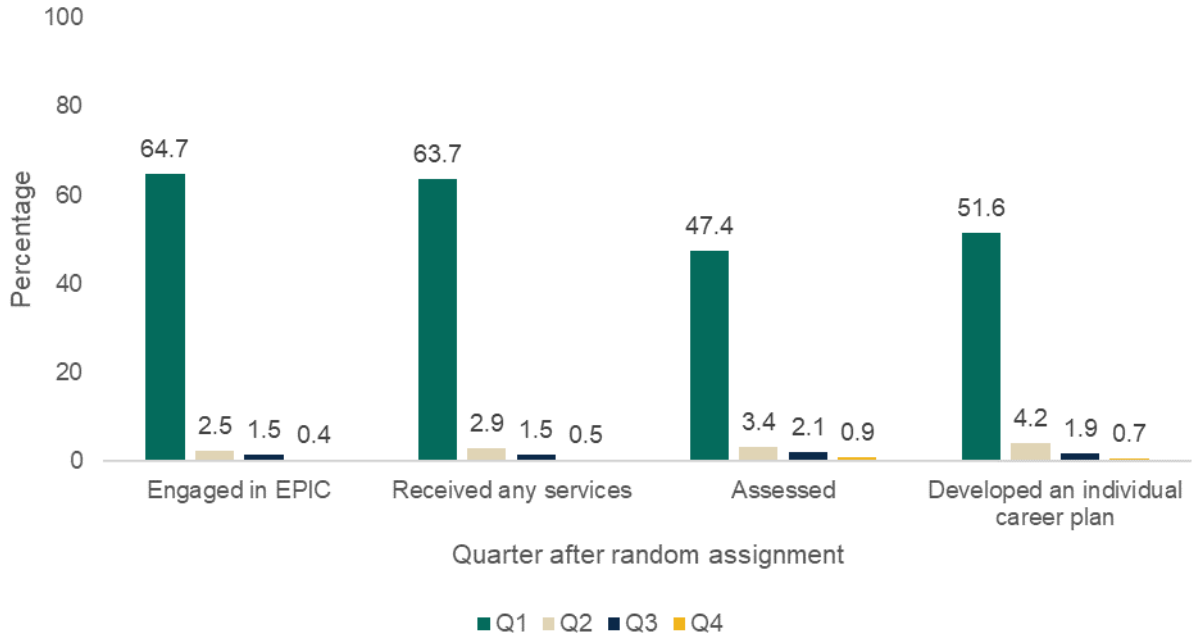
Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

Note: "Engaged in EPIC" measures any drop off between random assignment and first contact with EPIC staff related to services, including attendance at orientations, meetings with case managers, receipt of support services, receipt of skills or needs assessments, or participation in an education, training, or employment activity. "Received any services" measures engagement in activities, including assessments, ISTEP, and education, training, or employment activities; the measure does not include orientations, case management, and support services because individuals often engaged once to meet with a case manager or get a support service, but then did not return for more meaningful activities and services. Estimates cover the 12 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 2,504 EPIC group members.

During orientation at the CBO and often on subsequent days, career navigators met with EPIC group members to prepare them for participation in employment-related activities. During this initial phase of the program, about 54 percent of EPIC group members underwent assessments (gauging their math aptitude, career interests, and barriers to employment), and a slightly larger proportion (58 percent) worked with their career navigator to complete an ISTEP.

Length and timing of engagement. Following orientation and assessments at a CBO, EPIC group members could potentially start a wide range of pre-employment activities, depending on their career interests, skills, and work experience. As Appendix Table D.2 shows, the average duration of engagement for EPIC group members was fairly short: a total of about 3 months (88 days) among all EPIC group members and just over 4 months (128 days) for members who engaged in EPIC. Their engagement in EPIC took place during 3 to 4 months of follow-up (not shown). Nearly all EPIC group members began participating within the first quarter after their random assignment (Exhibit III.2), and few additional individuals started services during subsequent quarters.

Exhibit III.2. Percentage of EPIC group members who started engagement by quarter after random assignment



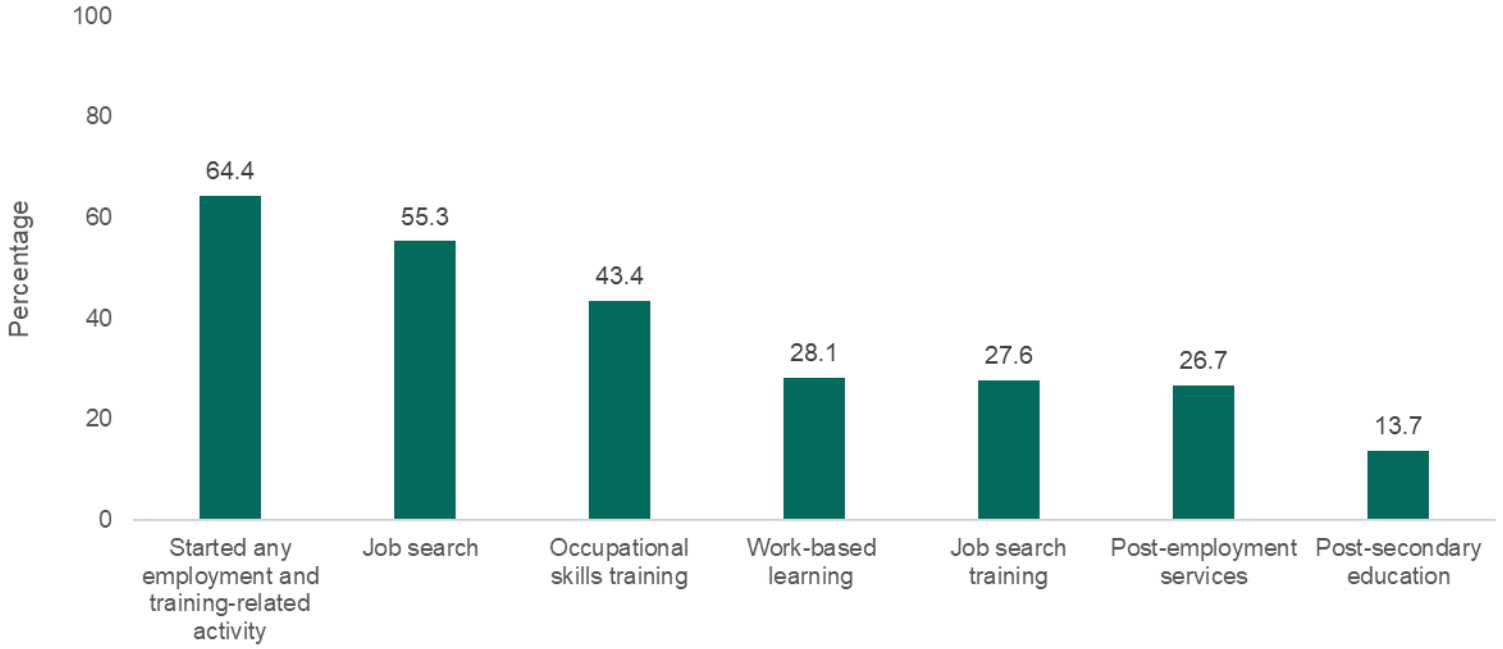
Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

Note: "Engaged in EPIC" measures any drop off between random assignment and first contact with EPIC staff related to services, including attendance at orientations, meetings with case managers, receipt of support services, receipt of skills or needs assessments, or participation in an education, training, or employment activity. "Received any services" measures engagement in activities, including assessments, ISTEP, and education, training, or employment activities; the measure does not include orientations, case management, and support services because individuals often engaged once to meet with a case manager or get a support service, but then did not return for more meaningful activities and services. Estimates cover the 12 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 2,504 EPIC group members.

2. Engagement in activities

Sixty-four percent of EPIC group members ultimately started an employment and training-related activity following orientation and assessments (Exhibit III.3; this does not include receiving a support service or case management). Such individuals – those who "received any services" – are the EPIC group members with the greatest likelihood of experiencing the benefits of EPIC services and financial supports.

Exhibit III.3. Percentage of individuals in the EPIC group who started activities



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

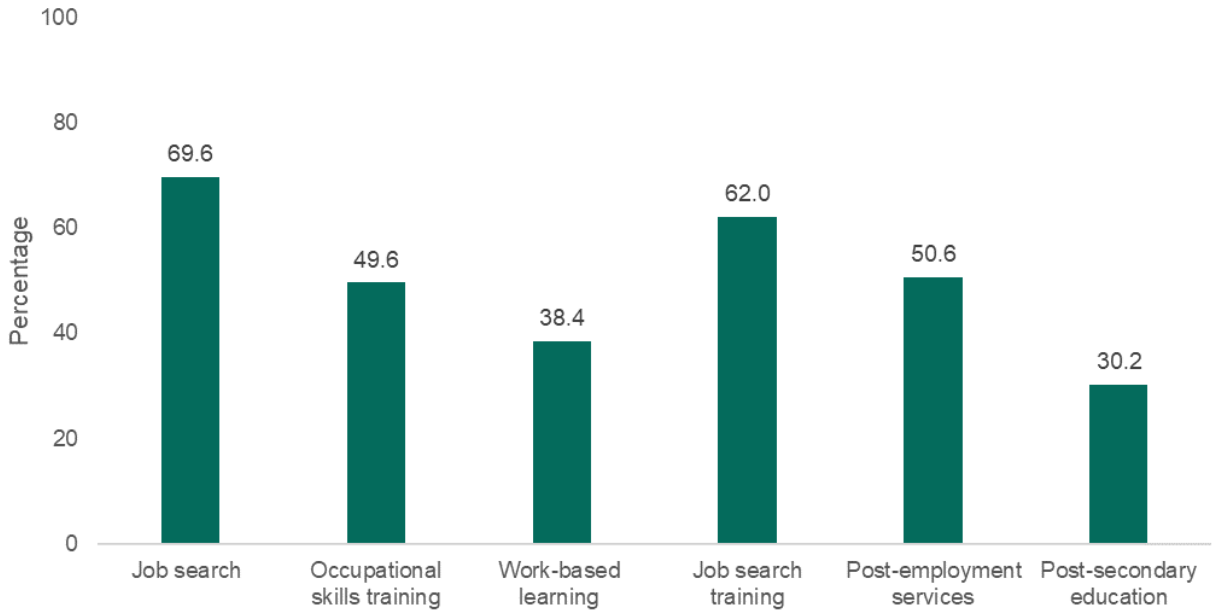
Note: Estimates cover the 12 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 2,504 EPIC group members.

EPIC administrators originally designed EPIC to include unique sequences of activities for individuals with different levels of basic skills, work experience, and barriers to employment. Later, as administrators considered how the first cohorts of EPIC group members reacted to the service offerings, administrators adopted a more flexible approach to referring individuals to available services. As Exhibit III.1 and Appendix Tables D.1 and D.2 show, EPIC group members did in fact take different pathways through EPIC. For instance, as discussed above, all three EPIC service models were intended to include occupational skills training as a first or second activity, and none were intended to include job search activities as a first or second activity. In contrast to these intended sequences, EPIC group members most often started job search assistance activities – either job search training (28 percent) or job search (55 percent)—out of all possible activities.[16] Narrowing down to the individuals who participated in only one activity, EPIC group members most often participated in job search, while those who participated in two or more activities most often participated in job search after starting another activity. Nonetheless, relatively large proportions of EPIC group members also participated in some type of education or training program – either as their only activity in EPIC or in combination with other activities. Consistent with the EPIC program model, occupational skills training had the highest level of participation (43 percent) among all education and training activities. About 14 percent of the EPIC group attended at least one post-secondary education class (for college credit) and about 11 percent of EPIC group members received instruction in adult basic education, high school equivalency preparation, or English as a Second Language. EPIC also offered opportunities to participate in one of several types of work-based learning, including on-the-job training and paid and unpaid work experience. About 28 percent of the EPIC group entered one of these types of work-based learning arrangements during the first 12 months after random assignment. EPIC did not offer life skills training or other social service activities, although a small number of EPIC group members (about 8 percent, not shown) did receive short-term instruction in managing their personal or household finances. Finally, more than one-quarter (27 percent) of EPIC group members received post-employment services from their EPIC career navigator (Exhibit III.3).

More than 60 percent of EPIC group members who started a job search activity (job search training or job search) eventually completed it (Exhibit III.4). Completion rates for education and training activities ranged from about 30 percent for basic education and post-secondary education to 50 percent for occupational skills training. Similar proportions of EPIC group members completed their work-based learning jobs (38 percent) or post-employment services (51 percent). These rates provide a snapshot of completion at the end of the 12-month follow-up period; however, some individuals who started these activities may still have been participating and did not yet complete by the end of the 12 months. To understand whether there were differences in the types of individuals who completed and did not complete activities, we compare the characteristics of these two groups in Appendix Table D.8.

[16] The term "job search" is used to denote an activity in which the EPIC career navigator met individually with EPIC group members, provided them with counseling and job leads, and monitored their progress in seeking employment. "Job search training," in contrast, involved instruction in a group setting on preparing resumes, conducting job interviews, appropriate dressing and self-presentation, and other job-seeking skills. The term "job search activities" refers to both job search and job search training.

Exhibit III.4. Completion rates for EPIC activities, among individuals who started the activity



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

Note: Estimates cover the 12 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 2,504 EPIC group members.

Length and timing of engagement in activities. EPIC group members most often started activities during the first quarter of follow-up (Exhibit III.5). They usually stayed in these activities for about 1 or 2 months (Appendix Table D.2). As expected, EPIC group members spent the shortest time in job search activities (about 1.5 months) and slightly longer in education and training classes and work-based learning.

Exhibit III.5. Percentage of EPIC group members starting activities, by quarter

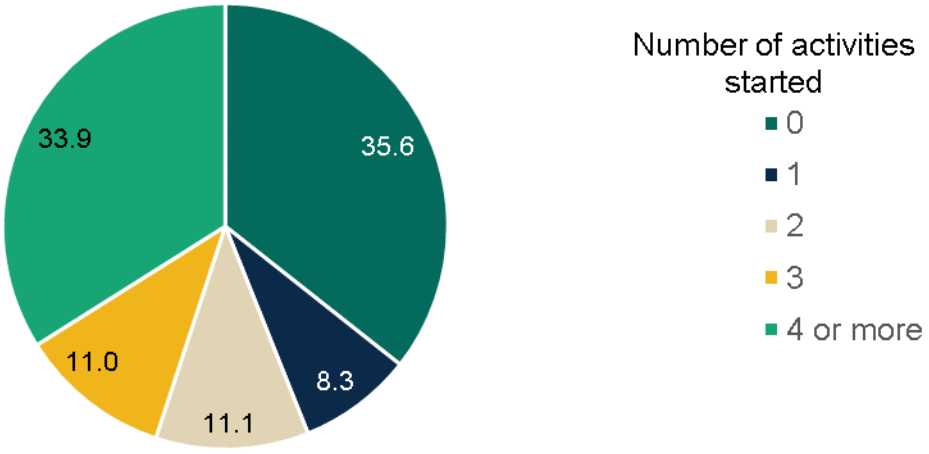
	Quarter in which individuals started to participate				
Started activity (%)	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Cumulative
Job search	46.4	5.1	2.6	1.2	55.3
Occupational skills training	29.0	8.3	4.1	2.0	43.4
Work-based learning	16.3	7.1	3.4	1.2	28.1
Jobs search training	22.8	2.5	1.5	0.7	27.6
Post-employment services	9.1	8.1	5.3	4.2	26.7
Basic education	7.6	1.5	1.1	0.4	10.7
Social services	2.5	0.4	0.2	0.2	3.4
Sample Size					**2,504**

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

Note: Estimates cover the 12 months following random assignment.

Number and order of activities. Identifying the number of activities individuals started and the sequencing of those activities is important for understanding if the service flow discussed in Chapter II worked as intended. EPIC administrators expected that many EPIC group members would work their way through EPIC by using multiple services that would help them address barriers to employment, attain skills and credentials that would increase their employability, and learn how to search for employment more effectively. To some extent, patterns of participation in EPIC followed expectations. More than half (56 percent) of the EPIC group participated in two or more activities during their first 12 months of follow-up (Exhibit III.6).

Exhibit III.6. Number of activities started by EPIC group members (percentage)



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

Note: Estimates cover the 12 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 2,504 EPIC group members.

Job search was the most commonly used service among EPIC group members who participated in only one activity (Appendix Table D.2). Among EPIC group members who started two or more activities, most either combined job search with occupational skills training or work-based learning, or attended workshops to improve their job search skills and then searched for employment under the supervision of an EPIC career navigator.

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

This section explores EPIC's skills- and credential-building activities in more detail and describes the type of education and training obtained, as well as any degrees or certifications earned through EPIC.

1. Education and occupational skills training

EPIC administrators planned to refer a large segment of the EPIC group to relatively short-term occupational skills training courses, commensurate with EPIC group members' career interests, skills, and barriers to employment. Through this strategy, EPIC administrators hoped to facilitate EPIC group members' attainment of occupational credentials that would help them find a good job. The strategy did enable credential receipt. About 19 percent of EPIC group members earned a certificate or other occupational credential during the 12-month follow-up period (Appendix Table D.9).[17] With few exceptions, EPIC did not officially support EPIC group members' attainment of academic credentials: Only 1 percent of EPIC group members attained a high school equivalency certificate during the first 12 months after random assignment and no EPIC group member attained a post-secondary degree during this period.

2. Work-based learning

EPIC administrators created many opportunities for EPIC group members to receive on-the-job training (OJT) or to work at a paid or unpaid work experience job. According to WorkNet data, jobs described as OJT, paid work experience, or work-based learning paid an average of $10 per hour in wages (not shown). EPIC group members who started an OJT or work experience job stayed employed for about two months (63 days; see Appendix Table D.2). Nearly 40 percent of EPIC group members who began OJT employment or a work experience job completed their subsidized or unpaid employment.

[17] WorkNet did not record the type of credential or the specific occupational field.

Exhibit III.7. Percentage of individuals in EPIC groups who engaged in work-based learning

Type of service	EPIC group
Started work-based learning (%)	28.1
Type of work-based learning, among those who started (%)	
Unspecified work experience[a]	58.2
Paid work experience	26.7
Unpaid work experience	24.3
On-the-job-training	38.0
Completed work-based learning (%)	10.8
Completed work-based learning, among those who started it (%)	38.4
Average number of weeks spent in work-based learning, by type of work-based learning, among those who started	
Unspecified work experience[a]	8
Paid work experience	5
Unpaid work experience	11
On-the-job-training	5
Sample size	**2,504**

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

Note: Estimates cover the 12 months following random assignment.

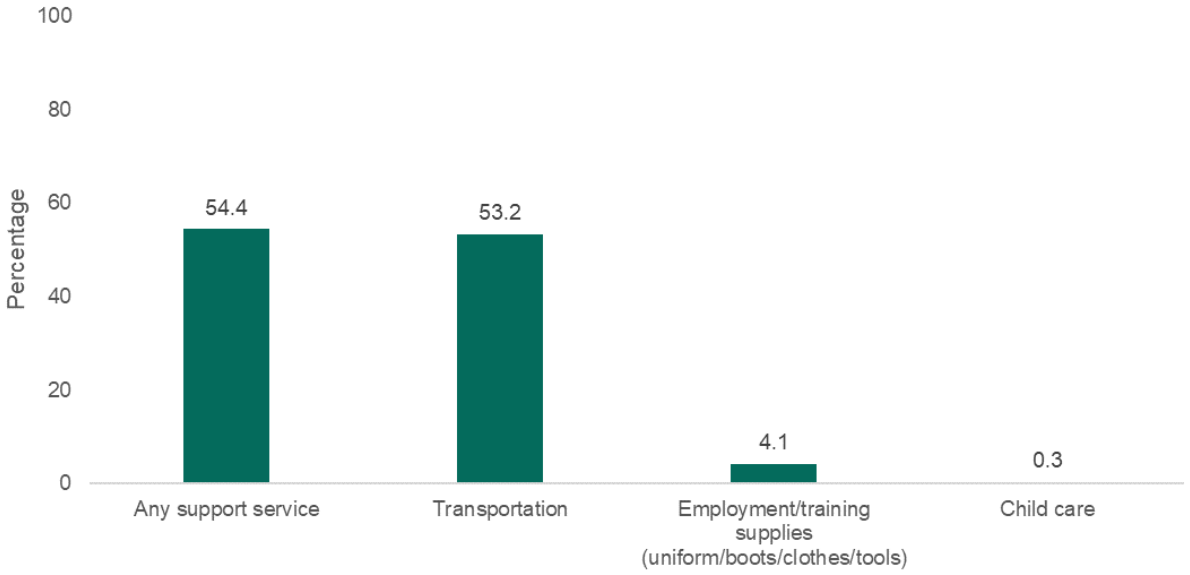
[a]Some instances of work experience were recorded without the specification of paid or unpaid.

C. Support services

EPIC group members could receive up to $1,000 in support services to help them maintain service use or employment. More than half (54 percent) of EPIC group members received at least one support service, mostly transportation assistance in the form of gas cards, public transportation cards, and reimbursements for car repair (Exhibit III.8 and Exhibit III.9).[18] With few exceptions, EPIC did not provide individuals with emergency assistance for food, clothing, housing, or other necessities. Similarly, EPIC rarely referred individuals to health care providers, substance use disorder treatment, or legal services.

[18] WorkNet did not record the amount paid to EPIC group members.

Exhibit III.8. Percentage of individuals in the EPIC group who received any support service and received each type of available support service



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

Note: Estimates cover the 12 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 2,504 EPIC group members.

Exhibit III.9. Among individuals in the EPIC group who received a support service, percentage received by type and amount of support

Type of service	EPIC group
Received support service, by type (%)	
Transportation	97.7
Child care	0.5
Employment/training supplies (uniform/boots/clothes/tools)	7.6
Sample size	**1,363**

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

D. Case management

EPIC career navigators worked proactively to attempt to maintain contact with EPIC group members and to encourage them to attend EPIC activities and scheduled check-in meetings. During the 12-month follow-up, 99 percent of EPIC group members had at least one contact with a career navigator (Exhibit III.10). The average number of contacts during this period was 12. Contact took a variety of forms. Most often, EPIC career navigators and EPIC group members met in-person at the CBO office or service provider facility (36 percent of contacts). They conversed by phone nearly as often (26 percent), but only occasionally communicated by email, text, or social media (12 percent). About 27 percent of contacts consisted of exchanges by mail of letters or forms. Not all contacts, however, reflected engagement with EPIC. Many of the contacts represented career navigators' responses to EPIC group members' missed or postponed

appointments. They also included mailed or emailed notices of non-attendance at program activities and warnings of possible termination from EPIC.

Exhibit III.10. Description of contacts with case managers among individuals in the EPIC group

Type of service	EPIC group
Any contact (%)	98.5
Average number of contacts per person	12.4
Average number of contacts per person, among those with a contact	12.6
Average number of contacts per person per month, among those with contact	1.0
Among contacts, type of contact (%)	
In person	35.7
Telephone	25.7
Electronic (email, text, social media)	11.6
Mail	26.6
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 EPIC. In some cases, this could include contact that was not direct communication (such as sending an email with appointment information or mailing documents to an individual). We excluded contacts, which consisted of leaving a phone message or sending mass mailings, where applicable. Evaluation team members reviewed and coded electronic case notes for a randomly selected subsample of EPIC group members and used these data to analyze the frequency and type of communications between EPIC group members and DHS and CBO staff. Estimates cover the 12 months following random assignment.

E. Exits

EPIC program administrators anticipated that many SNAP participants who enrolled in EPIC would lose their eligibility for assistance, and thus for EPIC services, within the first year of follow-up.[19] The administrative service use data indicate that exits from EPIC were indeed frequent. Almost three-quarters (74 percent) of EPIC group members left the program during the 12-month follow-up period (Exhibit III.11 and Exhibit III.12). About half of EPIC group members who exited the program did so during the first quarter (months 1 to 3) of follow-up. After quarter 1, exits from EPIC proceeded at a relatively steady pace, with about 10 to 16 percent of EPIC group members exiting EPIC during each succeeding quarter in year 1. The largest proportion of EPIC group members who exited were individuals who were referred to a CBO after random assignment but never attended a CBO orientation (35 percent of EPIC exiters). More than one-quarter (27 percent) of EPIC exiters were recorded as having exited due to employment, and a similar proportion were determined by IDHS or by the CBO to have become ineligible to continue engagement in EPIC.

[19] See Chapter V for the analysis of exits from SNAP participation.

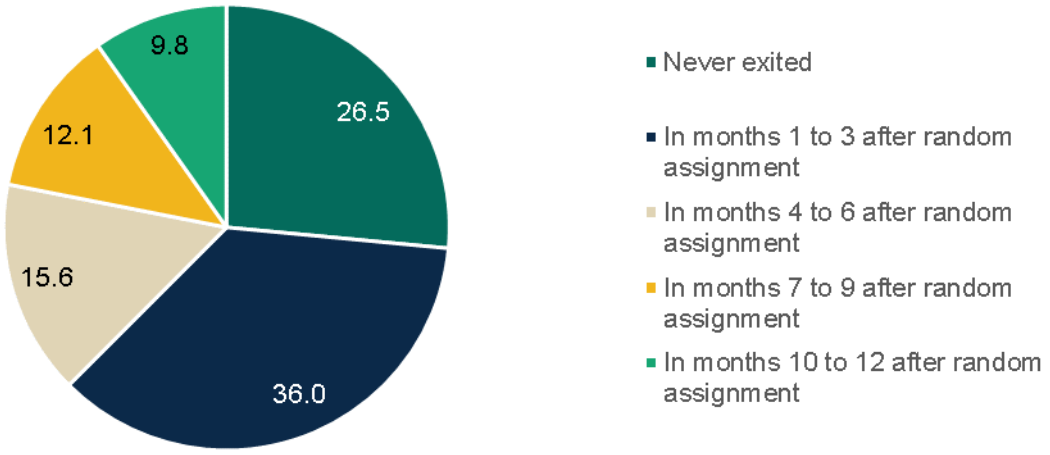
Exhibit III.11. Percentage of EPIC group members who exited, by reason

	EPIC group
Exited EPIC for any reason (%)	73.5
Reason for EPIC exit, among those who exited (%)	
Never attended orientation	35.2
Employed	26.7
Ineligible to continue	26.3
Dropped out or discontinued service	11.2
Completed the program	0.6
Terminated	0.0
Other reason	0.0
Sample size	**2,504**

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

Note: Estimates measured over the 12 months following random assignment.

Exhibit III.12. Percentage of EPIC group members who exited over time



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

Note: Estimates are measured over the 12 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 2,504 EPIC group members.

IV. DIFFERENCES IN SERVICE USE FOR EPIC AND CONTROL GROUPS

This chapter describes how engagement and service use differed between EPIC and control group members, considering participation in EPIC, existing SNAP E&T, or other services and programs available in communities. These differences provide important context for interpreting the impacts on employment, earnings, and receipt of public assistance (discussed in Chapter V). Without a meaningful difference in services between the EPIC and control groups, impacts on labor market and public assistance outcomes are unlikely to result.

The data discussed in this chapter come primarily from 12-month follow-up survey data collected from EPIC and control group members. These data describe the employment-related services and education and training activities in which respondents participated during the previous year, including type and duration.[20] The survey data capture any type of service received, regardless of whether it was provided through EPIC, existing SNAP E&T, or through providers in the community such as WIOA, community colleges, nonprofits, or other organizations.[21]

The analysis compared the receipt of services over the 12 months following random assignment across research groups. We estimated differences in service receipt by comparing regression-adjusted averages of measures across research groups. To improve the precision of the estimates, regressions controlled for the characteristics of individuals as measured at the time of random assignment. The control variables included demographic characteristics such as age, educational attainment, and number of children in the household, and economic characteristics such as employment status and earnings.[22] We used t-tests to determine whether service receipt differences across research groups were statistically significant. Statistical significance is a measure of how confident we are that an estimate represents a true difference in service receipt

[20] The activities measured in the survey included (1) job search assistance or job search training and (2) education and occupational skills training. Job search assistance or job search training activities included those that helped individuals with resume writing, interviewing, and networking. Education and occupational skills training activities included education in the form of adult basic education or 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.

[21] Supplementary tables based on the administrative service use data tracked by IDHS staff are provided in Appendix E. Because the administrative service use data capture services provided through EPIC and through the existing SNAP E&T program, but do not measure receipt of services provided in the community, these data are less useful than the survey data in assessing the contrast in the service receipt between research groups. In some cases, the administrative service use data were missing or incomplete for control group members, leading to inconsistencies between the EPIC and control groups in the type and quality of data obtained. In contrast, the survey data asked all respondents the same set of questions, fostering consistency in measurement of service receipt across research groups.

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

between research groups and did not arise purely by chance. We also conducted F-tests to assess research group differences in service receipt across subgroups.[23]

In presenting findings, we begin with a description of differences between the research groups in the receipt of overall services, including job search training, general job skills training,[24] occupational skills training, education, and work-based learning activities (Section A). We then examine differences between research groups in the rates of completion of activities and the typical amount of time spent in them (Section B), in the receipt of case management and support services (Section C), and in sanction rates and durations (Section D). Additional discussion of variations in these differences across a select number of subgroups is presented in Appendix E.

Key findings:

- Relative to the control group, the EPIC group was more likely to participate in job search training activities or education and training during the 12-month follow-up period—by 18 percentage points. These differences were observed despite control group members having high rates of participation in job search assistance and training activities and programs.
- The EPIC group had higher rates of participation than the control group in almost all types of activities: Differences between the EPIC and control groups were largest for participation in job search assistance and training activities (16 percentage point difference), but were also apparent for participation in occupational skills training, general job skills training, and education (14, 13, and 6 percentage point differences, respectively). EPIC group members also were more likely than control group members to complete activities or programs (13 percentage points) and were more likely than control group members–by 10 percentage points–to earn an occupational training certificate or license.
- EPIC group members were more likely than control group members to receive case management services (12 percentage point difference). They also were more likely to receive support services (by 10 percentage points), primarily for transportation assistance, and for clothes, uniforms, tools, and other supplies and equipment.
- EPIC group members were more likely than control group members to be sanctioned at some point during the 12-month follow-up period for noncompliance with the SNAP E&T work requirement (4 percentage point difference). This difference was apparent in the second, third, and fourth quarters following random assignment.

A. Differences between research groups in the receipt of services overall

As described in Chapter II, EPIC group members' first step in EPIC was to attend an orientation and assessment at the CBO to which they had been assigned for occupational skills training and other services. As a result of assessments, EPIC service provider staff could assign participants,

[23] When we calculated differences in the distributions and averages for research groups, observations were weighted to ensure that the differences were representative of all individuals enrolled in the pilot in Illinois. The weights were constructed to reflect the random assignment process, the survey administration design, and survey nonresponse in survey data.

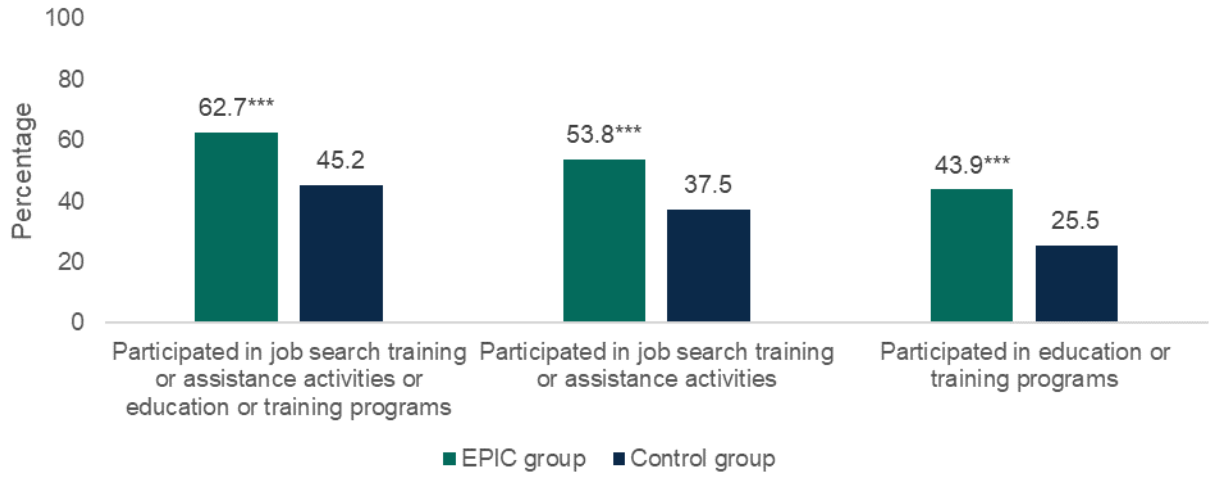
[24] Such training includes job readiness training.

as needed, to adult basic education, occupational skills training, job readiness training, job search activities, or other activities. Illinois' existing SNAP E&T program also offered services to the control group through CBOs. Similar to EPIC, these services consisted primarily of training but, in contrast, the number of training slots and the types of training available were limited and, in general, funding was much lower than in EPIC. Members of both groups could receive support services, to assist with transportation and provide work-related items.

For most individuals enrolled in the pilot—in both the EPIC and control groups—participation in either EPIC or existing SNAP E&T was mandatory, as long as existing SNAP E&T was offered in their county of residence and program slots were available. Cook County, which includes Chicago, enrolled the majority of individuals into the pilot, and the county operated an existing SNAP E&T program that primarily served mandatory SNAP E&T work registrants. As a result, the majority of EPIC and control group members were required to register for work and to participate in SNAP E&T services if they were assigned to them, as well as meet other requirements, in order to be eligible for continued receipt of SNAP benefits.

The survey data suggest that there was a sizeable difference between the two groups in levels of participation in any services and activities: 63 percent of EPIC group members participated in any service or activity compared with 45 percent of control group members (18 percentage point difference; Exhibit IV.1). The EPIC group was more likely than the control group to participate in job search training or assistance activities (16 percentage point difference) and participate in an education or training program (19 percentage point difference).

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



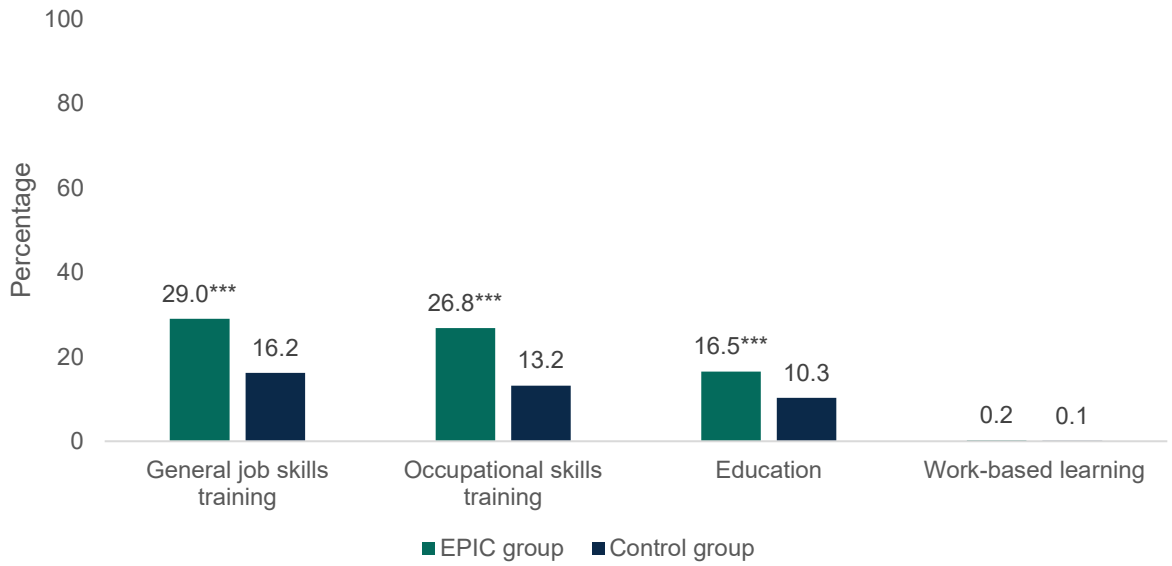
Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12-month survey, weighted data.

Note: Estimates measured over the 12 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 1,237 EPIC group members and 1,194 control group members who were surveyed.

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

Regarding the specific types of education or training programs in which individuals participated, shown in Exhibit IV.2, differences in service use between EPIC and control group members were largest for occupational skills training programs (14 percentage point difference). Research group differences also were apparent for participation in general job skills training programs (13 percentage point difference) and in education programs (6 percentage point difference). EPIC group members also were more likely than control group members to have completed post-enrollment career assessment tests (11 percentage point difference; Appendix Table E.2).

Exhibit IV.2. Participation in specific EPIC, existing SNAP E&T, or community-offered services



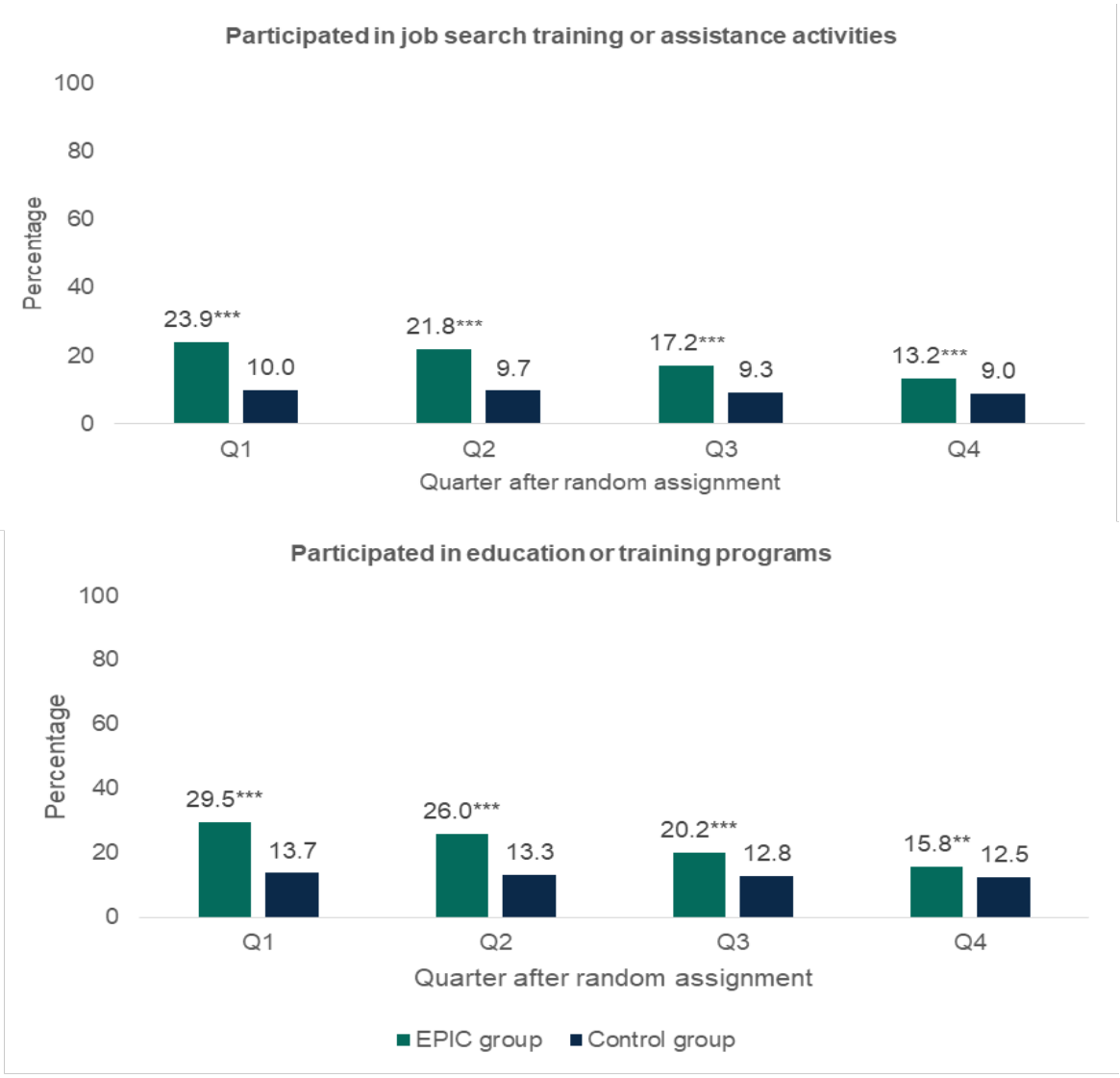
Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12-month survey, weighted data.

Note: Estimates measured over the 12 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 1,237 EPIC group members and 1,194 control group members who were surveyed.

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

As shown in Exhibit IV.3, EPIC group members' participation in job search training or assistance and in education and training programs declined over the course of the follow-up period, while control group members' participation in such activities and programs was lower overall, but remained fairly constant over time. As a result, by the last quarter of the follow-up period, differences between the two groups in terms of participation in job search training or assistance, education, and training were smaller.

Exhibit IV.3. Time trends in participation in EPIC, existing SNAP E&T, or community-offered services



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

Note: Estimates measured over the 12 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 1,237 EPIC group members and 1,194 control group members who were surveyed.

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

B. Differences between research groups in program and activity completion

In addition to the EPIC group being more likely to start education and training, relative to the control group, the EPIC group also had higher completion rates for education and training programs or activities.

Exhibit IV.4 presents program and activity completion estimates based on survey data. In addition, it shows the amount of time individuals spent in programs and activities and their receipt of credentials.

Exhibit IV.4. Length of stay, completion, and credential receipt in EPIC, existing SNAP E&T, or community-offered services

	EPIC group	Control group	Difference
Mean length of time spent in all activities and programs (months)	2.1	1.3	0.9***
Mean number of hours per week spent in program	8.0	4.1	4.0***
Percentage of individuals who are still in the program as of the survey interview date (%)			
All activities	11.8	8.7	3.1**
Programs with general job skills training	5.8	4.1	1.7*
Programs with occupational skills training	7.5	3.9	3.6***
Programs with education	5.3	4.4	0.9
Programs with work-based learning	0.1	0.0	0.1
Percentage who completed the program (%)			
All activities	25.5	13.1	12.5***
Programs with general job skills training	17.3	8.8	8.5***
Programs with occupational skills training	15.8	7.2	8.6***
Programs with education	7.5	4.8	2.7**
Programs with work-based learning	0.1	0.1	0.0
Type of certificate or degree/diploma received (%)			
Participation/attendance	2.8	1.4	1.4**
Adult basic education	0.1	0.0	0.1
High school diploma / GED	1.1	0.6	0.5
Associate's degree	0.0	0.4	-0.4***
Bachelor's degree	0.0	0.1	-0.1
English proficiency certification or TOEFL	0.1	0.0	0.1*
Occupational certificate or license	16.1	6.2	10.0***
Other	2.0	0.3	1.7***
Sample size	**1,237**	**1,194**	

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

Note: Estimates measured over the 12 months following random assignment.

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

EPIC group members spent an average of two months in services during the 12-month follow-up period—one month longer than control group members spent (Exhibit IV.7). EPIC group

members also spent more hours per week in services and activities than control group members: an average of 8 hours per week compared with an average of 4 hours per week for control group participants. Few individuals—12 percent of all EPIC group members and 9 percent of all control group members – reported that they were still in a program at the time they completed the 12-month follow-up survey. EPIC group members most commonly were still in occupational skills training, as reported by 8 percent; control group members most commonly were still in general job skills training, occupational skills training, or education, as reported by 4 percent.

Overall, 26 percent of EPIC group members reported that they completed programs that they started compared with 13 percent of control group members—a difference of 13 percentage points. Among both EPIC and control group members, completions were most commonly reported for programs that included general job skills training or occupational skills training.

Most commonly, individuals who completed programs received an occupational skills certificate or license. Sixteen percent of EPIC group members obtained an occupational skills certificate or license compared with six percent of control group members. There were no statistically significant EPIC-control group differences in the proportion of individuals who obtained a GED.

Among individuals who started programs, a little over half of individuals in both research groups completed them (Appendix Table E.6).[25] Among individuals who completed programs, almost half of EPIC group members received a credential after completing, while about a third of control group member completers did so.

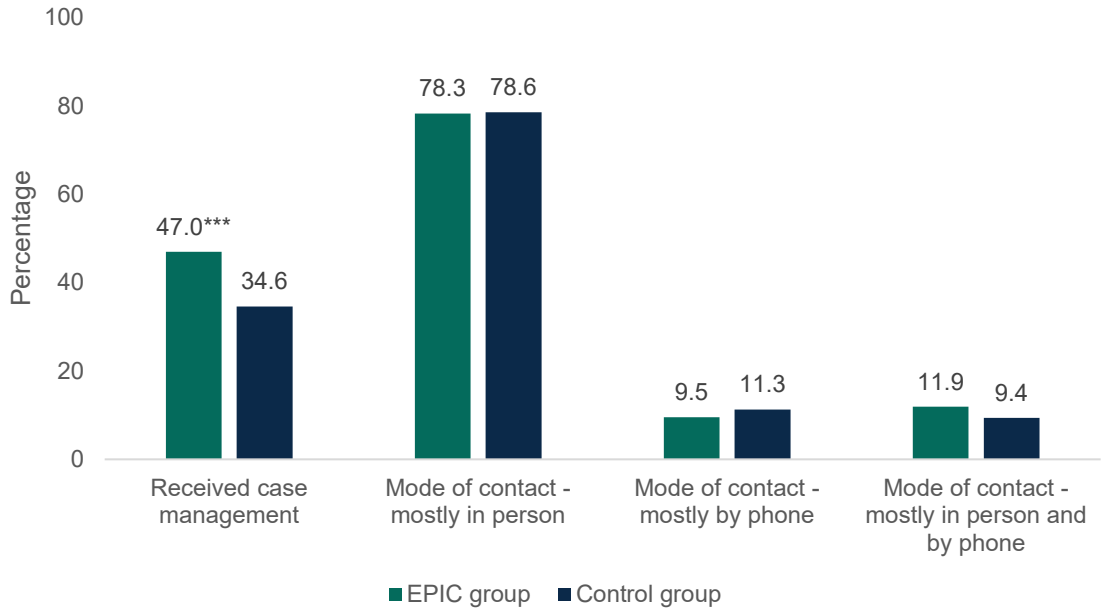
C. Differences between research groups in the receipt of case management and support services

Survey data suggest that contact between individuals in the pilot and career navigators, case managers, or employment professionals was higher among EPIC group members than among control group members. In addition, EPIC group members were more likely than control group members to receive support services, particularly transportation assistance.

EPIC group members were more likely than control group members to receive career counseling or one-on-one assistance from an employment professional or case manager and to complete career assessment tests. Forty-seven percent of EPIC group members reported receiving such counseling or one-on-one assistance compared with almost 35 percent of control group members (Exhibit IV.5). In addition, among those who had any contacts with such professionals, the number of contacts was higher among EPIC group members: EPIC group members with any contacts had an average of 13 contacts over the 12-month follow-up period, while control group members with any contacts had an average of 8 (Appendix Table E.8). The most frequent mode of contact, however, was generally the same for EPIC and control group members, with the vast majority of contact taking place in person for both groups.

[25] Appendix Table E.6 shows nonexperimental comparisons because the characteristics of participants and activity completers likely differed across the research groups.

Exhibit IV.5. Receipt of case management through EPIC existing SNAP E&T, or community-offered programs



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

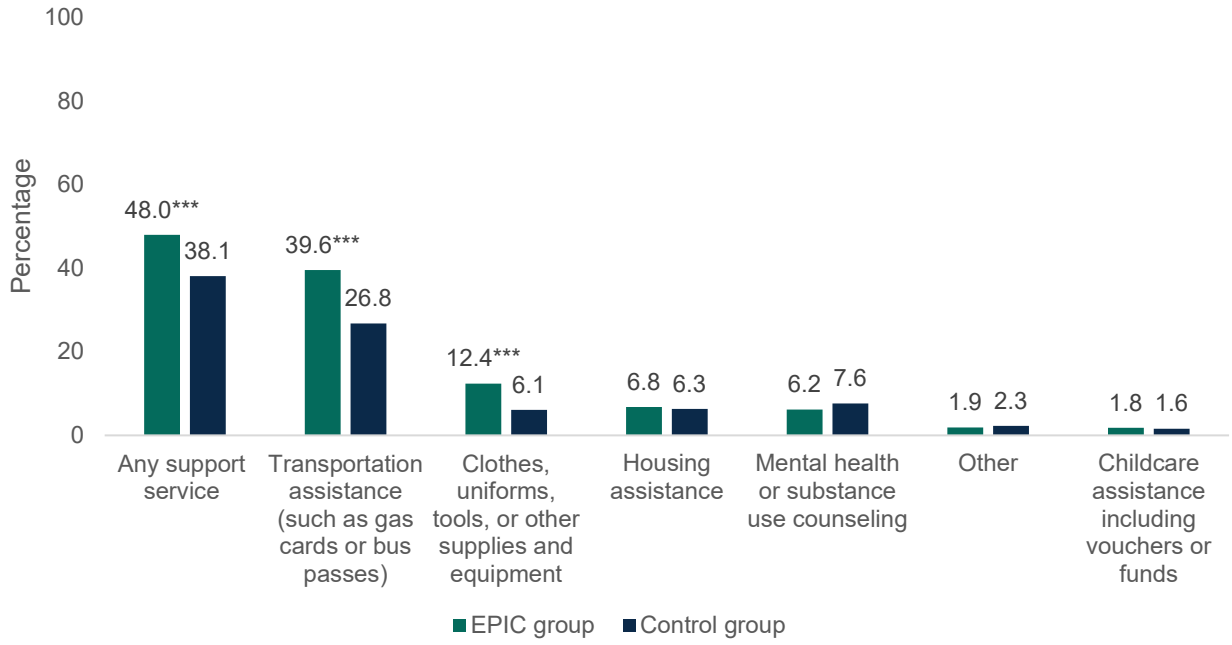
Note: Estimates measured over the 12 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 1,237 EPIC group members and 1,194 control group members who were surveyed.

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

EPIC group members also were more likely than control group members to receive support services. Forty-eight percent of EPIC group members received a support service during the 12-month follow-up period compared with 38 percent of control group members (Exhibit IV.6). Differences were concentrated in transportation assistance, such as gas cards or bus passes – EPIC group members' receipt of such assistance was 13 percentage points higher than such receipt among control group members – and in assistance with clothes, uniforms, tools, or other supplies and equipment (6 percentage point difference). Receipt of housing or child care assistance was not common among EPIC group members, 7 percent received housing help and 2 percent received help with child care, and were similar to receipt among control group members.

Similar percentages of EPIC and control group members (around six percent) reported receiving mental health or substance use counseling during the follow-up period.

Exhibit IV.6. Receipt of support services through EPIC, existing SNAP E&T, or community-offered programs



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

Note: Estimates measured over the 12 months following random assignment. Estimates are based ondata from 1,237 EPIC group members and 1,194 control group members who were surveyed.

Transportation assisstance includes supports such as gas cards or bus passes. Childcare assistance includes vouchers or funds. "Other" included assistance with payment of utilities such as electricity, phone, heat, or gas; food assistance; and assistance with medical care.

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

D. Differences between research groups in sanctions for noncompliance

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

were more likely to view EPIC services as engaging and valuable than control group members viewed their existing SNAP E&T services, participation could be more consistent in the EPIC group than in the control group, resulting in fewer sanctions in the EPIC group.

Data from the SNAP benefits administrative files indicate that EPIC group members were more likely than control group members to be sanctioned (not shown in exhibit). Eleven percent of EPIC group members and seven percent of control group members were sanctioned at some point during the 12-month follow-up period (a statistically significant four percentage point difference). This difference was found in the second, third, and fourth quarters following random assignment (statistically significant differences of two, three, and three percentage points, respectively); no difference was apparent in the first quarter following random assignment.

V. IMPACTS ON EMPLOYMENT, EARNINGS, RECEIPT OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE, AND WELL-BEING OUTCOMES

This chapter focuses on whether EPIC was able to increase the likelihood that SNAP participants would obtain jobs that lead to economic self-sufficiency through increasing their income levels and reducing their need for nutrition assistance benefits compared to what would have happened in the absence of EPIC. Specifically, this chapter examines whether the generally higher rates of engagement and service receipt among individuals in EPIC, as described in Chapter IV, translated into impacts on employment, earnings, and receipt of public assistance as well as job characteristics, food security, health, well-being, and housing.

To estimate how EPIC affected individuals' outcomes, we compared the average outcomes of the EPIC group and control group over the 12 months following random assignment. Because, on average, EPIC and control group members' baseline characteristics were the same at the time of random assignment (see 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 sources of data to measure outcomes: (1) State UI wage records, (2) SNAP administrative data, and (3) 12-month follow-up survey data. UI wage records provided information on quarterly earnings, which were also used to construct measures of quarterly employment status. The SNAP administrative data obtained from DHS were used to measure whether individuals participated in SNAP or TANF, the amount of SNAP and TANF benefits they received, and whether they were covered by Medicaid. The survey data were used to complement the UI wage records and provide more detail on individuals' employment and earnings. The survey asked respondents whether they were employed in the time between random assignment and the survey interview date and, if so, the number of jobs they held over that period and their employment status at the time of the interview. For each job reported, the survey captured the job start date, end date (if applicable), and characteristics of the job such as hours worked per week, weekly earnings, job type, fringe benefits, and occupation. The survey was also the sole source of information on other outcomes such as self-assessed levels of food insecurity, health, well-being, and housing status.

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 by the follow-up period. For example, UI data are not subject to the recall error that is a potential problem in surveys. However, UI data do not cover all types of jobs, exclude jobs in certain industries, contain less detailed information on jobs, and are subject to other reporting errors.[26] The omissions are nontrivial, and workers in sectors with no or partial coverage in UI data comprise about 10 percent of U.S. employment (Kornfeld and Bloom 1999; Hotz and Scholz 2002). Additionally, the UI data do not cover workers who are casually employed, such as day laborers

[26] In particular, UI data 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).

or part-time helpers, and exclude most 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. The characteristics and experiences of individuals who responded to the survey may differ from those who did not respond.[27]

Further, the time periods for which data are available differ for the UI and survey data, which means that analysis samples for 12 months of follow-up are different for the two data sources. Analyzed survey data include individuals who were randomly assigned from March 2016 through September 2017, whereas analyzed UI wage records include individuals who were randomly assigned from March 2016 through March 2017. The shorter time frame for the UI data 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 the data have been reported. As a result, the specific months included in the 12-month follow-up period covered by the two data sets also differ, with the survey-based results including individuals who were randomly assigned later in the pilot's enrollment period compared with UI-based results.[28] Differences in UI-based and survey-based results also could reflect changes that occurred over time in the implementation of EPIC activities. Finally, we note that even though there are differences between the data sources, each should provide unbiased estimates of the impacts of EPIC on the outcomes they measure because the research groups were balanced along individual characteristics at the time of random assignment.

We estimated impacts on the outcomes of interest by comparing regression-adjusted averages for the research groups. To improve the precision of the estimates, regressions controlled for the characteristics of individuals as measured at the time of random assignment. The control variables included demographic characteristics such as age, educational attainment, and number of children, and economic characteristics such as employment status and earnings at baseline.[29] The analysis focused on comparing the outcomes for the EPIC group to the control group outcomes. We used t-tests to determine whether there were significant differences between the contrasted research groups that were unlikely to have occurred purely by chance. We also conducted F-tests to assess differences in impacts across subgroups.

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

[27] 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.

[28] For example, an individual who was randomly assigned in August 2017 and responded to the survey supplied information about their activities over the period of September 2017 through August 2018. Because UI data were not available after March 2018, this individual was included in the survey-based analysis, but not the UI-based analysis.

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

survey non-response bias. (We describe weight construction in greater detail in the technical supplement).

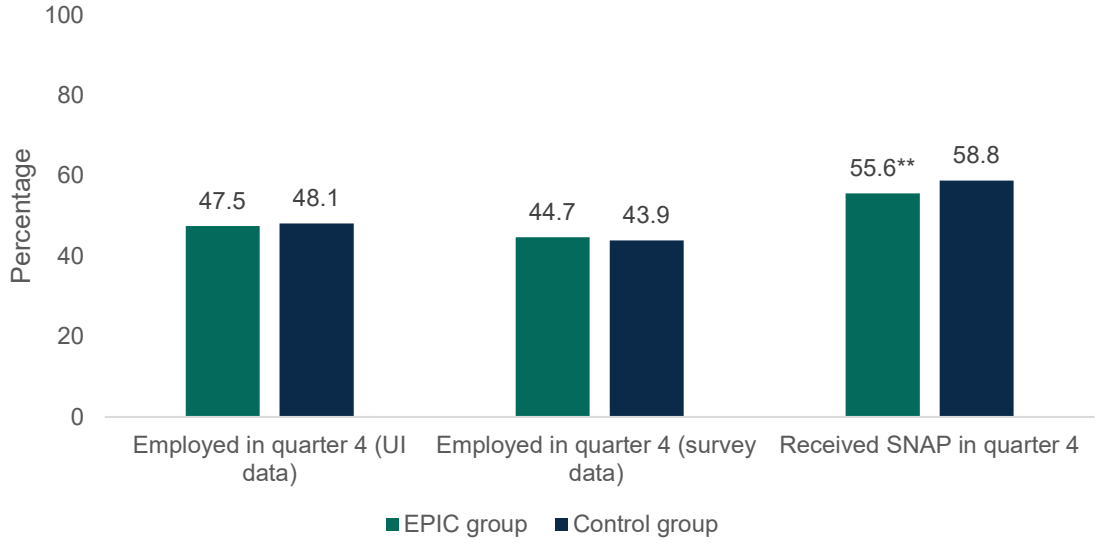
We estimated the impact of EPIC on many outcomes and across several subgroups, performing statistical tests for each. However, the likelihood that some estimates are found to be statistically significant simply by chance increases with the number of estimates tested, leading to false discovery of impacts not actually caused by EPIC. To help guard against this problem, known as multiple comparisons bias, we selected two primary (confirmatory) outcomes before analyzing the data. The primary outcomes were employment (based on both the UI and survey data) and SNAP participation—both in the fourth quarter after random assignment, the most recent observed period. The primary outcomes were defined over the final quarter of available data because many EPIC group members were expected to be engaged in occupational skills training and job readiness training in the early quarters, which could reduce their opportunity to be employed during those early quarters. Although EPIC's effect on earnings was an important outcome in the evaluation, we excluded it from the set of primary outcomes due to the lower statistical power of identifying an impact on earnings relative to employment. This reflects the large standard deviation of earnings for individuals enrolled in the pilot (and for the SNAP E&T population more broadly), which reduces the precision of the impact estimates. The estimated impacts on earnings and other outcomes and for subgroups are used to support findings for the primary outcomes by examining whether they fit within a pattern of similar impacts. We view subgroup analyses as exploratory, providing policy-relevant, but less rigorous evidence about program effects. This information can be valuable for continuous program improvement and for identifying potential hypotheses for more rigorous examination in the future.

Following a summary of key findings for this chapter, we present the impacts of EPIC on labor market outcomes (Section A) and on receipt of public assistance (Section B). We then present impacts on other outcomes, including food security, health, well-being, and housing status (Section C). Additional discussion of variations in the impacts on labor market outcomes, public assistance receipt, and food security across subgroups is presented in Appendix F. The technical supplement to this report includes detailed descriptions of the data and methodology used to estimate impacts of EPIC.

Key findings:

- In Quarter 4, EPIC did not lead to employment gains, based on either the UI data or the survey data, but did lead to a statistically significant reduction in SNAP participation (Exhibit V.1). In Quarter 4, about 48 percent of sample members in both research groups were employed based on the UI data, and about 44 percent were employed based on the survey data. EPIC group members were less likely than control group members to have participated in SNAP in Quarter 4 (56 versus 59 percent).

Exhibit V.1. Employment and SNAP participation rates in Quarter 4



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation UI wage records, weighted data, SNAP employment and training evaluation 12-month survey, weighted data, SNAP employment and training evaluation SNAP administrative data, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on UI data from 1,627 EPIC group members and 1,642 control group members, SNAP administrative data from 2,503 EPIC group members and 2,509 control group members, and survey data from 1,237 EPIC group members and 1,194 control group members.

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

- EPIC led to negative and statistically significant impacts on employment in Quarter 1 and on earnings in Quarters 1 and 2 based on the UI data. Based on the survey data, EPIC reduced employment by a statically significant amount but the difference in earnings was not statistically significant. In later quarters, the employment and earnings differences were not statistically significant based on either data source. Findings from past studies of workforce programs have shown that it can take more than a year before economic impacts begin to emerge (Card et al. 2018). Thus, data from a longer-term follow-up period will be analyzed in the final evaluation report to fully assess the effects of EPIC on labor market outcomes.
- EPIC had no effect on SNAP participation in Quarters 1 and 2. In Quarters 3 and 4, EPIC group members were less likely than control group members to have participated in SNAP. The differences in those quarters were statistically significant. Consistent with these findings, quarterly SNAP benefit amounts were lower, on average, for EPIC group members than for control group members in Quarter 4. In Quarters 1 and 3, EPIC increased TANF participation by a small but statistically significant amount. There were no impacts on Medicaid coverage throughout the follow-up period.
- EPIC did not change the rate of food insecurity but did decrease the rate of very low food security—a severe form of food insecurity—by a statistically significant amount. Around 35 percent of EPIC group members reported having very low food security compared with 41 percent of control group members.

- There were no statistically significant differences between the EPIC group and the control group for most other measures related to well-being. EPIC, however, did decrease the rate of screening positively for depression by a statistically significant amount. Around 19 percent of EPIC group members screened positively for depression compared with 23 percent of control group members.

A. Impacts of EPIC on labor market outcomes

This section presents impacts on key labor market outcomes for the EPIC group relative to the control group. Outcomes from both the UI wage records and survey are measured by quarter after random assignment and over the full first year after random assignment, starting with the quarter after the one in which random assignment occurred. Some outcomes based on the survey data are measured at the time of the survey, approximately 12 months after random assignment.[30]

1. Impacts on employment, earnings, and hours worked

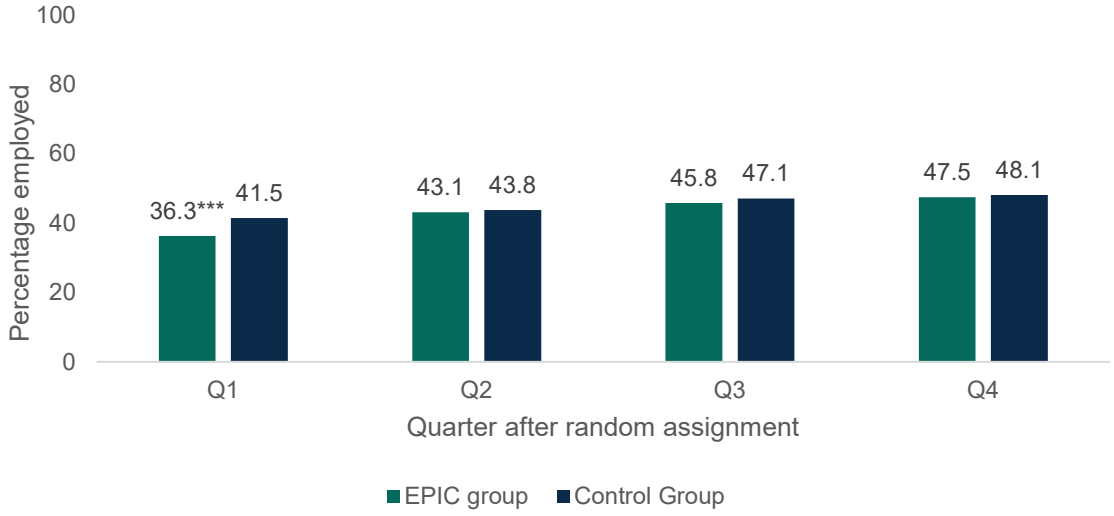
Employment. EPIC did not lead to an increase in employment in Quarter 4 using either the UI wage records or the survey data (Exhibits V.2 and V.3). Based on the UI data, about 48 percent of individuals in both research groups were employed in Quarter 4, and based on the survey data, about 44 percent of individuals in both research groups were employed.

In Quarter 1, EPIC group members were less likely to be employed than control group members based on both data sources. For example, based on the survey data, around 25 percent of EPIC group members and 29 percent of control group members were employed in Quarter 1. These negative and statistically significant impacts faded in Quarter 2. In Quarters 2 and 3, the differences in employment rates were not statistically significant using either data source.

In Year 1 overall, employment rates were similar for the two research groups in both the UI and survey data. For example, according to the UI data, 65 percent of EPIC group members and 65 percent of control group members were employed at some time (Appendix Table F.1).

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

Exhibit V.2. Quarterly employment rates based on UI wage records

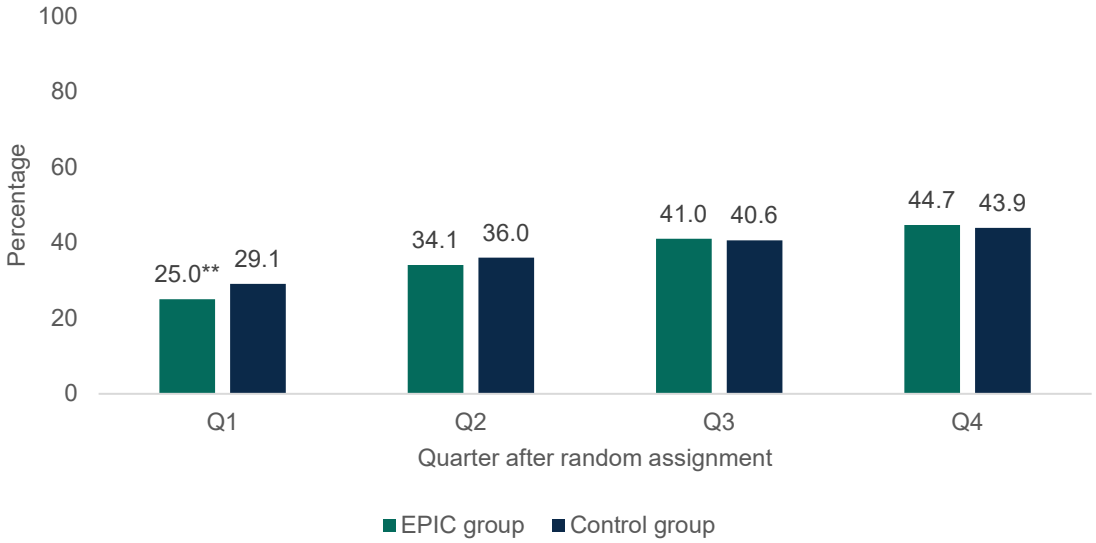


Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation UI wage records, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on UI data from 1,627 EPIC group members and 1,642 control group members.

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

Exhibit V.3. Quarterly employment rates based on survey data



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

Note: Estimates are based on data from 1,237 EPIC group members and 1,194 control group members who were surveyed.

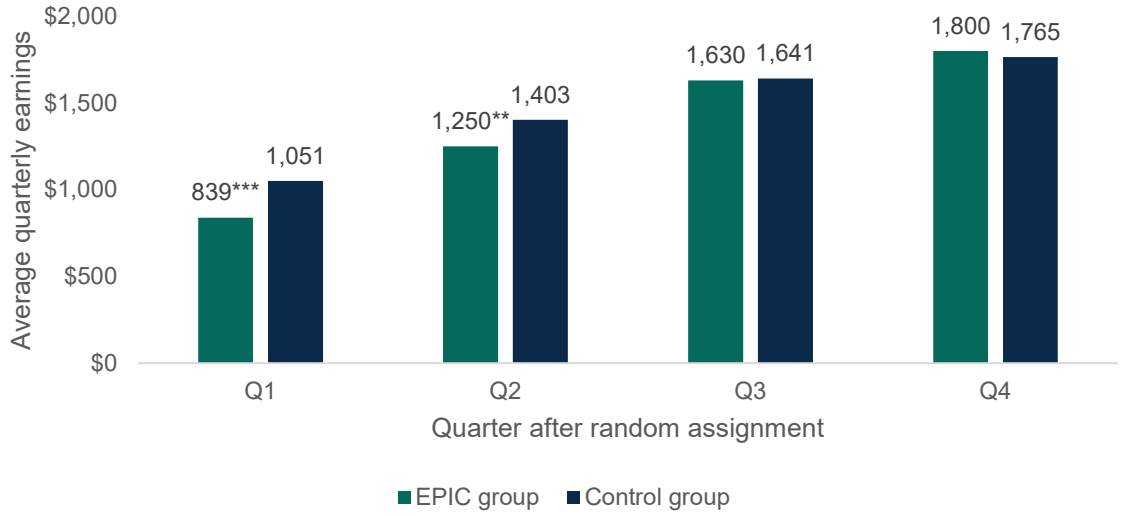
***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

Earnings. In the UI data, there were negative and statistically significant difference in average earnings between the EPIC group and the control group in Quarters 1 and 2. For example, in Quarter 1, on average, the EPIC group earned $213 less than the control group (Exhibit V.4). In the survey data, there were not statistically significant differences in average earnings in Quarters 1 and 2 (Exhibit V.5).

In Quarters 3 and 4, the earnings differences were not statistically significant based on either data source. For example, according to the UI data, the EPIC group earned an average of $1,800 in Quarter 4 compared to average earnings of $1,765 for the control group.

Finally, average earnings as reported in the survey were somewhat larger than the average earnings reported in the UI wage records, although the pattern of impact findings are similar across the two data sources.

Exhibit V.4. Quarterly earnings based on UI wage records

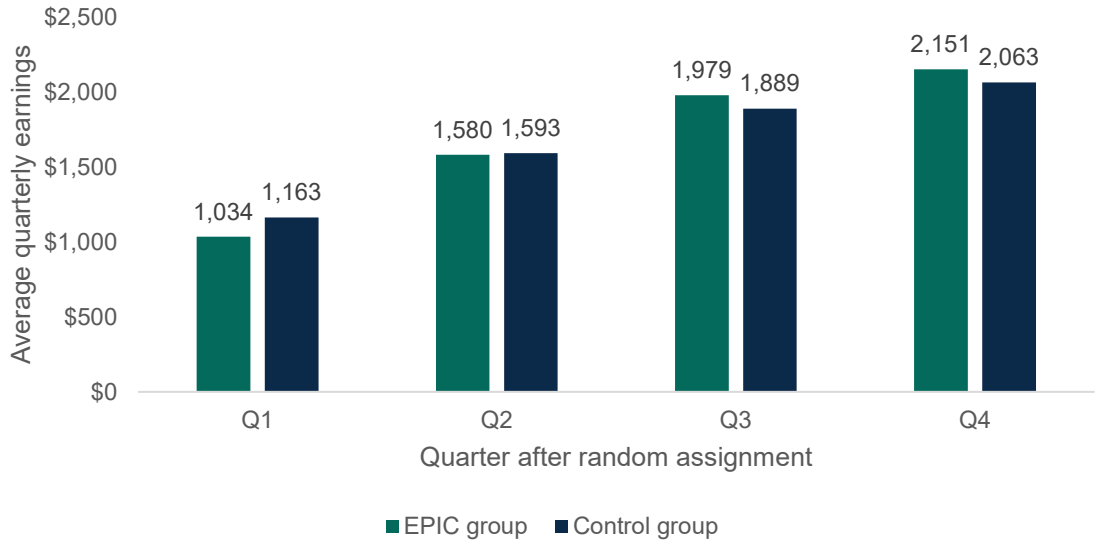


Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation UI wage records, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on UI data from 1,627 EPIC group members and 1,624 control group members.

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

Exhibit V.5. Quarterly earnings based on survey data



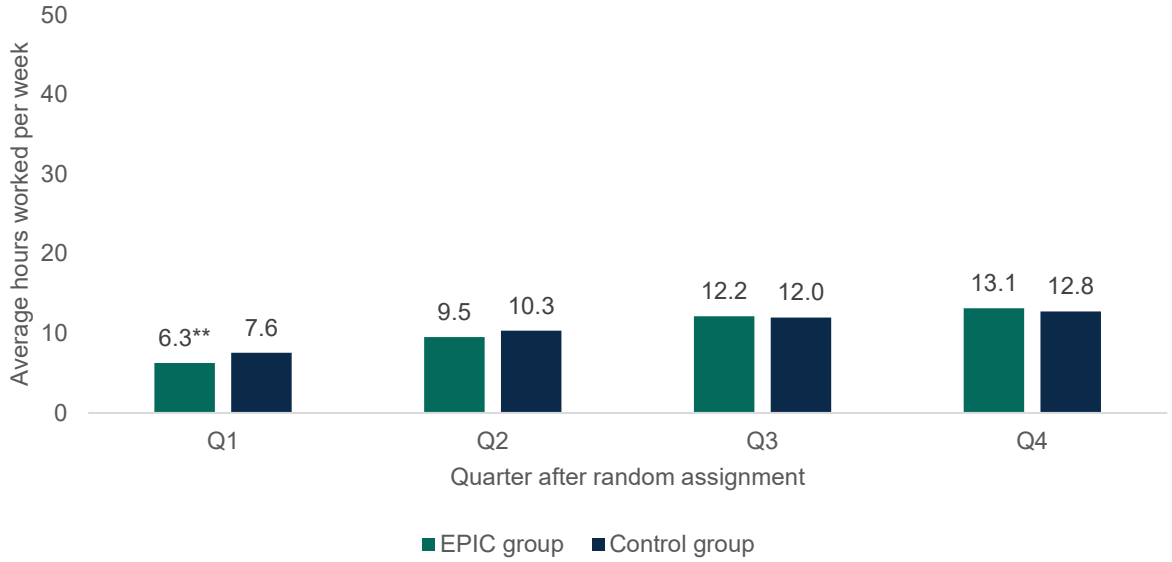
Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12-month survey, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on 1,237 EPIC group members and 1,194 control group members who were surveyed.

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

Hours worked. EPIC group members worked about 1 hour less than control group members, on average, in Quarter 1, but there were no statistically significant impacts in average hours worked per week in Quarters 2, 3, and 4 (Exhibit V.6). Individuals in both research groups worked an average of around 10 to 11 hours per week in Year 1.

Exhibit V.6. Average hours worked per week based on survey data



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

Note: Estimates are based on 1,237 EPIC group members and 1,194 control group members who were surveyed.

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

2. Impacts on characteristics of current jobs

Exhibit V.7 presents characteristics of jobs at the time of the 12-month survey.[31] This information was collected in the 12-month follow-up survey and was available only for individuals who were employed at the time of the interview (36 percent of the EPIC group and 37 percent of the control group). For this reason, the measures in Exhibit V.7 are non-experimental and the results do not represent the causal effects of EPIC.

[31] For individuals who were employed at the time of the survey, these measures capture the job in which they were working at that time (their "current job"). If sample members were working two or more jobs at the time of the survey, the job where they worked the most hours was considered their "current job."

Exhibit V.7. Characteristics of current jobs, among individuals employed at the time of the interview and based on 12-month survey data

Characteristic	EPIC group	Control group	Difference
Hours worked per week (%)			
Less than 20	25.0	26.3	-1.3
21 to 34	27.1	26.1	1.0
35 or more (employed full time)	47.9	47.6	0.3
Average	31.5	31.9	-0.3
Weekly earnings (%)			
$1 to $499	73.7	74.7	-1.0
$500 to $999	22.2	21.8	0.3
$1,000 to $1,499	4.0	2.6	1.4
$1,500 to $2,000	0.0	0.9	-0.9**
$2,000 and above	0.2	0.0	0.2
Benefits available at job (%)			
Any benefit	62.4	61.7	0.7
Health insurance or HMO/PPO plan membership	49.8	47.1	2.7
Dental insurance	37.7	35.9	1.8
Paid vacation	38.4	40.9	-2.5
Paid holidays	45.2	42.1	3.1
Paid sick leave	32.3	31.0	1.3
Any paid time off	51.4	51.8	-0.4
Pension or retirement benefits	38.8	36.7	2.1
Tuition assistance or reimbursement	19.7	20.3	-0.6
Type of employment (%)			
Regular full- or part-time	79.0	75.0	4.1
Temporary or on-call	12.2	11.8	0.4
Self-employed or independent contractor or consultant	7.0	7.0	0.0
Day laborer	1.7	6.2	-4.5***
Occupation			
Material Moving Workers	7.7	11.1	-3.5*
Retail Sales Workers	7.4	5.5	1.9
Food and Beverage Serving Workers	6.0	5.3	0.7
Building Cleaning and Pest Control Workers	4.4	4.1	0.3
Motor Vehicle Operators	4.9	5.9	-1.0
Cooks and Food Preparation Workers	4.4	4.2	0.1
Material Recording, Scheduling, Dispatching, and Distributing Workers	2.2	4.2	-2.0*
Other Personal Care and Service Workers	4.2	5.9	-1.7
Food Processing Workers	2.5	1.8	0.7
Information and Record Clerks	4.1	2.8	1.3
Sample size	**446**	**434**	

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

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

Among individuals who were employed at the time of the 12-month follow-up survey, EPIC group members and control group members held jobs with similar characteristics. There were no statistically significant differences between the two research groups in hours worked per week or in eligibility for employer-offered benefits and generally no differences in weekly earnings. A little less than half of employed individuals in both research groups worked full time. Around three-quarters of employed individuals in both research groups earned less than $500 per week. And close to two-thirds of employed individuals were offered at least one benefit by their employer, with the most common benefits offered being health insurance and paid time off.

Around three quarters of employed individuals in both research groups were regular full time or part time employees (79 percent of EPIC group members and 75 percent of control group members). Employed EPIC group members were less likely than employed control group members to be day laborers (2 versus 6 percent). There were some statistically significant differences between the two research groups in occupations. Employed EPIC group members were less likely than employed control group members to be material moving workers (p-value = 0.08) and material recording, scheduling, dispatching, and distributing workers (p-value = 0.07). The other most common occupations in both research groups included retail sales, food and beverage workers, motor vehicle operators, and other personal care and service workers.

3. Conclusion

EPIC group members worked and earned less than control group members in Quarters 1 and 2 while they were most likely to be receiving SNAP E&T services. The Quarter 1 employment impacts were statistically significant according to both data sources and the Quarters 1 and 2 earnings impacts were statistically significant according to the UI data. These differences were no longer statistically significant in Quarters 3 and 4. Past studies of workforce programs have shown that it can take more than a year before economic impacts emerge (Card et al. 2010, 2018; D'Amico et al. 2015). Indeed, in early quarters, EPIC group members were engaged in occupational skills training and job readiness training, likely displacing employment during this period. Results from the longer-term follow-up period – which will extend up to 3 years – are needed to fully assess the effects of EPIC on employment and earnings.

B. Impacts of EPIC on receipt of public assistance

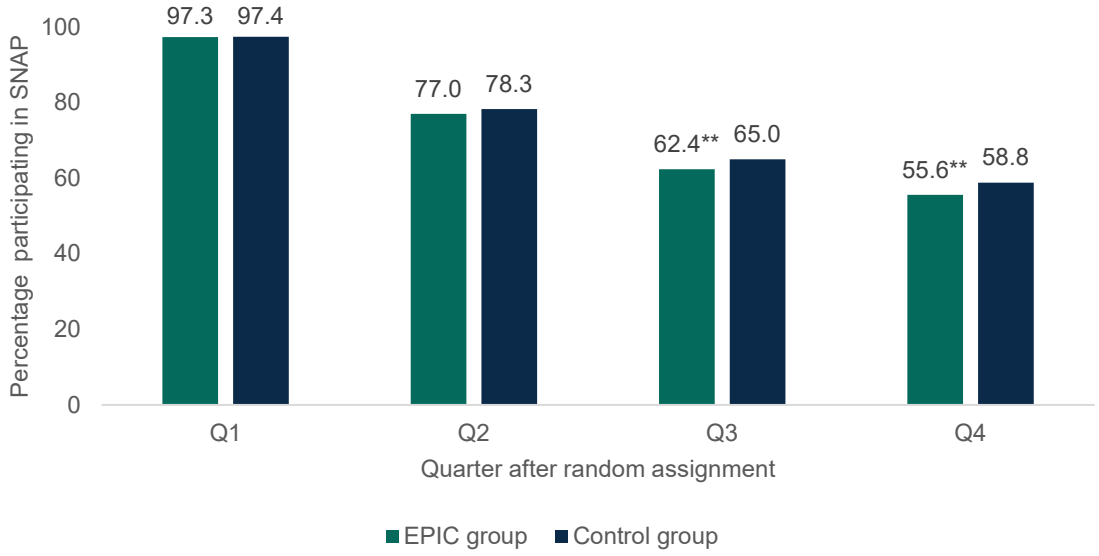
This section presents impacts on the receipt of public assistance—as measured by SNAP administrative records and survey data. Most of the outcomes measuring receipt of SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid are based on the administrative data and are measured for each quarter after random assignment and over the first year after random assignment. Receipt of other forms of public assistance are based on the survey data and capture receipt during the first year after random assignment.

1. Impacts on SNAP participation

EPIC led to a reduction in SNAP participation in Quarter 4. About 56 percent of EPIC group members participated in SNAP in Quarter 4 compared to 59 percent of control group members (Exhibit V.8). Impacts of EPIC on SNAP participation reflect larger decreases over time in the

rate of SNAP participation for the EPIC group than for the control group. For example, between Quarters 1 and 4, SNAP participation rates decreased from 97 to 56 percent among EPIC group members—a 42 percentage point change—and from 97 to 59 percent among control group members—a 39 percentage point change. In Quarters 3 and 4, EPIC group members were less likely to participate in SNAP than control group members. These differences in SNAP participation rates were both statistically significant.

Exhibit V.8. Quarterly SNAP participation rates based on SNAP administrative data



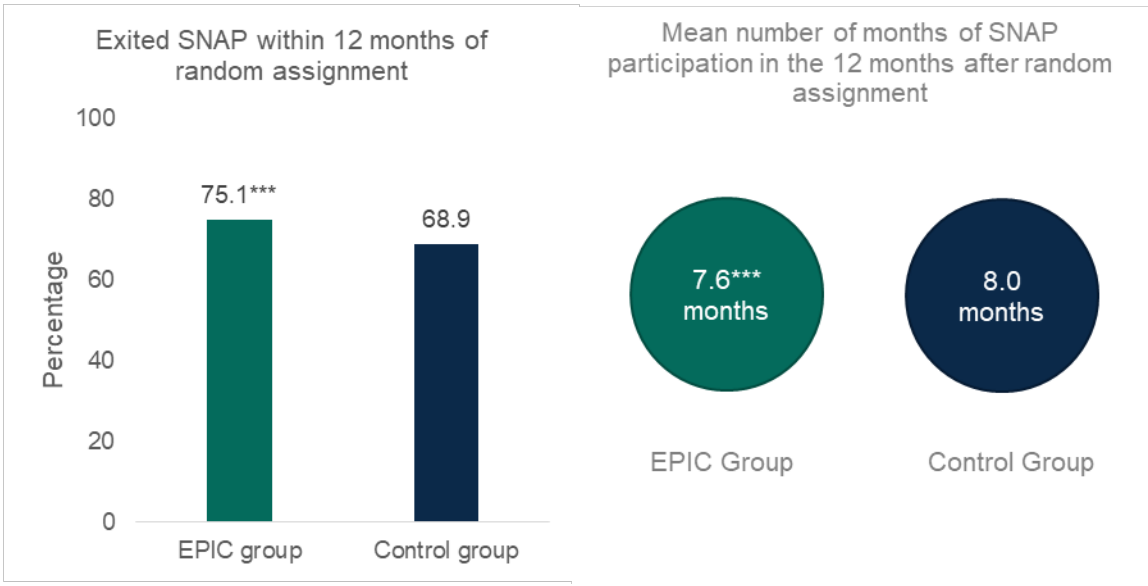
Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation SNAP administrative data, weighted data.

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

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

There was a statistically significant difference between the EPIC group and the control group in the length of SNAP participation. On average, EPIC group members participated in SNAP for 7.6 of the 12 months following random assignment compared to 8.0 months for control group members (Exhibit V.9). EPIC group members were significantly more likely than control group members to have exited SNAP at least once within 12 months after random assignment (75 percent of EPIC group members and 69 percent of control group members). The percentage of individuals who exited SNAP within the 12 months after random assignment includes those who left and did not re-enter SNAP within the 12-month follow-up period, as well as those who left and re-entered before the end of the period. Thus, even though 25 percent of the EPIC group participated in SNAP for the full year, SNAP participation in Quarter 4 was higher (56 percent), reflecting that individuals left and re-entered SNAP by Quarter 4.

Exhibit V.9. Participation in SNAP based on SNAP administrative data



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

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

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

In Quarter 1, average SNAP benefit amounts were significantly higher (by $17) for EPIC group members than for control group members (Exhibit V.10). In Quarter 4, the impact on average SNAP benefit amounts was negative and statistically significant (p-value = 0.07). For both research groups, the average SNAP benefit amounts were highest in Quarter 1 and decreased in each subsequent quarter, mostly reflecting people exiting SNAP over time. In Year 1, the average benefits received by both research groups were around $1,560.

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. In Quarter 1, EPIC group members received, on average, around 85 percent of the maximum possible benefit. A similar percentage was seen for the control group: 84 percent (Exhibit V.10). Benefit amounts for both research groups decreased over time to 40 and 44 percent of the maximum in Quarter 4. For both research groups, most of this decrease in benefit amounts over time can be attributed to individuals exiting SNAP. For example, among the EPIC group, the percentage of the maximum benefit amount received decreased by about 53 percent between Quarters 1 and 4. During this same period, the percentage of EPIC group members participating in SNAP decreased by about 43 percent.

Exhibit V.10. Impacts on average monthly SNAP benefit amount per Quarter and in Year 1, based on SNAP administrative data

	EPIC group	Control group	Difference
Average SNAP benefits received ($)			
Quarter 1	559	542	17***
Quarter 2	407	403	4
Quarter 3	313	327	-14
Quarter 4	277	293	-16*
Year 1	1,556	1,565	-9
Average monthly SNAP benefits received as a percentage of maximum benefit amount[a]			
Quarter 1	84.9	84.0	0.9
Quarter 2	60.9	61.6	-0.8
Quarter 3	46.1	49.8	-3.7***
Quarter 4	39.6	44.1	-4.6***
Year 1	58.0	59.9	-2.0**
Sample size	**2,503**	**2,509**	

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

[a] Maximum household SNAP benefit amounts normalized by household size.

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

2. Impacts on TANF, Medicaid, and other forms of public assistance

Impacts on TANF participation and Medicaid coverage were estimated using SNAP administrative data. EPIC increased participation in TANF by a small but statistically significant amount in Quarters 1 and 3 (p-value = 0.09 in Quarter 3). In each quarter, very few individuals (less than one percent) in either research group participated in TANF (Exhibit V.11). There were no impacts on Medicaid coverage throughout the follow-up period (Appendix Table F.7). Between 69 and 72 percent of individuals in both research groups were covered by Medicaid in each quarter.

Exhibit V.11. Quarterly TANF participation rates, based on SNAP administrative data

TANF participation (%)	EPIC group	Control group	Difference
Quarter 1	0.1	0.0	0.1**
Quarter 2	0.1	0.1	0.0
Quarter 3	0.3	0.1	0.2*
Quarter 4	0.4	0.2	0.2
Sample size	**2,503**	**2,509**	

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

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

Impacts on receipt of other forms of public assistance were estimated using the survey data. The survey measured receipt of general assistance; unemployment insurance; 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). There were no statistically significant differences between the two research groups in receipt of any of these forms of public assistance (Exhibit V.12). The most commonly received benefits were Medicaid (about 54 percent) and Section 8, Housing Choice Vouchers, or Public Housing Assistance (about 8 percent).

Exhibit V.12. Impacts on participation in other public assistance programs in the 12 months since random assignment, based on 12-month survey data

Program	EPIC group	Control group	Difference
Public assistance receipt in the 12 months since random assignment (%)			
General assistance	1.4	1.1	0.3
Unemployment insurance	5.2	6.4	-1.2
Supplemental Security Income	7.3	6.9	0.5
Section 8, Housing Choice Vouchers, or Public Housing Assistance	8.1	7.6	0.4
Medicaid	54.7	53.1	1.6
Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	4.3	4.4	-0.1
Sample size	**1,237**	**1,194**	

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

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

3. Conclusion

EPIC had no effect on SNAP participation rates in Quarters 1 and 2. In Quarters 3 and 4, EPIC led to a reduction in the likelihood of participating in SNAP. About 56 percent of EPIC group members participated in SNAP in Quarter 4 compared with 59 percent of control group members. EPIC increased TANF participation by a very small but statistically significant in Quarters 1 and 3. There were no impacts on Medicaid coverage.

Conceptually, SNAP E&T services are designed to increase employment and earnings and, thus, reduce the need for receiving SNAP or other public assistance. Although EPIC did not increase employment or earnings by a statistically significant amount, EPIC led to reductions in SNAP participation in Quarters 3 and 4. As discussed in Chapter IV, EPIC group members were more likely than control group members to have been sanctioned for noncompliance in Quarters 2, 3, and 4, which may have contributed to some of the reduction in SNAP participation later in the follow-up period.

Because it can take more than a year before economic impacts emerge, we cannot yet observe the full impact of EPIC on SNAP participation. The analysis based on data from the longer-term follow-up period will fully assess the effects of EPIC on SNAP participation in the final evaluation report.

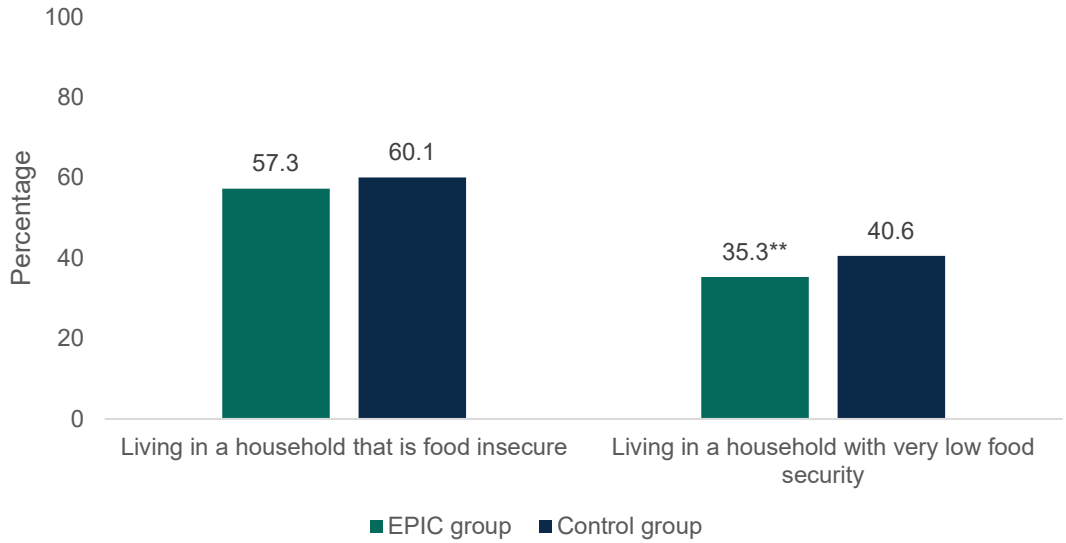
C. Impacts of EPIC on food security, health, well-being, and housing status

This section presents EPIC's effects on food security, health, well-being, and housing status as reported in survey data. Most of these outcomes reflect individuals' circumstances at the time of the 12-month follow-up survey. Exceptions include, food security status, which was reported based on the 30 days before the survey.[32]

The difference in rates of food insecurity across the research groups was not statistically significant. About 57 percent of EPIC group members reported being food insecure compared with 60 percent of control group members (Exhibit V.13). However, EPIC group members were less likely than control group members to have experienced very low food security—a severe form of food insecurity. Thirty-five percent of EPIC group members reported very low food security, a statistically significant 5 percentage point reduction from the control group average.

[32] Food security is 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. Those who cannot afford enough to eat experience a particularly severe form of food insecurity 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.

Exhibit V.13. Impacts on food security, based on 12-month survey data



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

Note: Estimates are based on data from 1,237 EPIC group members and 1,194 control group members who were surveyed. Food security measured over the 30 days prior to the survey interview.

***Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .01 level, two-tailed test.
**Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .05 level, two-tailed test.
*Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the .10 level, two-tailed test.

For most of the other outcome measures presented in Appendix Table F.21, there were no statistically significant differences between the EPIC group and the control group. One exception was for the measure of depression. About 18 percent of EPIC group members screened positive for depression compared with 23 percent of control group members, a statistically significant difference of 4 percentage points.

VI. ANALYSIS OF EPIC COSTS

This chapter describes the total cost of the planning and implementation of EPIC through calendar year 2017. It builds on the description of services received by EPIC group members by providing additional information about the cost of EPIC overall and for specific services. This chapter presents information about the costs incurred by IDHS and the partners and providers with whom it contracted to set up EPIC before the beginning of enrollment, to recruit people into the pilot, and to provide services to EPIC group members. It presents data on the total costs of services; costs covered by the FNS grant versus other funding sources; costs by category, such as staff costs and overhead costs; and the costs of key services, including occupational skills training and case management. The costs presented in this chapter exclude costs associated with the time pilot staff spent supporting the evaluation—including activities such as random assignment.[33]

The analyses were based on cost data provided by IDHS and by partners and providers with direct subcontracts through the FNS grant. Cost data were reported through standardized cost workbooks submitted for the planning period and on a quarterly schedule during service delivery. The workbooks captured data on a set of four core cost categories, or cost ingredients, including staff, direct service, supplies and equipment, and overhead and operating costs (Exhibit VI.1). These costs included costs that were paid for with FNS grant funds as well as costs that were paid for with funds leveraged from other sources. The cost ingredients were used to build an estimate of the total costs incurred in planning for and operating EPIC by summing the costs across the four cost categories.[34]

Exhibit VI.1. Ingredients of cost estimates

Staff costs	Direct service costs	Supply and equipment costs	Overhead and operating costs
• Salaries and fringe benefits • Volunteer time	• Service contracts • Support services • Partner and provider service costs	• Supplies • Leases or purchases of equipment	• Overhead • Facilities • Utilities • Indirect costs

Note: Cost workbooks asked for the total costs of the services provided to individuals receiving EPIC. For all costs reported in the workbooks, respondents were asked to report the percentage of the cost that was funded by the FNS grant. Remaining costs were assumed to be covered by other sources.

[33] The cost workbooks asked for the percentage of time each staff member spent on evaluation activities. To exclude evaluation activities from the cost analyses presented in this chapter, we reduced the number of hours each staff member reported spending on EPIC by the percentage of hours they reported spending on evaluation activities. Information about the percentage of time spent on evaluation activities was collected for every staff member listed in the planning period and quarterly workbooks and varied over time.

[34] 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. California: Sage Publications, Inc., 2001.*

Exhibit VI.2. Snapshot EPIC data cost collection

- IDHS, DCEO, SIU, and 23 other partners and providers each submitted workbooks.
- Workbooks were submitted for the planning period (April 2015–March 2016) and seven quarterly service delivery periods (April 2016–December 2017).

IDHS, partners, and providers each submitted workbooks with their own cost information (Exhibit VI.2). In addition, a web survey collected data on the percentage of time provider staff spent on key services for EPIC group members, such as case management, assessments, and job readiness or life skills workshops (such as a job club or job readiness training). Information about the average percentage of time staff spent on key services was used to allocate the costs of staff, supplies and equipment, and overhead and operating costs to the direct services reported in the workbooks. These allocated costs were added to the costs of direct services to estimate the total cost of each service. The estimated costs of support services, other direct service contracts, work-based learning, occupational skills training, and education do not include allocated costs for staff, supplies and equipment, or overhead and operating costs. We assumed the staff time and associated costs for these types of services are represented in the estimated cost of case management.

This chapter summarizes costs from the planning period (April 2015 through March 2016) and service delivery (April 2016 through December 2017).[35] Costs presented in the tables and figures have been adjusted to 2016 dollars, as this was the year that IDHS started incurring costs for providing EPIC services. The final report will present the final costs for both the EPIC and control group services, as well as a benefit-cost analysis, which will compare costs and benefits for the EPIC and control group members, from the perspectives of individuals, government, and society. The final report also will include estimates of costs per person for EPIC and control group services. The methodologies used in the cost data collection in the analyses presented in this chapter are provided in the technical supplement. The following is a summary of key findings.

Key findings:

- IDHS and its partners and providers reported spending a total of $9,845,000 between April 2015 to December 2017 on EPIC services, including $280,000 on the planning period and $9,566,000 on service delivery.
- The FNS grant funded 78 percent of EPIC costs, and IDHS, partners, and providers leveraged other funding sources for the remaining 22 percent.
- The largest estimated cost was for occupational skills training service costs ($980,000; 10 percent of total costs), followed by job readiness or life skills workshop service costs ($647,000; 7 percent).

[35] The FNS grant was awarded in March 2015, and some planning efforts began during that month. However, IDHS submitted the first cost workbook covering the planning period starting in April 2015.

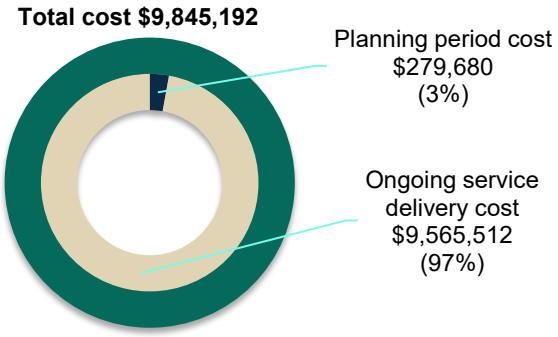
A. Analysis of total and service-specific costs

This section describes total costs as well as costs by funding source and by category (staff, direct services, supplies and equipment, and overhead and operating costs). It also presents estimates of the costs of specific services.

1. Total costs

The FNS grant awarded IDHS $21,858,000 for the planning and implementation of EPIC through February 2019. As shown in Exhibit VI.3, IDHS and its partners and providers reported spending a total of $9,845,000 through December 2017 on the planning and implementation of EPIC (numbers in the text are rounded to the nearest thousand; exhibits show actual costs). These costs included $280,000 for planning (3 percent of total costs) and $9,566,000 for service delivery (97 percent). The quarterly costs of service delivery were relatively stable across the seven quarterly reporting periods. (Appendix Table G.2).

Exhibit VI.3. Summary of total costs



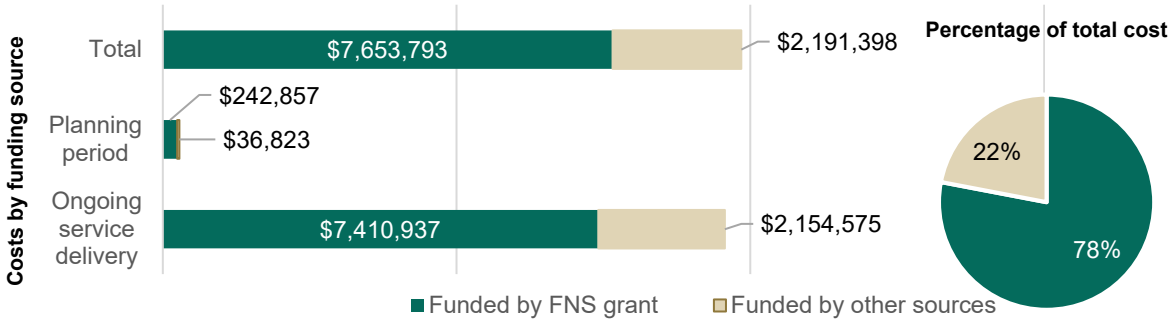
Source: EPIC cost workbooks 2015-2017.

Note: The planning period was considered to encompass the time between the award of the FNS grant and the beginning of enrollment in EPIC (April 2015 to March 2016). Service delivery costs represent the total reported in quarterly workbooks following the beginning of enrollment in EPIC. All costs are presented in 2016 dollars.

Through December 2017, EPIC providers reported spending $7,653,000 of the FNS grant funding (representing 78 percent of total expenditures) and leveraged $2,191,000 in funding from other sources (representing 22 percent of total expenditures) (Exhibit VI.4). Funding from other sources came from IDHS, Community Assistance Providers (CAPs), and other partners and providers, such National Able and A Safe Haven. During the planning period, the FNS grant provided the majority of resources ($243,000), whereas $37,000 was contributed by IDHS and other planning partners. During ongoing service delivery, EPIC administration and services were primarily funded by the FNS grant ($7,411,000). IDHS, partners, and providers leveraged an additional $2,155,000 in funding from other sources. The largest source of additional funding—$294,000—was contributed by National Able, which provided mostly overhead and operating resources, but also staff and direct service resources using other funding sources other than the FNS grant. A Safe Haven contributed $237,000 in overhead and operating, staff, and direct

service resources. Including the grantee, eight EPIC partners and providers each contributed more than $100,000 in funding from other sources, and six more partners and providers each contributed more than $50,000. The costs of service delivery that were covered by funding from sources other than the FNS grant each quarter ranged over the service delivery period from $152,000 to $434,000 (Appendix Table G.2).

Exhibit VI.4. EPIC funding from FNS grant and other sources

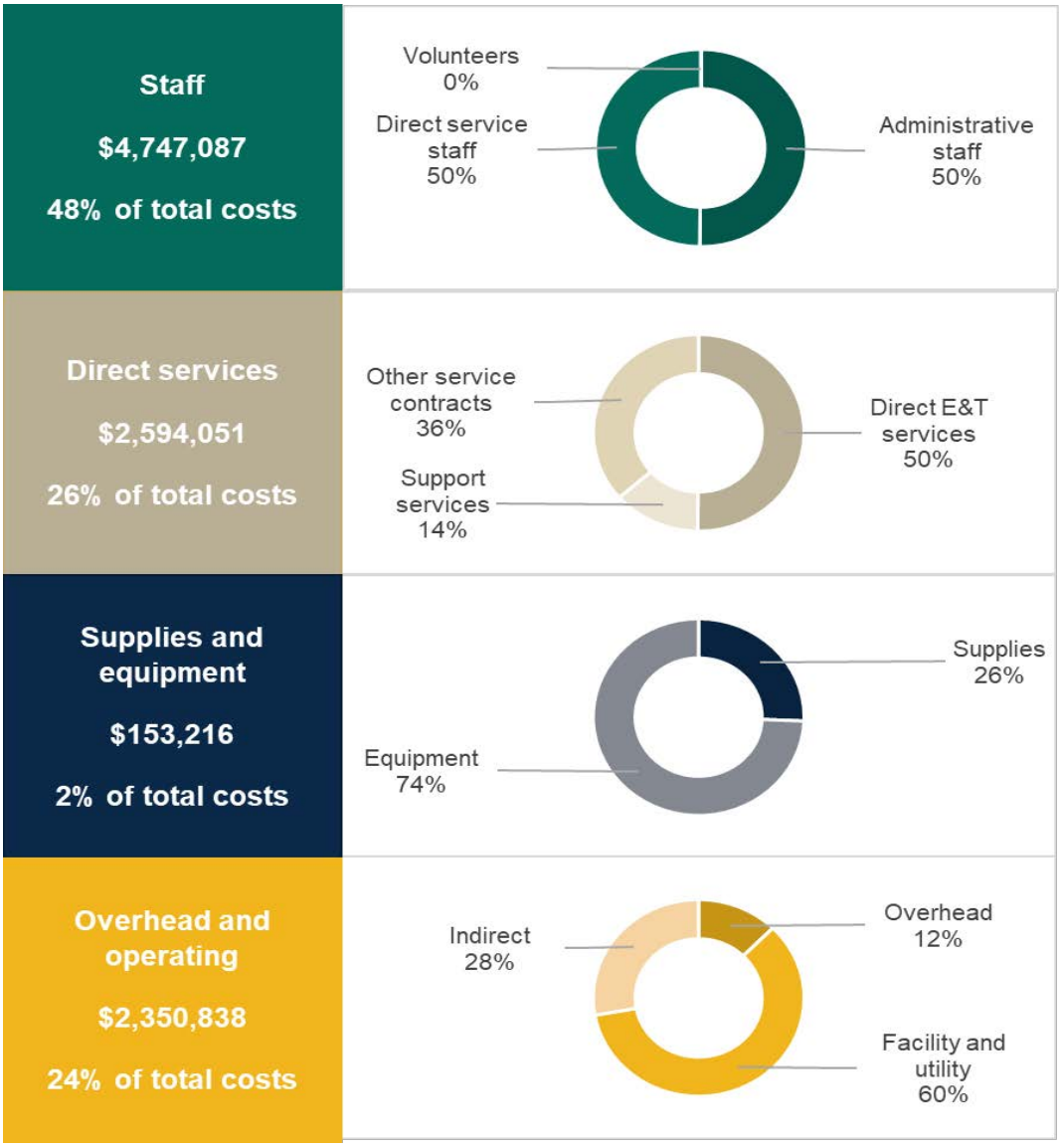


Source: EPIC cost workbooks 2015-2017.

Note: Cost workbooks asked for the total costs of the services provided to individuals in the EPIC group. For all costs reported in the workbooks, respondents were asked to report the percentage of the cost that was funded by the FNS grant. Remaining costs are assumed to be covered by other sources. All costs are presented in 2016 dollars.

Exhibit VI.5 summarizes costs through December 2017 by category, including (1) staff and volunteers' time, which represented 48 percent of total costs; (2) partner and provider direct service costs (26 percent of the total costs); (3) supplies and equipment (2 percent of the total costs); and (4) overhead and operating costs (24 percent of the total costs). Of the $4,747,000 dedicated to staff costs, 50 percent covered administrative staff costs and 50 percent covered direct service staff costs. There was no volunteer time donated to the planning or operation of EPIC. IDHS and EPIC partners and providers reported spending $2,594,051 on direct service costs. The largest share (50 percent) was attributable to partner and provider direct E&T services, 36 percent covered other service contracts, and 14 percent on support services. IDHS and EPIC partners and providers also allocated $2,351,000 to overhead and operating costs and $153,000 to supplies and equipment costs.

Exhibit VI.5. Costs by category



Source: EPIC cost workbooks 2015-2017.

Note: One provider– Instituto del Progreso Latino– reported that their facility and utility costs were included in the indirect cost rate. Another provider—Man-Tra-Con Corporation—reported that some of their facilities (like public libraries) were free and therefore incurred no costs. Three providers used donated facilities to provide direct services. We used the square footage of the space used for services and the zip code to estimate a cost for these facilities. All costs are presented in 2016 dollars.

Exhibit VI.6 provides additional detail on total costs by category, and costs funded by the FNS grant and by other sources. In all cost categories, the FNS grant covered the vast majority of costs. However, in all cost categories, funding from other sources was also used to cover costs. Funding from other sources covered 16 percent of staff costs, which indicates that IDHS and its partners and providers were able to leverage staffing resources to support EPIC. Funding from other sources also supported 48 percent of overhead and operating costs, and 11 percent of direct service costs. No other funding sources supported supplies and equipment.

Exhibit VI.6. Costs by category and funding source

Cost category	Total cost	FNS grant		Other sources	
		Costs funded ($)	Percentage of total category cost	Costs funded ($)	Percentage of total category cost
Total cost	**$9,845,192**	**$7,653,793**	**78%**	**$2,191,398**	**22%**
Staff costs	**$4,747,087**	**$3,971,115**	**84%**	**$775,972**	**16%**
Staff	$4,747,087	$3,971,115		$775,972	
Administrative staff[a]	$2,383,147	$1,947,969		$435,178	
Direct service staff	$2,363,940	$2,023,146		$340,794	
Volunteers	$0	$0		$0	
Direct service costs	**$2,594,051**	**$2,314,820**	**89%**	**$279,231**	**11%**
Direct E&T services	$1,300,972	$1,092,423		$208,549	
Support services	$348,650	$277,968		$70,682	
Other service contract[b]	$944,429	$944,429		$0	
Supplies and equipment costs	**$153,216**	**$153,216**	**100%**	**$0**	**--**
Supplies	$39,292	$39,292		$0	
Equipment	$113,924	$113,924		$0	
Other overhead-operating costs	**$2,350,838**	**$1,214,643**	**52%**	**$1,136,195**	**48%**
Overhead	$291,902	$269,981		$21,921	
Facilities and utilities	$1,405,121	$295,988		$1,109,133	
Indirect costs	$653,815	$648,673		$5,141	

Source: EPIC cost workbooks 2015-2017.

Note: Cost workbooks asked for the total costs of the services provided to individuals in the EPIC group. For all costs reported in the workbooks, respondents were asked to report the percentage of the cost that was funded by the FNS grant. Remaining costs were assumed to be covered by other sources. One provider – Instituto del Progreso Latino - reported that all of their facility and utility costs were included in reported indirect cost rate. Another provider – Man-Tra-Con Corporation – reported that some of their facilities (like public libraries and participants' homes) were free and therefore incurred no costs. Three providers used donated facilities to provide direct services. We used the square footage of the space used for services and the zip code to estimate a cost for these facilities. All costs are presented in 2016 dollars.

[a]We used staff titles and primary responsibilities reported in the cost workbooks to categorize staff and their associated costs as administrative- (including staff such as accountants, executive leadership, or SNAP eligibility staff) or direct service-related.

[b]Other service contracts represent costs paid by a partner or provider to another organization for a direct service. We assumed service contracts included all the costs of service, including staff, direct costs, supplies and equipment, and other overhead and operating costs.

2. Costs by service

This section describes estimates of the costs of key EPIC services including occupational skills training, job readiness or life skills workshops, work-based learning, case management (this

includes one-on-one meetings with individuals, or time spent on case notes or referrals), assessments, support services, other direct service contracts, and education.[36] To build these estimates, we used data from the staff time-use survey to estimate the average time spent on each service or activity. We then used these estimates to attribute a percentage of the total costs of staff, supplies and equipment, and other overhead and operating costs to the direct service cost reported for that service in the cost workbooks.

Exhibit VI.7 presents estimated total costs of each type of service and the percentage of the total cost that the service represents. The largest EPIC direct service expenditure was for occupational skills training, which accounted for $979,832, or 10 percent of total costs through December 2017. Job readiness or life skills workshops and work-based learning accounted for smaller shares of direct service costs—$646,955 (7 percent of total costs) and $602,000 (6 percent of total costs), respectively.

Exhibit VI.7. Costs by service type

Service type	Total cost	Percentage of total cost
Occupational skills training	$979,832	10
Job readiness or life skills workshop	$646,955	7
Work-based learning	$601,926	6
Case management	$585,034	6
Assessments	$455,948	5
Support services	$354,571	4
Other direct service contracts	$296,232	3
Education	$70,432	1
Other non-direct service costs[a]	$5,854,263	59
Total costs	$9,845,192	100

Source: EPIC cost workbooks 2015-2017 and time use survey data 2016-2017.

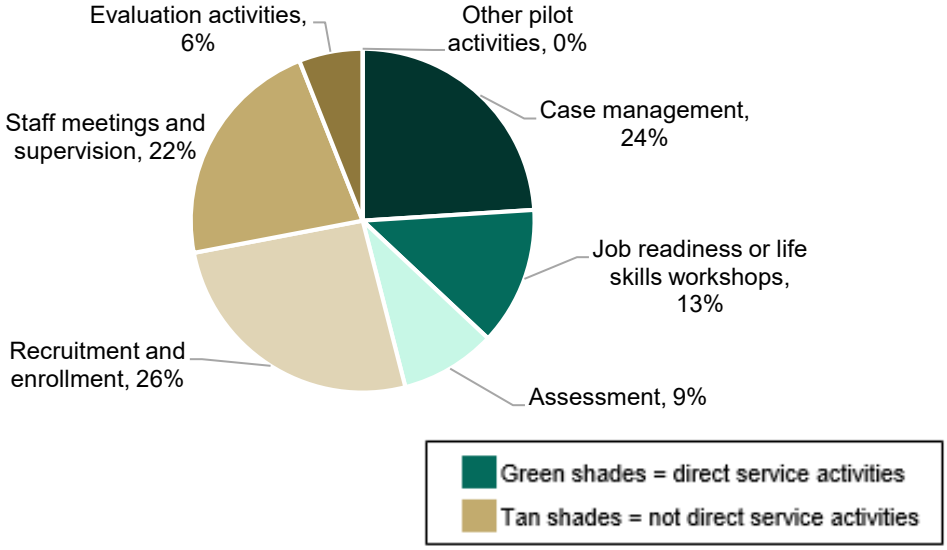
Note: The estimated costs of case management, structured group activities, and formal assessments include costs for staff, supplies and equipment, and overhead and operating costs, which were allocated using the average percentage of time spent on these activities in the time use survey. The estimated costs of support services, other direct service contracts, work-based learning, occupational skills training, and education do not include costs for staff, supplies and equipment, or overhead and operating costs. We assumed these costs are either built into those payments or the associated staff time and costs were represented as case management. All costs are presented in 2016 dollars.

[a]Other non-direct service costs include service contracts that cannot be assigned to one of the defined direct services, such as a subcontract for recruiting services. Other non-direct service costs also include the costs of other EPIC-related activities that are not direct services—including planning period costs, administration, recruitment and enrollment, and staff meetings and supervision.

[36] We use standardized titles of services in this chapter to facilitate comparison of findings across pilot projects. In addition, each cost workbook asked questions about direct service costs using these specific service titles.

Exhibit VI.8 shows the average percentage of time that direct service provider staff reported spending on key activities.[37] The two activities that accounted for the largest shares of direct service staff time were recruitment and enrollment (26 percent of time, on average) and case management (24 percent). Case management includes time for administering payments and making referrals for services such as work-based learning, occupational skills training, and education. The two other activities that accounted for large shares of EPIC direct service staff time were staff meetings and supervision (22 percent), job readiness or life skills workshops (13 percent), and formal assessment (9 percent).

Exhibit VI.8. Average percentage of time direct service provider staff spent on key activities



Source: Time-use survey 2016-2017.

Note: This graphic shows the average percentage of time direct service staff spent on key activities during the first and second rounds of the time use survey (fall 2016 and summer 2017). Twenty-five direct service staff were randomly selected to respond in each round. Costs for staff time associated with non-direct service activities are not attributed to the above service estimates; rather, they are included in the other non-direct service cost estimate row in Exhibit VI.7. Evaluation costs are excluded from all cost estimates but this figure includes time staff spent on the evaluation.

[37] Direct service provider staff from the following 22 providers are included in the estimates of the average time spent on key activities: A Safe Haven, Asian Human Services, Catholic Charities, Central States SER, Community Assistance Programs, Homework Hangout Club, Instituto del Progreso Latino, Lessie Bates Davis Neighborhood House, Man-Tra-Con Corporation, National Able Network, North Lawndale Employment Network, OAI, Phalanx Family Services, Rock River Training Corporation, The Cara Program, APCC, Inspiration Corporation, JARC, Southland Health Care Forum, Springfield Urban League, Tri-County Urban League, and Two Rivers Regional Council.

VII. 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. Through its comprehensive data collection and rigorous experimental design, this evaluation assessed whether EPIC—the innovative E&T program Illinois designed and implemented in 33 counties targeting unemployed or underemployed work registrants with low skills or limited work experience (including ABAWDs) and individuals working at least 30 hours per week but needing skill upgrades—was effective in achieving these outcomes. This interim report presents preliminary findings from the implementation and cost analyses that describe the planning and early implementation periods of the pilot and from the participation and impact analyses that cover one year of follow-up for individuals. This chapter summarizes the report's main findings. It also describes the additional questions that will be answered in the final report, which will present implementation and cost analysis findings covering the full period in which services were offered and costs were incurred and participation and impact findings covering up to three years of follow-up for individuals.

A. Summary of main findings

This section summarizes the main findings from the analysis of implementation data, EPIC group members' service receipt, costs, and differences between research groups in service receipt. It also discusses findings from the impact analyses and considerations regarding whether longer-term impacts may be expected.

1. EPIC implementation

As described in Chapter II, the analysis of the implementation of EPIC found that EPIC services were successfully implemented. The customized MIS also was extensively used to promote collaboration and communication with partners and providers and to help manage pilot enrollment and the provision of EPIC services. EPIC did have implementation challenges. As one example, the pre-random assignment matching of EPIC group members to particular CBO service providers sometimes did not result in the best match of individuals' skills and interests to occupational skills training programs and providers. This became apparent once the CBO service providers conducted more rigorous screenings and assessments of the individuals referred to them. As another example, the originally planned three service models were found to not meet the needs of many EPIC group members. As a result, EPIC service flows had to evolve to accommodate several alternative service pathways. Overall, administrators of the key organizations involved in EPIC worked well together to resolve challenges and unanticipated issues.

2. EPIC group members' service receipt

As described in Chapter III, administrative service use data indicated that over two-thirds of EPIC group members engaged in EPIC after random assignment, meaning that they completed the first step in EPIC by attending a program orientation at a CBO. About 64 percent of EPIC

group members subsequently participated in an E&T-related activity, and received assistance in looking for work, attended job search training workshops, received instruction in adult basic education or preparation for a high school equivalency certificate, enrolled in short-term occupational skill training, or began work-based learning within 12 months of random assignment. Participation in job search assistance activities was common, and individuals often started out in this type of activity: Over half of EPIC group members participated in job search activities and over a quarter participated in job search training. A significant share of the EPIC group—a little over a quarter—also entered some type of work-based learning arrangement. Along with job search, or as their only activity, somewhat under half of EPIC group members attended occupational skills training. About one-tenth participated in basic education activities. Half of the individuals who started occupational skills training completed it, but less than one-third of the individuals who started education completed it. Ultimately, 19 percent of EPIC group members received a credential or certification.

Nearly all EPIC group members were contacted by their EPIC career navigator at least once, and more than half of EPIC group members received at least one support service, most often to defray transportation costs. EPIC group members engaged in EPIC for an average of about three months. Nearly three-quarters of EPIC group members exited from EPIC within the 12-month follow-up period, and most who attended an orientation at a CBO left EPIC within six months.

3. Differences between EPIC and control groups in service receipt

Whether EPIC impacts employment, earnings, and SNAP participation depends, in part, on differences between the EPIC and control groups in the services offered to individuals, their receipt of services, and their completion rates. The findings reported in Chapter IV suggest that there were differences between the EPIC and control groups in service participation.

Relative to the control group, the EPIC group was more likely to participate in job search assistance or training activities and in education and occupational skills training during the 12-month follow-up period. According to the survey data, rates of participation in the EPIC group were about 18 percentage points higher than in the control group. This difference was observed despite control group members' high rates of participation in job search assistance and training activities and programs.

Differences between the EPIC and control groups were found for participation in job search assistance and training activities, occupational skills training, general job skills training, and education (16, 14, 13, and 6 percentage point differences, respectively). EPIC group members were also more likely than control group members to obtain an occupational skills certificate or license (10 percentage point difference).

Some individuals were still in activities at the end of the 12-month follow-up period, so some of the differences between research groups regarding aspects of participation in services and activities could change with longer follow-up.

4. Short-term impacts of EPIC on individuals' outcomes

As described in Chapter V, the findings from the analyses of the two primary outcomes in the fourth quarter show that EPIC did not have a short-term effect on employment but did reduce SNAP participation. EPIC group members worked and earned less than control group members in Quarters 1 and 2 while they were more likely to be receiving SNAP E&T services. The Quarter 1 employment impacts were statistically significant according to both data sources and the Quarters 1 and 2 earnings impacts were statistically significant according to the UI data. These differences were no longer statistically significant in later quarters. At the same time, EPIC had no effect on SNAP participation rates in Quarters 1 and 2. In Quarters 3 and 4, EPIC led to a reduction in the likelihood of participating in SNAP. About 56 percent of EPIC group members participated in SNAP in Quarter 4 compared with 59 percent of control group members.

The findings related to SNAP participation make sense given the patterns of changes in earnings and employment over the first year for EPIC and control group members. Conceptually, SNAP E&T services are designed to increase individuals' employment and earnings and, thus, reduce their need for SNAP or other public assistance. Although EPIC did not increase employment or earnings by a statistically significant amount, EPIC led to reductions in SNAP participation in Quarters 3 and 4. As discussed in Chapter IV, EPIC group members were more likely than control group members to have been sanctioned for noncompliance in Quarters 2, 3, and 4, which may have contributed to some of the reduction in SNAP participation later in the follow-up period.

These overall findings do not imply that EPIC will not be effective in achieving its goal of increasing employment and reducing the need for public assistance in the longer term. In fact, past studies of workforce programs have shown that it can take more than a year before economic impacts emerge (Card et al. 2010, 2018; D'Amico et al. 2015). Indeed, a substantial share of EPIC group members participated in training and education in early quarters, likely displacing employment during this period. Results from the longer-term follow-up period, which will extend up to three years, are needed to assess the full effects of EPIC.

5. EPIC costs

As described in Chapter VI, IDHS and its partners and providers reported spending a total of $9,845,000 from April 2015 to December 2017 on the planning and implementation of EPIC ($280,000 during the planning period and $9,566,000 on service delivery). The FNS grant funded 78 percent of these costs, and partners and providers leveraged other funding sources for the remaining 22 percent. More than half of the costs during the planning period and first 21 months of operations were related to administration, including planning and development, management and oversight, and recruitment and enrollment ($5,854,000; 59 percent of total costs). The remaining 41 percent of costs were for direct services, with occupational skills training and job readiness or life skills workshops being the largest costs. Direct service costs likely will represent a larger share of total costs when 2018 and 2019 expenditures are analyzed and reported.

B. Final report and other products

This report presents a preliminary assessment of the effects of EPIC. The participation and impact analysis findings cover only the first year following random assignment for each individual. For this reason, the short-term outcomes presented in this report do not capture the full potential effects of EPIC on labor market and public assistance outcomes. Notably, some individuals (12 percent of EPIC group members) were still receiving services through EPIC or other programs when 12-month survey outcomes were measured. In addition, EPIC continued to provide services to individuals in 2018 and 2019. A final report will present outcomes over a period of up to 36 months after random assignment and examine the benefits of the pilot's enhanced services relative to their costs, thereby providing more conclusive evidence about the effectiveness of EPIC.

The final report will address the following research questions.

- **Did EPIC continue to evolve over time?** What implementation changes occurred in the last one to two years of operations? Was EPIC or parts of EPIC sustained after the end of the pilot?
- **Did participation patterns change over time, as EPIC matured?** The final report will analyze updated administrative data on service use through the end of pilot operations (February 2019).
- **What effects did EPIC have on employment and SNAP participation over a three-year follow-up period?** The final report will present findings based on longer-term follow-up data. Impact analyses will use UI wage records extending through early to mid-2020, SNAP administrative records extending through December 2020, and 36-month survey data also extending through December 2020. These additional data will allow us to examine impacts on outcomes over longer periods of time—for up to three years after random assignment—for most individuals enrolled in the pilot.
- **What was the total cost of pilot operations?** The final report will include costs through the end of pilot operations, and per-person cost estimates will be presented for both EPIC and control group services.
- **How did total EPIC costs compare with three-year EPIC benefits?** The final report will present a benefit-cost analysis, which will use information from both the cost analyses and the impact analyses to compare costs with benefits for EPIC and control group members, from the perspectives of individuals, government, and society.

Several additional reports will address research questions focused on specific aspects of the services offered. These reports will complement the main evaluation analyses by delving more deeply into support services, the relationship between the amount of services received and individuals' outcomes, and the potential benefits of work-based learning. Together with the final report, these additional reports will provide a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of specific services and the role that service receipt plays in affecting individuals' outcomes. Additionally, these findings will be informative not only for SNAP E&T administrators and

policymakers seeking to understand the impact of particular services but also for administrators of other workforce programs and State SNAP E&T agencies considering changes to their existing programs.

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