

Illustrative Examples of Low-Cost RCTs That Have Produced Policy-Important Findings

Child Welfare Example: Recovery Coaches for Substance-Abusing Parents

- **Overview of the study:** This Illinois program provided case management services to substance-abusing parents who had temporarily lost custody of their children to the state, aimed at engaging them in treatment. The program was evaluated in a well-conducted RCT with a sample of 60 child welfare agencies, working with 2,763 parents. The study found that, over a five-year period, the program produced a 14% increase in family reunification, a 15% increase in foster care cases being closed, and net savings to the state of \$2,400 per parent.
- **Cost of measuring program impact: About \$100,000.** The low cost was achieved by measuring study outcomes using state administrative data (e.g., data on foster care case closures).

K-12 Education Example: New York City Teacher Incentive Program

- **Overview of the study:** This program provided low-performing schools that increased student achievement and other key outcomes with an annual bonus, to be distributed to teachers. It was evaluated in a well-conducted RCT with a sample of 396 of the city's lowest-performing schools, conducted over 2008-2010. The study found that, over a three-year period, the program produced no effect on student achievement, attendance, graduation rates, behavior, or GPA. Based in part on these results, the city ended the program, freeing up resources for other efforts to improve student outcomes.
- **Cost of measuring program impact: About \$50,000.** The low cost was achieved by measuring study outcomes using school district administrative data (e.g., state test scores).

Early Childhood Example: The Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) System

- **Overview of the study:** This program is a system of parenting interventions for families with children ages 0-8, which seeks to strengthen parenting skills and prevent child maltreatment. A well-conducted RCT evaluated the program as implemented county-wide in a sample of 18 South Carolina counties. The study found that the program reduced rates of child maltreatment, hospital visits for maltreatment injuries, and foster-care placements by 25-35%, two years after random assignment.
- **Cost of measuring program impact: \$225,000-\$300,000.** The low cost was achieved by measuring study outcomes using state administrative data (e.g., child maltreatment records).

Criminal Justice Example: Hawaii's Opportunity Probation with Enforcement (HOPE)

- **Overview of the study:** HOPE is a supervision program for drug-involved probationers that provides swift and certain sanctions for a probation violation. It was evaluated in a well-conducted RCT with a sample of 493 probationers, with follow-up one year after random assignment. The study found that the program reduced probationers' likelihood of re-arrest by 55%, and the number of days incarcerated by 48%, during the year after random assignment.
- **Cost of measuring program impact: About \$150,000.** The low cost was achieved by measuring study outcomes using state administrative data (e.g., arrest and incarceration records).

Criminal Justice Example: Philadelphia Low-Intensity Community Supervision Experiment

- **Overview of the study:** This was a program of Low-Intensity Community Supervision for probationers or parolees at low risk of committing a serious crime (compared to the usual, more intensive/costly supervision). The program's purpose was to reduce the cost of supervision to Philadelphia County without compromising public safety. The program was evaluated in a well-conducted RCT with a sample of 1,559 offenders, with follow-up one year after random assignment. The study found that the program caused no increase in crime compared to the usual, more-intensive supervision of such offenders, indicating that program is a viable way to reduce costs in the criminal justice system. Based on the findings, the county adopted this approach for all low-risk offenders.
- **Cost of measuring program impact: Less than \$100,000.** The low cost was achieved by measuring study outcomes using county administrative data (e.g., arrest records).