



Key Factors Enabling Research To Influence Policy

**Conference on Advancing Social Policy-Making
Through Benefit-Cost Analysis**

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Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy

- ◆ A nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, sponsored by Council for Excellence in Government.
- ◆ Mission: To promote government policy based on rigorous evidence of program effectiveness.
- ◆ Independent assessment found: Coalition has been “instrumental” in advancing evidence-based reforms.
- ◆ Coalition has no affiliation with any programs or program models – thus serves as an objective, independent resource on evidence-based programs.
- ◆ Funded independently, by MacArthur, WT Grant, and Clark Foundations.

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Example of research findings having a major impact on policy: U.S. welfare reform

- ◆ 1980s & 90s: Large, well-designed randomized trials showed superiority of welfare reforms emphasizing short-term job search assistance & training, and moving into workforce quickly.
- ◆ Benefit-cost results from these trials, particularly the showing of savings to government, may have been particularly persuasive.
- ◆ These findings were key to 1988 and 1996 welfare reform acts, and major subsequent reductions in welfare rolls and gains in employment.

An example at the state level: Welfare- to-work in California

- ◆ **Riverside GAIN Program** (to move welfare recipients quickly into workforce through short-term job search & training)
 - At 5-year follow-up, increased single-parent employment & earnings by ~40% vs control group
 - Large net gov't savings (~\$3 for every \$1 invested)
- ◆ **L.A. Jobs-First GAIN:** (LA scrapped their ineffective program, and replicated key features of Riverside's)
 - At 2-year follow-up, increased employment & earnings by ~30% vs. control group

Emerging example?: Evidence-based home visitation:

- ◆ **Nurse-Family Partnership** (nurse home visitation for low-income, pregnant women)
 - By age 15, produced 40-70% reductions in child abuse/neglect, and criminal arrests of children, compared to control group.
- ◆ **Led to creation of new evidence-based home visitation program at HHS (2008)**

FY 08 Appropriations Act (Public Law 110-161)

- ◆ Created an evidence-based home visitation program at HHS, directing HHS to –

"ensure that States use the funds to support models that have been shown, in well-designed randomized controlled trials, to produce sizeable, sustained effects on important child outcomes such as abuse and neglect . . . [and] not to incorporate any additional initiatives that have not met these high evidentiary standards"

An example from Mexico: Poverty reduction efforts

- ◆ Large RCT found conditional cash transfers are effective. At 2-year followup, Mexico's PROGRESA:
 - Increased high school enrollment by ~10%
 - Reduced incidence of illness in children age 0-5 by 12%
 - Reduced poverty rate by 17%
- ◆ Program survived change of Administrations; has also been adapted and implemented elsewhere in Latin America and NY City.

A key ingredient?: random assignment studies showing sizeable, sustained effects

◆ RCTs, conducted in real-world settings, tend to be particularly persuasive to policymakers

- Thoughtful policymakers readily grasp the value of random assignment.
- With complicated designs, policymakers may wonder about hidden assumptions or gaming.
- E.g., in welfare reform, policymakers understood the design and results without need for complex interpretations.

Possible Lessons for Benefit-Cost Analysis?:

- ◆ Keep methods simple and accessible to policymakers who are not researchers.
- ◆ If possible, use results of well-designed randomized controlled trials to estimate benefits and costs.
- ◆ Show results are robust to different assumptions.
- ◆ Report results and methods in clear, plain language, with little or no research jargon.