Using Administrative Data to for Policy Research

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Introduction

- Want to demonstrate the usefulness of administrative data by discussing a project I worked on for Department of Labor that made use of administrative data

  - "Workforce Investment Act Non-Experimental Net Impact Evaluation"

  - Use this to illustrate problems and potential benefits from use of administrative data in this manner

Overview of Project

- Project was a non-experimental evaluation of WIA
  - Experimental evaluation was launched at the same time
- Main findings:
  - Positive impact on earnings and employment for Adult Workers, very little impact for Dislocated Workers
  - For Adult workers benefit appears to exceed costs, not true for Dislocated Workers

Impact of Study

- WIOA (WIA replacement) provides more flexibility for administrators to move money from the dislocated worker program to adult worker program
  - Especially important in periods with low unemployment such as prior to 2020
- Administrators responded by developing better ways to serve dislocated workers
  - See: [Helping Workers Displaced by the Covid-19 Economy – WSJ,](#) Dec. 18, 2020
  - More focus on using data to better target training program and working with local businesses
  - Some evidence that these programs are now more successful
- Learned that states differ in who receives training services

Advantages of Administrative Data

- Final report took 15 months to produce, cost $1.5M.
- In contrast Randomized Control Trail (RCT) took over 10 years to complete (long after WIA had ended) and cost $23M.
  - Results from RCT largely match our results.
  - Results also supported by Anderson, Holzer, Lane, Rosenbaum and Smith (2016)
- RCTs are important, but expensive. Using administrative data, if done well, can produce evidence much quicker and at much lower cost—and may be more likely to inform policy.

Issues with Using Administrative Data

- Difficult (almost impossible) to conduct nation wide study
  - Asked for data from 50 states; got data from 12
  - Inconsistent data for comparison groups
  - Spent most of our time getting data into common format
- Needed data, such as UI wage record data, has become less available
- Often researchers do not obtain direct access to data but must work through an intermediary

Other Work with Bigger Impacts

- Bruce Meyer's work at Census using admin data to improve measures of poverty

  - Demonstrated how affective transfer programs are in lifting people out of poverty

  - Provide better measures of income inequality

  - Missing state-level data on several program

Other Work with Bigger Impacts

- Joint research between researchers at HUD and NCHS linking administrative and survey data to examine the impact of children's exposure to lead in public housing
- Administrative data can help improve programs and improve the lives of those being served
  - This idea largely embraced by businesses

Ways to Move Forward

- Provide a centralized mechanism for researchers and policy makers to access federal and state-level administrative data (national secure data service)

  - Provide meta-data and synthesize format of data

  - Provide clear guidelines on who can apply for access and use a common application

  - Continue to pursue the most advanced technology and methods available for protecting privacy

Ways to Move Forward

- Enhance interaction between program administrators and the research community
  - Research results need to be useful for program administrators
    - How to improve programs, not shutdown programs
    - Focus on results not methods
    - Timely, forward looking results
  - Demonstrate to policy-makers and program administrators how research can help
    - Recognize that majority of program administrators are interested in finding better ways to help people
  - Coleridge Initiative is a good start

Ways to Move Forward

- Increase interaction and coordination between Federal and State policy makers

  - Particularly on programs that are a joint federal-state cooperation

- Discussion on what we mean when we say, "protect privacy" and what the goals are.