



Actus Policy Research



Evaluation of the Iowa RCM/RESEA Program

Final Evaluation Report

December 2025

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Acknowledgments

This evaluation was funded by Iowa Workforce Development (IWD). The findings and views presented in this report are solely those of the authors and should not be attributed to IWD or any other Iowa state government agency. The authors are grateful to IWD staff—including Micheal Cockrum, Jana Kislingbury, Stacy Perkins, Linda Rouse, and Elizabeth Waigand—for their cooperation throughout the duration of this evaluation. The successful execution of this evaluation would not have been achievable without their dedication and support.

The suggested citation for this report is:

Michaelides M., Mueser P., Poe-Yamagata E., Nearchou P., and Ciobanu I. (2025). Evaluation of the Iowa RCM/RESEA Program: Final Evaluation Report. Prepared for Iowa Workforce Development. Rockville, MD: Actus Policy Research.

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Executive Summary

The Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program is a federally funded program that requires Unemployment Insurance (UI) claimants to meet with job counselors to undergo an eligibility review and receive customized job search services. In 2022, Iowa Workforce Development (IWD) leveraged state funding to enhance the RESEA program by adding a case-management component, called Reemployment Case Management (RCM). The RCM/RESEA program requires new UI claimants to meet regularly throughout their UI claims with RCM/RESEA Career Planners to receive case management services, undergo reviews of their UI eligibility, and receive customized services to enhance their job search.

The Iowa RCM/RESEA program differs from most RESEA models implemented in other states. In many states, RESEA programs require UI claimants to attend an initial session and, in some cases, a single follow-up session, with the follow-up often not required for all participants. As a result, most participants in other RESEA programs complete a single session at the start of their UI claims. In contrast, the Iowa approach engages UI claimants in regular meetings throughout their UI claims, offering a more continuous and intensive intervention.

In 2022, IWD commissioned Actus Policy Research (Actus) to conduct a third-party evaluation of the Iowa RCM/RESEA program. The primary objective was to evaluate the effectiveness of the program in facilitating UI claimant meetings with case managers and job counselors, increasing receipt of services, reducing UI receipt, and improving employment and earnings.

To estimate the causal impacts of the program, the evaluation included a **randomized controlled trial (RCT) impact study** that randomly assigned RESEA-eligible UI claimants into one of two groups:

- *RCM/RESEA group*—Required to participate in the program. These claimants were subject to the usual program requirements and were required to complete program activities to remain eligible for UI benefits.
- *Control group*—No requirement to participate in the program. These claimants were exempt from participating in the RCM/RESEA program during their UI claims.

Sample intake for the RCT impact study spanned 15 months, from the first week of October 2022 through the last week of December 2023. During this period, 12,599

claimants were randomly assigned to the RCM/RESEA group (11,319 claimants) or to the control group (1,280 claimants). The study took place during a period of exceptionally strong labor market conditions, with the Iowa unemployment rate averaging 3%, the lowest rate in at least 25 years. On average, claimants collected about 10 weeks of UI benefits, and about two-thirds found jobs in the first quarter after entering UI. Therefore, the impact study results should be interpreted in the context of these favorable economic conditions, which resulted in most claimants obtaining employment quickly.

Random assignment ensures that claimants assigned to the RCM/RESEA group are observationally equivalent to those assigned to the control group. This design enables estimation of the causal impacts of the Iowa RCM/RESEA program by comparing service take-up, UI receipt, and employment outcomes between the two groups. The analysis draws on Iowa administrative data, including UI claims data, wage records, and employment service data.

Key evaluation findings can be summarized as follows:



The program was very effective in facilitating meetings with case managers and job counselors. Approximately 84% of RCM/RESEA group claimants completed at least one required meeting, attending an average of 2.4 meetings during their UI claim. This level of engagement makes the Iowa RCM/RESEA program one of the most intensive job-search interventions studied to date in the U.S. context.



The program was highly successful in increasing service receipt. About 83% of claimants in the RCM/RESEA group received job counseling services, compared with only about 14% of those in the control group. Claimants in the RCM/RESEA group were also significantly more likely than those in the control group to receive direct job referrals (15% vs. 2%), receive basic services (52% vs. 20%) and participate in job search workshops (75% vs. 28%). These results indicate that the program caused a substantial increase in service take-up among UI claimants.



The program significantly reduced receipt of UI benefits. The program reduced UI duration by an average of 0.43 weeks, representing a 4.3% reduction relative to the control group. As a result, the program reduced the average benefit amount collected by \$148 per participant. Multiplying the average UI savings by the number of participants suggests that the program

caused nearly \$1.7 million in savings for the UI program during the study period. Furthermore, the program reduced the likelihood of participants exhausting their benefit entitlements before exiting UI by nearly 15%.



The program did not have statistically significant effects on participants' employment and earnings in the six quarters following UI entry. Aside from a small, statistically insignificant positive effect on employment in the first quarter after UI entry, estimated program impacts on employment were close to zero. Estimated impacts on earnings in quarters 1-6 after UI entry were negative—and somewhat larger in quarters 1 and 2—but lacked statistical significance.

Overall, these findings provide credible evidence on the effectiveness of the Iowa RCM/RESEA program during a period of exceptionally strong labor market conditions. The program stands out as one of the most intensive job-search assistance interventions studied in the United States, requiring participants to complete multiple meetings and resulting in a substantial increase in job counseling and related service receipt. These requirements proved effective in reducing UI duration and benefit payments, generating significant savings for the Iowa UI program. However, the results do not suggest that the program helped participants to find jobs or improve their earnings.

The demonstrated reductions in UI benefit duration and payments suggest that the RCM/RESEA program is an effective policy for promoting UI program integrity and supporting efficient use of UI funds. As such, the findings provide a strong rationale for continued Federal support of the Iowa RCM/RESEA program. At the same time, the absence of measurable impacts on employment and earnings during a period of very low unemployment suggests that the marginal benefits of intensive service requirements may vary with economic conditions. During periods characterized by a strong labor market—when most claimants can find jobs relatively quickly—Iowa may consider adjusting program intensity to ensure that resources are utilized most efficiently while still maintaining the program's core integrity and objectives.

1. Introduction

Unemployed workers who collect Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits are obligated to actively seek employment and be available for suitable job opportunities to maintain their eligibility for benefits. To support UI claimants in meeting these requirements and achieving better reemployment outcomes, Iowa Workforce Development (IWD) used Federal funding from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to implement the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program.

The RESEA program required service-eligible UI claimants to attend a meeting with a job counselor in the initial stages of their UI claim. During this meeting, claimants: 1) underwent an eligibility review to verify compliance with UI job search requirements, and 2) received reemployment services to assist them in connecting with suitable employment opportunities. The Iowa RESEA program was designed to meet Federal requirements outlined in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, which authorized the permanent and nationwide implementation of the program (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019).

Starting in 2022, IWD leveraged state funds to enhance the federally funded RESEA program by adding a case-management component, called Reemployment Case Management (RCM). The objective of the enhanced program—named RCM/RESEA—is to provide UI claimants with intensive case management and reemployment services throughout their UI spells. The program requires participants to meet regularly with case managers—called RCM Career Planners—to review their job search efforts and receive referrals to job search workshops and related services. Additionally, the program requires participants to attend regular RESEA meetings with job counselors—called RESEA Career Planners—at local IowaWORKS offices to undergo an eligibility review and receive reemployment services.

The Iowa RCM/RESEA program represents a unique job-search assistance intervention within the U.S. context, diverging from RESEA models studied to date. In most states, UI claimants are required to attend an initial RESEA session at the start of their claims, with a single follow-up session, which is often not universally required. Consequently, the majority of RESEA participants in other states complete only a single session. In contrast, Iowa requires claimants to participate in program sessions throughout their UI spells, representing a more continuous and intensive intervention that is not typical in other states.

In January 2022, IWD commissioned Actus Policy Research (Actus) to conduct a third-party evaluation of the Iowa RCM/RESEA program. The primary objective of the evaluation is to assess the program's effectiveness in reducing UI duration and benefits collected and in improving the reemployment outcomes of UI claimants. The evaluation includes a **randomized controlled trial (RCT) impact study** to estimate the program's causal impacts on participant outcomes as well as an **implementation study** to assess program implementation and provide essential context for interpreting the RCT impact study findings.

To conduct the RCT impact study, Actus developed a research design that randomly assigned service-eligible UI claimants to the *RCM/RESEA group* or the *control group*. Claimants assigned to the RCM/RESEA group were required to participate in the RCM/RESEA program and were expected to fulfill the usual program requirements. Claimants assigned to the control group had no obligation to participate in the RCM/RESEA program and were not subject to any related requirements.

Sample intake for the RCT impact study was done over a 15-month period, spanning from the first week of October 2022 through the last week of December 2023. During this timeframe, a total of 12,599 UI claimants were randomly assigned to either the RCM/RESEA group (11,319 claimants) or the control group (1,280 claimants). Because assignment to the program was random, the causal impacts of the program can be estimated by measuring differences in service receipt, UI outcomes, employment, and earnings between claimants in the RCM/RESEA group and claimants in the control group. For this purpose, the study uses Iowa administrative data—including UI claims data, UI wage records, and employment service data.

It is important to note that the study was conducted in a period with particularly strong economic conditions. During the study period, the Iowa unemployment rate averaged 3%, the lowest rate in at least two decades, while most UI claimants were entitled to a maximum of 16 weeks of UI benefits. As such, claimants collected an average of 10 weeks of benefits, and two-thirds of claimants were able to find employment within a quarter after UI entry without any assistance. Therefore, RCT impact study results should be interpreted within the context of these favorable labor market conditions, and should not be assumed to represent impacts under different labor market conditions.

This report presents the final evaluation findings. Results indicate that the Iowa RCM/RESEA program is one of the most intensive job-search assistance

interventions ever implemented in the U.S. context. About 84% of RCM/RESEA group claimants completed at least one meeting, and, on average, claimants completed 2.4 program meetings during their UI claims. As a result, the program significantly increased receipt of services, with 83% of RCM/RESEA group claimants receiving job counseling services and 15% receiving direct job referrals, compared to 14% and 2% of control group claimants, respectively. Results also indicate that, on average, the program reduced UI duration by 0.43 weeks and total benefit amount collected by \$148 per participant, implying that the program produced nearly \$1.7 million in savings for the Iowa UI program during the study period. However, there is no evidence that the program improved participant employment and earnings in the six quarters following UI entry.

In our view, these findings support continued Federal investment in the Iowa RCM/RESEA program, given its effectiveness in improving service take-up, reducing UI duration, and generating savings for the UI program. At the same time, during periods of strong labor markets, Iowa may consider adjusting program intensity, as continued participation in services may be less critical when most claimants can quickly find employment.

The remainder of this report is organized as follows. Section 2 provides the background of the Iowa RCM/RESEA program and the objectives of the evaluation. Section 3 presents the research design and the final findings of the RCT impact study. Section 4 presents the findings of the implementation study. Section 5 summarizes the findings and concludes.

2. Background

2.1. The RESEA Program

In 2005, DOL established the Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment (REA) program to address concerns that the automation of UI systems had reduced the ability of state workforce agencies to monitor UI claimants. The REA program required service-eligible UI claimants to visit a local employment office to undergo an eligibility review to confirm that they were actively searching for work and to obtain information about available reemployment services to aid their job search (Benus *et al.*, 2008). The primary program objective was to enforce UI work search requirements and achieve UI savings by eliminating benefit payments to claimants

who were not compliant with requirements. The program was initially operated by nine states and expanded to 42 states by 2011 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012).

To evaluate the impacts of the REA program, DOL sponsored an RCT impact study of the Nevada, Florida, Idaho, and Illinois programs, conducted during the Great Recession. The findings revealed that all four programs were effective in reducing UI spells and generating UI savings that exceeded program costs (Poe-Yamagata *et al.*, 2012). Notably, the Nevada REA program stood out as particularly effective in reducing UI payments compared with programs in the other states and was the only program that increased participants' employment and earnings. The higher effects of the Nevada REA program were attributed to the compulsory job counseling services offered after the eligibility review. In contrast, programs in the remaining three states only required the eligibility review and did not mandate participation in job counseling.

A number of academic papers provided additional evidence regarding the effects of the Nevada REA program. Michaelides and Mueser (2018) found that program effects were partly influenced by early claimant exits to avoid participation or due to disqualifications of non-compliant participants. The majority of the program's impact was attributed to job counseling, which helped claimants find employment quickly, leading to UI exits after they received services. Michaelides and Mueser (2020) corroborated these findings and demonstrated that job-search assistance programs in states that did not mandate job counseling did not yield similar service effects. Additional research showed that the Nevada REA program had long-term effects on participants' employment and earnings, helping participants to maintain their homeownership and avoid transitioning to disability insurance, while leading to savings for the UI program and increasing Federal tax receipts (Manoli *et al.*, 2018). Other work found that the Nevada program was effective during both periods of recession and moderate unemployment (Michaelides and Mueser, *forthcoming*) and that it was successful in helping youth UI claimants achieve improved reemployment outcomes (Michaelides, Mueser, and Smith, 2021).

In 2015, based on the promising evidence from the Nevada program, DOL encouraged states to replace their REA programs with interventions that required claimants to receive reemployment services after completing their eligibility reviews (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015). To highlight the addition of the services requirement, DOL renamed the program RESEA (Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment). The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 permanently authorized the nationwide implementation of RESEA by allocating over \$150 million to support

it across the 50 states and the District of Columbia (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). In FY 2023, DOL reinforced its commitment to the RESEA program by allocating \$375 million to support its operations (U.S. Department of Labor, 2023).

2.2. The Iowa RCM/RESEA Program

Since 2016, in line with DOL's recommendations, Iowa has operated an RESEA program requiring service-eligible UI claimants to attend a meeting with job counselors for an eligibility review and reemployment services. At the beginning of 2022, IWD used state funds to enhance the RESEA program by introducing a case-management component called RCM. The objective of this enhanced program—referred to as the RCM/RESEA program—is to conduct eligibility reviews and provide claimants with intensive case management and reemployment services throughout their UI spells.

Each week, IWD identifies new UI claimants who are eligible for services, which includes all claimants except those who are job-attached and subject to recall (i.e., on temporary layoff) or those who conduct their job search through union hiring halls. IWD compiles the RCM/RESEA selection pool and uploads it to the IowaWORKS system. IWD staff then use the list to contact claimants by phone to review their UI claim, discuss job-search requirements, and ensure enrollment in the IowaWORKS job exchange system.¹ During this call, claimants are also informed of the requirement to participate in the RCM/RESEA program.

After receiving their first UI benefit payment, claimants must participate in regular meetings with RCM case managers (called RCM Career Planners), funded by the RCM component of the program. During these sessions, case managers review claimants' job search efforts and UI eligibility, refer claimants to mandatory workshops covering various aspects of the job search process, and provide information about job fairs, training programs, and other available resources.² RCM meetings are typically conducted by phone and last approximately 15 minutes.

Two weeks after receiving a first payment, claimants are required to participate in the RESEA component of the program, which includes regular meetings between participants and RESEA job counselors (called RESEA Career Planners). The initial RESEA meetings focus on assessing claimant needs, delivering job counseling, and

¹ Sometimes the initial call may occur before claimants collect their first benefit payment.

² For more details on the workshop topics, visit: <https://workforce.iowa.gov/jobs/skills/workshops>.

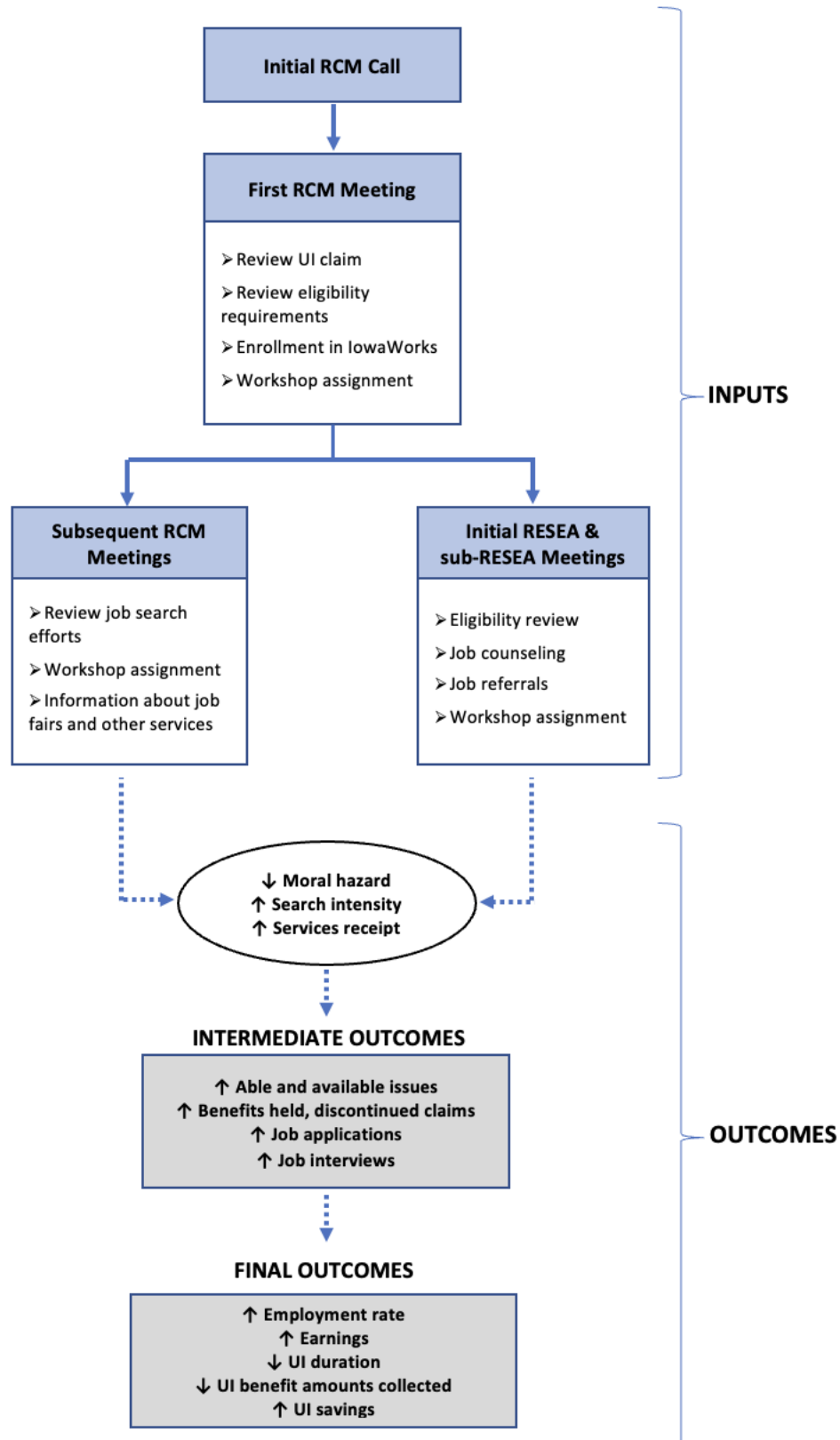
reviewing UI eligibility to ensure compliance with work search requirements. Counseling includes a review of local labor market information and job openings, conducting a skills assessment, assisting with resume development, formulating an individualized job search plan, and providing direct job referrals. Participants are also referred to mandatory workshops. The initial RESEA meeting lasts up to 60 minutes, usually conducted in person at local IowaWORKS offices. Claimants are expected to attend regular follow-up sessions, known as sub-RESEA meetings, for the duration of their benefit collection; sub-RESEA meetings are typically shorter, averaging about 30 minutes.

The program is designed to facilitate regular claimant meetings with RCM case managers and RESEA job counselors, for as long as claimants collect benefits. However, the frequency of RCM/RESEA sessions depends on staff availability and individual claimant needs. Between meetings, claimants are expected to participate in any workshops to which they have been referred. To uphold program requirements, IWD may suspend benefit payments for claimants who fail to attend required meetings or who do not demonstrate active job search efforts. Prior to the launch of the current RCT impact study, the Iowa RCM/RESEA program had the capacity to serve all service-eligible UI claimants.

The Theory of Change (TOC) for the Iowa RCM/RESEA program, illustrated in Figure 1, identifies two main program mechanisms through which the program is expected to achieve its impacts. First, the program aims to mitigate moral hazard by suspending benefits for claimants identified with eligibility issues—such as those not actively seeking work or those unavailable for suitable employment.

Second, the program seeks to improve reemployment outcomes by increasing participation in job counseling and related services, and by providing direct job referrals that connect claimants to employment opportunities. Furthermore, continued interaction with RCM and RESEA Career Planners is expected to motivate claimants to intensify their job search efforts or to persist after their initial efforts are unsuccessful. Through these mechanisms, the program is designed to expedite job placement and increase participants' earnings relative to what they would have achieved in the absence of the intervention. In turn, these efforts are expected to shorten UI durations and generate savings for the UI program.

Figure 1: Theory of Change: Iowa RCM/RESEA Programs



Two contextual factors, however, may limit the size of the observed program impacts. First, as discussed in Section 3.3, the RCT impact study was conducted during a period of robust labor market conditions. In such an environment, many UI claimants can find jobs without any assistance, resulting in relatively short unemployment durations, regardless of program participation. Therefore, even if the program is successful in helping participants connect to suitable job opportunities, the relative impact of the RCM/RESEA program on employment and earnings may be smaller in a strong labor market compared to a context where finding a job is more challenging.

Second, the majority of UI claimants in Iowa are entitled to a maximum of 16 weeks of benefits, with only a small share eligible for a maximum of 26 weeks (typically those whose employers went out of business). Given the relatively short 16-week entitlement, there is limited time for program effects to influence UI duration before benefits expire. As a result, impacts on UI duration and benefit amount collected are expected to be smaller than in states where claimants are eligible for the more typical 26-week maximum.

2.3. Evaluation Questions

The main objective of this evaluation is to estimate the causal impacts of the Iowa RCM/RESEA program on claimants' UI receipt and employment outcomes. Specifically, the RCT impact study addresses the following questions:

- 1) ***Does the program increase service participation?*** The program is expected to increase the receipt of services that directly support their job search efforts. If the program leads participants to use services that they would not have accessed otherwise, this provides a mechanism through which the program could affect employment, earnings, and UI outcomes.
- 2) ***Does the program reduce UI duration, benefit amounts collected, and benefit exhaustion?*** By increasing service receipt and enforcing work-search requirements, the program is expected to promote employment and reduce the duration of participants' UI spells. This study examines the program's causal impacts on UI duration, benefits collected, and the likelihood of exhausting benefit entitlements.
- 3) ***Does the program increase participants' employment and earnings?*** The

program may enhance participants' job-search outcomes by enforcing UI work search requirements and providing services that support their search efforts. A primary goal of the RCT impact study is to determine whether the program improves participants' employment rates and earnings following UI entry.

The evaluation also includes an implementation study to assess how the program was executed during the study period and to provide additional context for interpreting the RCT impact results. This study is also critical for evaluating the extent to which implementation adhered to the program model, a key factor in ensuring the replicability of the findings.

3. RCT Impact Study

3.1. Research Design

Actus designed and implemented an RCT impact study to estimate the causal impacts of the Iowa RCM/RESEA program. The design was successfully executed, causing minimal disruption to program administration and without affecting the program's typical service delivery model. Under this design, service-eligible UI claimants were randomly assigned to one of two groups:

- *RCM/RESEA group* – Claimants in this group were required to participate in the RCM/RESEA program. These claimants were contacted by IWD and were instructed to fulfill the usual RCM/RESEA requirements.
- *Control group* – Claimants in this group had no obligation to participate in the RCM/RESEA program and were not subject to any program requirements. These individuals were not contacted by IWD and received no RCM/RESEA program notifications.

The RCT sample intake period began in the first week of October 2022 and concluded in the last week of December 2023. During this period, the program had the capacity to serve all service-eligible UI claimants. To accommodate the RCT impact study, random assignment was used to allocate approximately 10% of service-eligible claimants to the control group, with the remaining 90% allocated to the RCM/RESEA group.

Random assignment ensures that the RCM/RESEA group and the control group are similar in terms of observed and unobserved factors, and, consequently, any disparities in outcomes between the two groups can be attributed to the effects of the program. Figure 2 illustrates the random assignment procedure, which comprised the following steps:

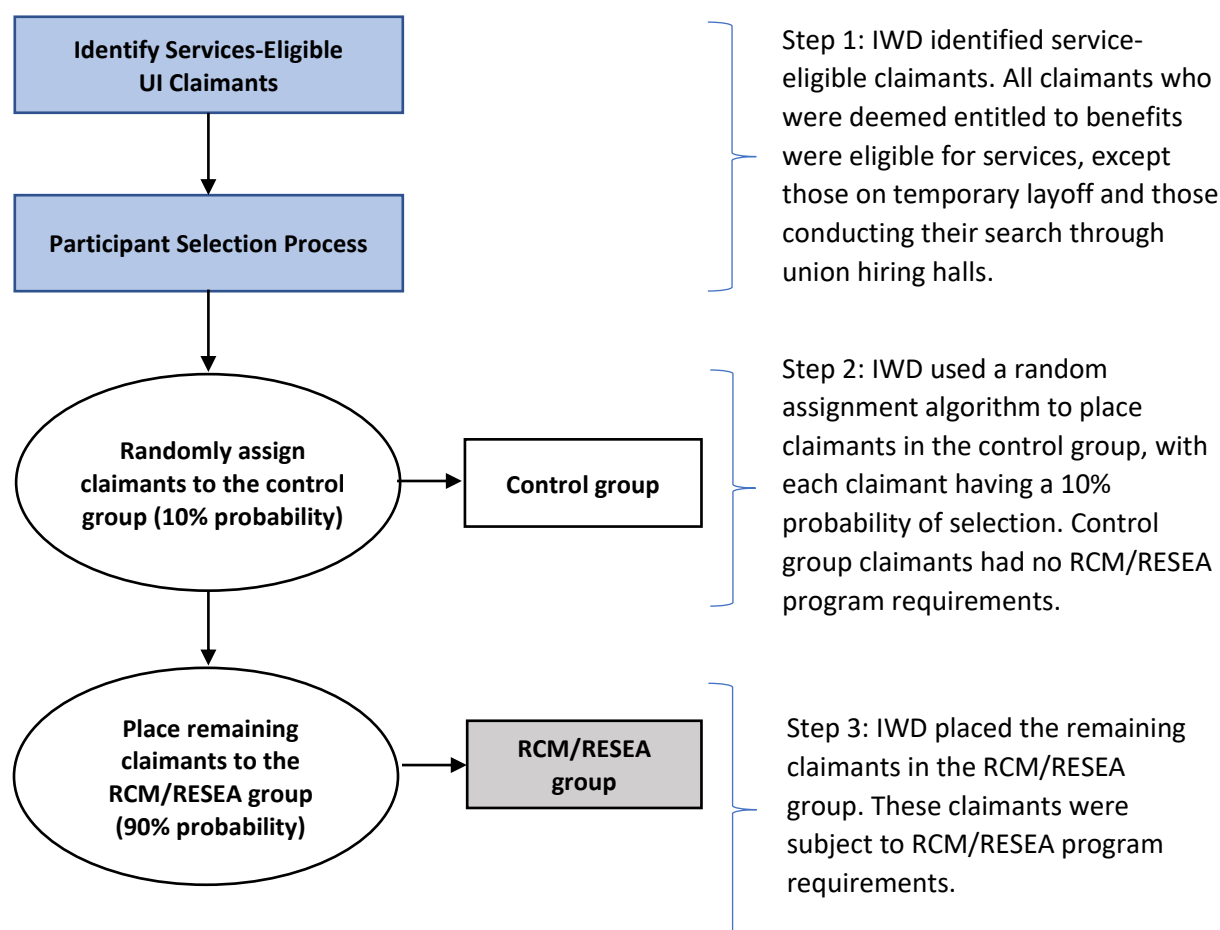
Step 1: Each week, IWD used its usual process to compile the list of new UI claimants who were eligible for the RCM/RESEA program. All claimants deemed entitled to receive UI benefits were eligible, except those who were job-attached (on temporary layoff) and those who conducted their search through union hiring halls.

Step 2: Using a random assignment algorithm, IWD assigned service-eligible claimants to the control group, with each claimant having a 10% probability of being selected. Claimants assigned to the control group were excluded from the RCM/RESEA program, so they did not receive a call from IWD, were not required to participate in RCM/RESEA program activities, and received no program communications for the duration of their UI claims.

Step 3: The remaining service-eligible claimants were assigned to the RCM/RESEA group and were required to complete the usual program activities. By default, claimants had a 90% probability each of being assigned to the RCM/RESEA group.

During the RCT sample intake period, 12,599 service-eligible UI claimants were randomly assigned to the two study groups—1,280 (10.2%) were allocated to the control group and 11,319 (89.8%) were allocated to the RCM/RESEA group.

Figure 2: Random Assignment Procedure



3.2. Data Sources

The study sample includes all 12,599 claimants who were randomly assigned to the RCM/RESEA and control groups during the sample intake period (October 2022 to December 2023). To estimate the program's impacts, we use Iowa administrative data that provide information for each claimant in the study sample. Below is a description of these data sources.

UI claims data. These data provide baseline UI claim information for all claimants in the study sample, including: 1) claimant characteristics as reported in UI claim applications, such as gender, race/ethnicity, education, and age; and 2) claimant benefit entitlements (weekly benefit amount and maximum benefit amount). The data also provide information on benefit payments and the corresponding benefit amounts collected by claimants.

The baseline information is used in statistical tests to confirm that random assignment produced similar study groups, and the payment information is used to estimate the causal impacts of the program on benefit receipt outcomes.

UI wage records. These data provide quarterly employment records from UI-covered jobs within the state of Iowa. This study uses UI wage records for all claimants in the study sample from quarter 4, 2020 through quarter 2, 2025. Data from quarter 4, 2020 through quarter 2, 2023 are used to describe the employment history of claimants in the eight quarters before random assignment and to test if RCM/RESEA and control group claimants had equivalent histories. Data from quarter 1, 2023 through quarter 2, 2025 are used to estimate the causal impacts of the program on employment and earnings for the six quarters after UI entry.

RCM/RESEA program data. These data provide information on program-related activities completed by claimants assigned to the RCM/RESEA program during their UI claims. This includes information on meeting scheduling, meeting completion, disqualifications, and reasons for disqualification. The study uses this information to examine the compliance of RCM/RESEA claimants with program requirements and investigate the frequency of their meetings.

Employment service data. These data provide information on the employment services received by all UI claimants from the Iowa public workforce system during their UI claims. This study uses employment service data to examine the services received by claimants in each study group and assess if the RCM/RESEA program resulted in increased service participation.

3.3. Operational Context and Sample Description

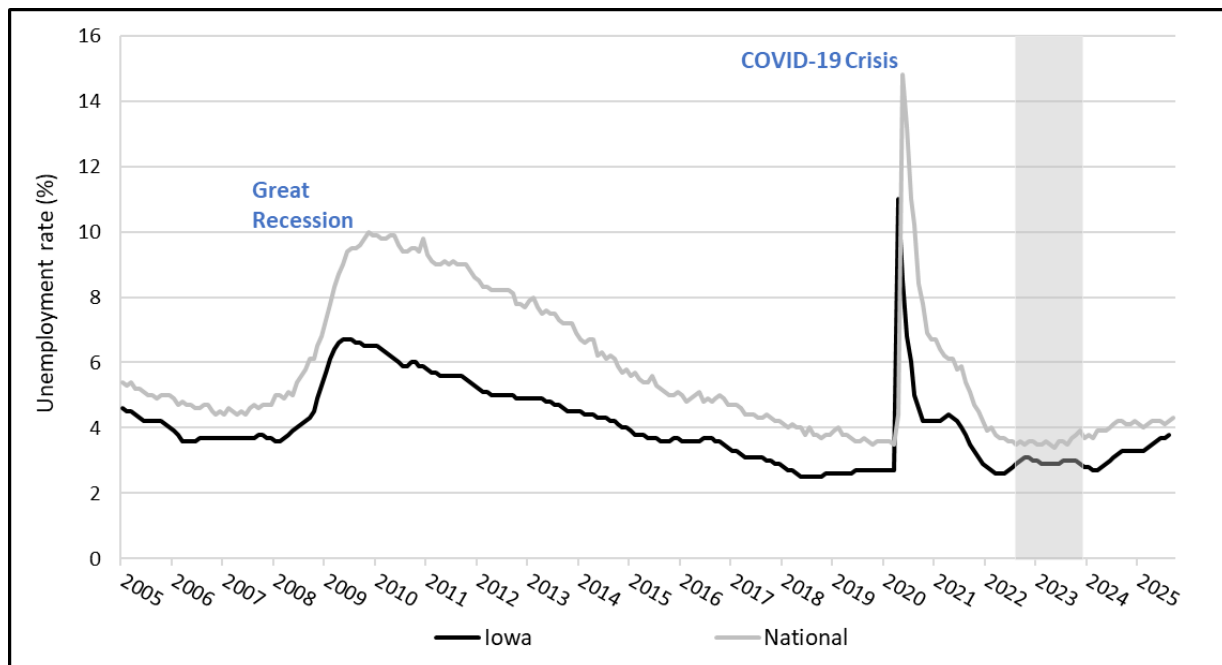
3.3.1. The Iowa Labor Market

During the RCT sample intake period, from October 2022 through December 2023, Iowa experienced a historically strong labor market. Figure 3 compares the Iowa monthly unemployment rate with the national rate from January 2005 through August 2025, encompassing the RCT intake period. Over the past two decades, the Iowa unemployment rate has been lower and exhibited less volatility during economic downturns than the national rate. During the Great Recession, the Iowa unemployment rate increased from an average of 4.2% in 2008 to a 6.1 % peak in 2010, a 1.9 percentage-point increase. By comparison, the national unemployment

rate increased by 3.9 percentage points, from 5.7% in 2008 to a 9.6% peak in 2010. Both the Iowa and national rates declined from their 2010 peaks; by 2019, they reached historically low levels of 2.7% and 3.7%, respectively.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Iowa rate peaked at 11% in April 2020, as compared with 14.8% nationally. Economic recovery after the pandemic was rapid both in Iowa and nationally. During the RCT sample intake period—from October 2022 through December 2023—the Iowa average monthly unemployment rate was 3%, marginally higher than the state’s pre-pandemic rate but still lower than the national rate over the same period.

Figure 3: Iowa Unemployment Rate



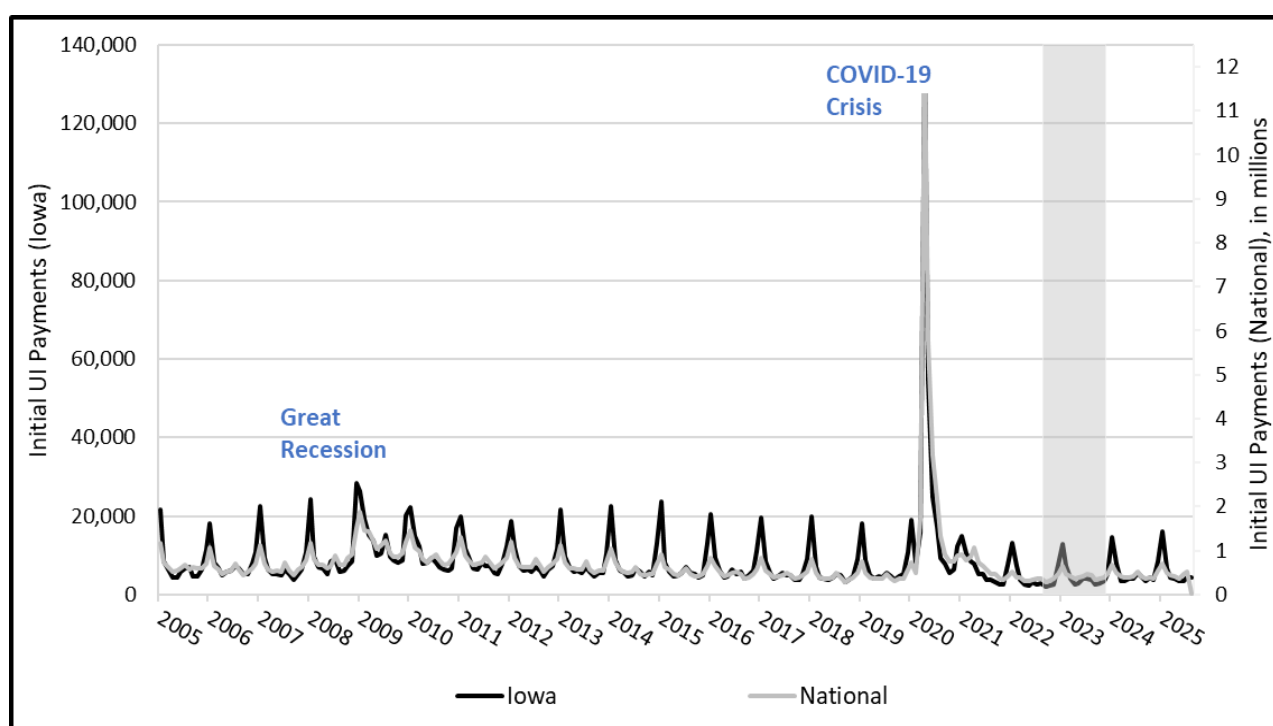
Note: Seasonally adjusted monthly unemployment rate. Sources: Local Area Unemployment Statistics (Iowa) and Current Population Survey (national), retrieved from: <https://www.bls.gov/data/>. The shaded area marks the RCT sample intake period.

A similar story emerges when we examine the number of new UI claims with a first payment. As indicated in Figure 4, during the pandemic, Iowa experienced a historic spike in the number of new UI claims. In 2019, Iowa had a monthly average of 6,558 new UI claims with a first payment. This figure reached a historic high during the pandemic, with 126,040 claims in March 2021 and 157,324 claims in April 2021. The national spike in new UI claims with a first payment during the pandemic was even more pronounced. The rapid recovery following the pandemic led to a sharp decline in the number of claims both in Iowa and nationally. During the RCT intake

period, the monthly average number of new claims with a first payment was 4,505, which is lower than the pre-pandemic average.

In summary, during the study period, the Iowa labor market was perhaps at its healthiest level since at least 2005. The state experienced historically low unemployment and UI program participation. Thus, the results of this evaluation will provide evidence of the effectiveness of the RCM/RESEA program in the context of a very strong labor market.

Figure 4: Iowa New UI Claims with a First Payment



Note: Number of initial UI payments. Source: US Department of Labor, retrieved from: <https://oui.doleta.gov/unemploy/claimssum.asp>. The shaded area marks the RCT intake period.

3.3.2. Sample Description

During the RCT sample intake period, a total of 12,599 UI claimants started collecting benefits and were eligible for RCM/RESEA. Random assignment was used to assign 11,319 (89.8%) of these claimants to the RCM/RESEA group and 1,280 (10.2%) to the control group. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the claimants in the study sample, as reported in their UI applications.

Table 1: Characteristics of Claimants in the Study Sample

	Sample Proportion
Number of claimants	12,599
Gender	
Male	46.0%
Female	50.7%
Other/missing	3.2%
Race/Ethnicity	
White	68.7%
Black	10.6%
Hispanic	3.1%
Asian	1.5%
Native American	0.4%
Multiple races	7.4%
Hawaiian and Pacific Islander	0.3%
Missing	8.1%
Age	
<25 years old	6.3%
25-34 years old	22.9%
35-44 years old	27.3%
45-54 years old	22.5%
55+ years old	21.0%
Education	
No High School Diploma	4.3%
High School Diploma	46.1%
Associate Degree / Some College	24.4%
College Degree	18.7%
Post-Graduate Degree	5.8%
Missing	0.6%
Veteran	4.8%
Disabled	5.1%

Note: Reported are sample proportions.

Source: Iowa UI claims data.

Approximately 46% and 51% of claimants reported being male and female, respectively. The majority of claimants identified as white (69%); race and ethnicity were not reported for 8% of the sample. The age and education distributions are as expected, with approximately half the claimants being 25-45 years old and about half completing no more than a high school education. Approximately 5% of claimants reported being veterans, and about 5% reported a disability.

Figure 5 presents the geographic distribution of claimants based on their Iowa Local Workforce Development Area (LWDA) of residence.³ About 29% of claimants were residing in the Central Iowa LWDA, encompassing the Des Moines metropolitan area. Approximately 19% were residing in the East Central Iowa LWDA, encompassing the Cedar Rapids metropolitan area. Other large areas include the Northeast Iowa LWDA (16% of claimants), covering counties in the northeastern part of the state, and the Mississippi Valley LWDA (14% of claimants), covering counties in the southeast. The remaining LWDAs encompass mostly rural counties in the rest of the state, serving from 1% to 9% of claimants in the state.

Workers in Iowa who lose their jobs through no fault of their own may become eligible for UI benefits subject to the following conditions: 1) had earnings from UI-covered employment in at least two calendar quarters in the base period (defined as the first four quarters of the five quarters prior to the UI application); 2) earned at least \$2,840 during the base period; and 3) earned at least \$1,890 during the base period quarter with the highest earnings. Claimants who meet these requirements are entitled to collect 9-16 weeks of benefits as long as they are unemployed, with a weekly benefit amount (WBA) ranging from a \$82 minimum to a \$676 maximum.⁴ In cases where claimants lost their jobs because of a permanent business closure, they may become eligible for up to 26 weeks of benefits.

³ For more information about the Iowa LWDAs, refer to: <https://workforce.iowa.gov/labor-market-information/resources/area-profiles>.

⁴ The WBA ranges from 1/19th of earnings in the quarter with the highest earnings during the base period if the claimant has four or more dependents to 1/23rd of earnings in the highest earnings quarter for claimants with no dependents, subject to \$82-99 minimums and \$551-676 maximums. Weeks of eligibility are equal to 20% of the base period earnings divided by the WBA, subject to a 9-week minimum and a 16-week maximum.

Figure 5: Geographic Distribution of Claimants in the Study Sample

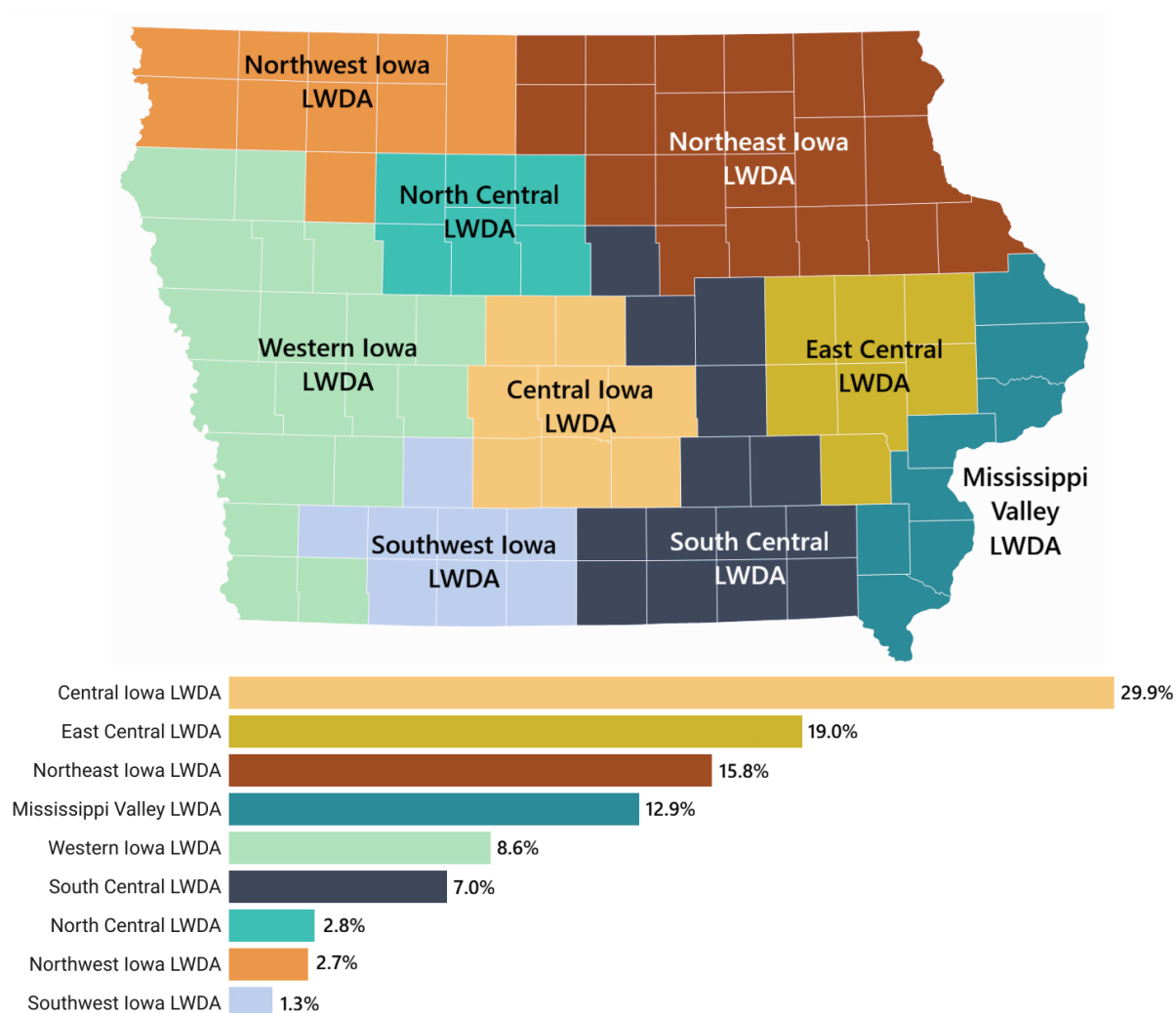


Table 2 summarizes the benefit entitlements for claimants in the study sample. The majority of claimants (85%) were eligible for the maximum 16 weeks of benefits, with 8% being eligible for 9-15 weeks. Nearly 6% of claimants qualified for 17-26 weeks of benefits because their employer went out of business. Information on benefit entitlements is not available for 99 claimants (less than 1% of all claimants). On average, claimants were entitled to a \$494 WBA and a \$8,076 total maximum benefit amount.⁵

⁵ The maximum benefit amount equals the WBA times weeks of eligibility.

Table 2: Benefit Entitlements of Claimants in the Study Sample

	Benefit Entitlements
Number of claimants[†]	12,500
Weeks of Eligibility	16.3 (2.6)
9-15 weeks	8.3%
16 weeks	85.8%
17-26 weeks	5.9%
Weekly benefit amount (\$)	494 (126)
Maximum benefit amount (\$)	8,076 (2,461)

Note: Reported are sample proportions or means with standard deviations in parentheses. [†]= Benefit entitlements are missing for 99 of the 12,599 claimants in the study sample.

Source: Iowa UI claims data.

Table 3 presents the average earnings of RESEA-eligible UI claimants in the eight quarters prior to UI entry. Average claimant earnings gradually increased from \$9,911 in quarter 8 prior to UI entry to \$13,278 in quarter 1 prior to UI entry. This increasing trend is most likely due to the economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 3: Prior Earnings of RESEA-Eligible UI Claimants

	Average Earnings
Earnings amount (\$)	
In quarter 1 prior to entry	13,278 (13,240)
In quarter 2 prior to entry	13,489 (10,820)
In quarter 3 prior to entry	13,152 (11,748)
In quarter 4 prior to entry	12,519 (12,033)
In quarter 5 prior to entry	11,592 (11,838)
In quarter 6 prior to entry	12,112 (11,256)
In quarter 7 prior to entry	10,326 (11,410)
In quarter 8 prior to entry	9,911 (12,239)

Note: Reported are sample means with standard deviations in parentheses.

Source: Iowa UI wage records.

3.3.3. Random Assignment Statistical Test

To affirm the validity of the study, it is important to verify that random assignment yielded study groups that were equivalent with respect to factors observed at the time of assignment. To formally test for RCM/RESEA-control group equivalency, we use a regression model to estimate the likelihood of assignment to the RCM/RESEA group. This model takes the following form:

$$T_i = X_i \cdot b + Earn_i \cdot c + LWDA_i \cdot d + Week_i \cdot e + v_i \quad [1]$$

The dependent variable (T_i) is an indicator that equals 1 if claimant i was assigned to the RCM/RESEA group and 0 otherwise. Control variables include:

- X_i —includes claimant characteristics and UI entitlements
- $Earn_i$ —includes earnings amount in quarters 1-8 prior to UI entry
- $LWDA_i$ —includes indicators for the LWDA where claimants resided
- $Week_i$ —includes indicators for week of random assignment

Additionally, the right-hand side of the equation includes v_i , a zero-mean error term. Random assignment was conducted using an algorithm where each claimant had a 10% chance of being allocated to the control group and a 90% chance of being allocated to the RCM/RESEA group. Since the structure of random assignment remained consistent throughout the RCT intake period, we expect that the estimated parameters associated with characteristics (b), prior earnings (c), LWDA (d), and week (e) would not be statistically significant, confirming that assignment into the RCM/RESEA program is not influenced by these factors.

Table 4 presents the estimation results for this model. Out of the 40 estimated parameters presented in the table (parameters for week of assignment are not reported), four are statistically significant at the 5% level or lower. These results indicate that assignment to either the RCM/RESEA or the control group cannot be attributed to observed factors beyond chance. Given that the two study groups are observationally similar, any RCM/RESEA-control group differences in outcomes observed after random assignment can be attributed solely to the program.

Table 4: Regression Results: Likelihood of RCM/RESEA Group Assignment

	Likelihood of RCM/RESEA Assignment
Gender	
Male	--
Female	-0.002 (0.006)
Other/Missing	0.057 (0.012)***
Race	
White	--
Black	-0.008 (0.010)
Hispanic	0.031 (0.014)**
Asian	-0.043 (0.026)
Native American	0.047 (0.034)
Multiple races	-0.005 (0.011)
Hawaiian and Pacific Islander	-0.041 (0.058)
Missing	-0.012 (0.010)
Age	
<25 years old	-0.021 (0.013)
25–34 years old	-0.002 (0.008)
35–44 years old	--
45–54 years old	0.008 (0.007)
55+ years old	-0.008 (0.008)
Education	
No High School Diploma	--
High School Diploma	0.017 (0.015)
Associate Degree / Some College	0.020 (0.015)
College Degree	0.023 (0.016)
Advanced Degree	0.027 (0.018)
Missing	-0.012 (0.041)
Veteran	-0.000 (0.013)
Disabled	0.002 (0.012)

(Table 4 continues on the next page)

(Table 4, continued from previous page)

	Likelihood of RCM/RESEA Assignment
Benefit entitlements missing	-0.076 (0.042)*
WBA (in \$000s)	-0.001 (0.027)
Weeks of Eligibility	
8-15 weeks	0.005 (0.010)
16 weeks	--
17-26 weeks	0.009 (0.011)
Earnings (in \$0000s)	
In quarter 1 prior to entry	-0.0003 (0.0003)
In quarter 2 prior to entry	0.0005 (0.0005)
In quarter 3 prior to entry	0.0002 (0.0003)
In quarter 4 prior to entry	-0.0010 (0.0004)**
In quarter 5 prior to entry	0.0004 (0.0003)
In quarter 6 prior to entry	0.0006 (0.0004)
In quarter 7 prior to entry	-0.0000 (0.0003)
In quarter 8 prior to entry	0.0001 (0.0004)
Workforce region	
Central Iowa	--
East Central Iowa	0.019 (0.008)**
Mississippi Valley	0.014 (0.009)
Northeast Iowa	0.010 (0.009)
Northwest Iowa	0.015 (0.017)
South Central Iowa	0.008 (0.012)
Southwest Iowa	-0.018 (0.027)
Western Iowa	0.009 (0.011)
North Central Iowa	0.008 (0.017)
Week controls	Yes
Observations	12,599
R-Squared	0.0131

Note: Reported are estimated parameters with standard errors in parentheses. "--" Denotes the omitted category for categorical variables. *** p-value<0.01, ** p-value<0.05, * p-value<0.10.

3.4. Program Impacts

3.4.1. Program Participation and Services Received

The Iowa RCM/RESEA program stands out as one of the most intensive job-search assistance interventions ever evaluated within the U.S. UI context. Designed to provide each participant with ongoing support throughout their UI claim period, the program requires regular meetings with case managers and job counselors. Frequent participation in the required meetings is expected to significantly boost take-up of job counseling, workshop attendance, and receipt of other related services, while also mitigating moral hazard. These services are expected to reduce UI receipt and improve reemployment outcomes, leading to benefit savings for the UI program and positive labor market returns for participants.

Table 5 presents program participation outcomes for the 11,319 claimants assigned to the RCM/RESEA group. Approximately 74% of RCM/RESEA claimants completed at least one RCM meeting, and 58% completed at least one RESEA meeting. Overall, nearly 84% of RCM/RESEA claimants completed at least one meeting.⁶ On average, claimants in the RCM/RESEA group completed 2.4 meetings.

⁶ Separate analysis indicate that among control group claimants, 2.6% were scheduled for and completed one RCM meeting and 0.2% were scheduled and completed an RESEA meeting. These figures indicate that direct sample contamination—due to control cases participating in the RCM/RESEA program in violation of study protocols—is limited and will not significantly affect the analysis of program impacts.

Table 5: Program Participation, RCM/RESEA Group

	RCM/RESEA Group
Number of Claimants	11,319
RCM meetings	
Completed RCM meeting	74.3%
Number of RCM meetings completed	1.2 (1.0)
RESEA meetings	
Completed RESEA meeting	58.2%
Number of RESEA meetings completed	1.1 (1.3)
RCM and/or RESEA meetings	
Completed RCM and/or RESEA meeting	83.9%
Number of total meetings completed	2.4 (1.8)

Note: Reported are sample proportions or sample means with standard deviations in parentheses.

Source: Iowa RCM/RESEA program data.

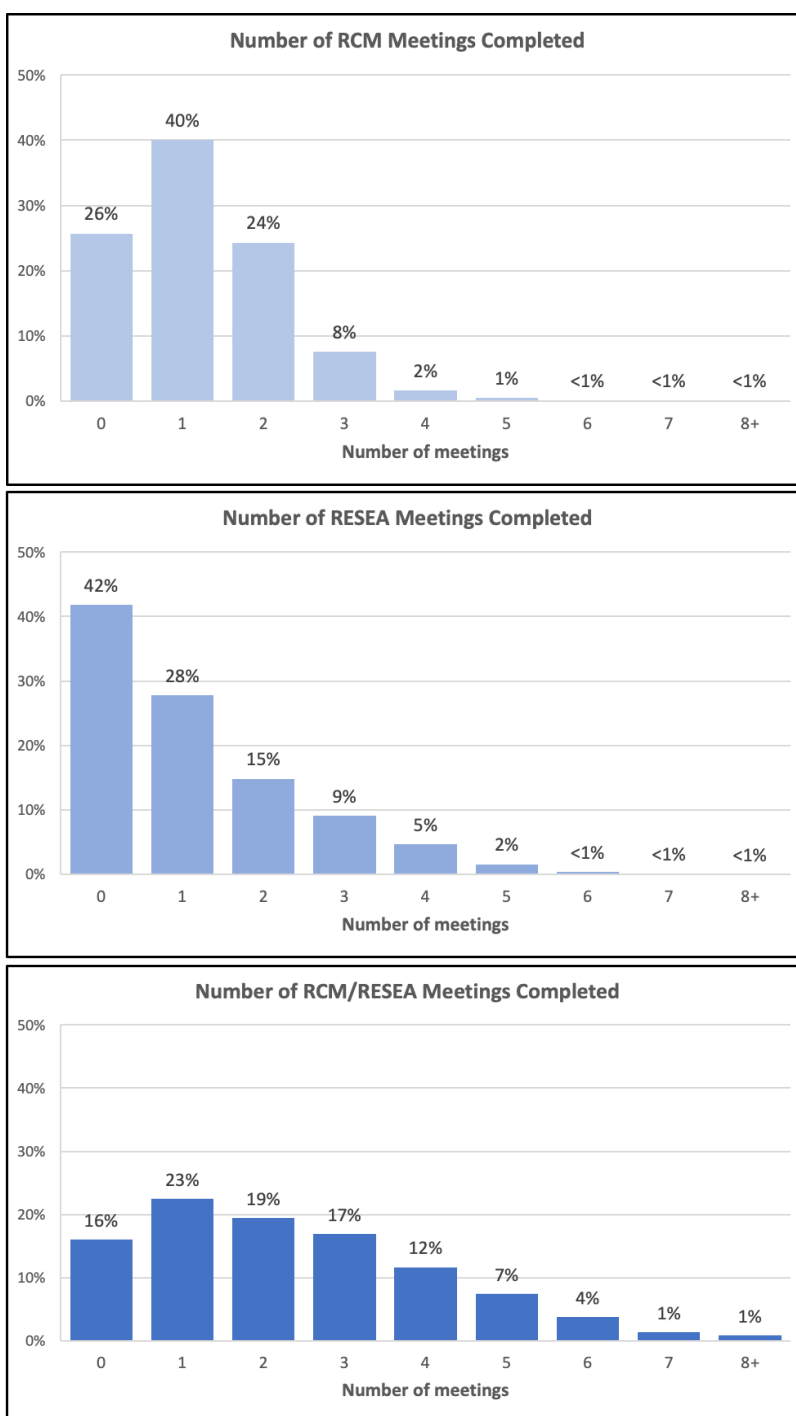
Figure 6 illustrates the distribution of completed program meetings. The top graph indicates that 40% of RCM/RESEA claimants completed only the initial RCM meeting, and 24% participated in both the initial and a follow-up RCM meeting. About 10% of RCM/RESEA claimants participated in three or more case management meetings.

The middle panel shows that about 28% of RCM/RESEA claimants completed the initial RESEA meeting but did not attend any follow-up RESEA meetings. About 15% completed both an initial and a follow-up RESEA meeting, while about 15% completed at least three RESEA meetings.

The intensity of the RCM/RESEA intervention is highlighted in the bottom graph, which presents the distribution of completed meetings, including RCM and RESEA. Approximately 16% of RCM/RESEA claimants completed no meetings, and 23% completed exactly one meeting. The majority—accounting for 61% of RCM/RESEA claimants—completed multiple meetings, with 19% completing two meetings and 42% completing three or more meetings.

These results indicate that the majority of RESEA/RCM claimants had frequent interactions with RCM and RESEA Career Planners throughout their UI spells. Consequently, it is anticipated that mandatory participation in the RCM/RESEA program would lead to increased job counseling and related services for claimants assigned to the program group compared to those assigned to the control group.

Figure 6: Number of Completed Meetings, RCM/RESEA Group



Note: Reported are sample proportions.

Source: Iowa RCM/RESEA program data.

Table 6 summarizes service uptake during the UI claim period for the two study groups. We define the following categories of services:

- 1) Job counseling—Includes individualized services provided during meetings with job counselors, including the skills assessment, reemployment plan development, resume development assistance, and career guidance services.
- 2) Basic services—Includes services that can often be accessed directly by claimants, such as group orientations of IowaWORKS offices and information on available services and resources, such as training and supportive services available through WIOA, VETS, and other programs.
- 3) Workshops—Virtual and in-person workshops covering a wide range of topics related to the job search process, including assistance in using the labor exchange system, resume development, interview preparation, and basic search skills.
- 4) Job referrals—Includes direct referrals to employers—via vacancies posted in the state’s labor exchange system or other opportunities known to counselors—that are actively seeking workers whose skills and experience align with those of the claimants.

The results in Table 6 demonstrate the program’s significant success in increasing service receipt among participants. Nearly 83% of RCM/RESEA group claimants received job counseling services, compared to 14% of control group claimants.

Workshop attendance was also notably higher among RCM/RESEA claimants, with nearly 75% attending at least one workshop. RCM/RESEA claimants were also much more likely to receive basic services. Importantly, nearly 15% of RCM/RESEA group claimants received a direct job referral, as compared to only 2% of control group claimants.

Overall, these findings underscore the intensity of the Iowa RCM/RESEA program, making it one of the most intensive job-search interventions ever implemented in the U.S. context.⁷ The program led to frequent meetings between claimants and Career Planners. Consequently, RCM/RESEA participants were much more likely than those in the control group—who were not subject to RCM/RESEA requirements—to receive individualized job counseling, participate in job-search

⁷ For a comparison of RESEA programs across states—including Iowa—see Poe-Yamagata and Michaelides (2025).

workshops, and receive direct job referrals.

Table 6: Service Take-up Rates by Study Group

	RCM/RESEA Group	Control Group
Number of Claimants	11,319	1,280
Job counseling services†	82.7%	13.9%
Workshops	74.7%	27.7%
Basic services††	52.0%	20.1%
Job referrals	14.8%	2.3%

Note: Reported are sample proportions. †= Includes skills assessment, reemployment plan development, resume development assistance, and career guidance services. ††= Includes orientation services and information on available services and resources.

Source: Iowa employment service data.

3.4.2. Effects on UI Receipt Outcomes

To assess the effectiveness of the program to reduce receipt of benefits, we use Iowa UI claims data to construct three UI outcome measures:

- *Benefit weeks collected*—Equals the number of weekly UI payments collected by the claimant under their UI claim.
- *Benefit amount collected*—Equals the total benefit amount collected by the claimant under their UI claim, which is the sum of all weekly UI benefit amounts collected.
- *Exhausted benefits*—Indicates if the claimant collected their entire maximum benefit entitlement under their UI claim.

Table 7 presents summary statistics of these measures. On average, claimants in the RCM/RESEA group collected 9.74 weeks of benefits, amounting to \$4,811 in total benefits. In comparison, control group claimants collected a higher average number of benefit weeks and amounts. Additionally, control cases were more likely to exhaust their benefit entitlements before exiting UI.

Table 7: Unemployment Insurance Receipt by Study Group

	RCM/RESEA Group	Control Group
Benefit Weeks Collected	9.74 (6.14)	10.06 (6.48)
Benefit Amount Collected (\$)	4,811 (3,303)	4,865 (3,328)
Exhausted Benefits†	0.291	0.337

Note: Reported are sample means with standard deviations in parentheses; for exhausted benefits, the sample proportion is reported. †=Not defined for 99 claimants (82 RCM/RESEA group; 17 control group) for whom benefit entitlements are not available.

Source: Iowa UI claims data.

Random assignment ensures that the two study groups are similar in terms of observed (and unobserved) factors, and thus any differences in outcomes between the two groups provide estimates of the causal impacts of the program. To obtain the most accurate estimates of program impacts, we use least squares regression models that can be expressed as follows:

$$Y_i = T_i \cdot \alpha + X_i \cdot \beta + EARN_i \cdot \gamma + LWDA_i \cdot \delta + Week_i \cdot \varepsilon + \omega_i \quad [2]$$

The dependent variable (Y_i) is the outcome of interest (number of weeks collected, benefit amount collected, or exhausted benefits). Control variables on the right-hand side of the model include:

- T_i —a treatment indicator that equals 1 if the claimant was assigned to the RCM/RESEA group and 0 otherwise
- X_i —includes claimant characteristics and UI entitlements
- $Earn_i$ —includes earnings amount in quarters 1-8 prior to UI entry
- $LWDA_i$ —includes indicators for the LWDA where claimants resided
- $Week_i$ —includes indicators for week of random assignment

The right-hand side of the equation also includes ω_i , a zero-mean error term. The parameter of interest in this model, α , estimates the program's average treatment effect (ATE) or intent-to-treat (ITT) effect on the outcome of interest.⁸ The remaining Greek letters represent parameters or vectors of parameters to be estimated for individual characteristics and benefit entitlements (β), prior earnings (γ), LWDA (δ), and week (ε).

⁸ The ATE or ITT effect estimates the impact of the program for claimants assigned to receive program services, regardless of whether these claimants complied with program requirements.

Controlling for claimant characteristics, benefit entitlements, prior earnings, LWDA, and week of assignment serves two purposes: one, it captures any RCM/RESEA-control differences that may have occurred by chance, and two, it improves statistical power by accounting for outcome variation based on these factors.

Table 8 presents the results. The first column reports the ATEs with heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. The second column reports the effects expressed as percentages of the control group means, measuring the percentage impact relative to the average outcome values in the absence of the intervention.

The estimates indicate that the RCM/RESEA program reduced average UI duration by 0.43 weeks, a 4.3% reduction relative to the control group mean UI duration. The reduction in UI duration is accompanied by a \$148 reduction in the average total benefit amount collected, representing a 3% benefit savings compared to the mean amount collected by control group claimants. The program also reduced the probability that claimants would collect their entire benefit entitlement before exiting UI by 14.5%.

Table 8: Average Treatment Effects on UI Outcomes

	Average Treatment Effect	Effect as a percentage of the control group mean
Benefit Weeks Collected	-0.43 (0.19)**	-4.3%
Benefit Amount Collected (\$)	-148 (88)*	-3.0%
Exhausted Benefits	-0.049 (0.014)***	-14.5%

Note: Reported are estimated average treatment effects with heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. The right column reports the average treatment effect as a percentage of the control group mean. *, **, *** = statistically significant at the 10%, 5%, 1% level.

3.4.3. Effects on Employment and Earnings

The above results indicate that the Iowa RCM/RESEA program caused significant reductions in UI receipt. Using Iowa UI wage records, we examine whether the program affected participant employment and earnings in the six quarters following program entry. In particular, we construct the following outcomes:

- *Employed*—Equals 1 if the claimant had earnings in a quarter and 0 otherwise. This outcome is measured for each of the six quarters after UI entry.

- *Earnings*—Equals the earnings amount earned by the claimant in the quarter (zero earnings included). This outcome is measured for each of the six quarters after UI entry.
- *Total earnings*—Equals the total earnings amount earned by the claimant across all six quarters after UI entry.

Table 9 presents summary statistics of these outcomes. With the exception of quarter 1, when RCM/RESEA group claimants had higher employment rates than control group claimants, employment rates and earnings were similar across the two study groups.

Table 9: Employment and Earnings after UI Entry

	RCM/RESEA	Control
Number of Claimants	11,319	1,280
Employed		
In quarter 1 after UI entry	0.687	0.668
In quarter 2 after UI entry	0.735	0.731
In quarter 3 after UI entry	0.740	0.741
In quarter 4 after UI entry	0.732	0.740
In quarter 5 after UI entry	0.719	0.716
In quarter 6 after UI entry	0.705	0.702
Earnings (\$)		
In quarter 1 after UI entry	6,562 (9,199)	6,657 (9,271)
In quarter 2 after UI entry	8,094 (8,597)	8,331 (9,587)
In quarter 3 after UI entry	8,634 (9,133)	8,515 (9,190)
In quarter 4 after UI entry	8,815 (9,300)	8,817 (10,745)
In quarter 5 after UI entry	9,004 (10,127)	8,957 (10,411)
In quarter 6 after UI entry	9,000 (10,273)	8,889 (10,624)
Total Earnings, quarters 1-6	50,109 (49,088)	50,166 (52,412)

Note: Reported are sample proportions for employment and means with standard deviations in parentheses for earnings.

Source: Iowa UI wage records.

To estimate program impacts on these outcomes, we use regression models with a similar structure to the structure of model 2. These models estimate the impacts of

the RCM/RESEA program controlling for individual characteristics, benefit entitlements, prior earnings, week of assignment, and LWDA.

Results, presented in Table 10, indicate that the program did not have statistically significant impacts on employment in the first six quarters after UI entry. With the partial exception of quarter 1—when the program’s effect on employment was 1.7 percentage points—effects on employment were close to zero. Estimated effects on earnings are negative in each quarter after UI entry but lack statistical significance, with the partial exception of an estimated \$418 negative impact on quarter 2 earnings, which is significant at the 10% level. These results provide no evidence that the program helped participants find jobs or improve their earnings.

Table 10: Average Treatment Effects on Employment and Earnings

	Average Treatment Effect†	Effect as a percentage of control group mean
Employed		
In quarter 1 after UI entry	0.017 (0.014)	+2.5%
In quarter 2 after UI entry	0.002 (0.013)	+0.0%
In quarter 3 after UI entry	-0.001 (0.013)	-0.0%
In quarter 4 after UI entry	-0.010 (0.013)	-1.4%
In quarter 5 after UI entry	0.001 (0.013)	+0.0%
In quarter 6 after UI entry	0.001 (0.013)	+0.0%
Earnings (\$)		
In quarter 1 after UI entry	-291 (241)	-4.3%
In quarter 2 after UI entry	-418 (236)*	-5.0%
In quarter 3 after UI entry	-102 (237)	-1.2%
In quarter 4 after UI entry	-160 (241)	-1.8%
In quarter 5 after UI entry	-170 (268)	-1.9%
In quarter 6 after UI entry	-106 (261)	-1.2%
Total Earnings, quarters 1-6	-1,248 (1,249)	-2.5%

Note: Reported are estimated average treatment effects with heteroskedasticity robust standard errors in parentheses. The right column reports the average treatment effect as a percentage of the control group mean. *, = statistically significant at the 10% level.

4. Implementation Study

The Implementation Study utilizes a combination of program observations, document reviews, and interviews with program staff to investigate the implementation of Iowa's RCM/RESEA program over the study period. Emphasizing the methods and procedures employed in conducting RCM and RESEA sessions and delivering associated services, the study aims to shed light on the consistency of services and their delivery across different regions and throughout the study duration. Additionally, the study identifies and examines implementation challenges while also highlighting best practices and lessons learned that emerge during the implementation process.

4.1. Data Sources

To evaluate the implementation of the RCM/RESEA program, we employed a comprehensive approach involving the collection and analysis of three types of qualitative data:

- **Interviews.** We conducted interviews with various stakeholders involved in program implementation, including Workforce Services program administrators, Career Planners responsible for conducting RCM or RESEA meetings, partner program staff, and UI staff. Throughout the study period, interviews were conducted with staff from a selection of IowaWORKS offices, chosen to represent diversity across key factors such as location, demographics of the served population, and office size. These interviews utilized semi-structured guides to ensure comprehensive coverage of research questions while allowing flexibility for interviewees' responses.
- **Program Observations.** We observed selected RCM/RESEA sessions and subsequent activities, with participant permission. These observations followed a checklist protocol aligned with research questions, aiming to identify variations in the implementation of RCM/RESEA activities.
- **Document Review.** Additional insights were gathered through a review of existing program materials related to the implementation of both programs at both statewide and regional levels. This encompassed documentation on data systems, templates for individual employment plans, labor market information,

outreach and training materials, guidance documents, and the letter prompting claimants to complete the assessment.

The study included three rounds of data collection. The first round occurred before random assignment and focused on obtaining program-related documents and on interviews with administrative and managerial staff involved in RCM/RESEA, UI, and program partnerships. These initial interviews informed the development of the TOC and the Evaluation Design Plan. The second round took place during the RCT intake period, gathering insights on RCM/RESEA implementation from Career Planners, conducting interviews in a sample of IowaWORKS offices statewide. This round also included program observations with participants who were assigned to the program during the RCT intake period. The third round of data collection, conducted towards the end of the RCT intake period, involved interviews with RCM/RESEA program partners.

4.2. Analysis and Findings

This section presents the findings derived from the analysis of the qualitative data. Our approach to organizing and analyzing the qualitative data facilitates the emergence of key themes, offering insights into the processes, best practices, and challenges associated with both programs. The discussion of the findings below highlights various aspects of program implementation that we deem significant, particularly in providing context for interpreting quantitative findings and, ultimately, the results of the impact study.

4.2.1. Overview of the RCM/RESEA Program

Unemployed individuals who have access to a computer can file their UI claim through the IWD website. For those without computer access, alternative options are available, such as utilizing computers at an IowaWORKS center or a local library. Typically, claimants can expect to receive their first week of benefits approximately three weeks after submitting their claim.

Claimants who meet specific criteria, including not being job-attached or subject to recall, and not seeking employment through a union hiring hall, are eligible for selection to participate in the RCM/RESEA program. Before the implementation of random assignment procedures for the current evaluation, IWD had the capacity to serve all service-eligible UI claimants under the RCM/RESEA program.

4.2.2. Program Administration and Staff Resources

Program Administration. Within IWD, the UI division is tasked with managing the UI system, while the Workforce Services division oversees the state's workforce programs and is responsible for implementing the RCM/RESEA program.

The implementation of RCM and RESEA is supported by Operations Managers, who ensure its efficient operation. Responsible for IowaWORKS centers within their assigned state region, Operation Managers not only oversee the day-to-day activities but also offer recommendations for program enhancements. Additionally, they provide ongoing training and conduct reviews of procedures, addressing any issues raised by Career Planners assigned to conduct the RCM or RESEA meetings.

Communication. Communication plays a pivotal role in the RCM/RESEA program, with regular meetings serving as a platform to disseminate new directives and procedures while addressing any arising queries. Additionally, team chats and email communication with supervisors are utilized to resolve issues encountered by RCM and RESEA Career Planners during meetings, such as inquiries regarding UI benefits or data entry. Interviewees also highlighted the availability of UI experts among Career Planners within IowaWORKS centers, offering support in answering UI-related questions. Moreover, the close proximity of staff from partner programs like Vocational Rehabilitation, VETS, and WIOA Title 1 facilitates seamless referrals to these services.

Still, some interviewees expressed frustration about their ability to feel fully informed regarding RESEA processes. Factors such as the time required to absorb new material or delays in receiving timely responses to queries were cited as challenges. This frustration was particularly evident during periods of program changes necessitating the implementation of new procedures. Additionally, given the overlap in claimants served by the RCM and RESEA Career Planners, some Career Planners suggested the need for improved communication between the two programs, especially in centers lacking dedicated RCM Career Planners.

Program implementation relies on two distinct computer systems. IowaWORKS functions as a case management tool, capturing all relevant information related to RCM/RESEA meetings, services provided, and scheduled workshops. However, individuals selected for RCM/RESEA participation are identified through the UI legacy mainframe system, which houses UI claim information. As the two systems are currently not integrated, accessing and sharing information depends on staff

permissions and direct communication. It is anticipated that once the ongoing system modernization process is completed, several functions, like case note sharing, will become less cumbersome.

Staff Training. Five Career Planners, each from a different region within the state (Central Iowa, East Central Iowa, Mississippi Valley, Northeast Iowa, and Western Iowa), were asked about the training they received prior to conducting interviews. While there is a degree of consistency in the training experiences reported by RCM and RESEA Career Planners interviewed for the study, there are also variations noted. Some staff members described their training as informal, providing only the basics and lacking consistency in its implementation. Conversely, others mentioned a more comprehensive training process spanning over four weeks. Given that the interviewed staff were in different areas and underwent training at different times, these differences likely reflect the natural evolution of training practices or procedural adjustments, such as those necessitated by the pandemic.

Overall, however, training seemed to equip new Career Planners with the necessary skills to effectively conduct RCM and RESEA meetings and accurately document meeting information. Common elements of the training reported by RCM and RESEA Career Planners included:

- Observational and hands-on practice.
- Job shadowing and practical training with experienced Career Planners.
- Utilization of resources such as the RESEA Manual and RESEA Resulting Desk Aid.
- Review of program-related information in the IowaWORKS data system, including case notes, virtual recruiter tools, labor market information, RESEA agreements, resume guides, and tip sheets.
- Familiarization with UI compliance and eligibility criteria.
- Attendance at workshops aimed at enhancing referral processes for claimants.
- Informal maintenance training facilitated through daily emails containing program updates from the Operations Manager and monthly RESEA meetings coordinated by the RESEA coordinator.
- Provision of ongoing training and on-demand training to address specific issues or challenges as they arise.

Nevertheless, some Career Planners expressed a desire for a deeper understanding

of UI-related issues to better assist claimants with general questions regarding benefits. Similarly, UI staff involved in the investigation and adjudication of disputed claims indicated a lack of information about RCM/RESEA participation, exacerbated by their inability to access claimants' data related to program involvement due to the bifurcated data systems described above.

4.2.3. Participant Identification and Notification

Claimants selected to participate in the RCM/RESEA program are contacted early in the UI claim process, sometimes as early as the week when the claim started, by an RCM Career Planner. Upon successful contact, the Career Planner assesses the claimant's needs for Wagner-Peyser reemployment services and schedules a first RCM appointment for the following week. If initial contact is unsuccessful, a scheduled time for a phone meeting is mailed to the claimant via the United States Postal Service (USPS).

When they receive their first benefit payment, usually around the third week of their UI claim, RCM/RESEA participants receive an RESEA notification letter via USPS. The notification letter informs the claimant about the requirement to attend an RESEA meeting, typically occurring in the fourth week of the claim, at a local IowaWORKS center. Additionally, RESEA Career Planners may also inform claimants about the meeting via email and/or phone one week before the meeting. The notification outlines the selection, participation requirement, meeting purpose, expectations, and consequences for non-participation (such as potential benefit suspension). It also includes meeting details and instructions on requesting changes, completing required forms beforehand, bringing necessary documents (e.g., resume, work search documentation, photo ID), rescheduling procedures, and notifying the IowaWORKS office if the claimant returns to work. Similar letters are sent for sub-RESEA meetings and rescheduled meetings, with the latter indicating that rescheduling is permitted only once.

In preparation for the RESEA meeting, Career Planners must utilize both IowaWORKS and the UI mainframe system to gather comprehensive information on scheduled claimants. While IowaWORKS provides some basic claimant data, details about the claim and its status are obtained from the UI mainframe. Despite being described as “cumbersome,” this process is necessary to verify the current claim status. RESEA Career Planners refrain from meeting with claimants if there is a lock

on their claim.⁹

4.2.4. Administration of the RCM/RESEA Meetings

The RCM and RESEA components of the programs were developed to complement each other, offering distinct yet complementary services throughout the duration of a UI claim. Although RCM and RESEA meetings have different objectives, there are notable similarities as well.

RCM meetings are initiated early in the UI claim process to expedite reemployment efforts. Conversely, RESEA meetings typically occur later in the claim period and are often more comprehensive than RCM meetings, addressing more persistent barriers to reemployment.

Mandatory participation in both initial and subsequent RCM and RESEA meetings, along with assigned workshops, provides claimants with frequent and continuous opportunities for interaction with RCM case managers and RESEA counselors. Claimants are required to attend regular RCM and RESEA meetings throughout their UI claims, with the number of subsequent meetings being driven by the volume of claims and staff availability.¹⁰ In many cases, claimants are no longer scheduled or required to attend RCM meetings once they begin their RESEA process. This ensures a streamlined approach to service delivery tailored to the evolving needs of claimants as they progress through their UI claims.

Initial Meeting. As illustrated in Table 11, the RCM and RESEA meetings differ in format, duration, and focus. All RCM meetings (initial and subsequent) are conducted over the phone and last approximately 15 minutes. Although based in a center, RCM Career Planners may conduct meetings with claimants statewide. During a typical RCM meeting, RCM Career Planners review the claimants' job search efforts and provide information about UI eligibility requirements. They also provide claimants with information about available services and resources, such as job fairs, training programs, and IowaWORKS office resources. Although claimants are not offered any job counseling services during an RCM meeting, Career Planners assign claimants to participate in workshops.

⁹ Prior to the RESEA meeting, a claim could be locked due to the discovery of an eligibility issue resulting from an RCM meeting or a discovery of non-compliance associated with weekly claim certifications (e.g., not completing work search requirements).

¹⁰ Typically, subsequent meetings are not scheduled if there is no availability in the following three weeks.

In contrast, RESEA meetings are conducted in person at local IowaWORKS offices, unless a virtual meeting is requested, and last approximately 45-60 minutes. Generally, RESEA Career Planners conduct RESEA meetings with claimants covered by their local IowaWORKS office. Upon a claimant's arrival for an appointment, RESEA Career Planners conduct the UI eligibility review, reviewing claimants' work search efforts and employer contacts to confirm compliance with UI work search requirements. Typically, RESEA Career Planners require job search verification, calling potential employers as necessary.

Following the eligibility review, claimants are offered job counseling services. First, claimants complete an "eligibility explorer" questionnaire to assess eligibility for partner services and are asked to think about what types of workshops they are interested in. RESEA Career Planners explore a claimant's goals for reemployment, any barriers that may exist, and complete a dislocated worker's survey. They also provide labor market information, review O*Net resources, and provide reemployment services, including: resume development assistance, enrollment in virtual recruiter, and job referrals. In addition, they provide referrals to partner programs, such as training available through WIOA Title 1, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Veterans' services.

Connecting participants to Wagner Peyser reemployment services and WIOA Title 1 and other types of workforce training is reported to be the main priority for RESEA Career Planners. One RESEA Career Planner noted that sometimes they would physically walk claimants to IowaWORKS staff at the end of the RESEA meeting to facilitate this connection. A workforce training coordinator – responsible for recruiting workers into an IT training program for dislocated workers during much of the period of random assignment – proactively followed up with claimants expressing interest in training during their RESEA meeting. During our interview, the coordinator expressed the belief that many of these claimants were referred to WIOA training.

Table 11: RCM and RESEA Meeting Logistics and Content

	RCM Meeting	RESEA Meeting
Meeting Logistics		
Initial contact	Week 1	Week 3-4
Initial meeting mode	Phone	In-person*
Subsequent meeting mode	Phone	Phone/virtual
Statewide/Local	Statewide	Local
Length of meetings	15 minutes	45-60 minutes
Meeting Content		
Review job search efforts and employer contacts	Moderate focus	Strong focus
Review of UI job search requirements	Strong focus	Less focus
UI eligibility review	Less focus	Strong focus
Information about available services and resources	Strong focus	Moderate focus
Reemployment plan and needs assessment	Less focus	Strong focus
Job counseling	Less focus	Strong focus
Assignments to workshops	Strong focus	Strong focus

Note: *= Meeting can be conducted remotely (by phone or virtually) at claimant's request.

At the conclusion of an RCM or RESEA meeting, Career Planners schedule claimants for required workshops to be completed before the next meeting. In addition, claimants often volunteer to attend additional workshops. Workshop attendance can be easily tracked by RCM/RESEA Career Planners in the IowaWORKS system. If a claimant fails to comply with workshop requirements without contacting the Career Planner who made the referral, immediate disqualification is enforced, and the claimant is notified by mail. A hold is placed on the claim until compliance is met.

Subsequent Meetings. If the claimant remains unemployed three weeks after the initial RESEA meeting, a subsequent RESEA meeting is scheduled, lasting anywhere from 20 to 60 minutes. These meetings typically involve:

- Reviewing UI eligibility and job search efforts.
- Providing resume review assistance, if needed.
- Referring the claimant to job opportunities or assisting with job searches.
- Referring the claimant to relevant workshops.

If the claimant remains unemployed and continues to claim benefits, subsequent RESEA meetings continue to be scheduled, initially, at intervals of approximately three weeks between meetings, to address more persistent barriers to employment. These meetings are designed to continue throughout the duration of the claim and become more frequent the longer the claimant remains unemployed, ultimately occurring up to once per week.

Claimants are required to attend online workshops agreed upon during meetings. Most commonly, this includes Essential Tools (IowaWORKS office orientation), Virtual Job Club, A-Game (a soft-skills workshop), resume development, and mock interviews. However, IWD encourages claimants to attend job fairs and offers a comprehensive selection of online workshops that claimants may self-select into based on their individual needs, such as financial literacy, unemployment information, digital literacy, and personal growth. This flexibility ensures that claimants receive tailored support to enhance their reemployment prospects.

Attendance Issues. For both RCM and RESEA meetings, claimants are granted one opportunity to reschedule their appointment without facing consequences. If a claimant contacts the Career Planner to reschedule before the scheduled meeting, a new meeting will be arranged. However, if the claimant fails to attend the rescheduled meeting or does not make contact before the originally scheduled meeting, benefit payments are suspended, and the missed meeting is documented in case notes. If the claimant later contacts the center and provides an acceptable reason or justifiable cause for missing the meeting, the benefit suspension is removed. Once they are in compliance, claimants receive back payments for benefits not paid during the suspension. However, if no explanation is provided, claimants are rescheduled for RESEA, and benefits resume only after the appointment is completed, with no back payments released. In all instances, claimants receive a letter notifying them if their claim is locked, ensuring transparency and communication regarding their benefit status.

UI Eligibility Issues. If eligibility issues are identified during the initial or subsequent RESEA meetings, Career Planners will document them in the case notes. These issues may include unreported earnings, unavailability for work, failure to provide verifiable work search documentation, and inadequate documentation of job contacts or efforts to find suitable work. While Career Planners do not issue decisions for failing to meet the minimum number of job contacts (as this is addressed by UI through online communication), they do address failures to adequately document job contacts or make a reasonable effort to find work.

Additionally, claimants may be disqualified if they repeatedly fail to upload a resume on IowaWORKS or attend scheduled workshops.

Career Planners have the authority to issue decisions regarding the claim, potentially disqualifying the claimant and placing a hold on the claim. While UI is not usually directly involved, if the issue remains unresolved, Career Planners can request that the claimant schedule a meeting with UI for further investigation. This is especially true in cases of unverifiable work search documentation or other disputes regarding eligibility.

5. Conclusion

In its effort to assist UI claimants in meeting UI work search requirements and improving the effectiveness of their job search, IWD enhanced the RESEA program by adding a case management component, called RCM. The objective of the Iowa RCM/RESEA program is to offer participants intensive case management and job counseling services throughout their UI claims. This approach represents one of the most intensive job-search assistance interventions ever studied in the U.S. context.

This evaluation used an experimental design to estimate the causal impacts of the Iowa RCM/RESEA program on service take-up, UI receipt, employment, and earnings. From October 2022 through December 2023, 12,599 service-eligible UI claimants were randomly selected either to participate in the RCM/RESEA program (RCM/RESEA group) or be exempted from program participation (control group). This design enabled us to estimate the causal impacts of the program on the outcomes of interest by leveraging Iowa administrative data provided by IWD.

During the study period, the Iowa unemployment rate averaged 3%—the lowest rate in at least 20 years—while the majority of claimants were eligible for up to 16 weeks of benefits. Given these favorable labor market conditions, in the absence of the RCM/RESEA program, claimants collected an average of 10 weeks of benefits, and two-thirds were able to find employment within a quarter after UI entry without any assistance. Therefore, the study results should be interpreted within this context and not assumed to reflect program impacts under different economic conditions.

This report presents the final evaluation findings. First, analysis of RCM/RESEA

program data indicates that the program was very successful in facilitating frequent meetings between participants and Career Planners. Approximately 84% of claimants assigned to the RCM/RESEA group completed at least one required program meeting, and participants attended an average of 2.4 RCM/RESEA meetings before exiting UI. As a result, about 83% of RCM/RESEA group claimants received job counseling, compared with only about 14% of control group claimants. Importantly, about 15% of RCM/RESEA group claimants received a direct job referral, in contrast to only 2% of control group claimants.

Second, analysis of UI claims data shows that the program was effective in reducing UI receipt. The program reduced average UI duration by 0.43 weeks, resulting in an average reduction of \$148 in the benefit amount collected per participant. The program reduced the likelihood that participants would exhaust their benefit entitlements before exiting UI by nearly 15%. In aggregate, these results indicate that the program caused nearly \$1.7 million in savings for the Iowa UI program during the study period.

Third, analysis of claimants' UI wage records produces no evidence that the program improved participants' employment and earnings in the six quarters after UI entry. With the partial exception of a small, statistically insignificant positive effect on employment, program impacts on employment were nearly zero, while impacts on earnings were negative but not statistically significant.

These findings provide robust evidence on the effectiveness of the RCM/RESEA program in a period of historically low unemployment. The program's intensive requirements successfully connected participants with targeted case management, job counseling, and related services, resulting in reductions in UI receipt and notable cost savings for the UI program. While these services did not translate into measurable improvements in employment or earnings—likely due to the strong labor market that enabled many claimants to find jobs without assistance—the results underscore the value of continued Federal support for the Iowa program. At the same time, the findings suggest that, during periods of low unemployment, Iowa may consider tailoring program requirements to balance administrative effort with the likely benefits, ensuring that resources remain focused on claimants who most need assistance.

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