Actus Policy Research

AIR®

Evaluation of the Wisconsin Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) Program

Final Evaluation Report

September 2025

STATE OF WISCONSIN DWD Department of Workforce Development

AUTHORS

Marios Michaelides (Actus Policy Research)

Peter Mueser (University of Missouri, Actus Policy Research)

Eileen Poe-Yamagata (Actus Policy Research)

Scott Davis (Centre College)

Acknowledgments

This evaluation was funded by the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD). The findings and views presented in this report are solely those of the authors and should not be attributed to DWD or any other Wisconsin state government agency. The authors are grateful to the DWD staff—particularly Ann Astin, Ellie Hartman, Sarvika Shetty, and Reggie Trino—for their cooperation throughout the duration of this evaluation. The successful execution of this evaluation would not have been possible without their dedication and support.

The suggested citation for this report is:

Michaelides Marios, Peter Mueser, Eileen Poe-Yamagata, and Scott Davis (2025). Evaluation of the Wisconsin Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) Program: Final Evaluation Report. Prepared for the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. Rockville, MD: Actus Policy Research.

About Actus

Actus Policy Research (Actus) is an independent research organization dedicated to delivering high-quality research and program evaluation services to U.S. federal and state government agencies, nonprofit and community-based organizations, educational institutions, and Federal grantees. At Actus, we specialize in developing state-of-the-art research designs to conduct randomized controlled trial (RCT) and quasi-experimental impact evaluations, cost-benefit analyses, implementation studies, evaluability assessments, and outcome studies. Our team of experts possesses subject matter expertise in an array of policy areas, including labor market, education, food security, welfare, youth, and criminal justice.

To support data collection and analysis for this evaluation, Actus contracted the **American Institutes for Research (AIR)**, a non-partisan nonprofit research organization that specializes in behavioral and social science research.

To learn more about Actus, visit: www.actuspolicyresearch.com

To learn more about AIR, visit: www.air.org

Contact the authors:

Dr. Marios Michaelides
Director of Research, Actus Policy Research
mariosm@actuspolicyresearch.com

Dr. Peter Mueser
Professor, University of Missouri; Principal Researcher, Actus Policy Research
mueserp@missouri.edu

Ms. Eileen Poe-Yamagata
President and Principal Researcher, Actus Policy Research
eileenpy@actuspolicyresearch.com

Dr. Scott Davis
Visiting Associate Professor, Centre College
scott.davis@centre.edu

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary

The Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program is a job search assistance intervention targeting Unemployment Insurance (UI) claimants in the United States. The program requires new UI claimants to undergo an eligibility review to confirm their compliance with UI work search requirements and to receive reemployment services. These requirements are intended to encourage claimants to actively search for work while collecting benefits and to provide services to help them connect to suitable jobs and exit UI quickly. Over the past few years, with Federal funding appropriated under the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, all 50 states and the District of Columbia have been operating RESEA programs that include eligibility review and service requirements.

The Wisconsin RESEA program, administered by the Department of Workforce Development (DWD), operates as follows:

- DWD requires all service-eligible UI claimants (i.e., all claimants except those on temporary layoff, those conducting their search through union hiring halls, and those enrolled in approved training) to complete an online job readiness assessment at the start of their UI claims.
- Using the results of the assessment, DWD identifies claimants facing reemployment barriers and requires them to participate in the RESEA program. These claimants are required to attend an initial RESEA session within 21 days of completing the assessment.
- During the initial RESEA session, claimants meet with an RESEA counselor to undergo an eligibility review and develop an individual employment plan.
- Following the initial session, claimants may be required to participate in a follow-up RESEA session within 21 days, in which they undergo a review to confirm that they completed the activities outlined in their employment plan and receive additional services.

In July 2021, DWD contracted Actus Policy Research (Actus) to conduct a third-party evaluation of the Wisconsin RESEA program. The objective of the evaluation was to examine the effectiveness of the program in helping UI claimants obtain employment and improve their earnings, thereby reducing the UI duration and benefits collected. One main focus was to identify the relative efficacy of requiring claimants to participate in a single RESEA session versus participating in both an initial and a follow-up session.

To evaluate the impacts of the program, Actus implemented a **randomized controlled trial (RCT) impact study** that randomly assigned RESEA-eligible UI claimants into one of three groups:

- *RESEA group*: Required to schedule and participate in the initial RESEA session within 21 days of completing the online assessment. These individuals have no requirements to schedule or complete a subsequent session.
- *RESEA+ group*: Required to schedule and participate in the initial RESEA session within 21 days of completing the online assessment. They are also required to schedule and participate in a subsequent RESEA session within 21 days of completing the initial session.
- *Control group*: No requirement to schedule or participate in an RESEA session after completing the online assessment.

The 18-month RCT intake period began in April 2022 and concluded in September 2023. This period was characterized by a strong labor market, as Wisconsin's unemployment rate averaged 2.9%, the lowest rate since at least 2005. Therefore, the evaluation's findings should be interpreted within the context of a strong labor market and do not necessarily reflect results under different labor market conditions. During the RCT intake period, 48,110 UI claimants were randomly assigned in one of three groups: 14,134 claimants (29.4%) in the RESEA group, 14,194 claimants (29.5%) in the RESEA+ group, and 19,782 claimants (41.1%) in the control group.

We estimate the overall impacts of the Wisconsin RESEA program by comparing the service take-up, UI receipt, and employment outcomes between the combined RESEA and RESEA+ groups and the control group. In addition, the study estimates the impacts of requiring a follow-up RESEA session by comparing the outcomes between the RESEA group and the RESEA+ group. Controlling for the structyre of random assignment, these comparisons generate unbiased estimates of the true impacts of program. The analysis relies on Wisconsin administrative data provided by DWD, including UI claims data, UI wage records, and employment service data.

Key evaluation findings can be summarized as follows:

The program was successful in increasing take-up of job counseling services

Approximately 70% of claimants in the RESEA and RESEA+ groups completed the initial RESEA meeting, and the majority of RESEA+ claimants who did so also attended the follow-up session. As a result, about 65% of claimants

assigned to these two groups received job counseling services, compared to only about 3% of claimants assigned to the control group.

The program caused reductions in UI receipt, leading to important savings for the UI program

The program reduced UI duration by 0.60 weeks on average, a 5% reduction relative to the mean UI duration for the control group. As a result, the program reduced benefits collected by $182 per participant. In aggregate, the program caused nearly $5.2 million in UI savings during the study period.

The program did not improve employment or earnings

The program had little or no effect on employment and earnings in the five quarters after program entry. With the exception of a modest increase in quarter 1 employment by 0.8 percentage points, impacts on employment and earnings during the five-quarter follow-up period were small and not statistically significant.

The follow-up RESEA meeting requirement caused additional UI impacts

Comparing the impacts of RESEA+ (initial plus follow-up meeting) with the impacts of RESEA (initial meeting, no follow-up meeting) shows that the initial meeting requirement reduced UI duration by 0.49 weeks and benefits collected by $150, and that the follow-up meeting requirement caused an additional 0.21-week and $64 benefit reduction. These results indicate that the follow-up meeting requirement generates further reductions in UI receipt and additional UI savings beyond those produced by the initial meeting.

The average UI savings caused by the RESEA program exceed the estimated program cost per participant

The average program cost is estimated to be $128 per RESEA participant (single meeting) and $192 per RESEA+ participant (initial plus follow-up meeting). Comparing these with the estimated average UI savings caused by each version of the RESEA program indicates that both programs yielded $22 in net savings per participant.

The job readiness assessment is effective in identifying claimants with longer UI durations and lower employment outcomes.

The job readiness assessment used by DWD to identify claimants facing

reemployment barriers is a strong tool for predicting claimant outcomes. In particular, high assessment scores (identifying claimants facing significant barriers to reemployment) are associated with: 1) longer UI durations and higher benefit amounts collected, and 2) lower employment rates and earnings. Low assessment scores, on the other hand, are associated with lower UI benefit receipt and better reemployment outcomes.

The job readiness assessment is a strong tool for identifying claimants most likely to benefit from RESEA participation.

The program significantly reduced UI benefit receipt for claimants with moderate and high assessment scores but had no impacts for claimants at the bottom of the assessment score distribution. There is also evidence that employment impacts in the first quarter after UI entry may be higher for claimants in the middle of the assessment score distribution.

Overall, these findings provide reliable evidence about the effectiveness of the Wisconsin RESEA program in the context of a strong labor market, indicating that the program is effective in increasing service receipt, reducing UI duration, and generating net savings for the UI program. Three policy recommendations emerge from these findings:

- ***Use the job readiness assessment to target program services.*** The assessment is an effective tool for identifying service-eligible claimants who face employability barriers and are most likely to benefit from RESEA. This suggests that DWD should continue its current practice of targeting RESEA services to claimants with the highest assessment scores.

- ***Increase program capacity.*** Due to capacity constraints, the Wisconsin RESEA program is able to serve about 50-60% of service-eligible UI claimants. Increasing program capacity to include all service-eligible claimants—particularly those with moderate and high assessment scores—could generate additional net savings for the UI program.

- ***Mandate follow-up RESEA sessions.*** The follow-up RESEA session causes additional UI savings, beyond those generated by the initial meeting, effectively offsetting the costs of implementing the follow-up. To the extent that the follow-up session is valuable for certain claimants—such as those needing additional services or those not complying with work search requirements—it would be worthwhile to mandate follow-up meetings for all RESEA participants.

1. Introduction

Since its establishment in 2015, the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program has become the largest job search assistance intervention targeting Unemployment Insurance (UI) claimants in the United States. The program requires new UI claimants to undergo an eligibility review to confirm their compliance with UI work search requirements and to receive reemployment services. These requirements are intended to encourage claimants to actively search for work while collecting benefits and to provide services to help them connect to suitable jobs and exit UI quickly. Over the past few years, with Federal funding appropriated under the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, all 50 states and the District of Columbia have been operating RESEA programs that include eligibility review and service requirements.

In July 2021, the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD), which administers the Wisconsin RESEA program, contracted Actus Policy Research (Actus) to conduct a third-party evaluation of the program. The objective of the evaluation is to estimate the effectiveness of the program in helping UI claimants obtain employment and improve their earnings, thereby reducing the duration of UI claims and the total benefits collected. Of particular interest is to identify the relative efficacy of requiring claimants to participate in a single RESEA session versus participating in both an initial and a follow-up session.

For this purpose, Actus implemented a **randomized controlled trial (RCT) impact study** to evaluate the impacts of the program, and a **process evaluation study** to assess program implementation and provide additional context for interpreting the impact study findings. This report presents the final evaluation results, offering DWD reliable evidence about the impacts of the Wisconsin RESEA program in the context of a strong labor market.

The final evaluation findings provide conclusive evidence that the program was effective in connecting claimants with counselors and increasing the take-up of reemployment services. This led to reduced UI duration and substantial net savings for the UI program. However, likely due to the strong economic conditions during the study period, the program did not cause any substantial impacts on employment and earnings. There is also strong evidence indicating that requring participants to attend a follow-up meeting further reduces UI receipt and generates additional savings for the UI program, beyond those achieved by the initial meeting.

Finally, we find strong evidence that targeting RESEA services using the results of the job readinesss assessment, which all claimants are required to complete after applying for UI benefits, is an effective strategy for enhancing the program's overall impact.

The remainder of this report is organized as follows. Section 2 describes the Wisconsin RESEA program and the objectives of the evaluation. Section 3 presents the research design and implementation of the RCT impact study, data sources used for the analysis, and the evaluation findings. Section 4 presents the research design for the process study and the study's findings. Section 5 summarizes the findings and offers policy recommendations.

2. Background

2.1. A Brief History of the RESEA Program

Unemployed workers who collect UI benefits are required to actively search for work and to be able and available to accept suitable job offers. The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) established the Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment (REA) program in 2005 to ensure that claimants complied with these requirements. The 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 services they could use to aid their job search. The objective was to yield UI savings by eliminating benefit payments to claimants who were not compliant with UI work search requirements and by increasing claimants' search efforts and effectiveness. The program was initially operated by nine states and expanded to 42 states by 2011 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012).

A DOL-funded RCT study of REA programs implemented during the Great Recession in Florida, Idaho, Illinois, and Nevada showed that the programs were effective in reducing UI spells and yielding UI savings that exceeded program costs (Poe-Yamagata *et al.,* 2012). The same study showed that the Nevada REA program was the most effective, yielding much higher UI savings than programs in the other states. Moreover, Nevada REA was the only program that increased participants' employment and earnings over 18 months following program entry. The study speculated that the higher effects of the Nevada program may have occurred

because the Nevada program required participants to receive job counseling services following the eligibility review, while programs in the other states did not mandate service receipt.

Subsequent research showed that, while part of the Nevada program's effects were due to voluntary claimant exits prior to the review and disqualifications of those deemed ineligible during the review, the largest portion of the effects were attributed to participants receiving job counseling that directly aided their job search efforts (Michaelides and Mueser, 2018; Michaelides and Mueser, 2020). This research concluded that programs that combine an eligibility review with mandatory job counseling are more effective than programs that require claimants to undergo only an eligibility review or programs that refer claimants to services but do not mandate participation in job counseling. Additional work showed that the Nevada REA program yielded long-term effects for participants, their families, and the government (Manoli *et al.,* 2018), was at least as effective in periods of low unemployment (Michaelides and Mueser, 2024), and was more effective than other state programs in aiding youth UI claimants (Michaelides *at al.,* 2021).

In 2015, DOL relied on these findings to encourage states to replace their existing REA programs with interventions that required UI claimants to both undergo an eligibility review and participate in reemployment services (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015). To emphasize the services requirement, the REA program was renamed RESEA (Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment). The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 permanently authorized the nationwide implementation of RESEA and awarded more than $150 million to support the implementation of the program in all 50 states and the District of Columbia (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). DOL's commitment to the RESEA program was reinforced by allocating $375 million to support the program in FY 2023 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2023).

2.2. The Wisconsin RESEA Program

The Wisconsin RESEA program has operated statewide since 2015, except for a temporary suspension in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, prior to implementation of the current RCT impact study, the program operated as follows.

Each week, DWD sent all new service-eligible UI claimants a letter requiring them to enroll in the Job Center of Wisconsin (JCW) online services system and to complete an online job readiness assessment. This assessment asked claimants to answer

questions related to their job search skills and potential barriers they faced in finding employment.

Claimant responses to the assessment were used to calculate an assessment score, with low scores indicating that the claimant faced no or few reemployment barriers and high scores indicating significant reemployment barriers.[1] Those with the highest assessment scores were required to participate in the RESEA program. In particular, claimants selected for RESEA participation were asked to: 1) watch an online video providing information on available services and resources at local Job Centers, and 2) use an online platform to schedule a one-on-one RESEA session with an RESEA counselor (or "presenter") within 21 days. DWD elected to conduct RESEA meetings virtually via web-based video conferencing; however, claimants could request to complete the meeting in person.

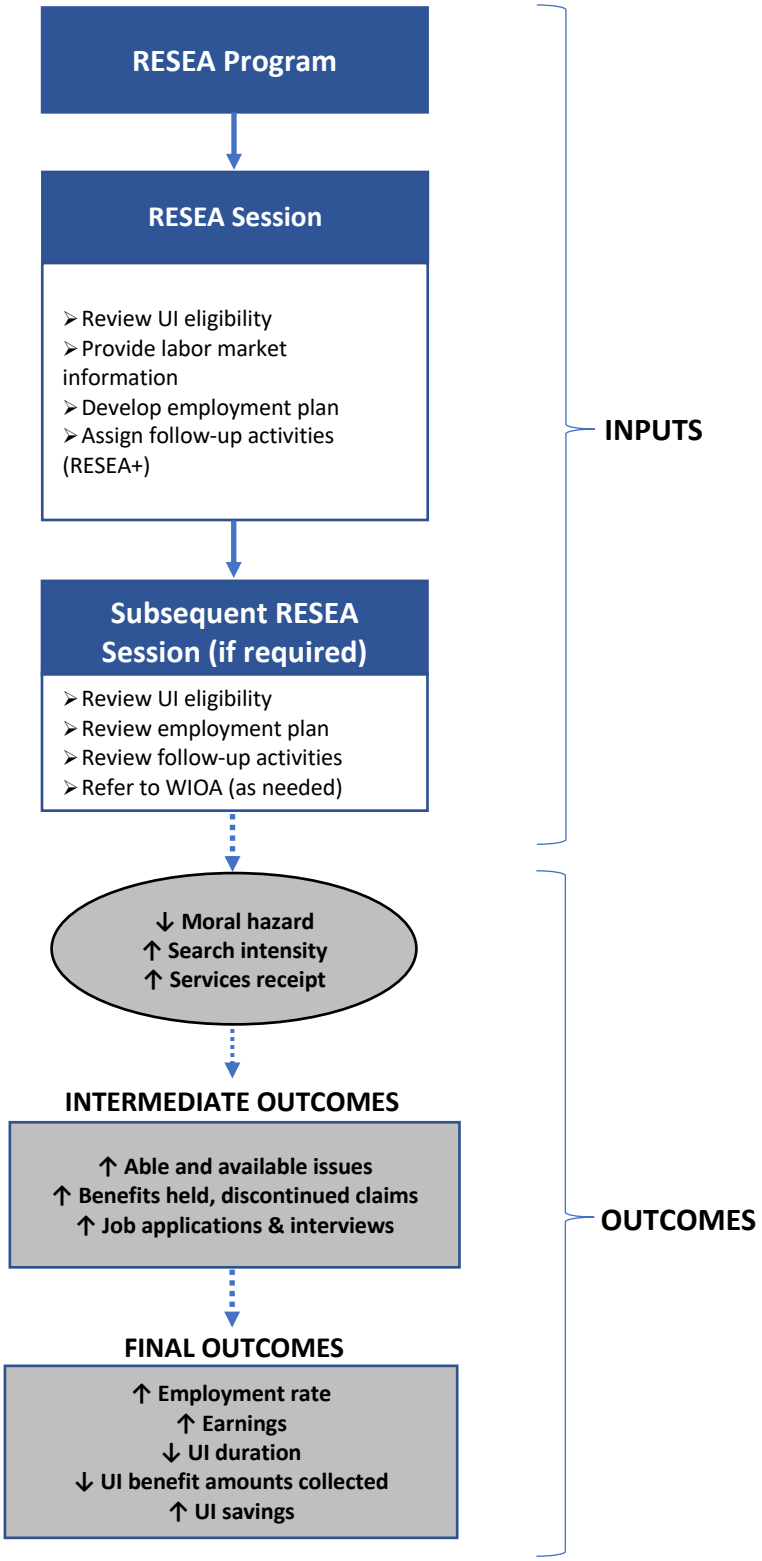
During the initial RESEA meeting, RESEA counselors conducted eligibility reviews to confirm the claimants' benefit entitlements and continued UI eligibility, worked with claimants to develop an individual employment plan, and provided claimants with relevant labor market information. The employment plan included activities such as completing skills assessments, meeting with career counselors, and participating in job search workshops.

At the end of the meeting, participants identified as having faced severe employability barriers—based on the results of the job readiness assessment—may be required to schedule a follow-up RESEA meeting to be held within 21 days using the online scheduling platform. Between the initial and the follow-up RESEA meeting, these claimants are required to complete the service activities identified in their employment plan. During the subsequent session, the RESEA counselors determined if the claimants had completed mandated activities included in their employment plan and provided claimants with additional services, as needed. Claimants assigned to RESEA who failed to attend the initial RESEA session and the follow-up session (if required) saw their UI benefits suspended until they complied with requirements.

Figure 1 presents the theory of change (TOC) for the Wisconsin RESEA program based on the program model that DWD implemented prior to the start of the RCT period. The program is expected to affect claimant outcomes through two mechanisms.

[1] Section 3.4.6 provides a more detailed description of the skills assessment.

Figure 1: Theory of Change, Wisconsin RESEA Program



First, the program may identify eligibility issues, such as claimants who are not able and available for work or who are not actively searching for work as required by UI regulations. Through this mechanism, the program is expected to reduce moral hazard by suspending benefits for those who are not searching for work and by motivating claimants to boost their job-search intensity.[2] The program provides similar incentives through suspensions of benefits for claimants who fail to show up and complete the required RESEA sessions or any mandated services. By mitigating moral hazard, the program is expected to reduce UI duration and the benefit amounts collected by claimants before exiting UI, thereby leading to savings for the UI program.

Second, during the one-on-one session with an RESEA counselor, claimants receive information about available services, which could motivate them to seek services on their own and/or increase the intensity of their job search. Similarly, the one-on-one meetings are expected both to increase service referrals and to push participants to receive services that they would not have received on their own. Through increased service receipt, the program is expected to improve participants' search efforts, thereby helping them to find jobs and achieve higher earnings than they would in the program's absence. This, in turn, is expected to reduce the amount of time participants spend collecting UI and the benefit amounts collected, leading to savings for the UI program.

2.3. Evaluation Objectives

This evaluation was designed to examine the impacts of the Wisconsin RESEA program on the outcomes of UI claimants and provide policy recommendations to improve program targeting and effectiveness. Using the program's TOC (Figure 1) as a baseline, the evaluation addresses the following research questions:

1) ***Does the RESEA program increase service participation?*** The evaluation examines whether the program led to higher take-up of reemployment services. This is key to confirming the program's TOC and demonstrating that effects on employment, earnings, and UI receipt may result from participants receiving services that they would not have received in the absence of the program.

[2] Moral hazard in this context means that UI claimants are not actively searching for work as required by state and federal laws.

2) ***Does the RESEA program reduce the duration of UI receipt and the amount of benefits collected?*** Increased take-up of services and enforcement of work search requirements may increase the likelihood of obtaining employment, thereby reducing the duration and amounts of UI benefits collected. The evaluation examines the overall program impacts on UI duration and benefit amounts collected and provides a rough estimate of the program's cost-effectiveness by comparing average UI savings with average cost per participant.

3) ***Does the RESEA program increase participants' employment rates and earnings?*** The TOC suggests that the program may improve the quality of participants' job search by enforcing work search requirements and by increasing participation in services. If so, the program is expected to help participants return to work sooner and improve their earnings. A key evaluation objective is to examine the overall impacts of the program on participants' employment rates and earnings.

4) ***Does the requirement to attend a follow-up RESEA session enhance program impacts?*** A key program component is that participants may be required to participate in a follow-up RESEA session to help them update their employment plans and to receive additional services. The evaluation examines the effects of the follow-up RESEA session requirement on UI benefits collected, employment, and earnings.

5) ***Do RESEA assessment scores correlate with outcomes?*** Under normal operations, the Wisconsin RESEA program uses scores from the online assessment to target program services. The evaluation examines whether assessment scores correlate with key outcomes, such as UI duration, employment, and earnings. The evaluation also examines if program effects vary based on claimant assessment scores. This analysis provides policy recommendations about using responses to the online assessment to target program services in a way that maximizes program impacts.

To address these research questions, the evaluation features two components. The first component is an ***RCT impact study*** that uses Wisconsin administrative data to estimate program effects on participant outcomes. The second component is a ***process study*** that uses program observations, document reviews, and program staff interviews to examine program implementation and provide additional context for interpreting the findings of the RCT study.

3. RCT Impact Study

3.1. Research Design

To estimate program impacts, an RCT design was implemented without affecting the extent or character of services provided to participants or the interactions of RESEA counselors with participants. Key for the success of the design was the use of random assignment procedures to assign service-eligible UI claimants into one of three groups:

- *RESEA group*—Required to schedule and participate in the initial RESEA session within 21 days of completing the online assessment. These individuals had no requirements to schedule or complete a follow-up session.
- *RESEA+ group*—Required to schedule and participate in the initial RESEA session within 21 days of completing the online assessment. They were also required to schedule and participate in a follow-up RESEA session within 21 days of completing the initial session.
- *Control group*—No requirement to schedule or participate in an RESEA session after completing the online assessment.

DWD made two modifications to its usual RESEA program to facilitate the study. First, DWD modified the RESEA selection process to facilitate random assignment. In lieu of using the job readiness assessment scores to allocate claimants to the RESEA program, UI claimants were randomly assigned to each study group (RESEA, RESEA+, control). Claimants in the RESEA and RESEA+ groups were asked to watch an online orientation video and use the online scheduling platform to schedule an initial RESEA session, as usual, but control group claimants had no RESEA requirements. Second, to estimate the impact of the follow-up RESEA session, all claimants selected for the RESEA+ group were required to schedule and complete a follow-up RESEA session. Claimants in the RESEA group were exempted from this requirement and were not referred to a follow-up RESEA session, regardless of the results of the initial session and regardless of their assessment score.

The random assignment procedure, illustrated in Figure 2, had the following steps:

Step 1: Each week, the state compiled a list that included all new service-eligible UI claimants; these claimants were eligible to receive the notification letter

directing them to complete the online assessment.

Step 2: Claimants were randomly assigned to one of the three study groups (RESEA, RESEA+, and control). Claimants were not informed at that point about their assignment.

Step 3: All eligible UI claimants (identified in Step 1) were notified by mail that they were required to complete the online assessment, as usual.

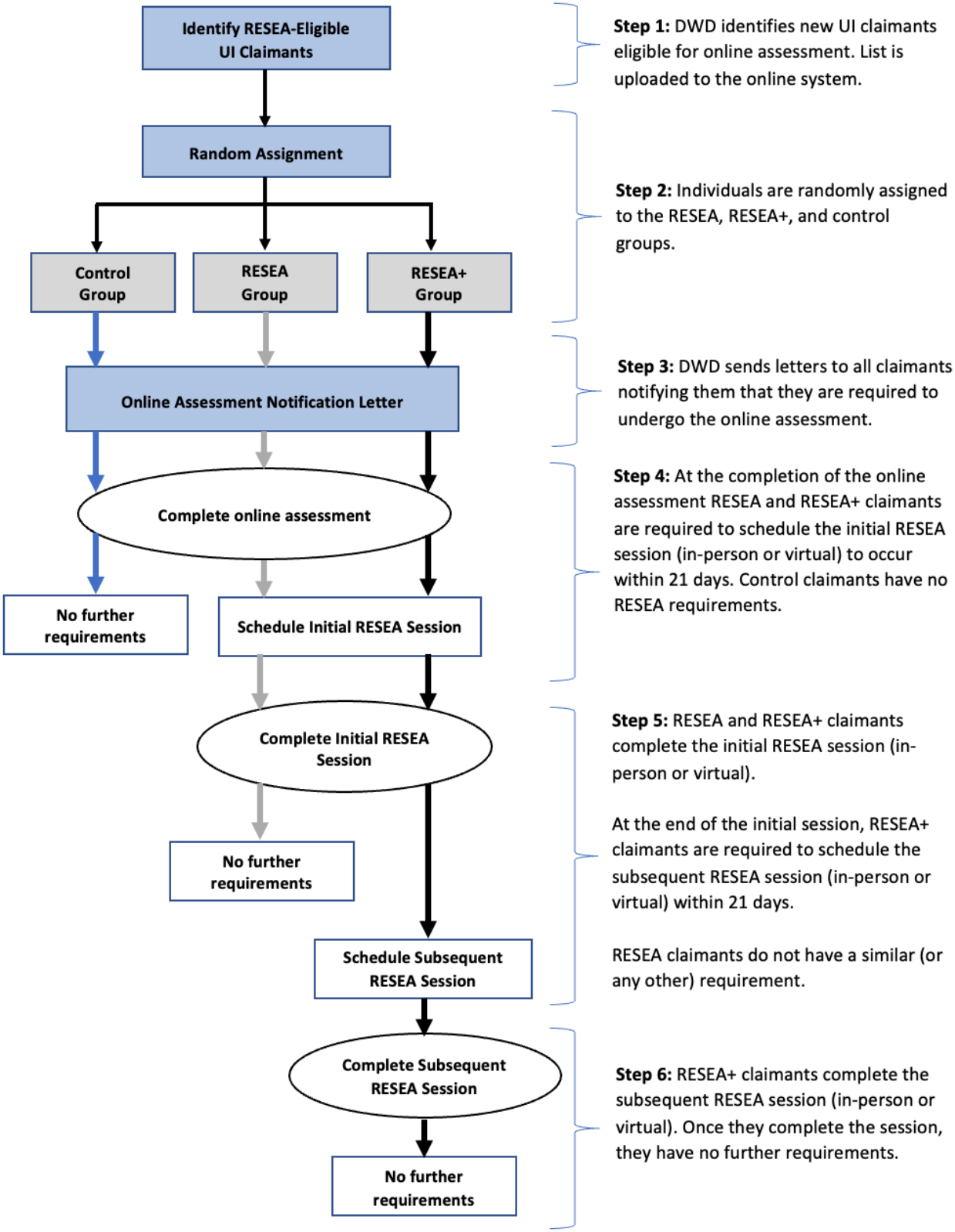
Step 4: Upon completing the assessment, RESEA and RESEA+ claimants were required to use the online scheduling platform to schedule their initial RESEA session. Claimants assigned to the control group did not receive any RESEA-related communication and were not required to schedule an RESEA session.

Step 5: All RESEA and RESEA+ claimants were required to attend the initial RESEA session within 21 days of completing the online assessment. Upon completing the initial session, claimants in the RESEA+ group were required to schedule the subsequent RESEA session to occur within 21 days. Claimants in the RESEA group were not required to schedule a subsequent session and had no further program requirements. Individuals assigned to the control group did not receive any communications and had no RESEA requirements.

Step 6: Claimants assigned to the RESEA+ group were required to complete their assigned reemployment services and to attend subsequent RESEA session unless they had stopped claiming UI benefits by the time the session was scheduled to occur. Once they completed the session, they had no further requirements.

This process was implemented over a 78-week period, from the first week of April 2022 through the final week of September 2023. Based on program capacity, it was determined that about 35% of RESEA-eligible claimants would be assigned to the RESEA group, 35% to the RESEA+ group, and 30% to the control group. This allocation was maintained for the first 40 weeks of random assignment (from the first week of April 2022 through the last week of December 2022). To accommodate unforeseen changes in program capacity, starting in week 41 (first week of January 2023), these proportions were adjusted to 25% RESEA, 25% RESEA+, and 50% control group. Note that, to account for this shift in the assignment proportions, all analyses below control for the week of random assignment.

Figure 2: Random Assignment Procedure and RESEA Requirements



3.2. Data Sources

The RCT impact study uses Wisconsin administrative data sources that provide information on all RESEA-eligible UI claimants in the study sample. Below is a description of each data source.

UI claims data. This data provides baseline UI claims information, including claimant characteristics and benefit entitlements, as well as UI payment information for benefits collected under the claim associated with random assignment. UI claims data are used to characterize the RESEA-eligible UI population during the RCT intake period, measure UI receipt outcomes, and estimate the impacts of the program on UI duration and benefit amounts collected.

UI wage records. This data reports the quarterly employment records of claimants in the study sample from quarter 1 (Q1) 2020 through Q4 2024. UI wage records are used to characterize the employment histories of RESEA-eligible claimants in the eight quarters prior to UI entry and to estimate program impacts on employment and earnings for the entire study sample in the five quarters after program entry.

RESEA program data. This data provides information on RESEA-related activities for claimants in the RESEA and RESEA+ groups, including meeting scheduling and meeting completion. RESEA program data are used to determine if RESEA and RESEA+ participants complied with program requirements.

Employment service data. This data provides information on the services received by UI claimants in the RESEA, RESEA+, and control groups during the claim's benefit year. Employment service data are used to identify services received by RESEA, RESEA+, and control claimants during their claim's benefit year.

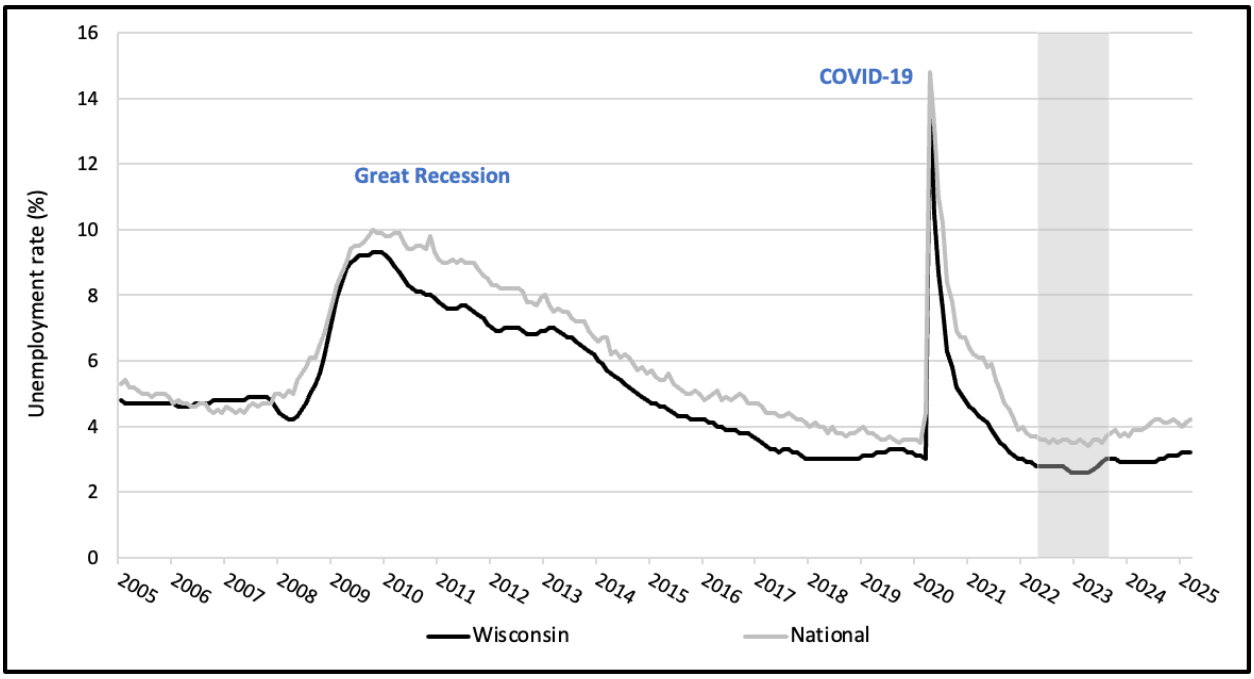
Job readiness assessment responses. These data report claimant responses to the assessment. These responses are used by DWD to construct the assessment score.

3.3. Characteristics of RESEA-Eligible Claimants

3.3.1. Operational Context

When RCT intake began in April 2022, the Wisconsin economy was thriving. Figure 3 shows that following the spike in unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic, the state unemployment rate declined rapidly. During the RCT intake period, from April 2022 through September 2023 (shaded area), the Wisconsin unemployment rate averaged 3.0 percent. This is the lowest unemployment in Wisconsin for any similar period since at least 2005.

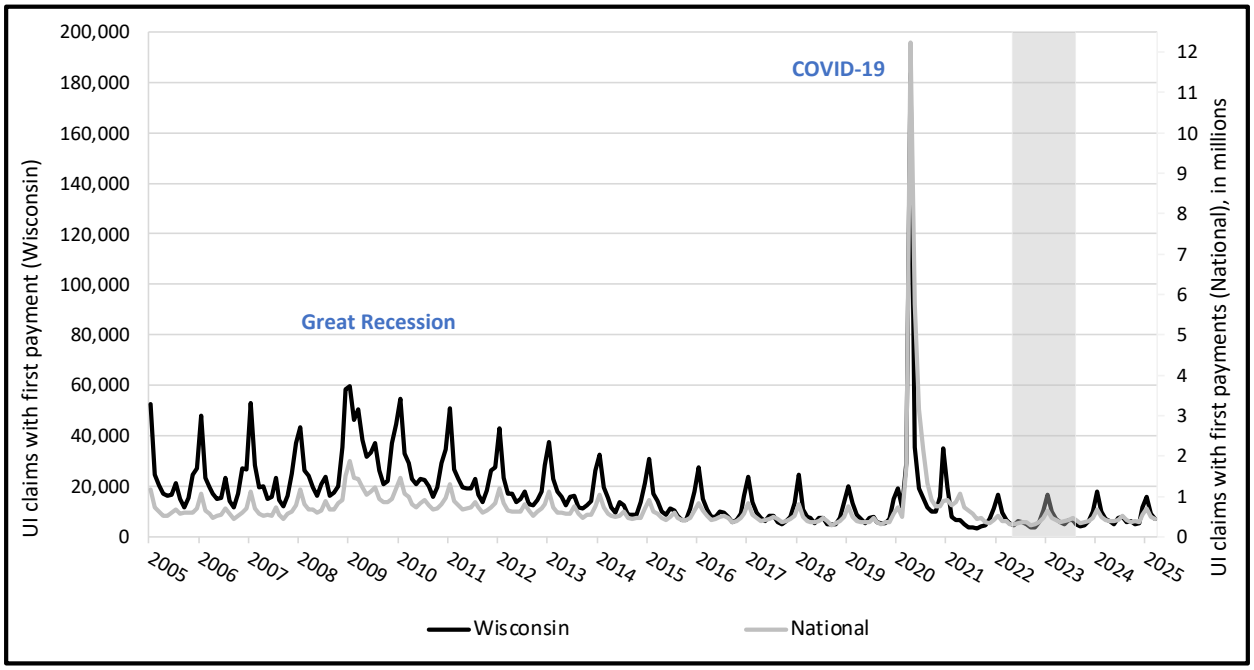
Figure 3: Wisconsin Unemployment Rate



Note: Seasonally-adjusted monthly unemployment rate. Source: Current Population Survey, retrieved from https://www.bls.gov/data/. Shaded area marks the RCT intake period.

This period is also characterized by a rapid decline in the number of UI claims with a first UI payment. Figure 4 shows that, following the spike in first UI payments during the pandemic, the number of claims with a first payment fell to below its pre-pandemic levels. During the RCT intake period, there was a monthly average of 6,496 claims with a first payment, which is about 28% below the monthly figure in 2019 (a monthly average 9,001 claims).

Figure 4: Wisconsin Number of UI Claims with a First Payment



Note: Number of UI claims with a first UI payment. Source: U.S. Department of Labor, retrieved from https://oui.doleta.gov/unemploy/claimssum.asp. Shaded area marks the RCT intake period.

3.3.2. Claimant Characteristics

During the RCT intake period, 48,110 RESEA-eligible UI claimants were randomly assigned to the three study groups. Figure 5 presents the study group allocations, indicating that 29-30% of claimants were assigned to each of the two RESEA groups and about 41% of claimants were assigned to the control group.

Figure 5: Random Assignment of RESEA-Eligible UI Claimants

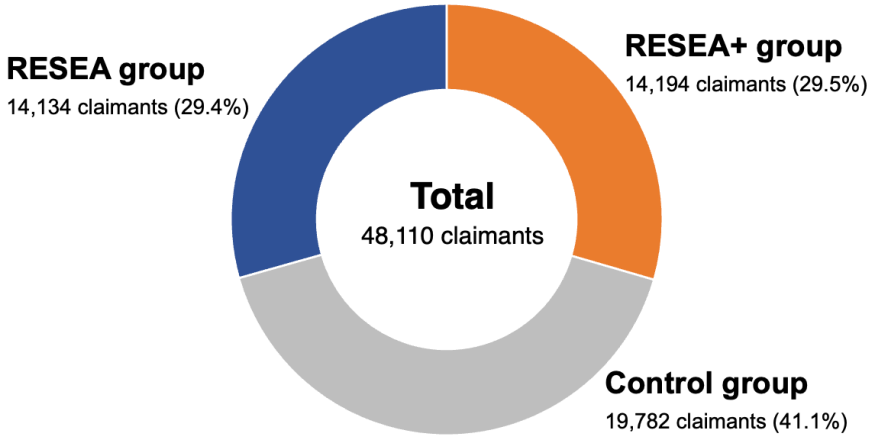


Figure 6 presents the characteristics of the claimants in the study sample. Fifty-one percent of claimants were men and 48% were women; 1% did not report their gender. Most claimants self-identified as white (64%), black (16%), or Hispanic (7%); Asian and other races each account for about 2% of the cases, and race/ethnicity was not reported for about 9% of cases. About 40% had no more education than a high school diploma, 28% had some college education or an associate degree, 29% had a college or postgraduate advanced degree, and 4% were missing information on educational attainment.

During the study period, UI claimants who lost their jobs through no fault of their own were deemed eligible for benefits if they:

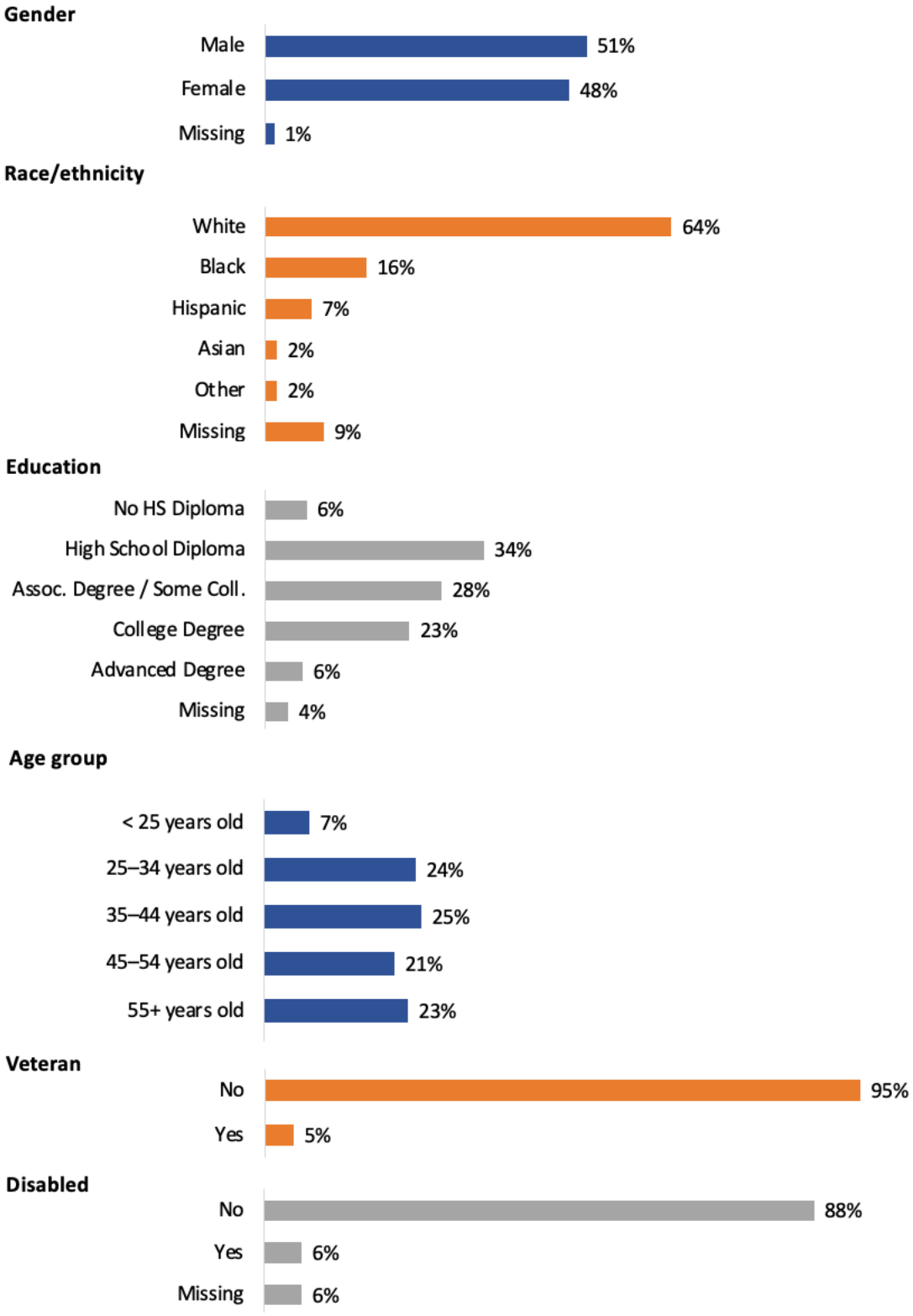
1) had earnings in at least two calendar quarters during the base period (defined as the first four of the five quarters before the UI claim);
2) earned at least $1,890 in covered UI employment during the base period; and
3) earned at least $1,350 in covered UI employment during the base period quarter with the highest earnings.

Claimants who satisfied these requirements were entitled to collect 14–26 weekly UI payments for a pre-determined weekly benefit amount (WBA) during the claim's benefit year.[3]

Table 1 presents information on UI benefit entitlements and the time elapsed between the initial claim filing date and claim approval. Nearly 80% of claimants were entitled to the maximum 26 weeks of benefits. The average weekly benefit amount was $338 and the average maximum benefit amount (the product of weeks of eligibility times the weekly benefit amount) was $8,426. Claimants can collect their entitlements within the claim's benefit year, which lasts 52 weeks after the start of the UI claim.

[3] The WBA equals 4% of earnings in the quarter with the highest earnings during the base period, with a $54 minimum and a $370 maximum. Weeks of eligibility equal 20% of the base period earnings divided by the WBA, with a 14-week minimum and a 26-week maximum. In a few cases, claimants with significant interest in family partnerships, LLCs, and corporations may be limited to fewer than 14 weeks of benefits. The benefit year lasts 52 weeks from the week the UI claim is filed.

Figure 6: Characteristics of RESEA-Eligible UI Claimants



About 60% of claimants saw their claims approved and collected their first UI payment less than four weeks after filing. However, some claimants had to wait longer. These delays occurred due to state reviews of claimant eligibility issues, for example, confirming that claimants had sufficient prior employment and earnings to qualify for benefits and that they lost their jobs through no fault of their own. This review process was affected by the claims backlog related to the COVID-19 pandemic. While most cases were resolved within eight weeks, about 10% of claimants had to wait at least nine weeks before their claims were approved.

Table 1: Benefit Entitlements of RESEA-Eligible UI Claimants

	RESEA-Eligible UI Claimants
Number of claimants	**48,110**
Weekly Benefit Amount ($)†	338 (66)
Maximum Benefit Amount ($)†	8,426 (2,108)
Weeks of Eligibility	
Missing	0.017
<14 weeks	0.008
14–17 weeks	0.049
18–21 weeks	0.069
22–25 weeks	0.061
26 weeks	0.796
Weeks Elapsed since Claim Date††	
<4 weeks	0.599
4–8 weeks	0.300
9–26 weeks	0.074
27+ weeks	0.027

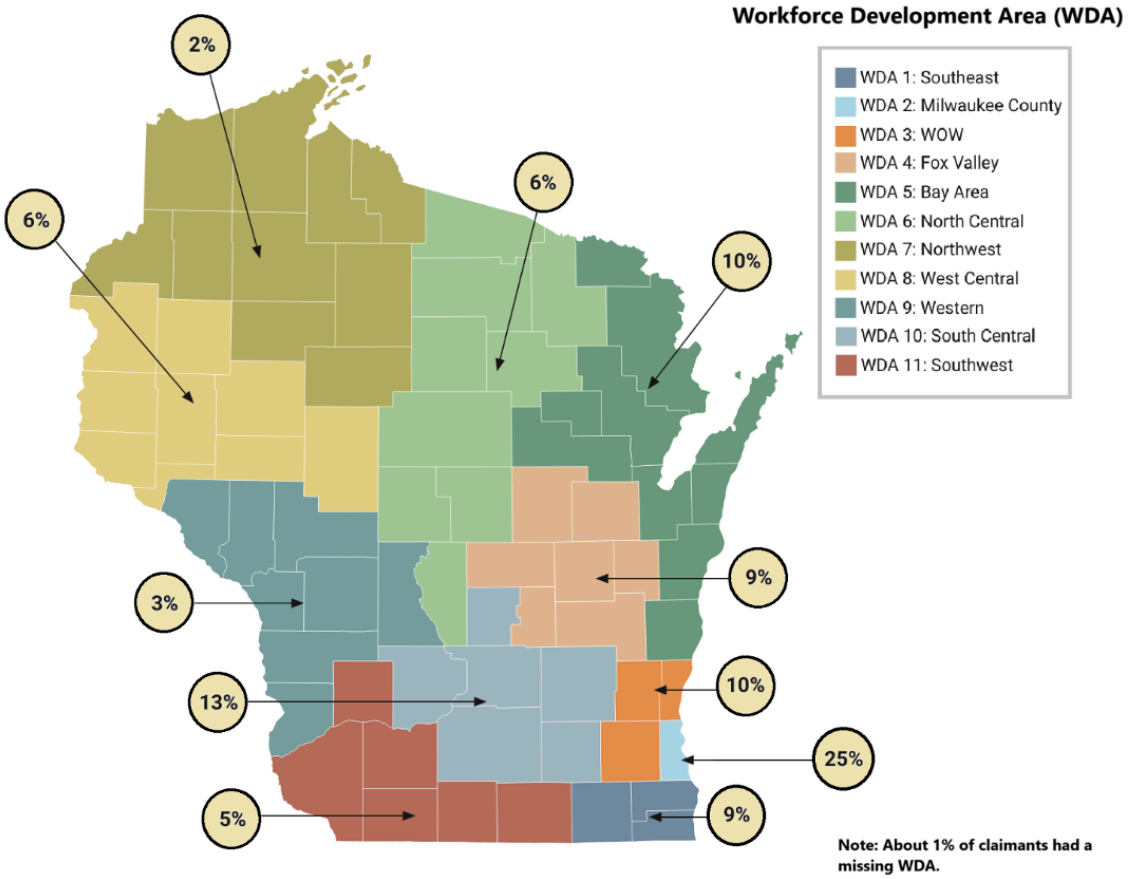
Note: For weekly benefit amount and maximum benefit, sample means are reported, with standard deviations in parentheses. For weeks of eligibility and weeks elapsed since claim date, sample proportions are reported. †Benefit entitlements are missing for 828 (1.7%) of claimants. ††Missing for 3 (<1%) claimants.

Source: Wisconsin baseline UI claims data.

Wisconsin has 11 Workforce Development Areas (WDAs), each administering local

Job Centers that serve job seekers within their geographic jurisdiction. Figure 7 presents a map of WDAs showing distribution of claimants among them.[4] The WDA with the most claimants is WDA 2 in Milwaukee County, which served nearly a quarter of claimants in the state. Large WDAs include South Central, Waukesha-Ozaukee-Washington, Fox Valley, and Bay Area.[5]

Figure 7: Distribution of Claimants Across WDAs



Using administrative UI wage records, Table 2 presents the prior earnings (of

[4] For more information, including counties of coverage of each WDA, see the official Job Center of Wisconsin website: http://www.wisconsinjobcenter.org/directory/default.htm.

[5] Note that the 2023 WDA distribution of the unemployed population was as follows: 9% Southeast, 19% Milwaukee County, 10% WOW, 6% Fox Valley, 13% Bay Area, 7% North Central, 4% Northwest, 9% West Central, 5% Western, 13% South Central, and 5% Southwest (source: Year 2023 State of Wisconsin Regional Economic Analysis, DWD). As such, UI claimants were overrepresented (i.e., their proportion exceeded the proportion of unemployed workers) in the Milwaukee County WDA (25% UI claimants, 19% unemployed) and were underrepresented in the Fox Valley, West Central, and Bay Area WDAs.

RESEA-eligible UI claimants in the eight quarters before UI entry.[6] Claimants experienced an increasing trend in average earnings leading up to their UI claim, which most likely stems from the economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic. Average earnings in the first quarter prior to UI entry was $12,401.

Table 2: Prior Earnings of RESEA-Eligible UI Claimants

	Average Prior Earnings
Earnings ($)	
In quarter 1 prior to entry	12,401 (13,351)
In quarter 2 prior to entry	12,714 (12,357)
In quarter 3 prior to entry	11,947 (12,054)
In quarter 4 prior to entry	11,111 (12,908)
In quarter 5 prior to entry	10,768 (14,768)
In quarter 6 prior to entry	10,355 (15,547)
In quarter 7 prior to entry	9,691 (11,842)
In quarter 8 prior to entry	8,866 (11,270)

Note: Reported are sample means for nominal earnings amounts with standard deviations in parentheses.

Source: Wisconsin UI wage records.

3.3.3. Random Assignment and Baseline Equivalence Tests

Because assignment to the study groups was done randomly, we expect that, on average, claimants in the RESEA, RESEA+, and control groups would have similar characteristics, UI entitlements, and geographic distribution. We use formal statistical tests to assess whether random assignment was successful in balancing the three groups. First, we use a regression model to estimate the likelihood of assignment into the RESEA group, as follows:

$$\text{RESEA}_i = X_i \cdot b + \text{Earn}_i \cdot c + \text{WDA}_i \cdot d + \text{Week}_i \cdot e + v_i \qquad [1a]$$

This model is estimated using RESEA and control group cases only. The dependent

[6] For example, for claimants who entered from October to December 2022 (Q4 2022), the first quarter prior to entry is Q3 2022 and the eighth quarter prior to entry is Q4 2020. For claimants who entered from January to March 2023 (Q1 2023), the first quarter prior to entry is Q4 2022 and the eighth quarter prior to entry is Q1 2021.

variable (RESEA_i) is an indicator that equals 1 if individual i was assigned to the RESEA group, and 0 otherwise. Control variables include:

- X_i—a constant term, claimant characteristics, and UI entitlements;
- Earn_i—a vector with the earnings amount in each of the eight quarters prior to UI entry;
- WDA_i—a vector of fixed effects for WDA; and
- Week_i—a vector of fixed effects for the week of random assignment.

In addition to the control variables, the right-hand side of the equation includes v_i, a zero-mean error term. The week fixed effects are included to account for changes in the randomization proportions over time, namely the shift from a 35% RESEA, 35% RESEA+, 30% control group allocation over the first 40 weeks of intake to a 25% RESEA, 25% RESEA+, and 50% control group allocation in week 41 and later. If random assignment was successful, the estimated parameters associated with characteristics (b), prior earnings (c), or region (d) should have very limited statistical power to predict RESEA assignment.

Second, to estimate the likelihood of assignment into the RESEA+ group and the control group, we use the following model:

$$\text{RESEA\_Plus}_i = X_i \cdot b + \text{Earn}_i \cdot c + \text{WDA}_i \cdot d + \text{Week}_i \cdot e + v_i \qquad [1b]$$

This model is estimated using RESEA+ and control group cases only. The dependent variable (RESEA_Plus_i) is an indicator that equals 1 if individual i was assigned to the RESEA+ group, and 0 otherwise. Control variables are as defined for model 1a. If random assignment was successful, none of the estimated parameters associated with claimant characteristics (b), prior earnings (c), and region (d) should have any statistical power to predict RESEA+ assignment.

Third, we fit a model that estimates the likelihood of assignment into any treatment group (i.e., either the RESEA group or the RESEA+ group), as follows:

$$\text{Treat}_i = X_i \cdot b + \text{Earn}_i \cdot c + \text{WDA}_i \cdot d + \text{Week}_i \cdot e + v_i \qquad [1c]$$

The dependent variable (Treat_i) is an indicator that equals 1 if individual i was assigned to the RESEA *or* RESEA+ group, and 0 otherwise. Control variables are as defined for models 1a and 1b. This model is estimated using the entire sample.

Table 3 presents the regression results for the three models.

Table 3: Regression Results, Likelihood of RESEA Assignment

	[1a] RESEA versus Control	[1b] RESEA+ versus Control	[1c] RESEA & RESEA+ versus Control
Gender			
Male†	--	--	--
Female	-0.004 (0.005)	-0.003 (0.005)	-0.003 (0.005)
Race/ethnicity			
White†	--	--	--
Black	-0.003 (0.009)	0.001 (0.009)	-0.001 (0.007)
Hispanic	-0.009 (0.011)	-0.007 (0.011)	-0.006 (0.009)
Asian	-0.004 (0.020)	-0.009 (0.020)	-0.009 (0.017)
Other	0.029 (0.020)	-0.011 (0.020)	-0.010 (0.017)
Missing	0.011 (0.011)	0.009 (0.011)	0.010 (0.009)
Age			
<25 years old	-0.001 (0.012)	0.007 (0.011)	0.003 (0.009)
25–34 years old†	--	--	--
35–44 years old	0.002 (0.008)	-0.002 (0.008)	-0.000 (0.006)
45–54 years old	0.002 (0.008)	-0.004 (0.008)	-0.001 (0.007)
55+ years old	0.008 (0.008)	0.000 (0.008)	0.004 (0.007)
Missing	-0.026 (0.056)	-0.048 (0.055)	-0.037 (0.046)
Educational Attainment			
No High School Diploma†	0.007 (0.012)	0.018 (0.011)	0.014 (0.010)
High School Diploma	--	--	--
Ass. Degree / Some College	0.007 (0.007)	0.015 (0.007)**	0.012 (0.006)**
College Degree	0.004 (0.008)	0.004 (0.008)	0.005 (0.006)
Advanced Degree	-0.025 (0.012)**	0.005 (0.012)	-0.010 (0.011)
Missing	0.007 (0.020)	0.030 (0.020)	0.018 (0.016)
Veteran			
Yes	0.011 (0.013)	0.002 (0.013)	0.006 (0.011)
No†	--	--	--

(Table 3 continues on next page)

(Table 3, continued from previous page)

	[1a] RESEA versus Control	[1b] RESEA+ versus Control	[1c] RESEA & RESEA+ versus Control
Disabled			
Yes	-0.013 (0.011)	0.002 (0.013)	-0.010 (0.009)
No†	--	--	--
Missing	-0.054 (0.042)	-0.031 (0.014)**	-0.057 (0.035)*
WBA (in $000s)	-0.062 (0.047)	-0.046 (0.048)	-0.054 (0.039)
Weeks of Eligibility			
<14 weeks†	--	--	--
14–17 weeks	-0.006 (0.031)	-0.005 (0.032)	-0.006 (0.026)
18–21 weeks	0.018 (0.030)	-0.004 (0.031)	0.0011 (0.025)
22–25 weeks	0.019 (0.031)	-0.006 (0.031)	0.006 (0.026)
26 weeks	-0.001 (0.029)	-0.006 (0.029)	-0.003 (0.024)
UI entitlements missing	-0.054 (0.042)	-0.070 (0.042)*	-0.057 (0.035)*
Earnings ($)			
In quarter 1 prior to entry	0.0002 (0.0003)	-0.0000 (0.0003)	0.0001 (0.0002)
In quarter 2 prior to entry	0.0002 (0.0004)	0.0001 (0.0004)	0.0002 (0.0003)
In quarter 3 prior to entry	-0.0001 (0.0004)	0.0001 (0.0004)	-0.0000 (0.0003)
In quarter 4 prior to entry	-0.0003 (0.0003)	-0.0003 (0.0003)	-0.0003 (0.0003)
In quarter 5 prior to entry	-0.0003 (0.0002)	-0.0002 (0.0002)	-0.0003 (0.0002)
In quarter 6 prior to entry	0.0002 (0.0002)	0.0003 (0.0003)	0.0002 (0.0001)
In quarter 7 prior to entry	0.0000 (0.0004)	0.0008 (0.0004)	0.0005 (0.0003)
In quarter 8 prior to entry	0.0002 (0.0004)	-0.0006 (0.0004)	-0.0002 (0.0003)
Controls for WDA	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls for week of assignment	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	0.573 (0.045)***	0.546 (0.045)***	0.720 (0.036)***
Observations	33,916	33,976	48,110
R-Squared	0.0459	0.0442	0.0428

Note: Reported are estimated parameters with robust standard errors in parentheses. †Denotes omitted category for categorical variables. *, **, *** = statistically significant at the 10%, 5%, 1% level.

Results indicate that random assignment yielded balanced RESEA, RESEA+ and control groups. Including controls for WDA (not reported), only one of the estimated parameters in the RESEA versus control specification (model 1a) is statistically significant at the 5% level. Similarly, only two parameters are significant at the 5% level in the RESEA+ versus control specification (model 1b) and only one parameter is significant in the treatment versus control specification (model 1c).[7]

Together, the results of the statistical tests provide convincing evidence that random assignment created three balanced study groups. Based on these results, we can estimate the overall impacts of the RESEA program by comparing differences in outcomes between the treatment group (includes claimants in the RESEA and RESEA+ groups) and the control group. Furthermore, we can estimate the additional impacts caused by the follow-up RESEA session by comparing differences in outcomes between the RESEA and the RESEA+ groups.

3.4. Program Impacts

3.4.1. Program Compliance and Services Received

The rationale behind the RESEA program is that claimants may not participate in reemployment services that would aid their job search. The program's TOC posits that the program would facilitate meetings between claimants and counselors, thereby increasing take-up of counseling services. It is thus important to examine the degree to which claimants assigned to the RESEA and RESEA+ groups complied with program requirements and received services.

Table 4 shows that about 70% of RESEA and 69% of RESEA+ group claimants completed the initial RESEA meeting. About 18% of both RESEA and RESEA+

[7] If control variables are strongly correlated, there is a small chance that the regression models may not reveal the true relationship between those variables and the likelihood of treatment assignment. To account for this unlikely scenario, we estimated each specification controlling for each variable separately. The results, not reported here, are consistent with the results of the regression models, indicating that random assignment yielded observationally equivalent study groups.

claimants were exempted from attending the initial RESEA session.[8] The majority of RESEA+ claimants who attended the initial RESEA meeting, also attended the required follow-up meeting. In particular, 7,625 (78%) of the 9,837 RESEA+ claimants who attended the initial meeting also attended the follow-up meeting. Overall, 54% of RESEA+ claimants attended both meetings.

Table 5 compares service take-up across the three groups. About 65% of RESEA and 64% of RESEA+ claimants received individualized job counseling, compared to about 3% of control claimants. RESEA and RESEA+ claimants were also more likely to receive basic services and referrals to additional services. Differences between the two treatment groups in receipt of services were modest.

Overall, these results reveal two important findings. First, the majority of claimants assigned to the RESEA and RESEA+ programs complied with requirements, attending at least one session with counselors. Second, the program was very effective in increasing the take-up of job counseling, which is a key program mechanism for producing impacts on UI receipt and employment outcomes.

Table 4: Program Compliance, RESEA and RESEA+ Group

	RESEA	RESEA+
Number of Claimants	**14,134**	**14,194**
[1] Attended RESEA meetings	9,902 (70.1%)	9,837 (69.3%)
Attended initial and follow-up meeting	--	*7,625 (53.7%)*
Attended initial, exempted from follow-up	--	*536 (3.8%)*
Attended initial, did not attend follow-up meeting	--	*1,676 (11.8%)*
[2] Exempted from initial meeting	2,539 (17.9%)	2,564 (18.1%)
[3] Not exempted, did not attend meeting	1,693 (12.0%)	1,793 (12.6%)

Note: Reported is the number of claimants with the sample proportion in parentheses.
Source: Wisconsin RESEA program data.

[8] RESEA and RESEA+ claimants were exempted for various reasons, including because they had found a job, received services on their own, voluntarily exited UI, or enrolled in approved training prior to the meeting. A few claimants were also exempted because limited staff availability did not allow them to schedule the initial RESEA meeting within the 21-day deadline. The data do not allow us to identify the reasons for particular exemptions.

Table 5: Service Take-up Rates by Study Group

	RESEA	RESEA+	Control
Number of Claimants	**14,134**	**14,194**	**19,782**
Job counseling†	64.6%	63.5%	2.8%
Basic services††	9.9%	11.7%	3.2%
Referrals to additional services	8.4%	9.3%	0.9%
Job referrals	0.3%	0.3%	0.1%

Note: Reported are sample proportions. †= Includes skills assessment, individualized employment plan (IEP) development, IEP review, resume development, and career guidance services. ††= Includes enrollment in job exchange system, orientation services, provision of labor market information (LMI), supportive services, and online self-assisted services.
Source: Wisconsin employment service data.

3.4.2. Effects on UI Receipt Outcomes

One of the key objectives of the RESEA program is to reduce claimants' UI duration and amount of UI benefits collected. To estimate program impacts on UI receipt, we use available UI payment data to construct three key outcomes:

- *Benefit weeks collected*—Equals the number of weekly UI payments collected by the claimant on the claim associated with random assignment.
- *Benefit amount collected*—Equals the total benefit amount collected by the claimant on the claim associated with random assignment.
- *Exhausted benefits*—Indicates if the claimant exhausted the maximum benefit entitlement on their claim.

Table 6 presents the UI receipt outcomes for each study group. Control group claimants collected an average of 13.2 weeks of benefits for $3,892 in total benefits, with both figures being higher than those for RESEA and RESEA+ claimants. The likelihood of exhausting benefits was slightly lower for RESEA+ claimants compared with claimants in the other two groups.

Table 6: UI Receipt Outcomes by Study Group

	RESEA	RESEA+	Control
Number of Claimants	**14,134**	**14,194**	**19,782**
Benefit Weeks Collected	12.6 (9.2)	12.4 (9.2)	13.2 (9.3)
Benefit Amount Collected ($)	3,686 (2,921)	3,625 (2,916)	3,892 (2,989)
Exhausted Benefits	0.083	0.077	0.086

Note: Reported are sample means with standard deviations in parentheses; for exhausted benefits, reported is the sample proportion.

Source: Wisconsin UI data.

To estimate the overall impacts of the program on UI receipt, we compare the mean outcomes between the pooled RESEA and RESEA+ groups and the control group, controlling for the week of random assignment (to account for variation in random assignment proportions over time). To maximize statistical power and improve the precision of the estimates, we estimate program impacts using ordinary least squares regression models of the following form:

$$Y_i = T_i \cdot \alpha + X_i \cdot \beta + \text{Earn}_i \cdot \gamma + \text{WDA}_i \cdot \delta + \text{Week}_i \cdot \varepsilon + u_i \qquad [2]$$

The dependent variable (Y_i) is the outcome of interest (number of benefits weeks collected, benefit amount collected, benefit exhaustion, employment, or earnings). Control variables include:

- T_i—a treatment indicator that equals 1 if the individual was either in the RESEA or the RESEA+ group and 0 otherwise;
- X_i—includes a constant term, observed characteristics, and UI entitlements;
- Earn_i—a vector with the earnings amount in each of the eight quarters prior to UI entry;
- WDA_i—a vector of fixed effects for the individual's WDA; and
- $Week_i$—a vector of fixed effects for the week when UI benefit receipt started.

In addition to the control variables, the right-hand side of the equation includes u_i, a zero-mean error term. Greek letters are parameters to be estimated. The

parameter of interest is α, which is the program's average treatment effect (ATE).[9]

The estimated ATEs are presented in Table 7. The middle column reports the ATE with the standard error in parentheses and the right column reports the effect expressed as a percentage of the control group mean.

Table 7: Average Treatment Effects on UI Receipt Outcomes

	Average Treatment Effect	Effect as a percentage of control group mean
Benefit Weeks Collected	-0.60 (0.09)***	-4.5%
Benefit Amount Collected ($)	-182 (27)***	-4.7%
Exhausted Benefits	-0.007 (0.003)***	-8.2%

Note: Reported are estimated parameters with robust standard errors in parentheses. Right column reports the average treatment effect as a percentage of the control group mean. *** = statistically significant at the 1% level.

These results indicate that the program reduced UI duration by 0.60 weeks, representing a 4.5% reduction compared with the control group mean (13.2 weeks, from Table 7). As a result, the program reduced average UI payments by $182 per participant, a 4.7% reduction compared with the control group. This indicates that the program yielded $182 in UI savings per participant served. Both effects are statistically significant at the 1% level. Multiplying average UI savings by the number of RESEA participants served, indicates that the program caused nearly $5.2 million in UI savings during the study period. The final row shows that the program also reduced the likelihood of exhausting benefits by 0.7 percentage points, an 8.2% reduction relative to the control group.

3.4.3. Program Effects on Employment and Earnings

Using UI wage records through Q4 2024 we measure employment and earnings for all claimants in the study sample for up to five quarters after UI entry. In particular, we construct the following measures for the five-quarter period after UI entry:

- *Employed*—Equals 1 if the claimant had earnings in the quarter and 0 else.

[9] This parameter estimates the program impact for those assigned to RESEA, regardless of whether they actually attended an RESEA meeting. By design, those assigned to RESEA and RESEA+ were all affected by the treatment because they received notification of program requirements.

- *Earnings*—Equals the total amount earned in the quarter. Note that individuals with no earnings in the quarter are included with zero earnings.

- *Total earnings, quarters 1–5*—Equals the total amount earned in quarters 1–5 after UI entry.

Table 8 presents summary statistics of these outcomes. Employment rates are similar across the three study groups. At the same time, control group claimants have slightly higher average earnings over the entire follow-up period. These findings provide informal evidence that the program did not improve participant employment and earnings.

Table 8: Employment and Earnings by Study Group

	RESEA Group	RESEA+ Group	Control Group
Employed			
In quarter 1 after UI entry	0.647	0.646	0.639
In quarter 2 after UI entry	0.717	0.717	0.709
In quarter 3 after UI entry	0.724	0.730	0.727
In quarter 4 after UI entry	0.718	0.721	0.718
In quarter 5 after UI entry	0.707	0.707	0.706
Earnings ($)			
In quarter 1 after UI entry	6,137 (10,201)	6,103 (9,562)	6,199 (9,670)
In quarter 2 after UI entry	7,794 (8,971)	7,802 (8,932)	7,896 (9,363)
In quarter 3 after UI entry	8,334 (9,394)	8,301 (9,186)	8,507 (9,670)
In quarter 4 after UI entry	8,331 (9,772)	8,293 (9,652)	8,453 (9,763)
In quarter 5 after UI entry	8,391 (9,938)	8,369 (10,223)	8,484 (9,789)
Total earnings, quarters 1-5	38,986 (41,585)	38,868 (41,279)	39,540 (42,989)

Note: Reported are the sample proportions for employed and sample means with standard deviations in parentheses for earnings. Earnings outcomes include individuals with no earnings in the quarter are included in the calculations with zero earnings. †=Not available for the 8,566 claimants assigned from July through September 2023.

Source: Wisconsin UI wage records.

To produce formal estimates of the impacts of the program, we use regression models similar to model 2 above. These models estimate the overall impacts of the RESEA program on employment and earnings by comparing the outcomes of the pooled RESEA and RESEA+ groups with the outcomes of the control group.

Table 9 presents the results. The effect on quarter 1 employment was 0.8 percentage points, a modest 1.3% increase relative to the control group; this effect was statistically significant only at the 10% level. Employment effects in subsequent quarters are close to zero—ranging from -0.005 to 0.005—and lack statistical significance. Estimated effects on earnings are also small and lack statistical significance.

Table 9: Average Treatment Effects, Employment and Earnings

	Average Treatment Effect	Effect as a percentage of control group mean
Employed		
In quarter 1 after UI entry	0.008 (0.004)*	+1.3%
In quarter 2 after UI entry	0.005 (0.004)	+0.7%
In quarter 3 after UI entry	-0.003 (0.004)	-0.4%
In quarter 4 after UI entry	-0.005 (0.004)	-0.6%
In quarter 5 after UI entry	-0.002 (0.004)	-0.2%
Earnings ($)		
In quarter 1 after UI entry	-29 (123)	-0.5%
In quarter 2 after UI entry	3 (76)	+<1%
In quarter 3 after UI entry	-96 (78)	-1.1%
In quarter 4 after UI entry	-87 (80)	-1.0%
In quarter 5 after UI entry	-71 (80)	-0.8%
Total earnings, quarters 1-5	-279 (340)	-0.7%

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

3.4.4. The Effects of the Follow-up RESEA Requirement

The Wisconsin RESEA program may require UI claimants to attend a follow-up RESEA session to update their employment plans and receive additional services. By comparing the UI receipt outcomes between the RESEA+ group (required to attend a follow-up session) and the RESEA group (no requirement to attend a follow-up session), we estimate the impacts of the follow-up RESEA session

requirement. For improved statistical power and precision, we use regression models of the following form:

$$Y_i = R_i \cdot a_0 + R_i^+ \cdot a_1 + X_i \cdot \beta + \text{Earn}_i \cdot \gamma + \text{WDA}_i \cdot \delta + \text{Week}_i \cdot \varepsilon + u_i \quad [3]$$

The dependent variable (Y_i) is the outcome of interest and control variables include: R_i—an indicator that equals 1 if the individual was assigned to the RESEA group and 0 otherwise; and R_i^+—an indicator that equals 1 if the individual was assigned to the RESEA+ group and 0 otherwise. The remaining control variables are defined as in previous models. This model includes three parameters of interest:

- a_0, which estimates the effect of being assigned to the RESEA group;
- a_1, which estimates the effect of being assigned to the RESEA+ group; and
- $a_1 - a_0$, which estimates the effect of the follow-up RESEA session (i.e., the outcome difference between the RESEA+ and the RESEA group).

Table 10 reports the regression results for UI receipt outcomes. Results show that the RESEA treatment (single RESEA meeting, no follow-up) reduced UI duration by 0.49 weeks and benefit amounts collected by $150. Effects are higher for the RESEA+ treatment (initial *and* follow-up meeting), with a 0.71-week reduction in UI duration and a $214 reduction in benefit payments.

Table 10: Effects of the Follow-up RESEA Session, UI Receipt Outcomes

	RESEA (a_0)	RESEA+ (a_1)	RESEA+ versus RESEA ($a_1 - a_0$)
Number of Benefit Weeks Collected	-0.49 (0.10)***	-0.71 (0.10)***	-0.21 (0.11)**
Benefit Amount Collected ($)	-150 (31)***	-214 (31)***	-64 (33)*
Exhausted Benefits	-0.004 (0.003)	-0.010 (0.003)***	-0.006 (0.003)*

Note: Reported are estimated parameters with robust standard errors in parentheses. ***, **, * = statistically significant at the 1%, 5%, 10% level.

The rightmost column compares the effects of RESEA+ relative to the effects of RESEA, providing estimates for the additional impact caused by the follow-up RESEA session. The results indicate that claimants in the RESEA+ group experienced an additional 0.21-week reduction and an additional $64 benefit reduction beyond the 0.49 and $150 reductions experienced by those in the RESEA group. The additional meeting more than doubled the effect of a single meeting on the likelihood of

exhausting benefits, decreasing the chance of exhaustion by an additional 0.6 percentage points beyond that of a single meeting. The effect on the number of benefit weeks collected is statistically significant at the 5% level, while the effects for benefit amount and benefit exhaustion are significant at the 10% level.

The same analysis for employment and earnings reveals no differences of note between the RESEA+ and the RESEA group. Table 11 shows estimated effects on employment are close to zero for both RESEA and RESEA+, and none are statistically different from zero. Differences in impacts between the two programs are also small and lack statistical significance. The results for earnings are similar. These results suggest that the RESEA program (with no follow-up session) had little or no effect on either employment or earnings and that the follow-up session likewise produced no effects.

Table 11: Effects of the Follow-up RESEA Session, Employment and Earnings

	RESEA (a_0)	RESEA+ (a_1)	*RESEA+ versus RESEA* ($a_1 - a_0$)
Employed			
In quarter 1 after UI entry	0.009 (0.005)	0.007 (0.005)	*-0.002 (0.006)*
In quarter 2 after UI entry	0.005 (0.005)	0.004 (0.005)	*-0.000 (0.005)*
In quarter 3 after UI entry	-0.005 (0.005)	0.000 (0.005)	*0.005 (0.005)*
In quarter 4 after UI entry	-0.006 (0.005)	-0.004 (0.005)	*0.002 (0.005)*
In quarter 5 after UI entry	-0.001 (0.005)	-0.002 (0.005)	*-0.001 (0.005)*
Earnings amount			
In quarter 1 after UI entry	41 (133)	-99 (134)	*-140 (107)*
In quarter 2 after UI entry	34 (89)	-27 (89)	*-61 (94)*
In quarter 3 after UI entry	-47 (93)	-144 (91)	*-98 (96)*
In quarter 4 after UI entry	-36 (94)	-137 (94)	*-101 (100)*
In quarter 5 after UI entry	-16 (95)	-125 (96)	*-110 (103)*
Total earnings, quarter 1-5	-24 (398)	-532 (398)	*-508 (413)*

Note: Reported are estimated parameters with standard errors in parentheses.

3.4.5. Program Cost-Effectiveness

Conducting a full cost-benefit analysis of the RESEA program is outside the scope of work of this evaluation. However, we can obtain a rough estimate of the cost-

effectiveness of the program from the perspective of the government by comparing the average UI savings caused by the program with the average cost of serving participants. Table 12 presents comparisons for the RESEA group, RESEA+ group, and the combined RESEA/RESEA+ groups.

Using budget information provided by DWD, average program costs were as follows: $176 per participant for those who attended a single RESEA meeting but no follow-up; $297 per participant for those who attended both an initial and a follow-up meeting; and $17 per participant for those who did not attend any meetings. Using this information, we estimate that the average program cost for the 14,134 RESEA group claimants was $128 and the average program cost for the 14,194 RESEA+ group claimants was $192.[10] Similarly, the combined average cost for serving RESEA and RESEA+ claimants was approximately $160 per participant.[11]

These figures indicate that the additional cost of implementing the RESEA+ version of the program (which includes the follow-up meeting) relative to the cost of implementing the RESEA version of the program (no follow-up meeting) was about $64 per participant. Comparing the UI savings caused by each version of the program with the average cost per participant provides a rough estimate of the cost-effectiveness of each version of the program in terms of direct expenditures and savings for the government. As shown in Table 13, the average UI savings for RESEA participants ($150 per participants) and RESEA+ participants ($214 per participant) exceeded the average cost per participant by $22. These results indicate that the additional cost of implementing the RESEA+ version of the program ($64) matched the additional UI savings caused by this version of the program.

[10] The average program cost for RESEA and RESEA+ was calculated by combining information on the number of claimants completing meetings (see Table 4) and the program cost information provided by DWD. The average RESEA cost is equal to the sum of the total cost of serving RESEA claimants who completed the initial meeting (9,902 claimants x $176) plus the total cost of serving claimants who did not complete any meetings (4,232 claimants x $17), divided by the total number of RESEA claimants (14,134). Similarly, the average RESEA+ cost is equal to the sum of the total cost of serving RESEA+ claimants who completed both meetings (7,625 claimants x $297) plus the total cost of serving claimants who completed only the initial meeting (2,212 claimants x $176) plus the total cost of serving claimants not completing any meetings (4,357 claimants x $17) divided by the total number of RESEA+ claimants (14,194).

[11] This is simply the weighted average of the average RESEA and RESEA+ costs.

Table 12: RESEA Average Program Costs and UI Savings

	RESEA	RESEA+	Combined
UI savings per participant†	$150	$214	$182
Program cost per participant††	$128	$192	$160
Difference	*+$22*	*+$22*	*+$22*

Note: †Estimated UI savings for RESEA and RESEA+ are based on estimated average treatment effects obtained using model 3 (see Table 10). ††Estimated program costs are based on the average program costs provided by DWD and based on the number of claimants completing meetings during the study period.

Based on this analysis, we conclude that both versions of the program—one with and one without a follow-up RESEA session—more than pay for themselves. The UI savings produced by each version of the program exceed the monetary cost of serving participants.

3.4.6. The Role of the Job Readiness Assessment

All RESEA-eligible UI claimants are required to complete an online job readiness assessment at the start of their UI claims, prior to them learning about their assignment to the RESEA and RESEA+ groups. The assessment asks claimants to answer a series of questions related to the following areas:

- **Job search activities.** Claimants are asked about the duration of their job search, number of job interviews they received, and job search activities through informal networks.
- **Job search preparedness.** Claimants are asked about their preparedness to search for a job, including if they have a resume, cover letter, and professional references for the jobs they are targeting.
- **Skill awareness.** Claimants are asked about their ability to identify their skills, identify how their skills fit with specific jobs, and communicate their skills to potential employers.
- **Technology.** Claimants are asked about their ability to use internet services to aid them in conducting their search, including use of social media, the state job exchange system, and other online tools.
- **Resources.** Claimants are asked if they face any additional difficulties in searching for a job, including lack of child care and transportation, a disability, or a felony conviction.

Using a pre-determined point system, DWD assigns each question a score and constructs an assessment score by aggregating the scores across all questions. The assessment score has a potential range from 0 to 265 points, with 0 points indicating that the claimant faces no reemployment barriers and 265 points indicating that the claimant faces all the barriers covered by the questionnaire.

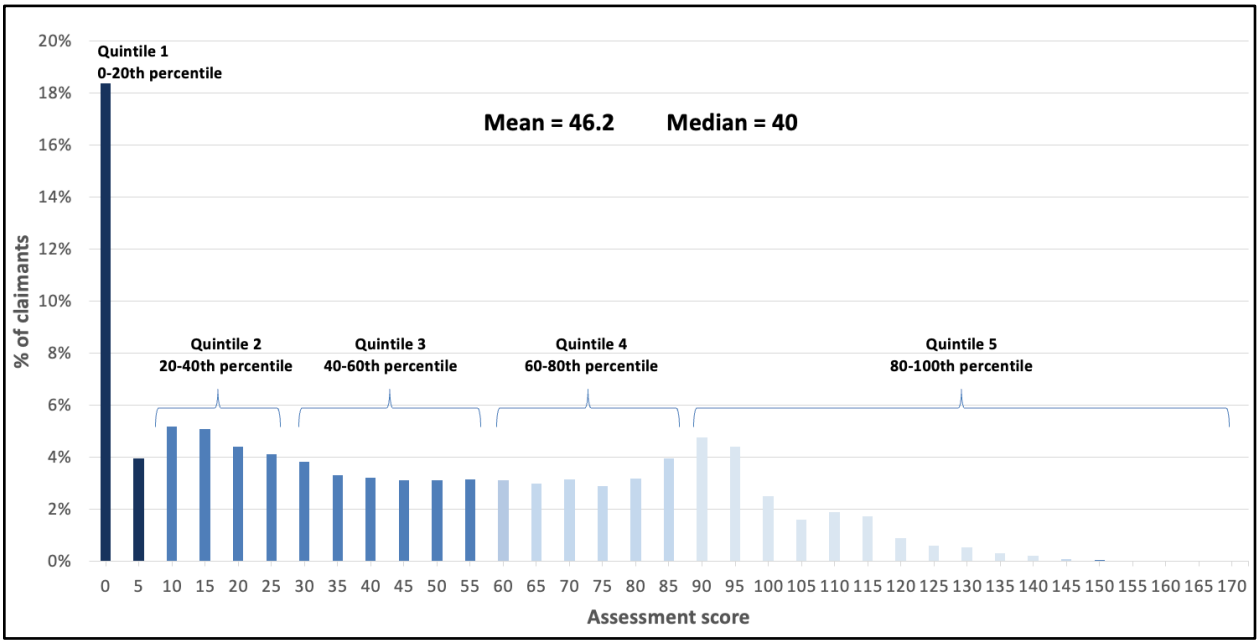
In the absence of the current RCT impact study, DWD uses the assessment scores to determine which claimants would be referred to the RESEA program. Claimants with the highest scores are given priority for RESEA assignment. For the RCT impact study, DWD forfeited the use of the assessment scores and instead used a random assignment algorithm to assign claimants to the three study groups. As a result, each of the three study groups includes claimants across the entire range of values of the assessment score distribution. Importantly, since all claimants are required to fill out the assessment, the assessment score is available for all RESEA, RESEA+, and control group claimants in the study sample.

Figure 8 presents the assessment score distribution for claimants in the study sample. The assessment score varied from 0 to 170, with a 46.2 mean score and a 40 median score. Figure 7 illustrates the assessment scores for claimants in each quintile of the distribution.[12] Roughly speaking, claimants in quintile 1 faced no reemployment barriers, claimants in quintiles 2 and 3 faced moderate barriers, and claimants in quintiles 4 and 5 faced significant barriers.

The use of random assignment to determine RESEA participation, combined with the availability of the assessment scores for each claimant in the study sample, presents a unique opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the job readiness assessment score to predict claimant outcomes and to identify which claimants are likely to benefit from RESEA participation. Random assignment ensures that the assessment score distribution is similar across the three groups (RESEA, RESEA+, and control), so differences in claimant outcomes across the three groups cannot be attributed to the assessment score. Indeed, the average assessment score is 46.5 for RESEA, 45.8 for RESEA+, and 46.2 for control group claimants; these differences are very small and lack statistical significance.

[12] Each of the five quantiles contains claimants whose assessment scores fall within a 20 percentage-point range, from quintile 1 (bottom 20% scores) to quintile 5 (top 20% scores).

Figure 8: Assessment Score Distribution



Source: Job readiness assessment responses, provided by DWD.

First, using available data, we examine if assessment scores predict key claimant outcomes, such as UI duration, benefit amount collected, and employment and earnings in quarter 1 after entry. To estimate these relationships, we modify model 2 to include indicators for the assessment score, as follows:

$$Y_i = T_i \cdot a + b_1 \cdot Q_1 + b_2 \cdot Q_2 + X_i \cdot c + \text{Earn}_i \cdot d + \text{WDA}_i \cdot e + \text{Week}_i \cdot f + g_i \qquad [4]$$

Similar to model 2, the dependent variable is the outcome of interest (Y_i) and control variables include: T_i, a treatment indicator that equals 1 if the claimant was in either the RESEA or the RESEA+ group and 0 otherwise; X_i, which includes a constant term, observed characteristics, and UI entitlements; Earn_i, a vector with the earnings amount in each of the eight quarters before UI entry; WDA_i, a vector of fixed effects for the individual's WDA; and Week_i, a vector of fixed effects for the week when UI benefit receipt started.

This model also includes Q_1, an indicator that equals 1 if the claimant assessment score is in quintiles 2–3 (20-60th percentile) or zero otherwise, and Q_2, an indicator that equals 1 if the score is in quintiles 4–5 (60-100th percentile) or zero otherwise. The omitted category includes claimants in quintile 1, who have the bottom 20% assessment scores. Parameters b_1 and b_2 estimate the outcome difference between claimants in the 20–60th percentile range and claimants in the 60–100th percentile

range with claimants in the 0–20th percentile range (the omitted category).[13]

Table 13 presents the results. Claimants in the 20–60th percentile range collected 7.49 more weeks and $2,246 higher benefit amounts than claimants in the 0–20th percentile range. Similarly, claimants with the top 40% of assessment scores collected 8.07 more weeks and $2,403 higher benefit amounts than claimants with the bottom 20% of assessment scores.

Results for quarter 1 employment and earnings show that, compared to those in the 0–20th percentile range: 1) claimants in the 20–60 percentile range were 17.2 percentage points less likely to be employed and had $3,549 lower earnings, and 2) claimants with the top 40% of assessment scores were 20.1 percentage points less likely to be employed and had $4,036 lower earnings.

These results show that the assessment score used by DWD to measure the employability of UI claimants is strongly correlated with claimant outcomes. Claimants with the lowest assessment scores (i.e., those expected to face no reemployment barriers) have much shorter UI durations, collect lower benefit amounts, and have better reemployment outcomes than claimants with higher scores (i.e., those expected to face moderate or substantial barriers).

Table 13: Regression Results, Relationship between Claimant Outcomes and the Assessment Score

	UI Receipt		Employment in Quarter 1	
	Benefit Weeks	Benefit Amount	Employed	Earnings
Treatment	-0.61 (0.08)***	-186 (25)***	0.008 (0.004)*	-23 (122)
Assessment Score				
0–20th percentile	--	--	--	--
20–60th percentile	7.49 (0.10)***	2,246 (30)***	-0.172 (0.005)***	-3,549 (190)***
80–100th percentile	8.07 (0.10)***	2,403 (30)***	-0.201 (0.005)***	-4,036 (171)***

Note: Reported are estimated parameters with standard errors in parentheses. *, *** = statistically significant at the 10%, 1% level.

[13] In addition to the specification reported, we estimated two alternative specifications. One specification included the raw assessment score as a control variable and the other specification included dummies representing the five quintiles of the assessment score distribution. The results from these alternative specifications, which are available upon request, produce essentially the same results and lead to the same conclusions as those presented here.

Note that differences between the parameters for claimants in the 20-60th and 60-100th percentile range suggest that those with the top assessment scores have higher UI receipt and lower reemployment outcomes. However, separate tests indicate that these differences are not statistically significant.

Second, we examine whether the assessment score can be used to target RESEA to claimants who are more likely to benefit from receiving services. The Wisconsin RESEA program typically targets claimants with the highest assessment scores based on the rationale that those facing more reemployment barriers are more likely to benefit from the program.

As noted, random assignment ensures that the assessment score distribution is similar across the three groups (RESEA, RESEA+, and control). Thus, we can estimate if the impacts of the program vary based on claimant assessment scores. For this analysis, we extend model 4 above to include interaction terms between the treatment and assessment score indicators, as follows:

$$Y_i = T_i \cdot a_0 + a_1 \cdot Q_A \cdot T_i + a_2 \cdot Q_B \cdot T_i + b_A \cdot Q_A + b_B \cdot Q_B + \\ + X_i \cdot c + \text{Earn}_i \cdot d + \text{WDA}_i \cdot e + \text{Week}_i \cdot f + g_i \quad [5]$$

The added interaction terms include: $Q_A \cdot T_i$, which equals 1 if the claimant was assigned to the RESEA or the RESEA+ group *and* had an assessment score in the 20–60th percentile range; and $Q_B \cdot T_i$, which equals 1 if the claimant was assigned to the RESEA or RESEA+ group *and* had an assessment score in the 60–100th percentile range. In other words, this model assumes that the impact of the program varies based on the position of claimants on the assessment score distribution. In particular:

- a_0 estimates the impact of the program for claimants in the 0–20th percentile range, which is the omitted category;
- $a_0 + a_1$ estimates the impact for claimants in the 20–60th percentile range; and
- $a_0 + a_2$ estimates the impact for claimants in the top 40% of scores.[14]

[14] Note that we also estimated differential impacts based on the assessment score using two alternative specifications. One specification included the interaction of the assessment score with the treatment indicator, and the other specification included interactions between the treatment indicator with indicators for each quintile of the assessment score distribution (omitting quintile 1). These alternative specifications, which are available upon request, produced very similar results with those presented here.

Regression results, presented in Table 14, indicate that program impacts increase with claimant assessment scores. The baseline treatment effects (a_0) for benefit weeks and benefit amount collected are close to zero, indicating that the program had no or little impact for claimants with the bottom 20% of assessment scores (the omitted category). However, the interactions of the treatment effect with the 20–60th percentile and 60–100th percentile indicators (a_1 and a_2, respectively) are negative and statistically significant, indicating that the program was effective in reducing UI receipt for claimants with high assessment scores.

Estimated impacts for quarter 1 show that the baseline treatment effects for employment are small and not statistically significant. However, the treatment interaction term for the 20-60th percentile (0.026) is positive and statistically significant. Estimated parameters for quarter 1 earnings are small and not statistically significant. Separate analysis (not shown) indicates no significant effects for employment and earnings in quarters 2-5.

The bottom panel of Table 14 confirms the earlier results that claimants with higher assessment scores collect more weeks of benefits and higher benefit amounts, while they have lower employment rates and earnings in quarter 1.

Table 14: Regression Results, Program Impacts and the Assessment Score

	UI Receipt		Employment in Quarter 1	
	Benefit Weeks	**Benefit Amount**	**Employed**	**Earnings**
Treatment (a_0)	-0.08 (0.15)	-9 (46)	-0.004 (0.008)	-395 (394)
Treatment x				
0-20th percentile	--	--	--	--
20-60th percentile (a_1)	-0.57 (0.20)**	-196 (61)***	0.021 (0.011)**	585 (408)
60-100th percentile (a_2)	-0.83 (0.19)***	-260 (60)***	0.010 (0.011)	376 (389)
Assessment Score				
0-20th percentile	--	--	--	--
20-60th percentile	7.81 (0.15)***	2,361 (48)***	-0.185 (0.008)***	-3,893 (384)***
60-100th percentile	8.56 (0.15)***	2,555 (47)***	-0.207 (0.008)***	-4,257 (354)***

Note: Reported are estimated parameters with standard errors in parentheses. **, *** = statistically significant at the 5%, 1% level.

To better understand these results, Table 15 presents the *average treatment effects*

for claimants in each assessment score category. Starting with benefit weeks collected, the effect was close-to-zero (−0.07) for claimants with scores in the bottom 20%. Effects for claimants in the 20-60th percentile range (−0.63) and the 60th-100th percentile range (−0.91) were statistically significant, indicating that the program reduced their UI durations by 0.63 and 0.91 weeks, respectively. The bottom row of Table 15 presents a formal test for the difference between these two effects. Results indicate that, although impacts for claimants with the top 40% scores are higher, they are not statistically different from the impacts for claimants with scores in the 20-60th percentile range.

We obtain similar results for the benefit amount collected. The program had a close-to-zero impact for claimants with scores in the bottom 20% but led to statistically significant reductions in benefit amounts collected for claimants in the 20-60th percentile range (-$205) and those in the 60-100th percentile range (-$269). These two impact estimates are not statistically different from each other.

Finally, results for employment and earnings in quarter 1 show that the program had little or no effect on participant employment for participants in the bottom 20%. However, we find a 1.7 percentage-point treatment effect on quarter 1 employment for claimants in the 20-60th percentile range. The employment effect for claimants in the 60-100th percentile range was close to zero. Effects on earnings lacked statistical significance across all claimant categories.

Table 15: Program Impacts by Assessment Score Category

	UI Receipt		Employment in Quarter 1	
	Benefit Weeks	**Benefit Amount**	**Employed**	**Earnings**
Assessment Score				
0-20th percentile (a_0)	-0.07 (0.15)	-9 (46)	-0.004 (0.008)	-396 (394)
20-60th percentile ($a_0 + a_1$)	-0.63 (0.13)***	-205 (41)***	0.017 (0.007)**	189 (145)
60-100th percentile ($a_0 + a_2$)	-0.91 (0.13)***	-269 (40)***	0.006 (0.007)	-19 (91)
Difference (a_2-a_1)	*-0.29 (0.18)*	*-64 (57)*	*-0.011 (0.010)*	*-208 (169)*

Note: Each row reports estimated average treatment effects with standard errors in parentheses, based on the results from Table 14. The last row reports the difference in the average treatment effect between claimants in the 60-100th percentile range and claimants in the 20-60th percentile range, with standard errors in parentheses. **, *** = statistically significant at the 5%, 1% level.

4. Process Evaluation Study

The process evaluation study uses program observations, document reviews, and interviews with program staff to examine the implementation of the RESEA program during the study period. The study emphasizes the methods and processes used for conducting RESEA sessions and delivering services. An important consideration for the study is whether RESEA services and service delivery are consistent across regions and over the study period. Moreover, the study identifies implementation challenges, as well as best practices and lessons learned, that emerge throughout implementation.

4.1. Data Sources

To assess the implementation of the RESEA program, we collected and analyzed three types of qualitative data:

- **Interviews.** The interviews were designed to gather information about program implementation from Job Service program administrators, program staff and partners responsible for conducting the RESEA sessions, and UI staff. Over the course of the study period, interviews were conducted with staff from a sample of Job Centers selected to reflect variation across several key factors, such as location, type of population served, and size. Semi-structured interview guides were used to ensure information addressing all research questions was obtained, while providing flexibility for interviewees' responses.

- **Program Observations.** We observed selected RESEA sessions and follow-up activities, as permitted by RESEA participants. Observations were conducted using a checklist protocol for recording observations that were linked to the research questions and were designed to identify variation in the implementation of RESEA activities.

- **Document Review.** Additional program detail was gathered by reviewing existing materials related to the implementation of the RESEA program. This included documentation about the data systems used to record RESEA meetings, templates for individual employment plans, outreach materials, labor market information, training materials and guidance documents, the letter requesting that claimants complete the assessment, and program reports.

The evaluation involved three rounds of data collection:

- The first round was completed early in the study period (August 2021) and before the start of random assignment, and interviews were limited to RESEA, UI, and program partner administrative and managerial staff. These early interviews were designed to gather information to inform the development of the logic model and the Evaluation Design Plan.

- The second round occurred about halfway through the first year of the RCT intake period (November 2022) to gather information about RESEA implementation through the perspective of RESEA counselors from a sample of Job Centers across the state.[15]

- The third round occurred toward the end of the RCT intake period (August 2023), involving observations of RESEA initial and follow-up meetings with UI claimants.

4.2. Analysis and Findings

In this section, we describe findings identified through analysis of information gathered through the data collection activities described above. Content analysis was used to obtain insights and identify overarching themes from interviews, the review of program documents, and RESEA meeting observations. These findings, organized and analyzed to allow themes to emerge, shed light on the processes, best practices, and challenges related to Wisconsin's RESEA program.

Below, we first provide a general description of UI application processes and procedures for selecting RESEA participants,[16] followed by a discussion of various aspects of program implementation that we consider noteworthy, especially as context for interpreting quantitative findings and the impact study results.

[15] RESEA counselors (or "presenters") are Job Center staff with expertise in case management, skills training, mentoring, job search assistance, placement, career development, retention, and career advancement for underemployed and unemployed job seekers and career-changing workers.

[16] Note, the RESEA selection described here reflects the process used to select claimants prior to the start of the RCT study.

4.2.1. Overview of UI Claims Process and RESEA Selection

The UI claims process in Wisconsin involves several steps. Within 14 days of filing an initial UI claim online, claimants are required to register on the JCW online system. If a claimant does not register within this timeframe, benefits are suspended and no benefits are paid until registration is complete.[17] If registration is completed after the 14 days, the claimant is not eligible for benefits for any week prior to registration.

Claimants are paid no sooner than seven days after filing for benefits, assuming they have registered with Wisconsin Job Service using the online system. The first payment triggers a legally required letter to be sent by mail instructing the claimant to complete the online assessment within 14 days (the notification indicates the exact date). The claimant is also notified of the requirement through the UI web portal. If this activity is not completed, benefits are withheld. After completing the assessment, claimants meeting the threshold for participation in RESEA are notified via an online prompt that they are required to participate in the program. The RESEA claimant then has 21 days to schedule an RESEA session and attend it.

As described in the program's TOC in Figure 1, RESEA sessions are held virtually, unless the claimant requests an in-person meeting. Prior to the pandemic, the vast majority of RESEA meetings were in person and consisted of both a group orientation and a one-on-one meeting. The 3-hour group orientation featured visits from representatives of other services available to claimants (e.g., WIOA, veterans, employers). While the group orientation session is not currently a feature of the virtual meetings, claimants are directed to watch an online video after completing the online assessment and before scheduling the RESEA meeting. The video provides information on the work search services and resources available to claimants, duplicating the contents of the in-person group orientation.

The RESEA one-on-one session is described as intensive and tailored to the needs of each RESEA participant, with follow-up activities designed to further address those needs. During this meeting, program staff work with claimants to develop an individual employment plan, provide the claimant with labor market information, and review UI eligibility and work search requirements.[18] RESEA participants are

[17] There are some exceptions. Those enrolled in approved training or those with a return-to-work date are not required to register. See: https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/uiben/faqs/registration.htm.
[18] Having been suspended during the pandemic, Wisconsin's work search requirement was reinstated in May 2021. Claimants are required to compete four work search activities weekly and

provided with assignments or tasks they are expected to complete as part of the RESEA requirements. Because of the information and the connections to services provided to claimants during the RESEA meetings, many may not immediately take up other reemployment services. Subsequent RESEA meetings are scheduled with claimants within 21 days of the first meeting. During these meetings, staff review the claimant's work search records and their continued UI eligibility as well as their individual employment plan.

4.2.2. Program Administration and RESEA Staff Resources

Program Administration. Currently, the key functions associated with implementing the RESEA program (i.e., providing reemployment services and reviewing UI eligibility) fall under two separate divisions within DWD: 1) the UI Division and 2) the Division of Employment and Training (DET). However, this was not always the case. Prior to 1996, DET and the UI Division were one division that handled scheduling, meeting with participants, UI disqualifications, and UI investigations as a team. In some locations, DET and UI operated under one roof even after the two divisions were created.

While there is communication across divisions, the current separation of key RESEA functions across divisions may create challenges. The involvement of different staff in the operation of the same program and aligning and understanding each other's standard operating procedures requires increased effort for each entity. For example, on an administrative level, a meeting with UI and DET staff resulted in identifying 28 points of connection requiring continuous communication. This was particularly evident when developing the online scheduling system tied to both the JCW online system and UI, with electronic messaging requiring legal approval by the Bureau of Legal Affairs (the department responsible for providing legal services to the UI program).

For RESEA frontline workers, DET centralizes the process of communicating information related to UI issues. For example, rather than contacting UI staff directly, RESEA counselors submit any questions they have about UI eligibility or other UI issues to an RESEA mailbox; responses are provided by the DET RESEA program coordinator. Although they did not communicate directly with UI staff, RESEA counselors indicated that the process for getting answers to their questions was clear and effective.

provide proof of such activities.

In addition, the DET RESEA coordinator holds biweekly meetings with RESEA counselors. In addition to discussing any issues related to RESEA programming and service delivery, the meetings are used to discuss any new UI directives or other UI issues. .

RESEA Staff Training. While similar, there was some variation in the training experiences expressed by RESEA counselors interviewed for the study. Since staff were trained at different points in time, this likely reflects such things as the natural evolution of training or procedural shifts, such as those necessary during the pandemic. However, in general, training appeared to provide new RESEA counselors with the skills needed to effectively implement the key components of an RESEA interview and to accurately record information about the RESEA meeting. RESEA staff most commonly described their training to include the following:

- Training to create and record information about the RESEA interview using the Automated System Support for Employment and Training (ASSET), DWD's designated Management Information System.[19]
- Content training in such topics as RESEA, WIOA, and other related partner services, and UI compliance.
- Required online training modules, including a UI certification module.
- One-on-one training with the RESEA coordinator.
- Job shadowing with experienced RESEA counselors. .

A SharePoint site provides valuable resources for RESEA counselors, including a step-by-step guide for conducting initial and subsequent sessions and for entering information in ASSET. This manual covers such topics as participant scheduling, the RESEA initial session, RESEA reporting in ASSET as well as an introduction to RESEA, the RESEA participation selection criteria, and the participant experience. In addition, RESEA staff have access to the Job Center of Wisconsin which provides resources for referrals to workshops and other partner services such as WIOA training and Veteran's services.

Further, the biweekly meetings with the RESEA coordinator, as well as periodic multiday trainings, were described as methods and opportunities for continuous training.

[19] The information in ASSET is used, among other things, to help inform program staff on how to best serve participants and make decisions.

Staff Resources and Schedule Availability. Maintaining the capacity to conduct RESEA interviews is an important consideration for RESEA program staff to prevent scheduling backlogs or a lack of available timeslots for self-selection by RESEA participants. The availability of staff to conduct RESEA interviews and/or to post their interview slots (both in-person and virtual) 21 days in advance, as required, can be affected by such things as: 1) the annual ebb and flow of UI claim numbers over the course of a year; 2) the difference in Center size and the number of claimants to be served; 3) staff schedules (vacation, sick, personal); 4) variation in claimant choice of an in-person versus a virtual RESEA; and 5) week-to-week variation in RESEA counselor availability due to other work demands within their Centers.

However, Wisconsin uses several processes that help mitigate these challenges. For example, the state likely experiences greater flexibility with staffing across Centers since most RESEA meetings are conducted virtually. RESEA sessions conducted in person require that, in any given center, the number of participants scheduled must generally match the availability of RESEA counselors within that Center. However, sessions conducted virtually are conducted by staff located throughout the state. Further, RESEA counselors within a given Center have opportunities to assist others as needed or find assistance with coverage via the RESEA mailbox. In addition, the RESEA coordinator monitors the demand for appointments and the availability of slots on ASSET to troubleshoot potential backlogs.

4.2.3. Participant Identification, Notification and Scheduling

Identifying RESEA Participants. As described in Section 3.4.7, before the RCT impact study, DWD used the online assessment scores to determine which claimants would be required to participate in the RESEA program. The assessment involved 31 questions related to job search activities, job search preparedness, skill awareness, technology, and resources. An algorithm creates an assessment score, using weights for questions thought to reflect the importance of each in assessing claimant reemployment barriers. Claimants with the highest scores—i.e., those expected to face more reemployment barriers—were referred to RESEA based on program capacity. To accommodate variation in RESEA staff availability, DWD adjusted the assessment score threshold for RESEA participation based on the volume of UI claims each week.

At the time of our interviews, staff indicated that it was unclear which questions best predicted the benefits of the RESEA program. The findings presented in

Section 3.4.7 indicate that the assessment scores are both highly predictive of claimant outcomes and can be used to predict which claimants are likely to benefit from RESEA participation. Note that, during the RCT intake period, from April 2022 through September 2023, DET authorized the use of random assignment for assigning claimants to different study groups, temporarily suspending the use of the assessment scores. The program resumed the use of the assessment scores after the end of the RCT intake period.

Notification of RESEA Selection. Claimants selected to participate in RESEA are notified of their selection in two ways: a notification letter sent via the United States Postal Service (USPS) and a notification when the claimant logs into JCW and the UI portal. The notification informs the claimant of their selection and the requirement to participate in RESEA, the consequences for non-participation (i.e., that it may impact their benefit receipt), and provides instructions for self-scheduling an RESEA appointment. Despite these multiple modes of notification, counselors report that claimants often state that they were unaware of the requirement. Further, in some cases, claimants believe that mandated participation in RESEA is punitive. In these cases, RESEA counselors must work with the claimant to dispel any misunderstandings about the nature of the RESEA and gain their trust.[20]

Participant Online Scheduling. Wisconsin is among a minority of states that have RESEA participants schedule their own RESEA meetings online. This process provides claimants with a great deal of flexibility, providing choice in date and time for the meeting. When RESEA meetings were conducted in person, claimants also had the option of choosing the meeting location. According to DWD staff, providing claimants with this flexibility is expected to reduce the number of "no-shows," that is, the percentage of participants attending their scheduled meetings may increase when meetings are self-scheduled versus if the meetings are scheduled by staff. Additional benefits of participant scheduling include reducing staff burden by reducing the need to reschedule claimants and increasing claimant compliance.

While staff uniformly agree on the many advantages of self-scheduling, the time to create appointments in JCW is not insignificant for RESEA counselors, especially for virtual sessions where each appointment must contain a unique Teams' link.

[20] This response prompted one RESEA counselor to wonder if "toning down" the language in the letter might help resolve this issue.

4.2.4. Administration of the RESEA Meetings

Attendance and non-compliance. Although RESEA counselors do not make reminder calls prior to the scheduled interview, the system sends an automated email to the claimant two days prior to the event. If the claimant is not heard from within 5 minutes of their scheduled interview time, staff will attempt to reach them by phone, allowing the claimant a 10 minute grace period to continue with their scheduled appointment. After one hour, the claimant's no-show status is documented in ASSET and benefits are subject to being held. Wisconsin's UI system monitors missed sessions through nightly checks of the DET system. A missed meeting signals that the claim is out of compliance and a denial of benefits is triggered.

If the claimant schedules a new session within the same week, benefits will be reinstated and the claimant receives benefits as scheduled. However, if the claimant reschedules any week thereafter, the claim is considered out of compliance and benefits will be lost for each week until compliance is met. If rescheduled within 21 days, benefits will resume at the time of rescheduling, but benefits for lost weeks will not be paid.[21] It should be noted, however, that claims of individuals missing two RESEA meetings may be investigated by an adjudicator, as this may reflect an issue of availability.

When claimants are out of compliance with their RESEA due to non-attendance, they are notified of such through both the JCW online system and the UI claimant portal. Further, claimants whose benefits have been denied or suspended will receive a letter through USPS notifying them of this action.

Initial and Subsequent RESEA Meetings. As required, RESEA meetings include developing an individual employment plan, providing the claimant with labor market information, and reviewing UI eligibility and work search requirements. Initial RESEA meetings are expected to last anywhere from 30 to 45 minutes, with counselors allocated an additional 30 minutes for documentation and data entry.

In preparation for the RESEA meeting, claimants are asked to bring their resumes as well as documentation for four work search activities from the previous week. RESEA counselors pull together information on assigned claimants from the JCW system. This generally includes examining their resume (as available), their claims

[21] While the claimant may be able to get these lost benefits back, they must file a claim to do so.

status (particularly if they have stopped claiming which may indicate reemployment), their work search activities, and any other information that may help them when conducting the meeting.[22]

The most common services RESEA counselors provide during the meeting involve reviewing and updating the claimant's resume. However, counselors also commonly discuss the claimant's employment goals; provide tips on work search and interview techniques; discuss the content of the orientation video; help the claimant navigate the JCW website and identify their local Job Center; identify workforce events within the local area; and, to a lesser extent, make job referrals.

RESEA counselors also review the claimant's completed assessment to identify other services (e.g., the FoodShare program) and in-person job-search workshops that may be of value to the claimant and inform the employment plan. The most common referrals are for resume development workshops. Claimants are also referred to services of partner programs including WIOA and Wagner-Peyser, and programs under Veterans Services and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). While job training may benefit RESEA participants, some indicated that it may be underutilized as a referral option because the goals for reemployment associated with the RESEA may conflict with participation in training.

For claimants assigned to the RESEA group, referrals to job-search workshops and services are recommended but not required. However, all those assigned to the RESEA+ group are mandated to complete an assigned workshop or service as outlined in their employment plan. These claimants must complete their assignments and self-schedule and attend a subsequent meeting within 21 days of the initial meeting. Described as both a challenge and a benefit, subsequent meetings are not necessarily conducted by the same RESEA counselor involved in the initial meeting.[23] On one hand, counselors cannot rely on previously acquired knowledge about the claimant. On the other hand, the process provides an opportunity for RESEA counselors to start fresh, perhaps introducing a new and different perspective from what was previously provided to the claimant.

Though briefer (about 15 minutes), the subsequent RESEA meeting includes: 1) a check of assignment completion; 2) a UI eligibility review; 3) employment plan review; and 4) identification of other recommended services that may be of use to

[22] Claimants are expected to notify RESEA counselors if they will not be attending due to reemployment.

[23] Claimants use JCW to schedule their subsequent RESEA and are, thus, subject to staff availability.

the claimant. Completion of the required assignment is documented in case notes and claimants must provide proof of attendance. If there is none or the claimant is identified as non-compliant, one week of benefits will be lost.

If an eligibility issue is identified as a result of the eligibility review conducted during the initial or subsequent RESEA meeting, the RESEA counselor will identify it as such in ASSET and document the issue through case notes. If the counselor has questions about whether the issue should be flagged as potential non-compliance, a question would be submitted internally through the state's dedicated RESEA mailbox.

Problems related to the claimant's work search tend to be the most frequent issue associated with non-compliance. Therefore, the process of reviewing the claimant's work search serves as both an opportunity for training the claimant on the associated requirements and a method for gathering information related to noncompliance. For example, RESEA counselors make suggestions for what types of work search are allowed and would be helpful to the claimant. In addition, they may make suggestions for documentation needed to ensure their claim is protected in the case of an audit.

Some believe that if work search non-compliance is suspected, the level of information about the claimant's work search activities may not be sufficient for UI adjudicators to pursue disqualification.[24] RESEA counselors consider themselves "information gatherers." They do not verify claimant work search through employer contacts nor make determinations. Counselors may discuss the concern with the claimant and reinforce the eligibility requirements; however, a UI adjudicator makes the final decision if benefit suspensions are warranted based on the findings or if further investigation is required.

During the study period, about 85% of all RESEA meetings were virtual and 15% were provided in person. While RESEA counselors believe the same level of service can be provided through either virtual or in-person meetings, they also acknowledge the merits of each. For example, virtual meetings provide both claimant and staff flexibility while in-person meetings are an attractive option for those less computer savvy, so that claimants can more directly be introduced to the resource room.

[24] The counselor who reported this opinion believed this to be true even though work search documentation requirements have increased over time.

5. Conclusion

The objective of this evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the Wisconsin RESEA program in improving the labor market outcomes of UI claimants and in reducing UI duration and benefit amounts paid by the state's UI program. From April 2022 through September 2023, a period characterized by a strong labor market, the RCT impact study randomly assigned 48,110 service-eligible UI claimants to three study groups:

- *RESEA group*—Required to participate in a single RESEA session to undergo the eligibilty review and receive services.
- *RESEA+ group*—Required to participate in an initial and a follow-up RESEA session to undergo eligibility reviews and receive services.
- *Control group*—No RESEA requirements.

Using Wisconsin administrative data, the study estimates the overall impacts of the RESEA program by comparing service receipt, UI receipt, employment, and earnings of the combined RESEA and RESEA+ groups with the outcomes of the control group. In addition, the study estimates the impact of the follow-up RESEA session by comparing the outcomes between the RESEA and the RESEA+ groups.

The results show that the program was very effective in increasing receipt of job counseling services, with nearly 65% of RESEA and RESEA+ claimants receiving services, compared to 3% of control cases. As a result, the program reduced average UI duration by 0.60 weeks, causing an average $182 UI savings per participant. In aggregate, the RESEA program caused nearly $5.2 million in UI savings. The program also caused a modest 0.8 percentage-point increase in quarter 1 employment. However, the program did not have impacts on quarterly employment in subsequent quarters and no earnings effects in the entire five-quarter period following program entry.

Further analysis indicates that the initial RESEA meeting caused a 0.49-week and a $150 benefit reduction, and that the follow-up meeting requirement caused an additional 0.21-week reduction in average UI duration and an additional $63 in UI savings. Comparing the average UI savings with the average program cost per participant indicates that both versions of the program—one with and one without the follow-up meeting requirement—caused $22 in net benefit savings per participant.

Finally, our analysis of the job readiness assessment used by DWD to identify claimants facing reemployment barriers shows that it is a strong tool to identify claimants who are likely to benefit from RESEA participation. In particular, the program significantly reduced UI benefit receipt for claimants with moderate or high assessment scores (those who face moderate or significant reemployment barriers) but had no impacts for claimants with low assessment scores (those who face no reemployment barriers).

The findings of this evaluation provide reliable evidence about the effectiveness of the Wisconsin RESEA program in the context of a strong labor market. Based on the evaluation findings, we offer three recommendations:

- ***Use the job readiness assessment to target program services.*** DWD uses claimant responses to the assessment to target RESEA services. This evaluation provides strong supportive evidence that the job readiness assessment is an effective policy tool for targeting services to claimants who face employability barriers and who are most likely to benefit from RESEA participation. Based on these findings, we conclude that DWD should continue their current practice of targeting RESEA services to claimants with the highest assessment scores.

- ***Increase program capacity.*** The Wisconsin RESEA program has the capacity to serve about 50-60% of service-eligible UI claimants. Increasing program capacity to cover all service-eligible UI claimants—particularly those with moderate and high assessment scores—may cause additional net savings for the UI program.

- ***Mandate follow-up RESEA sessions.*** The evaluation findings confirm that requiring the follow-up RESEA session causes an additional reduction in UI receipt, beyond the reduction caused by the initial meeting. Savings-cost comparisons indicate that the additional UI savings caused by the follow-up session requirement cover the additional cost of implementing this requirement. From a cost-benefit perspective, requiring the follow-up session is a wash. However, to the extent that the follow-up session is valuable for certain claimants—such as those needing additional services and those not compliant with work search requirements—it is advisable to mandate the follow-up meetings for all RESEA participants.

References

Manoli, Dayanand, Marios Michaelides, and Ankur Patel (2018). Long-term effects of job search assistance: Experimental evidence using administrative tax data. NBER Working Paper No. 24422.

Michaelides, Marios, and Peter Mueser (2018). Are reemployment services effective? Experimental evidence from the Great Recession. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 37(3): 546-570.

Michaelides, Marios, and Peter Mueser (2020). The labor market effects of U.S. reemployment policy: Experimental evidence from four programs during the Great Recession. *Journal of Labor Economics* 38(4): 1099-1140.

Michaelides, Marios, and Peter Mueser (2024) The employment and displacement effects of job counseling over the business cycle: Evidence from the U.S. Unemployment Insurance system. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri.

Michaelides, Marios, Peter Mueser, and Jeffrey A. Smith (2021). Do reemployment programs for the unemployed work for youth? Evidence from the Great Recession in the United States. *Economic Inquiry* 59(1): 162–185.

Poe-Yamagata, Eileen, Jacob Benus, Nicholas Bill, Marios Michaelides, and Ted Shen (2012). Impact of the Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment (REA) initiative. *ETA Occasional Paper 2012-08*. Washington, DC: US Department of Labor.

US Department of Labor (2012). Unemployment Insurance Program Letter 10-12.

US Department of Labor (2015). Unemployment Insurance Program Letter No. 13-15.

US Department of Labor (2019). Unemployment Insurance Program Letter No. 7-19.

US Department of Labor (2023). Unemployment Insurance Program Letter No. 2-23.