

**Executive Summary of the Seventh
Ticket to Work Evaluation Report**

Final Report

July 30, 2013

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ACRONYMS

BASS	Beneficiary Access and Support Services
BFWDI	DI Benefits Forgone for Work
CDR	Continuing Disability Review
DI	Social Security Disability Insurance
EN	Employment Network
I&R	Information and Referral
IMM	Intended Mail Month
MM	Mail Month
NBS	National Beneficiary Survey
NSTW	Nonpayment of Cash Benefits Due to Suspension or Termination for Work
PASS	Plan to Achieve Self-Support
SSA	Social Security Administration
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
STW	Benefit Suspension or Termination Due to Work
SVRA	State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency
TPR	Timely Progress Review
TTW	Ticket to Work
TWP	Trial Work Period
WIIRC	Work Incentive Information and Referral System
WIPA	Work Incentives Planning and Assistance

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I. INTRODUCTION

This summary presents the key findings from seven studies completed under an evaluation of the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program (TTW) from 2011 through 2013. These studies comprise the seventh and final report developed for the TTW evaluation. The Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 (Ticket Act) established TTW to increase access to, and quality of, rehabilitation and employment services available to Social Security disability beneficiaries. The Ticket Act's ultimate goal is to increase the number of these beneficiaries to become economically self-sufficient. Congress passed the Ticket Act in part because it wanted to give people with severe disabilities a better chance to participate fully in society, particularly through employment. Under TTW, the Social Security Administration (SSA) provides beneficiaries with a Ticket they can use to obtain vocational rehabilitation, employment, or other support services from participating providers known as employment networks (EN). Because few beneficiaries leave the rolls as a result of having found work, the Ticket Act was an attempt to help more beneficiaries do so by paying service providers if they help beneficiaries find and keep employment, and by providing other work supports such as access to health insurance and benefits counseling.

TTW and other elements of the Ticket Act provided new means to help beneficiaries become employed and financially self-sufficient. In particular, it introduced a new financing system for providers, under which SSA paid registered ENs for helping beneficiaries reduce their dependence on disability benefits by increasing their earnings. The new financing system enabled ENs to receive payments under two options—a milestone-outcome and an outcome-only option. To take full advantage of either option, providers must help a beneficiary earn enough to exit cash benefit status for several years. Through this mechanism, Congress envisioned TTW as a self-financing program because the savings to SSA in terms of reduced Social Security Disability Insurance (DI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits associated with beneficiaries returning to work would offset TTW program costs.

In the remainder of this chapter, we briefly describe the TTW evaluation efforts encompassed by the first six TTW evaluation reports, and describe the seven studies that comprise the seventh report. In Chapter II, we present summaries of the seventh evaluation report studies, and in Chapter III, provide concluding remarks about the key findings. For more detailed findings, readers are referred to the full reports.

A. Focus of Prior Six TTW Evaluation Reports

In addition to establishing the TTW program, Section 101 of the Ticket Act included a provision mandating SSA to conduct an independent evaluation of TTW and to report to Congress on the status of the program periodically during the first several years after its implementation. In late 2000, SSA contracted with The Lewin Group to develop the TTW evaluation design (Stapleton and Livermore 2002) and to conduct a preliminary process evaluation (Livermore et al. 2003). In 2003, SSA contracted with Mathematica Policy Research to conduct the comprehensive TTW evaluation. Over time, the nature of the studies conducted for the TTW evaluation evolved to meet SSA's changing information needs. Below we briefly describe the focus of the previous evaluation reports to provide a context for the discussion of the findings of the seventh evaluation report presented in the subsequent sections.

The first TTW evaluation report (Thornton et al. 2004) focused on the early implementation issues experienced by the program and provided early enrollment statistics. During the time period covered by the report, TTW participation was very low (less than one percent in the phase 1 and 2 rollout states) and assignments to state vocational rehabilitation agencies (SVRAs) represented the large majority (91 percent) of Ticket assignments. Although roughly 1,000 providers were enrolled as ENs, SSA's program manager was struggling to recruit providers, and only a small proportion of ENs (38 percent of those operating in the phase 1 rollout states) had accepted any Tickets. The financial viability of participating ENs appeared uncertain. Few ENs had received any TTW payments, and many indicated that efforts to educate beneficiaries about the program, assign Tickets, and submit claims for payment were administratively burdensome. In addition, some providers experienced considerable difficulty in helping their TTW clients to find and maintain jobs. Staff of the eight experienced ENs interviewed for the report indicated that each of their organizations was losing money on its TTW operations.

The second, third, and fourth evaluation reports were similarly structured to provide comprehensive, ongoing information about TTW implementation, the number, characteristics and experiences of TTW participants and providers, and program impacts (Thornton et al. 2006; Thornton et al. 2007; and Stapleton et al. 2008). These reports were the first to include information from the National Beneficiary Survey (NBS), a repeated survey implemented as part of the TTW evaluation to provide information not available from any other source. Although information from the NBS indicated that there was substantial potential beneficiary demand for employment and services to support employment, beneficiary participation in TTW remained low. As of December 2005, participation in the phase 1 states, where TTW had been available the longest, was just 1.8 percent. With just 25 percent of beneficiaries with work goals or expectations reporting knowledge of TTW, a general lack of awareness of the program likely contributed to the low participation rate, as did the continued low participation by ENs. Despite this, the evaluation found measurable impacts of TTW on service enrollment but impacts on employment outcomes could not be detected. The vast majority of beneficiaries continued to assign their Tickets to SVRAs, rather than to other ENs. The characteristics and outcomes of beneficiaries who assigned their Tickets to ENs differed in many ways from those assigned to SVRAs. Although those assigned to ENs reported using fewer hours of services on average, they were more likely to be employed and had higher average earnings, suggesting systematic differences between the two groups that could be related to the TTW financial incentives for providers to serve specific types of individuals. Although early problems with administrative procedures and the process for submitting claims for payment were addressed, as of December 2005, only about 45 percent of non-SVRA ENs had accepted at least one Ticket, and only about 5 percent had accepted 10 or more. Providers believed that the TTW payment systems offered little financial incentive to participate in the program. Many were waiting to see whether the revised TTW payment system, proposed in September 2005, would be adopted before deciding whether to actively participate in the program.

The format and content of the fifth TTW evaluation report changed markedly from the previous reports because at the time the analyses to be included in the fifth evaluation report were being planned, major changes to the TTW program were anticipated. When the Ticket Act was passed in 1999, little research had been conducted on beneficiaries' employment-related activities, and no pilot test of the TTW concept had been conducted before full-scale implementation of the program. The Ticket Act did, however, provide the SSA commissioner with the authority to monitor and revise the program to make it more successful. The early TTW evaluation activities were one means by which SSA had been monitoring the program and developing information needed to

improve it. In response to information about the program's early experiences drawn from both the evaluation and other sources, SSA substantially revised the TTW program and implemented the changes in July 2008.¹

For two primary reasons, a focus of some of the evaluation resources on broader beneficiary employment issues seemed opportune. First, the effects of the revised regulations would take time to become evident and to be reflected in the data sources used for the TTW evaluation. Second, the findings from the early TTW evaluation reports indicated that many beneficiaries were engaged in employment-related activities outside of TTW. Because little information existed about the broader context of beneficiary work efforts and outcomes, further study of these issues was considered critical to understanding how TTW fit into the broader context. Thus, the fifth evaluation report was comprised of a collection of nine studies conducted from 2009–2010 that more broadly focused on the employment efforts of SSI and DI beneficiaries and the SSA program features designed to encourage and facilitate beneficiary employment. Three of the studies specifically concerned TTW participants and program issues, including an updated study of TTW participation (Stapleton et al. 2009), an analysis of the time that beneficiaries spend off the disability rolls because of earnings and the payments generated for ENs (Stapleton et al. 2010b), and a study of the longitudinal experiences of an early cohort of TTW participants based on the first three NBS rounds (Livermore et al. 2010). Six other studies centered on more general topics related to beneficiary employment and SSA work supports other than TTW. Two focused on the SSA programs that provided beneficiaries with information about how work affects SSI and DI benefits and the SSA work supports that are available to beneficiaries—Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program (O'Day et al. 2009) and its precursor, the Benefits Planning, Assistance, and Outreach program (Livermore and Prenovitz 2010). The other four reports analyzed the characteristics, employment, and sources of support of working-age SSI and DI beneficiaries (Livermore et al. 2009a), SSI and DI beneficiaries with work-related goals and expectations (Livermore et al. 2009c), and longitudinal experiences of DI beneficiaries during their first 10 years in the program in terms of their use of SSA work supports and employment outcomes (Stapleton et al. 2010a). A tenth standalone report summarized the key findings of the nine studies (Livermore and Stapleton 2010).

The topics for the fifth evaluation report studies were selected based on SSA's need for important information about aspects of beneficiary work activity for which little information existed previously. The findings were intended to add to the evidence base regarding beneficiary employment to inform SSA's compliance with a congressional mandate to monitor TTW and assess ways to make the program more effective. The presentation of research findings as a collection of papers rather than as a single evaluation report reflected the diversity of the study topics, the intent to make the research findings available more quickly, and a desire to disseminate a substantial amount of information in an accessible manner. This format was adopted for the subsequent two TTW evaluation reports.

In early 2009, SSA extended the TTW evaluation contract to include a sixth and seventh evaluation report to assess the experiences of the program after implementation of the revised regulations which went into effect in July 2008. The sixth evaluation report was comprised of a collection of four studies. Two studies focused specifically on the TTW program, including one that

¹ The new regulations revised the two TTW payment systems to make provider participation in the program more financially worthwhile. See Section II.D for more details.

assessed EN and SVRA experiences under the revised regulations (Altshuler et al. 2011), and one that analyzed the extent to which TTW generates sufficient savings to be self-financing (Thornton 2012). Two other studies addressed more general topics related to beneficiary employment and use of SSA work supports other than TTW. They addressed beneficiary use of the WIPA program (Schimmel et al. 2010) and a longitudinal analysis of the use of SSA work supports and employment outcomes among SSI recipients (Ben-Shalom et al. 2012) analogous to the Stapleton et al. (2010a) fifth evaluation report study conducted for DI beneficiaries. A fifth standalone report summarized the key findings of the four studies (Livermore et al. 2011). As with the fifth evaluation report, the four studies were selected for the sixth evaluation report based on SSA's need for information at the time and were intended to add to the existing evidence base regarding TTW and beneficiary employment in general. Some findings of these studies reflected experiences before the TTW regulation changes were instituted in 2008, and some reflected the experiences of beneficiaries and the TTW program under the revised regulations.

B. Content of the Seventh TTW Evaluation Report

The seven studies that comprise the seventh TTW evaluation report, and which are summarized here, compare TTW program experiences before and after the revised regulations were implemented, extend prior analyses of the WIPA program, and update the general employment efforts of working-age SSI and DI beneficiaries. Three of the four TTW-focused studies assess the experiences of ENs and beneficiaries after implementation of the revised TTW regulations, and a fourth reestimates the impact of the original program on beneficiary service use and employment using new methods intended to improve the precision of those estimates. Two other reports specific to the WIPA program provide an update on program activities that occurred during the April 2010–March 2011 period, and assess the employment-related outcomes of a cohort of WIPA users. The remaining study in this series documents the 2010 NBS methodology and provides descriptive statistics about the characteristics and employment-related activities of all SSI and DI beneficiaries. Collectively, the seven studies constitute the seventh and final report of the TTW program evaluation. The studies are:

- **Evaluation of the Recent Experience of the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Program: Beneficiaries Served, Services Provided, and Program Costs** (Schimmel et al. 2011) focuses on the activities of the 103 organizations that received SSA grants to provide services under the WIPA program from April 2010–March 2011. This report addresses SSA's need to monitor the WIPA program and determine if it was targeting services to beneficiaries likely to work and providing the types and intensity of services envisioned by SSA.
- **Employment-Related Outcomes of a Recent Cohort of Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Program Enrollees** (Livermore et al. 2011) presents the findings of an analysis of the relationship between WIPA services and enrollees' earnings, employment, and use of work supports. This report addresses SSA's need to track WIPA program users' outcomes.
- **2010 National Beneficiary Survey: Methodology and Descriptive Statistics** (Wright et al. 2012) presents the sample design and data collection activities for round 4 (2010) of the National Beneficiary Survey (NBS). It also provides descriptive statistics on working-age individuals receiving SSI and DI, based on the nationally representative sample from the 2010 NBS. This report addresses SSA's need for updated information on the

beneficiary population during the period after implementation of the revised TTW regulations, and provides public documentation about an important source of data on the employment-related experiences and characteristics of disability beneficiaries.

- **Ticket to Work After the Release of the 2008 Revised Regulations: Progress and Prospects** (Prenovitz et al. 2012) examines the additional changes made to the TTW program since spring 2010 and assesses the effect of the revised regulations and new changes on provider and beneficiary participation in TTW. This report addresses SSA's need for feedback on the immediate effects of the revised regulations on provider participation and beneficiary enrollment in TTW.
- **Ticket to Work Participant Characteristics and Outcomes Under the Revised Regulations** (Livermore et al. 2012) presents the findings of a comparative analysis of TTW participant characteristics before and after the revised regulations were implemented. This report addresses SSA's need to assess the changes in participant characteristics and outcomes that occurred after implementation of the revised TTW regulations.
- **Participant and Provider Outcomes Since the Inception of Ticket to Work and the Effects of the 2008 Regulatory Changes** (Schimmel et al. 2013) compares statistics on employment and benefit receipt outcomes for TTW participants before and after implementation of the revised regulations and compares outcomes for TTW participants and nonparticipants as well. The report also provides statistics on payments to ENs and how beneficiary employment outcomes and provider payments vary by EN business model. This report builds on and updates similar findings from a prior report (Stapleton et al. 2010a), and addresses SSA's need to understand the likelihood of employment and the success of beneficiaries in leaving the disability rolls because of earnings both with and without the assistance of TTW and how this changed after implementation of the revised regulations.
- **Initial Impacts of the Ticket to Work Program for Young New Social Security Disability Awardees: Estimates Based on Randomly Assigned Mail Months** (Stapleton et al. 2013) presents results from a recent analysis of the impacts of introducing the original TTW program—the program that was in place before the July 2008 regulatory changes. The new analysis substantially resolves ambiguities associated with earlier estimates of TTW impacts on earnings and benefits, and addresses SSA's need to rigorously assess the effectiveness of the program.

During the 10 years the TTW evaluation was being conducted, we have gained substantial knowledge about the characteristics of SSA disability beneficiaries, their employment patterns, use of services, and program costs. As with the prior studies, those summarized here are intended to provide valuable information about TTW and how it fits into the broader landscape of beneficiary employment efforts, add to the evidence base regarding beneficiary employment, and inform SSA's compliance with the congressional mandate to monitor TTW and assess ways to increase the program's effectiveness. The research conducted through the TTW evaluation and other findings continue to provide an important knowledge base for return-to-work efforts going forward.

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II. SEVENTH REPORT STUDY SUMMARIES

A. Evaluation of the Recent Experience of the WIPA Program: Beneficiaries Served, Services Provided, and Program Costs

Schimmel et al. (2011) present findings on the activities of the 103 organizations receiving SSA funding under the WIPA program from April 1, 2010–March 31, 2011, and compare these to an examination of activities under the WIPA program in the previous six months (Schimmel et al. 2010). The report makes use of data from the WIPA web-based data system.

The WIPA program was established in 2006 and charged by SSA to “disseminate accurate information to beneficiaries with disabilities ... about work incentive programs and issues related to such programs.” The ultimate goal was to “assist SSA beneficiaries with disabilities succeed in their return to work efforts” (SSA 2006). To meet these goals, SSA provided WIPA projects with annual funding totaling \$23 million. The program emphasized providing ongoing assistance to beneficiaries, as opposed to one-time support. Those with simple questions received information and referral (I&R) services, whereas those with more intensive employment-related needs were enrolled to receive ongoing WIPA services. SSA provided WIPA projects with the guidance that at least 80 percent of their funding should be spent providing WIPA services, with the remainder going to provide I&R and conduct outreach.

From April 1, 2010, to March 31, 2011, WIPA projects provided first-time services to nearly 46,000 beneficiaries, including almost 21,000 who received information and referral (I&R) assistance, and an additional 25,000 who received more intensive WIPA services. Overall, the WIPA program worked with nearly 60,000 beneficiaries during this period, including those who first contacted a WIPA project before April 1, 2010. The number of beneficiaries contacting a WIPA project for the first time declined, with 20,717 served for the first time from October 2010 to March 2011, compared with 27,000 beneficiaries during the same six-month period a year earlier (Schimmel et al. 2010). This might suggest that WIPA projects devoted more resources to serving existing clients, or that beneficiaries most interested in employment already made contact with the WIPA program in an earlier period. Or it could be that beneficiaries interested in employment received basic information from other sources, such as the SSA Work Incentive Information and Referral System (WIIRC), which is part of Beneficiary Access and Support Services (BASS), a national call center that provides TTW and other information to beneficiaries upon receiving their Tickets.

Recent first-time WIPA enrollees were similar demographically to those who enrolled in the earlier period. However, the recent group was more likely to already be employed (40 percent versus 35 percent) and less likely to be only considering employment (19 percent versus 26 percent). This suggests that when recent WIPA enrollees made contact with a WIPA project they were relatively far along in their employment process compared with earlier enrollees. A higher proportion of recent WIPA enrollees reported learning about the WIPA program through the WIIRC—20 percent compared with 10.6 percent of earlier enrollees. The increase likely reflects a change that occurred in February 2010, which enhanced the role of WIIRC in the I&R process and enabled WIIRC staff to directly refer beneficiaries to WIPA projects through the WIPA web-based data collection and referral system. By referring the cases directly to WIPA projects through the data system, follow-up became the responsibility of the WIPA projects. Previously, beneficiaries were provided a phone number for a local WIPA project and were expected to follow up on their own. The change likely resulted in more beneficiaries referred by the WIIRC receiving WIPA services than previously.

The authors found that, relative to prior reports, WIPA projects continued to prioritize services to beneficiaries most interested in employment and encouraged enrollees to use work incentives to increase employment. Consistent with stated program goals, 78 percent of recent enrollees received some level of ongoing support from WIPA projects, an increase over the 71 percent of the earlier group who did so (Schimmel et al. 2010). Still, many clients did not receive the ongoing assistance that the program was intended to provide, receiving no additional support beyond an initial WIPA assessment. Among those who received ongoing support, the average number of contacts was about three over a one-year period for both recent and earlier enrollees, with most of those occurring relatively soon after enrollment. It is unclear whether this amount of support is consistent with the goals of the WIPA program, which envisioned intensive ongoing services, or sufficient to lead to improved employment outcomes among beneficiaries.

Relative to prior reports, WIPA projects continued to vary markedly in terms of output and service costs, with extreme outliers contributing to the observed range. Adjusting for funding levels and input costs, the hourly cost of WIPA services varied from \$52 to \$1,404 across all projects, but for the majority, these costs ranged from \$100 to \$300. These figures are very similar to those from the previous six-month period examined in Schimmel et al. (2010). Findings suggest that several differences across WIPA projects were affecting costs, including the share of clients receiving I&R only versus WIPA services, the underlying demand for services within the projects' target populations, availability of substitute services, how non-SSA funding was being used, and efficiency in providing services.

B. Employment-Related Outcomes of a Recent Cohort of WIPA Enrollees

Livermore et al. (2011) present findings on the employment, earnings, and work support use by individuals first enrolled in the WIPA program from October 1, 2009, to March 31, 2010. This is an earlier enrollment cohort than the one studied by Schimmel et al. (2011) and discussed above. Focus on an earlier cohort allowed the authors to observe longer-term outcomes. The report makes use of WIPA program data, SSA administrative data, and Internal Revenue Service earnings data.

The primary objective of the WIPA program was to assist SSA beneficiaries succeed in employment by providing accurate information about Social Security programs and work incentives. The majority (75 percent) of WIPA enrollees in this cohort were employed or seeking employment at enrollment. About 55 percent of the cohort had earnings at some point between enrollment and December 2010 (a 9- to 15-month period, depending on enrollment date), 16 percent experienced a decline in SSA benefits due to earnings in at least one of the 9 months following enrollment, and 9 percent experienced a month with benefits suspended or terminated due to earnings between enrollment and December 2010. It appears that WIPA projects were serving their target group—beneficiaries interested and engaged in employment—and may have helped clients pursue those goals.

In an effort to better understand the effects of receiving WIPA services, the authors conducted multivariate analyses to determine the relationship between client outcomes and hours of WIPA services and suggestions by WIPA staff for clients to use particular work supports or pursue particular goals. With other client characteristics held constant, more hours of WIPA services were associated with an increased likelihood of using all but one of the work supports studied, having earnings in 2010, having an increase in earnings between 2009 and 2010, and having at least one month with benefits suspended or terminated due to earnings by December 2010. The authors note that it is possible this relationship is not a causal one. Clients who are more serious about or ready to

work may need more services, or WIPA staff may be willing to spend more time providing services to such individuals. Some of the follow-up activities carried out by WIPA staff are specifically tailored to individuals who experience a change in circumstances, and would thus be more likely to be available to those who entered employment.

With client characteristics held constant, individuals who discussed the Trial Work Period (TWP) with their WIPA counselor and were not using it at enrollment, were more likely to subsequently use the TWP than those who did not discuss it with a counselor. A similar relationship exists between discussion and use of the Plan to Achieve Self Support (PASS), but not for other work supports. The authors note that discussing a work support is not the same as recommending it, and that there is no way to prove a causal relationship between discussion and use. But because using PASS is fairly uncommon and requires significant upfront effort, its use is likely to be related to the discussions held with WIPA staff.

The suggestion to seek employment or take a job was negatively associated with having earnings in 2010. The authors speculate that WIPA staff would be unlikely to suggest this to individuals already planning to work, but instead would suggest employment to those who were good candidates not already seeking a job. Similarly, and likely for similar reasons, the variable representing WIPA suggestions to look for a job or take a job offer is negatively associated with experiencing an annual earnings increase from 2009 to 2010. It is also worth noting that any such job search would have occurred in the midst of the recession, and this likely mitigated the employment success of those encouraged to seek work. However, beneficiaries who received the WIPA suggestion to earn enough to leave benefits were significantly more likely to have at least one month with benefits suspended or terminated due to earnings than others.

C. 2010 National Beneficiary Survey: Methodology and Descriptive Statistics

Wright et al. (2012) presents the sampling design and data collection activities for SSA's 2010 NBS. The report also provides descriptive statistics on working-age individuals receiving SSI and DI benefits, based on the national sample of the 2010 NBS. The sample was designed to represent beneficiaries in the period after the implementation of the revised TTW regulations.

The NBS is designed to collect information to evaluate TTW and includes an oversample of TTW participants. The survey also provides extensive information on characteristics, services, and employment-related activities of a nationally representative sample of working-age SSI and DI beneficiaries. The 2010 NBS represents the fourth round of the survey; the first three rounds were conducted from 2004–2006. SSA delayed implementation of round 4 until 2010 so that TTW participant experiences under the revised TTW regulations, implemented in July 2008, could be captured. The 2010 NBS includes 2,298 individuals in the national sample, and 2,780 individuals in the TTW participant sample.

In addition to a detailed description of the survey sampling and administration methods, the report contains 25 tables with descriptive statistics on beneficiary:

- Personal characteristics and health status
- Sources of support
- Service use

- Employment-related characteristics, activities, and expectations
- Awareness of Social Security work supports

The statistics covering the above topic areas are shown for all beneficiaries, for beneficiaries by program participation status (DI-only, concurrent, and SSI-only), and for all employed beneficiaries. Highlighted below are selected 2010 NBS findings related to beneficiary employment and awareness of Social Security work supports.

1. Characteristics of Employed Beneficiaries

Compared with all beneficiaries, those who were working at the time of the NBS interview were generally younger (mean age of 43 versus 50 years), less likely to be SSI-only recipients (20 percent versus 29 percent), more likely to have completed high school (73 percent versus 66 percent), less likely to be married (19 percent versus 31 percent), more likely to have experienced disability onset during childhood (50 percent versus 22 percent), and more likely to report their health as very good or excellent (33 percent versus 10 percent). Employed beneficiaries received lower average monthly benefits from Social Security (\$809 versus \$942) and from non-Social Security sources (\$69 versus \$182), but they were slightly less likely to be living in households with incomes below the federal poverty level (43 percent versus 48 percent). In addition, employed beneficiaries were more likely to have private health insurance coverage relative to all beneficiaries (27 percent versus 19 percent).

2. Employment Expectations

Overall, 31 percent of beneficiaries indicated that their goals include work or career advancement. Concurrent beneficiaries were most likely to report having work goals (40 percent), while DI-only beneficiaries were least likely to do so (26 percent). In comparison, only 27 percent of all beneficiaries saw themselves working for pay in the next five years, and even fewer envisioned working and earning enough to leave Social Security benefits (16 percent). SSI-only and concurrent beneficiaries were more likely to see themselves leaving benefits in the next five years (20 percent and 19 percent, respectively) relative to DI-only beneficiaries (13 percent). Overall, 41 percent of beneficiaries indicated having work goals or saw themselves working for pay within the next five years.

3. Employment-Related Activities and Work Capacity

About 12 percent of all beneficiaries had used services specifically intended to enhance their employment opportunities during the previous calendar year or were using them at the time they were interviewed. Overall, 7 percent of beneficiaries were working during the month they were interviewed, and another 5 percent were actively seeking employment. About 10 percent had worked during the previous calendar year. Taken together, about 15 percent of all beneficiaries were employed, were actively seeking employment, or had worked during the previous calendar year; concurrent beneficiaries were more likely to report recent employment or job-seeking activities (21 percent) than were SSI-only and DI-only beneficiaries (13 percent).

Among those who were working at interview or had worked during the previous calendar year, 23 percent indicated that they worked fewer hours or earned less than they were capable of earning. Among these beneficiaries, the primary reasons given for working or earning less than they were

capable of include wanting to keep their cash benefits (41 percent) and wanting to retain their Medicare or Medicaid coverage (40 percent).

4. Job Characteristics of Beneficiaries Employed at Interview

Hours. Most employed beneficiaries (86 percent) worked part time (fewer than 35 hours per week) and averaged 20 hours per week. SSI-only recipients were much more likely to be working full time (30 percent) relative to DI-only and concurrent beneficiaries (11 percent and 9 percent, respectively).

Job tenure. Most employed beneficiaries (55 percent) had been working at their jobs for more than two years. The median number of months on the job was highest for concurrent beneficiaries (53) and lowest for SSI-only recipients (25).

Hourly wages. On average, working beneficiaries were earning a little more than \$8 per hour. DI-only beneficiaries reported the highest hourly wages (\$8.80), while concurrent beneficiaries reported the lowest (\$6.50). Many beneficiaries (32 percent) had hourly wages that were less than the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour. Similar to the pattern of average wages, DI-only beneficiaries were much less likely to be working at subminimum wages (28 percent) compared to concurrent beneficiaries (41 percent), and somewhat less likely compared to SSI-only recipients (33 percent).

Monthly earnings. Among all working beneficiaries, monthly earnings averaged \$683. SSI-only recipients reported substantially higher average monthly earnings (\$930) relative to DI-only (\$658) and concurrent beneficiaries (\$524). Similarly, SSI-only recipients (37 percent) were much more likely to report earnings above the non-blind substantial gainful activity level (\$1,000 per month) compared with DI-only (19 percent) and concurrent beneficiaries (9 percent).

Supported employment. A large percentage of working beneficiaries (40 percent) reported working in sheltered or supported employment settings. Concurrent beneficiaries were much more likely to report doing so (49 percent) than were DI-only beneficiaries (38 percent) and SSI-only recipients (37 percent).

5. Awareness of Social Security Work Supports

Beneficiaries were asked if they had ever heard of SSA work supports that were relevant to them, based on their DI and SSI program participation status at sampling. Those queried were most likely to be aware of the DI TWP (35 percent), followed by the TTW program (27 percent), DI extended period of eligibility (17 percent), and benefit specialists (16 percent).² All other work supports queried (Section 1619b, expedited reinstatement, SSI earned income exclusion, plans for achieving self-support, impairment-related work expenses, student earned income exclusion, and property essential for self-support) had awareness rates of less than 15 percent among those to whom the supports were applicable. Overall, DI-only beneficiaries had the highest rates of awareness, and SSI-only recipients had the lowest. Not surprisingly, employed beneficiaries were more likely to report having heard of most applicable work supports relative to all

² The question in the 2010 NBS refers to the WIPA program. In previous NBS rounds, the question referred to benefit specialists and the Benefits Planning, Assistance, and Outreach program.

beneficiaries. The exceptions include plans for achieving self-support, the student earned income exclusion, and property essential for self-support.

D. TTW After the Release of the 2008 Revised Regulations: Progress and Prospects

Prenovitz et al. (2012) present findings on changes to the TTW program rules and implementation, and trends in beneficiary and provider participation. The report draws on interviews with SSA staff and its contractors responsible for implementing the program, as well as SSA administrative data.

On July 21, 2008, in response to the low rates of participation by beneficiaries and ENs, SSA significantly changed the regulations that govern TTW, making the program more financially attractive to providers and embodying a more flexible return-to-work concept.³ SSA hoped that the changes would encourage more ENs to accept Tickets; that more Tickets would be assigned under the EN payment systems; that SVRAs would provide SSA with a more complete account of the Ticket holders they serve; and, ultimately, that better employment outcomes would result.

Since then, SSA implemented additional changes to further improve the program, including the introduction of a new EN contract that sets higher requirements for participation and requires more documentation of services to receive payments, an expanded auto-payment system that makes it easier for ENs to request and receive payments, and several adjustments to EN and SVRA support intended to lessen the administrative burdens of the program. A contractor also administers a beneficiary satisfaction survey, and compiles EN report cards that report on outcomes such as client employment and wages, in addition to satisfaction. These changes reflect a shift in focus from enrolling as many providers as possible to enrolling only those who are prepared to be strong partners and holding them to high standards. This makes it easier to administer the program. SSA representatives reported on increased efforts to recruit ENs from two populations they believed were especially qualified—organizations providing services as contractors to SVRAs and One-Stop Career Centers.

SSA ceased automatically mailing Tickets to new beneficiaries in June 2011, replacing the mailings with calls targeted to those most likely to participate in TTW and adding reminders about the TTW program in regular mail correspondences such as the yearly cost of living adjustment notice. SSA also resumed conducting Timely Progress Reviews (TPRs) in November 2010, which had been suspended since 2005 while SSA revised the TPR structure. TTW participants receive protection from medical Continuing Disability Reviews (CDRs), in which SSA periodically determines whether beneficiaries are still medically eligible for disability benefits. In the TPR, SSA ensures that participants are making progress towards employment, and if they are not doing so makes them eligible for the next scheduled CDR.

Prenovitz et al. (2012) found that the percentage of eligible beneficiaries participating in TTW grew slightly in 2010. About 2.38 percent, had a Ticket assigned in December 2010, compared with 2.23 percent in December 2009 and 2.16 percent in July 2008. Calculating the TTW participation

³ See Altshuler et al. (2011) for a detailed description of the 2008 changes and early effects on beneficiary and provider participation.

rates among the subset of work-oriented beneficiaries, that is, those with work goals and expectations based on data from the NBS,⁴ the authors report a similar increase in 2010. TTW participation among work-oriented beneficiaries was 6 percent in 2010, 5.6 percent in December 2009, and 5.4 percent in December 2008. Almost all growth came from new participants served under the EN payment systems. In December 2010, 0.45 percent of eligible beneficiaries had a Ticket assigned under an EN payment system, compared with 0.35 percent in December 2009 and 0.23 percent in July 2008.

The number of providers enrolled in the program remained stable, at about 1,400, but the percentage of ENs that had accepted at least five Tickets in the previous year grew from 11 percent in July 2008 and 25 percent in December 2009, to 30 percent in December 2010. Despite efforts to promote Partnership Plus, an option that allows Ticket holders to receive employment services first from an SVRA and later from an EN, and for both organizations to potentially receive payments, use of this option continued to be quite low, at about 0.6 percent of Ticket assignments. The authors noted that the effects of the revised TTW regulations may not have been fully reflected in the data available for the study, but that there are early indications that they have been successful in increasing beneficiary and EN participation and may continue to do so in the future.

E. TTW Participant Characteristics and Outcomes Under the Revised Regulations

Livermore et al. (2012) compare findings on the characteristics and outcomes of TTW participants before and after the revised regulations went into effect in July 2008. The report uses data from the 2005, 2006, and 2010 rounds of the NBS, which included a representative sample of TTW participants, SSA administrative data, and county-level unemployment data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The analysis makes use of two groups—beneficiaries who were sampled in the 2005 or 2006 NBS and had assigned their Tickets less than 16 months prior to interview comprised the pre-regulation change (pre-change) sample, and a comparable group of TTW participants sampled in the 2010 NBS made up the post-regulation change (post-change) sample. The revised regulations substantially changed the payment systems for providers, in general making payments larger and available at lower levels of client earnings. This might be expected to have increased providers' willingness to take on clients less likely to work at a given level, require more extensive services, or take longer to reach earnings milestones. At the same time, a new system was put in place to allow SVRAs to report the clients they served to SSA by submitting batch files rather than paperwork on each individual. As a result, an increase in the number who were recorded as being served, and the inclusion of those the SVRAs thought less likely to generate payments, could be expected even with no change in the individuals who received services. In addition, the 2007–2009 recession and lasting high unemployment rates made it more difficult for beneficiaries to find employment and may have depressed wages.

⁴ Work-oriented beneficiaries were defined as those in the NBS who indicated at least one of the following: their personal goals included finding a job, advancing in a job, or learning new skills; they saw themselves working for pay during the next year; they saw themselves working for pay in the next five years. Estimates were based on statistics presented in Livermore et al. (2009c).

In general, the two groups of TTW participants had similar demographic profiles; however the post-change group was younger, with more participants age 18–24. Members of the post-change cohort were also more likely to have psychiatric disabilities, musculoskeletal disabilities, and disabilities related to diseases of the respiratory system, and less likely to have disabilities related to diseases of the nervous system or sensory disabilities. The pre- and post-change groups of TTW participants had similar proportions receiving SSI-only, DI-only, or both SSI and DI, but members of the post-change group were more likely to report receiving food stamps (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), and unemployment insurance benefits. They were also significantly less likely to have ever worked for pay (79 percent versus 94 percent) and to be employed at interview (24 percent versus 35 percent). Despite having a higher proportion of jobless participants, the post-change cohort was not significantly more likely to report having looked for work in the past four weeks (26 percent versus 22 percent, but the difference is not statistically significant).

Livermore and colleagues note that the differences between the pre- and post-change cohorts might indicate an increase in ENs' willingness to accept Tickets from beneficiaries who appear hard to serve, especially those without a history of employment. However, some characteristics are only significantly different for SVRAs, suggesting that at least some changes may be driven by the change in how SVRAs report the clients they are serving to SSA, rather than an actual change in the clients they serve.

Using regression-adjusted estimates to account for personal characteristics and the labor market (the unemployment rate), the post-change cohort was significantly more likely to express satisfaction with TTW. This difference was larger for those using an EN, but significant for both groups. Although their service-use patterns were similar to those of the pre-change cohort, the post-change EN group was less likely to report unmet service use needs. These results suggest that the quality of EN services improved, either in response to the regulation changes, or as the program matured. However, the post-change group was less likely to be employed at interview, worked fewer hours, and had lower monthly earnings. These differences were greater for SVRA clients than for those with Tickets assigned to ENs, and persisted even after adjusting for county-level unemployment rates. The authors interpret these differences as a result of the poor state of the economy and their inability to fully control for this in the regression models.

F. Participant and Provider Outcomes Since the Inception of TTW and the Effects of the 2008 Regulatory Changes

Schimmel et al. (2013) examined TTW participant outcomes from 2002–2010, focusing on the years surrounding the 2008 TTW regulatory revisions. The authors extend earlier work by Stapleton et al. (2010a), relying on two key measures of beneficiary work activity contained in the Ticket Research File (TRF10) and its successor, the Disability Analysis File (DAF11). This first measure is a monthly indicator of nonpayment of cash benefits due to suspension or termination for work (NSTW) and the second is a dollar value measure of the monthly DI cash benefits forgone due to work (BFWDI).

The authors considered four distinct, but related, assessments of TTW participant work activity. The first provides a comparison of NSTW and BFWDI statistics among TTW participants and comparable nonparticipants. The second focuses on following annual assignment cohorts of TTW participants, tracing their earnings, NSTW, and BFWDI from the year of assignment onward. The third examines TTW participant outcomes just before and after the 2008 regulatory changes by

payment system. Finally, the authors explore implications of the 2008 changes on EN viability, taking into account the business models under which the top producing ENs operated in 2010.

The report first considers changes in TTW participation during 2002–2010. After the rollout ended in 2004, the TTW program expanded slowly until the 2008 revised regulations took effect and reinvigorated the program. The pace of growth in the annual number of ENs accepting at least one Ticket was slow before these changes, increasing from 714 in 2005 (the year after completion of rollout) to 818 in 2007, and then jumping to 1,600 in 2010. The number of new assignments increased from more than 61,000 in 2005 to just over 66,000 in 2007, and then to almost 94,000 in 2010. The number of assignments under the EN payment systems grew fourfold from 2005 to 2010. By 2010, 4.1 percent of all beneficiaries had participated in the TTW program.

TTW participants are more likely than comparable nonparticipants to experience NSTW, reflecting the selection into the program of those interested in work and the possible, but unknown, impact of the services received on work activity. In 2010, 5.1 percent of participants experienced at least one NSTW month, compared with 2.7 percent of nonparticipants. In the same year, the number of NSTW months accumulated per 1,000 participants was equivalent to 32 years without benefits (zero-benefit years). That figure is 46 percent higher than the 22 zero-benefit years accumulated per 1,000 nonparticipants.

Focusing on those who first experienced an NSTW month in 2002, the authors compared the likelihood of participants and other beneficiaries remaining in NSTW during the next eight years. They found that eight years after their first NSTW month, the percentage of participants and nonparticipants remaining in NSTW were about the same. However, in the years immediately following assignment, the pattern of remaining in NSTW depended critically on payment title, with SSI-only and concurrent participants more likely to be in NSTW than their counterparts among nonparticipants, while a lower percentage of DI-only participants than nonparticipants remained in NSTW.

Following annual assignment cohorts of TTW participants from the assignment year onward, the authors found evidence that the 2007–2009 recession dampened work activity among TTW participants. They considered the annual earnings, NSTW, and BFWDI in each year following assignment through 2010. These profiles showed that the trajectory for most TTW cohorts was similar regardless of assignment year, but that in 2008, outcomes began to worsen. The proportion of participants with earnings above annualized substantial gainful activity began to decline after several years on an upward trajectory, as did the proportion with an NSTW month and the number of NSTW months.

The implementation of the 2008 regulatory changes coincided with the recession, and the analysis was unable to disentangle the effects of the TTW regulatory change from those of the recession. Given this overlap, it is not surprising that, from the year before to the year after the regulatory changes took effect, there were declines in the proportion of TTW participants experiencing NSTW, the duration of NSTW, and BFWDI. In one sense, however, the new regulations succeeded in increasing the number of participants with NSTW, at least under the new payment systems. The rapid growth in the number of such participants more than offset the effect of per-participant declines on the total number experiencing NSTW as well as on total BFWDI such that the overall number of TTW participants in NSTW and BFWDI increased.

The authors also explored changes in work activity based on the business models used by ENs to inform an assessment of EN financial viability. EN business models are important considerations because they influence the extent to which a provider is reliant on revenues generated from TTW payments. SSA categorized the 100 ENs with the highest payment values in 2010 into five business models:

- **SVRAs:** SVRAs are able to assign Tickets under either the EN or traditional payment system on a per-participant basis.
- **Traditional ENs:** These include various community rehabilitation providers and other non-SVRA organizations that have traditionally provided services to people with disabilities.
- **Consumer-directed ENs:** These ENs share a portion of the TTW payments they receive with their clients.
- **Employer ENs:** Under this model, employers receive TTW payments based on work activity of their TTW participant employees.
- **State workforce agency ENs:** These ENs include local workforce investment boards and One-Stop Career Centers.

Drawing on the experience of these 100 ENs, they found again that participant outcomes were worse after the 2008 regulatory changes and recession. But before and after that time, relative to the other EN types, participants in consumer-directed ENs tended to realize some of the highest NSTW and BFWDI outcomes. Participants who assigned Tickets to SVRAs experienced some of the lowest NSTW and BFWDI outcomes.

Using EN business models as a backdrop, the authors conclude by examining EN viability—that is, whether the revenues ENs collect from SSA for TTW participants are sufficient to cover the cost of providing services. The author’s assessment is more optimistic than the assessments conducted in earlier reports. Consistent with beneficiary work activity, they find that participants in consumer-directed ENs generate some of the highest revenue streams, while those in SVRAs are much lower. However, each model faces very different operating costs and revenue from other funding streams such that the other models looked more likely to be financially viable, especially in the long-run, as payments continue to accrue.

G. Initial Impacts of the TTW Program for Young New Social Security Disability Awardees: Estimates Based on Randomly Assigned Mail Months

Stapleton et al. (2013) present results from a new analysis of the impacts of introducing the original TTW program—the program that was in place before the regulatory changes of July 2008. An earlier analysis produced evidence that TTW had positive impacts on service enrollment (that is, enrollment in services at a state vocational rehabilitation agency or other employment network), but methodological limitations led to ambiguous conclusions about impacts on earnings and benefits (Thornton et al. 2007; Stapleton et al. 2008). The new analysis substantially resolves these

ambiguities. The summary focuses on findings for phases 2 and 3 of the T^TW rollout because the methodology’s ability to detect impacts is much greater for these phases than for phase 1.⁵

SSA implemented T^TW in phases and mailed Tickets to beneficiaries within each phase over several succeeding months. All beneficiaries in a phase were selected at the same time, but in phases 2 and 3, their Tickets were mailed out on a monthly schedule over the course of 11 months. SSA initially determined the intended mail month (IMM) in a random fashion and made adjustments to this schedule only for a small share of Ticket mailings that occurred early on, that is, those issued to beneficiaries upon request. As a result, the duration from rollout start to the month Tickets were mailed to each group within a phase was essentially random.

The new analysis directly addresses the following research questions:

- Did an increase in duration from the rollout start to Ticket mailing reduce the extent to which each of four “event” outcomes (service enrollment, TWP start, TWP completion, and the likelihood of benefit suspension or termination because of earnings (STW)) were attained as of 12, 24, 36, and 48 months after rollout start?
- Did an increase in duration from the rollout start to Ticket mailing reduce the number of STW months accumulated as of 12, 24, 36, and 48 months after rollout start?

The authors used a well-established statistical approach to address the issue of Tickets mailed to beneficiaries upon request, using the duration to IMM as an *instrumental variable* for the duration to the actual mail month (MM). They also made adjustments for the fact that SSA did not mail Tickets to some whose benefits were terminated prior to the scheduled MM, primarily due to mortality.

The authors found clear evidence that the Ticket mailings during the rollout period significantly increased service enrollment. However, they found no consistent evidence that this impact translated into a substantive increase in STW or in the number of STW months. Key impact estimates of duration to MM for the latter two outcomes from the phase 2 rollout are marginally significant and consistent with a substantive impact. But phase 2 findings for TWP outcomes (TWP start and completion) and findings from phase 3 fail to confirm the phase 2 findings; in fact, these other findings suggest that the phase 2 findings are simply due to chance. Projections of total impacts at 48 months reinforce this interpretation.

The strongest findings pertain to how the duration from rollout start to Ticket mailing affects service enrollment in the first 12 months. Findings for phases 2 and 3 show not only that the impacts are significant and positive but also that they are consistent with each other. The phase 2 point estimate implies that a 12-month delay in Ticket mailing reduces enrollment by 1.0 percentage point. The phase 3 estimate implies a reduction of 0.8 percentage point. Both of these estimates imply that a 12-month delay in Ticket mailing reduces enrollment by 15 percent. These estimates are substantial.

⁵ Our ability to detect impacts was more limited with the phase 1 sample for two reasons. First, the phase 1 sample had to be split into two relatively small samples because an operational issue led to different rollout schedules for New York than the rest of the phase 1 states. Second, the phase 1 rollout was substantially shorter than for phases 2 and 3—nine months in New York and five months in the rest of phase 1—compared with 11 months for phases 2 and 3.

The results also indicate, however, that the delay did not reduce the *eventual* impact on service enrollment. This is evident from the finding that, 48 months after the start of the rollout, the service enrollment of beneficiaries who were mailed Tickets late in each rollout was not significantly lower than for those mailed Tickets early in the rollout. Put differently, those mailed Tickets early had a head start on service enrollment relative to those mailed Tickets later, but the latter group caught up after SSA mailed their Tickets.

The total impact of Ticket mailing on service enrollment was expected to be larger than the impact of delaying the mailing for 12 months on service enrollment as of month 12 because mailing the Ticket could induce beneficiaries to enroll for services more than 12 months later. The service enrollment estimates imply that the additional impact is substantial. We used the estimates to project the impact of mailing the Ticket in the first rollout month versus not mailing it at all on cumulative service enrollment as of 48 months after the rollout start. We found that the projected total impact at month 48 is substantially larger than the estimated impact at 12 months—2.3 percentage points in phase 2 (versus 1.0) and 1.2 percentage points in phase 3 (versus 0.8).

The analysis provides no consistent evidence of impacts on other outcomes. Some estimates for phase 2 are suggestive of an impact, but it appears likely that this was due to chance. Specifically, marginally significant phase 2 point estimates for the likelihood of STW and number of STW months imply that a 12-month delay in mailing a Ticket increases both the attainment of STW as of 48 months by 0.6 percentage points and the number of STW months by an average of 0.07 months.

Although phase 2 estimates on their own suggest that TTW had an impact on STW and the number of STW months, there are substantial reasons to believe that the results are simply due to chance. The comparison of phase 3 impact estimates for STW and the number of STW months with those for phase 2 is particularly important because of the larger phase 3 sample and a rollout period that was equal in length to the phase 2 rollout period. The phase 3 estimate for the impact on STW at 48 months is not significant; it is also only one-third the size of the phase 2 estimate. The phase 3 estimate of the impact on the number of STW months is comparable in magnitude to the phase 2 estimate, *but in the opposite direction*. Therefore, we can as easily interpret the phase 3 estimates as evidence that the Ticket mailing *reduced* STW months as we can interpret the phase 2 estimates as evidence that the Ticket mailing *increased* STW months. It is difficult to understand why comparable impacts on service enrollment in the two samples would translate into such different impacts on STW months.

Results for TWP completion also undermine the conclusion that phase 2 estimates for the likelihood of STW and number of STW months reflect real impacts. The authors found almost no relationship between duration to MM and TWP completion in phase 2 and marginally significant evidence of a negative impact of duration to MM on TWP completion in phase 3. This is the opposite of what we would expect if phase 2 estimates for STW and the number of STW months reflected real impacts in phase 2, and if phase 3 estimates for the same variables indicated an absence of real impacts in phase 3. The projections for total impacts on outcome variables, other than service enrollment, also provide no evidence of positive total impacts. In summary, the consistency of the findings on service enrollment at 12 months convinces us that the estimates reflect real impacts. Symmetrically, the inconsistency of the findings on TWP start, TWP completion, STW, and the number of STW months across these same samples, implies that there is no evidence of positive impacts for these outcomes.

The authors also examined whether TTW was self-financing through benefit reductions. Although the study did not find positive evidence of impacts on STW and the number of STW months, the estimates are not strong enough to rule out the possibility that TTW was self-financing in 2007. Because a very small positive impact of TTW on STW and the number of STW months would be sufficient for TTW to pay for itself through benefit reductions, the authors were not able to reject the self-financing hypothesis on the basis of projected impacts for either STW or the number of STW months. Thus, although the results overall are consistent with no impact, and the authors are confident that the estimates are not biased, the statistical power of the methodology is not sufficient to definitively discriminate between “no effect” and “smallest effect consistent with self-financing.”

It is important to note that these estimates are for TTW under the original regulations. The 2008 regulation changes clearly stimulated provider interest and beneficiary participation in TTW. In principle, those changes might have had a positive impact on STW and the number of STW months. Unfortunately, it appears impossible to measure any such impact rigorously because the regulations were implemented nationally, without a test, and also because the implementation of the new regulations coincided with the trough of a major recession in the U.S.

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III. CONCLUSIONS

From the studies summarized in this report, as well as other research, it appears that TTW and related programs are having a limited but positive effect on the employment of Social Security disability beneficiaries and have motivated some beneficiaries to pursue employment. The 2008 revisions to the TTW regulations have reinvigorated the program by modestly expanding the number of ENs and increasing their level of activity in the TTW program. The number of beneficiaries who assigned a Ticket under an EN payment system more than doubled between June 2008 and December 2009. The revised regulations also appeared to have improved the viability of ENs, increasing both the timing and amounts of payments received for successfully serving TTW participants. Although relatively few beneficiaries continue to be enrolled in SSA-funded employment support programs through TTW or WIPA, those who used such employment services had better employment outcomes and were more likely to leave benefits than those who did not. Beneficiaries also demonstrate their interest in work by contacting the WIPA program for information on SSA work incentives and employment programs; between April 1, 2010, and March 31, 2011, nearly 60,000 beneficiaries received assistance from WIPA programs. The majority of these beneficiaries were actively engaged in employment efforts, suggesting that the program was well targeted to those most in need of WIPA services. Analyses of the outcomes of beneficiaries who received WIPA services are suggestive that the program is helping to improve employment outcomes.

Beneficiary employment was adversely affected by the 2007–2009 recession and its aftermath, which confounded comparisons of TTW participant employment outcomes during the pre- and post-regulation change periods. Although the employment and earnings of TTW participants were lower, on average, after the revised regulations took effect, beneficiary satisfaction with TTW services was greater. The greater satisfaction with services might reflect both a maturing of the program (and greater provider proficiency) and increased willingness to provide quality services because of the enhanced TTW payment system. It might also reflect SSA's more recent efforts to limit the pool of ENs to those with the potential to be actively involved in the program and promote its goals. It also appears that, under the revised regulations, ENs are more likely to accept Tickets from beneficiaries that might be considered harder to serve, including those with no prior employment history. However, administrative changes in the program might have contributed to this finding.

Although we find evidence that TTW is targeting individuals interested in employment, rigorous impact analyses failed to provide strong evidence of its impact on employment. Stapleton et al. (2013) confirms earlier findings that TTW has had a significant and positive impact on service enrollment, but found no consistent evidence that TTW affected employment and benefit receipt. It is important to note that the analysis was conducted for the period covered by the original regulations. The evidence thus far suggests that the program is not producing better outcomes than under the original regulations. Such improved outcomes would be a precondition to positive impacts under the revised regulations. With time, there might be significant improvements in those outcomes as the economy improves, however, it will not be possible to assess whether there were positive impacts on employment under the revised regulations given the manner in which TTW was implemented.

The research summarized in this report, along with that conducted over the last decade for the TTW evaluation, provides a wealth of information about the barriers beneficiaries face in returning to work and the outcomes of some promising solutions. However, the research evidence is not

strong enough to clearly indicate what types of programs will work effectively—and for which beneficiaries. SSA’s limited success in this area should not dampen the agency’s efforts to develop the means to promote the employment of SSI and DI beneficiaries. The economic status of people with disabilities has declined markedly relative to their peers without disabilities for the past two decades. Since 1990, employment rates for working-age people with disabilities have fallen by half (from 29 percent in 1990 to 15 percent in 2010), but remained fairly constant for people without disabilities (around 75 to 80 percent) except for during recessionary periods. The median household income of working-age people with disabilities is about 50 to 60 percent of the level of their counterparts without disabilities and has declined in real terms by about 10 percent since 1990, while for people without disabilities it increased by roughly 5 percent.⁶ At the same time, the DI program has experienced rapid growth, exceeding even what might be expected based on size and demographic changes in the labor force (Stapleton and Wittenburg 2011). The continued decline in the economic well-being of working-age people with disabilities and the rapid growth in the disability programs are important reasons for SSA to continue to seek strategies that have the potential to address both issues in the long term.

⁶ Statistics calculated from data obtained from Nazarov and Lee (2011).

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