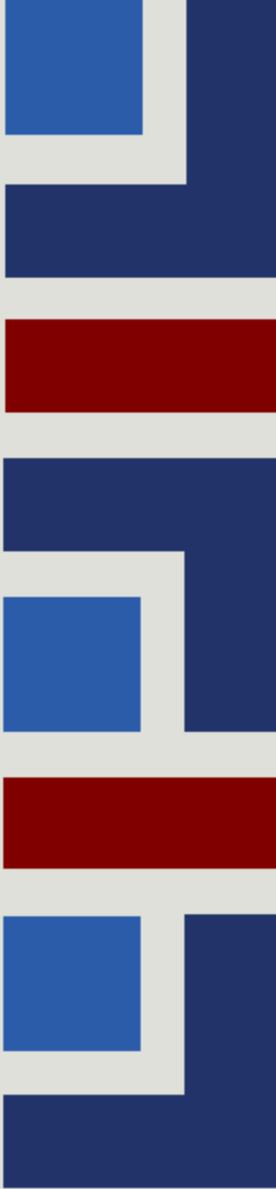DR. ROBERT M. GOERGE,
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KEYNOTE

Past, Present and Future Challenges in Measuring Outcomes for Vulnerable Populations

IRP Annual Poverty Research and Policy Forum

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Transitioning into the Information Age

- Where did we start?
  - From surveys, paper, and pencil to administrative data
  - Focus on survey data
  - Data for policymakers

- Where are we now?
  - Focus on evidence building and data governance
  - Data to improve programmatic and case-level decision-making (predictive analytics)
  - Beginning to see more integrated data

- Where are we going?
  - Improving Access
    - Institutionalizing data (e.g. Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics - LEHD)
    - Shared datasets across states and at the federal level
  - Richer data - Linking data from cradle to grave and across family members/relations
  - Improving communications with policymakers (audiences)

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What are we measuring

- Outcomes of interest related to addressing economic mobility, family self-sufficiency, well-being, and adversity
  - Employment
  - Earnings
  - TANF and SNAP receipt
  - Child care and other work support utilization
  - Educational achievement (intergenerational poverty)
  - Family stability and birth outcomes
  - Child protective services and out-of-home care
  - Family violence (domestic violence)
  - Criminal and juvenile justice outcomes
  - Health care utilization (e.g. pre-natal care, substance abuse/mental health services)

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In the 80s

- Government workers were using 3X5 paper cards to track caseloads and electronic systems for paying bills were slowly being developed.

- Researchers had done very little with administrative data and it was looked upon as very inadequate.

- Most social program research still used social surveys or collected data on 100s of cases and would have had a rich qualitative component. Transcription from paper files was a major tool

- Computing was still expensive and much of it was done on mainframes.

- However, the core ideas of working with larger datasets from information systems were established and still drives our thinking today.
  - Spells and episodes, entry cohorts vs point-in-time, relational databases, record-linkage

- ASPE and Children's Bureau funds first work on child welfare administrative data

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In the 90s

- Leaver studies around welfare reform
  - Began to integrate administrative data
- The beginning of integrated data
  - In SC and IL and WI
- Washington begins the building of their integrated data to address welfare reform
- Multi-state studies – building comparable data

https://www.irp.wisc.edu/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/sr79.pdf

http://public.econ.duke.edu/~vjh3/working_papers/adm_data.pdf

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1997 Advisory Panel on Research Uses of Administrative Data

A. Fostering Institution Building

I. Establish (and fund) a centralized and on-going repository of information on administrative data.

II. Encourage states without administrative databases to establish partnerships with independent research organizations, such as those at universities, to help develop and use administrative databases on an on-going basis.

III. National organizations (such as APWA or the WIN) as well as organizations and groups within the academic community (such as APPAM and NAWRS) need to find ways to recognize and encourage the use of administrative data in research.

B. Further Assessment of Confidentiality and Privacy Concerns

IV. Independent organizations, such as the Committee on National Statistics, as well as professional organizations (such as the American Statistical Association) need to conduct a more thorough assessment of the adequacy of existing principles and practices that will protect the privacy of individuals and confidentiality of the in-formation contained in administrative databases. Special attention should be paid to such questions as:

• How should informed consent of program participants with respect to the use of information on them for research be handled?

• What mechanisms and procedures should be adopted that will provide access of these data to responsible researchers while still safeguarding the privacy of individuals?

• What guidance can be provided for crafting interagency agreements?

• What are the proper "disclosure" standards for these databases when reporting on results from research based on these data?

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1997 report (cont'd)

C. Assessing and Improving the Quality and Across-State Comparability of Administrative Data for Public Assistance Programs

V. Funding needs to be provided by agencies (such as the National Science Foundation), private foundations and government agencies themselves to further research and analysis on such questions as:

• quality of administrative data;

• comparability with other data sources, such as survey data;

• methodological strategies for dealing with analytic issues such as the denominator problem, which affect the range of usage of data; and,

• the interactions of research and management objectives and how this affects the structure and quality of data.

VI. **Research organizations (such as the Joint Center for Poverty Research) and academic publishers and journals must encourage and help legitimize research** on these questions by creating outlets for it, including convening conferences and supporting volumes or special issues of journals on these topics.

VII. Those working on the "management" side of the equation, including professional organizations for the public sector, must collaborate and help support efforts to develop higher quality administrative data.

VIII. **Guidelines and standards need to be developed to ensure that comparable and high-quality data is gathered across states and across agencies within states.**

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Employment and Earnings

- A central set of measures that indicate progress toward self-sufficiency and evidence around short and long-term social programs.
  - Becoming employed and wage progression during good economy
  - TANF and SNAP take-up, re-employment during a recession

- Particularly critical now during the pandemic and recession to see how different segments of the labor force are faring. **What will happen to those who exhaust their UI benefits?**

- Increased Use of National Directory of New Hires may be a way to increase access to such data.

TANF Data Collaborative

- **TANF Data Collaborative** (TDC) is sponsored by ACF's Office of Family Assistance (OFA) and Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE).

- TDC is an initiative of ACF's TANF Data Innovation (TDI) project, launched in late 2017 to accelerate the use of TANF administrative data for program improvement and evidence building at the federal, state and local level.

- TDC serves TANF agencies through:
  - Targeted training and technical assistance (TTA) open to all TANF agencies and stakeholders via the TDC TTA community (hosted at tanfdata.org) and
  - TDC Pilot Initiative for selected agencies

- Informed by a comprehensive, national needs assessment, TDC partners with selected states to enhance their capacity to inform policy, program management, and front-line practice in order to improve employment and well-being outcomes for individuals and families.

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TDC National Needs Assessment of State TANF agencies – Early findings

- They are actively developing their data assets.

- There is progress on integrated data, although it is sporadic in many cases and unclear if there is regular reporting from it.

- There is some success around linking with employment data although are still challenges around accessing it in many states

- There are capacity issues around doing complex analyses and evaluation

- There are challenges around partnering with external researchers

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Implications/Recommendations of TANF Needs Assessment

- Need ways to improve access to data

- Emphasis on data quality and documentation as an important forgotten area in state government

- Develop best practices for effective partnerships with external researchers

- Incentives to disseminate and share state-level analyses as much of what is done in states is never made public

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In the near future

- Commission on Evidence-based Policymaking and the Evidence Act and the Federal Data Strategy
    - OPRE has taken this as seriously as any federal agency
    - Creation of Division of Data Improvement (DDI)
- Data Science is only beginning to be be visible in social program research and analysis
    - Not just machine learning
    - Best practices around metadata, documentation, data security, data modelling, open source code . . .
    - Text data from case notes may be more important to satisfy the need for richer data
- Data on all family members is needed to understand multi-system families
    - First, a definition is needed (nuclear, extended, non-custodial parents)
    - Additional challenges because their composition is not static
    - Many systems only collect data on individuals or other groupings (e.g. SNAP)
- Building capacity in or for public agencies to support data curation, data analysis and data use whether internal or external to government.

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Thanks

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