

What do we know about the effectiveness of reemployment initiatives?

Losing a job can be devastating for individuals, their families, and their communities. Federal and state governments have helped by providing temporary financial support through the unemployment insurance (UI) program and by providing reemployment interventions for UI claimants (Table 1). Studies of these reemployment interventions examine the extent to which they help people return to work quickly, draw lower UI benefits, and improve their employment and earnings.

This synthesis highlights key findings from studies identified through a CLEAR systematic evidence review that examined the impacts of reemployment interventions on employment, earnings, or receipt of UI benefits.¹ CLEAR found 43 reports of such studies published from 1978 to August 2018.² These reports included 50 distinct studies that received a high or moderate causal evidence rating in CLEAR.³ This means that we have a good degree of confidence that the studied interventions caused the measured impacts on individuals' employment, earnings, or UI benefit receipt outcomes.⁴

Key takeaways

- ▶ **The majority of reemployment interventions reduced weeks of benefit receipt and amount of benefits paid.** All but one of the interventions (less stringent contact requirements) succeeded in their core goal of reducing the receipt of UI benefits without compromising the employment and earnings of UI claimants.
- ▶ **The reemployment interventions had varying degrees of effectiveness.** Although the interventions varied a great deal in what they offered, all had at least one study that found effectiveness. No intervention was consistently effective across all outcomes and all studies.

Table 1. Key features of reemployment interventions examined

Intervention	Key features
Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment (REA) program	UI claimants selected to participate in REA receive up to three mandatory in-person sessions in which workforce staff assess their eligibility for UI benefits, provide an orientation to the American Job Center and its services, share labor market information, develop a reemployment plan, and make referrals to additional services. Failure to attend these REA sessions can affect continuance of benefits. In 2015, the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment program replaced REA, supplementing REA program services by providing direct reemployment services.
Job search assistance (JSA) services	UI claimants receive assistance and training in job search techniques, including, for example, job search workshops, preparing a resume, and interview training.
Reemployment bonuses	UI claimants receive a cash incentive for returning to work within a certain time frame.
Profiling	Sites identify UI claimants at higher risk of exhausting unemployment benefits and try to provide them with enhanced employment services. These services may include an orientation, providing labor market information, and referrals to job search training or resume training workshops.
Changes in employer contact requirements	UI claimants typically have to engage in job search and contact a certain number of employers to continue receiving unemployment compensation. Some interventions of this type represented more stringent requirements than usual practice: for example, the intervention required more employer contacts, verifying the contacts, or both. Some interventions of this type represented less stringent requirements than usual practice: for example, they required fewer or no employer contacts.

For more information, please see the supplement to this research synthesis, available at <https://clear.dol.gov/synthesis-report/reemployment-synthesis>.

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¹ For more information on CLEAR, including how CLEAR conducts systematic reviews, see <https://clear.dol.gov/>.

² See the CLEAR Reemployment Review Protocol (<https://clear.dol.gov/reference-documents/reemployment-review-protocol>) to learn more about the literature search parameters and the specific criteria used to determine which studies were eligible for inclusion in the systematic review.

³ Each study examined a separate implementation of an intervention; for example, one report evaluated reemployment interventions in six states that constituted six distinct studies.

⁴ See the CLEAR Causal Evidence Guidelines, Version 2.1 (<https://clear.dol.gov/reference-documents/causal-evidence-guidelines-version-21>) for information on the evidence guidelines used to determine the causal evidence ratings.

Key takeaways, continued

▶ **The Reemployment and Eligibility Assistance (REA) program boosted short- and long-term employment and earnings.** For example, one study found that Florida REA participants were slightly more likely to be employed and earned almost \$500 more than nonparticipants one year after program entry. Another study found that the Nevada REA program had more sizeable effects, substantially improving employment and earnings for participants and creating savings that were more than twice the program cost. However, other studies of the REA program found no statistically significant impacts in these outcome domains. See the CLEAR reemployment topic area (<https://clear.dol.gov/topic-area/reemployment>) to learn more about these studies and REA interventions as well as other reemployment interventions.

Potentially promising features of the Nevada REA program

This program **streamlined program delivery** by having the same staff person provide both REA services and reemployment services to claimants.

In other states, different staff delivered the two types of services during separate appointments.

▶ **Job search assistance (JSA) services had favorable impacts on all outcomes examined, but employment and earnings impacts varied over time.** A few JSA interventions had favorable impacts on employment or earnings in the short or long term. However, in most cases these impacts did not appear in all time periods examined. For example, impacts on quarterly earnings varied from quarter to quarter and could range from no significant impacts in some quarters to significant impacts of hundreds of dollars in other quarters, with no apparent pattern over time.

▶ **Reemployment bonuses appear to work in the short term, but their long-term effects are not known.** These bonuses, which few sites use anymore, provide a financial reward for a speedy return to work.

▶ **Lighter-touch interventions, such as profiling and changing employer contact requirements, yield more limited benefits.** Studies indicate that profiling was effective at reducing receipt of UI benefits. However, it had limited impacts on other outcomes of interest. Applying more stringent employer contact requirements is similarly effective at reducing UI benefit receipt but has mixed or limited impacts on short-term employment and earnings. Applying less stringent employer contact requirements does not reduce UI benefit receipt and has mixed or limited impacts on short-term employment and earnings. The long-term impacts for these lighter-touch approaches are not known.

Overview

What we know based on existing research, as summarized in Table 2, includes the following:

- The most studied reemployment strategies are JSA and reemployment bonuses (15 and 14 studies respectively; see column 1)
- Although studies indicate that most types of interventions reduce UI benefit receipt (green boxes labeled with “a” in column 2), less stringent contact requirements did not reduce UI benefit receipt (no green boxes labeled with “a” in column 2) and all types of interventions had at least one study that found no impacts on UI benefits (grey boxes labeled with “c” in column 2)
- All interventions have examined short-term employment and earnings, with some studies finding favorable impacts but more studies finding no impacts (comparing the numbers in the green “a” and grey “c” boxes in columns 3 and 4)
- Fewer studies have assessed long-term employment and earnings, with impacts found only for REA and JSA (columns 5 and 6)
- Differences in the intervention features, implementation experiences, and context could drive the variation in results. Further details about these interventions are available in the reports referenced in CLEAR’s online supplement to this synthesis (<https://clear.dol.gov/synthesis-report/reemployment-synthesis>)

Table 2. Overview of the evidence base

Intervention	1	2			3			4			5		6		
	#	Reduction in UI benefit receipt			Short-term employment			Short-term earnings			Long-term employment ²		Long-term earnings ²		
REA	7	5 ^a	2 ^c		2 ^a	3 ^c		2 ^a	3 ^c		1 ^a		1 ^a		
JSA services	15	9 ^a	6 ^c		2 ^a	12 ^c		3 ^a	7 ^c		2 ^a	10 ^c	2 ^a	6 ^c	
Reemployment bonuses	14 ¹	8 ^a	6 ^c		1 ^a	4 ^c	1 ^d	2 ^a	10 ^c	1 ^d		1 ^c		3 ^c	
Profiling	8	6 ^a	1 ^c	1 ^b	1 ^a	4 ^c		2 ^b	3 ^a	4 ^c	1 ^b	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
More stringent contact requirements	4	3 ^a	1 ^c		1 ^a	2 ^c			3 ^c			1 ^c		1 ^c	
Less stringent contact requirements	2		1 ^c	1 ^b	1 ^a	1 ^c		1 ^a	1 ^c			1 ^c		1 ^c	

Key: ^a Indicates the number of studies that found at least one favorable impact in the outcome domain. These studies had at least one statistically significant favorable impact in the outcome domain and no statistically significant unfavorable impacts. ^b Indicates the number of studies that found at least one unfavorable impact in the outcome domain. These studies had at least one statistically significant unfavorable impact in the outcome domain and no statistically significant favorable impacts. ^c Indicates the number of studies that found no statistically significant impacts in the outcome domain. ^d Indicates the number of studies with mixed impacts in the outcome domain. These studies had some statistically significant favorable and some statistically significant unfavorable impacts in the outcome domain. Finally, **n.a.** indicates that none of the studies examined these outcomes.

¹ One study has a reemployment bonus bundled with JSA services.

² Long-term outcomes are those measured more than one year after program entry.

Where are the gaps in the research on reemployment interventions?

- CLEAR designed the literature search and screening process for the reemployment topic area to identify studies that use a causal design—that is, studies that can credibly estimate program impacts. These types of studies, when they are of sufficient quality, can answer questions about whether an intervention worked. The CLEAR search did not include descriptive or implementation studies that do not yield causal impact estimates but might provide other valuable information about how sites implemented programs, program feasibility, potentially promising program components, and outcomes.
- Results across studies differed substantially (for example, the results for REA programs in Florida and Nevada differed, as discussed earlier). It is not clear whether results differed across studies because the interventions themselves differed or because the contexts differed. To answer those kinds of questions, more research is needed on how programs are implemented and whether they are implemented as intended. Research on the same interventions in different contexts would improve understanding of how context matters for an intervention’s effectiveness.
- In many cases, an intervention involved a unique bundle of services (for example, REA and JSA programs). For studies that found the intervention was successful, more research is needed to understand whether particular components are effective on their own or only in combination with other specific components. Such studies could examine bundled interventions more closely and attempt to isolate the most effective components. Sites could then potentially replicate or scale up effective program components and study them to see if the favorable impacts persist in other settings.
- Most states have provided reemployment services for a long time. The 50 existing studies identified in CLEAR’s systematic evidence review provide important insight into the reemployment evidence base. However, they only cover a small breadth of the interventions that states have used or contemplated. More rigorous research on a broader set of interventions would enable us to draw stronger conclusions about the effectiveness of reemployment interventions.