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**NORTH AMERICA**  
**MONTHLY NEWSLETTER**

July 2021

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Good afternoon,

After almost a year and a half of working remotely, we are planning to return to the office after Labor Day with a mix of remote and hybrid staff. We anticipate that for many of us at J-PAL North America, this transition will raise a range of questions and spur a range of emotions. On one hand, it is exciting to know we will once again be able to engage directly with one another—like many, I have missed the creativity of in-person collaboration and the joy of interacting in person with colleagues.

On the other hand, many of us at J-PAL have found increased productivity and balance in more flexible schedules. And we know that the emotional toll of the past year and a half has impacted all of us significantly. The mandatory work-from-home period overlapped with challenges for all of us, among them dealing with anxiety, grief and loss, adjusting to new routines, or dealing with new personal or financial realities.

Transitioning back to the office won't erase the impact of those challenges, and for many of us, it may provoke new anxieties. As we navigate this period, among our primary considerations is ensuring our workplace re-entry plans are equitable and inclusive for all staff. If you are going through similar transitions in the workplace or elsewhere, I hope that you too are able to extend grace to yourself and others as you navigate these complex times.

In this newsletter, we feature a new article and blog post from US Health Care Delivery Initiative co-chairs, Amy Finkelstein and Marcella Alsan, outlining four benefits of randomized evaluations in health policy beyond estimating a program or policy's causal impact. We also share results from a new study that found video messages about Covid-19 recorded by doctors increased viewers' understanding of Covid-19 and caused them to seek out more information. Finally, J-PAL affiliate Alicia Sasser-Modestino of Northeastern University reviews the evidence on summer youth employment programs and argues that cities and states should pursue them as an equitable pandemic recovery strategy in a recent op-ed in *The Hill*.

Liz Zuckerberg  
Director of Finance and Operations, J-PAL North America



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## Beyond Causality: Additional benefits of randomized evaluations for improving health care delivery

In a new [Milbank Quarterly](#) article and [accompanying blog post](#), US Health Care Delivery Initiative co-chairs, Amy Finkelstein and Marcella Alsan, outline four benefits of randomized evaluations—beyond estimating a program or policy’s impact—that are useful for addressing pressing health policy questions. Randomized evaluations can empower researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to study the questions they want to answer, allow us to test theory, credibly examine indirect effects, and facilitate fruitful collaboration between researchers and service providers. Each benefit is supported by an example of a real-world randomized evaluation, including studies examining the impact of diversity in health care, Medicare policy reforms, and more.



Photo: MIT News



Photo: © Getty Images

## Study finds physicians are widely effective messengers of Covid-19 information

A recently published, [large-scale randomized evaluation](#) found that video messages from doctors caused viewers to report higher understanding of Covid-19 and to seek out more information about Covid-19. The research team found that these effects did not change based on the viewers' race, political affiliation, income, or sex—suggesting that doctors can be effective public health messengers for a wide range of audiences. The researchers—including US Health Care Delivery Initiative Co-Chair Marcella Alsan, J-PAL Directors Abhijit Banerjee, Esther Duflo, and Ben Olken, and co-authors—randomly assigned participants to view three messages on either Covid-19 information or on general health topics. Participants in each group were further randomized to view videos recorded by either Black or white doctors. Compared to the generic health videos, the messages about Covid-19 reduced knowledge gaps, caused viewers to seek out more information, and increased their willingness to pay for a mask.

## For equitable pandemic recovery, invest in summer jobs programs

In a [new op-ed](#) in The Hill, J-PAL affiliate Alicia Sasser Modestino argues that cities and states should invest in summer youth employment programs as an evidence-based, equitable pandemic recovery strategy. The piece highlights key takeaways from several randomized evaluations of summer jobs programs in Boston, Chicago, and other cities: multiple studies have identified [decreases in violent crime](#) as a result of participating in these programs, and researchers in different cities have found that participants report [improved employment outcomes](#) and increased [soft skills and community engagement](#). Some cities [scaled back on summer jobs programs](#) last summer or cut them completely due to challenges brought on by the pandemic. This piece argues that cities and states should [use money from the American Rescue Plan's economic recovery funding](#) mechanisms to support and expand summer jobs for youth.

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**FEATURED EVALUATION SUMMARY**

**FEATURED RESEARCH RESOURCE**



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## Costs of failure to appear in court

People who are summoned to appear in court frequently fail to appear. A failure to appear (FTA) has serious implications for individuals' personal records: regardless of the original reason for the court hearing, an FTA can result in fines, fees, arrest warrants, and other severe consequences—all of which can have an even greater impact than that of the original infraction. Researchers [evaluated the impact of text message reminders and personalized assistance](#) on rates of failure to appear in traffic, general sessions, and criminal misdemeanor courts. Researchers found that the nudge reminders with and without personalized assistance were equally effective at reducing FTAs, and by consequence, reduced the likelihood of having a warrant or FTA-related fee issued against the defendant.

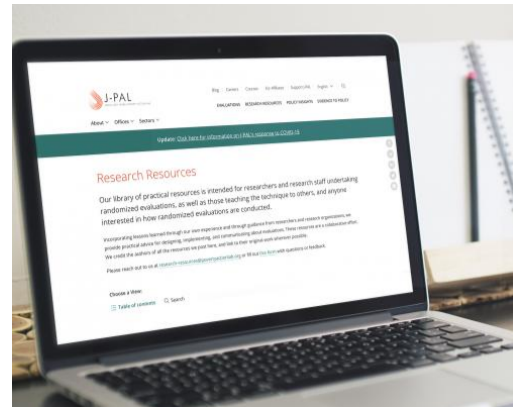


Photo: J-PAL

## Formalize research partnership and establish roles and expectations

Once a research team and an implementing partner have been identified for a randomized evaluation, the work of establishing and building the relationship between them begins. This process involves exploring questions around the project's goals and activities to create working agreements between the implementer and research team. [This research resource](#) outlines steps to establish and build a strong working relationship with an implementing partner at the beginning of a randomized evaluation. Topics include questions to consider when developing a project scope, timeline, communications strategy, and formal agreements between researchers and implementing partners.

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