



**NORTH AMERICA**  
**MONTHLY NEWSLETTER**  
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Good afternoon,

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to changes and challenges unparalleled in recent memory. While the world is still in the early phases of understanding all of the pandemic's implications, some general lessons from existing rigorous research can help decision makers design responses to help people access care and services. We have put together a [COVID-19 Evidence Portal](#), sharing policy recommendations in the areas of health, education, and the social safety net. Via our [State and Local Innovation Initiative](#), we are able to provide pro bono technical assistance to government leaders who would like to tailor and apply evidence in their local context. Our team can help you analyze whether evidence is likely to be relevant in your context and provide implementation details from the original studies. Please reach out if you would like to learn more.

One section of the Evidence Portal features practical evidence for health care delivery, and the [recent NEJM Perspectives piece](#) by Amy Finkelstein highlights an increase in rigorous studies in this area. We launched our US Health Care Delivery Initiative in 2013 to spur new studies in an area where randomized evaluations were relatively rare, and it is encouraging to see progress.

During this time of the year, we typically welcome dozens of policymakers, researchers, and practitioners to Cambridge for our [Evaluating Social Programs](#) course. This year, we are instead offering a [series of webinars](#) that highlight some of the core content from the course at no cost. The Evaluating Social Programs webinar series will provide participants with an introduction to randomized evaluations and how they can be used to inform policy in real-world settings. We hope that through this virtual platform, we are able to connect with more of you.

Mary Ann Bates  
Executive Director, J-PAL North America



## **The Nobel Prize in Economics has a clear message for US Health Care Delivery: Conduct more randomized controlled trials**

In the midst of this global pandemic, we are reminded of how important it is for health care to be delivered efficiently, effectively, and equitably. In a recent [NEJM Perspective piece](#), Co-Scientific Director of J-PAL North America Amy Finkelstein discusses how randomized evaluations, an approach recently recognized by the Nobel Prize in Economics, can and should be used to improve health care delivery in the United States. Randomized evaluations, though widely used in medicine, have been too rarely used to evaluate US health care delivery. For too long, conducting a rigorous study in a system as complex as Medicare and Medicaid seemed like a [daunting and nearly impossible pursuit](#). In the years since, this attitude has started to shift as researchers, practitioners, and policymakers are finding ways to overcome some of the common challenges to conducting randomized evaluations to improve health care delivery. Our US Health Care Delivery Initiative (HCDI) has seen growing demand for rigorous evidence, helping to launch dozens of [randomized evaluations in health care](#). Finkelstein also explores how randomized evaluations can effectively address system-wide challenges and help identify root causes of complex issues like racial disparities in health. Drawing from examples from HCDI and beyond, she provides practical guidance on how to address ethical concerns, and financial and time cost barriers.

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## **Evidence-informed policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in immense health, social, and economic challenges for state and local governments. J-PAL North America's new [COVID-19 Evidence Portal](#) features actionable evidence from randomized evaluations to help policymakers respond to these challenges. With millions of Americans recently unemployed, easy access and take-up of social benefits, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), is critical. Without a vaccine, preventive measures and access to medical treatment are integral to combat the spread of COVID-19. Shutdowns caused by the pandemic have interrupted education for students across the country. The Evidence Portal draws on generalizable lessons from studies conducted in other contexts to provide recommendations for how state and local decision-makers can increase access to social safety net programs and health insurance, and improve virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.



## **J-PAL's flagship Evaluating Social Programs course moves virtual**

J-PAL's Executive Education course, [Evaluating Social Programs](#), equips participants with resources and knowledge to design, use, and interpret evidence from impact evaluations of social programs. Due to COVID-19, this year we will offer a taste of the Evaluating Social Programs course through a series of five virtual webinars, free and open to the public. This [online webinar series](#) will provide an introduction to why and when randomized evaluations can be used to rigorously measure social impact, methods and considerations for their design and implementation, and how findings can inform evidence-based policies and programs. While we strongly encourage participants to attend all five sessions, participants can choose to [register](#) for individual sessions covering different topic areas: building on theories of change, advantages of randomization, ethics of randomized evaluations, creating research-policy partnerships, and applying evidence across contexts. This is a unique opportunity to gain practical knowledge from J-PAL experts in the design and implementation of randomized evaluations. We look forward to seeing you there.

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[J-PAL North America](#) is a regional office of the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), a global research center based at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Anchored by a network of more than 190 affiliated professors at universities around the world, J-PAL draws on results from randomized impact evaluations to rigorously study what strategies meaningfully reduce poverty and translate research into action.



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