Key Findings and Policy Implications

This paper examines key factors that predict SSI enrollment in three age categories: enrollment before the age of one, before adulthood, and during adulthood before retirement. It uses a new data resource, the Rhode Island Innovative Policy Lab (RIIPL) RI 360 database, which contains administrative records for SSI, RSDI, TANF, SNAP, Medicaid, General Public Assistance, and TDI; as well as demographic information, incarceration and birth records, and wage and employment data from the UI system. The paper finds that:

- Childhood SSI enrollment can be predicted with high accuracy, based on information available about children and their families. Features that drive enrollment at birth are largely captured by birthweight.

- Enrollment later in childhood is largely predicted by characteristics of the mother, including her behavior before birth, as well as complications in delivery. Family social program use is not strongly predictive of SSI enrollment.

- For adults, social program use, demographics, changes in economic opportunities, employment characteristics all predict SSI enrollment, but the prediction is weaker than for children.

Explaining the factors that influence SSI enrollment and its growth is extremely important in evaluating SSI and related policies, as these programs are central to the U.S. social safety net. The findings also shed light on policies that may improve health and financial outcomes, and reduce SSI enrollment, such as interventions that improve health behaviors during pregnancy.

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