PATHWAYS TO WORK
Evidence Clearinghouse

Pathways Clearinghouse Evidence Gap Maps: User's Guide

What are the Pathways Clearinghouse Evidence Gap Maps?

An evidence gap map is a visual summary of how much published research exists on a topic within a field of study. Evidence gap maps support decision making by helping researchers and others understand the how much evidence is available on particular topics. They help identify gaps in published research and highlight topics that need further study.[1]

The Pathways Clearinghouse Evidence Gap Maps show the quantity of existing evidence about the effects of different employment and training services on employment, earnings, public benefit receipt, and education and training outcomes for workers with low incomes.

The data for the maps comes from a systematic review conducted by the Pathways Clearinghouse of research on programs, which the Pathways Clearinghouse refers to as *interventions,* designed to improve the employment-related outcomes of individuals with low incomes.[2] As of May 2023, the Pathways Clearinghouse included information on 262 employment and training interventions evaluated in 337 studies. The Pathways Clearinghouse team reviews all the studies in the Pathways Clearinghouse and assigns them a study quality rating of high, moderate, or low quality (see text box). 223 of the 337 studies in the Clearinghouse received a study quality rating of high or moderate. The evidence gap maps display information about these 223 studies and the interventions they evaluated. The maps will continue to be updated as the Pathways Clearinghouse reviews new studies.

> ### What is the Pathways Clearinghouse?
>
> The Pathways Clearinghouse identifies programs, or interventions, that aim to improve employment outcomes for people with low incomes. The Clearinghouse systematically evaluates and summarizes the evidence of these interventions' effectiveness.
>
> The Clearinghouse is sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation within the Administration for Children and Families, within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

What questions can the evidence gap maps answer?

The evidence gap maps answer two overarching questions: "How much evidence do we have?" and "For which outcomes, services, or populations is more evidence needed?" Answers to these questions can help researchers identify areas for future research.

There are five related Pathways evidence gap maps, discussed in the next section. Table 1 provides some examples of specific questions each evidence map can help answer.

How does the Pathways Clearinghouse define evidence that is high or moderate quality?

The evidence gap maps only count interventions that have been evaluated in studies that receive a study quality rating of "high" or "moderate." A high study quality rating means users can be confident in the study findings because strong evidence shows that the study finding is solely attributable to the intervention examined. A moderate study quality rating means users can be somewhat confident in the study findings. However, other factors not accounted for in the study might also have contributed to the findings so users cannot be confident that the study finding is solely attributable to the intervention.

Table 1. Example questions the Pathways Clearinghouse evidence gap maps can answer

Maps	Example questions the maps can answer
All interventions with evidence by services offered, All interventions with evidence by primary service offered	• For which types of services is there the most (or least) evidence about effects on employment, earnings, benefit receipt, or education and training? • Which types of services have the most (or least) evidence across outcome domains for different populations served (for example, cash assistance recipients, people who are unemployed, immigrants, parents, or people who are experiencing homelessness)?
Supported interventions by primary service offered	• For which types of services is there the most (or least) evidence of favorable effects on employment, earnings, public benefit receipt, or education and training?
All interventions with evidence by service offered across racial or ethnic groups or by sex, All interventions with evidence by primary service offered across racial or ethnic groups or by sex	• For which types of services is there the most (or least) evidence about effects for Black or African American individuals? Hispanic individuals? • For which types of services is there the most (or least) evidence about effects for women? Men? • Are there disparities in the quantity of evidence across racial or ethnic groups or by sex for specific services?

What information does each of the five related evidence gap maps display?

You can view five different, but related, evidence gap maps on the Pathways Clearinghouse site:

• **Map of all interventions with evidence by services offered.** This map shows the number of interventions with rigorous evidence of effectiveness (i.e., high- or moderate-quality evidence of whether the intervention had an effect) across each of 10 outcome domains, for each of the different service categories. In other words, it shows for which services the field knows *something* about effectiveness of those services. This map does not give information about *what* is known—that is, it does not show whether the evidence indicates the service strategy is effective. Instead, it simply shows how many interventions that use a given service have been rigorously evaluated, regardless of the findings from those evaluations. The map counts interventions multiple times if they include more than one service. For example, it counts an intervention that includes case management and job search assistance services twice (once in each service category).

- **Map of all interventions with evidence by *primary* service offered**. This map is like the *All interventions with evidence by services offered* map, except that this map groups interventions by the main service that the intervention focuses on, which the Pathways Clearinghouse refers to as an intervention's primary service. This map counts each intervention once.

- **Map of *supported* interventions by *primary* service offered**. This map presents the number of interventions that have demonstrated effectiveness in improving participant outcomes across each of the 10 domains. This map groups interventions by their primary service and counts each intervention once. The map can help users identify specific interventions that have successfully demonstrated effectiveness. However, users should understand that it does not reflect the overall balance of evidence of whether a given service is effective, since it does not incorporate information from any rigorously studied interventions shown to have no or unfavorable effects. It also does not provide information on the size of any favorable effects. For a more thorough presentation of what the body of research says about a specific service, users should consult Pathways' Evidence Snapshots.

- **Map of all interventions with evidence by services offered across racial or ethnic groups or by sex**. This map presents the number of interventions with rigorous evidence of effectiveness (i.e., having an effect or not) by race and ethnicity (White, Black or African American, Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and Hispanic) and by sex (male or female), for each of the different service categories. Interventions are counted within this map when a study reported subgroup findings for a given population on any outcome domain, or when the author reported that at least 80 percent of the study's sample belonged to one of the groups. Like the *Map of all interventions with evidence by services offered*, this map shows the number of interventions for which there is high- or moderate-quality evidence, but not whether the findings are favorable, unfavorable, or inconclusive. This map counts interventions multiple times if they deliver multiple services.

- **Map of all interventions with evidence by *primary* service offered across racial or ethnic groups or by sex**. This map is like the *Map of all interventions with evidence by services offered across racial or ethnic groups or by sex* except that this map groups interventions by their primary service. This map counts each intervention once.

> **What is the difference between primary services and additional services?**
>
> Interventions often include multiple services implemented together. For each intervention, the Pathways Clearinghouse team identifies one service as its "primary service," or the principal service of the intervention. The primary service is (1) a component that a large proportion of intervention group members received and a large proportion of comparison group members did not and (2) the component that was described by the study authors as most integral to the theory of change tested by the study. Only one service is designated as primary.
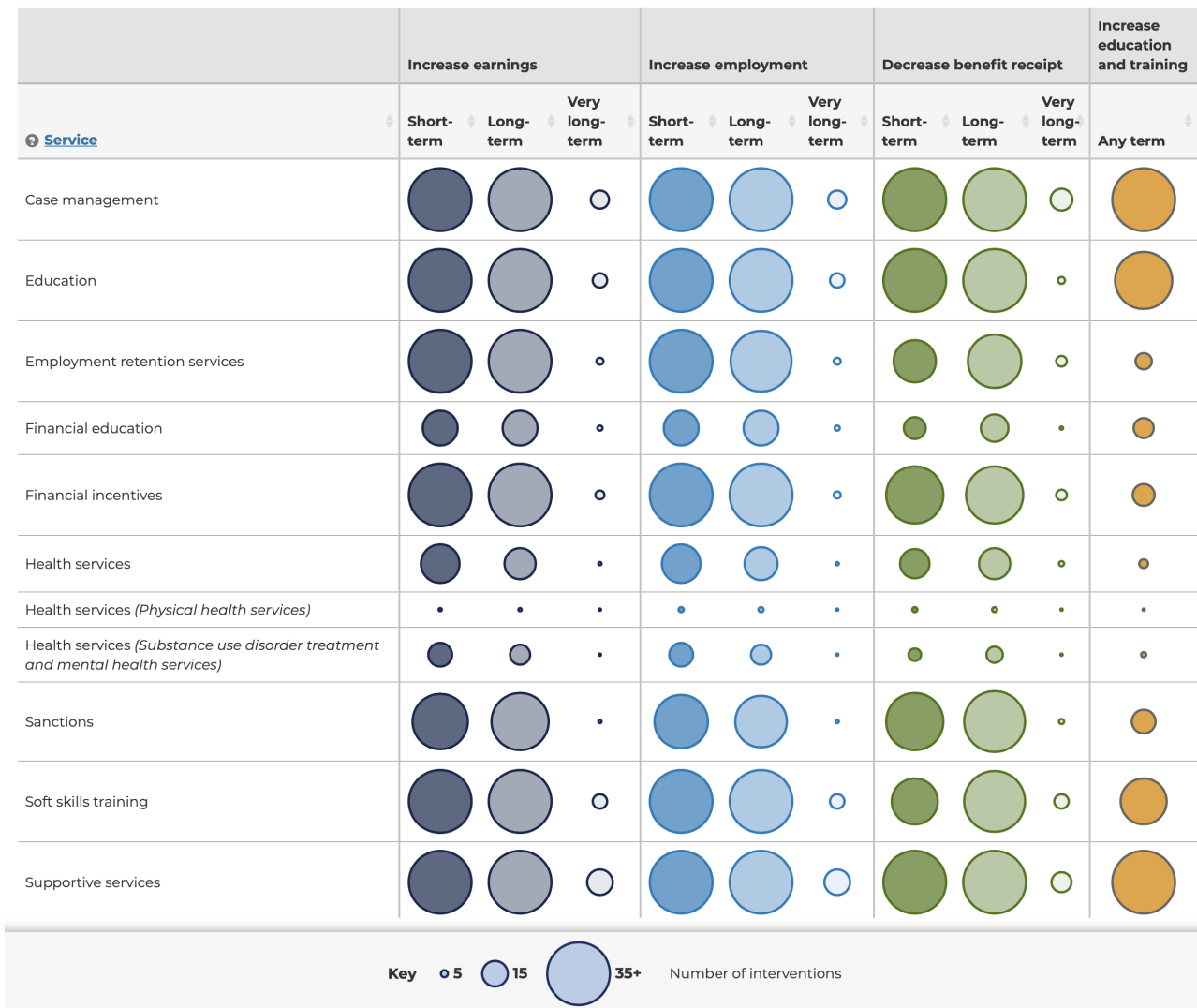>
> Additional services are other components within the larger suite of services. For example, case management or supportive services provided to participants in a training program would be additional services.

How do the evidence gap maps answer questions about specific services?

The maps are arranged as grids where the rows are the distinct services types and the columns are either the 10 outcome domains or the race, ethnicity, and sex classifications. Within the grid, circles convey the number of interventions that provide evidence for the given service type and domain or demographic classification. Larger circles indicate a larger volume of evidence than smaller circles.

Figure 1 shows the *Map of all interventions with evidence by services offered*. Each row represents a different type of service catalogued by the Pathways Clearinghouse. Each column represents one of the Clearinghouse's 10 outcome domains: employment, earnings, and public benefit receipt over the short term (18 months or fewer after participants are first offered services), long term (a period lasting between 18 months and 5 years after participants are first offered services), and very long term (a period lasting 5 years or more after participants are first offered services), as well as education and training (at any point in time).

Figure 1. Map of evidence for each outcome domain by services offered

Service	Increase earnings			Increase employment			Decrease benefit receipt			Increase education and training
	Short-term	Long-term	Very long-term	Short-term	Long-term	Very long-term	Short-term	Long-term	Very long-term	Any term
Case management	●	●	○	●	●	○	●	●	○	●
Education	●	●	○	●	●	○	●	●	·	●
Employment retention services	●	●	·	●	●	·	●	●	○	●
Financial education	●	●	·	●	●	·	●	●	·	●
Financial incentives	●	●	○	●	●	○	●	●	○	●
Health services	●	●	·	●	●	·	●	●	·	●
Health services *(Physical health services)*	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·
Health services *(Substance use disorder treatment and mental health services)*	●	●	·	●	●	·	●	●	·	●
Sanctions	●	●	·	●	●	·	●	●	○	●
Soft skills training	●	●	○	●	●	○	●	●	○	●
Supportive services	●	●	○	●	●	○	●	●	○	●

Key: ○ 5 ● 15 ● 35+ Number of interventions

Note: The colors in the evidence gap map intend to help users to easily distinguish the different outcome domain columns and do not signify anything about the number or nature of interventions that fall into each category.

Each circle shows the number of interventions for which there is high- or moderate-quality evidence about whether a specific service is effective in improving a particular outcome. The size of the circle represents the number of interventions: larger circles indicate there are more interventions with high- or moderate-quality evidence, and smaller circles indicate that there are fewer. The lack of a circle indicates that the Pathways Clearinghouse team has not yet identified and reviewed any studies of interventions that include that service and provide high or moderate-quality evidence on that outcome.

For users interested in learning more about the evidence, clicking on a circle will yield a list of interventions in the Pathways Clearinghouse that include the service indicated by that circle. Users can also navigate to the Find Interventions that Work search tool to find information on whether specific interventions are effective in improving employment-related outcomes, the size of the effects on labor market outcomes, descriptions of the interventions, and information about the populations they served.

How to filter the evidence gap maps to find specific information

The evidence gap maps include filters that enable users to customize each map. Users can filter each evidence gap map to display information about evidence for interventions serving clients with various characteristics, such as cash assistance receipt, education level, employment status and income level, sex, and specific employment barriers. For example, if a user is interested in understanding whether there is evidence on interventions serving military veterans, they can apply the filter and see which types of services have high- or moderate-quality evidence across the outcomes displayed.

Three evidence gap maps group interventions by the primary service of the intervention. Users who want to understand the number of interventions with high- or moderate-quality evidence about the effect of a particular service might prefer checking these maps to ones that also include interventions where another service is the primary one. If there is little or no high- or moderate-quality evidence for a given service as a primary service, it might mean that very few interventions include that service, that it is not the focal service of the interventions that include it, or that the interventions that include the service have not been part of high- or moderate-quality studies. This is the case for supportive services, such as money or vouchers to fund child care, transportation (for example, gas cards and bus passes), or other supports to help clients as they search for work or engage in a training program. Clients do not typically receive such services independently of other program services. Rather, these types of supportive services often complement other employment and training services such as on-the-job training, job search assistance, or subsidized employment services. Viewing the counts of all interventions that included the service can clarify whether the service occurs rarely as a primary service. (The *Map of supported interventions by primary service offered* does not have an alternate version that counts interventions where the service was not the primary service offered.)

Where can users find more information about the effectiveness of specific services?

The evidence gap maps answer lots of important questions about how much high- or moderate-quality evidence there is about many types of employment and training services, and the maps will be updated continually as the Pathways Clearinghouse releases information about additional studies and interventions. But there are many questions that they do not answer, such as what is the average effect on employment of interventions that deliver soft skills training? Or, by how much did the interventions that included apprenticeships increase long-term earnings? Or, do interventions that include unpaid work experience lead to better employment outcomes than interventions that include job search assistance? The Pathways Clearinghouse developed a series of synthesis products to answer these and other questions. For information about the effectiveness of specific services, including the average size of the effects found across interventions, view the Pathways Clearinghouse meta-analysis, *What Works to Improve Employment and Earnings for People with Low Incomes?* To learn more about the interventions with a particular primary service and their effects, view the Pathways Clearinghouse Evidence Snapshots. Evidence Snapshots are short briefs that summarize the evidence available in the Pathways Clearinghouse on the effectiveness of programs that use a common approach to service provision. Finally, the Find Interventions that Work search tool on the web site allows users to filter to interventions that best meet their needs. Users can then access pages for individual interventions that provide more information about the services they delivered, the context in which those services were delivered, the people to whom services were delivered, and the effects of the intervention.

Pathways Clearinghouse evidence gap map in practice: *Transitional jobs and employment coaching*

This section provides examples of how users might use the evidence gap maps. It focuses on two types of services— transitional jobs and employment coaching—and the interventions that deliver those services. The figures presented in these illustrative examples reflect the data available in May 2023.[3]
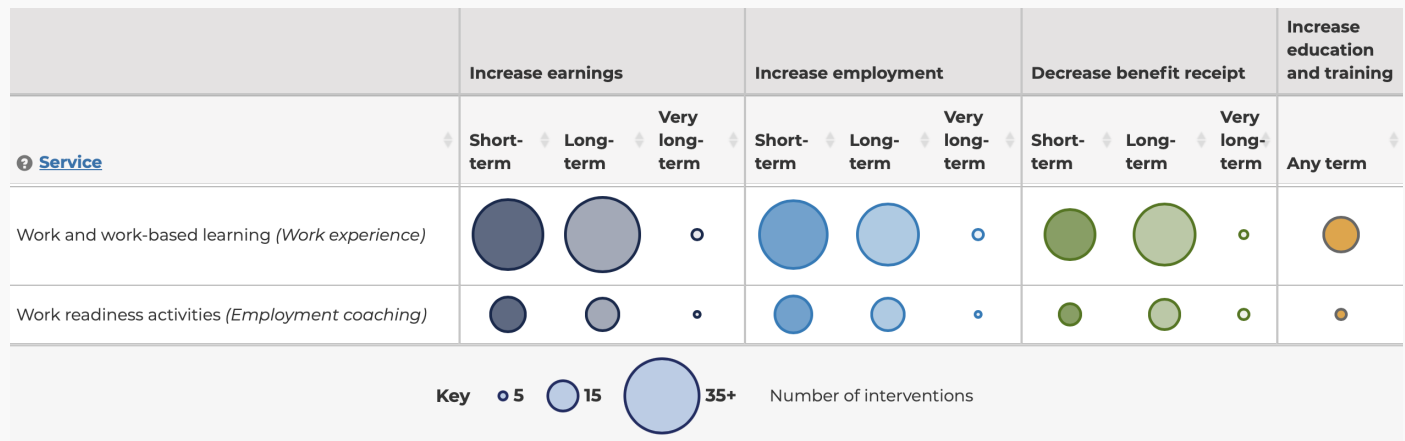
For which type of service is there more evidence about effects on employment?

Figure 2 uses the *All interventions with evidence by services offered* map to show the number of interventions that provide employment coaching or transitional jobs and have high- or moderate-quality evidence on employment in the short term, long term, and very long term. It shows that there are more interventions with high- or moderate-quality evidence that deliver employment coaching than transitional jobs. For employment in the short term, there are 18 interventions that deliver employment coaching with high- or moderate-quality evidence as compared with 12 interventions that deliver transitional jobs. Similarly, there are 16 interventions that deliver employment coaching with evidence on long-term employment compared with 11 interventions that deliver transitional jobs interventions. For very long-term employ-

Transitional jobs are jobs meant to integrate those who have been out of the workforce (for example, people who were formerly incarcerated) into the community. They can be paid or unpaid.

Employment coaching is intensive, collaborative assistance between an employment coach and job seeker in identifying and addressing employment barriers and goals.

ment, there are four interventions that deliver employment coaching and none that deliver transitional jobs with high- or moderate-quality evidence.

Figure 2. Evidence for each outcome domain for employment coaching and transitional jobs

❓ Service	Increase earnings			Increase employment			Decrease benefit receipt			Increase education and training
	Short-term	Long-term	Very long-term	Short-term	Long-term	Very long-term	Short-term	Long-term	Very long-term	Any term
Work and work-based learning *(Work experience)*	●	●	○	●	●	○	●	●	○	●
Work readiness activities *(Employment coaching)*	●	●	○	●	●	○	●	●	○	●

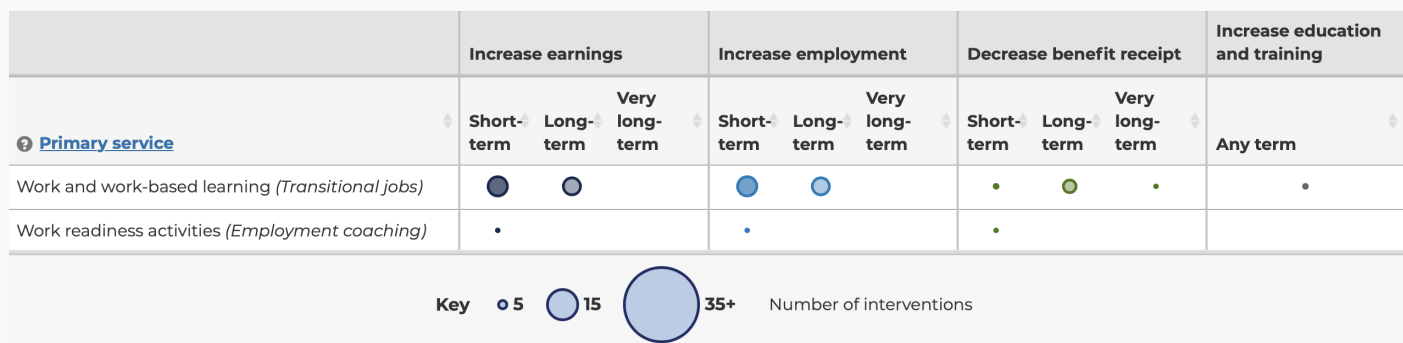Key ○ 5 ◯ 15 ◯ 35+   Number of interventions

Note: The figure comparing the two services is for illustrative purposes. Users are not able to select and filter by service in the actual web-based tool.

These results do not mean that employment coaching is better than transitional jobs at increasing employment. The counts indicate how many interventions that provide the two services have high- or moderate-quality evidence on employment, not whether the interventions are effective. The counts might reflect past research priorities and constraints in methodologies, but cannot speak to the relative value of each type of service.

Although there are more interventions that provide employment coaching than transitional jobs, the reverse is true when we only focus on interventions' primary services. The Pathways Clearinghouse team identified 24 interventions that offered employment coaching. However, only one of those interventions delivered employment coaching as the primary service, as shown in Figure 3. This is because employment coaching is often one component in a suite of employment and training services provided to participants, and it is rarely the primary service. In contrast, the team identified 10 interventions for which transitional jobs were the primary service. Transitional jobs are more commonly the central feature of interventions that include that service. In other words, although relatively similar numbers of studied interventions provide employment coaching or transitional jobs as a component of the intervention, there are many more studied interventions with transitional jobs as the primary focus.
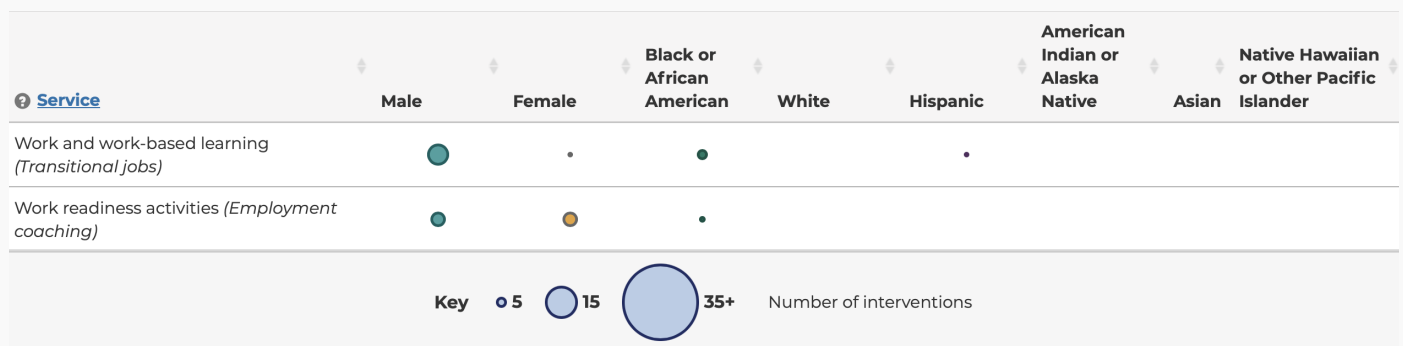
Figure 3. Evidence for each outcome domain when employment coaching and transitional jobs are the primary service

Primary service	Increase earnings			Increase employment			Decrease benefit receipt			Increase education and training
	Short-term	Long-term	Very long-term	Short-term	Long-term	Very long-term	Short-term	Long-term	Very long-term	Any term
Work and work-based learning *(Transitional jobs)*	●	●		●	●		·	○	·	·
Work readiness activities *(Employment coaching)*	·			·			·			

Key ○ 5   ○ 15   ○ 35+   Number of interventions

For which type of service is there more evidence about effects for women?

The *Map of all interventions with evidence by services offered across racial or ethnic groups or by sex* can answer this question. For both service types, Figure 4 shows the number of interventions with high- or moderate-quality evidence for which a study reported subgroup findings for females or had a sample that was predominantly female.

Figure 4. Evidence by demographic groups for transitional jobs and employment coaching

Service	Male	Female	Black or African American	White	Hispanic	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
Work and work-based learning *(Transitional jobs)*	●	·	●		·			
Work readiness activities *(Employment coaching)*	●	●	·					

Key ○ 5   ○ 15   ○ 35+   Number of interventions

As the figure shows, few interventions meet these criteria: seven interventions that deliver employment coaching and two interventions that deliver transitional jobs have evaluated the effects of the service on women for any of the 10 outcome domains. This is in part because of the target population of the programs—for example, some interventions that deliver transitional jobs aimed to serve men—and in part because of there were few studies that reported findings broken out by sex. (The small numbers also reflect the modest number of interventions providing these services with high- or moderate-quality evidence, as noted in the discussion of Figure 2.) This indicates an opportunity for future research to better understand the effectiveness of each type of service for women. More generally, these examples demonstrate how individuals can use the evidence gap maps to identify research gaps of interest to them and develop research questions to build evidence in these areas.
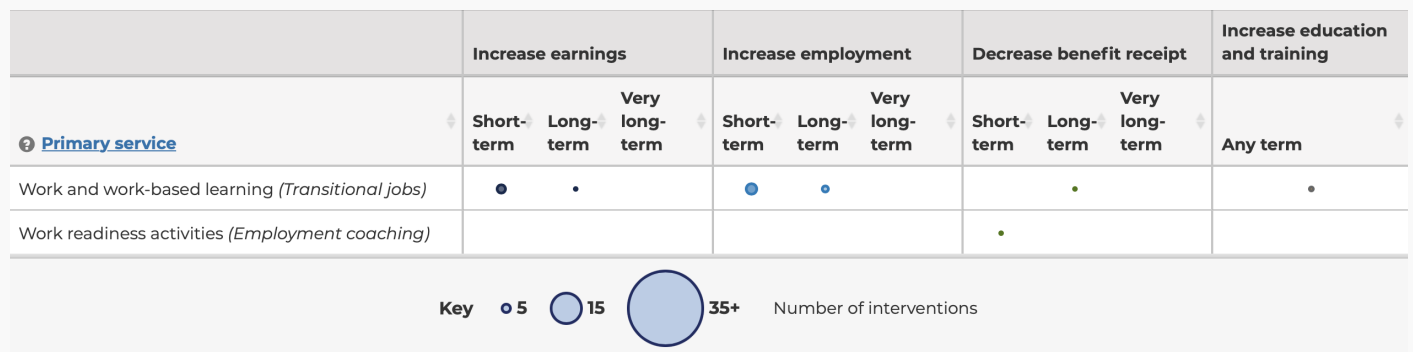
For which type of service is there more evidence showing favorable effects on earnings?

The *Supported interventions by primary service offered* map enables users to see the number of interventions across services and the 10 outcome domains for which there is high- or moderate-quality evidence that an intervention is effective in improving employment and training outcomes. This map only counts interventions if the service type in question is the primary service and the Pathways Clearinghouse found favorable effects. This is the map to use when looking for information on which types of services are featured in interventions that have been shown to be effective.

As discussed earlier, in most interventions that deliver employment coaching, employment coaching was not the primary service. At the time of this guide's publication, the one intervention in the Pathways Clearinghouse for which employment coaching was the primary service did not show an effect on earnings.

More evidence is available about the effectiveness of transitional jobs in increasing earnings. Evidence on earnings is available for 11 interventions with transitional jobs as the primary service. Of these, five increased clients' earnings in the short term, and only one increased long-term earnings, as shown in Figure 5. No interventions increased very long-term earnings.

Figure 5. Evidence of improved outcomes for interventions with transitional jobs as the primary service

⊙ **Primary service**	Increase earnings			Increase employment			Decrease benefit receipt			Increase education and training
	Short-term	Long-term	Very long-term	Short-term	Long-term	Very long-term	Short-term	Long-term	Very long-term	Any term
Work and work-based learning *(Transitional jobs)*	⊙	·		⊙	⊙			·		·
Work readiness activities *(Employment coaching)*							·			

Key ⊙ 5 ◯ 15 ◯ 35+   Number of interventions

Endnotes

[1] Miake-Lye, Isomi M., Susanne Hempel, Roberta Shanman, and Paul G. Shekelle (2016). What is an evidence map? A systematic review of published evidence gap maps and their definitions, methods, and products, Systematic Reviews 5(28). Available at https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-016-0204-x.

[2] For more information about how we conduct our reviews, visit https://pathwaystowork.acf.hhs.gov/publication/ProtocolPathways.

[3] The graphics and illustrations included in this brief present data as of May 2023. Readers should view the evidence gap map website for the latest information and available data.