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By Michael D. Rich, President and CEO of RAND

RAND’s mission—to help improve policy and decisionmaking through research and analysis—is the motivation for all that we do. For the RAND community, it is our united purpose, our professional calling. But how do we know when we’ve made a difference? Each year, we assess (1) whether we are addressing the most pressing policy issues with the scientific rigor and objectivity that are our core values, (2) whether our findings and recommendations are reaching key decisionmakers and the broader public, and (3) whether our efforts have contributed to significant improvements in policy and practice.

Below, I profile examples of how RAND efforts made a difference in 2013. The list of ways RAND is helping to improve policy and decisionmaking through research and analysis gets longer each year. I’ve selected these few examples because they highlight how, for even the most complex and entrenched challenges, RAND analysis has produced recommendations that policymakers have acted on to help individuals, communities, and nations be safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous.

**Sexual Assault in the U.S. Military**

Reports of sexual assaults against trainees within the U.S. Air Force’s Basic Military Training program at Lackland Air Force Base began to circulate widely during the summer of 2012. The allegations led to the conviction of 26 Air Force personnel for criminal misconduct. Many questioned the Air Force’s ability to safeguard the safety and well-being of its personnel, particularly its vulnerable junior enlisted population. The Commander of Air Education and Training Command requested assistance from RAND Project AIR FORCE, which responded immediately with on-site expertise and advice. Over the next year, a larger RAND team worked closely with Air Force staff to design, test, and implement a set of survey tools to more effectively monitor the basic training environment and help Air Force leaders detect incidents of abuse, harassment, unprofessional relationships, and sexual assault. Since October 2013, the surveys have been administered to each class of Air Force basic military trainees—thousands, so far. At RAND’s recommendation, respondents are able to complete the online surveys without using any identifying access cards or personalized information. Such a fully anonymous process has very rarely been applied in a military setting and represents a significant breakthrough in eliciting the candid feedback necessary for revealing potential problems and facilitating intervention. Air Force leaders view these tools as a critical part of their strategy to detect and deter future misconduct in basic training. Moreover, the survey instruments and their rapid, innovative implementation are sparking wider interest within the Department of Defense.

**Health Care for Low-Income Americans**

When the U.S. Supreme Court reviewed the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in 2012, it upheld most of the provisions of the mammoth health care reform law. But the Court did strike down the ACA’s Medicaid expansion provision, which
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would have required all states to extend coverage to more of their poorest residents (those earning less than 138 percent of the Federal Poverty Level), and instead left the decision up to each state. As a result, one of 2013’s most significant health care policy issues was whether states would accept Medicaid expansion or opt out. Using the RAND-developed COMPARE microsimulation tool, RAND researchers were able to model the likely effects of Medicaid expansion for specific states—a unique and highly valuable resource to governors and state legislators confronting this decision, and one made possible only by years of investment in COMPARE by RAND and our donors and through other commissioned analyses. Arkansas and Pennsylvania were two states initially unlikely to accept expansion. Stakeholder groups in each state asked RAND to analyze the potential impacts on their local economies, jobs, and low-income populations. RAND’s analyses forecast significant economic benefits to both Arkansas and Pennsylvania were they to implement the expansion, helping to create a more informed debate. Arkansas recently accepted expansion (with some modifications), and as of mid-January 2014, Pennsylvania is reported to also be exploring expansion options with some modifications.

Effective Policing for 21st-Century Israel

A RAND study of the Israel Police is changing how the organization approaches community relations, deterrence, and performance measurement. The analysis, prompted by a breakdown in trust between communities and police, included recommendations for gaining and sustaining public support and demonstrated how equipping officers with video cameras can be useful in providing feedback on their performance. Intent on seeing their recommendations change policy and practice, the research team also supported implementation design and planning. Following the reports of two working groups impaneled by the commissioner of Israel’s national police force to focus on police professionalism and public accountability, implementation of RAND’s recommendations is now under way.

Shifting Prevailing Wisdom About the Active-Reserve Force Mix

As budget cuts force reductions in the size of the U.S. military, the Army must decide what mix of active and reserve component units are needed to meet a wide range of operational military demands. Conventional wisdom for the past several decades has been that reserve forces cost less. But there has been a lack of impartial, empirical analysis of the issue, and debate has been characterized mostly by politics and emotions. To help decision-makers navigate a path forward, RAND developed a suite of innovative new modeling techniques and tools. Applying data from recent military operations, the team found that it was actually more expensive to maintain some types of reserve component units in the field than to field the same unit types staffed with full-time, active soldiers. This convinced senior Department of Defense leaders to revise their recommendations for transferring these units to the reserves in the Strategic Choices and Management Review, the department’s critical 2013 internal study of its future budget options.

European Cybercrime

In 2013, the European Cybercrime Centre (ECC) was established within Europol, the European Union’s criminal intelligence agency, to be the focal point in the EU’s fight against cybercrime. The design and operational approach of the ECC was based directly on recommendations from a RAND Europe study. RAND Europe researchers provided an assessment of the nature, extent, and effects of cybercrime in Europe, as well as the capabilities of 15 of the EU member states’ computer crime units to combat it. They proposed and evaluated various options for a pan-European, coordinated cybercrime unit and helped EU decisionmakers better understand the operational and institutional costs of a coordinated unit, as well as location and governance considerations. The ECC is now operating consistent with RAND Europe’s recommendations.

Gun Violence

After 27 school children and staff were killed by a gunman in Newtown, Connecticut, and with American lawmakers at an impasse over measures to reduce gun violence, the Los Angeles City Attorney, in collaboration with the California Attorney General and the Los Angeles Police Department, moved swiftly to implement a new public safety program wherein gun buyers are sent letters prior to taking possession of their firearms reminding them of the laws applying to gun ownership and also their personal liability should a gun registered in their name be used to commit a crime. The program is based, in part, on RAND analysis published in 2011 demonstrating that recipients of such letters are twice as likely to later report a gun as stolen. Law enforcement agencies view the program as an important part of disrupting illegal firearm markets and preventing legally acquired firearms from becoming crime guns. Los Angeles is now issuing some 2,000 letters each month, and the National Institute of Justice has commissioned RAND to further evaluate the results of the program.
Terrorist Transit Hubs

Using social network analysis and drawing on sensitive classified information collected across the Intelligence Community, RAND has identified key global transit hubs used by violent extremist groups to move money, weapons, and personnel in support of their activities. RAND’s assessment of each hub’s vulnerabilities is helping the U.S. national security community to dismantle them. RAND’s findings have been briefed throughout the U.S. government, including in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, several Unified Combatant Commands, the National Counterterrorism Center, and the National Security Council Staff, and has influenced the planning and strategies of numerous security agencies.

Marijuana Legalization

In 2013, two U.S. states, Washington and Colorado, moved ahead with unprecedented plans for legalizing marijuana, which would permit the commercial production, distribution, and possession of marijuana for nonmedical purposes. To prepare for regulating and taxing a new marijuana industry, the state of Washington needed baseline information about the amount of marijuana consumed in the state and turned to RAND for help. Researchers took to the task by supplementing existing household surveys with new data from a novel, web-based consumption survey they designed specifically to help respondents be more precise in describing their consumption. The result: a more accurate estimate of the state’s marijuana market that was twice as large as what state officials had previously projected. The analysis is helping Washington decisionmakers in numerous ways, including enabling them to make more informed decisions about the number of licenses to distribute and to more accurately project tax revenue. The project team also was asked by the White House to estimate the size of the national marijuana market. They’ve briefed their results to the Office of National Drug Control Policy, and the findings are expected to be made public in early 2014.

Teaching Effectiveness

How well American students do in school is influenced by many factors. When it comes to what schools can do to help, teachers’ effectiveness has the largest impact. As a result, policymakers think that teachers should be evaluated, in part, based on how much academic growth they produce in their students. Over the past decade, RAND has conducted extensive research on the strengths and weaknesses of various methods of measuring teacher effectiveness, including those that rely primarily on student achievement growth as measured by tests and those that are based on direct measures of instruction using structured observations. An important recommendation from this work is for states and school districts to use multiple measures when assessing teaching effectiveness that combine information about achievement and practice along with other validated sources of evidence instead of relying exclusively on principal judgments, as has been the norm for years. In the past year, we’ve seen this approach increasingly adopted. As of 2013, 40 U.S. states and the District of Columbia have passed new legislation requiring that objective measures based on student achievement be incorporated into teacher evaluation systems to complement administrator judgments. RAND researchers are now working with key education leaders throughout the United States to implement evaluation systems that conform to legislated requirements and represent best practices from the research evidence. Through their various advisory roles with states, districts, and charter management organizations, they are helping to answer fundamental questions raised by the new policies, including how to provide effective feedback to teachers to drive instructional improvement, and when and how to use these measures in personnel decisions, such as tenure and dismissal. We can look forward to more impact in 2014, as RAND Education researchers begin working with New Mexico, a national leader in implementing these new evaluation systems, to provide research and advice to the state’s Department of Education regarding how principals can use the results in providing feedback to teachers and in personnel decisions.

Medicare Savings

As part of a broader set of efforts to enhance its fiscal sustainability, Medicare recently implemented a program to allow it to more easily collect from beneficiaries money it is owed but has traditionally been unable to collect. This secondary payer liability program requires companies that provide auto, homeowner’s, and other types of insurance to report award payments made to Medicare beneficiaries to the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. In theory, the reports would allow Medicare to identify when a beneficiary’s injury treatment had already been paid for by Medicare, enabling Medicare to recoup its costs from the insurance award. But the program has experienced challenges amid a glut of data, and its promise of greater efficiency and financial benefit for Medicare has been challenged by those who claim it impedes attorneys from settling cases, delays payments to injury victims, and increases legal costs. In 2011, the RAND Institute for Civil Justice published a first-of-its-kind empirical study of the Medicare reporting program and demonstrated that exempting low-value claims from
having to be reported could enable the system to operate more efficiently without sacrificing much revenue recovery for Medicare. Congressional sponsors cited RAND’s analysis when they introduced new legislation establishing such a reporting floor, and that legislation was signed into law by President Obama in early 2013.

Afghanistan

In 2013, RAND supported U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) by deploying analysts to Afghanistan and conducting research back in the United States. RAND research explored policies necessary to achieve unity across U.S. and other NATO SOF; analyzed key challenges facing Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF); developed tools that SOF could use for supporting the coordination, integration, and sustainability of Afghan SOF; and assessed the effectiveness of SOF targeting of insurgents. This research was utilized by U.S. and other NATO leaders in their efforts to improve SOF effectiveness, contributed directly to the priorities and plans of SOF commanders, and was influential in identifying and examining emerging issues. In addition, RAND conducted research for U.S. Special Operations Command on prospects for the resurgence of al Qaeda and other militant groups in Afghanistan after 2014 that was briefed at the White House, State Department, Department of Defense, throughout the U.S. intelligence community, and to members of Congress. The work was used as input into several National Security Council Principals Committee meetings that discussed U.S. options in Afghanistan after 2014, including troop levels, the possibility of civil war, and prospects for economic growth. These efforts were just part of RAND’s program of analysis for the leadership of U.S. Special Operations Command. A significant body of additional research informed the development of the first U.S. Global SOF Campaign Plan, among other contributions.

Looking Ahead

These examples demonstrate not just the breadth and excellence of RAND research but also our commitment to ensuring that our findings and insights make a difference.

Looking forward, I see numerous opportunities for our research and analysis to have a significant impact in 2014 and beyond: research on ways to reduce the cost burden of dementia, new concepts for operating military forces in contested areas, helping the United States develop a new and more sustainable transportation funding system, supporting the needs of military caregivers, and improving communities’ resiliency to catastrophic events, to name just a few. Of course, the key to our success in these endeavors and others is our people. I am immensely proud of RAND’s talented staff—their ingenuity, dedication, and passion—as we pursue our mission to help improve policy and decisionmaking through research and analysis.