The Matched Savings Account Program Participation and Goal Completion for Low-Income Participants study examines the role of financial credit in participants' success in individual development accounts (IDAs), which help low-income individuals build savings and assets.

2. Matched Savings Account Program Study

This longitudinal study analyzed whether initial credit scores influenced participation decisions, program completion, and asset purchases. The findings revealed that while initial credit scores did not significantly predict program completion or asset purchase type, participants who completed the program within two years experienced substantial credit gains.

1. Reasons for Reduced Retention

- **Poor Initial Credit Scores:** Individuals with very low credit scores were more likely to avoid enrolling in the program due to a perceived inability to improve their financial situation.
- **Financial Hardship:** Participants who faced financial instability, such as inability to pay rent or utilities, were more likely to drop out of the program.
- **Lack of Clear Program Goals:** Participants who did not fully understand the program's benefits or how it could help them improve their financial standing tended to disengage.

2. Elements for Keeping Retention

- **Tailored Credit Improvement Plans:** Participants who received individualized plans focused on improving their credit scores were more likely to stay engaged in the program.
- **Comprehensive Financial Education:** Financial education that included practical strategies for improving credit and managing debt contributed to participant retention.
- **Peer Support and Mentorship:** Programs that incorporated peer group meetings or mentoring helped participants stay motivated and continue through to completion.

3. Strategies and Best Practice Recommendations

Successful Strategies

- **Targeted Credit-Building Support:** Participants who received support in improving their credit scores saw significant gains, particularly those who completed the program.

- **Regular Check-ins and Flexibility:** Ongoing support and flexibility in savings goals helped participants stay on track.

- **Early Credit Gains:** Programs that focused on boosting participants' credit scores within the first year saw higher retention rates.

Unsuccessful Strategies

- **One-Size-Fits-All Approach:** Programs that did not adapt to participants' specific financial needs and challenges struggled with retention.

- **Lack of Immediate Results:** Participants who did not see quick improvements in their credit scores were more likely to drop out.

Prioritizing the Findings

The most impactful insights for retention in financial coaching, particularly for low-income Canadians, are:

1. **Early Credit Gains Are Crucial:** Programs that help participants achieve measurable credit improvements within the first year are more likely to retain participants.

2. **Tailored Support for Credit Building:** Personalizing credit improvement plans to meet the specific financial situations of participants leads to better retention and outcomes.

3. **Holistic Support Systems:** Incorporating peer support, mentoring, and financial education helps participants stay motivated and achieve their financial goals.

Best Practices Context

- **Early Success as a Retention Tool:** Credit gains in the first year of the program significantly increased participants' likelihood of staying engaged. Similarly, in financial literacy programs, focusing on early wins, such as improving credit or reducing debt, can keep participants motivated.

- **Customized Financial Coaching:** Programs need to adapt their financial coaching to the individual needs of participants. This approach ensures that participants see the relevance of the coaching to their personal financial goals, thus improving retention.