



GUARANTEED INCOME RESEARCH ROUNDUP

An Unconditional Investment in Children and Families

Executive Summary

Everyone deserves the opportunity to thrive, with access to stable housing, good jobs, and quality healthcare, free from the threat of financial hardship. Economic security is about more than money—it's fundamental to health. Research clearly demonstrates that wealth and income **impact wellbeing**, life expectancy, opportunity, and the quality of life we can provide for ourselves and our families.

When communities have the resources and support they need, families can spend time together, invest in their futures, and contribute to a stronger economy for all. Yet too many people are forced to make impossible choices like delaying medical care to afford rent, or spending less time with family to work an extra job to put food on the table. This is not an individual failure—it's the result of systemic barriers that were built into housing, lending, and employment practices to exclude Black and Brown people from wealth-building opportunities and shared economic gains, perpetuating both health and **wealth inequities**. We can create a more just and equitable society where health and economic wellbeing are no longer a privilege for some, but a right for all.

Guaranteed income—a form of direct, unconditional financial support designed to help people meet their basic needs, weather unexpected expenses, and participate fully in the economy—is one pathway to address these inequities and achieve economic inclusion for every family.

This research roundup highlights the growing body of research on guaranteed income and evidence-based policy strategies to scale and sustain these programs through tax credits like the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit so that everyone, regardless of background or ZIP code, has the resources they need to thrive.



Glossary

Guaranteed income: An unconditional and recurring payment provided directly to people and families to supplement their existing resources so they can meet their basic needs and achieve economic inclusion.

Child Tax Credit: A tax credit intended to help families with children under age 17 by providing up to \$2,000 per qualifying child.

Earned Income Tax Credit: A tax credit designed to supplement the earnings of workers with low incomes, particularly those with dependent children.

Evidence from Guaranteed Income Initiatives

Since 2017, more than 150 guaranteed income pilots and programs have launched across the United States. RWJF is proud to support initiatives in cities like Jackson, Mississippi; Stockton, California; and Atlanta, Georgia. Research from these initiatives demonstrates that guaranteed income has the potential to improve health and promote economic inclusion by giving people and families the stability and autonomy to meet their basic needs and invest in their futures.

01 MAGNOLIA MOTHER'S TRUST | JACKSON, MS

The **Magnolia Mother's Trust (MMT)** is the longest-running guaranteed income program in the United States. Since 2018, MMT—which concluded its fifth cohort in September 2024—has provided unconditional \$1,000 payments each month for 12 months to over 400 Black mothers with low incomes in Jackson, Mississippi. Findings **from all five cohorts** continue to reinforce that when paired with other family supports, guaranteed income helps mothers meet their needs and supports overall wellbeing. Researchers studying the impact of the 2023-2024 **cohort found** that MMT:

- **Increased financial stability, helped build savings, and reduced debts.** The number of moms who reported consistently paying bills on time more than doubled, rising from 19% before the program to 41% after 12 months. MMT payments also helped nearly half (45%) of participants save for the future, 65% make loan payments, and 35% reduced their total number of debts or loans. Moms also reported experiencing less stress about finances.
- **Improved self-efficacy, confidence, and mental health.** Moms reported that because of MMT payments, they were more confident in themselves (50%), more hopeful for their future (56%), and more satisfied with their ability to take care of themselves (47%) and their children (60%).
- **Gave moms more autonomy over how they spend their time.** Moms reported the MMT payments helped them dedicate more time to their children and families, self-care, and pursuing new employment and educational opportunities. During the program, 25 moms (21%) started or completed an educational program or certificate.



This program is a whole new different aroma in the air around me. I can breathe without choking on my own anxiety because I know that with my guaranteed income, along with my willingness to work and become a better person for me and my son, better days are surely ahead of me.

– MMT participant

02 STOCKTON ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT DEMONSTRATION | STOCKTON, CA

Launched in 2019, the [Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration \(SEED\)](#)—the nation’s first mayor-led guaranteed income initiative—gave \$500 in unrestricted monthly payments to 125 randomly selected residents in Stockton, California, for two years. [Research found](#) that one year* of receiving guaranteed income through SEED:

- **Increased financial stability.** SEED recipients’ monthly income fluctuated less on average than non-recipients (46% vs. 68%). This helped recipients manage unexpected expenses. At the start of the program, only 25% of participants reported that they would be able to pay for an unexpected expense. After one year, this number jumped to 52% of recipients—nearly double the rate of non-recipients (28%).
- **Helped participants find full-time employment and pursue new opportunities.** Recipients found full-time work at double the rate of non-recipients. Over one year, the percentage of recipients employed full time increased from 28% to 40%.
- **Improved mental and emotional health.** Recipients reported lower levels of anxiety and depression and enhanced wellbeing compared to non-recipients.

03 IN HER HANDS | ATLANTA, GA

[In Her Hands \(IHH\)](#) launched in 2022 to support Black women with low incomes in Atlanta, Georgia. Phase one of the program provided 654 participants with a total of \$20,400 over two years, divided into monthly payments that varied by group. Findings from the first year of the initiative show that the guaranteed income provided by IHH:

- **Improved financial and housing security.** Only 19% of participants reported difficulty paying bills, compared to 48% of non-participants. Participants were nearly twice as likely to build emergency savings (28% vs. 15%) and were less likely to resort to predatory payday loans (15% vs. 26%). Housing stability also improved: participants experienced fewer utility shutoffs (24% vs. 42%), fewer missed housing payments (37% vs. 53%), and faced lower eviction rates (6% vs. 14%).



My son wanted to go to a football camp—I was able to pay for that. I was able to buy him some new shoes. I was able to give him money so he wouldn’t be hungry when he was at his track meet. It was basically for [my sons] ... it’s all about them.

– **Mekie,**
SEED participant



In Her Hands kind of changed my life way more than just financially ... For me, mentally. For me, emotionally. For me, everything.

– **Ana,**
IHH participant

*The COVID-19 pandemic began during the second year of the SEED study, significantly limiting findings. The findings presented in this research roundup encompass the pre-COVID time period from February 2019 through February 2020.

- **Increased access to nutritious food and healthcare.**

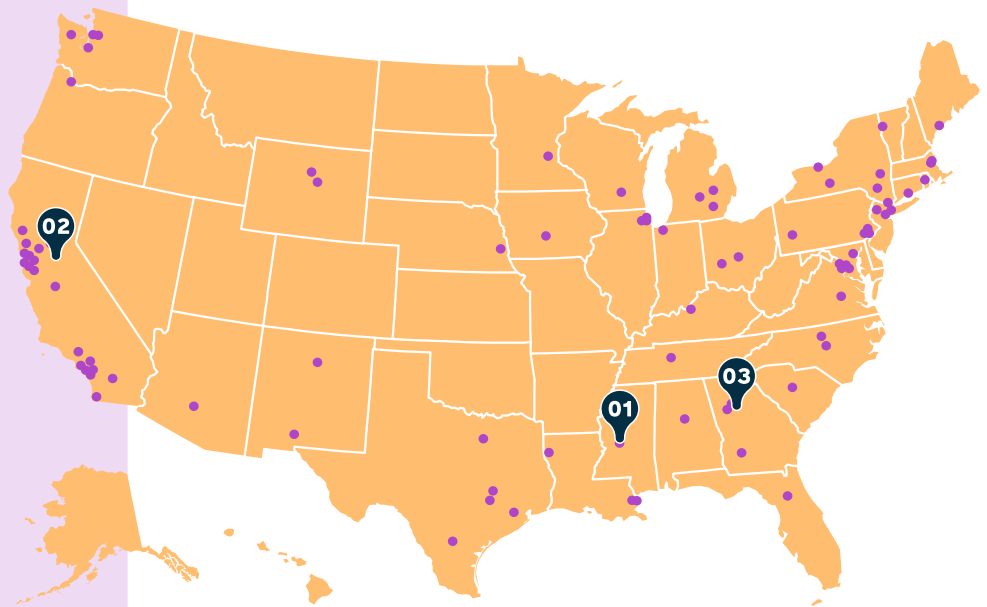
Participants were less likely than non-participants to report that they could not afford balanced meals (58% vs. 78%) or buy healthy foods (42% vs. 69%), and less likely to skip medical care because of cost (30% vs. 48%). Participants also reported being able to purchase essential items, like refrigerators to store fresh foods, and medical necessities, like eyeglasses.

- **Helped participants invest in educational opportunities for themselves and their families.**





Participants were more likely to be enrolled in higher education and skills training than non-participants (17% vs. 10%). IHH participants were also more likely to save for their children's education (36% vs. 23%).

Guaranteed Income Programs Across the Nation

Pioneering programs like the Magnolia Mother's Trust and the Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration paved the way for more than 150 guaranteed income programs across the nation and led to the founding of groups and collaboratives of researchers, funders, policymakers, and other advocates working together to mobilize support for guaranteed income.



Explore more evidence from RWJF-supported programs:

-  [Chicago Future Fund](#)
-  [Compton Pledge](#)
-  [Denver Basic Income Project](#)
-  [Thriving Providers Project](#)

Opportunities to Scale and Sustain Guaranteed Income

The vast majority of the more than 150 guaranteed income pilots and initiatives launched in recent years have relied heavily on philanthropic funding, and although public funding for these initiatives has increased in some cities and states, it has been primarily through one-time American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. Funding poses significant limitations on programs' scale and duration—like the [Denver Basic Income Project](#), one of the country's largest guaranteed income pilots focused on unhoused people, which received \$4 million in ARPA funds from the city of Denver. Despite additional investments from philanthropic funders, without a sustainable public funding stream, the program's longevity is uncertain.

Evidence from pilots and local initiatives is clear: guaranteed income helps people and families thrive. That's why we need policy solutions that move beyond temporary funding and piecemeal programs to make guaranteed income scalable, sustainable, and available nationwide to all who need it.

Policies like the Child Tax Credit and the Earned Income Tax Credit can improve financial stability, health, and economic mobility for millions of families. When designed and implemented equitably, these tax credits can provide people and families with the guaranteed income they deserve.

RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT

Storytelling Guide for Guaranteed Income Advocates

This storytelling guide from the Economic Security Project is designed to help guaranteed income advocates craft impactful stories that mobilize support for guaranteed income and promote our shared values of dignity, health, and opportunity for all. Coupled with research and evidence, a well-told story can be the key to creating a new social contract where everyone has the resources to thrive.

[VIEW GUIDE](#)

Permanently Expanding the Child Tax Credit

In [response](#) to the economic challenges families faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, in July 2021, the U.S. government expanded the Child Tax Credit (CTC)—a benefit intended to reduce poverty and improve outcomes for families with children. This temporary expansion increased the credit from \$2,000 per child to a maximum of \$3,600 per child, and included those who were previously excluded from receiving the full benefit. The expanded CTC was also distributed monthly (fully refundable) instead of as an annual tax refund, providing families with a reliable guaranteed income to help cover monthly expenses. The [expanded CTC](#):

- Cut child poverty by more than 40%.
- Helped families with low incomes pay for food (59%), utilities (52%), rent or mortgage (45%), and education (40%).

Recommendations

Although Congress allowed it to expire at the end of 2021, the expanded CTC demonstrated that a guaranteed income policy on the national scale was not only possible, but effective. A permanent expansion would deliver sustained support, helping more families meet their basic needs and build a healthier future. To ensure every child and family has the resources they need to thrive, RWJF offers the following [recommendations](#) for a permanently expanded CTC:

- ✓ Make the full credit available to all families, regardless of earnings, and oppose proposals that impose work requirements for eligibility, which harm children in families with unstable employment and disproportionately impact children of color.
- ✓ Repeal restrictions excluding children without Social Security numbers, which disproportionately affects immigrant families and prevents many children from receiving essential financial support.
- ✓ Automatically adjust the credit for inflation.

The expanded CTC
cut child poverty by
more than

40%

Reimagining the Earned Income Tax Credit

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is a refundable tax credit designed to supplement the earnings of workers with low incomes, particularly those with dependent children. However, the EITC only benefits people who have earned income, excluding those who are unemployed or not in the formal workforce. Those with very low incomes receive a reduced benefit—a limitation that leaves many families without needed support. Despite these limitations, studies show that [the EITC](#):

- Lifts families out of poverty and improves children's economic and educational attainment.
- Improves health outcomes, reducing stress among mothers and reducing risk of low infant birthweight.

State-Level Progress Amid Federal Roadblocks

Despite evidence, progress has been blocked on a permanently expanded CTC and reforms to the EITC at the federal level. But [states across the country](#) are making progress. Since 2023, 19 states plus Washington, D.C. have improved, expanded, or created a state-level CTC or EITC. These state-level tax credits supplement federal credits to further support families.

Recommendations

To make the EITC an inclusive and impactful source of guaranteed income, it must be reimagined as an equitable income support program that removes employment as a requirement for eligibility. “Earned income” shouldn’t mean that families without wages are excluded altogether. The benefits the EITC provides have always been proportional to income—it’s designed to increase as earnings rise until reaching a maximum before phasing out at higher income levels. By removing work requirements, the EITC can extend its reach downward to include all households with low incomes, including those with no earnings, ensuring a baseline of financial security for everyone. RWJF supports the following [recommendations](#) to reimagine the EITC:

- ✓ Eliminate work requirements to allow families without traditional employment—whether due to caregiving, disability, or other factors—to access the EITC.
- ✓ Distribute benefits in monthly installments rather than as an annual tax refund, helping families cover essential, recurring expenses like rent, food, and utilities, and reducing financial volatility.

DIG DEEPER

Building a Robust Social Contract to Support All Families

Guaranteed income is just one piece of a comprehensive approach needed to address the structural racism in our systems and achieve health and racial equity. Dig into the following resources to learn about other income supports that can work alongside guaranteed income to create a robust social contract that works for all families:

🔗 [Direct Cash Payments in the Next Recession](#)

🔗 [The Impact of a Poverty Reduction Intervention on Infant Brain Activity](#)

🔗 [What Do We Know about Baby Bonds? A Summary of Literature](#)

🔗 [What We Know About Universal Basic Income: A Cross-Synthesis of Reviews](#)

🔗 [Where to from here? Understanding the Expanding Landscape of Cash Transfers in the US and their Impact on Women](#)

🔗 [Visualizing UBI Research](#)

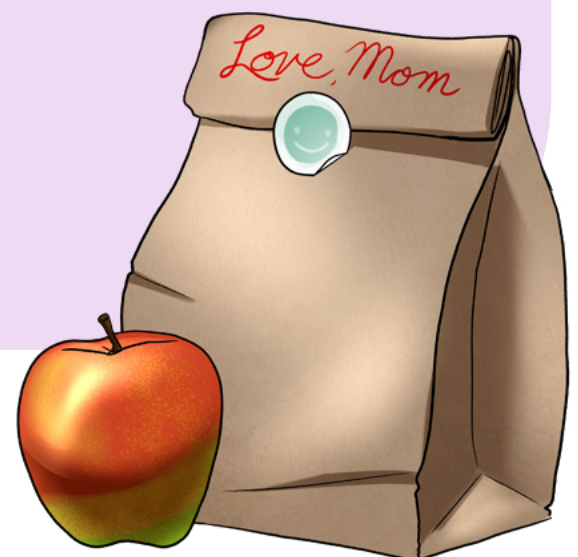
Guaranteed Income vs. Universal Basic Income: What's in a Name?

While proposals may have different names, like guaranteed income (GI) and universal basic income (UBI), they share a common goal: to distribute essential income support through recurring, unconditional payments—with a key difference. As its name suggests, UBI is universal, available to every member of the community, regardless of income or need. GI is more targeted, aiming to address economic and racial inequities by directing money to those who need it most, like people with low incomes and communities that face the greatest barriers to economic inclusion.

[READ MORE](#)

Follow these organizations to stay up-to-date on emerging evidence and recommendations:

- Economic Security Project
- Guaranteed Income Community of Practice
- Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy
- Mayors for a Guaranteed Income
- Springboard to Opportunities
- Stanford Basic Income Lab



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