

Austin Guaranteed Income Pilot: Participant Outcomes at 12 Months

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Respondents reported **spending most of their pilot cash on housing** and said their **housing security improved substantially**.

Employment remained relatively stable throughout the pilot. Of the 9 percent of participants who reported reducing their working hours, half stated that they used the time to “skill up” for future work and half took on caretaking responsibilities.

Food security improved steadily over the course of the pilot, but some **mental health measures reverted** to enrollment levels; on one metric (constant worry), participants reported worse outcomes at the end of the 12-month period.

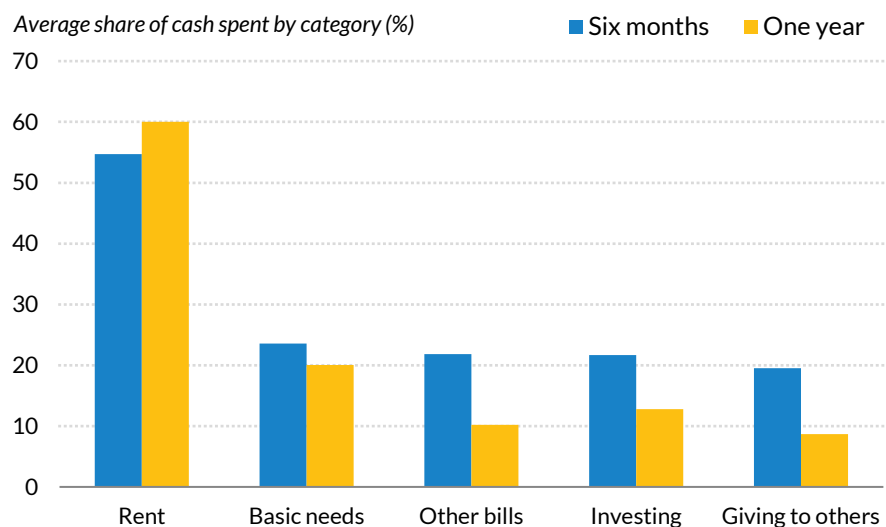
The Austin Guaranteed Income Pilot tests how direct cash might help individuals and families with low incomes weather their unstable housing circumstances in some of the highest-poverty and most rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods in Austin, Texas. In September 2022, UpTogether and 10 community-based partners enrolled 135 households to receive \$1,000 each month for one year. The cash transfers ended in August 2023.

This fact sheet draws from survey data at baseline (enrollment), 6 months, and program end (12 months). We also pull from interview data and Census Pulse data to provide a snapshot of outcomes.

CASH USE

Participants reported spending, on average, more than 50 percent of their pilot cash to cover financially burdensome housing costs. The average share of cash spent on housing increased between the 6- and 12-month mark and was more than twice as high as spending in any other top category.

FIGURE 1
Breakdown of UpTogether Payment Spending
Respondents’ reported spending at six months and one year into the pilot



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute analysis of 54 responses to six-month and one-year follow-up surveys completed through October 2023.

HOUSING STABILITY

Pilot participants were notably more housing insecure at enrollment compared with Texas residents with low incomes who responded to the Census Pulse survey within similar time frames as the baseline and one-year UpTogether surveys. By the end of the 12-month period, pilot participants had become substantially more housing secure. Statewide, Texas residents with low incomes became modestly less housing secure over the same period. It must be noted that the Pulse sample of Texas residents with low incomes is not a comparable external control group for UpTogether participants given considerable differences between the two groups that we are unable to control for; in other words, people across Texas are not necessarily good matches to people in Austin in terms of demographic characteristics or because of locality-specific circumstances. However, benchmarking the UpTogether responses against broader housing security trends statewide offers valuable context for assessing whether Austinites in the pilot experienced meaningful changes in their housing security. This is particularly useful when paired with qualitative and other survey data, which confirm that participants typically applied the bulk of their pilot cash toward meeting high housing costs.

TABLE 1

UpTogether Participants’ Housing Stability Compared with Experiences of People with Low Incomes Statewide

Housing stability measures	UpTogether Participants			Texas Residents with Low Incomes		
	Baseline	One year	% change	Sept. 2022	Sept. 2023	% change
Currently caught up on rent/mortgage	48%	62%	+14%	81%	76%	-5%
Likelihood of having to leave home in next two months due to eviction/foreclosure	60%	48%	-12%	38%	41%	+3%

Source: Census Household Pulse survey (weeks 49 and 62) and Urban Institute–administered baseline survey and 12-month survey.

Notes: We defined “confident in making next rent/mortgage payment” as being “moderately confident” or “very confident” about making the next rent/mortgage payment. We defined “likelihood of having to leave home in next two months due to eviction/foreclosure” as being “somewhat likely” or “very likely” that a household would be evicted or foreclosed on in the next two months. The sample size of respondents for the national Census Pulse comparison group of Texas residents with low incomes was 115 for the baseline benchmark, 153 for the 12-month benchmark, and 51 UpTogether participants (a 38 percent response rate) who responded to both the baseline and follow-up surveys. There was no significant nonresponse bias by key sociodemographic characteristics, including race, gender, age, and income.

EMPLOYMENT

Participants’ employment remained relatively stable throughout the pilot. The share of respondents reporting educational activities, part-time employment, or care work rose modestly from enrollment to 12 months. A small dip in full-time employment returned to very near enrollment levels at 12 months. Nine percent of respondents reported that they reduced time spent working as a result of the funds, with half saying they spent the extra time on skills-building with the aim of securing a higher-quality job and the other half taking on additional care commitments, such as spending more time with their children. Seven percent reported increasing their time spent working as a result of the cash, with most saying they used the cash to break down barriers to better jobs (e.g., inadequate commuting options). See our companion fact sheet “Austin Guaranteed Income Pilot: How Cash Payments Affect Social Networks” (Fung, Bogle, Noble, and Garcia 2024) for data on how some pilot participants used the additional time pilot cash “bought” them to secure better jobs and more stable family situations.

It helped me get back on my feet. If I didn’t have that, I wouldn’t be able to pay my rent.

—Black senior who is parenting her grandson

TABLE 2

Pilot Participant Employment Status at Baseline, 6 Months, and 12 Months

Employment status	Baseline	At six months	At 12 months
Employed full time	24%	20%	22%
Employed part time	24%	24%	28%
Self-employed full time	0%	0%	0%
Self-employed part time	12%	8%	18%
Full-time care work	14%	14%	14%
Part-time care work	0%	4%	8%
Unpaid work	6%	10%	10%
Unemployed	4%	6%	4%
Student	4%	6%	4%
Retired	4%	2%	2%
Other	8%	4%	4%
Preferred not to answer	0%	2%	0%

Source: Urban Institute analysis of 51 responses (a 38 percent response rate) in baseline and follow-up surveys completed through September 2023.

Notes: This question allowed for multiple employment selections among the 51 respondents who had reported employment in all baseline and follow-up surveys. Some “other” fill-in answers include temp work, gig work, and disability attributable to long COVID-19.

Since I don't have a vehicle, I take Ubers and the bus [to job sites]. [Before I started receiving the pilot cash,] sometimes I didn't have enough money for Ubers and I'd have to take only the bus to make it to more than one job. It's hard trying to manage that. Public transportation doesn't get there in time because the bus varies with traffic and with the weather, there may be a delay, stuff like that. And I try to manage my time well, so I'm always early. But even when I may get [to the bus stop] early, it's [often] still a 15-minute walk to make it, I gotta walk like 8 blocks, you know. [If I have] \$12 for an Uber, I [can] be there on time or early.

—Security guard who works at multiple job sites each day to make ends meet

MENTAL HEALTH

Participants' mental health reached the highest level of improvement at the 6-month mark, with the most notable gain being substantial relief from depression for 12 percent of participants. Two measures—feeling anxious and feeling depressed—remained at or near 6-month levels at the completion of the pilot. Concerningly, the share of participants reporting that they were “not able to stop worrying,” which had improved slightly at the 6-month mark, increased by 6 percent above baseline by the end of the pilot. In our interviews, a substantial number of participants told the research team that they were deeply concerned about being able to make ends meet once the pilot ended. Even some of those who were leveraging the cash to build skills or make new job contacts expressed doubt that they could fill a \$12,000 gap in annual gross income with increased labor market income in such a short period of time.

One recent study on the child tax credit found that direct cash allotments are associated with a decrease in the number of reported bad mental health days, especially among low-income households, women, and younger respondents. The effect materializes after the third monthly payment and disappears when the benefits are withdrawn (Pignatti and Parolin 2023). Most guaranteed income evaluations find improvements in recipients'

mental health outcomes (Wilson and McDaid 2021), but more research is needed on methods to minimize the stress of transition out of programs, as well as on the appropriate dose and duration of cash transfer depending on recipients’ circumstances and goals related to job attainment, housing stability, and long-term child well-being. Post-pilot survey data from this study, which we intend to gather in early 2024, will help to clarify the sources of the additional worry.

TABLE 3
Comparison of Mental Health Measures among UpTogether Participants and All Texas Residents with Low Incomes

Mental health measures (%)	UpTogether Participants			Texas Residents with Low Incomes		
	Enrollment	One year	% change	Sept. 2022	Sept. 2023	% change
Felt anxious	50%	48%	-2%	58%	45%	-13%
Not able to stop worrying	44%	50%	+6%	48%	36%	-12%
Felt down, depressed	54%	48%	-6%	46%	33%	-13%

Source: Census Household Pulse survey (weeks 49 and 62) and Urban Institute–administered baseline survey and 12-month survey.
Notes: We defined “felt anxious” as experiencing symptoms of anxiety “more than half [of the last 7] days” or “nearly every day [of the last 7 days]”; “not able to stop worrying” as not able to stop worrying for “more than half [of the last 7] days” or “nearly every day [of the last 7 days]”; “felt little interest, pleasure” is defined as feeling little interest or pleasure for “more than half [of the last 7] days” or “nearly every day [of the last 7 days]”; “felt down, depressed” is defined as feeling down or depressed for “more than half [of the last 7] days” or “nearly every day [of the last 7 days].” The sample size of respondents for the national Census Pulse comparison group of Texas residents with low incomes was 115 for the baseline benchmark, 153 for the 12-month benchmark, and 51 UpTogether participants (a 38 percent response rate) that responded to both the baseline and follow-up surveys. There was no significant nonresponse bias by key sociodemographic characteristics, including race, gender, age, and income.

FOOD SECURITY

Most participants faced food insecurity before receiving their first cash disbursement. Reductions in food insecurity were significant across all metrics from baseline to 12 months, and participants were notably more likely to be able to afford balanced meals as a result of the cash payments.

TABLE 4
Pilot Participants’ Food Security at 12 Months

Food security metrics	Baseline	At 6 months	At 12 months
Food did not last and there was not money to buy more	82%	67%	70%
Could not afford to eat balanced meals	76%	63%	59%
Cut meal sizes or skipped meals because participant was unable to afford more food	47%	43%	39%

Source: Urban Institute analysis of 51 completed food security question responses in both participant baseline and follow-up surveys completed through the end of the pilot (a 38 percent response rate).
Notes: We categorized participants as being unable to buy enough food or eat balanced meals if they selected that this experience was “sometimes” or “often” true in the past 30 days. We do not provide benchmarks from Pulse since food security metrics were not collected by the Census Bureau during the survey fielding periods.

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