

Austin Guaranteed Income Pilot: Participant Outcomes at Six Months

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Many pilot participants **caught up on rent** and were **less likely to be concerned about eviction** six months into the program.

There were **slight reductions in full-time employment alongside a few modest increases in part-time work** among pilot participants. These reductions may reflect **reallocations of time toward improving long-term financial and household stability**, as implied by **increases in student enrollment and care work**.

Pilot participant households experienced **substantial improvements in food security**.

'The cash is very, very helpful for my family. We are struggling with daily life. We don't have extra for next week, extra for tomorrow. The money cash program [gives more time for me to educate] my children. Then in daily life, I use it to buy enough food and to pay rent. I am not worried so much about being able to pay rent next month.'
—Program participant

The Austin Guaranteed Income Pilot is testing 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 per month for one year.

This fact sheet draws from survey data at baseline and six months into the program, as well as participant interviews, to present a snapshot of preliminary outcomes.¹

A CHANCE TO BREATHE AND PURSUE A BETTER FUTURE

Janelle* is a Black mom who has lived in poverty in southeast Austin her entire life. She has two children, a toddler in preschool, and a first grader with special needs. Janelle took on temp work to make ends meet, but her income barely covered her share of rent, utilities, necessities for her children, and food when her modest public benefits, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), fell short.

That changed when Janelle was accepted into the Austin Guaranteed Income Pilot. She describes the monthly stipend as a lifeline—a chance to breathe and work toward both immediate and longer-term goals.

After partially reducing her work hours, Janelle's priority was to spend more time on her children's needs. Now, she has new family routines in place and is working together with her children's teachers to ensure learning loss from COVID-19 and developmental delays will not prevent them from succeeding in school. She has enrolled her first grader in a dance class and purchased outfits and dance shoes.

Janelle is also using some of her extra time and energy to help a local tenant association organize meetings and educate her neighbors on their rights. A few years ago, she was suddenly evicted from her subsidized unit by a landlord who claimed that he needed to repair damage caused by the ice storm of February 2021. Janelle says the building residents knew that this was just an excuse to evict them legally so the property could be sold. Without help from the tenant association, Janelle says her family would have become homeless.

Janelle understands that her new income stream won't last beyond the fall, so she is using this time to find ways to boost her earning potential. She is capable with computers and math and knows she can make more money—or even find a full-time job—doing data entry or tasks like bookkeeping. Learning these new skills once seemed overwhelming, but with the monthly cash payments, she can afford classes and devote time to study and practice. Janelle credits the guaranteed income with giving her the bandwidth, energy, and time she needs to take risks and pursue a better future for herself, her children, and her community.

**Name and several details have been changed to protect confidentiality.*

¹ Almost all the outcomes reported are based on early survey data and are combined with qualitative data to tentatively infer a few preliminary findings. Our upcoming interim and final findings may shed additional light on trends or patterns that are still emerging or subject to redirection.

HOUSING STABILITY

Participants were notably housing insecure at enrollment, with 8 percent unhoused and the majority of those in rental housing or with mortgages reporting being behind on payments and concerned about having to leave their homes due to eviction or foreclosure. Six months into the pilot, those numbers had dropped by 22 and 12 percentage points, respectively.

TABLE 1

Pilot Participants' Housing Stability at Six Months

Housing stability measures	Baseline	At six months
Behind or late on most recent rent or mortgage payment	55%	33%
Likelihood of having to leave home due to eviction or foreclosure	63%	51%

Source: Urban Institute analysis of 49 comparative participant baseline and follow-up surveys completed through March 2023.

Note: Our analysis was limited to 49 respondents who did not report being currently unhoused during enrollment and who had completed answers for both the enrollment and six-month follow-up surveys.

EMPLOYMENT

Overall employment trends remained relatively stable six months into the pilot. There was a modest drop in full-time employment and a slight rise in unemployment. The share of respondents reporting educational activities, part-time employment, or care work rose. Interview data suggest that some participants are making planful short-term “time swaps” to gain longer-term financial and household stability. Several participants said they had cut their work hours to pursue skill-building activities and/or focus more on care for children or elders. All participants who were interviewed expressed acute awareness that the cash disbursements would end in six months, and almost all described using the funds directly and indirectly toward advancing short-term goals that could help them make progress toward longer-term household stability and economic security. Most participants expressed surprise and gratitude that the city of Austin was giving them an opportunity to re-group in the face of rising housing costs and related commuting dilemmas. For example, a few participants described saving some of their monthly cash for an inexpensive car so they could access better-paying jobs in farther neighborhoods or take jobs with odd hours.

TABLE 2

Pilot Participant Employment Status at Six Months

Employment status	Baseline	At six months
Employed full time	24.6%	20%
Employed part time	21.3%	23.3%
Self-employed full time	0%	0%
Self-employed part time	11.5%	8.3%
Full-time care work	13.1%	13.3%
Part-time care work	0%	5%
Unpaid work	4.9%	8.3%
Unemployed	3.3%	6.7%
Student	3.3%	8.3%
Retired	3.3%	1.7%
Other	8.2%	3.3%
Preferred not to answer	1.6%	3.3%

Source: Urban Institute analysis of 60 responses in baseline and follow-up surveys completed through March 2023.

Notes: This question allowed for multiple employment selections among the 60 respondents who had reported employment in both baseline and follow-up surveys. Some “other” fill-in answers include temp work, gig work, and disability attributable to long COVID-19.

MENTAL HEALTH

Participants' mental health has improved slightly in the past six months, with fewer people reporting feeling down, depressed, or anxious. One participant noted that the monthly funds have improved their mental health and anxiety levels, noting, "The money has helped me not to fall into despair...if my baby needs something and I can be like, yes, I got you. Sometimes you need a break...just so we can watch a movie and relax. Just to have my own time to recharge, rejuvenate, and not be around or take on someone else's emotions."

TABLE 3

Pilot Participants' Mental Health at Six Months

Mental health metrics	Baseline	At six months
Felt anxious	50%	45%
Not able to stop worrying	43%	42%
Felt down, depressed	55%	44%

Source: Urban Institute analysis of 59 completed mental health question responses in both the participant baseline and follow-up surveys completed through March 2023.

Notes: We defined "felt anxious" as experiencing symptoms of anxiety "more than half [of the last seven] days" or "nearly every day [of the last seven days]"; "not able to stop worrying" as not able to stop worrying for "more than half [of the last seven] days" or "nearly every day [of the last seven days]"; "felt little interest, pleasure" is defined as feeling little interest or pleasure for "more than half [of the last seven] days" or "nearly every day [of the last seven days]"; "felt down, depressed" is defined as feeling down or depressed for "more than half [of the last seven] days" or "nearly every day [of the last seven days]."

FOOD SECURITY

More than 80 percent of participants reported that they experienced a shortage of food in their households in the month before receiving their first cash disbursement. Participants experienced significant reductions of food insecurity six months into the pilot, particularly in their ability to afford more balanced meals for their households.

TABLE 4

Pilot Participants' Food Security at Six Months

Food security metrics	Baseline	At six months
Food did not last and there was not money to buy more (<i>n</i> = 56)	80%	68%
Could not afford to eat balanced meals (<i>n</i> = 59)	77%	62%
Cut meal sizes or skipped meals because participant was unable to afford more food (<i>n</i> = 57)	49%	38%

Source: Urban Institute analysis of between 56 and 59 completed food security question responses in both participant baseline and follow-up surveys completed through March 2023.

Notes: We categorized participants as being unable to buy sufficient food or eat balanced meals if they selected that this experience was "sometimes" or "often" true in the past 30 days.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research is funded by UpTogether, with support from private donors and public funding. The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. Further information on the Urban Institute's funding principles is available at urban.org/fundingprinciples. Copyright © May 2023. Urban Institute. Permission is granted for reproduction of this file, with attribution to the Urban Institute.