

Spotlight on Illinois

The Get My Payment Illinois (GMPIL) Coalition formed in April 2020 to help low-income Illinoisans receive stimulus funds. The coalition is comprised of the Economic Awareness Council, New America Chicago, Heartland Alliance, and Heartland Human Care Services. In May 2020, the coalition launched a website, [GetMyPaymentIL.org](https://www.getmypaymentil.org). The coalition also worked with government and nonprofit partners to spread the word about the Child Tax Credit (CTC).

Heartland Alliance's Social IMPACT Research Center (IMPACT) and New America Chicago engaged in research for GMPIL to (a) share the impact of CTC expansion on low-income Illinois families to bolster the case for a permanently expanded federal CTC and (b) advocate for improvements to the IRS non-filer tool to strengthen access to the CTC and Earned Income Tax Credit in the long-term.

IMPACT focused primarily on accomplishing the first research goal. To that end, we analyzed data from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey (IPUMS CPS) and the Household Pulse Survey to estimate Illinois families' take up of CTC payments, including demographics--and how they spent those payments--as well as demographics of eligible families who did not receive CTC payments. We conducted interviews with eight families who claimed CTC payments and were intermittent filers (i.e., did not file taxes every year) to learn about their experiences claiming CTC and the impact of the CTC on their lives.

Key findings from the study include:

- Only 55% of eligible Latinx and 66% of eligible Asian families received CTC payments, compared to 76% of eligible White, 75% of eligible Black, and 73% of eligible multiracial families.
- Middle-income (between 35K and 100K) families made up the largest portion of CTC recipients (38%) compared to higher (over 200K) and lower income (under 35K) families (17% and 18% respectively). At the same time, some taxpayers who may have been eligible for the CTC did not receive CTC payments.
- A majority of families (52%) used CTC payments mostly on basic needs.
- CTC payments helped low-income families reduce financial insecurities, but families also experienced barriers in accessing payments.

For the full report, please send an email to deliasmcallister@HeartlandAlliance.org

IMPACT would like to thank the generous supporters of this research project: Joyce Foundation, J.B. and M.K. Pritzker Family Foundation, Irving Harris Foundation, and Steans Family Foundation.

Tax Filing Challenges

What barriers did intermittent and non-filers face?

During interviews, participants were asked about barriers, if any, they faced in trying to access Child Tax Credit (CTC) payments and what strategies were effective in overcoming these barriers. The most frequent challenge for most participants was navigating an unfamiliar IRS process, with one sharing:

“

With that—with the CTC—I was scared. I said, ‘I’m going to go to [Grantee] to see what they tell me there. By myself, I was kind of scared they would tell me, you can’t do it without your husband. But I went there, and she said, ‘Yes, you can do it alone. . . . Give me your paperwork.’ She began to ask for everything. From there, I needed some [other] things. I went back the next day, and she began to do everything. Then she said, ‘You know what? You did not reach the range needed to file taxes. You earned very little, but I will ask for the money [CTC]. Then she did the whole process for me, and she said, ‘Yes, it went through. You just have to wait and see when they are going to make the deposit.’ And that’s how it went. The girl was very kind. She helped me with everything. She advised me. She said, ‘Bring this. Don’t be afraid, he is now apart [from you]. More than anything, it was that, I was afraid he would take [the CTC] from me.

Quote Source: Mother of a 4 year old. Translated from Spanish.

Five organizations--Cunningham Township Supervisor's Office, Inner Voice, Peoria Public Schools Foundation, Public Health Foundation through the Stephenson County Health Department, and Universidad Popular--received Get My Payment IL (GMPIL) grants to reach and assist families to receive all available tax credits. This interview participant’s experience highlights not only barriers low-income people who normally do not file taxes faced in trying to access CTC payments, but also how initiatives like GMPIL’s grants can be extremely effective in helping these types of filers overcome barriers.