

Cash assistance program improves work, school outcomes

Written by gallupsun

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SANTA FE — A report on a recently concluded statewide guaranteed income pilot program with 330 immigrant families demonstrated unrestricted cash assistance programs allowed for low-wage earners to pursue better jobs, increase their educational levels, and improve other critical outcomes for their children.

The report, *Guaranteed Income: Increasing Employment and Helping Families Thrive*, on the New Mexico Guaranteed Income Pilot Program for Immigrant Families, was released Dec. 12.

The 18-month guaranteed income pilot program was created in 2022 to address poverty and economic security for low-income, mixed-immigration status families and workers in New Mexico. Immigrant families were chosen for the pilot because polling showed these families struggled significantly more than the general population during the pandemic because of numerous exclusions from the country's safety net; these exclusions were due to lack of a social security number even if the household had U.S.-citizen children. In addition, many immigrant parents are not eligible for public safety-net programs, even though many are essential workers, make substantial tax contributions, and have positive economic impacts on the communities, state, and nation.

The program selected 330 mixed-immigration status households to receive unconditional direct cash transfers of \$500 monthly for 12 months from February 2022 to February 2023. One-third of households sampled came from rural communities and two-thirds from urban communities.

An additional extension was granted to 50 randomly selected mixed-status households to receive \$500 monthly for an additional 6 months (February 2023-August 2023). Participants resided in Bernalillo, Santa Fe, Doña Ana, Rio Arriba, San Juan, Lea, Chaves, and McKinley counties.

"As New Mexico lawmakers are looking at additional ways to help working families who are struggling, they should take guaranteed income programs into consideration," Javier Rojo, a Senior Research and Policy Analyst with NM Voices for Children and the report author, said. "More than 35 cities across the nation are exploring GI programs. They are gaining traction because they are effective at reducing poverty and improving outcomes for families and children, especially for families excluded from the country's safety net."

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The pilot program was designed and implemented by the five New Mexico organizations that constitute the NM Economic Relief Working Group (EL CENTRO de Igualdad y Derechos, NM CAFé, NM Voices for Children, Partnership for Community Action, and Somos un Pueblo Unido) and UpTogether, an Oakland-based nonprofit focused on investing in families and individuals with limited income by providing them with cash.

“Low-wage workers who are helping sustain our local economy used these cash payments to cover rising housing and living expenses. Like other GI projects across the country, New Mexico’s pilot shows participants were also able to improve their employment opportunities,” Marcela Díaz, executive director of Somos Un Pueblo Unido, said. “GI and recurring cash assistance are tools policymakers should be utilizing more often to help empower workers as they pursue training and better job opportunities.”

One GI participant from Doña Ana County explained how helpful the program was.

“As one of many immigrants who does not have access to a job or medical insurance, the guaranteed income program was very helpful for my medication and additional payments,” Elizabeth Salmeron said. “If guaranteed basic income were approved permanently in the state of New Mexico, it would be very beneficial for many immigrant families like mine.”

Executive Director of Partnership for Community Action Nichelle Gilbert, explained that guaranteed income solves more than just immediate financial needs.

“Guaranteed income goes beyond addressing immediate financial need; it shapes a powerful narrative in favor of cash transfer as a strategy for economic security and mobility,” Gilbert said. “The link to employment uplifts the potential to address worker shortages by increasing access to training and job readiness opportunities, particularly in critical industries such as early childhood education. This recognizes and honors New Mexico’s essential early childhood educators and the crucial role they play in shaping both the future generation and the economic development of our state.”

Maria de Carmen de Jesus Guerrero, a GBI participant from Albuquerque, called the program

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“a lifeline.”

“The program was a lifeline and I liked the fact the program showed that as working class families, we can be trusted and are capable of making decisions about how we spend our money in the best interest of our families. I also see it as an investment in New Mexico families who contribute as workers, taxpayers and consumers,” she said. “My husband and I have also both experienced discrimination and labor abuse at previous jobs. Having guaranteed basic income would give workers options to seek out better employment, instead of suffering in silence, and would even make it possible to go back to school.”

