

# Research Roundup of the Expanded Child Tax Credit: One Year On

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## *Executive Summary*

The American Rescue Plan significantly expanded the 2021 Child Tax Credit, increasing benefit levels and making more than 90 percent of children nationwide eligible—almost all but those in the highest earning families. From July through December 2021, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) delivered the expanded credit in six monthly payments, reaching over 61 million children in more than 36 million households. Families received the second half of their credit, a lump-sum payment worth the remaining six months' value, at tax time in spring 2022.

A continuous stream of research has tracked the impact of the Child Tax Credit expansion, documenting notable reductions in poverty, food insecurity, and financial hardship, as well as the impact of the expansion's expiration—which saw increases in poverty and other hardships. A challenge has been how best to understand this regularly evolving evidence base.

This research roundup compiles what we know as of early November 2022, close to one year on from the last monthly Child Tax Credit payment. It reviews the wide range of available information—analyses of national and local surveys, focus groups, expenditures, and more—on families' access and receipt of the payments, how families used them, how the payments impacted their lives, and what happened when the payments ended in 2022.

This is an update to the [original Child Tax Credit research roundup](#), published in December 2021, that documented what we knew from research available after the first six months. Evidence is now reviewed across nine central themes: access; income; poverty; spending; food; financial hardship; differences by payment type (e.g., monthly vs. lump-sum); employment; and equity. For each theme, the original December 2021 findings feature first (*What We Knew After 6 Months*) and the new additions follow (*Update: One Year On*). The updates also include available information on how families have fared in 2022 after the expanded Child Tax Credit expired.

The weight of the evidence is clear: while in place, the expanded Child Tax Credit reached the vast majority of families with low, moderate, and middle incomes; shored up family finances amidst the continuing COVID-19 and economic crisis; helped reduce child poverty to the lowest level on record; decreased food insufficiency; increased families' ability to meet their basic needs; and had no discernable negative effects on parental employment.

Since its expiration, however, many families with children have seen a reversal of fortune directly attributable to the loss of the credit—including lower disposable income and increased poverty, food hardship, and financial strain. Combined with recent inflation trends, the expiration of the expanded Child Tax Credit has posed an ongoing challenge for families nationwide.

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## Key Findings

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### ACCESS: Monthly Child Tax Credit reached vast majority, but newly-eligible faced access challenges

**One year on**, official sources confirm that the IRS reached 62 million children, with a 98 percent payment accuracy rate. While the number of eligible children who did not receive monthly payments remains currently unknown, available data suggest that monthly payments were sent to the vast majority (potentially over 90 percent) of eligible children.

➤ **Most of those eligible received monthly payments, but data on who may have missed out remains limited**

Official demographic data on who did and did not receive monthly payments is sparse, though may become more available in future. Available self-reported information indicates families with lower incomes; Latino families; Spanish-speaking families; mixed-immigration status families; and families who had not filed recent taxes may have been more likely to miss out.

➤ **Lessons from monthly payment rollout can inform future cash delivery efforts**

Stakeholder reviews of the monthly payment experience find that awareness raising, engagement, and enrollment efforts among communities most likely to miss out are important, but improving access also hinges on the process itself. For tax credits: simplified filing, ideally with a user-friendly electronic access point, is key to help close access gaps and help ensure those who would benefit most from future credit expansions can receive what they are eligible for.

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### INCOME: Monthly payments buffered family incomes amidst an uncertain economy

**One year on**, financial data continues to indicate that the Child Tax Credit payments positively impacted family finances. Families with low and moderate incomes, in particular, saw improved checking account and savings account balances throughout the second half of 2021 while the monthly payments were in place, despite rising costs over the same period.

➤ **Families with children lost their income gains after Child Tax Credit expired**

Family financial trends reversed in early 2022. Families who had received the monthly Child Tax Credit payment saw account losses compared to households who had not received the credit.

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### POVERTY: The expanded Child Tax Credit substantially reduced child poverty

**One year on**, the Census Bureau confirmed child poverty in 2021 was cut almost in half (a 46 percent reduction) from 2020 levels, down to the lowest levels on record. Census notes that approximately 90 percent of this historic reduction can be attributed to the expanded credit.

➤ **Child poverty rose quickly in 2022 after monthly Child Tax Credit expired**

The expiration of the expanded Child Tax Credit is likely to result in higher annual child poverty rates for 2022. Monthly poverty information for 2022 provides an early indicator: January 2022 saw 3.7 million more children in poverty than December 2021. Aside from a temporary tax time dip, monthly child poverty rates remained elevated in 2022, reflecting an erasure of gains made.

### EXPENDITURES: Families spent the monthly Child Tax Credit on food and basic needs

**One year on**, expenditure analyses further confirm that families, on balance, were more likely to spend the monthly payments on goods and services or pay down debt than to save it, though families of all incomes did save at least a portion. Most families report the monthly payments were an important help for day-to-day expenses: most commonly, food.

#### ➤ Families struggle to meet basic needs after monthly Child Tax Credit expired

Once the monthly payments expired, households' ability to meet their basic needs worsened. Households struggling the most in 2022 were those most likely to have spent their Child Tax Credit on basic needs in 2021. Absent the payments, families report difficulties covering the cost of food, housing or utility payments, children's clothing, and more.

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### FOOD SECURITY: Monthly Child Tax Credit reduced food insufficiency

**One year on**, research is clear that the expanded Child Tax Credit played an important role in improving food security in families with children nationwide. The monthly payments resulted in a meaningful drop in food insufficiency, with particularly strong effects for households below \$35,000. Research also indicates positive changes in healthy eating and nutrition.

#### ➤ Food hardship rose after monthly Child Tax Credit expired

When the monthly Child Tax Credit expired, much of these gains were lost. Early 2022 saw an immediate rise in food hardship among all families with children, with the effects particularly pronounced among Black and Latino households and households with incomes below \$35,000—many of the same households who had benefited from the credit the most while it was in place.

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### FINANCIAL HARDSHIP: Monthly payments may have reduced financial hardship

**One year on**, evidence on the credit's impacts on general financial hardship remains more circumscribed, but descriptive studies indicate families saw increases in available funds and the ability to meet regular and emergency expenses, plus decreases in debt, high-cost financial services, and worry about finances while the monthly payments were in place. Available causal evidence suggests these gains may have more pronounced among certain population groups.

#### ➤ Financial hardship rose after Child Tax Credit expired

Increases in family financial hardship appeared in the data almost immediately upon expiration of the monthly payments. Early 2022 saw the Census Bureau report households with children having more difficulty in paying for their usual expenses. As 2022 progressed, families with low and moderate incomes reported particular difficulty in meeting their basic expenses (e.g., food, bills, clothing, and housing) and purchasing items or activities for their children.

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### **PAYMENT TYPE: Families used the monthly payments and lump-sum payment differently**

Monthly payments marked a real shift in approach for tax credits, which traditionally arrive annually. Early evidence indicates that this shift in delivery corresponded with a shift in how families thought of and utilized the credit. Because most families spent at least a portion of the credit each month, it quickly became an integral part of monthly household budgets, rather than a one-time source for bigger-ticket items. Available evidence indicates that a sizable portion of parents (particularly those on low and moderate incomes) preferred this new approach.

➤ **The monthly versus lump-sum payments appear associated with different types of effects**  
Monthly payments were spent on smaller, regular expenditures, often food, and reduced food insufficiency. Available evidence suggests families with the lowest incomes used the lump-sum balance of the credit to pay off debt, including housing arrears. In turn, housing hardship declined during tax time in 2022, but food hardship did not. Options for either monthly payments or lump sum can allow families to choose option that best fits their family needs, but monthly delivery can keep poverty lower, more consistently, over the longer-term for a similar cost.

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### **EMPLOYMENT: There is no evidence that the monthly payments reduced employment**

**One year on**, research has consistently found no evidence of negative employment effects while the payments were in place. Studying the periods before, during, and after the monthly payment delivery enabled researchers to understand the impacts of the expansion in the real world, rather than simulations based on other policies or theory.

➤ **Employment data continues to show no changes while monthly payments in place**  
Causal examinations of the data on all families with children, families with low, moderate, and middle incomes, and families also in receipt of other benefits (e.g., SNAP) found no evidence of reductions in parental employment. Families with children in New York City saw a modest, but statistically significant, increase in hours worked per week in response to the payments.

➤ **Some families found the monthly payments to be an employment support**  
Available descriptive data featuring the voices of families themselves from various parts of the country saw parents identify the payments as a source of support to balance paid work and caregiving, cover child care and transportation costs, and more.

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### **EQUITY: The expanded Child Tax Credit matters for racial equity**

**One year on**, research shows that children who had been disproportionately ‘left behind’ by the credit prior to its expansion—Black and Latino children in particular, as well as children in single parent families, rural areas, larger families, and young children—all saw significant reductions in poverty that also helped close poverty gaps and disparities between groups.

➤ **Communities of color among those most impacted by Child Tax Credit expiration**  
Post-expiration, the Child Tax Credit has reverted back to its prior form. Under these parameters, close to one out of every three children nationwide, including one out of every two Black and Latino children, risk being excluded from the full credit once again.

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*Note: New research continues to be released regularly and this paper will be updated in the future.*

## *Policy Context: One Year On*

2021 marked a turning point in US social policy for children and families. On March 11, 2021, President Biden signed into law the American Rescue Plan: a \$1.9 trillion economic relief and stimulus package to support households, businesses, and state and local governments amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Researchers estimated the combination of income supports in the American Rescue Plan—a third round of stimulus checks, expanded unemployment benefits, an expanded Child Tax Credit, an expanded Earned Income Tax Credit, and more—could potentially reduce overall poverty by approximately one-third and child poverty by at least half in 2021 (Parolin et al 2021a; Wheaton et al 2021). For children in particular, these gains would be largely driven by the expanded Child Tax Credit.

In September 2022, the US Census Bureau released the income and poverty figures for 2021 and confirmed this did indeed occur (Creamer et al 2022). From 2020 to 2021, child poverty was effectively halved, with the proportion of children in poverty dropping from 9.7 percent down to 5.2 percent (a 4.5 percentage point decline, or a 46 percent drop). According to the Census Bureau, “the Child Tax Credit kept 2.9 million children out of poverty and lowered the child poverty rate by 4.0 percentage points, holding all else equal”; in other words, approximately 90 percent of this historic drop can be attributed to the expanded Child Tax Credit (Creamer et al 2022:15; Burns, Fox, Wilson 2022).

The American Rescue Plan (ARP) temporarily transformed the Child Tax Credit into a program more closely resembling a national child allowance—a core public support long in place across wealthy nations worldwide. The ARP made three important changes to the Child Tax Credit: (1) it temporarily increased benefit levels to an annual maximum of \$3,000 per child aged 6 to 17 and \$3,600 per child under 6; (2) it made the full benefit available to families with low and moderate incomes, thereby closing the gap that previously left one-third of all children in the United States excluded from the full Child Tax Credit; (3) and it began paying the credit out in monthly installments of up to \$250 per older child and \$300 per young child, rather than delivering the entire credit in a lump-sum amount at tax time. Because the payments began mid-year, monthly payments were available from July 2021 through December 2021, with the balance of the credit paid to families at tax time in spring 2022.

These changes closely resembled the proposed American Family Act (H.R. 1160/S. 690 in the 116th Congress; H.R. 928 in the 117th Congress) and built on decades of prior work from the 1960s to today, including research proposals for a US child allowance, young child allowance, or expanded Child Tax Credit. Prior to the passage of the American Rescue Plan, estimates using pre-pandemic data had indicated that the expanded Child Tax Credit, if all eligible children receive it, could—on its own—potentially reduce child poverty by an additional 40 to 45 percent in one year, after all other safety net programs are accounted for (CPSP 2021; Acs and Werner 2021a; Marr et al 2021). Children of color stood to see even greater gains: child poverty among Black children could be cut by more than fifty percent in a pre-pandemic context; among Latino children by more than 45 percent; and among Native American children by more than 60 percent (CPSP 2021). State child poverty rates, pre-pandemic, could fall to less than 10 percent in all but three states (Acs and Werner 2021b).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Of these three remaining states, Acs and Werner (2021b) still estimated large anti-poverty reductions from the expansion: California could see child poverty drop from 20.5 percent to 13.7 percent (a 33.3 percent reduction); Florida could see child poverty drop from 18.2 percent to 11.1 percent (a 39 percent reduction); and Texas could see child poverty drop from 17.3 percent to 10.1 percent (a 41.8 percent reduction).



Garfinkel et al (2022) identify significant long-term societal benefits that far outweigh the direct costs of this policy change. They find that an expanded Child Tax Credit with a gross cost of approximately \$97 billion would generate—through improved child health educational attainment, reduced involvement with the child welfare and criminal justice systems, and more—approximately \$929 billion in societal benefits, representing a rate of return on investment at a level of nearly ten to one.

The expanded Child Tax Credit was only in place for tax year 2021. As of January 2022, the credit reverted back to its pre-American Rescue Plan form, under the parameters of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017. This means that, once again, approximately one out of every three children in the US are at risk of being left out of the full Child Tax Credit, as they were prior (Collyer et al 2019; Tax Policy Center 2022). The stark disparities in place before the expansion are also posed to return, as one out of every two Black and Hispanic children had been historically left out, with children in rural areas, the South, Southwest, and Appalachia region, larger families, single parent families, young children, and more at disproportionate risk of exclusion again as well (Collyer et al 2019; Collyer 2019; Curran and Collyer 2020).

Much of the remaining COVID-19 federal economic relief—aside from continuing food assistance in selected states—has also since expired. Overall, the economic situation for many households—particularly those with low and moderate incomes—has worsened. Since the Child Tax Credit expiration, the most drastic change since last year has been the rapid rise in inflation, felt by families with children in the form of increased prices for food, utilities, gas, and other everyday needs. As of September 2022, prices were 8.2 percent higher than the year before (Siegel 2022). For many families, the concurrent loss of the expanded Child Tax Credit and the rise in prices have been felt acutely, as subsequent sections of this paper will detail.

The US House of Representatives passed a continuation of the expanded Child Tax Credit—including monthly payments—as part of the Build Back Better package in November 2021, but action was not taken in the US Senate. As of the time of writing, a continuation remains an option for potential 2022 end of year tax extender legislation. Additional Child Tax Credit proposals have also emerged, with an alternative federal proposal from Senator Mitt Romney (R-UT) and a growing number of state-level Child Tax Credits and proposals. State-level credits range in size, structure, and generosity, but all to date have been delivered in the traditional annual format, rather than monthly<sup>2</sup> as under the 2021 federal expansion. As such, these credits may be considered as a complement to an expanded federal Child Tax Credit, rather than a replacement.<sup>3</sup> State and local Child Tax Credit action represents an emerging policy area to watch.

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<sup>2</sup> One exception is California's Young Child Tax Credit, which was written with the authority given to the state Franchise Tax Board to deliver the state credit monthly, but not a mandate to do so.

<sup>3</sup> A joint report (Collyer et al 2022a) by Columbia University Center on Poverty and Social Policy and the Institute for Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP) documents state options for state-level Child Tax Credits.

## *Approach to the Child Tax Credit Research Roundup*

This version is an update to the [original Child Tax Credit research roundup](#), published in December 2021, that documented what we knew after the first six months. Evidence is now reviewed and organized across nine central themes:

1. Access
2. Income
3. Poverty
4. Spending
5. Food
6. Financial hardship
7. Differences by payment type (e.g., monthly vs. lump-sum) *\*new\**
8. Employment
9. Equity.

For each theme, the original December 2021 findings feature first, under *What We Knew After 6 Months*; the new additions follow under *Update: One Year On*. The update sections also include evidence as to how families are faring in each area this year after the expanded Child Tax Credit expired. This paper incorporates new research released through early November 2022.

The review now rounds up the available evidence on its impact more than one year on from the start of the monthly Child Tax Credit payments in July 2021 and close to one year on from their expiration after December 2021. It reviews the wide range of available information – from analyses of national and local surveys, focus groups, expenditures, and more – on families’ access and receipt of the payments, how families used them, how they impacted their lives, and what happened when the payments ended in 2022.

The evidence accumulated here is compiled from a large variety of publicly available sources. The [US Census Household Pulse](#) survey is a prominent data source for a range of the analyses included. Results also come from a range of surveys, focus groups, and other data on families with children as conducted by polling firms, research organizations, service providers, banking and finance companies, and other groups. Information about the size and scope of the samples referenced—for example, whether results reflect national or particular geographic respondents, respondents from select income brackets, or a particular time period—are noted in the discussion of the results. Full details of each survey and dataset featured in this roundup can be accessed via their original sources.

This roundup attempts to capture a wide array of the available evidence, but we also recognize that the literature continues to evolve. New research continues to be released regularly and this paper will be updated again in future. Longer-term impacts of this policy change on children and their families may be further evidenced over time. We invite researchers to share additional sources for incorporation in future updates.



## ACCESS: Monthly Child Tax Credit reached vast majority, but newly-eligible faced access challenges

### *What We Knew After 6 Months*

The American Rescue Plan's changes to the Child Tax Credit represented a meaningful policy shift. Prior to 2021, one-third of all children—numbering anywhere from 23 to 27 million—were left out of the full Child Tax Credit because their family earnings were too low to qualify (Collyer, Harris, & Wimer 2019; Maag 2019); these children were newly included. More than 90 percent of all children became eligible for the credit, which was delivered in a monthly and lump-sum hybrid form (Tax Policy Center 2021a). The Congressional Research Service identified that the largest increase in those newly eligible would be families with children in poverty—prior to the expansion, 52 percent of families with children below the poverty line were eligible for the credit, but after the expansion, 94 percent were (Crandall-Hollick, Carter, Boyle 2021).<sup>4</sup>

The overwhelming majority of children received the new monthly payments automatically. In preparation for the July 2021 rollout, the IRS (2021) announced in May 2021 that they would be able to deliver automatic payments to 88 percent of all children in the United States<sup>5</sup>—across 39 million households—based on information from recent tax filing and stimulus payment registration they already had on hand. Families with eligible children who had not had recent contact with the IRS could register for the new Child Tax Credit payments through a simplified filing process via an online portal. In monthly updates, the IRS reported sending 59.3 million children the first monthly payment in July, and increased the number of children served each month—sending direct payments to an additional 2 million children over the course of the six months the payments were in place—for a total of 61.3 million children served monthly at its highest point.<sup>6</sup>

The total number of eligible children in eligible tax units was not publicly available during the payment rollout. It was likely, however, that a few million children or more may not have been reached. Prior to the expanded Child Tax Credit rollout in mid-2021, researchers identified 4 million or more children at risk of missing out on their payments because their families were not likely to have filed recent taxes and would likely need to take additional steps to register for and receive it. These families were likely to be among those with the lowest incomes, disproportionately Black or Latino, and/or with a range of family circumstances that pose challenges for outreach and enrollment, including disabilities, insecure housing, lack of Internet or phone access, a language other than English spoken at home, and more (Cox et al 2021). Families who had not filed recent taxes needed to register with the IRS by mid-November 2021 in order to receive monthly payments (including retroactive payments for prior months missed) by the end of 2021. Families who did not meet this deadline still had the chance to file with the IRS afterwards and receive their full 2021 credit in a lump-sum payment at tax time in 2022.

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<sup>4</sup> The Congressional Research Service notes that one reason full universality for families with children below the poverty line was not achieved is due to the exclusion of children without Social Security Numbers, which began with changes made in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Not all children in the US were eligible for the 2021 expanded Child Tax Credit. The Tax Policy Center (2021a) estimates over 90 percent of children were eligible; those not include children in families with incomes too high to receive the credit (e.g. joint filing households over \$400,000), plus additional children who are ineligible for the credit due to immigration status, residency status, or other family circumstances.

<sup>6</sup> According to IRS monthly reports, they sent payments to **60.9 million children** in August 2021; **60 million children** in September 2021; **61.1 million children** in October 2021; **61.3 million children** in November 2021; and **61.2 million children** in December 2021. The temporary dip in September was due to an IRS error, since rectified, that delayed payments for 2 percent of recipients at the time of reporting (IRS 2021b).

Prior to the expansion, families with no or low earnings and families of color were most likely to be excluded from the full credit due to the phase-in structure and earnings requirements (Collyer, Harris, & Wimer 2019; Goldin & Micheltmore 2022). They could, in turn, see the greatest relative gains from the policy change. But of the children who may not have received their payments automatically, the families most likely to remain unaware or unclear as to their eligibility overlapped with those who stood to benefit from it most. The Child Tax Credit changes featured in many news reports from the time of passage in late March to its rollout in mid-July 2021. By late July, 88 percent of national survey respondents<sup>7</sup> had heard of the new Child Tax Credit (Hamilton et al. 2021). A national monthly survey of families with at least one young child under age 5 found that 82 percent expected to receive the new benefit (RAPID-EC 2021b). But surveys indicated variations in awareness of the new Child Tax Credit by income level.

Early on, families on incomes less than \$25,000 were least likely to be aware of the new credit. Those least likely to believe they were eligible were Black families, families with infants or toddlers, families with just one child, or families without connections to paid employment (e.g., those living on disability or retirement income or households with unpaid caregivers) (Hamilton et al. 2021). A late July/early August focus group conducted with twenty low- and moderate-income families<sup>8</sup> found that all participants were aware of the new Child Tax Credit, but 20 percent of the group had not received the first payment because they were unbanked, had not filed recent taxes, or were otherwise unsure (Waxman, Gupta, Gonzalez 2021). Two-thirds of low-income households in a non-profit-run savings network<sup>9</sup> were not well-informed about the new credit just prior to its rollout and 20 percent of the savings network members had not filed recent taxes (SaverLife 2021b)—a prerequisite for receiving the Child Tax Credit as an automatic monthly payment. The vast majority of this non-filer group (78 percent) either had no knowledge of the Child Tax Credit or that they would need to proactively register with the IRS to receive it or were misinformed about their eligibility.

As the months progressed, surveys on self-reported receipt suggested the credit reached the majority of families with low and moderate incomes, but important gaps remained (Pilkaukas & Micheltmore 2021). A survey of SNAP-recipient families on very low incomes (under \$10,000) reported 20 percent had not received monthly Child Tax Credit payments by early November, though ostensibly income-eligible. Within this population, close to half of those with \$500 or less in monthly earnings had not received it, compared to just over 20 percent with at least \$1,000 in monthly earnings. Those not in the labor force were twice as likely to not receive it than those in work. Those without a high school degree were the least likely to receive it compared to those with more education. Pilkaukas & Micheltmore (2021) point out these groups likely have lower levels of recent tax filing and would not receive the payments automatically. Spanish-speaking parents were among the least likely to have received the credit, despite ‘relatively high rates of tax filing’, suggesting these families may have faced additional barriers to receipt.

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<sup>7</sup> Here: Child Tax Credit-eligible parents with household incomes below \$150,000.

<sup>8</sup> Here: below 250 percent of the federal poverty line, or about \$66,000 for a 2-adult, 2-child family.

<sup>9</sup> Here: a population averaging \$25,000 to \$35,000 a year, 80 percent female, 59 percent people of color, and 80 percent parents (SaverLife 2021a).

## Access Research Update: One Year On

### Most of those eligible received monthly payments, but data on who may have missed out remains limited

As of mid-2022, the IRS reported having sent \$93.6 billion in advance Child Tax Credit payments between July and December 2021 to 62 million children (IRS 2022).<sup>10</sup> An April 2022 Government Accountability Office (GAO 2022) report provided a similar set of summary statistics: over six months, the average number of monthly payments made was 36.1 million, the average number of monthly child beneficiaries was 61.2 million, and the total cost of all the advance payments made was \$93.5 billion. An audit review of the advance monthly payments by the Taxpayer Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA 2022) confirmed a similar amount, \$93.5 billion, was delivered through the issuance of 216.9 million payments over the six months.

The TIGTA review reported a high rate of payment accuracy. They found that 98 percent of the first five payments (July through November 2021) were correctly sent—representing 175.6 million payments totaling \$75.6 billion. Just two percent of payments were sent to “taxpayers who should not have received the payment...including instances in which a dependent did not meet age requirements, was deceased, or was claimed on another tax return” (TIGTA 2022:4).

The number of eligible children who did not receive monthly payments is not currently known. There are at least four potential categories of those eligible who did not receive advance Child Tax Credit payments in the second half of 2021 and therefore would not be reflected in the IRS and TIGTA numbers above. These would include:

1. children in families who opted out of the advance payments, preferring instead to receive the entire credit at tax time in spring 2022;
2. children in families known to the IRS with recent tax filing or other data (e.g., Economic Impact Payment registration in 2020 or 2021, Child Tax Credit online portal simplified filing registration in 2021, or other) who should have received monthly payments, but did not;
3. children in families who completed the Child Tax Credit online portal simplified filing process after the deadline for monthly payment receipt (who would instead, in theory, receive their entire Child Tax Credit at tax time in spring 2022); and
4. children in families not known to the IRS because they had not filed taxes in recent years (‘non-filers’) and were not in families who otherwise qualified for automatic receipt.<sup>11</sup>

With respect to the first category, the Government Accountability Office (GAO 2022) identified the total number of advance payments opt-outs as 2.1 million.<sup>12</sup> In terms of the remaining categories, specific numbers are not publicly available. The TIGTA (2022:1) audit found the IRS “did not send 8.3 million payments, totaling about \$3.7 billion, to 4.1 million eligible taxpayers”. TIGTA (2022) notes that the IRS made efforts to rectify this at the time for eligible families for the July and August 2021 payments, but any missed payments from September onwards would be rectified upon tax

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<sup>10</sup> Specifically, \$93,621,326,000 in total payments for 61,976,091 qualifying children. For tables on total payment amounts and number of qualifying children reached by adjusted gross income bracket, by state, and by filing status, see [IRS \(2022\) SOI tables](#).

<sup>11</sup> Children in families who had not filed recent taxes, but had registered for Economic Impact Payments (e.g., stimulus checks), were meant to receive the advance Child Tax Credit automatically. In July 2022, the [IRS identified 720,000 children](#) in this group. [Cox et al \(2021\)](#) identify children of non-filers at risk of missing out.

<sup>12</sup> It is unclear from the information in [GAO \(2022\)](#) what number of qualifying children this figure represents.

filing in spring 2022. Information about the status of these tax-time payments is not yet available. TIGTA (2022) stated that a separate review of the reconciliation of advance Child Tax Credit payments with spring 2022 tax filing (for tax year 2021) is forthcoming. It is also not yet clear whether the TIGTA estimate of 4.1 million eligible taxpayers who did not receive advance payments is inclusive of children in categories 3 and 4 in the above list—namely, children in families who filed late through the online portal and children in families who have not filed recent taxes and therefore are not likely to be currently known to the IRS.

A challenge in the overall assessment of receipt of the expanded credit is the fact that the exact number of children who were eligible for the expanded Child Tax Credit in tax year 2021 is not publicly available. This is a real limitation in the data. It also poses a ‘denominator problem’ in terms of being able to identify the proportion of children who received the monthly payments while in place: while we understand from the IRS that 62 million children received the monthly Child Tax Credit, we cannot yet assess with certainty what percentage of all eligible children this represents. Pre-pandemic estimates, using income, population, and tax information from prior years, placed the total number of eligible children across a range of figures up to more than 67 million children.<sup>13</sup> If the total number of eligible children in 2021 was approximately that level, then the information that is available—62 million children in receipt of monthly payments (IRS 2022), with an average of 61.2 million children per month (GAO 2022)—indicates that the vast majority (potentially over 90 percent<sup>14</sup>) of eligible children were sent monthly payments while they were in place.

### Estimating likely receipt at the state level

California offers one state example of how researchers have attempted to estimate expanded Child Tax Credit receipt at the state level—here, for a specific population group: California children who are also in receipt of SNAP or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). A California Policy Lab analysis linking tax filing status, earnings, and demographics of SNAP or TANF-recipient children and adults—developed by non-governmental researchers with assistance from California state agencies—provides an important look at the proportion of newly eligible California children enrolled in other safety net programs who likely received the credit (Fischer et al 2022).

They find that 76 percent of Child Tax Credit-eligible California children who are also enrolled in SNAP or TANF likely received the expanded credit in 2021. Some of these children in SNAP or TANF-recipient households would have received the annual Child Tax Credit in the past, but many (an estimated 610,000) would have become newly eligible under the expansion. The researchers estimate that approximately two-thirds of this newly eligible group (381,000) received the monthly payments in 2021, but approximately one in three children newly eligible for the Child Tax Credit who are also enrolled in SNAP or TANF are likely to have missed out. They identify very low income as the primary determinant on children missing out in these instances (Fischer et al 2022). This analysis will be updated when more state administrative data becomes available.

<sup>13</sup> To illustrate the range of estimates available: [Columbia University Center on Poverty and Social Policy estimates](#), based solely on simulations of eligibility within the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC), suggested that up to 67 million children could live in tax units that are eligible for the CTC. [Goldin and Michelmore \(2020\)](#), also using the CPS ASEC found that a fully refundable Child Tax Credit could see over 67 million children living in eligible tax units. [Marr, Cox, Hingtgen, and Windham \(2021\)](#) identified a potential 65.6 million eligible children.

<sup>14</sup> Here, as a thought exercise estimate, but not currently confirmable in the available data: 61.2 million divided by (a potential maximum of) 67 million equals 0.91, or 91 percent.

Survey data of self-reported receipt also indicate that the wide majority of families nationwide received the monthly Child Tax Credit. But these self-reported figures are subject to a number of caveats and should be interpreted with caution. Various surveys based on self-reported receipt produced very different levels at different points in time: as of mid-September 2021, the Census Household Pulse survey saw 57 percent of families with children reporting they received a monthly Child Tax Credit payment (Karpman et al 2021). By December 2021, the nationally representative Urban Institute Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey saw approximately 75 percent of adults with children reporting receipt (Karpman and Maag 2022) and 2022 look-back surveys of families with incomes below \$75,000 and \$150,000, respectively, saw results of 80 percent or more of self-reported receipt (Burnside, Fuller, Zhang 2022; Hamilton et al 2022). Because some surveys focused only on incomes below a certain level, rather than the entire population, they did not capture higher-income families who would have received the credit prior to the expansion and likely received the 2021 Child Tax Credit automatically and at high levels of receipt.

Depending on the survey design, it is also important to note—as Karpman and Maag (2022) did with the Urban Institute survey—that some respondents who reported no receipt said another parent (potentially living in a separate household with a shared custody situation) had already claimed the credit. This type of response would affect the number of adults in the survey sample who could report receipt, but their children would likely still have benefited from these payments. Finally, self-reported surveys are subject to underreporting—for example, from the start, self-reported estimates of Child Tax Credit receipt from the US Census Household Pulse were lower than the administrative total of number of children and households reached as reported by the IRS (Karpman et al 2021).

As such, self-reported survey information may be a more useful indicator of trends and patterns among groups with potentially lower levels of receipt than as a source for absolute receipt rates. In this context, available survey data provides insight into gaps and variations by income level and other household characteristics that may have occurred and indicate areas of emphasis for future cash delivery efforts. Concurring with what the available evidence indicated after the first six months, more recent research confirms our early understanding that inequities in monthly payment receipt emerged by “race, ethnicity, nativity, banking status, education level, household employment, marital status, [and] tax filing status” (Bovell-Ammon et al 2022c:8). Newly-eligible families (here: those with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty line) were more likely to believe they were not income-eligible or did not know how to claim it (Karpman and Maag 2022). As preliminary studies also indicated, Latinx families continued to be the least likely to report receipt compared to all other racial and ethnic groups and mixed-status families, headed by one or more immigrant parents, were also significantly less likely to report receipt than other groups (Bovell-Ammon et al 2022a, 2022c).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> As a result of changes made in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (2017), qualifying children were no longer eligible for the Child Tax Credit without a Social Security Number (SSN). Prior, children had been eligible with an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) when their parents file a federal tax return. Parents who filed taxes with an ITIN rather than an SSN are still able to file on behalf of their SSN-holding children. But the ITIN application process has been subject to significant delays and a long backlog presented challenges for many potential applicants (Bovell-Ammon et al 2022c; Taxpayer Advocate Service 2022). TIGTA (2022) also reported on an error in the IRS system that “erroneously excluded taxpayers who had an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number from receiving the advance Child Tax Credit payment” in July 2021.



## **Lessons from monthly payment rollout can inform future cash delivery efforts**

Overall, the IRS was able to successfully implement a large-scale advance tax credit payment system with a great deal of precision in a short amount of time; here: within four months of passage of the American Rescue Plan, payments to 62 million children went out with a 98 percent payment accuracy rate (TIGTA 2022). The opening lines of the TIGTA (2022:2) audit acknowledges the “swiftness of the IRS’s implementation of the ARPA-related monthly advance Child Tax Credit payments was a significant undertaking...[and] the IRS’s efforts to implement this legislation directly resulted in assisting millions of taxpayers in obtaining advance Child Tax Credit payments”.

For those at risk of not receiving the monthly payments automatically—usually because they did not earn enough to be required to file recent federal taxes—building awareness of their new eligibility and expanding opportunities to file for the new credit was key. The IRS implemented a simplified filing process, which requires less information than a traditional tax return, similar to what was in place during the pandemic to access Economic Impact Payments (stimulus checks), and kept it open until mid-fall 2021 for families to claim the Child Tax Credit.

However, early reports saw challenges with families accessing the IRS online portal through mobile phones and, initially, it was not available in any language other than English—limiting access, in particular, for Spanish-speaking households (Delivery Associates 2022). An additional website option was developed through Code for America to help funnel families through the simplified filing process through a more accessible platform called GetCTC.org—a web portal accessible across devices and web browsers, in English and Spanish, and with chat support (Code for America 2022). GetCTC.org was operational from September through mid-November 2021; Code for America (2022) reported that 115,451 households used the GetCTC.org platform to successfully file for their Child Tax Credit and/or past Economic Impact Payments, totaling just under \$440 million in tax benefits. The number of households who filed for the expanded Child Tax Credit through the IRS online portal was not publicly available as of the time of writing.

Despite a simplified filing process for new tax filers, disparities in self-reported receipt across income and other demographic groups may be partially explained by challenges families report. The TIGTA (2022:8) audit of the advance monthly payments found that “information provided to taxpayers through the eligibility assistant tool and IRS website was not always clear”. Those unfamiliar with the filing process encountered a range of technical difficulties: for example, being informed that they had already filed a 2020 return and therefore could not use the portal; confusion over who in the family was claiming the credit; challenges with the identification verification process; and more (Walker, Bogle, Maag 2022). A stakeholder review of those involved in the monthly payment rollout by the consulting firm Delivery Associates (2022) catalogued further challenges, especially for new filers, around tax hesitancy and unfamiliarity with the IRS; a lack of knowledge about the new Child Tax Credit or their personal eligibility for it; and difficulties with the filing process, including digital literacy issues and filing errors.

Center for the Study of Social Policy interviews with Mississippi families observed that the quick rollout meant that it may not have been communicated as well as possible to those newly eligible (Kaverman & Minoff 2022). Qualitative interviews with families supported through the Birth through Eight Strategy for Tulsa, an initiative to help families likely to miss out on advance payments or the annual Child Tax Credit, saw new filers comment on the tax system as ‘complex and scary’ (Walker, Bogle, Maag 2022). Studies also found the ‘digital divide’ a real barrier.



As one parent, reflecting the experience of a number of newly-eligible families, put it: “if you’re not tech savvy, you cannot navigate” the system (Kaverman et al 2022:14). Further filing challenges arose if a household’s living or custody situation was complex, as only one adult could receive the monthly payments on behalf of the child. The Tulsa pilot noted that as issues encountered often depended on personal circumstances, there was no ‘one size fits all’ model to apply.

To address these challenges in the future, reviews examining the process for new filers (Delivery Associates 2022; Code for America 2022; Walker, Bogle, Maag 2022) emphasize attention to, and make recommendations within, three core areas: (1) awareness and communication; (2) engagement and trust; and (3) enrollment efforts.<sup>16</sup> But reviews to date also note that in combination with these strategies, ensuring improved access and receipt in the future specifically hinges on the filing process itself. For tax credits: simplified filing, ideally with a user-friendly electronic access point, is key to help close access gaps and help ensure those who would benefit most from future credit expansions can receive what they are eligible for.

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<sup>16</sup> Each report offers specific sets of recommendations for informing future cash delivery efforts. For example, Code for America (2022) details the particular types of communication activities that were more successful in directly generating tax returns through their GetCTC.org platform (e.g. direct outreach from benefit agencies or Google search ads) than other efforts (e.g. social media ads and social media posts by public figures).

## INCOME: Monthly payments buffered family incomes amidst uncertain economy

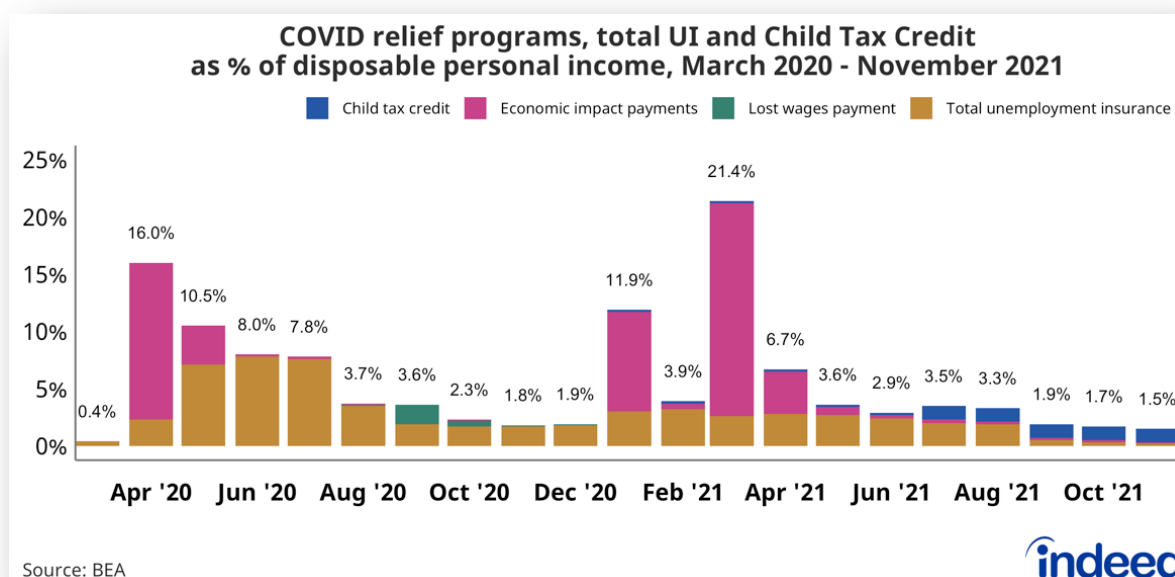
### What We Knew After 6 Months

Prior to the rollout, the Tax Policy Center (2021b) placed the average annual Child Tax Credit total benefit for families in 2021 at \$4,380, equal to \$365 per month (as many families have more than one child). For the poorest twenty percent of families with children in the US—families that would have been excluded from the Child Tax Credit prior to the temporary policy change—the expanded Child Tax Credit increased their incomes by more than one-third (ITEP 2021).

Household finance data indicated the monthly Child Tax Credit payments boosted family incomes in a time of economic precarity. By the monthly payment rollout in mid-July 2021, many earlier forms of COVID-19 cash relief had already expired or were near expiration. The third stimulus check, authorized by the American Rescue Plan in March 2021 at a rate of up to \$1,400 per eligible adult and child and disbursed by the US Treasury immediately thereafter, was largely exhausted. Expanded unemployment benefits, including the \$300 per week national supplement, were technically in place through early September 2021, but by mid-summer, 26 states had announced early terminations of the federally-funded program (Stettner 2021).

Stimulus checks and expanded unemployment benefits were meaningful contributors to personal and household incomes nationwide during the months they were in place (Figure 1, Konkel 2022). Amid their expirations, COVID-19 economic relief comprised a modest and continuously declining share of personal incomes overall in the second half of 2021; for families who received the monthly payments, the Child Tax Credit represented one of last remaining forms of cash support available amidst the continuing crisis.

Figure 1. Child Tax Credit as a percent of disposable personal income by Nov 2021



Reproduced with permission from Konkel (2022)

These findings were echoed across other financial datasets. From the first payment, the JPMorgan Chase Institute reported<sup>17</sup> that the Child Tax Credit had emerged as an important new support for family cash balances and a financial buffer for those now without earlier forms of economic relief. Throughout the pandemic, JPMorgan Chase had seen families with children experience larger percent gains in their checking accounts with each round of COVID-19 stimulus delivery, but also that families with children spent down their economic relief faster than families without children (Greig, Deadman, Sonthalia 2021b). For those who received the payment in July, the Child Tax Credit “slow[ed] the depletion of balance gains from the third stimulus” check (Greig, Deadman, Sonthalia 2021a).

As the crisis continued, the Child Tax Credit helped shore up family finances across income levels. For families with the most modest means, the credit may have helped build a modicum of financial security not possible in pre-pandemic times. JPMorgan Chase saw that families with low incomes had checking account balances 70 percent (approximately \$1,000) higher following the initial monthly Child Tax Credit payments than they were pre-pandemic in 2019 (Greig, Deadman, Sonthalia 2021a)

### *Income Research Update: One Year On*

Recent research provides further evidence that the Child Tax Credit payments positively impacted family finances while in place. By the end of 2021, JPMorgan Chase reported that checking account balances among families with low incomes still remained 65 percent higher than pre-pandemic, with Child Tax Credit recipient families retaining higher balances than non-recipient families by year end (Greig, Deadman, Sonthalia 2022). The non-profit savings network SaverLife (2022) reported low- and moderate-income families who received the CTC were able to keep their savings accounts balances largely intact throughout the second half of 2021, despite rising costs over the same period. These sources do not represent an exhaustive portrait of family finances, particularly those with low and moderate incomes, but do provide an indication that the monthly payments, for the period they were in place, had a positive financial impact on those who received it.

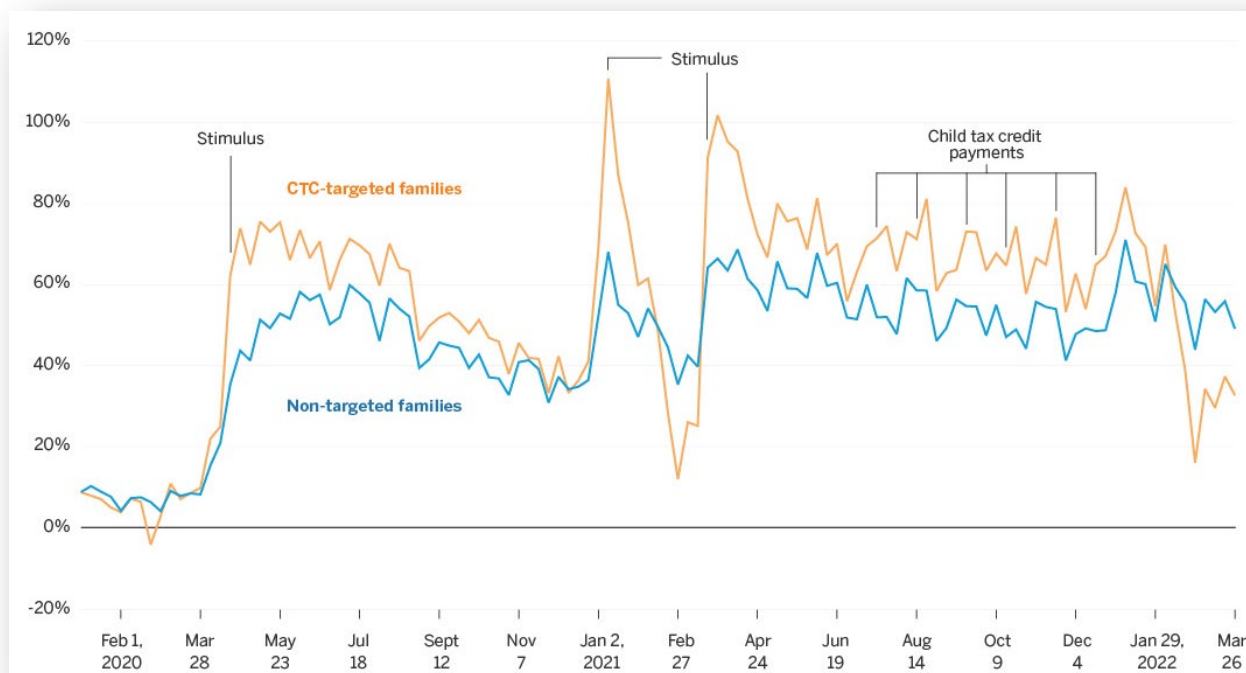
### **Families with children appear to have lost their income gains after the credit expired**

In early 2022, these trends reversed. Within the JPMorgan Chase data, families who had received the monthly Child Tax Credit payment saw “depleting gains after the expiration of the advanced Child Tax Credit payments” and their median balances fell below those of non-recipient families. By late March 2022, families who had received the Child Tax Credit had balances just 35 percent higher than they did pre-pandemic compared to non-recipient families who maintained balances 50 percent higher than pre-pandemic (Figure 2, Greig & Deadman 2022).

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<sup>17</sup> From an analysis of de-identified balance and activity information from 1.6 million active checking account users (26 percent of which were Child Tax Credit-recipient households) with at least \$12,000 in annual income prior to the pandemic (Greig, Deadman, Sonthalia 2021b).

**Figure 2. Percent change, relative to 2019, in median weekly checking account balances, by Child Tax Credit reciprocity**



Reproduced with permission from [Greig and Deadman \(2022\), Figure 6](#)

The checking account balance amounts in Figure 2 are in nominal dollars, not adjusted for inflation. Inflation, however, has continued to spike through 2022. In spring 2022, the JPMorgan Chase Institute indicated that “inflation eats away at the prime savings buffers of financially vulnerable households” (JPMC 2022). In broader terms, financial indicators also suggest that the loss of the Child Tax Credit coincided with other troubling trends. By the end of summer 2022, the New York Federal Reserve observed that credit card debt saw the largest year-on-year increase in more than twenty years (Federal Reserve Bank of New York 2022) and credit card rates are now at their highest rate in thirty years and may rise further (Bhattarai 2022). A five-year nationally representative financial survey, the Financial Health Pulse, based on data from the long-running Understanding America Study, found that financial health among Americans has declined for the first time in the survey’s five-year history as expenses overshadow income and savings decrease (Dunn et al 2022). Overall, family finances in 2022 have continued to trend downward compared to the year prior.

## POVERTY: The expanded Child Tax Credit substantially reduced child poverty

### *What We Knew After 6 Months*

As the expanded Child Tax Credit increased family incomes, it made meaningful reductions in child poverty. Prior to the American Rescue Plan policy change, the expanded Child Tax Credit was estimated to have the potential to reduce child poverty by as much as 45 percent<sup>18</sup>, if all children eligible for the benefit received it (CPSP 2021; Acs and Werner 2021a; Marr et al 2021).

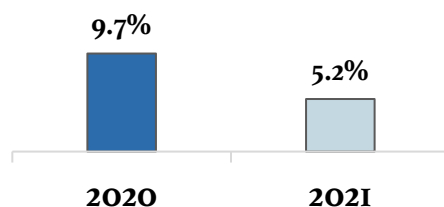
Annual poverty data for 2021 was not available until September 2022, more than one year after the monthly payments began. To provide closer to real-time poverty estimates during the pandemic, the Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University developed a framework to examine poverty rates on a monthly basis. This has been a valuable tool for assessing the impact of pandemic-era economic changes and policies on family incomes and poverty rates (Parolin et al 2022) and offered a particularly useful lens for tracking the impact of the expanded Child Tax Credit. The Center on Poverty and Social Policy estimated that the first Child Tax Credit payment in July 2021, on its own, reduced the monthly child poverty rate by 26 percent—keeping 3 million children from poverty whose family incomes would otherwise have been below the poverty line had the payment not been in place (Parolin et al 2021b).

The monthly anti-poverty impacts of the Child Tax Credit grew over time, as the IRS reached more eligible children as the months progressed. According to Columbia’s estimates, the monthly Child Tax Credit kept 3.5 million children from poverty in August 2021 (Parolin & Curran 2021); 3.4 million children from poverty in September 2021 (CPSP 2021b); 3.6 million children from poverty in October 2021 (CPSP 2021c); 3.8 million children from poverty in November 2021 (CPSP 2021d); and 3.7 million children from poverty in December 2021 (Parolin, Collyer, Curran 2022). By December 2021, the Child Tax Credit, on its own, had reduced the monthly child poverty rate by close to 30 percent, compared to what it would have been in the program’s absence (Parolin, Collyer, and Curran 2022).

### *Poverty Research Update: One Year On*

In September 2022, the Census Bureau released their report on 2021 poverty. Using the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM), which accounts for a fuller range of tax and transfers than the official poverty measure (OPM), Census reported that child poverty was cut almost in half (a 46 percent reduction) from 2020 levels. The national child poverty rate dropped from 9.7 percent in 2020 down to 5.2 percent in 2021 (Figure 3). Approximately 90 percent of this drop, the Census Bureau notes, can be attributed to the expanded Child Tax Credit, as it was responsible for 4.0 percentage points of the 4.5 percentage point drop (Creamer et al 2022; Burns, Fox, Wilson 2022).

**Figure 3. Annual SPM child poverty rates, 2020 and 2021**

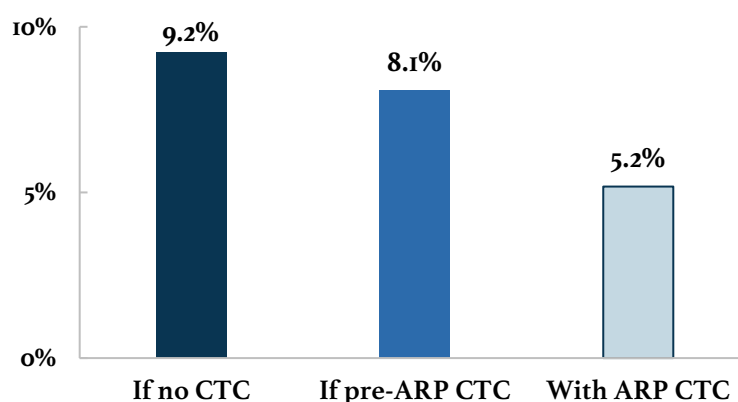


Source: Creamer et al (2022) using the 2022 CPS ASEC.

<sup>18</sup> This does not represent a 45 percent reduction compared to the prior year; rather, it is a ‘before and after’ within-year estimate—for example, child poverty would be 45 percent lower in 2018 after counting an expanded Child Tax Credit in family incomes compared to before counting it.

Looking within 2021, it is clear that the components of the credit expansion—here: increasing benefit levels and including the one-third of children formerly left out (by removing the earnings requirement and making the credit fully refundable)—made the difference in the annual poverty rate. When looking specifically at the effect of the expansion on the national child poverty rate in 2021, only one-quarter of the child poverty reduction achieved by the Child Tax Credit in 2021 came from its pre-reform structure (Figure 4). The pre-American Rescue Plan Child Tax Credit would have only brought child poverty down to 8.1 percent in 2021. The expanded part of the credit was responsible for the remaining three-quarters of the child poverty reduction achieved, bringing the actual 2021 child poverty rate down to the historic low of 5.2 percent.

**Figure 4. Effects of the Child Tax Credit on the 2021 child poverty rate**



**National child poverty rate in 2021, under three scenarios**

Reproduced, with permission, from [Figure 1 of Wimer et al \(2022\)](#). Created by Center on Poverty and Social Policy ([povertycenter.columbia.edu](http://povertycenter.columbia.edu)) using 2022 CPS ASEC, from IPUMS-CPS, University of Minnesota ([ipums.org](http://ipums.org)).

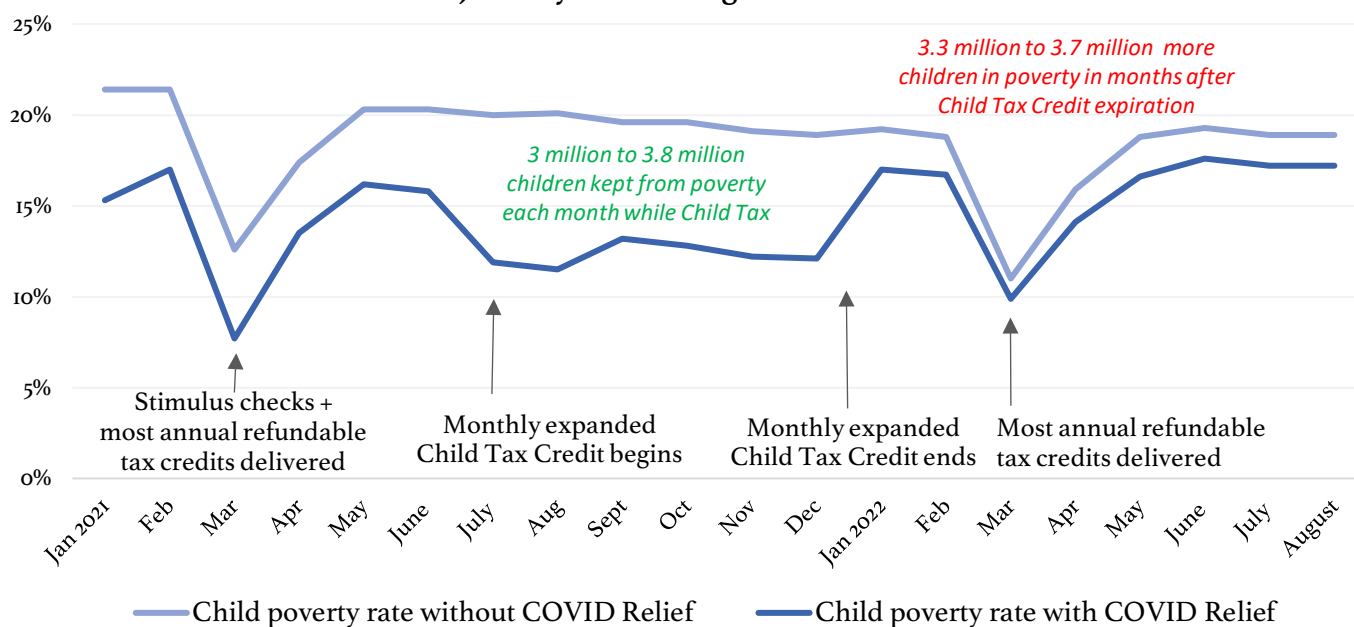
The expanded Child Tax Credit also improved how the US fares internationally in terms of child poverty. Looking across 34 peer countries within the Organization for Economic and Co-operative Development (OECD), the US has had one of the highest rates of child poverty in recent years, ranking 31 of 34 countries. With the expanded Child Tax Credit—and the accompanying significant drop in child poverty—the US would move up to 24 on the 34-country list, making meaningful progress towards the mainstream of high-income countries (Collyer et al 2022b).

### Child poverty rose quickly in 2022 after monthly Child Tax Credit expired

The expiration of the monthly payments at the end of 2021, however, is likely to result in higher annual child poverty rates for 2022. This will be confirmed when the Census Bureau releases the 2022 annual poverty information in fall 2023. Figure 5 displays monthly poverty trends from 2021 through mid-2022 and indicates the erasure of gains made. With the expiration of the expanded monthly Child Tax Credit payments in the new year, January 2022 saw 3.7 million more children below the poverty line compared to December and child poverty remained elevated in February (Parolin, Collyer, Curran 2022a). Following the end of the monthly Child Tax Credit payments, one in four Black children were in poverty, an increase of 600,000 more Black children from December 2021 (a 28 percent rise). From December 2021 to February 2022, Latino children saw a 40 percent increase in child poverty—equal to 1.25 million additional Latino children below the monthly poverty line. 200,000 more Asian children were pushed into poverty over the same period, a 37 percent rise (Parolin, Collyer, Curran 2022b).



**Figure 5. Impact of the expanded monthly Child Tax Credit on monthly child poverty, January 2021 to August 2022**



Source: Center on Poverty and Social Policy, [Monthly Poverty Data 2022](#).

In a monthly poverty framework, poverty rates often temporarily decline during the tax season when families file for and receive their annual tax refunds, including important tax credit payments. Because these funds are delivered in one-time, lump-sum payments, they contribute to large reductions in poverty in the months they are delivered (Parolin et al 2022). The impact of annual tax refunds on monthly poverty is evident in Figure 5, where March 2021 and March 2022 saw the lowest poverty rates in each year. Delivery of the second half of the Child Tax Credit, alongside other family tax credits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit<sup>19</sup>, resulted in a substantial, but temporary, dips in monthly poverty rates for the US population as a whole and for children specifically in March and April of 2022. The May 2022 child poverty rate spiked back to a high level akin to January and February following the expiration of the monthly Child Tax Credit payments and 3.3 million more children lived in poverty in May 2022 compared to December 2021 (CPSP 2022). Child poverty remained elevated through the summer. Absent the continuation of an expanded Child Tax Credit, further policy interventions, or strong improvements in the labor market, it is likely that monthly child poverty rates could be persistently high through the rest of 2022.

<sup>19</sup> These results do not account for the refundable portion included as part of the American Rescue Plan expansion of the expanded Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC) due to limitations on recent data on child care spending; see Parolin, Collyer, & Curran (2022c).

## Understanding Monthly vs. Annual Poverty

Monthly poverty and annual poverty frameworks are not directly comparable, but it is useful to identify a few additional factors why the monthly reduction in child poverty attributable to the Child Tax Credit did not match the 40 percent or more reduction estimated annually.

As noted earlier, the 40 to 45 percent reduction in child poverty estimate is modeled on the assumption that all eligible children receive the benefit. Available data suggests, though, that the rollout of the monthly Child Tax Credit payments did not achieve full take-up. Anti-poverty effects can increase further as program coverage increases, with the greatest gains to be realized for Black and Latino children (Parolin et al 2021b). In addition, the original annual estimates of the Child Tax Credit's anti-poverty potential were based on pre-pandemic data; these original pre-pandemic estimates did not account for the significant infusion of other forms of economic relief in 2021, including stimulus checks, expanded unemployment benefits, and a series of temporary and permanent increases to the SNAP program—all of which combine to alter the continuously changing baseline monthly poverty rate against which the impact of the Child Tax Credit as a standalone policy is assessed.

Finally, because an annual framework captures the accumulation of different elements of the tax and transfer system available throughout the year, it can potentially see bigger annual reductions in poverty than are available within the framework of any given month. For example, Parolin et al (2020) demonstrate how a monthly poverty framework shows significant monthly poverty reductions around tax-time each year, primarily due to large lump-sum payments of the Earned Income Tax Credit (and the annual Child Tax Credit prior to the introduction of the monthly payments from July 2021). Because these payments arrive once a year, they do not feature as 'incoming monthly resources' in other months. In an annual framework, though, these types of once-off payments work alongside elements such as the advance monthly Child Tax Credit payments and anti-poverty effects can be stronger. As Parolin et al (2021b:8) note, a "focus on monthly poverty may, in most months, understate the poverty reduction effect of the CTC compared to its effect on annual poverty".

The official US Census release of the Current Population Survey data in autumn 2022 revealed a more comprehensive annual picture of family income and poverty in 2021 and adds to our understanding of the annual policy effects in its real-world environment, amidst the continuing pandemic and other cash relief changes.

## EXPENDITURES: Families spent monthly Child Tax Credit on food and basic needs

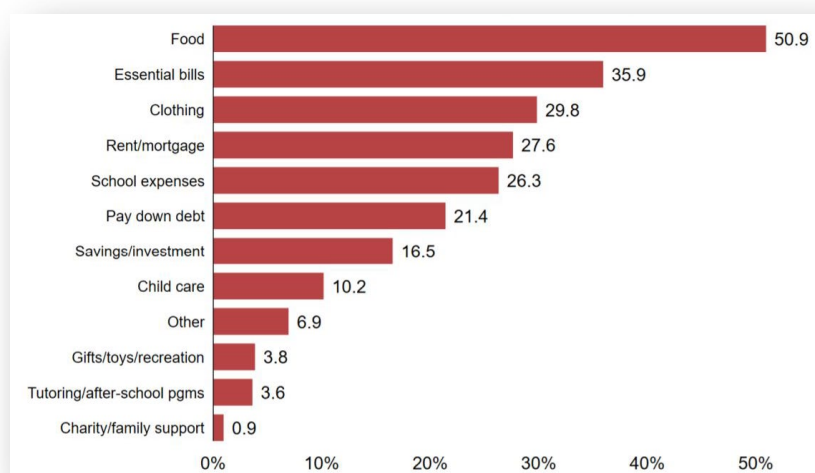
### What We Knew After 6 Months

Studies show the vast majority (anywhere from two-thirds to three-quarters) of families reported spending, rather than saving, the monthly Child Tax Credit payments. US Census Household Pulse data around the initial payments saw roughly three out of four families spent their Child Tax Credit payments, with the rest saving at least a portion (Roll et al 2021).

A majority of families reported the monthly payments were an important support for day-to-day expenses, with the share of families who believed so growing over time. A September 2021 national survey by the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) found close to two-thirds (62 percent) of families across all income levels said the Child Tax Credit was ‘somewhat important or very important’ for meeting day-to-day expenses (Rachidi 2021). A clear majority of families with incomes up to \$100,000 identified it as a key day-to-day support, with low and moderate income families reporting so at even greater rates (e.g. 82 percent of families below \$30,000; 72 percent of families \$30,000 to \$60,000.) A December 2021 NPR/Marist (2021:12) national poll saw almost 80 percent of families who received the credit confirm it helped their families.

Research revealed that families reported spending the payments on basic household needs and children's essentials: the most common item was food. Figure 6 identifies the most common set of Child Tax Credit-related expenditures nationwide, by household income. Food topped the list across income levels. A state-by-state analysis conducted after the first two payments in July and August 2021 revealed food also topped the list in every state (bar Mississippi, where school essentials and food essentially tied for number one<sup>20</sup>) (Roll et al 2021b). These results held steady over time; by the end of September 2021, 70 percent of families spent the Child Tax Credit, with food still the most common use across all income groups (Karpman et al 2021)<sup>21</sup>.

**Figure 6. Most common uses of the first two expanded Child Tax Credit payments**



Reproduced, with permission, from [Roll et al \(2021\), p.1](#); based on analysis of US Census Household Pulse data from July 21 to August 16, 2021 of Child Tax Credit-eligible parents with annual incomes of \$150,000 or less.

<sup>20</sup> This may be a reflection of the earlier school year start in Mississippi compared to other states.

<sup>21</sup> Hamilton et al (2022) found consistent results in their Social Policy Institute Child Tax Credit Panel Survey: as of December 2021, 70 percent of respondents mostly spent their monthly payments (17 percent of whom spent them to pay down debt) and 30 percent of respondents mostly saved them.

Overall, reported Child Tax Credit expenditures fell into a central set of categories: food and essential bills; debt; children’s clothing; school and child care; and savings. The degree to which spending was spread across these areas varied by income level, age of children in the household, and seasonality (e.g. back to school time).

The particular importance that low- and moderate-income families placed on using the monthly Child Tax Credit payments to meet basic needs is reflected in available self-reported expenditure patterns. US Census Household Pulse data from July, August, and September 2021 saw 91 percent of families with incomes of \$35,000 or less report they spent their Child Tax Credit on basic household needs—specifically: food, utilities, housing, clothing, and school costs (Zippel 2021). The most common use of Child Tax Credit payments reported among SNAP recipients—by definition, a low-income population—was essential bills (Pilkauskas & Michelmore 2021).

For families with school-age children, the July and August Child Tax Credit payments coincided with back-to-school season. The US Census Pulse saw an increased likelihood of Child Tax Credit spending on school costs and children’s clothing in late August and early September 2021, with trends particularly pronounced among Black and Latino families. Families with younger children increased their use of the Child Tax Credit on child care spending at the same time (Perez-Lopez & Mayol-García 2021). Household financial data from Mastercard—reflecting data on actual financial transactions, not self-reports—further confirmed that the initial Child Tax Credit payments drove notable increases in parents’ back-to-school retail spending, with apparel and department store purchases seeing the greatest activity in immediate period following payment receipt (Mastercard 2021). Back to school spending was also a clear trend among low- and moderate-income families in receipt of SNAP (Pilkauskas & Cooney 2021). These patterns are consistent with the evidence from other countries (e.g. United Kingdom and Canada) who expanded child-related income benefits in recent decades and, as a result, saw increased spending on child-related items (Gregg, Waldfogel, Washbrook 2006; Jones, Milligan, & Stabile 2015; Hammond & Xu 2021).

While parents were more likely to spend the monthly Child Tax Credit overall, many families—between one-quarter and one-third of families across all income levels—also saved at least a portion. US Census Household Pulse data indicates approximately one in four families saved at least a portion of their initial payments (Roll et al 2021). Families with higher incomes were more likely to save at least some of the Child Tax Credit than were families with low or moderate incomes, though many higher-income families still spent the Child Tax Credit each month. The American Enterprise Institute found that 50 percent of higher-income families<sup>22</sup> spent the monthly payments on household and/or children’s items or on household debt (Rachidi 2021) and just under half of higher-income families<sup>23</sup> with young children spent the Child Tax Credit regularly on unpaid bills and other essentials, including child care (RAPID-EC 2021c).

Savings activity may have also reflected family uncertainty over the permanence of the program. Eighty-nine percent of low- and moderate-income members<sup>24</sup> of the non-profit-run savings network, SaverLife (2021d), said they knew the expanded Child Tax Credit was temporary and the majority reported that knowing this impacted how they planned to use the money. Among this group—admittedly, one that by its nature is comprised of savings-minded individuals—‘saving for emergencies’ emerged as the second most common use of the Child Tax Credit. By August 2021,

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<sup>22</sup> Here: annual incomes of \$100,000 or more.

<sup>23</sup> Here: with incomes over 400 percent of the federal poverty line.

<sup>24</sup> Here: with average annual incomes between \$25,000 and \$35,000.

savings network members who received the Child Tax Credit were 33 percent more likely to increase their savings by \$100 and 18 percent less likely to significantly reduce their savings levels compared to trends a year prior in August 2020 (SaverLife 2021c). The JPMorgan Chase Institute (2021) notes, citing Ganong et al (2020) and others, that increasing families' ability to save is particularly beneficial for Black and Latino families with low and moderate incomes, as they often have fewer alternative assets to draw upon in times of financial need compared to their low-income White peers.

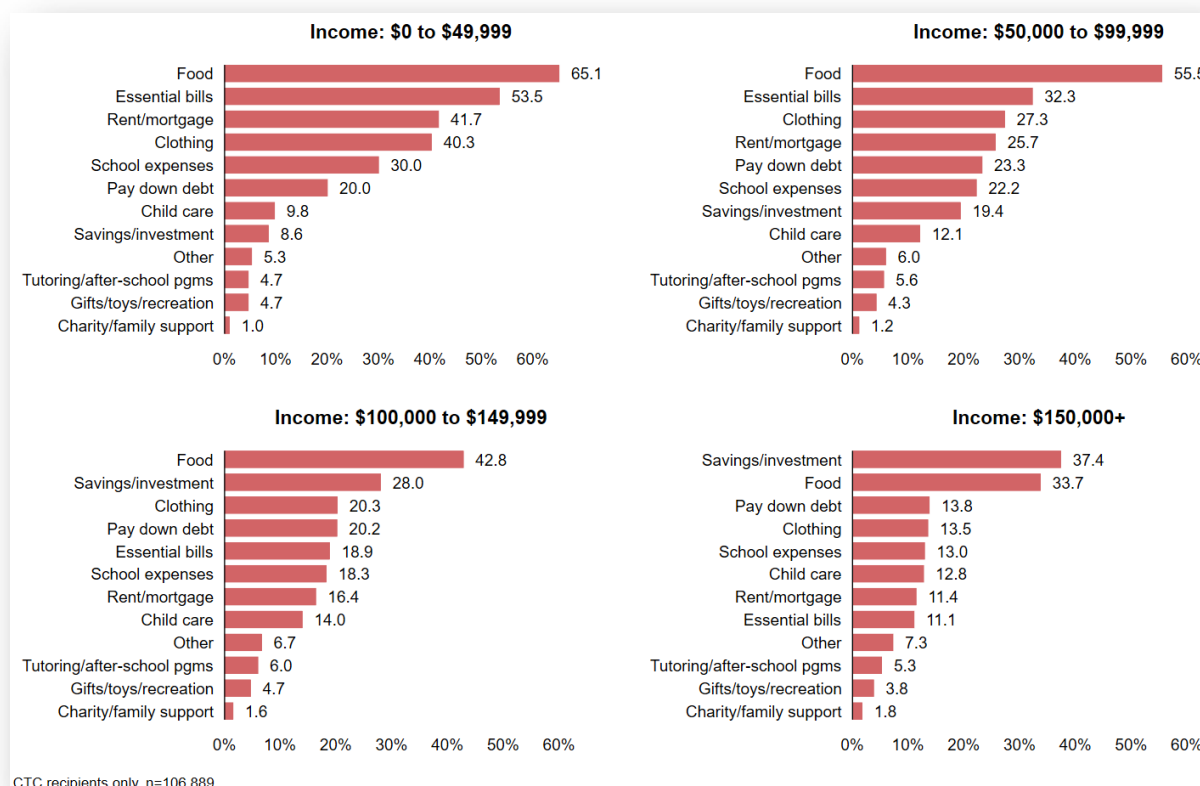
### *Expenditures Research Update: One Year On*

Subsequent analyses of expenditure patterns further confirmed that families, on balance, were more likely to spend than save the monthly payments and further emphasized the particular importance that low- and moderate-income families placed on using the monthly Child Tax Credit payments to meet their basic needs.

A Columbia University Center on Poverty and Social Policy analysis of Census Household Pulse survey data from April 2021 to May 2022 found households below \$100,000 were more likely to report spending the monthly payments on goods and services or to pay down debt than to save it, though a portion of all families also reported saving at least some of the monthly Child Tax Credit (Parolin et al 2022d). A large-scale study of anonymized bank card and credit card data for 1 million Americans—representing financial transaction data, not self-reports—of the three months prior to the monthly payment rollout (April to June 2021) versus the first three months of monthly Child Tax Credit payments (July to September 2021) saw total consumption increase for those who received the payments. Specific increases were seen in essential spending on groceries, education, and healthcare (Lourie et al 2022). These positive consumption effects were most notable among families with lower incomes and families with more children. Survey data of SNAP-recipient households on very low incomes also show that these families spent much of their monthly payments on 'immediate expenses' (Pilkauskas et al 2022).

Early patterns of the most common types of expenditures—most notably, food spending—were also consistent with results from analyses of data after the conclusion of all six monthly payments. Figure 7 confirms that by the last payment in December 2021, food remained the number one way families with incomes under \$150,000 nationwide used their monthly Child Tax Credit (Roll, Hamilton, Chun 2022b). Furthermore, they find that even for families above \$150,000, food remained the second most common Child Tax Credit expenditure.

Figure 7. Most common uses of monthly Child Tax Credit payments, by income



Reproduced with permission from [Roll, Hamilton, Chun \(2022b\), Figure A3, p.4;](#) based on analysis of US Household Census Pulse data.

### Families struggle to meet basic needs after monthly Child Tax Credit expired

Once the monthly payments expired, the ability of families to meet their basic needs worsened. By February 2022, the Census Bureau reported more households with children having difficulty covering usual household expenses. Households struggling the most in 2022 were those most likely to have spent their Child Tax Credit on basic needs in 2021. Nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of families with children who reported difficulty with their bills in early 2022 had spent their Child Tax Credit on housing or utilities in late 2021; just 37 percent of those who did not report financial difficulty in early 2022 had spent their payments on those items (Giefer 2022).

A July 2022 national survey of households with children under \$75,000 reported families facing similar levels of difficulty (Burnside et al 2022). 60 percent of parents who received the Child Tax Credit found it more difficult to meet expenses without the payments—two-thirds of this group could not afford food and groceries or cover usual bills and were visiting food banks or pantries more frequently. Approximately half of this group found it difficult to afford necessary clothing or cover housing costs. Researchers found that Hispanic respondents, disabled respondents, parents who have never been married, and respondents with lower incomes were more likely to report these difficulties. As of September 2022, the nationally representative US Census Household Pulse Survey reported 40 percent of Americans had difficulty in meeting their usual expenses (Census 2022)—the highest proportion in the past two years of the survey.



## FOOD SECURITY: Monthly Child Tax Credit reduced food insufficiency

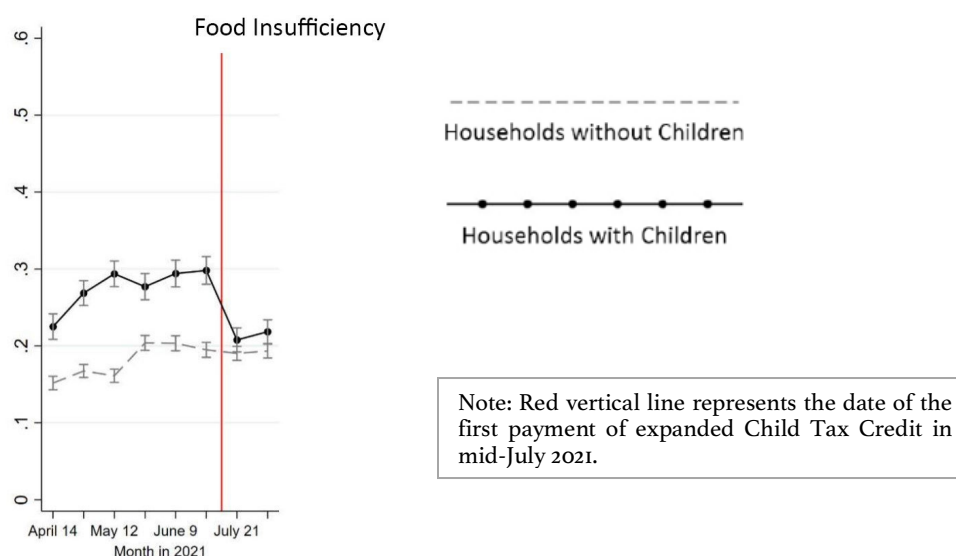
### What We Knew After 6 Months

Families spent the Child Tax Credit first and foremost on food and the monthly payments moved the needle on food insufficiency. Food became a defining feature of the pandemic from the start. Family food needs escalated quickly amidst widespread job losses and school and child care closures where children are often fed (Feeding America 2021). Families waiting hours in food bank lines became commonplace in the news (Kulish 2020). Food insufficiency is a measure of whether a household has enough to eat, usually within the last week or two; it is a ‘more severe condition’ than food insecurity, which is a broader term capturing worry about food running out, as well as the quality and quantity of food available (USDA 2021). Following the July 2021 rollout of the expanded Child Tax Credit, family food insufficiency—particularly among children in families with low and moderate incomes—saw meaningful reductions.

Food insufficiency rates for families with children dropped following the first Child Tax Credit payment. During the pandemic, households with children consistently experienced higher rates of food insufficiency than those without. But following receipt of the July payment, food insufficiency rates among families with children dropped by 24 percent (from a rate of 11 percent—or just over 1 in 10 households—to 8.4 percent, a three percentage point reduction) (Perez-Lopez 2021). Households without children saw no change over the same period.

After two months of payments, the “number of households without enough to eat dropped by 3 million or nearly one-third”—with 3.3 million fewer adults reporting that their households did not have enough to eat and 2 million fewer adults reporting that their children, specifically, did not have enough to eat (Marr, Cox, & Sherman 2021). The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities notes the important reductions for Black and Latino families, who experience food hardship at twice the rate of White families.

**Figure 8. Food insufficiency trends for low-income households with and without children, before and after the Child Tax Credit rollout**



Reproduced, with permission, from [Parolin et al \(2021c\)](#), p.14;  
US Census Household Pulse sample limited to households with 2019 pre-tax income under \$35,000.

These descriptive trends were further bolstered by results of econometric analyses available in fall 2021 of the US Census Household Pulse data. Holding all other family circumstances constant, the Columbia Center on Poverty and Social Policy confirmed, as seen in Figure 8, that the initial Child Tax Credit payments were responsible for the post-July 2021 downward trends in food insufficiency rates among families with children, with the strongest policy effects concentrated among families with incomes below \$35,000. Specifically, the initial payments led to a 7.5 percentage point (25 percent) decline in food insufficiency among low-income households with children. The Child Tax Credit rollout was also found to be largely effective at reducing food insufficiency among low-income Black, Latino, and White children alike. Columbia also notes—similar to income poverty—that increasing coverage of the Child Tax Credit to more eligible children is necessary to see further reductions in both food insufficiency and other forms of material hardship (e.g. financial stress or housing) (Parolin et al 2021c).

### *Food Security Research Update: One Year On*

The early reported gains in food security were later reflected in the US Department of Agriculture’s annual household food security report for 2021, which showed a decline in food insecurity from 2020 for children, households with children (including those under age 6), Black households, all households with low and moderate incomes below 185 percent of the federal poverty threshold, and households in the South (Coleman-Jensen et al 2022). It is important to note that over the entire course of 2021, there were additional food assistance expansions in place that likely also contributed to the annual figures—including, Pandemic EBT (P-EBT), SNAP emergency allotments, an across-the-board SNAP benefit increase, and more.

At the same time, evidence indicates that the expanded Child Tax Credit played an important role. An Urban Institute study following the same adults from December 2020 to December 2021 saw families who received the monthly payments report larger declines in household food insecurity than those who did not receive the payments, even after accounting for differences in the characteristics between the two groups. Reductions in food insecurity were particularly concentrated among families with low- and moderate-incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (Karpman et al 2022). A Brookings Institute report with results from a survey just after the final December 2021 payment was delivered saw Child Tax Credit-eligible households not only report improved food security, but also changes in their food consumption towards increased healthy eating. Child Tax Credit-eligible households were 1.3 times more likely to eat more fruit, 1.5 times more likely to eat more meat and protein, and 1.4 times more likely to better afford balanced meals, compared to non-eligible counterparts (Hamilton et al 2022).

In an econometric analysis of Census Household Pulse survey data, Children’s HealthWatch further confirmed that, holding all other family circumstances constant, the first round of monthly payments were associated with a significant drop in food insufficiency among households with children nationwide: a reduction of 26 percent (Shafer et al 2022). Columbia Center on Poverty and Social Policy extended their initial econometric analysis of Pulse survey data and found that, once all six Child Tax Credit payments were accounted for, this reduction held over the entire period the monthly payments were in place: all the payments together reduced food insufficiency among all families with children by at least 19 percent, with the effect being potentially as high as a 32 percent decline in food hardship among families with children who reported payment receipt (Parolin et al 2022d).

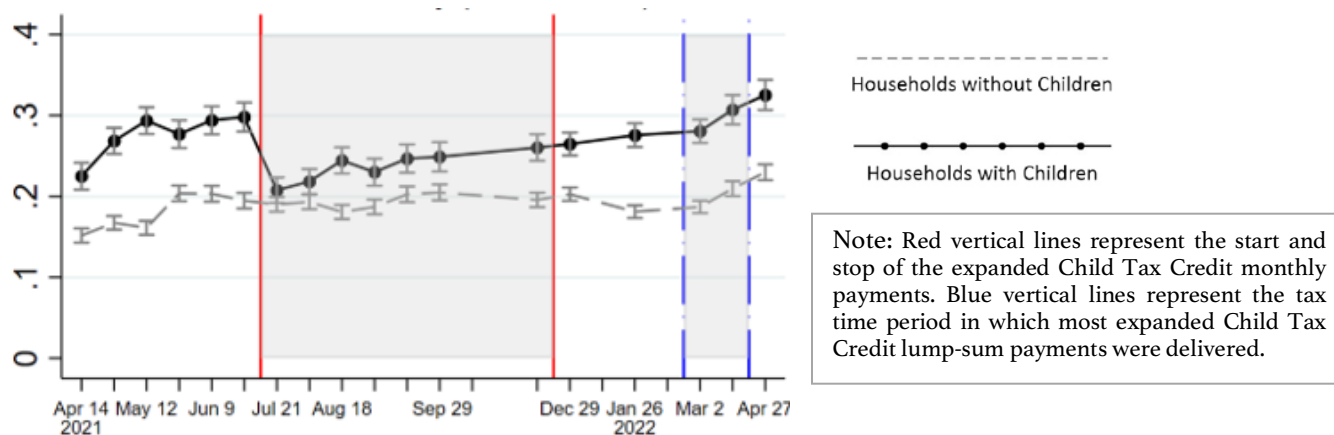
University of Michigan researchers, in partnership with Propel, also used a causal methodological approach to provide further corroboration of these findings. They identified strong effects specifically among families with very low incomes. Looking at a sample of mostly women with children with incomes below \$24,000 who receive SNAP, a \$500 monthly Child Tax Credit (akin to a credit value for a two-child family) was associated with a 32 percent decline in food insecurity (Pilkauskas et al 2022).

In-depth interviews with families in a select set of cities (here: Boston, Philadelphia, Little Rock, and Minneapolis) conducted by Children’s HealthWatch between September 2021 and February 2022 reinforce national findings: families who received the monthly Child Tax Credit payments reported higher levels of family food security and better parental health than families who did not (Bovell-Ammon et al 2022a). Collyer et al (2022), analyzing a sample of New York City residents from the longitudinal New York City Poverty Tracker and Early Childhood Poverty Tracker studies, also saw families with children experience meaningful reductions in reporting any type of material hardship (including food insufficiency and use of food pantries), with even greater reductions for families with children in poverty while the monthly payments were in place. The Poverty Tracker study also employed a causal methodology to identify the specific effect of the payments on each indicator, finding “moderately significant reductions in food and utilities hardship” among New York City families with children (Collyer et al 2022:26) and a significant decline in both the overall need, and the intensity of need, for emergency food assistance—revealing that each additional \$100 in Child Tax Credit payments were associated with a 10 percent reduction in overall food pantry use and a 20 percent reduction in frequent food pantry use among New York City families with children; similar to Pilkauskas et al (2022), they found even larger effects for families living in poverty.

### Food hardship rose after monthly Child Tax Credit expired

When the monthly Child Tax Credit expired, however, much of these gains were lost. Similar to the rise in monthly poverty following the expiration of the monthly Child Tax Credit payments, early 2022 saw a rise in food hardship. In the immediate aftermath of the expiration, as seen in Figure 9, it was now families with children who saw food hardship rates rise; by contrast, their childless counterparts saw slight declines over the same period (Parolin et al 2022).

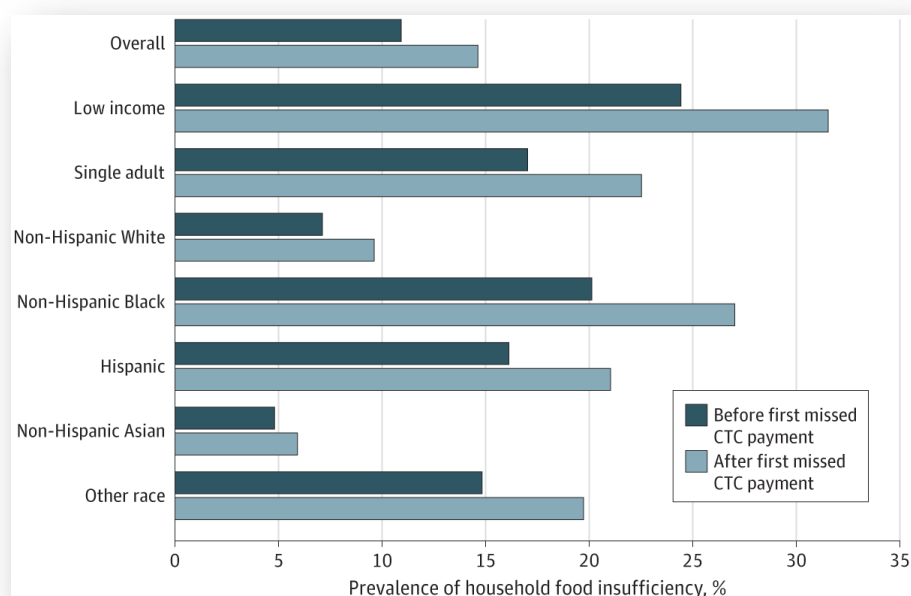
**Figure 9. Food insufficiency trends for low-income households with and without children before and after the Child Tax Credit expiration**



Reproduced, with permission, from [Parolin et al \(2022\)](#), Figure 1; US Census Household Pulse sample limited to households with 2019 pre-tax income under \$35,000.

Children’s HealthWatch, examining Census Household Pulse data, had previously found that the monthly Child Tax Credit payments had been associated with an early reduction of food insufficiency of 26 percent among households with children (Shaefer et al 2022). As of February 2022, they found that family food insufficiency rates were up 12 percent compared to the end of 2021 (Bovell-Ammon et al 2022b). By July 2022, they found that families with children had food insufficiency rates that were 25 percent higher than the period just after the final monthly payment ended (Bovell-Ammon et al 2022d). In terms of comparing to households without children, the increase over time was a statistically meaningful difference from April 2022 onwards. Children’s HealthWatch also found that families with incomes below \$35,000, families headed by a single parent, as well as Black and Hispanic households saw the greatest increases in food insufficiency after the monthly payment expiration compared to other groups, as seen in Figure 10.

**Figure 10. Unadjusted food insufficiency before and after missed Child Tax Credit (CTC) payments among households with children, by subgroup**



Reproduced, with permission, from [Bovell-Ammon et al \(2022b\)](#), Figure 2.

Notes: Unadjusted Food Insufficiency Before and After Missed Child Tax Credit (CTC) Payments Among Households With Children by Subgroup. Unadjusted food insufficiency prevalence for the period before the first missed advance CTC payment (July 21, 2021 through January 10, 2022) is shown in dark blue. Unadjusted food insufficiency prevalence for the period after the first missed CTC payment (January 26 through July 11, 2022) is shown in light blue. Results are shown for the entire sample, for low-income households (defined as an annual household income <\$35,000), single-adult households, and non-Hispanic White, Hispanic, non-Hispanic Black, non-Hispanic Asian, and another race ethnicity respondent subgroups.

These causal studies provide evidence that food hardship increased in the absence of the monthly Child Tax Credit payments; in smaller survey, families provide further confirmation of this pattern. A late April 2022 survey of 500 parents by the non-profit parent advocacy group ParentsTogether (2022) saw almost half of respondents (48 percent) could no longer afford enough food for their family. Almost half (45 percent) of those now finding it difficult to afford food were skipping meals to make sure children are fed and approximately two-thirds (65 percent) reported having to change

food they purchase – specifically, fewer fruits and vegetables. A July 2022 national survey of parents with low and moderate incomes (all below \$75,000) led by CLASP et al (2022) provides a descriptive account of increased food hardship following the end of the monthly payments. Food hardship was particularly pronounced among those with the lowest incomes (over half of respondents with \$25,000 or less reported increased difficulties), those headed by a parent with less than a bachelor’s degree, and Hispanic parents (half of Hispanic respondents reported difficulty, compared to 39 percent of White respondents and 34 percent of Black respondents). Families who had previously received the Child Tax Credit now faced difficulty in affording enough or higher quality foods and increased the frequency of their visits to food banks or pantries (Burnside, Fuller, & Zhang 2022).

Adding to these pressures, food prices have increased sharply since 2021. The US Department of Agriculture predicts food-at-home prices to increase anywhere from 10 to 11 percent in 2022 (versus the 2021 increase of 3.5 percent) and food-away-from-home to increase between 6.5 and 7.5 percent (versus the 2021 increase of 4.5 percent) (USDA 2022). Post-expiration of the monthly payments, 70 percent of Child Tax Credit recipients in a Brookings survey who reported negative effects on their households from inflation said that the expanded Child Tax Credit, while in place, had “helped them to better manage higher prices” (Hamilton et al 2022:4).

## **FINANCIAL HARDSHIP: Monthly payments may have reduced financial hardship**

### *What We Knew After 6 Months*

The connection between the monthly Child Tax Credit and family financial hardship more broadly was still developing and less definitive in the evidence available after just six months compared to the more immediate causal effects seen with food. Studies have taken different approaches to assessing impacts on financial hardship: some surveys sought to assess the ability of families to meet their financial obligations (e.g., regular bills and expenses), while others asked families about financial stress (e.g., being worried about money or covering usual bills). Though the early evidence base in this domain was less conclusive, available studies suggested that the expanded Child Tax Credit may have been reducing more general financial hardships in addition to domain-specific hardships like food insecurity.

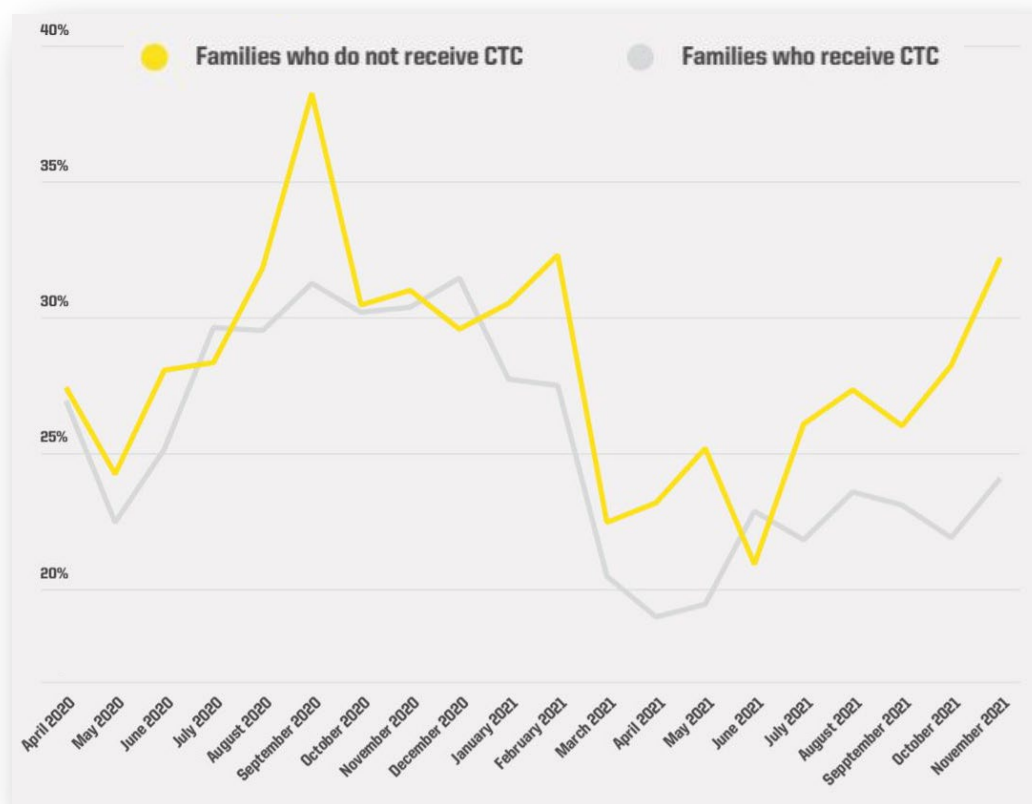
An econometric analysis by the Columbia University Center on Poverty and Social Policy found that the initial effects of the monthly payments on families' difficulties with expenses were smaller in magnitude than the effects of the payments on food insufficiency. Parolin et al (2021c:7) hypothesize that this may be because families spent the early payments first and foremost on food and that "measures of subjective wellbeing [may be] be more sensitive to continued receipt of monthly payments than to just the initial payments". In other words, we may see more immediate effects of monthly payments on families' abilities to afford smaller items such as food, but broader economic stability may take longer to achieve.

Descriptive trends do suggest a link between the Child Tax Credit and reduced family financial hardship—both in terms of being able to meet expenses and being worried about doing so. The Census Bureau reported that, beginning with the first monthly Child Tax Credit payment in July 2021, households with children were better able to cover their regular expenses. By early August, the proportion of families with children reporting it was 'somewhat or very difficult' to pay their usual household expenses in the prior week—as reported by the US Census Household Pulse—had declined by 2.5 percentage points, or 8 percent, while rates among households without children increased slightly over the same period (Perez-Lopez 2021). A mid-fall 2021 nationally representative survey of Child Tax Credit-eligible families with children on middle and low incomes (here: \$75,000 or less) from CLASP et al (2022) saw nearly 70 percent of recipient families report that the monthly payments "made them a lot or a little less stressed about money" (Burnside 2021). While descriptive, such evidence suggests that the monthly credit payments may also have the potential to alleviate financial hardship and stress beyond just food insecurity.

The RAPID-EC (2021c) survey reported that material hardship increased less among families with young children who received Child Tax Credit payments, relative to families with young children who did not. These early descriptive trends, as seen in Figure 11, indicate that there could be merit—particularly in light of the increased benefit value for young children under age 6—in further examining what kind of role that they monthly payments may have played in reducing or preventing increases in financial hardship within certain population groups.



**Figure II. Material hardship trends among families with children who did and did not receive the expanded Child Tax Credit**



Reproduced, with permission, from [RAPID-EC \(2012c\); p4.](#)

Surveys of low-income families with children also provided early indications that the nature of the relationship between the monthly payments and broader financial hardship is worth exploring. In a sample of SNAP recipients, data showed that once the monthly payments began, three-quarters of SNAP-recipient parents reported spending at least a portion on bills, including to prevent utility shutoffs and evictions/foreclosures. Almost all (94 percent) reported the payments as very important for meeting basic needs (Pilkauskas & Cooney 2021). Families on SNAP who received the Child Tax Credit reported that they were “more likely to think they would be able to stay in their current housing for the next 30 days; less likely to have been evicted; less likely to have slept in a shelter in the past 30 days; less likely to have under \$25 on hand; and more likely to report having everything they need in their homes” (Propel 2021). While limited to a sample of SNAP recipients, these survey results suggest potentially important short-term gains for these economically vulnerable families in meeting routine expenses beyond just food.

For many families with children, however, their debt and financial hardship was much larger than the monthly Child Tax Credit value—making it difficult to move broader financial hardship rates in the short term, particularly for families with low and moderate income, through the credit alone. In the second half of 2021, 13 percent of SNAP-recipient households with children in the Propel survey still reported utility shutoffs and 72 percent of parents still owed money towards utilities and

other essential bills (with close to one-third owing \$500 or more). As of September 2021, half of households in the SNAP survey were unable to meet their rental payments on time. Rent arrears often totaled a much larger sum than the typical monthly Child Tax Credit—families behind on housing payments owed, on average, \$3,300 as of June 2021, with families in high-cost areas or extreme arrears owing much more (Aurand & Threet 2021).

### *Financial Hardship Research Update: One Year On*

Evidence on the credit's impacts on general financial hardship remains circumscribed. Descriptive studies suggest families reported increased available funds, increased ability to meet expenses, and decreased worry about finances while the monthly payments were in place, but a reversal in these trends once the payments expired. Available causal evidence—in other words, studies establishing more direct links between the monthly payments and these outcomes—points towards the payments as a driver of these trends among certain population groups (here: families with low incomes receiving SNAP or families in certain geographic areas), but our understanding of how these results compare to the broader population remains more limited.

Despite these limitations, there are indications of a link between the expanded Child Tax Credit and reduced or mitigated financial hardship among the broader population. For example, a survey of families receiving the last monthly payment revealed that, compared to non-eligible households, Child Tax Credit-eligible households nationwide saw declines in credit card debt and reliance on high-cost financial services (e.g., payday loans, pawn shops, selling blood plasma), increased their 'rainy day' funds and ability to cover emergency expenses, and saw meaningful reductions in eviction (Hamilton et al., 2022). A large-scale analysis of debit and credit card expenditures (a study based on transaction data, not self-reports) found that Child Tax Credit recipients also improved their finances when the monthly payments were in place through increased payments towards debt and reductions in overdraft fees (Lourie et al., 2022).

Results from studies of particular population groups have offered some of the most specific information to date. University of Michigan analysis of Propel data on low-income SNAP-recipient families noted a majority of families self-reported that they spent the monthly payments on immediate expenses; as such, researchers anticipated corresponding reductions in material hardship (Pilkauskas et al 2022). In their causal analysis, Pilkauskas et al (2022) found that an average monthly payment of \$500 reduced the total hardships families experienced by 17 percent. This was largely driven by reductions in food insufficiency, but there was also “some evidence that the expansions led to reductions in medical hardship, reduced inability to pay utility bills, and reduced the need to rely on friends and family for food” (Pilkauskas et al 2022:3).

Collyer et al's (2022) analysis of the effect of the monthly Child Tax Credit among New York City families with children, provides additional evidence on this point. After the monthly payments began in mid-2021, rates of material hardship declined for families with children, while families without children saw no change. Econometric difference-in-difference analyses further showed that the monthly Child Tax Credit payments led to substantial reductions in financial hardship, as measured by whether or not a household ran out of money by the end of the month, buttressing findings from the Michigan SNAP study.

## **Emerging themes from the expanded Child Tax Credit:**

### *Financial stress and mental and physical health*

Related to—but also independent of—financial hardship, financial stress and stress in the context of broader mental and physical health, also represent areas with early indications of an expanded Child Tax Credit effect.

Descriptive reports featuring the voices of parents themselves all point towards the monthly payments as a source of reduced stress while in place. An October 2021 national survey of Child Tax Credit-eligible families with children with incomes below \$75,000 found that families of color were more likely to report reduced stress with receipt of the Child Tax Credit than White families (CLASP et al 2022). Families with incomes between \$10,000 and \$25,000 were the most likely to report the Child Tax Credit reduced their financial stress compared to other income groups.<sup>1</sup>

Results from more localized studies mirror available descriptive national trends. Families in New York City described monthly Child Tax Credit payments as a “game-changer”, a “blessing”, and a “big relief”. As one respondent put it: “[t]he whole time I was getting it, honestly it made such a big relief because I was able to get caught up...just a little breathing room. Not so stressed” (Lens et al 2022:9).

Interviews with families in Arkansas, Massachusetts, and Minnesota emphasized how the Child Tax Credit reduced their worry and helped them cover their bills, including rent arrears from earlier in the pandemic (Bovell-Ammon et al 2022c). The most common response in surveys with caregivers in Michigan, Mississippi, and North Carolina was that the Child Tax Credit: “helped reduce my financial stress”, followed by “helped reduced my stress or anxiety overall”, “allowed me to be more effective and supportive as a parent”, and “helped reduce the stress of my children” (Kaverman, Minoff, & Kashen 2022:12; Kaverman & Minoff 2022:13, 2022a). Similar to national trends, Black and Latinx or Hispanic families and families with incomes less than \$35,000 in these areas were the groups most likely to report feeling ‘a lot’ less stressed (Kaverman, Minoff, & Kashen 2022:12).

A more causal investigation of whether or not the monthly payments moved the needle on the subjective well-being and mental health of adults in Child Tax Credit recipient households, using data from the nationally representative Understanding America Study through December 2021, did not find evidence that the payments had a significant short-term impact on indicators related to life satisfaction, anxiety, or depression. The researchers identify the temporary nature of the monthly payments (in place for just six months) as a likely reason for its limited impact in this area to date (Glasner et al 2022).

Early evidence suggests that reductions in financial stress may have the potential to positively impact family health more broadly. Survey data from Children’s HealthWatch provides one indication that the monthly payments may have helped to decrease the risk of parents experiencing anxiety and depressive symptoms; they also found that parents who received the monthly Child Tax Credit for their children were 1.3 times more likely to be in excellent or good health compared to those who did not (Bovell-Ammon 2022c). Recent research has revealed connections between tax credit receipt and reduced risk of child abuse. Looking at pre-pandemic data, Kovski et al (2022:1) found that Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit payments were associated with “immediate reductions in child maltreatment reporting” at the state level; this is an area of research interest for the expanded Child Tax Credit.

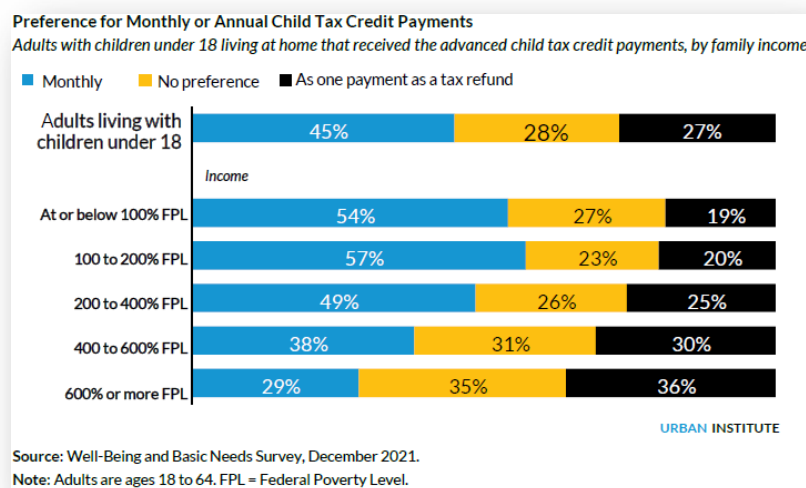
## PAYMENT TYPE: Families used the monthly payments and lump-sum payment differently

### *Payment Type Research Findings: One Year On*

A unique feature of the 2021 expanded Child Tax Credit was its hybrid delivery structure. For the vast majority of recipients, half the value of the total credit was delivered across six monthly payments from July to December 2021 and the remaining half delivered in a single lump-sum payment at tax time in spring 2022.<sup>25</sup> A monthly payment system marked a real shift in approach for tax credit delivery, which traditionally follow an annual schedule. Early evidence indicates that this shift in delivery corresponded with a shift in how families thought of and utilized the credit. These payment and usage changes, in turn, produced different results.

As noted earlier, most families spent at least a portion of the credit each month. From the first payment, the advance Child Tax Credit became an important contributor to regular household expenses, e.g., food, utilities, housing, clothing, child care, and more (Roll, Hamilton, Chun 2022b; Hamilton et al 2022). In doing so, the payments quickly became an integral part of monthly household budgets in a way that set them apart from the more traditional annual tax refund. Available evidence indicates that a sizable portion of parents preferred this new approach.

**Figure 12. Self-reported preference for Child Tax Credit payment type: monthly vs. annual**



Reproduced, with permission, from [Maag and Karpman \(2022\)](#), Figure 1.

A Brookings report saw two-thirds (63 percent) of Child Tax Credit-eligible families confirm that monthly payments made it easier to budget, compared to the lump-sum annual payment (Hamilton et al 2022). Results from the Urban Institute December 2021 Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, following the sixth and final monthly payment, reported close to half (45 percent) of adults living with children receiving the credit preferred the monthly payment delivery, compared to just 27 percent who preferred it as a single, annual payment (28 percent indicated no real preference) (Maag and Karpman 2022). The preference for monthly payments increased as family incomes decreased, as seen in Figure 12, with the greatest preference for regular receipt among families lower down the income distribution. As Maag and Karpman (2022:1) note, this preference is “likely a reflection of greater instability in other income streams”.

<sup>25</sup> GAO (2022) identified the total number of advance payments opt-outs as 2.1 million.

Localized studies also reveal some parents appreciated the introduction of monthly payments. 94 percent of caregivers in a Michigan survey preferred a monthly or biweekly payment, with Black and Latinx/Hispanic caregivers more likely to prefer payments every two weeks.

Caregivers emphasized that:

The consistency helped them ‘fill in the gaps’ in their budgets. All respondents valued the predicatability of the payments as well as the flexibility, which allowed caregivers to put it towards whichever expenses were most pressing in a particular month. That flexibility meant that they could use the CTC to pay for school uniforms in August, pay off debt in October, and buy gifts in December  
*(Kaverman, Minoff, Kashen 2022:11).*

These sentiments were echoed by caregivers in Mississippi who described the regular delivery as a huge help if they “get stuck in the middle of the month with bills” and that the credit “just helps more with monthly payments instead of the lump sum...Just the security from month to month with the payments and bills and everything” (Kaverman and Minoff 2022:11).

The reflections of families themselves echo what Holt et al (2020:9) point out with respect to annual tax refunds, namely that “the timing of credit disbursements does not align with need”. While the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit keep millions of families from poverty annually, “the potential benefits of tax credits for some families are limited by a key misalignment: unlike the annual disbursement of benefits, meager paychecks and unaffordable living expenses are not experienced once a year” (Holt et al 2020:9). While a past demonstration effort to provide the Earned Income Tax Credit in advance payments was not widely taken up, Maag and Karpman (2022; ref: Bellisle and Marzahl 2015) note that the advance monthly Earned Income Tax Credit payments were widely preferred over the annual credit among those who received the demonstration advance payments. There are indications that families did not avail themselves of the advance Earned Income Tax Credit while it was in place for many of the same reasons that some newly eligible families had difficulties accessing the expanded Child Tax Credit, namely: lack of awareness, confusion over eligibility, difficulties with the application process, and—perhaps of most concern—fears of having to re-pay part or all of the credit at a later date (Maag and Karpman 2022). In anticipation of this latter concern, in particular, the expanded Child Tax Credit had a set of protections to mitigate the risk of repayment (Crandall-Hollick 2021). These safeguards are an important component to consider retaining in future policy iterations when moving to a monthly distribution system.

### **Early evidence suggests that the monthly versus lump-sum payments are associated with different types of effects**

The hybrid structure of the 2021 expanded Child Tax Credit set up a natural experiment in which the six months of monthly payments could be contrasted with the six-month value of the lump-sum payment. Parolin et al (2022) find that the impact of the expanded Child Tax Credit on hardship measures depended on the delivery method.

Monthly payments were spent on smaller-ticket, regular expenditures: most often, food (Roll, Hamilton, Chun 2022b; Pilkauskas et al 2022). In turn, food insufficiency rates declined while monthly payments were in place (Parolin et al 2021c; Shafer et al 2022; Hamilton et al 2022; Karpman et al 2022; Perez-Lopez 2021).

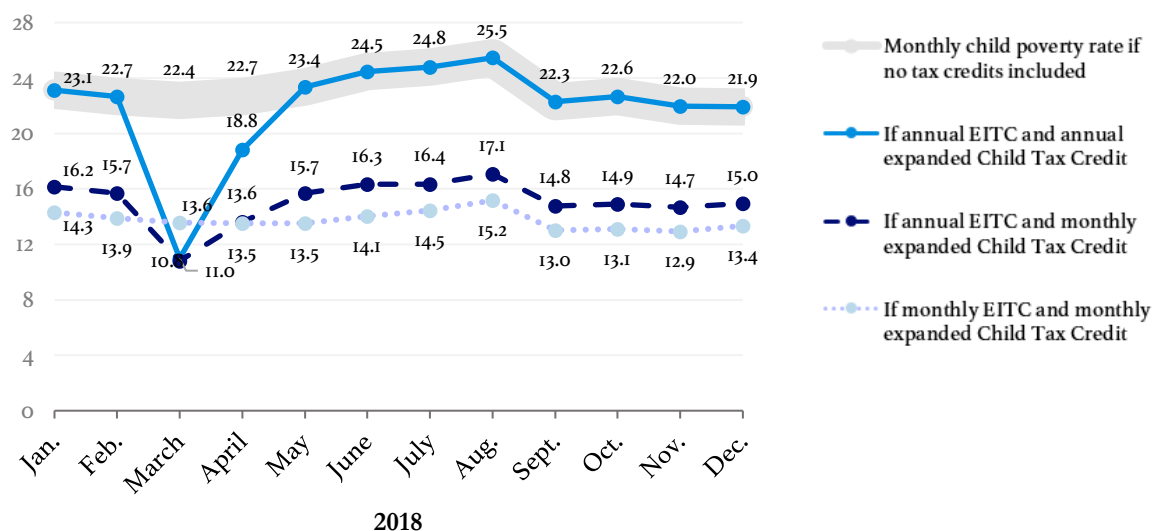


Other forms of hardship—particularly, housing—did not see as much movement during the period the monthly payments were in place (Collyer et al 2022; Pilkauskas et al 2022). Pilkauskas et al (2022:8), looking at a sample of SNAP recipient families on very low incomes note that they did not find evidence of reductions in severe housing hardship, but acknowledge that the housing indicators measured (eviction and homelessness) represent an extreme end of the housing hardship spectrum, “which might be difficult to alleviate with a modest monthly benefit provided over a short duration of time”.

Existing literature (Halpern-Meekin et al 2015; Goodman-Bacon and McGranahan 2008) has long-noted that lump-sum tax payments, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit—are often used for bigger-ticket items, such as large purchases or debt repayment. Parolin et al (2022) find similar patterns among the lowest-income recipients of the lump-sum expanded Child Tax Credit: most used these payments to pay off debt, including housing arrears. This single payment played a different role in family finances and did not move the needle on food insufficiency in the same way that the monthly payments did while in place. As a result, rates of housing hardship declined during the tax time period in 2022, but food hardship did not (Parolin et al 2022d).

Moving forward, offering options for either monthly payments or lump sum can allow families to choose option that best fits their family needs. As Figure 13 shows, providing a regularly delivered payment on a more permanent basis<sup>26</sup>, however, has the potential to keep poverty lower, more consistently, over the longer-term and potentially help break the cycle of income volatility and income swings that can be so disruptive to building family economic security (Holt et al 2020; Hamilton et al 2022a).

**Figure 13. Monthly distribution of tax credits are more effective at consistently reducing child poverty rates than lump sum distributions**



Reproduced, with permission, from [Hamilton et al 2022a, Figure 1](#).

<sup>26</sup> Maag et al (2022) find that data from one quarter in the year is sufficient to accurately estimate refundable tax credits, and identify appropriate advance credit amounts, for most families and provides analysis of design considerations for future advance credit structure and delivery.



## EMPLOYMENT: There is no evidence that indicates the monthly payments reduced employment

### *What We Knew After 6 Months*

The potential impact of the Child Tax Credit expansion on parental employment emerged as a topic of policymaker and researcher interest. While economists continue to debate the Child Tax Credit's predicted effects on parental employment based on economic theory, studies using real-world data from the period in which the expanded Child Tax Credit was in place revealed no indication that the monthly payments reduced employment.

Ananat et al (2022:2-3) summarize the crux of the theoretical debate:

Economic theory predicts ambiguous effects of the expanded CTC on parental labor force participation and employment. On one hand, the elimination of the phase-in portion of the previous CTC raises incomes while lowering the return to work, which could reduce parental labor force participation and employment...On the other hand, eliminating the phase-in, and therefore providing cash to families that are not working, may provide credit-constrained parents with resources to address barriers to employment, such as by allowing them to secure childcare or get auto repairs, which could increase labor force participation and employment...Moreover, increased aggregate demand as a result of higher incomes, particularly among populations such as low income families with children that have a high marginal propensity to consume, may have positive macroeconomic effects that contribute to higher aggregate employment (Fisher, Johnson, Smeeding, & Thompson, 2020).

Prior to the American Rescue Plan, researchers attempted to forecast the implications of such an expansion in relation to parental income, with different studies making different assumptions about the magnitude of the potential employment response. A National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine panel, in their 2019 *A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty* study, found that a policy change similar to the expanded Child Tax Credit might reduce employment by just 150,000 workers nationwide (NASEM 2019). The National Academies of Science (NASEM 2019) conclusions were cited in a [September 2021 open letter to Congressional leadership](#)—which noted that “a universal child allowance would have a negligible effect on employment”—signed by more than 450 economists and public policy experts<sup>27</sup>.

A 2021 study from researchers at Stanford University, Urban Institute, and University of Michigan estimating the potential costs associated with an expanded Child Tax Credit specifically, looking at direct costs, revenue changes due to labor supply responses, and long-term tax revenue changes due to children's future earnings, also identifies a relatively small labor supply effect (Goldin, Maag, & Micheltore 2021). Another 2021 study from the American Enterprise Institute estimate a permanent version of the 2021 expanded Child Tax Credit could potentially reduce employment by 296,000 full-time equivalent positions (Brill et al 2021). Drawing a very different conclusion, researchers from the University of Chicago suggest that the expanded Child Tax Credit could see up to 1.5 million parents exit the labor force (Corinth et al 2021; Corinth & Meyer 2021)<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> The author of this paper is a co-signatory.

<sup>28</sup> Bastian (2022:1) notes that “Corinth et al. (2021) limits household employment responses to either both spouses or neither spouse stops working, which overstates the income shock for two-parent families that stop working”.

Ananat et al (2022:3) note that “the differences in the simulations, in short, are driven by different assessments regarding the proper size of the employment elasticities and the types of employment elasticities applied in the models”. Employment elasticities, here, refer to the degree to which employment changes in response to a policy or other change (e.g., a small elasticity assumes that policy changes result in smaller changes in employment and a larger elasticity assumes larger changes in employment).<sup>29</sup> The academic dispute over the distance between the National Academies of Science panel models and related literature and the Corinth et al (2021) estimate has been discussed in the press<sup>30</sup>; [a formal statement from the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine](#) in support of the 2019 *Roadmap* report conclusions; a December 2021 research note from Corinth and Meyer (2021); and a summary commentary from the American Enterprise Institute (Winship 2021).

The implementation of the Child Tax Credit during the second half of 2021 enabled researchers to study the impacts of the expansion in the real world, as opposed to making assumptions based on other policies or theory. Research consistently found no evidence of negative employment effects while the payments were in place.

Using US Current Population Survey and Census Household Pulse data from April through mid-September 2021 (pre- and post-monthly payment introduction), the Columbia University Center on Poverty and Social Policy assessed the impact of the Child Tax Credit payments on employment and found no evidence in the real-world data to support claims that the Child Tax Credit negatively affected employment (Ananat et al 2021). Early analysis of July to October 2021 Census Household Pulse data, following the introduction of the Child Tax Credit, by researchers at the Washington University of St. Louis and Appalachian State University further supports these results. They found “no significant differences in employment for low-income, middle-income, or high-income families receiving the Child Tax Credit” and “no difference in employment trends between parents and non-parents before and after Child Tax Credit payments started going out” (Roll et al 2021).

These results are similar to findings from Canada, which expanded its child care benefit in 2015 and then rolled this into its new national child benefit in 2016 (the latter with a number of similarities to the expanded US Child Tax Credit, including no earnings requirement or phase-in; a higher benefit for young children; and monthly payment delivery through the tax system<sup>31</sup>). Since the 2016 Canadian expansion, researchers—looking in particular at single and married mothers’ employment—report “no evidence of a labor supply response to either of the program reforms” (Baker, Messacar, & Stabile 2021).

These results are also consistent with responses from families themselves in survey questions posed about the Child Tax Credit both before and after its rollout. A nationally representative survey of parents eligible for the Child Tax Credit asked parents in early July, just before the first monthly

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<sup>29</sup> See Goldin, Maag, and Michelmore (2021) for a review of existing literature on labor supply responses to other examples of income support policy changes and Winship (2021) for a discussion of the different types of potential changes in employment (e.g. changes in number of hours worked vs changes in labor market participation.)

<sup>30</sup> For example, a [Wall Street Journal letter to the editor](#), in response to earlier editorial and op-ed pieces and a [Washington Post fact checker article](#) that included statements from [two of the authors of Corinth et al \(2021\)](#), Kevin Corinth and Bruce Meyer (University of Chicago), and the two researchers who led the [A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty section on potential employment effects](#): Hilary Hoynes (University of California, Berkeley) and Robert Moffitt (Johns Hopkins University).

<sup>31</sup> See Collyer et al (2020) for comparison of the Canadian Child Benefit and an expanded US Child Tax Credit.

payment went out, how they felt the new payments might impact their work: 94 percent of parents predicted that they would work the same amount as or more than they did prior to receiving the monthly credit. Within the small number of families who predicted their work might change upon receipt, those most likely to predict they might work less were parents of infants and toddlers (Hamilton et al 2021). Following the initial payments, the American Enterprise Institute’s survey of families saw 90 percent of parents who received the credit reporting no change to their work, with 5 percent of parents reporting working more and 5 percent of parents reporting working less<sup>32</sup> (Rachidi 2021). And a nationally representative survey of parents with incomes under \$75,000 saw one-quarter of families affirmatively report that the Child Tax Credit payments made it easier to work or work more. Black families indicated that the Child Tax Credit made it easier to work or work more at twice the rate of White families (42 percent versus 20 percent); families with lower incomes were more likely to report this than their moderate- and middle-income counterparts; and families with at least some college were more likely to report this compared to other groups (Burnside 2021).

### The expanded Child Tax Credit may also generate broader economic effects

Employment studies focus primarily on the expanded Child Tax Credit’s impact on households who receive it. As the payments reached more than 36 million households each month, though, and with the majority of families spending the payments on food and other items for household consumption, there were also likely to be broader economic effects.

The Niskanen Center examined this in terms of the potential economic activity the Child Tax Credit could generate at state and local level. They projected the first twelve-month period of the new Child Tax Credit (e.g. July 2021 to July 2022) could see Child Tax Credit-related expenditures “boost consumer spending by \$27 billion, generate \$1.9 billion in revenues from state and local sales taxes, and support over 500,000 full-time jobs at the median wage” (Hammond & Orr 2021:1).<sup>33</sup> Populous states were likely to see larger aggregate benefits, as they have more children and families receiving the credit, but non-metro states stood to realize the most gains on a per-capita basis and in relative increases to their state gross domestic outputs (GDP).

**Figure 14. State-level economic impacts of the expanded Child Tax Credit**

	State	Net benefit per capita	Total benefit per capita		State	Net benefit, % of state GDP	Total benefit, % of state GDP
1	Alaska	\$417	\$859	1	Mississippi	0.98%	1.78%
2	Mississippi	\$391	\$709	2	Arkansas	0.73%	1.55%
3	Louisiana	\$377	\$725	3	Idaho	0.71%	1.80%
4	Indiana	\$369	\$807	4	Montana	0.70%	1.56%
5	South Dakota	\$368	\$819	5	Kentucky	0.70%	1.49%
6	Utah	\$366	\$929	6	Oklahoma	0.68%	1.43%
7	Oklahoma	\$354	\$742	7	West Virginia	0.68%	1.40%
8	Montana	\$354	\$782	8	New Mexico	0.68%	1.28%
9	Nebraska	\$350	\$761	9	Louisiana	0.67%	1.29%
10	New Mexico	\$347	\$653	10	Alabama	0.66%	1.38%

Reproduced, with permission, from [Hammond & Orr \(2021\)](#), p.4.

<sup>32</sup> Rachidi (2021) also reports 1 percent of families in their survey reporting that the credit enabled them to not work at all; this totals to more than 100 percent, likely due to rounding.

<sup>33</sup> Hammond & Orr note they use a 1.13 multiplier in assessing the Child Tax Credit’s potential economic impact.

The Jain Institute also identified a set of areas for future macroeconomic research should the Child Tax Credit expansion continue into the future. In addition to looking at any potential changes in parental employment (working more or working less), Sahm (2021) suggested that future examinations of potential changes in take-home pay (due to feedback effects or tax changes associated with program financing); potential changes in business investment (due to changes in private savings or interest rates, in response to recipient decision-making, feedback effects, or deficit spending changes associated with program financing); and potential changes in parental investments in their children's or their own education and training (due to changes in take-home pay). Sahm (2021) noted that past models, using other guaranteed income policy changes, yield “no clear picture” of what the macroeconomic effects of the expanded Child Tax Credit may yet be in these areas, but that this list offered a range of additional potential effects to consider as time and research progressed.

### *Employment Research Update: One Year On*

In subsequent simulation work, Bastian (2022) considered the impact of what a permanent version of the 2021 Child Tax Credit expansion could look like with respect to tax rates, work incentives, and employment and poverty effects, with a particular look at how elasticity assumptions affect results. With respect to the simulations, he notes “every approach leads to the same conclusion: while the 2021 CTC leads some parents to stop working, the CTC also leads to an unprecedented decrease in poverty and deep poverty” (Bastian 2022:2). Under his preferred elasticity approach, he finds 411,000 parents (only 78,000 of whom are poor) could potentially stop working under a permanent expansion of the 2021 Child Tax Credit, but also that “a permanent version of the 2021 Child Tax Credit would reduce poverty and deep poverty by more than the 2018 CTC and the Earned Income Tax Credit combined” (Bastian 2022:1).

An October 2022 analysis by the Joint Committee on Taxation, in response to a request from the Ranking Members of the House Budget Committee, Jason Smith (R-MO-08), and House Ways and Means Committee, Kevin Brady (R-TX-08), simulates potential macroeconomic effects of a permanent Child Tax Credit expansion over the next ten years, reporting a potential 0.2 percent decrease in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 0.2 percent decrease in labor supply, 0.4 percent decrease in capital stock, and 0.2 percent increase in consumption. They estimate a ten-year revenue loss of \$113.2 billion (JCT 2022). Similar to other simulations, the models utilize elasticities that assume negative parental employment effects; the real-world data from the monthly payment period does not indicate employment losses. But importantly, the model also examines only the costs and does not account for the potential benefits of a permanent expansion. One member of the National Academy of Sciences Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty study committee, Hilary Hoynes (2022:9-10), noted in testimony before the House Budget Committee in mid-2022 that “we can quantify both benefits and costs of social safety net programs targeted at children. And we can put them together to compare the benefits relative to the costs...the 10-year cost window rules out consideration of the long-term benefits. This can lead to short-term thinking that ignores the investment aspect of these programs”.

Taking a broader view, the National Academy of Sciences Roadmap study identified the annual macroeconomic cost of childhood poverty at a level between \$800 billion and \$1.1 trillion, equivalent to 4.0 to 5.4 percent of GDP each year (NASEM 2019). The anti-poverty potential of the expanded Child Tax Credit—which, on its own, was responsible for reducing child poverty by 43 percent in 2021 according to the Census Bureau (Creamer et al 2021; Burns, Fox, & Wilson 2022)—would deliver considerable savings in this area. Conducting a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis,

Garfinkel et al (2022) find that an expanded Child Tax Credit would cost \$97 billion per year but also generate societal benefits—through improved child health educational attainment, reduced involvement with the child welfare and criminal justice systems, and more—of \$929 billion per year. This would be a return on investment at a rate of nearly ten to one and represent an annual benefit that far outweighs the potential ten-year revenue loss estimate total identified in JCT (2022). Garfinkel et al (2022:24) conclude that “the most plausible estimates range from a child allowance being a very good to being an extraordinarily good investment in our nation’s future”.

## **Data continues to show no evidence of employment changes while monthly payments in place**

Real-world data encompassing the entirety of the period while the monthly payments were in place, and after, continue to show negligible employment effects in practice.

An update of the original Columbia University Center on Poverty and Social Policy employment analysis of the initial Child Tax Credit payments, using US Current Population Survey and Census Household Pulse data from April through December 2021, confirmed initial findings of no evidence in the real-world data to support claims that the Child Tax Credit negatively affected employment. For households with low and moderate incomes in particular, “labor supply responses to the policy change do not differ for households for whom the CTC’s expansion eliminated a previous work incentive. Thus, our analyses of real-world data suggest that the expanded CTC did not have negative short-term employment effects that offset its documented reductions in poverty and hardship” (Ananat et al 2022:1).

Consistent with these results, researchers at the University of California, Irvine, found that “families significantly benefited from the expanded Child Tax Credit payments without significant cost to employment”; they concluded that “the realized impact of the 2021 expansion is an insignificant change, or even increase, in employment” (Lourie et al 2022:i,13). And a study from the Tax Policy Center examined data from the Urban Institute’s Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey that followed the same adults throughout 2021, encompassing periods both prior to the introduction of the credit and while the monthly payments in place. They found no significant differences in short-term employment for recipients versus non-recipients of the monthly payments. Any changes in employment status or work hours between December 2020 and December 2021 were similar for both credit recipients and non-recipients (Karpman et al 2022).

Updated analysis of research from the Washington University of St. Louis and Appalachian State University of Census Household Pulse data through mid-December 2021 confirmed their initial results in terms of no real negative impacts on employment at national level. Rather, “the rates of parents reporting they were unemployed because they had to care for children substantially decreased after the Child Tax Credit went out (from 26.0% to 19.9%)”; this was particularly so for middle-income groups (e.g., household incomes between \$50,000 and \$99,000 annually) (Roll, Hamilton, & Chun 2021:2, 2022, 2022b). A subsequent update, including a period in early 2022 to capture the loss of the monthly payments, saw a modest decline in parental employment only *after* the monthly Child Tax Credit payments ended (Roll, Hamilton, & Chun 2022b).

Looking at particular population groups also revealed no evidence of meaningful employment effects. Han, Meyer, and Sullivan (2022), using descriptive trends from monthly Current Population Survey data, document relatively slower employment growth for adults with a high school level of education or less who have children (compared to childless adults of the same education level)



during some months in the second half of 2021.<sup>34</sup> Parolin et al (2022:16) note that this relatively slower employment growth is in the context of the fact that “levels of employment among low-educated adults with children actually increased from July to December 2021 (and also from March to December 2021, the former month being when Congress passed the American Rescue Plan). The relative decline is merely because the employment rates happened to increase at a slower rate relative to childless adults”.

University of Michigan’s causal examination of the monthly payment impact on SNAP recipients (mostly female-headed households) with very low incomes “found no evidence that the monthly CTC benefits led to a reduction in employment or labor force participation in the six months during which the benefits were distributed” (Pilkauskas et al 2022:18). And the causal examination of the payments’ effect in New York City also found “no evidence of significant reductions in employment in response to the monthly CTC payments”; when looking just at families with children, they instead saw a modest, but statistically significant increase in weekly hours worked (an increase of 0.45 hours per week for families with children) (Collyer et al 2022:30).

### **Some families found the monthly payments to be an employment support**

Regional descriptive data from families add additional nuance to these national trends. Semi-structured interviews with 15 Michigan parents and caregivers and a larger survey of Michigan families to learn about their access to and experiences with the Child Tax Credit, with a sample disproportionately comprised of low and moderate income families and Black, Latinx or Hispanic, and Native Americans,<sup>35</sup> found that the monthly payments “helped [parents] balance paid work and caregiving, allowing some parents in Michigan to stay in their jobs, go back to work, or pursue work that they felt fulfilled by, rather than being forced to accept and stay in the first job offered to them out of sheer necessity” (Kaverman, Minoff, Kashen 2022:12). Repeated qualitative interviews with parents throughout the second half of 2021 in the New York City Poverty Tracker study saw that “none viewed the Child Tax Credit as a means for stopping work...[t]o the contrary, [parents] spoke about how the Child Tax Credit enabled work by providing needed supports”—including child care, summer camp, and school transportation (Lens et al 2022:10). Families participating in the study had low and moderate levels of income between 100 and 200 percent of the poverty line and extensive work histories across restaurants, professional services, health care and social services, and transportation. None of the parents in the study reduced or left employment through the period of the study while the monthly payments were in place. In summarizing their New York City findings, the researchers wrote that:

In short, parents viewed the Child Tax Credit as a needed supplement to work wages, not a replacement for it. Practically, the monthly amounts they received—either \$250 or \$300 for each child—were too small to trigger an exodus from work. Nor did it serve as an incentive to reduce hours. What families needed was not less money, or the same money, but more money. The Child Tax Credit filled the crucial gap between income earned and the amount needed to pay for basic needs and enhance a family’s well-being (Lens et al, 2022:10).

On the whole, no evidence emerged to suggest that the expanded Child Tax Credit reduced parental employment while in place.

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<sup>34</sup> See Han, Meyer, and Sullivan (2022) Appendix Figure 3.

<sup>35</sup> The study featured 15 interviewees, of which 12 identified as Black and 3 as Hispanic or Latinx. All had incomes less than \$55,000 and half (7) had incomes under \$25,000. Of the 529 survey respondents, 40 percent had incomes below \$35,000, 21 percent had incomes between \$35,000 and \$50,000, and the remaining 40 percent had incomes over \$50,000.



## **EQUITY: The expanded Child Tax Credit matters for racial equity**

### *What We Knew After 6 Months*

The expanded Child Tax Credit has been noted for its potential to make meaningful reductions in child poverty, but particularly for its potential to reduce child poverty among children of color. In the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, one-third of all children in the United States were excluded from the full Child Tax Credit (Collyer, Harris, & Wimer 2019).

Because Black and Latino children were disproportionately excluded from the Child Tax Credit in its pre-reform structure, they stood to gain the most from the temporary expansion. Just prior to the rollout of the monthly payments in July 2021, however, Black and Latino children in families with low incomes were among the children identified as being at greatest risk of missing out on the expanded benefit (Cox et al 2021). Detailed administrative data on the expanded Child Tax Credit is not publicly available; nor was it for Child Tax Credit take-up prior to the current expansion (Goldin, Maag, & Micheltore 2021). As discussed earlier in the section on access and receipt, what is known is the number of payments delivered to households and children each month. The IRS was able to deliver the first monthly payment in mid-July—less than four months since passage of the American Rescue Plan—to 59.3 million children, the overwhelming majority of all those eligible. The IRS was then able to reach an additional 2 million children over the course of the first six months of delivery, concluding with 61.2 million children receiving the December 2021 monthly payment. Within the smaller group of children identified early on, though, as being at the highest risk of missing out on the monthly payments—four million children or more (Cox et al 2021)—available survey information indicates that concerns over disparities in non-receipt may be valid.

The RAPID-EC national survey of parents with young children, running continuously during the pandemic through two tax filing seasons and multiple rounds of economic stimulus payments delivered via the tax system, saw Black and Latino families less likely to anticipate receiving the new Child Tax Credit (RAPID-EC 2021b). Among SNAP-recipient families, as discussed earlier, parents with very low or no recent earnings, lower levels of education, or who speak Spanish as their primary language were consistently the most likely to report not receiving payments between July through early November (Pilkaskas & Cooney 2021; Pilkaskas & Micheltore 2021). Columbia University Center on Poverty and Social Policy analysis of the US Census Household Pulse data following the initial payments saw that self-reported receipt varied significantly by income, with lower income corresponding with lower levels of self-reported Child Tax Credit receipt (Parolin et al 2021c); an Urban Institute analysis of self-reported receipt in the same dataset through September found the lowest rates of monthly payment receipt among Hispanic/Latinx parents, American Indian/Alaska Native parents, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander parents, or parents who identify as more than one race, as well as adults with household incomes below \$25,000 across all racial and ethnic groups (Karpman et al 2021). It is important to note that self-reported estimates of Child Tax Credit receipt from the US Census Household Pulse are lower than the administrative total of number of children and households reached as reported by the IRS (Karpman et al 2021). As such, this information may be a more useful indicator of trends and patterns among groups with potentially lower levels of receipt than as a source for absolute receipt rates.

Receipt matters for anti-poverty gains. Estimates of the expanded Child Tax Credit's potential to reduce child poverty on an annual basis show that if all eligible children receive it, children of color could see the largest anti-poverty effects (CPSP 2021). Monthly poverty analyses that adjust for the

number of children reached in each state, as reported by the IRS, currently show the monthly payments reducing poverty at a greater relative rate for White children; Black and Latino children can see greater antipoverty gains as coverage levels increase (see Parolin et al 2021b for a more detailed discussion). But the experience of the first six months of the Child Tax Credit rollout offered valuable insight on realizing further anti-poverty effects.

Between July and November 2021, the IRS reported that the number of monthly payments sent out increased by 2 million children. As a result, the anti-poverty effects of the expanded Child Tax Credit increased by 800,000 children—the credit kept 3 million children from poverty in July and kept 3.8 million children from poverty in November 2021. As coverage increased, children of color also saw greater anti-poverty gains: the first payment reduced child poverty among Black children by 21 percent in July, but the fifth payment, on its own, reduced Black child poverty by 26 percent in November. Similarly, the first payment reduced child poverty among Latino children by 25 percent in July, but the fifth payment, on its own, reduced Latino child poverty by 30 percent in November. If monthly payments are continued in future, efforts to continue outreach and enrollment of communities at greatest risk of missing out on these payments can help realize even greater anti-poverty results moving forward.

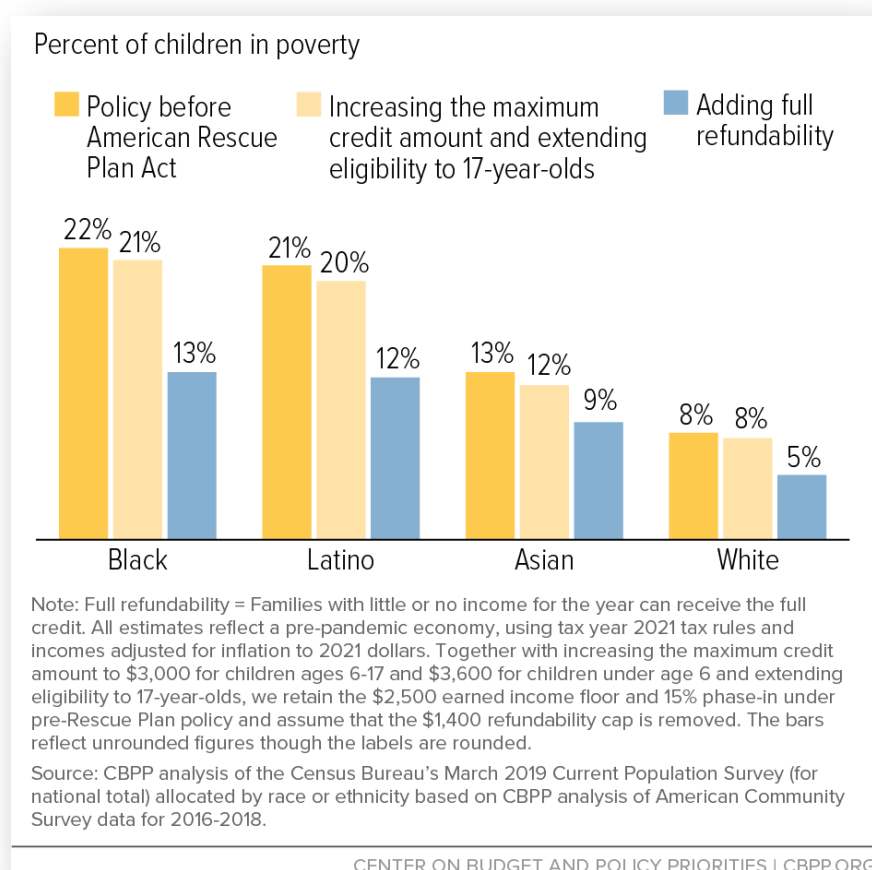
### *Equity Research Update: One Year On*

In the real-world, pandemic-era context, of 2021, analysis of the 2021 SPM poverty data shows that SPM child poverty rates fell to the lowest level on record due in considerable part to the expanded Child Tax Credit (Burns, Fox, Wilson 2022). It also shows that children who had been disproportionately ‘left behind’ by the credit prior to its expansion—namely, Black and Latino children, children in single-parent families, rural areas, larger families, and families with young children—all experienced significant reductions in poverty that also helped close poverty gaps and reduce disparities among groups (Wimer et al 2022). For example, the 2021 Child Tax Credit expansion meant that 2021 was the first time in history that SPM child poverty rates for Black, Latino, and White children were all under 10 percent—rather than just for White children alone. The expansion also moved the child poverty rate for children in single-parent households under 10 percent, significantly reduced child poverty in larger families and rural families, and equalized poverty rates between older children and younger children due to both full refundability and the young child \$600 bonus (Wimer et al 2022).

In addition to an overall increase in the credit value, making the Child Tax Credit fully refundable is a critical provision towards building racial equity for children. This policy component, combined with a removal of the earnings requirement, ensures that low- and moderate-incomes families can access to the full Child Tax Credit, reduces child poverty rates across groups, and would permanently close the gap that had resulted in the prior exclusion of one-third of all children and had seen Black and Latino children excluded from the credit at twice the rate of White children (Marr, Cox, Sherman 2021b; Collyer, Harris, & Wimer 2019). It would also rectify prior geographic disparities in access, whereby children in Appalachia, the South, and Southwest had been left out of the full credit at significantly higher rates than in other parts of the country (Collyer, Harris, & Wimer 2019; Collyer 2019; Goldin and Michelmore 2022).

Figure 15 shows one illustration of the potential importance of making the Child Tax Credit fully available to all children in families with moderate, low, or no earned income. It shows that an expanded Child Tax Credit only achieves meaningful poverty reduction *and* reduces racial disparities among children when full refundability is included. It is important to note that the results in Figure 15 refer to an expanded credit such as that provided under the American Rescue Plan, but assume a pre-pandemic economic and policy context, without stimulus payments or other emergency relief measures in place (that is, an economy more likely to resemble the future economy than the economy of 2020 or 2021).<sup>36</sup> Since 2020, the pandemic – and, more recently, inflation – have altered the economy and various forms of temporary pandemic economic relief have had complicated effects on datasets on income and poverty (such as the CPS ASEC) that are traditionally used to simulate the effect of social policy changes. Figure 15, however, uses pre-pandemic data.

**Figure 15. Potential impact of Child Tax Credit policy changes on SPM poverty in a pre-pandemic economic context: importance of full refundability**



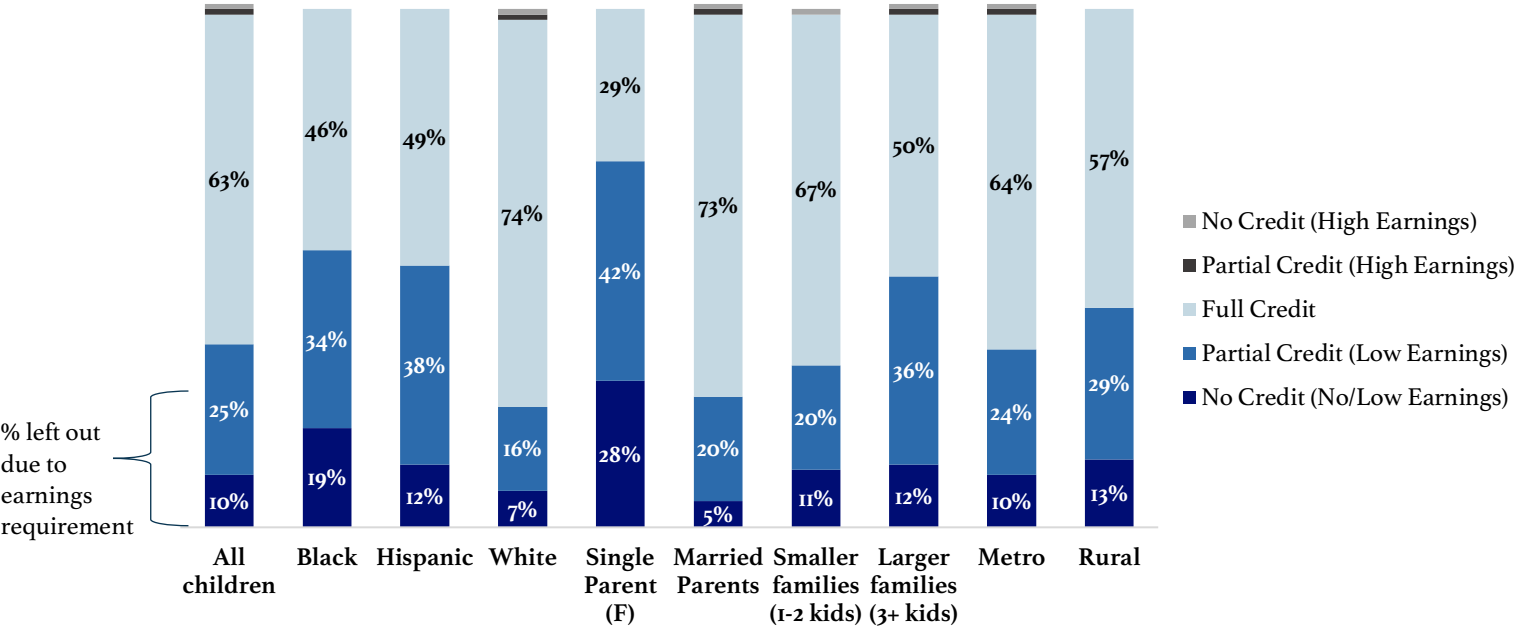
Reproduced with permission from [Trisi et al \(2021\), Figure 1](#)

<sup>36</sup> It is not directly comparable to the 2021 SPM poverty data from the Census Bureau, nor is it meant to be. The 2021 SPM poverty information, part of the 2022 CPS ASEC (for calendar year 2021), represents a pandemic-era economy and also includes a number of temporary pandemic economic relief measures.

**Communities of color among those most impacted by Child Tax Credit expiration**

Due to the Child Tax Credit, child poverty in 2021 reached a historic low. But following the expiration of the 2021 expansion, the Child Tax Credit has reverted back to its pre-American Rescue Plan parameters: annual delivery; a lower maximum credit value; and an earnings requirement and benefits phase-in structure that again excludes children in families with moderate and low incomes. Figure 16 identifies the share of children across family types that were left out of the full Child Tax Credit prior to the temporary expansion. These children are at highest risk of exclusion from the full credit once more. Recent estimates from the Tax Policy Center (2022) indicate that a similar proportion—just under one-third (29 percent)—of all children will be left out of the full Child Tax Credit in 2022 because their parents do not earn enough to qualify and disparities across these population groups are likely to follow once again.

**Figure 16. Share of children left out of the full Child Tax Credit before the temporary 2021 expansion**



Reproduced with permission from [Collyer et al \(2019\)](#) and [Curran and Collyer \(2020\)](#).

Disproportionately affected are children of color: one out of every two Black and Latino children were left out of the full credit, compared to one out of every four White children (Collyer, Harris, & Wimer 2019). Children in single parent families, children in rural families, children in the South, Southwest, and Appalachia, younger children, and children in larger families are also all left out of the full Child Tax Credit at higher rates (Collyer, Harris, & Wimer 2019; Collyer 2019; Curran and Collyer 2020) and will continue to be without action to once again close these gaps.

While the expansion was in place, ensuring those newly eligible for the full credit received it was key to both achieving the policy’s anti-poverty potential and rectifying past disparities in access across racial and ethnic groups. A national survey of families with moderate and low incomes below \$75,000 from CLASP et al (2022), including those who would have been excluded from the full Child Tax Credit in the past, found that the expanded monthly payments made the wide majority of both Hispanic and Black respondents—“feel like the government cares about their family’s health and wellbeing” and that “the government is responsive to the needs of their community” (Burnside, Fuller, Zhang 2022:2).

Yet the 2021 year-end expiration reversed these feelings for some families—interviews with Child Tax Credit recipients and caregivers in North Carolina, for example, revealed that the “benefit cut-off felt abrupt because they did not receive direct outreach letting them know that the expanded CTC was a short-term program or that the checks were ending. Their primary concern was whether the program would continue into the future or not” (Kaverman and Minoff 2022a:15). In the words of one North Carolina caregiver interviewed:

It’s concerning that a program was created and then it only lasted a short period of time...you had people kind of banking on this and then it wasn’t available. It’s kind of like you had the rug swept out from underneath your feet. If you’re going to do a program, do it

*(Kaverman, Minoff, Kashen 2022a:15).*

## *Conclusion*

Since the introduction of the first monthly Child Tax Credit payment in July 2021, a continuous stream of research has tracked the impact of this new policy on the lives of children and their families. This is an update to the [original Child Tax Credit research roundup](#), published in December 2021, that documented what we knew from research available after the first six months. This roundup compiles the range of information publicly available as of early November 2022, close to one year on from the last monthly Child Tax Credit payment in December 2021.

The weight of the evidence is clear: while in place, the expanded Child Tax Credit shored up family finances amidst the continuing COVID-19 crisis, reduced child poverty and food insufficiency, increased families’ ability to meet their basic needs, and had no discernable negative effects on parental employment.

The evidence is also clear that since its expiration, many families with children have seen a reversal of fortune directly attributable to the loss of the credit—including lower levels of disposable income and increased poverty, food hardship, and financial stress. Combined with recent inflation trends, the expiration of the expanded Child Tax Credit has posed an ongoing challenge for families nationwide.

This roundup reviews short- and medium-term effects based on the available evidence to date. Longer-term research is ongoing, with researchers tracking impacts of the expanded Child Tax Credit on child and family health, child nutrition, child welfare, housing, stress, debt, education, state and local economies, and more. The scope of potential longer-term impacts of this policy change for children and their families, particularly if an expanded Child Tax Credit is revived through future legislative efforts, will continue to evolve and expand over time. This roundup will be updated in future as new research emerges.



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