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Money

Who is eligible for the first U.S. Guaranteed Income Program with \$500 a month?

Check the requirements of this new program that secured its stay



Cook County announced the continuation of the program. LAPRESSE

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CONNOR REID

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Cook County, Illinois, has made national headlines by announcing the permanence of its **guaranteed basic income program**, a historic decision made by the Board of Commissioners last week. Following the success of a pilot program initially funded with \$42 million in federal pandemic aid, the

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board approved **an additional \$7.5 million from its 2026 budget to sustain the initiative.**

The program, which provides \$500 monthly payments with no strings attached to low- and middle-income households, thus becomes one of the first and largest in the country to move from a pilot phase to a permanent financial support strategy.



3 questions to understand guaranteed income in Cook County

What is the Guaranteed Income Program?

The Guaranteed Income Program is a social policy model in which the government or an organization **provides direct and recurring cash payments to individuals or families**, often targeting those with low or middle incomes, without conditions or work requirements.

Beneficiaries receive a fixed sum of money (e.g., \$500 or \$1,000) on a monthly, quarterly or regular basis.

Who is eligible for the Guaranteed Income Program?

Although specific details about eligibility for future rounds will come from the new \$7.5 million allocation, the original pilot program focused **on low- and moderate-income Cook County residents.**

The decision to make it permanent was based on the results of a survey that revealed the "historic success" of the program, according to Sarah Saheb, Director of Economic Security Illinois. The findings showed that:

- 75% of participants felt more financially secure.
- 94% used the funds to address financial emergencies.
- Most reported improvements in their mental health and a reduction in stress levels.
- Participants used the money primarily for essential needs such as food, rent, utilities and transportation.

What are the Guaranteed Income Program amounts?

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The Cook County Board of Commissioners approved a budget of **\$7.5 million** from its 2026 finances to fund the program's continuity.

In the past, the pilot version of the program delivered \$500 a month with no strings attached to 3,250 households.

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