Exploring EmPwR

EARLY INSIGHTS

Vol. 2. Summer 2026

What is EmPwR?

EmPwR gives families monthly cash gifts with no strings attached. We study how this money helps lower family stress and keep kids happy and healthy.
Learn more at empwrstudy.com.

About this report

This report shares helpful resources for Illinois families and shows how EmPwR is different from programs like SNAP and TANF.

SECTION 1: **ENROLLMENT**

460 **Illinois families have been a part of EmPwR so far!**

161 **Interviews Completed!**

512 **Surveys Completed!**

YOUR VOICE HELPS OUR RESEARCH

Thank you for joining our study! By sharing your experience, you help us learn and discover important answers.
We will send you three short surveys over your year with us—at 0, 6, and 12 months. You can earn up to $75 in Amazon gift codes if you complete all three!
Please watch for them so you don't miss out. We are excited to have you in our study! Thank you again!

Please update your contact information!
Please take a quick moment to update your phone number and email! Even if you think we have it, double-checking ensures you won't miss your survey invites or gift cards.
CLICK HERE!

SECTION 2: **SUPPORT AFTER EMPWR**

A Quick Note: We wanted to share these resources in case you or your family need a little extra support. While these programs can be helpful, EmPwR does not run them and cannot sign you up. Please contact them directly to get started! Thank you for your participation and understanding!

211 Illinois

Need Help? Dial 211
A free, 24/7 service that connects you to real people for help with daily struggles or emergencies. Available in over 180 languages by phone, text, or chat.
What 211 Can Connect You To:

- Basic Needs: Food, housing, rent, utility bills, and clothes.
- Health Care: Doctor info, insurance, and mental health support.
- Jobs & Money: Job leads, career training, and tax help.
- Legal Aid: Renters' rights and legal support.
- Special Support: Help for veterans, seniors, youth, and people with disabilities.

How to get help: Dial 211 to talk to a real person, or search the online 211 Resource Directory.

So I'm Done with the Study, What Now?

Many families are wrapping up their time with EmPwR. Over 150 families have already finished the program! Thank you!!

How Our Team Can Support You

CAN

We would be more than happy to help with:

- Questions about the study or surveys
- Help opening or taking a survey
- Replacing lost or misplaced cards

CANNOT

Unfortunately we are unable to help with:

- Case management
- Referrals to other programs
- Re-enrolling in the EmPwR study

Family Advocacy Centers

Family Advocacy Centers

Free, safe places that help Illinois parents keep their families strong.

Services Offered:

- Parenting Classes: Mentoring in English and Spanish.
- Counseling: Support for family conflicts and domestic safety.
- Youth Programs: Fun after-school and summer activities for kids.
- Family Reunification: Safe spaces for supervised family visits.
- Meeting Support: Staff support during family and court meetings.

Consult this **link** for information on centers in your area!

SECTION 3: **EARLY FINDINGS AND PROGRAM COMPARISONS**

What We Are Learning About Government Benefit Programs

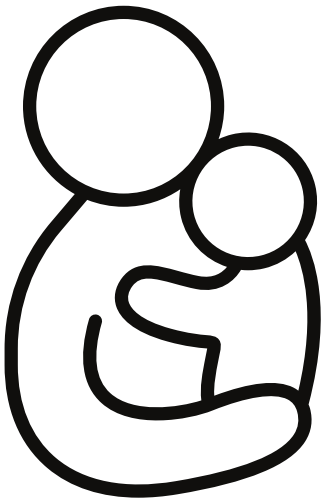
Through your survey responses and interviews, families are helping us see where programs like SNAP, WIC, and SSI fall short—and why flexible financial support matters.

- **Gaps in current aid:** Standard programs (SNAP, WIC) often restrict what you can buy or penalize you if you earn extra money.
- **What families actually need:** Flexibility and support that doesn't lower other benefits.
- **Your impact:** Hearing from both cash-receiving families and control families gives researchers the clear proof needed to advocate for better policy changes in Illinois.

Voices from Our Study

"And the formula, if you get **WIC**, you only get so much of that and then you have to buy some out of pocket. So it was constantly trying to save up money to be able to afford formula because you can't let your kid go hungry."
-Mother of 4, control group

"I have to report **SSI** to everything... So if I get SSI, it counts against us for any other social programs...It [EmPwR] was such a big help...I wish it was something the state would implement, you know, just for-for every low-income [family]. It would prevent a lot of things."
-Mother of 2, treatment group



PROGRAMS FAMILIES USE MOST

FOOD STAMPS - 50%

MEDICAID - 30%

WIC - 20%

ENERGY HELP - 10%

CHILD CARE HELP - 10%

Numbers rounded to the nearest 10%. Each icon = 10% of families.

SECTION 3: **WHAT'S NEXT**

In our next quarterly report in October we will put together more visualizations of some of the things we are seeing, so stay tuned ! Thank you for your ongoing partnership with EmPwR.

SECTION 4: **ASK US ANYTHING!**

Have a question about what we are doing? What about a suggestion for a next report? Maybe you just want to stay updated. Please email at ssw-empwrstudy@illinois.edu anytime!

EmPwR
Empower Parenting With Resources