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Financial Health Pulse® 2025 Chicago Trends Report

RESEARCH BRIEF | JANUARY 2026

For many Cook County residents, life became a little less financially precarious between 2022 and 2025. That's the key finding from the *Financial Health Pulse® 2025 Chicago Trends Report*, which builds on the 2022 analysis and was written by the Financial Health Network with support from The Chicago Community Trust and JPMorganChase. The Financial Health Network also partnered with TransUnion to analyze aggregated credit profiles of Chicago consumers, which provided a deeper understanding of Chicagoans' credit health.

This modest gain in financial health among Cook County households took place alongside state and local policies that raised wages, expanded tax credits, and banned medical debt from credit reporting, as well as investments to increase homeownership and neighborhood development.

The *Financial Health Pulse® 2025 Chicago Trends Report* is based on a representative survey of Cook County households from May through July that collected data on how effectively they could spend, save, borrow, and plan for the future. Respondents answered questions related to eight core financial metrics: spending relative to income, on-time bill payment, liquid savings levels, confidence in long-term financial goals, debt manageability, credit score, confidence in insurance coverage, and planning ahead financially.

These metrics convert to a score from zero to 100. Top scorers (80-100) are considered Financially Healthy. Financially Healthy households spend less than they earn, have savings for a rainy day, and can access tools like credit and insurance to build toward long-term goals. Financially Healthy households have greater freedom to choose how they spend their money and time, and more options when it comes to decisions such as housing, healthcare, childcare, education, transportation and food — choices that significantly alter the quality of a person's life.

Those scoring lowest on the metrics (zero to 39) are described as Financially Vulnerable. Financially Vulnerable households are more likely to struggle with everyday bills, lack a cushion for emergencies, and face debt that can turn a single setback into a full-blown crisis. Financially Vulnerable households have fewer options when it comes to basic life decisions, including where they live, where they send their children to school and daycare, how they get around, and what they eat — and that lack of choice extends to their ability to plan for the future.

As measured by the Financial Health Network, there is greater variability in the financial health of Cook County residents than there is nationally.* Compared to national figures, Cook County has both a higher percentage of Financially Healthy households (34% vs. 31%) and a greater share of Financially Vulnerable residents (18% vs. 15%).

Within Cook County, the distribution of financial health remains heavily skewed, with some demographic groups experiencing much higher rates than others. **On average, Asian, Black, and Latino* households are less Financially Healthy than white households — a fact that held true in both 2022 and 2025.**

Completing a four-year degree remains one of the most powerful drivers of financial stability, with college-educated households consistently reporting markedly stronger financial health than those with lower levels of schooling, regardless of race or ethnicity. Even among those with comparable levels of education, however, significant disparities remain. While 54 percent of white households with a bachelor's degree or higher reported being Financially Healthy, the same was true for only 44 percent of Asian households, 31 percent of Latino households, and 24 percent of Black households. At the same time, **households with less formal education — including those with a high school diploma, some college experience, or an associate degree — reported lower levels of financial vulnerability in 2025 than in 2022.**

In 2025, Cook County residents who used public benefits like Medicaid or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) were less likely to be Financially Vulnerable and more likely to be Financially Coping or Healthy than in 2022. Upcoming changes to public benefit programs, taking effect in 2026, coupled with increasing economic uncertainty, could threaten the modest progress Cook County residents have seen in their financial health.

Though the uptick in financial health for vulnerable residents is promising, substantial geographic and demographic inequities persist across Cook County. At the same time, **the study points to clear opportunities to further stabilize and improve financial health across the region.**

* The research brief provides an overview of high-level findings described in greater detail in the full report.

* In the report and this research brief, respondents who identified themselves of Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino descent were categorized as "Latino."

CHANGES IN COOK COUNTY'S FINANCIAL HEALTH, 2022-2025

The chart on the following page highlights the changes in how Cook County survey respondents answered questions on eight indicators that comprise the four pillars of financial health. In 2025, more respondents expressed confidence in their insurance coverage and their ability to achieve long-term financial goals. Fewer respondents said they struggled to pay bills on time or lacked enough savings to cover one week of expenses.

Changes in these areas led to a small, though statistically significant decrease in the share of Cook County households classified as Financially Vulnerable: from 19 percent in 2022 to 18 percent in 2025. Chicago residents appeared to drive the decrease; the share of Financially Vulnerable Chicagoans dropped by two percentage points, from 23 percent to 21 percent between 2022 and 2025. The distribution of financial health in suburban Cook County did not change over the time period.

To understand financial health more deeply, the report examines typical elements of a financial balance sheet: financial assets, including homeownership, debt, and access to credit.

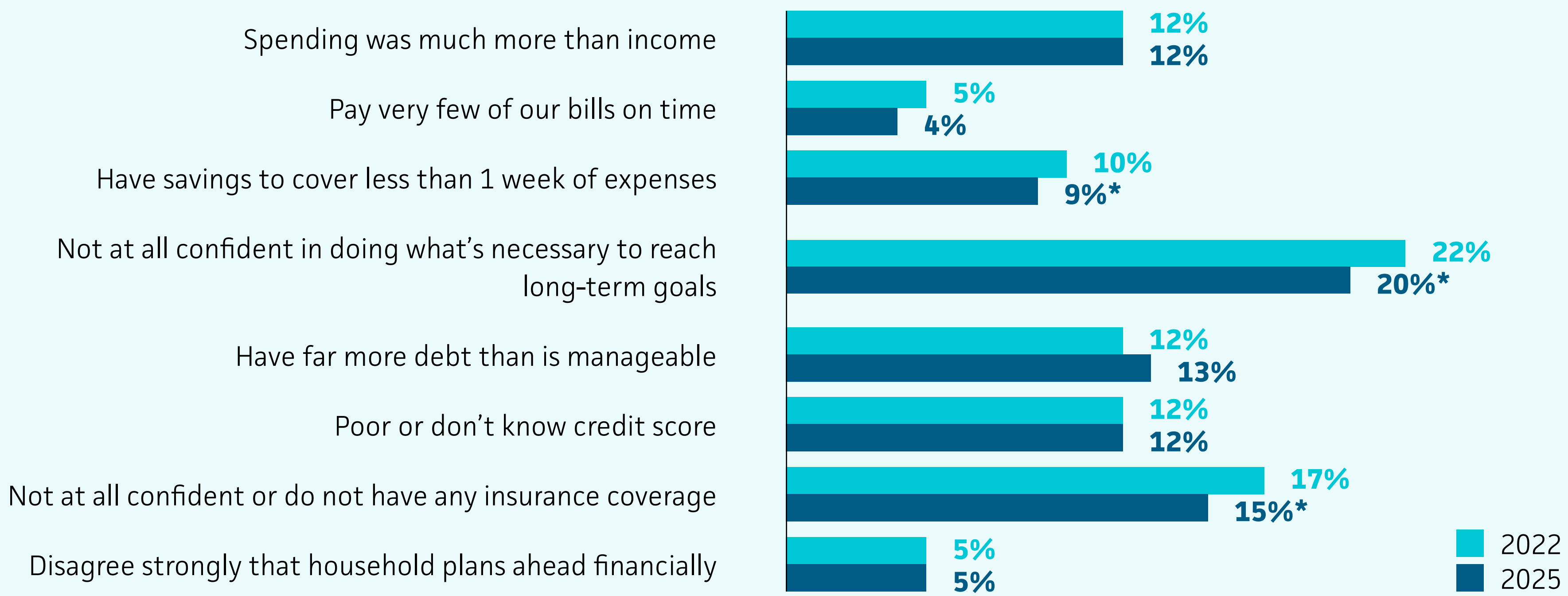
JEANETTE G., *Workforce Development Graduate and Homeowner*

For Jeanette, rebuilding her life after incarceration meant finding a career that offered a true second chance. In 2015, she joined Cara Collective and enrolled in the Second Chance Program, which led to an opportunity with the Chicago Transit Authority. It was a rocky road. Jeanette faced repeated rejection and came to understand just how much her background could limit her options. Still, Cara and the CTA believed in her when others didn't, providing the tools, support and trust she needed to move forward.

Through persistence and determination, doors that were once closed began to open. That career stability eventually made homeownership possible as well. Today, Jeanette is proud to have a steady job that supports her family's future and a home she can truly call her own.

Her message to others is one of hope and resilience: "For every 'no,' there will always be a 'yes.' Delay doesn't mean denied. Trust the process."

FIGURE 1: THE PERCENTAGE OF COOK COUNTY HOUSEHOLDS REPORTING SIGNIFICANT FINANCIAL VULNERABILITY BY FINANCIAL HEALTH INDICATOR, 2022-2025



Source: Chicago Financial Health Pulse Survey

Note: Bar sizes for the same estimates may differ due to rounding. Sample sizes are N = 5,417 and N = 7, 762 for 2022 and 2025, respectively

** Statistically significant difference relative to 2022.*

HOMEOWNERSHIP AND NET WORTH

Homeownership, a cornerstone financial asset, is associated with higher levels of financial health because of the stability and wealth building potential it offers. However, **systemic barriers to homeownership and equity-building lead to differences in households' abilities to access and realize wealth through homeownership.**

Differences in homeownership rates likely drive wealth disparities between Chicago households and those in suburban Cook County. Only 46 percent of Chicago households own their homes, compared with 72 percent of suburban Cook County households.

Yet, simply owning a home is not enough to ensure financial health. Homeowners must also be able to pay for property taxes, insurance, and repairs. Challenges in maintaining a home and disparities in property appreciation limit wealth-building for many households in underinvested neighborhoods, exacerbating wealth gaps. In the past 12 months, 20 percent of all respondents reported that they had a home repair they could not afford and one in nine respondents reported having a property tax bill they could not afford. Rate increases in 2024 Cook County property tax bills may place additional strain on financially challenged homeowners and increase both housing-related debt and the risk of falling into tax delinquency.[1]

Further, not all homeowners have a will or estate plan in place to ensure that their home can be transferred easily to their heirs, with 37 percent of suburban Cook County reporting having a will or estate plan versus only 21 percent of Chicago households.

MARC F., *Homeowner*

Marc always knew renting wasn't his long-term plan. Determined to own a home, he explored down payment assistance programs and considered Habitat for Humanity, but the required volunteer hours weren't realistic while working two jobs. His persistence paid off when he discovered Reclaiming Chicago, a program that ultimately made homeownership possible.

For Marc, buying a home wasn't just about having a place to live — it meant freedom, stability, and a chance to build generational wealth. As a first-time homeowner, he defines financial health as peace of mind: being able to pay his bills without constant stress.

Achieving his goal required real sacrifices. Marc saved aggressively, planned carefully, and made career moves to increase his income along the way. His advice to others considering homeownership is simple but powerful: do your research and don't give up. "The process may challenge you," he says, "but the payoff is worth it."

[1] Danny Ecker, "Loop Loss Fallout: Chicago Homeowners Hit with Biggest Property Tax Bill Hikes in Decades," Crain's Chicago Business, November 17, 2025, https://www.chicagobusiness.com/commercial-real-estate/chicago-homeowners-hit-big-property-tax-bill-hikes-year

OTHER ASSETS

Compared with suburban Cook County, fewer households in Chicago owned financial assets of nearly all types. Although Chicago households were more likely to hold most types of financial assets relative to the U.S., the only asset type Chicago households were more likely to have than suburban households was cryptocurrency or other digital assets.

FIGURE 2: TYPES OF HOUSEHOLD ASSETS IN CHICAGO, SUBURBAN COOK COUNTY, AND THE U.S., 2025.

	Chicago	Suburban Cook County	U.S.
Checking or savings account	92%[1]	95%	91%
Savings in cash not held in an account	27%[1,2]	33%	33%
Bonds or certificates of deposits (CDs)	25%[1,2]	34%[2]	20%
Educational savings plans	9%[1,2]	15%[2]	7%
Employer-provided retirement account or pension	62%[1,2]	68%[2]	54%
Individual retirement account not provided by an employer	44%[1,2]	54%[2]	34%
Other non-retirement investment accounts that allow you to invest in the stock market	38%[1,2]	44%[2]	31%
Cryptocurrencies or other digital assets	11%[1,2]	9%	8%
Other financial assets or accounts	7%[1,2]	9%[2]	4%
N	4,883	2,864	7,418

Sources: Chicago Financial Health Pulse Survey, U.S. Financial Health Pulse Survey
[1] Statistically significant difference relative to suburban Cook County
[2] Statistically significant difference relative to the U.S.

These different experiences related to asset ownership contribute to gaps in wealth and net worth in Cook County. As shown in the table below, while two-thirds of suburban Cook households reported positive net worth, above the national share, only 57 percent of Chicago households reported positive net worth. **Chicago households are less likely than the national average to have positive net worth and more likely to have negative net worth.**

Further, across Cook County, Black and Latino residents are twice as likely to report negative net worth as white households (23%, 21%, 10%). Differences in asset ownership drive the wealth gap between households.

FIGURE 3: HOUSEHOLD NET WORTH IN CHICAGO, SUBURBAN COOK COUNTY, AND THE U.S., 2025.

	Chicago	Suburban Cook County	U.S.
Have money left over	57%[1,2]	66%[2]	61%
Break even	14%	14%	15%
Be in debt	18%[1,2]	11%[2]	13%
Don't know	11%[1,2]	9%[2]	12%
N	4,895	2,860	7,424

Sources: Chicago Financial Health Pulse Survey, U.S. Financial Health Pulse Survey

[1] Statistically significant difference relative to suburban Cook County

[2] Statistically significant difference relative to the U.S.

Responses to the question, "Suppose you [and your household] were to sell all of your major possessions (your car, your home, etc.), turn all of your major investments and other assets into cash (including any financial assets such as your retirement accounts, savings and checking accounts, etc.) and pay all of your debts (including your mortgage, other loans, medical debt, and credit cards). Would your household have money left over or be in debt?."

THE PARADOX: CREDIT IMPROVES AS DEBT BURDENS INCREASE

In 2025, three-quarters (76%) of Cook County households rated their credit as good, very good, or excellent — slightly higher than the national average. Such households are able to access credit at lower interest rates, secure housing and utilities, and finance major purchases with better terms.

The Financial Health Network partnered with TransUnion researchers to review Chicagoans' credit health between 2022 and 2025 and found a gradual rise in the number of households with above-prime credit scores (scores above 721). **The share of consumers with prime (661-720) or above-prime credit scores is higher in Chicago than it is nationally.**

However, this aggregate picture of Cook County credit health masks disparities by geography and by race or ethnicity. This uptick in highly creditworthy consumers may have obscured signs that **more Chicagoans are struggling to manage their debt.** Since 2022, the share of borrowers who are 30 days or more behind on debt payments has increased from 26 percent to 29 percent. In particular, mortgage delinquencies in Chicago have risen in line with national trends.

Comparing the types of debt held by Chicagoans with households in suburban Cook County shows that, while medical debt is a countywide problem, Chicago households are more likely to carry outstanding credit card balances and hold debt from alternative financial sources like auto title or personal loans, suggesting they may struggle to access traditional credit.

SIXTO R., *Small Business Owner*

For Sixto, owner of Araceli's Bakery, financial health means stability and freedom, but it didn't come easily. Since purchasing his first bakery in Pilsen in 1982, Sixto has faced significant setbacks, including poor credit and the loss of a building during a riot. Through persistence, hard work, and the support of his family, he rebuilt. Today, he's been able to pay for his children's college education, reinvest in his business, and enjoy greater financial flexibility. Last year, he returned to Back of the Yards, the neighborhood where he grew up, to open his fifth bakery.

As an employer, Sixto is committed to helping others achieve their goals. He prioritizes paying a living wage and offering retirement and other benefits. "Benefits matter because they show employees you care about their future," he says.

His advice is simple: stay focused, work hard, ask for help when you need it, and surround yourself with people who believe in you. Success, he says, takes time — and sacrifice.

Meanwhile, 16 percent of Chicago households skipped a rent or mortgage payment in the last year, compared to 11 percent of suburban households. Rising costs may play a role here, and the impacts are felt differently by communities across the Chicago area.

Another worrying sign is the decline in the financial health of households earning between $60,000 and $99,999 and more than $100,000. In 2025, a smaller share of these households qualified as Financially Healthy compared to 2022. **This downward trend suggests that income is not enough to achieve and maintain financial well-being in the face of economic stressors.**

FIGURE 4: TYPES OF HOUSEHOLD DEBT IN CHICAGO, SUBURBAN COOK COUNTY, AND THE U.S., 2025.

	Chicago	Suburban Cook County	U.S.
Auto loans	27%[1,2]	35%	35%
Student loans	32%[1,2]	24%[2]	20%
Small business loans	3%[2]	3%[2]	2%
Mortgages	34%[1]	50%[2]	36%
Home equity line of credit with a balance	5%[1,2]	8%[2]	6%
Past due medical bills	21%[,2]	21%[2]	17%
Outstanding credit card balances carried over from previous months	36%[,2]	35%	34%
Loans from a retirement plan	6%[1]	7%	7%
Personal loans	14%	13%[2]	13%
Other loans or debts not listed (payday loans, auto title loans, etc.)	16%[1,2]	14%[2]	10%
N	4,868	2,847	7,418

Sources: Chicago Financial Health Pulse Survey, U.S. Financial Health Pulse Survey

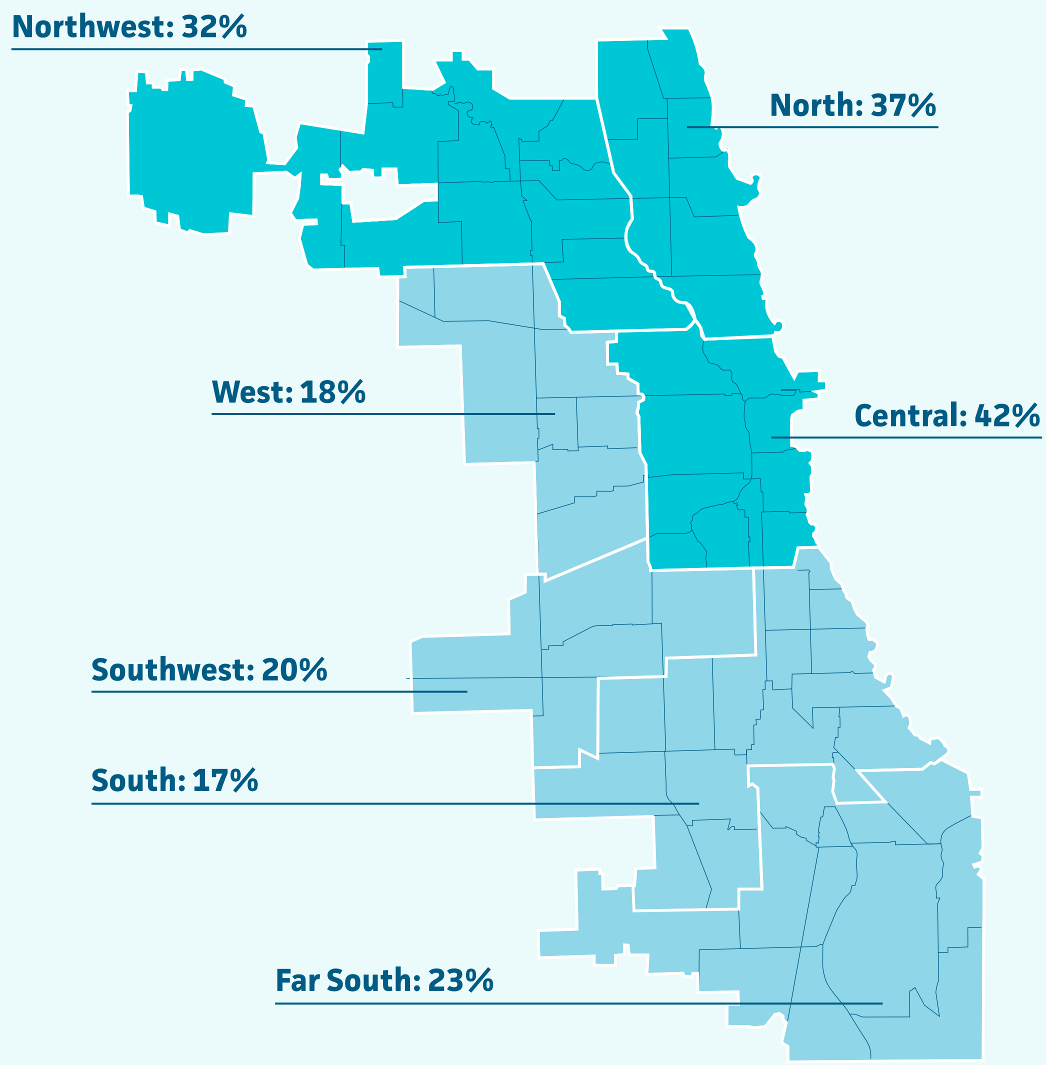
[1] Statistically significant difference relative to suburban Cook County *[2] Statistically significant difference relative to the U.S.*

STARK FINANCIAL HEALTH GAPS ACROSS CHICAGO

To better understand how financial health disparities show up within Chicago, Financial Health Network grouped the city's 77 community areas into seven regions that share similar characteristics. The map on the right shows that **financial health is concentrated in the Central, North, and Northwest areas,** characterized by higher education, incomes, and asset-ownership rates, including homeownership. **In contrast, the West, South, Southwest and Far South have higher rates of financial vulnerability.** Residents here face higher rates of material hardship and debt stress.

Access to credit and types of borrowing reflect and reinforce these disparities in financial health. Self-reported credit scores show sharp regional contrasts. Over 80 percent of Central, North, and Northwest households report they have good credit, while fewer than two-thirds of Far South, South, Southwest and West households do so. Higher balances and medical debt in the West, South, Southwest, and Far South suggest heavier repayment burdens, while broader access to credit in the North, Central, and Northwest supports greater financial flexibility. Residents in these parts of the city enjoy access to more than twice the amount of usable credit — $36,000, on average — as residents in the Far South, South, Southwest, and West.

FIGURE 5: PERCENTAGE OF FINANCIALLY HEALTHY HOUSEHOLDS BY CHICAGO REGION, 2025.



OUR WORK

The wealth and financial health disparities seen across Cook County today did not emerge overnight. They are the result of decades of policy decisions, structural inequities, and uneven investment that have shaped access to opportunity across communities. While recent data show signs of improvement for our most vulnerable residents, sustained progress will require continued protective policies, reforms, and coordinated investment. With long-term commitment and partnership, we are building on this momentum. **The Chicago Community Trust works alongside policymakers, community-based organizations, and private-sector partners to advance strategies that improve financial health, expand opportunity, and build wealth across the region.**

1. We advance economic mobility by strengthening college to career pathways, workforce development programs, and financial tools and supports that help households build stability.

Because a four-year degree opens the door to greater economic security over time, the Trust supports efforts to improve transfer pathways from two- to four-year colleges and universities so that more Chicago-area community college students can complete bachelor's degrees with minimal debt. In partnership with higher education institutions and policy leaders, we work to reduce structural barriers that limit degree completion.

We invest in education-to-career pathways, including apprenticeships, industry-recognized credentials, and training programs, that connect residents to quality jobs and open doors to well-paying careers based on skills and experience, not just a four-year degree, particularly in high-growth sectors. To improve job access and long-term success, these community-led workforce initiatives pair training with supports like childcare, transportation, and career coaching and are shaped by what employers need.

We also fund and advance programs that help residents build financial capability, such as improving credit, increasing savings, and expanding access to asset-building tools, so that households can pursue wealth-building opportunities such as homeownership, retirement savings, and entrepreneurship.

In addition, the Trust advocates for and supports policies that protect workers' earnings and strengthen family safety nets, including state tax credits like the Illinois Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit, which have proven impacts on financial stability.

2. We increase homeownership and preserve home equity as critical pathways to building intergenerational wealth to lift up vulnerable communities.

The Trust works with housing counselors, lenders, and public partners to expand access to down payment assistance, affordable mortgage products, and trusted guidance that helps residents successfully navigate the homebuying process.

To help existing homeowners remain in their homes, we invest in supports that address home repair costs and rising property tax burdens, particularly for long-time and legacy homeowners in underinvested communities.

We also support estate planning and succession tools that enable homeowners to pass properties to the next generation, helping families retain and transfer wealth rather than lose it through foreclosure or tax-related sales.

In response to the region's shortage of affordable homes to buy or rent, the Trust provides flexible capital and other supports for both the development and preservation of single-family and multifamily housing, working alongside mission-driven developers and public agencies.

Finally, we advocate for reforms to property tax and foreclosure systems to ensure that homeowners who lose properties due to unpaid taxes can recover the equity they have earned.

3. We invest in neighborhoods so that community-led development creates shared and lasting benefits.

The Trust supports innovative financing and investment models for community-driven development, ensuring that local residents and organizations shape projects and benefit from new amenities, services, and economic activity.

We partner with policymakers and planning agencies to advance zoning, permitting and regulatory reforms that reduce development costs and accelerate timelines, making it easier to bring equitable projects to fruition.

Our work also focuses on returning vacant land to productive use by supporting projects that transform underutilized parcels into affordable housing, small business and commercial spaces, parks, and other community assets.

To expand opportunities for wealth-building, the Trust invests in alternative ownership models such as community land trusts, housing cooperatives, and worker-owned enterprises, which allow financially vulnerable residents to build assets while maintaining long-term affordability and community control.

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At The Chicago Community Trust, we believe people are our region's greatest asset. When everyone is contributing to and benefiting from our economy, our region will thrive. The Trust funded the *Financial Health Pulse® 2025 Chicago Trends Report* and prepared this research brief as a part of its work to understand the wealth gap and advance its strategy to improve economic mobility for Chicagoans, particularly for households and communities that have faced systemic barriers to building wealth.

Visit Financial Health Network's website, finhealthnetwork.org, to download the complete report. Learn more about the Trust's economic mobility strategy at cct.org.