



INDIANA
COMMUNITY ACTION
POVERTY INSTITUTE

TOGETHER

2026 ANNUAL REPORT



INDIANA COMMUNITY ACTION POVERTY INSTITUTE

Mission

We produce research, engage in advocacy, and promote civic engagement to respond to community needs through programmatic and policy change.

Vision

We envision an Indiana where financial security allows Hoosiers to better contribute to their families, communities, and the world.



The Institute is a program of the Indiana Community Action Association

Indiana's **21 Community Action Agencies** provide over 70 programs & services to Hoosiers throughout Indiana to address poverty and improve communities.

Focus Areas

Foundations like safe, stable housing, utilities, healthcare, and child care;

Good jobs that provide financial stability and time to care;

Safety net support programs to catch those who are struggling to make ends meet;

An end to the **financial drains** like medical debt and predatory loans that make financial security impossible to achieve;

And a **fair tax code** that ensures each person and business is contributing their fair share to the services and supports we need to have quality of life and quality of place.



Director Spotlight

Erin Macey, Ph.D.

Every day that I drive to our statehouse, attend a community listening session, or meet with our team about a project, I hold in mind the promise of our shared vision: what if every Hoosier had the financial security to pursue their goals, put their talents to use, and serve their families and communities? The work we do has never been easy, and this year in particular we saw new challenges – among them, policies that will strip access to health care and criminalize homelessness. But we were part of something else as well: a groundswell of Hoosiers who, across race, place, and religion, stood up to demand something better.

Moving forward, we draw strength from this rising collective of community members, fellow organizations, and leaders who work alongside us to refocus policymaking on quality of life and quality of place. It is from this solidarity and community that I drew inspiration for this year's annual report theme: Together. Community and community action are possible because a multitude of talented, hard-working, and brave souls get involved. This past year and the year ahead are testaments to the importance of collaboration and connection across interests to create a common vision of financial opportunity in Indiana. I hope you enjoy this glimpse at the work we have done, and draw energy from the insights and efforts we are sharing here. Thank you for your partnership.

Erin Macey

Reflections From the Team

"While 2026 wasn't a budget session in Indiana, it didn't stop the legislature from quietly opening the current budget to enact new tax breaks that align with some components of federal tax changes passed in 2025. Despite the estimated cost to the state and local units topping \$250 million, there was very little visibility and pushback about a choice to spend this considerable sum on narrow tax breaks-- meanwhile, CCDF vouchers, Medicaid, and SNAP were all facing serious funding hurdles. The Institute was the only group to testify against this spending in the House Ways and Means Committee, and while the bill still passed into law, I am very proud that we were able to get a commentary published in the Indiana Citizen that brings accountability and understanding to the public."

Olivia Smith
Policy Analyst

"A project I am very proud of from our past year is the Know Your Rights Project we conducted on medical debt. I was able to use my training in science communication and applied research to translate the findings into useable tools and training for the public. As someone with experience with medical debt, it was particularly meaningful to directly engage with people in-person and share our work and offer them our supportive tools to ensure they know their rights."

Lauren Murfree
Policy Analyst



Fast Facts: **2025-2026** **Institute Impact**

With one director, two full-time analysts, and two associate-level positions, the Institute has...

Published:



2 research reports



4 fact sheets



8 blog posts

14 
partnerships

with different national,
state, and local funders

Mobilized Over
100 Hoosiers

to attend an in-person Hoosier
Healthcare Day of Action



Conducted

24 one-on-one
research interviews



Contributed to
the pre-session
development of
two bills

Offered two civic
engagement
Get IN-VOLVED
Challenge series,
with over
100 participants
completing more
than **570 challenges**



“
**quoted as
experts in**
73 different
media
pieces

Testified in **19**
hearings

Delivered 18
policy presentations

Drove over
1,500
letters
from Hoosiers to
their legislators

Engaged
13

advisory council
members with lived
experiences of
financial hardship
to guide our work

Held over
140



one-to-ones
with legislators to
represent YOUR interests

Led or
Co-Led
SIX



different statewide
policy coalitions

You can help us make an even bigger impact:
insitute.incap.org/donate



GET IN-VOLVED

Civic Engagement in Indiana

With support from our advisory council, #TeamInstitute designed a ten-week challenge series to help Hoosiers get to know a little more about their elected officials and the policymaking process. Participants receive **weekly, bite-sized challenges** to learn when and how they can participate in the legislative process, how to use tools like the iga.in.gov website, and other strategies to make their voices heard.

This year, we offered Get IN-VOLVED with two new twists: First, we offered a summer session. With a focus on budgets and taxes, our summer session engaged new participants who completed challenges to not only learn how the government collects and spends money, but also how to make their priorities and preferences known to lawmakers.

We also revamped our winter session with a special *Get IN-VOLVED: Get in the Game* theme, where we offered a weekly virtual “tailgate” from inside the statehouse to share just-in-time insights and mini-tours of key areas. As a bonus, we also offered special sports-themed prizes for MVPs - participants who completed all challenges - with contributions from local sports teams. **This year, 18 participants achieved MVP status!**

“I love how [the challenges we completed] are catered to us - the working class people - and you guys show us how to utilize the information and also to reach out for change.”

“[After completing Get IN-Volved], I showed my child how to look up our representatives; I am having my students write a legislator on a topic around women's health that they are interested in.”

Know Your Rights: Medical Debt



The Institute is proud to have continued our Know Your Rights campaigns with a new partner and focus: Health Foundation of La Porte, highlighting rights around medical debt. Through this collaboration, the Institute conducted a project in two phases:

- **Research**

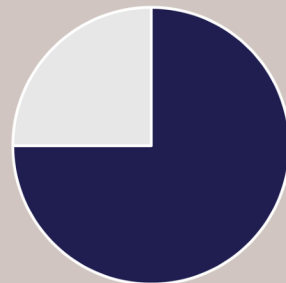
- We interviewed 10 residents from La Porte County, Indiana, about their experiences with medical debt, learning about the coping strategies that assisted them along the way.
- Findings from these interviewees offered insight for Institute staff in making and distributing Know Your Rights materials.

- **Program**

- We distributed infographics and pamphlets at La Porte County events.
- We coordinated and offered two free webinars to learn about ways to prevent medical debt from happening, get support with medical debt, and ensure all rights relating to debt practices were being followed by debt collectors.

These trainings and all materials remain on the Institute's webpage to continue to provide assistance to Hoosiers in need.

75%
of training
attendees



said in a feedback survey that what they learned at the training would help them have an easier time paying for food.



In the Statehouse: Hoosier Healthcare Day of Action

Community engagement is a central part of the Institute's changemaking process. This year, in addition to the tireless staff efforts to connect with legislators and testify on critical bills that would impact low-income Hoosiers, #TeamInstitute was grateful to work with co-organizers in the medical debt movement to organize a Hoosier Healthcare Day of Action.

At this Day of Action, over 100 Hoosiers from across the state convened to share their experiences with high healthcare costs with their legislators. In this unique blend of empowerment and community organizing, participants were able to meet with legislators and legislative staff and connect with one another, creating a community of changemaking.

"I realize now that I had the antidote to learned helplessness, and it was learning that my experiences are valuable, that speaking directly to those in power does make a difference. The things I do, even when they feel small and insignificant, can move people."

#TeamInstitute Policy Fellow Lindsay O'Neil

The conversations with legislators were far less intimidating than I imagined...Being [in the State House] made me feel like anything was possible, like my voice and story mattered. I felt important to be there."

#TeamInstitute Policy Fellow Becca Freeman

In addition to our in-person engagement opportunity, we also continued to offer Action Network as a way for Hoosiers across the state to access legislative engagement opportunities. This platform, which allows constituents to easily connect with legislators on topics of importance, motivated Hoosiers to send over 1,500 letters this past year on topics ranging from utility affordability to paid parental leave to food access.

Research Toward Change

At the Institute, we are proud to continually be on the cutting-edge of state-level research contributions in Indiana. This year, we published two research reports, four fact sheets, and eight blogs, in addition to the 18 policy presentations we delivered. These efforts highlight our commitment to providing legislators and Hoosiers across the state with fact-driven stories, statistics, and solutions that ground financial well-being in a broader context and lived experience.



Among our many outputs this year, we are particularly proud of our report titled “Strong Families, Strong Indiana: The Past, Present, and Future of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program.” Drawing inspiration from our Advisory Council members with lived experience of financial hardship, this report focused on the past successes of Indiana’s 2023 TANF reform while also highlighting areas for future improvement.



I think the members of the Institute are passionate about advocating for Hoosiers, take feedback and consideration of the council members’ concerns and what we are passionate about also while taking on tough topics such as the housing issues, homelessness, food costs, housing costs...disability projects and awareness... FSSA issues, and medical debt, as well as other amazing projects. The staff members are always looking for grants to help us and ways to get people more involved in policy, including knowing their rights and how to identify and contact their representatives.”

- Advisory Council Member



Policy Fellows Program



“I feel better now knowing that I can engage in our lawmaking process, and that my voice does matter.”

- Current #TeamInstitute Policy Fellow
Lindsay O’Neil

“Being on this program at the Institute has been so rewarding and challenging and I’ve learned so much about research, program tools, and how legislation works.”

- Policy Fellow Alumna Sarah Conrad

Thanks to support from the Herbert Simon Family Foundation and Pritzker Children’s Institute, the Institute proudly offered our Policy Fellows program for the second year in a row, training and empowering voices with lived experience of financial hardship to learn policy research, engagement, and advocacy techniques. This year, we were delighted to support two talented fellows – Becca Freeman and Lindsay O’Neil – through biweekly lessons, attendance at statehouse events, and even travel to Washington D.C. The fellows will cap their experience this year by leading a conference session designed to mobilize members of Indiana’s Community Action network at the network’s annual conference.

We are so proud of these talented and engaged leaders! We see their growth as a core part of our larger commitment to creating sustainable and ongoing change, even as our previous cohort of Policy Fellows continues to stay engaged through the Institute’s Advisory Council and remain active in local community organizing spaces.

We look forward to continuing to offer these opportunities!

Want to support our Policy Fellows program?

Reach out to us at institute@incap.org to learn more and explore potential partnership opportunities.

Partners in 2025-2026



IN-CAA

Member dues fund our work on community needs assessment for each of the 21 Community Action Agencies.

CareQuest Institute for Oral Health

CareQuest is supporting the Institute's research on barriers to oral healthcare for low-income Hoosiers.

National Skills Coalition

NSC provides operating support for our role as the coordinator of the Indiana Skills2Compete Coalition and our research activities related to skills and higher education.

The Indianapolis Foundation

The Indianapolis Foundation, a CICF affiliate, supports research and advocacy for consumer protections and civic engagement.

The Herbert Simon Family Foundation

The Herbert Simon Family Foundation supports our policy fellows program. This collaboration allowed us to amplify the voices of Indiana's "Overlooked & Undercounted."

Consumer Federation of America

Our partnership with CFA allows us to conduct research and advocacy in this critical area.

Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence

ICADV supports our efforts to provide education and advocacy around paid family and medical leave.

NASW Indiana

We are supporting NASW's research exploring the preparation and retention of licensed behavioral health workers in Indiana.

Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority

Our current partnership with IHCD supports the Balance of State Continuum of Care as it tracks and responds to policy change.

Pritzker Children's Initiative

The Pritzker Children's Initiative supports a collaboration with United Way of Central Indiana and Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence to educate policymakers and the public about the needs of prenatal-to-three families.

Glick Philanthropies

Our partnership with Glick Philanthropies enables us to work on topic areas of consumer protections and housing instability.



Partner with Us!



We often partner with community organizations on projects that align with our mission of promoting financial well-being. Within the scope of our focus, we can conduct needs assessments for your community, help you formulate a strategic plan in one of our action areas, conduct research of interest, assist in the creation of media kits or research messaging plans, or discuss an alternative project that interests you.

You can learn more about the range of projects we have completed through partnerships or view our “menu” of offerings on our website institute.incap.org/have-a-project. Alternatively, if you’re feeling ready or just want to chat with us, you can reach out to institute@incap.org to learn more about how partnerships work and get started planning your project.

Speaking on behalf of TRI-CAP, one of Indiana’s Community Action Agencies, I know that our work is not possible without the assistance of the Indiana Community Action Poverty Institute. The Institute’s research and advocacy team is the best in the state. We couldn’t produce our federally required Community Needs Assessment without their assistance. And they also do a great job for special projects like grant writing support, general civic education for beginners through advanced knowledge individuals, and so much more!”

- Joyce Fleck, Executive Director at TRI-CAP

Thank you!

We could not do what we do without the support of partners, donors, volunteers, research participants, and staff. We are so grateful to each and every person that has lifted their voice or used their talents to support our momentum.

Your voice matters. **Get in touch:**

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