



# COLLIN COUNTY: ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ASSESSMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN EQUITABLE ECONOMIC RECOVERY IN COLLIN COUNTY

Every Texan is honored to partner with Communities Foundation of Texas to present this Collin County Economic Opportunity Assessment. The data and analysis in this report are timelier than ever, given our communities' challenges as we prepare for an equitable economic recovery from the pandemic. We know that Collin County, as with many communities, went into the pandemic seeing disparate outcomes in areas such as education and employment as a result of gaps in past policies and opportunities. **Closing gaps and strengthening policy will help everyone thrive, creating opportunity for all.** Analysis of early economic indicators shows that the pandemic has only exacerbated many areas of need for Collin County residents. Unemployment is up, industries that had been expanding (such as restaurants) are shrinking, and low-income families and communities of color are especially at risk for unemployment.

At Every Texan, we strengthen public policy so every Texan can be healthy, well-educated, and financially secure. Solid data and analysis are at the core of our work to advocate for policy solutions that enable Texans of all backgrounds to reach their full potential. **We offer the following policy recommendations for consideration and look forward to hearing other innovative ideas:**

### EXPAND ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE

- Broaden access to health insurance for underserved families by providing information on affordable public and private coverage options and supporting organizations that offer outreach and enrollment.
- One in five Collin County residents has medical debt. Medical debt negatively impacts access to health care as residents may postpone care they need due to fear of further debt. Increasing awareness of, and providing programs to support debt relief would be impactful.
- Chronic health conditions are the leading cause of death in Collin County, and can increase the risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19. Ensure residents know about COVID-19 testing options, including immigrant protections; expand access to free clinics, and provide funding for mobile testing sites that are geographically dispersed throughout Collin County.

### STRENGTHEN THE EDUCATION TO WORK PIPELINE

- Strengthen the college completion pipeline for all students by closing investment gaps in programs that have proven to be effective, such as: early education, pre-K, and bilingual and dual-language programs – particularly in suburban areas with changing demographics.
- Scale regional and sector partnerships between businesses and educational institutions to strengthen career pathways. House Bill 5 (2013) provided Texas students with new options for graduation targeting certain career paths. Several local Collin County businesses have already created internships that help ensure every student can participate in the county's economic prosperity.
- Focus on college affordability by looking at grant funding and tuition options for all students, including non-traditional students, to expand access to college. With Collin County residents holding college debt balances at over \$37,000 per student on average, college affordability today will have an outsized impact on the county's future economic growth.
- Offer financial wellness programs such as financial coaching, loan forgiveness, and debt payoff to employees entering the workforce as part of employment benefit/incentives. Companies that offer these services attract talent, increase employee retention and productivity, and boost their company brands.

## SUPPORT AT-RISK HOUSEHOLDS

- Paid sick leave can help protect public health by preventing workers from choosing between caring for a sick family member and losing wages. It also increases employee retention and boosts the bottom fifth of income earners who are currently less likely to have paid sick leave.
- Invest in infrastructure for online working and job training/certification solutions to help displaced workers gain new, marketable skills. Ensure online options are accessible to all households to improve equity and close digital divides.
- Support public-private partnerships to establish Financial Opportunity Centers in targeted neighborhoods that include services to help residents with debt reduction, building/repairing credit, purchasing homes, and researching career/workforce opportunities. This could also include helping residents receive unclaimed stimulus tax benefits and boost asset-building opportunities.
- Provide incentives for small, minority-owned, and immigrant-owned businesses to locate and hire in low-opportunity neighborhoods. Flexible loan terms and low-interest rates are increasingly important as the pandemic stretches on, and small businesses need longer-term stability.
- Inform residents on available relief benefits, such as P-EBT (Pandemic-Electronic Benefit Transfer, for children who receive SNAP benefits during the typical school year) through resource centers, communications added to utility bills, and partnering with community organizations like churches and nonprofits.

## INCREASE ACCESS TO HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION

- Consider creative options to increase affordable housing availability, including rent subsidies, during the period of economic recovery. Support and fund the development of affordable housing at the lower end of cost and ensure residents know about available housing programs like Housing Choice Vouchers.
- Create and support shuttle services and expanded sidewalks for students, workers, and the elderly connecting to schools and health care, and more. Incentivizing mixed developments can also decrease travel time to amenities.

As this data and research sink in, we are excited for the next phase of our collective efforts in working towards an equitable economic recovery in the region. Let's roll up our sleeves, dig into the data, and keep the dialogue going as we press forward to enact solutions to improve our community.

Sincerely Yours,



Ann Beeson, CEO, Every Texan



*Every Texan is an independent public policy organization that uses research, analysis and advocacy to promote solutions that enable Texans of all backgrounds to reach their full potential. Learn more at [everytexan.org](http://everytexan.org).*