

Community IDs promote health, economic and civic well-being

To fully engage in community life, people must be able to prove their identity. Localities across the U.S. have launched community ID programs to expand opportunity for people facing barriers getting a state ID or driver's license. In Iowa, Johnson County has administered a community ID program since 2015.¹

Community IDs represent a **low-cost, high-reward strategy** to help connect people who are often most marginalized from broader prosperity in their community, including refugees, seniors, people fleeing domestic violence or experiencing homelessness and undocumented immigrants.²

Johnson County has invested \$15,000 to \$20,000 in its program and issued over 2,000 IDs.³ Ongoing costs are minimal. In fact, the program, which charges cost \$8 for an adult ID and \$4 for a child ID, over time may come close to paying for itself.

It's time for Polk County to establish a community ID program. Having a local government administer and issue IDs is considered best practice, because it gives local officials more control over program features and rules and gives the program itself more permanence and community standing.⁴

**Polk County
should establish
a community ID
program.**

Here's why community IDs are a good idea:

They enhance public health

- Studies show that immigrants who lack documentation are less likely to access health services, including prenatal and mental health care.⁵ Government-issued ID removes barriers to health care.
- Because of federal regulations, including the 2001 PATRIOT Act, health care providers typically request government-issued ID when providing and billing for services. Proof of identity and citizenship is required to enroll in Medicaid.⁶ A government-issued community ID can expand health care access for many residents.
- Research shows people with strong community connections and social support are more likely to access mental health help, and that pattern is especially strong among immigrants.⁷ Opening access to health care and other supports through community ID may reduce rates of substance abuse and risky behavior.

They expand financial well-being

- IDs allow people to complete vital transactions that require identification, like cashing paychecks, using debit cards, renting an apartment and purchasing medication.
- They open the door to banking services. Most community ID programs across the country partner with local banks and credit unions to enable access to financial services. Several financial institutions in Johnson County allow local community IDs as a form of identification for opening accounts.⁸

They promote community involvement

- IDs encourage active community participation by enabling proof of residency and connecting cardholders to local businesses by offering discounts (an incentive for participation). In New York City, according to a survey of over 70,000 using the city's ID, IDNYC, 77 percent reported the cards increased their sense of belonging to the city.⁹
- Programs can be structured so cardholders can use their IDs as library cards, bus passes, and proof of identity to enroll in education or training programs, pick up kids from school, and secure housing — all essential activities that encourage family stability and belonging.

They contribute to neighborhood safety

- Many undocumented immigrants hesitate to seek help from police because they fear repercussions.¹⁰ New Haven, Connecticut, was the first to adopt an ID card program in 2006. Assistant Chief of Police Luiz Casanova called that community's card "very helpful from a law enforcement perspective," noting that the card "has played an important role in building relationships and respect."¹¹
- Because people cannot use community IDs for certain sensitive activities, such as purchasing age-restricted substances, entering age-restricted venues, voting, boarding an airplane, or enter a federal building, they do not interfere with broader security requirements.¹²

To learn more about community ID programs, contact Common Good Iowa policy analyst Sean Finn at sfynn@commongoodiowa.org.

¹ Jeff Charis-Carlson and Zach Berg, "Johnson County approves community ID program," Iowa City Press-Citizen, April 9, 2015. Accessed at <https://www.press-citizen.com/story/news/local/2015/04/09/johnson-county-community-program/25518835>

² Irund A-wan, Barbara Baquero, Keta Cowan, Jason Daniel-Ulloa, Alana LeBrón, William D. Lopez, Mayra Elena Martínez, Marlén Mendoza, Nicole L. Novak, Xiomara Santana, Rosamond Smith, and Olivia Temrowski. "The First Two Community ID Programs in the Midwest: Organizing, Evaluation, and Community Health in Johnson County, IA and Washtenaw County, MI," Cambio Center at the University of Missouri, 2017. Accessed at <https://mospace.umsystem.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10355/60961/2017-A-wan.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

³ Stephen Gruber-Miller, "Johnson County to begin issuing community IDs next week," Iowa City Press-Citizen, July 9, 2015. Accessed at <https://www.press-citizen.com/story/news/local/2015/07/09/community-johnson-county/29887703/>. Maria Kuiper, "Members of Johnson County may benefit from community ID," The Daily Iowan, October 9, 2018. Accessed at <https://dailyiowan.com/2018/10/09/members-of-johnson-county-may-benefit-from-community-id/>

⁴ The Center for Popular Democracy, "Building Identity: A Toolkit for Designing and Implementing a Successful Municipal ID Program," 2015. Accessed at https://populardemocracy.org/sites/default/files/Municipal-ID-Report_WEB_Nov2015_0.pdf

⁵ Scott D. Rhodes, Lilli Mann, Florence M. Simán, Eunyong Song, Jorge Alonzo, Mario Downs, Emma Lawlor, Omar Martinez, Christina J. Sun, Mary Claire O'Brien, Beth A. Reboussin, and Mark A. Hall. The Impact of Local Immigration Enforcement Policies on the Health of Immigrant Hispanics/Latinos in the United States. Am J Public Health. 2015 February; 105(2): 329–337. Accessed at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4318326/>. Amelia Seraphia Derr, "Mental Health Service Use Among Immigrants in the United States: A Systematic Review." Psychiatr Serv. 2016 Mar; 67(3): 265–274. Accessed at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5122453/>

⁶ Restrictive ID Policies: Implications for Health Equity," J Immigr Minor Health. 2018; 20(2): 255–260. Accessed at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5735025/>

⁷ Amelia Seraphia Derr, "Mental Health Service Use Among Immigrants in the United States: A Systematic Review," December 2015. Accessed at <https://ps.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/appi.ps.201500004>

⁸ Johnson County, Iowa, Community ID Partners and Business Discounts. Accessed at <https://www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/Business%20Discount%20List%20Updated.pdf>

⁹ Tamara C. Daley, Laurel Lunn, Jennifer Hamilton, Artis Bergman, Donna Tapper, "A Tool of Empowerment: A Mixed-Methods Evaluation of the New York Municipal ID Program," Westat, August 2016. Accessed at https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/idnyc/downloads/pdf/idnyc_report_full.pdf

¹⁰ Melody Mercado, "Immigrant rights group seeks IDs for Polk County residents who can't obtain official ones," Des Moines Register, February 26, 2022. Accessed at <https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/local/des-moines/2022/02/26/polk-county-community-id-program-proposed-immigrants-homeless-identification-dmps-covid-relief/9229629002/>

¹¹ Aaron Sankin, "Undocumented Immigrant Debit Cards: Oakland Introduces Landmark New Program," HuffPost News, February 26, 2013. Accessed at https://www.huffpost.com/entry/undocumented-immigrant-debit-cards_n_2769198

¹² Ways community IDs can and cannot be used in Johnson County are outlined at <https://www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/communityid>