



# From Data to Action: Addressing Austin Metro's Interconnected Community Challenges

Prepared by: **The Austin Area Sustainability Indicators for AARO**

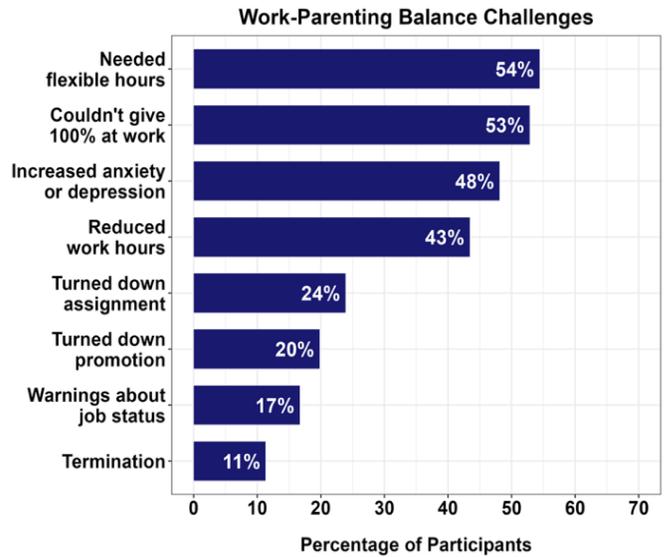
The Austin Area Sustainability Indicators (A2SI) project has measured quality of life and sustainability trends in Central Texas since 2004, surveying residents across six Central Texas counties. The 2024 data highlight the interconnected nature of our regional challenges and the importance of social connection and cross-sector collaboration.

## 1. Income Disparities Drive Interconnected Challenges

Income disparities, largely rooted in unequal access to education and employment opportunities, create cascading effects that amplify other challenges such as housing affordability, food security, healthcare access, and environmental resilience.

### 2. Residents Face Employment and Childcare Stress

While Austin residents (81%) are satisfied with their jobs and feel that opportunities are available to them, 48% of parents report anxiety or depression from balancing work and parenting. Childcare represents a critical constraint. And 28% report that they could face consequences for taking sick time.



### 3. Housing and Food Access are Under Pressure

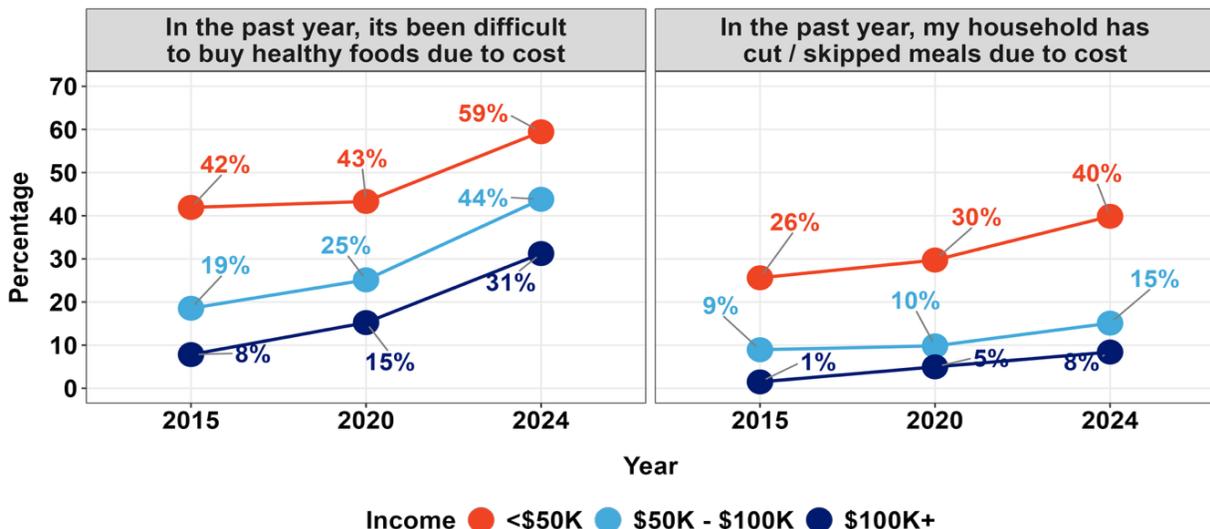
While most respondents can afford their housing payments, 6% of homeowners and 11% of renters say it's not very likely they can make the next payment on time. 59% say rising housing costs have forced neighbors to move.

Food insecurity has worsened sharply since 2015, with 40% of households making \$40,000 / year or less reporting cutting or skipping meals. 59% report that it is difficult to afford healthy food. Residents with lower income, identify as Hispanic households, those lacking access to a car, or families with children under 6 are more likely to report experiencing food insecurity.

### 4. Residents Face Health and Environmental Challenges

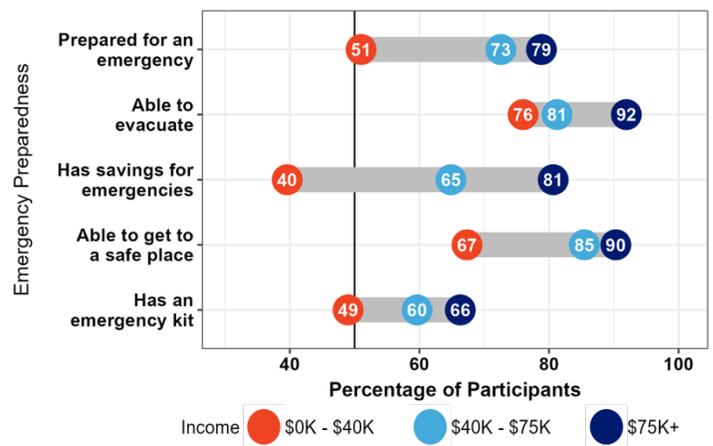
Self-reported health status has declined since 2004, with those reporting very good or excellent health decreasing by 10% points. Environmental risks continue to increase, with disparities observed in healthcare access and emergency preparedness.

Black and Hispanic residents, and those with lower income, are more likely to report a lapse in health insurance over the last year. Cost is the most prominent barrier to accessing healthcare.



Extreme weather events will become more severe and more frequent. Households making \$40,000 / year or less are not as prepared for emergencies, with less savings, and less able to evacuate.

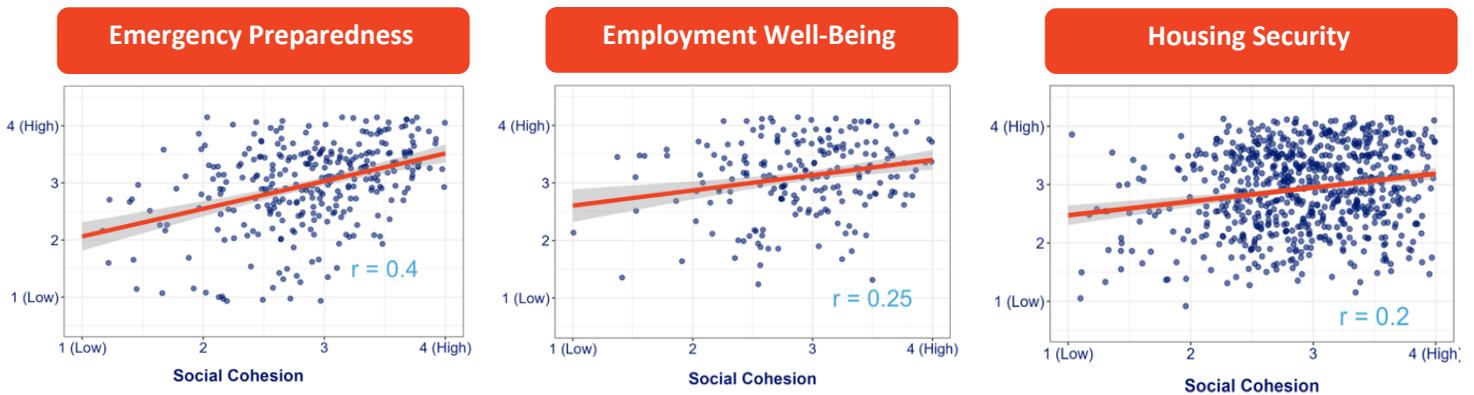
Households making \$40,000-\$75,000/ year are more prepared, but are less able to evacuate or get to a safe place.



### 5. Social Connection as a Force Multiplier

Households with social capital, or social connection, fare better across every measure of well-being. Social capital is defined as the social resources a household can access, such as personal networks, neighborhood cohesion, and trust. Across all domains, social capital improves outcomes. Where institutions or policies fall short, neighborhood networks, cohesion, and trust buffer against hardship. Residents who report more social capital are:

- Less likely to report housing or food insecurity
- More prepared for emergencies, even for lower-income households
- More satisfied with their jobs, and less likely to report childcare challenges
- Reporting better health outcomes, with more access to healthcare resources



### Conclusion

Central Texas is facing deepening pressures from rising costs, systemic inequalities, and environmental risks that threaten the region’s livability. While residents are vulnerable to interconnected challenges, A2SI reveals that communities with social connection are resilient in the face of these individual and collective challenges. When communities have cohesion, trust, and expanded networks, resilience develops. As the region confronts intensifying pressures, solutions will depend on strengthening social connections alongside addressing economic disparities.

### Methodology

The 2024 community survey collected nearly 1,100 responses across six counties in Central Texas (Bastrop, Burnet, Caldwell, Hays, Travis, Williamson) between July 2023 and August 2024. Surveys were conducted in English and Spanish.

Participants were recruited through telephone surveys, online panels, postcard mailers, and community outreach in partnership with Consumer Research International and Go Austin Vamos Austin (GAVA).

Topics in the survey included housing and food security, health and healthcare, environmental concerns, employment and education, childcare access, safety, community resilience, policy support, emergency preparedness, and more.