Choosing Payday: Evidence from Earned Wage Access

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Abstract

Earned wage access (EWA) allows workers to receive accrued earnings before payday. Using administrative data covering over a million EarnIn users and a matched difference-in-differences design, I estimate the effects of first use on income, spending, and bank fees. Adoption coincides with elevated spending on essential expenses and is followed by continued use. First use increases net monthly income by $322, or 12%, with positive effects across both sample years and a broad range of employment sectors. Spending also increases. Among surveyed regular users, 60% report improved finances, compared with 11% reporting deterioration, and 71% use accessed wages for expenses that support work. Survey respondents anticipate persistence consistent with administrative usage patterns, while some express demand for commitment devices. These findings suggest that greater control over pay timing can ease liquidity constraints and increase income.

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1 Introduction

Most workers are paid biweekly or monthly, but financial obligations—like rent, utilities, transportation, and groceries—arrive daily. Moreover, nearly 60 percent of adults experience a major unexpected financial shock, like a major car repair or a medical emergency, every year (Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, 2026). Managing the timing of spending and income is convenient regardless of financial health: 82 percent of adults in the United States had a credit card in 2025 (Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, 2026). But it is especially valuable when a savings buffer is not available. Indeed, just under half of credit card users, 45 percent, carried a balance with an average interest rate of over 23 percent (Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, 2026; Martinez and Seikel, 2024). Options are worse for individuals with low credit who often have to rely on payday loans, late payments, or loans from friends and family (when available) to make ends meet between paydays.

Over the last decade, earned wage access (EWA) has emerged as a financial tool designed to bridge the gap between liquidity needs and pay timing by allowing workers to access a portion of their earned wages before payday. EWA uses digital payroll and payment technologies to give workers more control over when they receive their earnings. The fee structure for EWA is often quite different from that of more conventional financial products. For example, EarnIn, the data provider for this study, charges no mandatory fees for standard ACH transfers through its Cash Out product, the focus of this paper, but allows users to pay a Lightning Speed fee for expedited transfers or leave a voluntary tip. EarnIn also offers Live Pay, which provides real-time access to eligible earnings through the EarnIn Card for a monthly fee of $2.99 when the autopay feature is activated. Other EWA providers charge per-transaction fees or use subscription models. EWA generally does not require a credit check, and many products are non-recourse, meaning that providers cannot send unpaid balances to collections. Use has grown rapidly. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau estimates that 10 million workers used EWA to access $31.9 billion in 2022 (Consumer

Financial Protection Bureau, 2024a).

The growth of EWA has sparked a regulatory debate about whether accessing earned wages before payday is a form of credit or a payroll innovation. Critics of EWA argue that it is a loan and should be subject to existing regulations, like annual rate caps. Proponents of EWA claim it is more analogous to an ATM that allows workers to access resources they already own, which are subject to disclosure and consent requirements. Consider a worker who accesses $100 one week before payday. An annual rate cap of, say, 36 percent, would require that fees paid on this transaction be 69 cents or less. By comparison, an average out-of-network ATM fee is $4.77 on a withdrawal of $128 (Bennett and Goldberg, 2024; Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, 2024b). States have resolved this question differently. As of March 2026, twelve states had adopted EWA-specific laws or regulations, with substantial variation in how they classify EWA, regulate fees and voluntary payments, mandate disclosures, and restrict collection practices (Grote et al., 2026). Credible evidence about the impact of EWA on users is critical given the rapid growth in EWA usage and the resulting regulatory questions.

The increasing popularity of EWA also raises a broader economic question about the design of compensation: how does giving workers control over when they are paid affect how much they earn, how much they spend, and their broader financial stability? Earlier access could increase the effective return to working by making earnings more immediate or by relaxing liquidity constraints that interfere with work. Alternatively, changing pay timing could simply shift consumption and liquidity across days without affecting labor supply or income. To my knowledge, this paper provides the first causal evidence on the impacts of direct-to-consumer (D2C) EWA on these outcomes. Using comprehensive administrative data from EarnIn, the largest D2C EWA provider, covering the universe of over a million users in 2024 and 2025, I first document how users use EWA. I then use a matched difference-in-differences design to estimate how first-time EWA usage affects users' income, spending, bank fees, and future EWA usage. The empirical design compares users who begin using EarnIn's

Cash Out EWA product early in 2024 or 2025 with matched individuals who begin using it several months later, after the outcome observation window, providing credible identification of short-run causal effects.

Over a million unique individuals used EarnIn's Cash Out product in 2024 and 2025 with significant growth in users over time. On average, users access $106 and pay $5.34 (5%) per transaction and make 38 transactions per year. Users continue accessing their earnings after first use. Spending differences around the day of first use between new users and their matched comparisons suggest that users access their wages when liquidity demands are high. The combined increases in rent, phone bills, gasoline, automotive expenses, pharmaceuticals, and credit-card payments exceed the average amount accessed, indicating that first use occurs amid a cluster of financial obligations larger than a typical EWA transaction. Excluding the initial transaction, the matched difference-in-differences results show that new users make approximately 2.3 EWA transactions per month, accessing $91 and paying $5.33 in voluntary tips and expedited-transfer fees per transaction. Thus, the estimated effects of first use occur in a setting of continued EWA usage rather than a one-time transaction.

I find that first-time EWA usage increases users' net monthly income by nearly $400 in the month of first use and approximately $322, or 12 percent relative to the matched comparison group's average income, in the first three months after first-use despite being nearly identical in the three months prior to first use. Looking separately at new users in 2024 and 2025, the income increase is $279 in 2024 and $345 in 2025. The difference between these effects is not statistically significant at conventional levels. The income increase is also widespread across employment sectors. The estimated effects are positive in every sector with at least 100 matched pairs and generally range from approximately $240 to $540 per month. While I do not observe hours worked or unemployment spells and therefore cannot directly test these mechanisms, increased hours in response to more immediate pay, liquidity to cover work-related expenses, greater job attachment, and improved productivity are all plausible explanations.

First EWA use coincides with unusually high bank fees. The concentration of these increases on the date of first use suggests that workers often start using EWA in response to an anticipated liquidity shortfall.[1] After the day of first use, overdraft and non-sufficient funds (NSF) fees remain elevated by about $4.74 and $8.40 per month. These estimates correspond to approximately one additional overdraft fee for every 17 EWA transactions and one additional NSF fee for every 9 transactions (Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, 2023).

I complement the administrative analysis with a survey of about 1,000 active EWA users. About 60 percent report that EWA improved their financial situation, compared with 11 percent who report deterioration. Consistent with EWA relaxing liquidity constraints on work, 71 percent report using accessed wages for expenses that help them work or get to work. Following the comparison of expected and actual behavior in DellaVigna and Malmendier (2006), I find that respondents' expectations imply persistence consistent with administrative usage patterns. Respondents also express limited demand for binding usage restrictions that could serve as commitment devices.

This paper contributes to several areas of research. First, a large literature tests the predictions of the permanent income hypothesis by measuring the consumption response to the timing of income. A takeaway from this literature is that consumption is more responsive to the timing of income than economic theory would predict (Gelman et al., 2014; Olafsson and Pagel, 2018; Shapiro, 2005). This sensitivity is frequently explained by limited liquid assets (e.g., Kaplan et al., 2014) or quasi-hyperbolic discounting (e.g., Shapiro, 2005). This paper extends this literature by studying a setting in which workers can choose when to access income they have already earned. The results show that greater control over pay timing affects not only when workers spend their income, but also how much income they earn—consistent with increased labor supply.

A second literature directly studies the impact of paycheck timing. Baugh and Correia

[1]Importantly, the estimated income effects are robust to an alternative specification that includes day-of-adoption measures of financial distress in both the matching model and as controls.

(2022) leverage employer-initiated changes in paycheck frequency and find that increasing pay frequency decreases consumption and credit card borrowing but increases episodes of financial distress. Baugh et al. (2017) show that consumers struggle to budget over long pay cycles, which leads to high-cost borrowing. Parsons and Van Wesep (2013) develop a theoretical model of pay timing as a commitment device to help manage a budget. Unlike conventional changes in pay frequency, EWA allows workers to control the timing of their pay without requiring employers to change their payroll schedules or workers to change jobs. This paper provides new evidence on the consequences of giving workers this control over the timing of their pay.

This paper also adds to the literature on the welfare effects of financial products that provide short-term liquidity. McDevitt and Sojourner (2025) study bank customers choosing between depositing a check and waiting for it to clear or paying a fee to cash it immediately. They find that an additional day of clearing time makes account holders 65.5% more likely to cash rather than deposit a check, which implies a willingness to pay of $11.17 per day for faster access to funds. Much of this literature studies payday loans, which provide liquidity to borrowers with limited access to conventional credit but charge high fees (Allcott et al., 2022; Melzer, 2011; Morse, 2011; Zinman, 2010). These studies reach different conclusions about whether access to short-term credit improves borrower welfare. This paper provides new evidence on the use and effects of EWA, a lower-cost potential substitute that allows workers to access income they have already earned.

Finally, this paper contributes to the emerging literature on EWA and flexible pay. Chen et al. (2026) report the results of a randomized experiment evaluating the roll-out of Uber's Instant Pay earned wage access product and find that flexible pay increases hours worked and earnings. Other research discusses the potential household-finance effects of EWA or examines its relationship with employee retention (Donner and Siciliano, 2021; Murillo et al., 2022). This paper differs from these studies by examining direct-to-consumer EWA, which operates independently of employers and is available to workers across a broad range of

sectors. It provides causal evidence on income and financial outcomes in this increasingly important segment of the market.

2 Earned Wage Access

EWA is a tool introduced in the early 2010s that gives workers more choice over the timing of their pay by allowing workers to access their wages before they would otherwise be paid (Lux and Chung, 2023). EWA is becoming more widely available because of intermediaries that provide workers with more immediate access to their earned wages. The market is generally segmented into business-to-business (B2B) and direct-to-consumer (D2C) EWA providers. B2B providers work directly with employers to integrate EWA into existing payroll systems. Direct-to-consumer (D2C) EWA platforms allow employees to use EWA independently of their employer, verifying earnings through a combination of prediction based on pay history and, in some cases, geotracking with phones. EarnIn, the data provider in this paper, was founded in the early 2010s and is the largest direct-to-consumer EWA provider in the United States, in addition to offering other products like payroll software. In most states, EarnIn allows workers to access up to $150 in earned wages per day and a maximum of $1,000 in earned wages per pay period. Some firms, including Walmart, Uber, and Lyft, have also piloted or adopted EWA for their workers.

The fee structure for EWA varies by provider and is often quite different from that of traditional financial instruments. EarnIn's "Cash Out" product studied in this paper does not have any mandatory fees. Users can leave a tip and, similar to products like Venmo, pay a fee for an expedited "Lightning Speed" transfer rather than a standard ACH transfer that can take up to 1–2 business days to be reflected in the customer's bank account. Other EWA providers charge per-use fees or monthly subscriptions. For example, Uber and Lyft's EWA option charges drivers between $0.50 and $1.25 per cash-out (Chen et al., 2026).

EWA also differs from conventional financial tools in that it does not require a credit

check to use. Most providers, including EarnIn, do not charge any fees or penalties if there is an issue that prevents accessed wages from being recovered from the worker's bank account. For EarnIn, the worker is prevented from using the service again until the accessed wages are repaid. EWA is also non-recourse, meaning that providers cannot send amounts they fail to recover to collections agencies. In contrast to credit transactions or payday loans, where the borrower shares the risk with increasing fees and penalties for late payments, EWA providers bear nearly all of the risk of non-payment.

Critics of EWA worry that consumers could potentially enroll in multiple EWA platforms and access more than they earn. While the consumer generally would not face financial penalties from the EWA providers for doing this, banks may charge overdraft or NSF fees if the account is overdrawn.

3 Data

Administrative data. My analysis is based on comprehensive administrative data provided by EarnIn. The data include detailed information about EWA usage, net monthly primary employment income, other spending based on bank transactions, some employer details, and periodic credit report snapshots for a subset of users who have opted in to credit monitoring.

The EWA usage data include information about all EWA transactions with EarnIn in the 2024 and 2025 calendar years. This includes an anonymized user identifier, each user's date of first use, and, for each transaction, the date and amount of the transaction, the amount the user voluntarily tipped (if any), and whether the user paid an extra fee to use a Lightning Speed transfer to receive their accessed wages faster.

The income and spending data are based on bank transactions voluntarily shared with EarnIn. Net income data from the primary employer is available at the calendar month level and is based on deposits into users' bank accounts from their main employer. Daily spending information aggregated by spending category is also observed. A limitation of these data is

that I do not observe income or spending that is not reflected in the linked bank account—for example, spending on a credit card or from other bank accounts. However, I do observe credit card payments from the bank account.

Employer data are reported at the monthly level and include an anonymized employer identifier and sector, derived from the employer's name, and pay frequency for the last employer in each month. I use these data to identify each user's sector in the month containing the reference date.[2] For early adopters, the reference date is the date of first EWA use. For matched later adopters, sector is measured on the same reference date rather than in the month of their own first use. A limitation of these data is that I do not observe unemployment spells, so individuals are assumed to work with the same employer until a new employer is reported in the data.

Finally, for users who had opted in to credit monitoring, I observe several details from their Experian credit report, including their credit score, total number of accounts, and total balance. For the 9,819 users with any credit data, I observe these details about once every 30 days and 11 times total, on average.

Survey data. EarnIn customers were surveyed in September 2026 about their use of EWA, available alternatives, and perceived effects on their financial situation. The survey was administered through Qualtrics and distributed by EarnIn to a sample of 80,000 Live Pay and Cash Out users who had used the app at least twice per month in each of the preceding six months and were in good standing, with no active reviews or penalties. The first 1,000 respondents who provided an email received a $5 Amazon gift card for their time. Users were informed that the survey was part of an independent academic evaluation of EWA and that EarnIn would not have access to their responses. Appendix C reproduces the questionnaire.

A total of 1,103 users opened the survey. 97 respondents are dropped because they did not pass the survey's embedded attention check. Another 15 respondents were dropped because

[2]Sector is unknown for 48% of users. This usually reflects the user working at a small business or a business with a difficult to decipher payroll name.

they did not agree to take part in the survey. Therefore, the final survey analysis sample includes 991 respondents.

3.1 EWA Usage and Users

The best information to date on EWA usage is based on a CFPB report that gathered information from eight employer-partnered earned wage access providers that constituted roughly half of the employer-partnered market (Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, 2024a). The report documents over seven million users accessing $22.8 billion in 2022, with an average transaction of $106 and 27 withdrawals per year. The CFPB separately estimates that D2C providers advanced approximately $9.1 billion to 3 million consumers, although it provides substantially less information about D2C usage.

Table 1 summarizes usage of EarnIn's Cash Out product, the most widely used D2C EWA product, in 2024 and 2025. Over a million unique users used the product in 2024 or 2025 with about 500,000 new users in 2024 and substantially more new users in 2025.[3] Across the two years, users accessed an average of $105.81 about 3.2 times per month. The average amount accessed increased from $96 in 2024 to $114 in 2025. In 2024, over 1 million unique users accessed an average of $96 about 4 times per month. In 2025, over a million unique users accessed an average of $114 about 2.7 times per month.

Users paid voluntary fees averaging about 5 percent of the amount accessed. They left a voluntary tip in 40 percent of transactions (averaging $1.10 over all transactions). In over 80 percent of transactions, users chose to pay an additional fee for a Lightning Speed transfer (averaging $4.24 across all transactions at the time the data was pulled[4]) so the deposit is reflected in their account almost instantaneously. Standard transfers are sent via a standard ACH transfer that could take 1–2 business days to be reflected in a user's bank account. Users did not pay a tip or Lightning Speed fee in 10% of transactions. More than half of users (52%) had at least one transaction with no fees.

[3]Exact user counts are suppressed to protect confidential information about EarnIn's revenues and profits.
[4]For comparison, average wire transfer fees are about $26 (Bennett, 2025).

Table 1, Panel D shows usage summary statistics by employment sector. Rather than showing the count of users, the table shows the share of pooled user-year observations in the employment sector. The top sectors, covering 56% of users with a known sector, are retail trade (18% of users with a known sector), health care and social assistance (16%), accommodation and food services (7%), public administration (7%), and transportation and warehousing (7%). Across all sectors, users access around $100 a little less than once per week and pay about 5% of the accessed amount in fees.

Figure 1 shows the number of EarnIn users per 100,000 in each state in 2024 and 2025. In 2024, usage was highest in Georgia, Arizona, Nevada, Maryland, and Washington D.C. with between 400 and 550 users per 100,000 residents. In 2025, per capita usage was highest in Georgia, Nevada, Arizona, Florida, and North Carolina with between 900 and 1200 users per 100,000. The growth in EWA usage is highlighted by Maine, which ranked 45th out of the 50 states plus Washington D.C., having 400 users per 100,000 residents, similar to the highest usage states in 2024.

Appendix Figure A1 shows how EWA transactions change across successive uses among workers who started using the product in 2024 or 2025 and used the product at least 20 times. The figure reports the average amount accessed, the number of days between uses, and the level and composition of fees paid. After some fluctuations during the first few transactions, the average amount accessed increases from approximately $96 to $104 by the twentieth use. The average time between uses declines from approximately 12 days to 7 days. Total fees are lowest on the first use, averaging $2.39, and increase to $5.55 by the twentieth use. Although not shown in the figure, 45 percent of users pay no fees on their first transaction. This share falls to 12 percent on the second transaction and gradually declines to approximately 9 percent.

4 Identifying the Causal Effects of EWA

A key challenge when estimating the effects of earned wage access is finding a credible comparison group. Individuals use EWA for a reason. For example, a worker may first access earned wages because a bill, bank fee, or other expense creates an immediate shortfall. Outcomes around first use may therefore reflect the event that caused the worker to adopt EWA rather than the effect of EWA itself. This is a version of the selection problem in labor market interventions commonly referred to as "Ashenfelter's Dip" (Ashenfelter, 1978).

I address this challenge by comparing workers who begin using EWA on a particular date with observably similar workers who first use EWA at least 92 days later. The 92 day restriction guarantees that they remain untreated throughout the three month outcome window used in the main analysis. Thus, the comparison group is a set of late adopters who have not used EWA during the outcome window, but who go on to eventually use EWA. The resulting estimand is the effect of first using EWA on a particular date relative to delaying adoption by at least 92 days among workers who eventually use EWA.

In each year, early adopters first use EWA between April 1 and September 30. Their matched comparisons first use EWA between July 2 and December 31 and always at least 92 days after the corresponding early adopter. The resulting sample contains 26,277 matched pairs in 2024 and 72,368 matched pairs in 2025, for a pooled sample of 98,645 matched pairs.

4.1 Constructing the matched sample

I construct a matched comparison group by matching early EWA adopters with late adopters who had a nearly identical probability of first using EWA on the early adopter's date of first use.

To construct the first-use propensity score, I begin with a person-day sample of EarnIn customers in 2024 and 2025. Individuals remain in the sample through the date of their first use. I require each individual to have three months of prior income data, a nonmissing

state, and at least 14 days of observed bank-account activity before the reference date. These restrictions ensure that the pre-adoption covariates needed to estimate the first-use propensity score are observed for both treated and comparison observations.

For each person-day, I estimate a linear probability model of first EWA use:

$$FirstUse_{it} = M'_{it}\beta + X'_{it}\gamma + Z'_{it}\theta + \delta_{s(i)} + \varepsilon_{it}, \tag{1}$$

where $FirstUse_{it}$ is an indicator for worker i first using EarnIn's EWA product on reference date t. M_{it} includes net income in the three calendar months preceding the reference month and all pairwise interactions among the three monthly income measures. X_{it} includes weekly spending on bank fees and debt payments in the two weeks before the reference date. The bank-fee categories include overdraft, NSF, interest, and other fees. Debt payments include auto, credit-card, mortgage, personal, student, and other loan payments. Z_{it} includes characteristics of the employer in month t, and $\delta_{s(i)}$ denotes state fixed effects.

To avoid overfitting by using the same observations to estimate the model and generate fitted values, I estimate equation (1) using five-fold cross-fitting. Each person's predicted value is generated from a model estimated without that person's fold.

I match early adopters who start using EWA on date t to late adopters, with replacement, working in the same sector on that reference date and who start using EWA at least 92 days later using these cross-fitted linear predictions. Matching with replacement improves match quality by permitting each early adopter to be paired with the best possible match. Exact matching on sector at the reference date facilitates estimating heterogeneous treatment effects by sector. Finally, I drop the 5 percent of matched pairs with the largest absolute differences in the cross-fitted prediction. The matched sample contains 98,645 early adopters matched to 23,514 distinct later adopters.

The matching procedure produces early and later adopters with nearly identical predicted first-use propensity scores. Appendix Figure A2 shows the density of differences in first use propensity scores and date of first use between early adopters and matched late adopters.

Propensity scores between matched pairs are nearly identical with nearly all differences less than 0.001 in absolute value. Late adopters start using EWA a minimum of 92 days after early adopters and 131 days later on average. The event-study estimates reported below along with the main results provide an additional assessment of whether outcomes had parallel trends prior to first EWA use.

4.2 Estimating average effects

Using a balanced panel for each outcome, I use the matched sample to estimate the following difference-in-differences specification:

$$Y_{igt} = \alpha \left(Early_i \times Post_{it} \right) + \eta Early_i + \mu_g + \lambda_t + \tau_{c(i,t)} + \phi \widehat{p}_{ig} + \varepsilon_{igt}, \tag{2}$$

where Y_{igt} is an outcome for worker i, in matched group g, at relative time t. $Early_i$ is an indicator for the worker who adopts EWA on the reference date, and $Post_{it}$ indicates periods on or after that date.

The specification controls for matched-group fixed effects, μ_g, which compare workers within matched pairs; relative-time fixed effects, λ_t, which account for common changes around the reference date; and calendar-time fixed effects, $\tau_{c(i,t)}$, which account for common shocks occurring in a particular calendar day or month. I also control for the cross-fitted prediction used to form the match, $\widehat{p}_{ig}$. The unit of time depends on the frequency at which the outcome is observed. Income is measured monthly, while spending, EWA use, and bank fees are measured daily.

The coefficient α measures the average difference in post-adoption outcomes between early adopters and matched later adopters, relative to their pre-adoption difference. α is interpretable as the causal effect of initiating EWA use under a conditional parallel-trends assumption. Specifically, absent early adoption, the outcomes of early adopters must have changed similarly to those of their matched later adopters. Matching on observed

characteristics and eventual EWA adoption makes this assumption more credible, but it does not eliminate all selection concerns. In particular, workers may first use EWA in response to an idiosyncratic liquidity shock that is not captured by their prior income, spending, employment, or bank-fee histories.

I examine the dynamics of the estimates and assess pretreatment differences using the following event-study specification:

$$Y_{igt} = \sum_{k \neq -1} \beta_k \left(Early_i \times \mathbb{1}\{t = k\} \right) + \eta Early_i + \mu_g + \lambda_t + \tau_{c(i,t)} + \phi \widehat{p}_{ig} + \varepsilon_{igt}. \tag{3}$$

One period preceding first use, usually $k = -1$, is normalized to zero. Each β_k therefore measures the adjusted difference between early adopters and matched later adopters in period k, relative to their difference in the omitted period. The pretreatment coefficients show whether the groups had similar outcome trends before the early adopter first used EWA. The post-adoption coefficients show how the estimated effect develops over time.

The absence of differential pretreatment trends supports the identifying parallel trends assumption, but does not rule out other contemporaneous changes. In particular, pretreatment balance cannot rule out a liquidity shock that occurs on the date of first use. This distinction is important for outcomes such as spending and bank fees, which may themselves help explain why a worker adopts EWA. I therefore interpret sharp changes concentrated on the date of first use cautiously because they may reflect both selection into EWA and the immediate effects of access.

A remaining concern is that first EWA use could coincide with a change in the observability of a worker's linked bank account. Appendix Figure A3 examines the number of observed non-EWA bank transactions around first use. Transaction counts increase sharply on the day of first use, consistent with workers beginning to use EWA on days when they are unusually financially active. However, this difference dissipates rapidly, and transaction counts for early

adopters and matched later adopters converge within approximately one week. Thus, changes in account observability are unlikely to explain effects that persist over subsequent weeks or months.

In all specifications, standard errors are clustered by user. Clustering allows outcomes for the same user to be arbitrarily correlated over time. It also accounts for the fact that matching with replacement causes some later adopters to appear in multiple matched groups.

5 Patterns of EWA Adoption and Use

5.1 Spending around first EWA use

Figure 2 examines spending on rent, phone bills, gasoline, automotive expenses, pharmaceuticals, and credit card payments in the week before and two weeks after first use of EWA. The figure reports daily event-study estimates from equation (3) for the seven days preceding first use and the following 14 days. Day -7 is the omitted category and is normalized to zero. The short window highlights how initially accessed wages are used. Section 6.2 examines whether total monthly spending also increases beyond this initial spike.

Spending levels are comparable between early and late adopters a week before first use. Spending among early adopters starts to increase slightly in the couple of days before first use and then rises sharply on the day of first EWA use, or "day 0", in all six categories. Relative to the matched comparison group, spending on the day of first use increases by approximately \$38 for rent, \$28 for phone bills, \$55 for gasoline, \$19 for automotive expenses, \$8 for pharmaceuticals, and \$72 for credit card payments. All of these differences are statistically significant at the 1 percent level. After day 0, the estimates fall back to zero within a couple of days. The combined day 0 increases in these categories exceed the approximately \$106 accessed in the average EWA transaction reported in Table 1. Of course, users may combine accessed wages with existing balances or other financial tools or shift the timing of expenditures they would otherwise have made later. Nevertheless, the estimates indicate that

first EWA use occurs on days with unusually high liquidity needs. The estimates therefore provide particularly clear evidence that workers initiate EWA use on days when their financial obligations are unusually high.

The survey evidence discussed in Section 8 is consistent with these spending patterns. Respondents most commonly report using accessed wages for groceries, utilities, and transportation.

5.2 EWA use following adoption

I next examine EWA use during the eight weeks following first adoption. Table 2 reports estimates for six daily outcomes: any EWA use, the amount accessed, any tip, the amount tipped, any positive Lightning Speed fee, and the amount paid in Lightning Speed fees. The first row averages these outcomes over the first 56 days, including the date of initial use. The second and third rows decompose this overall effect into separate effects on the date of first use and the average outcomes over the subsequent 55 days. The latter two effects are estimated jointly in a single regression.

The day 0 estimates in the second row of Table 2 are informative about the average characteristics of users' first EWA transaction, whereas the summary statistics in Table 1 are about all transactions. Users access $92 and pay $2.19 in tips and Lightning Speed fees, on average, in their first transaction. Total fees equal 2.4% of the amount accessed, approximately half the typical total fee rate across all transactions.

The estimates in the third row provide insight into how new users continue to use EWA after their first use over the next eight weeks. Coefficients are interpretable as the average usage on a given day during this period. For example, the coefficient in the first column, 0.076, implies that new users have a 0.076 probability of using EWA on any day in this period. This corresponds to using EWA 2.28 times per month ($= 30 \times 0.076$). Across these 2.28 transactions, users access $207 and pay $12 in tips and Lightning Speed fees, 5.9% of the accessed amount. This corresponds to accessing $90.99 and paying $5.33 in total fees per

transaction.

Appendix Tables A1 and A2 show analogous estimates separately by year. New users in 2024 used EWA significantly more over this window than users in 2025. In 2024, new users used EWA 3.3 times per month, accessing $282 and paying $16.65 in tips and Lightning Speed fees (5.9%) compared to new users in 2025 who accessed $180 and paid $10.53 in total fees (5.8%) across 1.92 transactions.

These estimates yield several insights. First, new EWA users continue to use EWA, so the estimated impact of first use captures the effects of ongoing use over the outcome period. Second, users pay less in tips and Lightning Speed fees on their first transaction than on subsequent transactions. This pattern could reflect one-time users who pay relatively low fees, continuing users whose fees rise over time, promotional offers for first-time users, or users who first turn to the product during a period of acute financial stress.

6 Effects of EWA on Economic Outcomes

6.1 Impacts of First EWA Usage on Income

In this subsection, I estimate the impact of EWA on net monthly employment income. EWA changes when workers receive their earnings but does not change their wages. Even so, EWA could still increase income by increasing labor supply or productivity.

Figure 3 presents event-study estimates of the effect of first EWA use on net monthly income, pooling the 2024 and 2025 research designs. Supporting the parallel trends assumption required to interpret the estimated effects as causal, the income of early EWA adopters is nearly identical to that of the matched comparison group in the three months before first use. The p-value on the null hypothesis that the pre-period effects are jointly equal to zero is 0.50.

In the month of first use, however, early adopters' income increases by nearly $400 relative to the matched comparison group. Because income is measured by calendar month, this period generally includes days before and after adoption. The effect persists in the first full

month after first use and declines to approximately $220 in the second full month. I focus on impacts during the first three months in order to keep adoption dates relatively close within matched pairs while measuring outcomes before comparison users begin using EWA.[5]

Table 3 reports average effects across the three post-adoption months. The first row of Column 1 shows that, pooling the 2024 and 2025 samples, first EWA use increases net monthly income by $322. This estimate is statistically significant at the 1 percent level and represents a 12 percent increase relative to the matched comparison-group mean of $2,657. The second and third rows decompose the estimate into impacts in the first month of use and in the second and third months of use. The increase is larger in the first month of use, $384, than in the next two months, $291. However, both effects are large and statistically significant.

Columns 2 and 3 show the estimates separately for 2024 and 2025.[6] The effects are positive and statistically significant in both years. First EWA use increases net monthly income by $279 in 2024 and $345 in 2025. These estimates represent 10 and 13 percent increases relative to the corresponding comparison-group means, respectively. While the 2025 effect is $66 larger than the 2024 effect, the difference is not statistically significant. The year-specific income estimates should be interpreted more cautiously because the pre-adoption coefficients are jointly different from zero in both 2024 and 2025 ($p = 0.01$ in each year). Even so, the similar estimates in both samples indicate that the pooled effect is not concentrated in a single year.

Figure 4 examines how the income effect varies across employment sectors. The estimated effects are positive in every sector shown.[7] Excluding transportation and warehousing, where the point estimate is large but imprecisely estimated, the effects all fall in the relatively narrow range from $240 to $540 per month. These estimates are statistically significant for all

[5]Income is nominal. Annual inflation based on CPI-U was 2.9% in 2024 and 2.6% in 2025.

[6]Appendix Figure A4 presents the event-study estimates separately for the 2024 and 2025 samples.

[7]Four sectors with fewer than 100 matched pairs are excluded. Their estimates are imprecise: all four confidence intervals include zero, and their point estimates include the largest positive estimate and the only two negative estimates.

sectors except the transportation and warehousing and real estate, rental, and leasing sectors. The confidence intervals overlap substantially across sectors. Thus, the sector estimates provide little evidence that the pooled effect is driven by a particular industry. Because sectors differ in their average income, Appendix Figure A6 expresses each estimate relative to the corresponding matched comparison-group mean. The proportional estimates are also similar, ranging from approximately 8 to 16 percent.

The sectoral estimates show that the increase in income is widespread rather than driven by a small number of sectors. However, because the estimates are so similar across sectors, they provide limited insight into the underlying mechanisms. If the income increase reflects individuals working more hours, for example, one might expect larger effects in sectors that tend to offer more flexible schedules. Although schedule flexibility may differ across sectors on average, EWA users within a sector need not be representative of that sector's broader workforce. The sectoral results therefore strengthen the conclusion that the income increase is broad-based, but they do not distinguish among potential explanations.

What, then, explains the broad-based increase in income? One possibility is that EWA relaxes short-term liquidity constraints that prevent workers from paying for transportation, childcare, or other expenses required to work. Indeed, the survey results discussed in Section 8 show that 71% of survey respondents report using accessed wages on expenses that support working.

In addition to relaxing liquidity constraints, more immediate pay could increase labor supply through present-biased preferences. The workhorse model of intertemporal choice and self-control in behavioral economics is quasi-hyperbolic discounting (Ericson and Laibson, 2019). The model predicts that individuals are especially impatient when choosing between an immediate reward and a future reward, even when they are relatively patient when choosing between two future rewards (Ericson and Laibson, 2019; Shapiro, 2005). By making the returns to work available immediately, EWA could therefore increase the perceived value of working in a way similar to a pay raise, even though the underlying wage remains unchanged.

In a randomized evaluation of Uber's Instant Pay system involving approximately 110,000 drivers, Chen et al. (2026) find that access to flexible pay increased hours worked by about 21 percent and weekly earnings by about 23 percent.

Alternatively, EWA could increase job satisfaction and attachment to the labor force (Baker and Kumar, 2018; Murillo et al., 2022).[8] Finally, EWA may increase income by reducing the effect of financial stress on worker productivity. Financial scarcity taxes cognitive bandwidth, and workers preoccupied with cash-flow concerns may perform worse on tasks requiring sustained attention (Kaur et al., 2024; Mani et al., 2013). By providing access to earned wages when workers face a liquidity shortfall, EWA may allow them to focus more effectively on their jobs.

Taken together, the results show that changing the timing of pay can increase the amount of income workers receive, not only when they receive it. The effect appears in both sample years and across a wide range of sectors, making it unlikely that the pooled estimate reflects a particular cohort or industry. Increased hours, greater job attachment, and improved productivity are all plausible explanations.

6.2 Effects on Consumption

A key question in the pay timing literature is how more frequent paychecks affect spending (Baugh and Correia, 2022; Baugh et al., 2017; Parsons and Van Wesep, 2013). Section 5.1 examined daily spending around first use and showed that spending on rent, gasoline, automotive expenses, phone bills, pharmaceuticals, and credit card payments increases sharply on the date of first use but returns to baseline within a few days.

In this section, I look at how total monthly spending on consumption changes with EWA. I define the outcome as consumption-related bank-account outflows, including purchases of goods and services, rent and utilities, insurance, bank fees, and credit-card payments.[9]

[8] My data do not allow me to test this mechanism directly. I do not observe unemployment spells, and employer information is updated only when users report new information to EarnIn.

[9] I exclude income, deposits, cash withdrawals, transfers between accounts, savings and investment

The main analysis sample is restricted to individuals with at least 14 days of spending information prior to the reference date. For this analysis, I impose the more restrictive requirement that three months of spending data be observed before and after the reference date. This leaves a reduced sample of 25,650 matched pairs.

Figure 5 shows the event-study estimates. Early and late adopters had comparable spending in the two months prior to early adopters' first use. However, early adopters had significantly higher spending three months prior to first use.

Table 4 summarizes the average spending effects in the first three months after first use. Across all three months, total spending increases by $738.52. The month of first use includes some spending before the day of first use and may reflect a liquidity shock that caused first EWA use that was not fully accounted for in the matching model. Looking separately at the month of first use, "Month 0", and the next two months, spending in the month of first use spikes $1,510. This increase is statistically significant and represents a 48 percent increase relative to the comparison group's average spending.

New EWA users continue accessing wages after their first use. Given this fact, I interpret the following two months as providing evidence on whether the spending increase persists beyond the immediate circumstances surrounding first use. In this case, spending increases by $353, or about 11 percent of the comparison-group mean. As shown in the previous section, however, new users' income also increases.

The survey evidence in Section 8 indicates that 90 percent of respondents would have delayed, reduced, or forgone an expense without EWA. These responses suggest that EWA both brings spending forward and enables expenses that would otherwise go unmet.

6.3 Effects on Bank Fees

The effect of EWA on bank fees is theoretically ambiguous. On the one hand, EWA gives workers access to earnings that would otherwise remain unavailable until payday. If overdraft

contributions, loan proceeds, payments on loans other than credit cards, tax payments, charitable contributions, and rebates.

and NSF fees arise from a temporary mismatch between the timing of income and expenses, earlier access to earned wages may allow workers to cover transactions that would otherwise overdraw their accounts. EWA could therefore substitute for overdrafts, returned payments, and other costly sources of short-term liquidity. On the other hand, earnings accessed before payday are recovered from the worker's subsequent paycheck, leaving fewer funds available on the scheduled payday. Tips and Lightning Speed fees may also reduce disposable resources. The net effect of EWA on bank fees is therefore an empirical question.[10]

Prior evidence provides limited guidance. Constantine et al. (2024) find that overdraft use increases after consumers begin using cash-advance applications. However, their research design is not well suited to estimating a causal effect. Their analysis compares overdrafts before and after first use among 604 selected users of the SaverLife platform and does not include a contemporaneous comparison group. The analysis also divides these 604 users into three subgroups according to their prior overdraft frequency without reporting subgroup sample sizes, standard errors, confidence intervals, or p-values. Most importantly, a before-and-after comparison cannot distinguish the effect of EWA from the financial event that caused a consumer to begin using it. For example, a consumer may begin using EWA precisely because a bill or attempted withdrawal would otherwise overdraw the account. In this case, an increase in overdrafts around first use would reflect selection into EWA rather than an adverse effect of the product.

The central empirical challenge is therefore to distinguish changes in bank fees caused by EWA from the liquidity shortfall that prompts a consumer to begin using it. The matched event-study design helps address this challenge by comparing early adopters with observationally similar later adopters and tracing differences in bank fees before and after first use. The pre-adoption estimates show whether bank fee outcomes were trending similarly, while the post-adoption dynamics test whether any increase is concentrated around first use

[10]According to EarnIn, if a bank fee is incurred as a direct result of an EarnIn transaction, EarnIn will take proactive measures to ensure the affected customer is made whole, after evaluating the circumstances of the fee. Reimbursement is intended to be issued automatically; however, if a customer does not receive reimbursement, the customer is instructed to contact EarnIn support to request a review.

or persists afterward.

Figure 6 presents weekly event-study estimates of the effect of first EWA use on four categories of bank fees: overdrafts, NSFs, interest, and other types. The matched treatment and comparison groups have similar bank fee outcomes during the two weeks preceding first use. None of the pre-adoption differences are significantly different from zero, except that early adopters paid slightly more overdraft fees two weeks prior to first use. In week 0, however, all four types of bank fees increase sharply among EWA users. After week 0, overdraft and NSF fees remain elevated, albeit at a lower level than on week 0, while interest and other bank fees fall to approximately zero.

Table 5 presents corresponding estimates using daily outcomes. The first row shows the overall effect. The second and third rows show estimates from a single regression that decompose this overall effect into an effect on day 0 and after the day of first use. On the date of first use, overdrafts increase by \$5.63, NSFs by \$4.66, interest charges by \$0.73, and other bank fees by \$2.32. All four estimates are statistically significant at the 1 percent level and are economically large relative to the matched comparison-group means. However, the timing of these day 0 increases suggests that they are unlikely to be adverse effects of EWA itself. The accessed amount is not recovered until the worker's subsequent payday and workers have little reason to access wages on a payday, when those earnings would otherwise become available. I therefore interpret the day 0 increase primarily as evidence of selection into EWA: users appear to initiate EWA use in response to an anticipated or existing liquidity shortfall.[11]

After day 0, bank fees remain elevated but the increase is 20 to 45 percent smaller than the overall increase. Excluding day 0, EWA use is associated with increases of \$0.16 in daily overdraft fees, \$0.28 in daily NSF fees, and \$0.02 in daily interest charges. Each of these estimates is statistically significant at the 1 percent level. The estimated effect on

[11]Appendix Table A4 shows that the income results are robust to including day of first use bank fee and loan-payment variables in the propensity score matching model and also as controls in the income regressions. These are not included in the main model because they are post-treatment variables.

other bank fees is also positive, at $0.05 per day, but is not statistically distinguishable from zero. These correspond to monthly increases of $4.74 in overdraft fees, $8.40 in NSF fees, and $0.48 in interest. Assuming an overdraft fee of $35 and an NSF fee of $32 (Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, 2023), these estimates correspond to approximately one additional overdraft fee for every 17 EWA transactions and one additional NSF fee for every 9 transactions.[12]

The survey evidence in Section 8 provides some additional insight into these results. About 12.5 percent of respondents report that the most likely alternative to using EWA would have been overdrafting their bank account. This suggests that EWA substitutes for overdrafts for some users, even though its estimated average effect on overdraft fees is positive.

These results support two conclusions. First, EWA adoption is responsive to liquidity needs: users access their earnings at the same time that bank fees indicate a financial shortfall. Second, EWA use is associated with a small increase in overdraft and NSF fees.

7 The Impact of EWA on Credit and Debt

Credit outcomes are an important input into the welfare consequences of EWA. If EWA substitutes for higher-cost forms of liquidity, users may carry lower credit balances or preserve other borrowing capacity for future financial shocks. In this case, EWA could improve financial resilience even if it does not immediately increase credit scores. Alternatively, if accessing earnings before payday shifts rather than resolves a liquidity shortfall, users may subsequently rely more heavily on credit or have greater difficulty meeting existing obligations. This could increase balances, reduce available credit, or eventually lower credit scores.

I examine these possibilities using information on users' credit scores, outstanding balances, revolving credit limits, and credit utilization. These outcomes capture different dimensions of users' credit positions. Credit scores provide a broad measure of creditworthiness. Total and

[12]Based on an analysis of EarnIn's transaction level bank data that was shared with me, the vast majority of overdrafts are not caused by an EarnIn withdrawal. In 2025, only about 1.5 percent of overdraft fees were directly attributable to an EarnIn withdrawal based on notes on the overdraft transactions.

revolving balances measure reliance on existing debt, while revolving limits and utilization measure the credit available to meet future liquidity needs.

Unfortunately, fewer users voluntarily share credit data than bank-account transaction data, so the credit subsample is much smaller than my full analysis sample. I therefore do not have a sufficient sample to implement the matched difference-in-differences design used in the main analysis. For completeness, in Appendix A I compare credit outcomes for the same user before and after first EWA use. This research design is weaker than the matched design used for the main outcomes. In particular, it does not include a contemporaneous comparison group whose credit outcomes identify what would have happened to users in the absence of EWA.

Taken together, the within-user differences suggest credit outcomes change relatively little following EWA adoption. Credit scores and revolving utilization remain approximately unchanged. Total open balances decline and there is no statistically significant change in revolving balances. Revolving credit limits also decline modestly. These estimates provide little evidence that EWA either improves or harms users' broader credit positions. Moreover, because the analysis does not include a contemporaneous comparison group, the observed changes may reflect other financial events occurring around first EWA use.

8 Survey Evidence on EWA Use and Alternatives

In this section, I complement EarnIn's administrative data with a survey of about 1,000 regular EWA users. The survey was administered through Qualtrics and distributed by EarnIn between September 16 and September 25, 2026, to 80,000 Live Pay and Cash Out users. Eligible users had used the app at least twice per month in each of the preceding six months and were in good standing, with no active reviews or penalties.[13] The survey elicited respondents' assessments of EWA's effects on their finances, spending purposes, alternatives without EWA, expectations about future use, and preferences for usage limits. A total of

[13]Invitations were sent in batches of 10,000 users.

1,088 respondents consented to participate. Up to 1,000 respondents who provided an email address for compensation received a $5 Amazon gift card. Users were informed that the survey was part of an independent academic evaluation and that EarnIn would not have access to their responses.[14]

Figure 7 shows that most respondents believe EWA has improved their financial well-being: 60.4% report that it made their financial situation somewhat or much better, including 19.2% who report that their finances became much better. By comparison, 11.1% report that EWA made their financial situation somewhat worse (9.5%) or much worse (1.5%).

Self-report of how accessed wages are used. Table 6, Panel A summarizes how respondents report using EWA.

Most respondents, 71%, report using accessed wages on an expense that supports work or getting to work, such as transportation, childcare, phone service, or work equipment. This result complements the observed income effects by showing that EWA may increase earnings by addressing liquidity shortfalls that prevent working. Respondents, however, do not perceive a large change in their hours (not shown): 87.8% of respondents report no change in hours, 8.6% report an increase, and the remaining 3.6% report a decrease. Reported changes in hours may understate changes relative to what workers would have worked without EWA if it helps prevent missing shifts they had planned to work, which could be viewed as maintaining their usual hours rather than increasing them.

More than half of respondents report deciding to access wages when a particular expense or need arises. Fewer than 10 percent of respondents plan to use EWA before the pay period begins.

Respondents most frequently report using EWA on groceries or essentials (58.7%), utilities (41.7%), transportation (35.2%), everyday discretionary spending (e.g. eating out, entertainment, shopping; 25.5%), rent or mortgage payments (22.9%), debt payments (19.4%),

[14]Appendix C reproduces the questionnaire. Appendix Table A6 shows that respondents use EWA more frequently and access larger amounts per transaction than users in the administrative sample. Appendix Table A7 summarizes respondent characteristics.

and unexpected emergency expenses (17.8%). Respondents were allowed to select multiple categories so these are not mutually exclusive.

Alternatives without EWA. Table 6, Panel B summarizes what alternative tools respondents would have used had EWA not been available for their last use. Most frequently, respondents would not have been able to cover the expense (21.4%). Others would have paid a bill late or incurred a late fee (15.7%) or overdrafted their bank account (12.5%). In other cases, respondents would have turned to other financial tools like borrowing from friends or family (12.8%) or using a credit card (10.1%). These latter options are not universally available. In many cases, EWA provides liquidity needed to cover expenses that would otherwise go unmet.

Table A8 shows that respondents report these alternatives as being much more expensive than EWA. Among respondents reporting costs for the alternatives shown in Table A8, average perceived costs range from $35.48 for credit cards to $53.39 for payday loans, compared with $8.31 in reported EWA fees and tips.[15]

Expectations about future use. Persistent use need not reflect a mistake if users anticipate continued access and value its benefits relative to its costs. Comparing expected with observed behavior can help assess this possibility. For example, DellaVigna and Malmendier (2006) find that surveyed health-club members expect to attend substantially more often than members in their administrative data actually do.

I compare the persistence implied by EWA users' expectations with persistence in administrative usage data. The results are shown in Appendix Table A9. Regressing expected EWA use over the next 30 days on reported use over the preceding 30 days yields a coefficient of 0.685 with a 95 percent confidence interval ranging from 0.638 to 0.732. This is statistically indistinguishable from the actual monthly persistence coefficient of 0.64 estimated using the

[15]These estimates are based on different respondent samples and so do not measure within-respondent savings.

actual usage of all users in the administrative data.[16] This shows that respondents have realistic expectations about their future usage.

Self-control and demand for commitment. Accurate expectations do not rule out self-control problems. Allcott et al. (2022) find that experienced payday loan borrowers anticipate repeat borrowing but still demand incentives to avoid future borrowing which suggests that they perceive a self-control problem.

Table 7 summarizes respondents' preferences for additional limits on their EWA usage. About 44 percent of respondents would like no additional limits and only 4 percent would like stricter limits for everyone. 13.2 percent would like an optional limit on the number of transactions per pay period.

About 40 percent of respondents would like to be able to set an optional dollar limit in each pay period. While the question asked about optional limits in addition to EarnIn's existing limits, some respondents may have interpreted this option as allowing users to *increase* EarnIn's current limit on daily withdrawals. Consistent with this interpretation, nearly 10 percent of respondents who left a substantive comment in the survey asked for EarnIn to increase its daily limits.

Preferences for when an increase to a chosen limit takes effect provide more direct evidence on demand for commitment. Among 325 respondents expressing a timing preference, 53.8% favor an immediate increase, while 28.9% prefer a delay until at least the following day or their next pay period. These responses suggest demand for binding commitment among a minority of surveyed users.

Open-ended comments. Respondents were also asked: "Is there anything else you would like us to understand about the benefits or drawbacks of using earned wage access?" Appendix Table A10 groups the comments into benefits and appreciation, concerns, and other recurring themes. Most respondents left the field blank or gave a non-substantive comment, like "NA".

[16]For this exercise, usage in the administrative data is coded to match the survey coding.

56.4% of substantive responses expressed appreciation or highlighted a benefit of EWA. These respondents describe using EWA to pay essential expenses, manage the timing of bills, and obtain money at lower perceived cost than alternatives. One respondent connects access to essential spending and work: "I can't tell you how many times it helped me get my food so I could get through the work week or gas or auto issues like a tire or battery."

Others used the open-ended response to express drawbacks of using EWA. About 21 percent of substantive comments mentioned repeatedly using EWA or dependence on EWA. 14.7 percent of comments referenced fees or asked for lower fees, 9 percent asked for higher daily withdrawal limits, and 5 percent requested more flexible payback options.

Comments expressing these concerns often also acknowledge the value of access. One respondent describes this tension: "It's a double edged sword. It's helped me be able to pay bills, buy food, get gas, but when paying it back I have to turn around and take it right back out to ensure my bills get paid etc."

9 Conclusion

This paper provides new evidence on how workers use direct-to-consumer earned wage access and how first use affects their economic outcomes. Using administrative data covering more than a million EarnIn users in 2024 and 2025, I first document that EWA is not typically a one-time source of funds. After their first transaction, new users continue to access approximately $207 per month across 2.3 transactions, paying about $12 in voluntary tips and expedited-transfer fees. Spending increases sharply around the date of first use, particularly for rent, phone bills, gasoline, automotive expenses, pharmaceuticals, and credit card payments. These patterns indicate that workers often begin using EWA when they face an unusually high concentration of financial obligations.

I then use a matched difference-in-differences design to estimate the effects of first EWA use. The main result is that EWA increases net monthly income by approximately $322, or

12 percent relative to the matched comparison-group mean. The increase appears for new users in both years and across a wide range of employment sectors. The effect also persists beyond the calendar month of first use: net monthly income increases by approximately $291 during the following two months. These results show that the pooled income effect is not driven only by the month of adoption, a particular year, or a small number of industries.

EWA use is also followed by an increase in consumption spending. Spending rises sharply in the calendar month of first use, which includes the date of adoption and may partly reflect the liquidity demand that caused the worker to adopt EWA. During the following two months, consumption spending increases by approximately $353, or 11 percent relative to the matched comparison-group mean.

The increase in income suggests that changing the timing of pay can affect how much workers earn, not only when they receive their earnings. My data do not allow me to distinguish among the underlying mechanisms. Earlier access to earned wages may increase hours worked by making the return to work more immediate. EWA may also allow workers to pay for transportation, childcare, or other expenses required to remain employed. Alternatively, EWA could improve job attachment or productivity by reducing financial stress. The broad-based increase in income is consistent with each of these explanations, but further research is needed to determine their relative importance.

The results for bank fees are more nuanced. First EWA use coincides with sharp increases in overdraft, NSF, interest, and other bank fees. Because the accessed amount is not recovered until the worker's subsequent payday, these day-zero increases are unlikely to be adverse effects of EWA itself. Instead, they indicate that workers often adopt EWA in response to an existing or anticipated liquidity shortfall. After day 0, bank fees fall substantially from their initial peaks but remain elevated relative to the matched comparison group. Excluding day 0, EWA use is associated with monthly increases of approximately $4.74 in overdraft fees, $8.40 in NSF fees, and $0.48 in interest charges. The estimated increase in other bank fees is positive but not statistically significant. Thus, EWA provides liquidity when financial needs

are high, but it does not eliminate the underlying constraints facing its users and may shift some liquidity needs to later dates.

The credit results provide little evidence of large changes in users' broader credit positions. Credit scores and revolving utilization remain approximately unchanged following first EWA use, while total balances and revolving credit limits decline. However, the credit data are available for a selected subset of users, and the analysis does not include a contemporaneous comparison group. These estimates should therefore be interpreted as within-user changes rather than causal effects of EWA.

The survey provides complementary evidence on how regular users experience EWA. About 60% report improved finances, compared with 11% reporting deterioration, and 71% report using accessed wages for expenses that help them work or get to work. These responses are consistent with EWA easing liquidity constraints that interfere with work.

The survey also provides evidence on users' sophistication in anticipating future EWA use and their demand for commitment devices. I find that respondents anticipate a degree of persistence consistent with administrative usage patterns. Among EWA respondents expressing a preference about when increases to self-imposed limits should take effect, 29% favor a delay, suggesting demand for commitment among a subset of survey respondents.

The findings have several limitations. The matched design identifies effects for workers who adopted EarnIn earlier rather than several months later. These workers were already willing and able to use direct-to-consumer EWA, so the estimates may not generalize to workers who never use EWA or to products with different fees, recovery practices, or access limits. The analysis also focuses on outcomes observed over a relatively short period following adoption. Longer-run effects on savings, debt, employment, and repeated reliance on EWA remain important questions.

Taken together, the results show that direct-to-consumer EWA gives workers access to liquidity at times of elevated financial need and is followed by a substantial and persistent increase in income. At the same time, EWA use is associated with increases in overdraft and

NSF fees after the date of first use. These competing effects are important for the policy debate over whether EWA should be regulated as credit, as a payroll service, or as a distinct financial product. The appropriate treatment of EWA cannot be determined from its implied annual percentage rate alone. It also depends on how access affects workers' income, spending, bank fees, and use of other financial products. The evidence in this paper shows that these broader effects are economically important and should be considered when evaluating policies governing earned wage access.

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Tables

Table 1: Earned Wage Access Usage in 2024 and 2025

			Average	Tips		Lightning Speed	
	N	Uses	Amount	Any	Average	Any	Average
Panel A. Annual usage, 2024–2025							
All users in 2024 and 2025	> 1,000,000	38.19	$105.81	40%	$1.10	86%	$4.24
All users in 2024	> 1,000,000	50.08	$95.91	45%	$1.24	86%	$3.79
All users in 2025	> 1,000,000	31.87	$114.07	36%	$0.99	85%	$4.62
			Average	Tips		Lightning Speed	
	Share	Uses	Amount	Any	Average	Any	Average
Panel B. Annual Usage by Sector							
Accommodation and Food Services	3.82%	36.75	$97.74	37%	$1.02	87%	$4.22
Administrative and Support Services	3.02%	37.42	$102.74	39%	$1.08	87%	$4.28
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	0.10%	42.48	$105.67	39%	$1.12	88%	$4.36
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	0.57%	43.89	$101.03	40%	$1.08	87%	$4.19
Construction	0.89%	42.82	$108.31	42%	$1.20	90%	$4.51
Educational Services	2.55%	40.36	$105.83	43%	$1.20	82%	$3.99
Finance and Insurance	3.31%	46.56	$108.33	41%	$1.08	82%	$4.00
Health Care and Social Assistance	8.55%	46.48	$105.05	41%	$1.13	85%	$4.11
Information	1.94%	37.09	$104.76	41%	$1.11	85%	$4.13
Management of Companies and Enterprises	0.19%	41.57	$105.31	38%	$1.07	85%	$4.16
Manufacturing	3.17%	47.91	$107.87	41%	$1.17	89%	$4.40
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	0.13%	44.12	$114.36	45%	$1.38	87%	$4.42
Other Services (except Public Administration)	1.02%	42.67	$103.09	40%	$1.09	88%	$4.27
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	2.77%	43.79	$107.02	41%	$1.11	85%	$4.14
Public Administration	3.69%	42.96	$108.68	42%	$1.31	87%	$4.29
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	0.89%	47.40	$105.74	42%	$1.18	88%	$4.26
Retail Trade	9.42%	42.82	$97.87	36%	$0.95	85%	$4.06
Transportation and Warehousing	3.57%	42.81	$105.08	40%	$1.13	87%	$4.26
Unknown	47.67%	32.76	$107.95	40%	$1.11	86%	$4.34
Utilities	0.31%	49.13	$111.12	44%	$1.30	87%	$4.34
Wholesale Trade	2.43%	44.49	$104.50	38%	$1.05	80%	$3.93

Notes: This table summarizes EWA use in the EarnIn administrative data. The pooled sample covers calendar years 2024 and 2025. Panel A reports the number of unique users across the two years and separately by calendar year. Panel B reports each sector's share of pooled user-year observations. Average use is the mean number of EWA transactions per user-year. Average wages accessed and fees are averaged over all transactions. Administrative and Support Services includes waste management and remediation services.

Table 2: Effects of First Earned Wage Access Use on Subsequent Usage

	Any Use	Amount Accessed ($)	Any Tip	Tip Amount ($)	Any Lightning Speed Fee	Lightning Amount ($)
EWA effect, all days	0.093***	8.44***	0.037***	0.123***	0.066***	0.314***
	(0.000)	(0.03)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.001)
EWA effect on day 0	1.000***	92.29***	0.483***	1.95***	0.050***	0.241***
	(0.000)	(0.16)	(0.002)	(0.01)	(0.001)	(0.004)
EWA effect after day 0	0.076***	6.92***	0.029***	0.090***	0.066***	0.315***
	(0.000)	(0.02)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.001)
Comparison-group mean	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Observations				13,810,300		
Matched pairs				98,645		

Notes: This table reports estimated effects of first EWA use on daily EWA usage during the first eight weeks after adoption. The first row averages over all post-adoption days. The second and third rows decompose this effect into the date of first use and subsequent days; these two effects are estimated in a single regression. The unit of observation is a person-day. Standard errors, clustered by user, are reported in parentheses. $^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, and $^{*}p < 0.10$.

Table 3: Effects of Earned Wage Access on Net Monthly Income

	Treatment Effect			Difference
	Pooled	2024	2025	2025–2024
Panel A. Average effect during months 0–2				
EWA effect	322.25***	279.31***	344.83***	65.52
	(21.69)	(27.07)	(29.87)	(40.31)
Panel B. Effects by timing				
Month 0	383.84***	226.79***	466.44***	239.65***
	(23.97)	(27.94)	(33.48)	(43.61)
Months 1–2	291.45***	305.57***	284.03***	−21.54
	(23.16)	(30.95)	(31.35)	(44.06)
Comparison-group mean	2,656.72	2,823.06	2,569.23	–
Observations	914,844	315,324	599,520	–
Matched pairs	76,237	26,277	49,960	–

Notes: This table reports estimated effects of first EWA use on net monthly income during the first three months after adoption. Panel A reports the average effect across months 0–2. Panel B decomposes the effect into the month of first use and the following two months; the two effects are estimated in a single regression. The first column pools the 2024 and 2025 matched samples, the next two columns report effects separately by year, and the final column reports the difference between the 2025 and 2024 estimates. Standard errors, clustered by user, are reported in parentheses. The comparison-group mean is calculated among matched later adopters. Monetary amounts are measured in nominal dollars. $^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, and $^{*}p < 0.10$.

Table 4: Effects of Earned Wage Access on Monthly Consumption Spending

	Treatment Effect			Difference
	Pooled	2024	2025	2025–2024
Panel A. Average effect during months 0–2				
EWA effect	738.52***	520.68***	808.33***	287.64*
	(65.60)	(145.03)	(73.08)	(162.39)
Panel B. Effects by timing				
Month 0	1,510.03***	1,122.92***	1,634.08***	511.16***
	(94.15)	(160.61)	(113.09)	(196.42)
Months 1–2	352.76***	219.56	395.45***	175.89
	(71.79)	(160.41)	(79.64)	(179.08)
Comparison-group mean	3,162.37	3,168.25	3,160.48	–
Observations	307,800	74,700	233,100	–
Matched pairs	25,650	6,225	19,425	–

Notes: This table reports estimated effects of first EWA use on monthly consumption spending during the first three months after adoption. Panel A reports the average effect across months 0–2. Panel B decomposes the effect into the month of first use and the following two months; the two effects are estimated in a single regression. The first column pools the 2024 and 2025 matched samples, the next two columns report effects separately by year, and the final column reports the difference between the 2025 and 2024 estimates. Consumption spending includes observed bank-account outflows for goods and services, including credit-card payments, interest, and bank-service fees. It excludes income, savings, deposits, account transfers, cash withdrawals, loan payments, taxes, charitable contributions, rebates, and composite categories. Standard errors, clustered by user, are reported in parentheses. The comparison-group mean is calculated among matched later adopters. Monetary amounts are measured in nominal dollars. $^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, and $^{*}p < 0.10$.

Table 5: Effects of Earned Wage Access on Bank Fees

	Fee Amount ($)			
	Overdraft	NSF	Interest	Other
EWA effect, all days	0.26***	0.36***	0.03***	0.09
	(0.03)	(0.07)	(0.01)	(0.06)
EWA effect on day 0	5.63***	4.66***	0.73***	2.32***
	(0.30)	(0.59)	(0.09)	(0.16)
EWA effect after day 0	0.16***	0.28***	0.02***	0.05
	(0.03)	(0.08)	(0.01)	(0.06)
Comparison-group mean	0.59	0.43	0.06	0.24
Unit of observation	Person-day	Person-day	Person-day	Person-day
Observations	13,810,300	13,810,300	13,810,300	13,810,300
Matched pairs	98,645	98,645	98,645	98,645

Notes: This table reports estimated effects of first EWA use on daily bank fees during the first eight weeks after adoption. The first row reports the average effect across all post-adoption days. The second and third rows decompose this effect into the date of first use and subsequent days; these two effects are estimated in a single regression. Standard errors, clustered by user, are reported in parentheses. The comparison-group mean is calculated among matched later adopters. $^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, and $^{*}p < 0.10$.

Table 6: Survey Evidence on EWA Uses and Alternatives

	N	Percent
A. Work support, decision timing, and uses		
Supports work or getting to work	954	71.0
Decides when an expense or need arises	964	57.8
Uses of most recent withdrawal		
Groceries or household essentials	990	58.7
Utilities	990	41.7
Transportation	990	35.2
Everyday discretionary spending	990	25.5
Rent or mortgage	990	22.9
Debt or credit card payments	990	19.4
Unexpected emergency expense	990	17.8
B. Alternatives without EWA		
Could not cover the expense	872	21.4
Pay a bill late or incur a late fee	872	15.7
Borrow from friends or family	872	12.8
Overdraft checking account	872	12.5
Use a credit card	872	10.1

Notes: N is the denominator for each share. Work support and decision timing exclude "Not sure" and missing responses. Spending purposes allow multiple selections. The seven most common uses are shown. Alternatives refer to the single most likely alternative without EWA. All categories selected by more than 10% of the 872 respondents with a coded answer are shown in descending order.

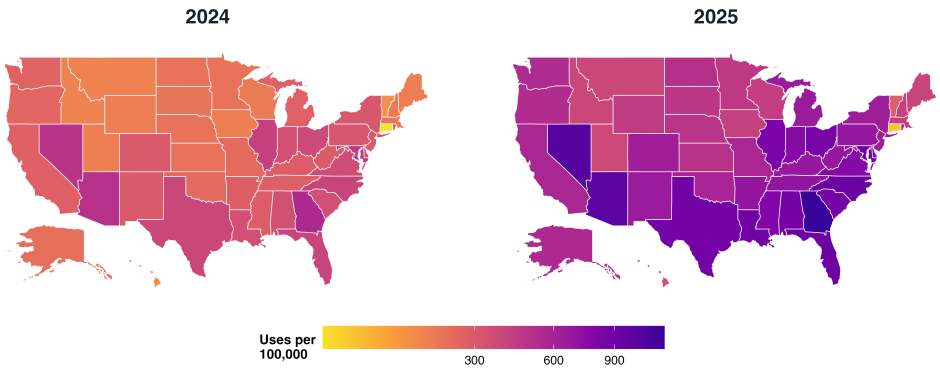
Table 7: Preferences for EWA Usage Limits

	N	Percent
A. Preferred policy		
No additional limits	651	43.5
Optional dollar limit per pay period	651	39.6
Optional transfer limit per pay period	651	13.2
Stricter limits for everyone	651	3.7
B. When an increase to a chosen limit takes effect		
Immediately	325	53.8
After 24 hours	325	8.9
Beginning of next pay period	325	20.0
Choose timing when setting the limit	325	17.2

Notes: N is the denominator for each share. Policy preferences exclude "Not sure", "No preference", and missing responses. Preferences for when an increase to a chosen limit takes effect exclude "Not sure" and missing responses.

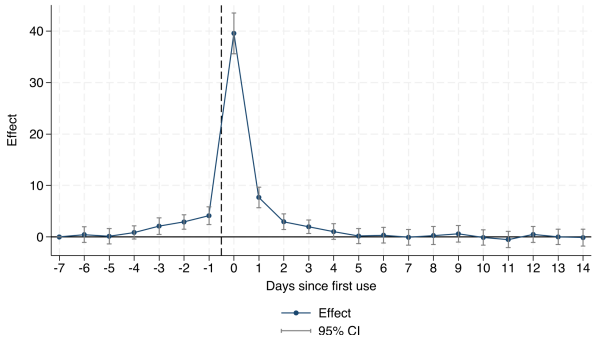
Figures

Figure 1: EarnIn Users Per Capita by State

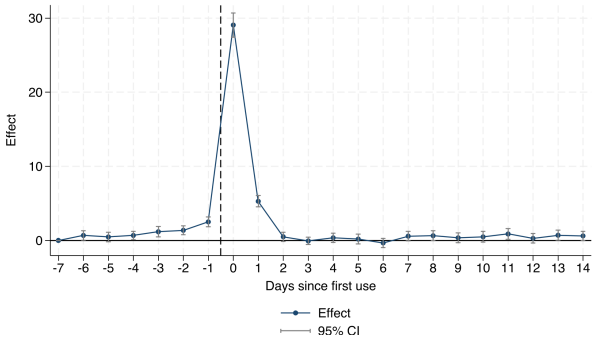


Notes. This figure shows EarnIn usage per capita in 2024 and 2025 by U.S. state. Connecticut has no users because EarnIn did not operate in the state. Population estimates are U.S. Census Bureau Vintage 2025 population estimates.

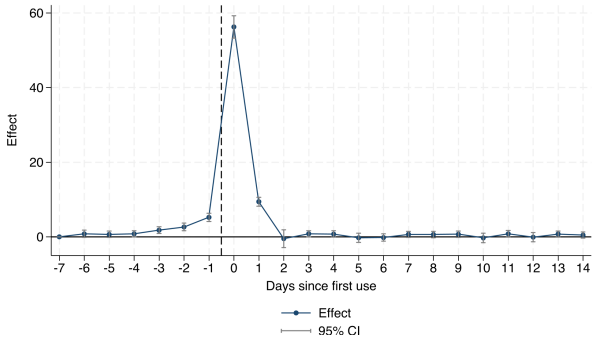
Figure 2: Spending Around First Earned Wage Access Use



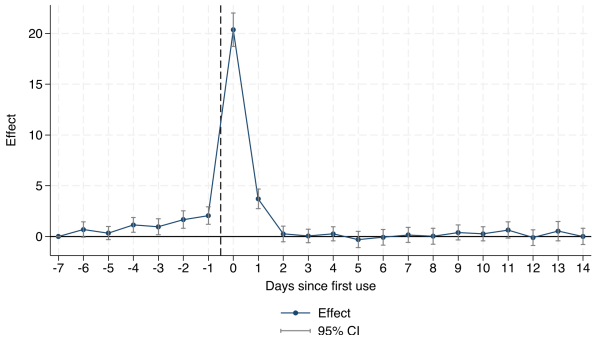
(a) Rent



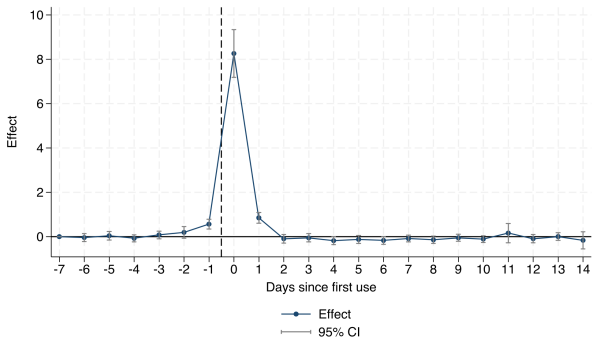
(b) Phone bills



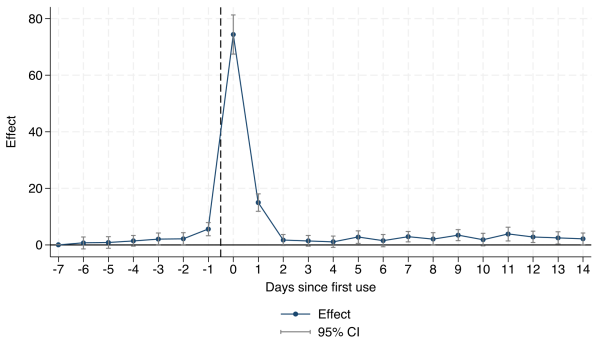
(c) Gasoline



(d) Automotive expenses



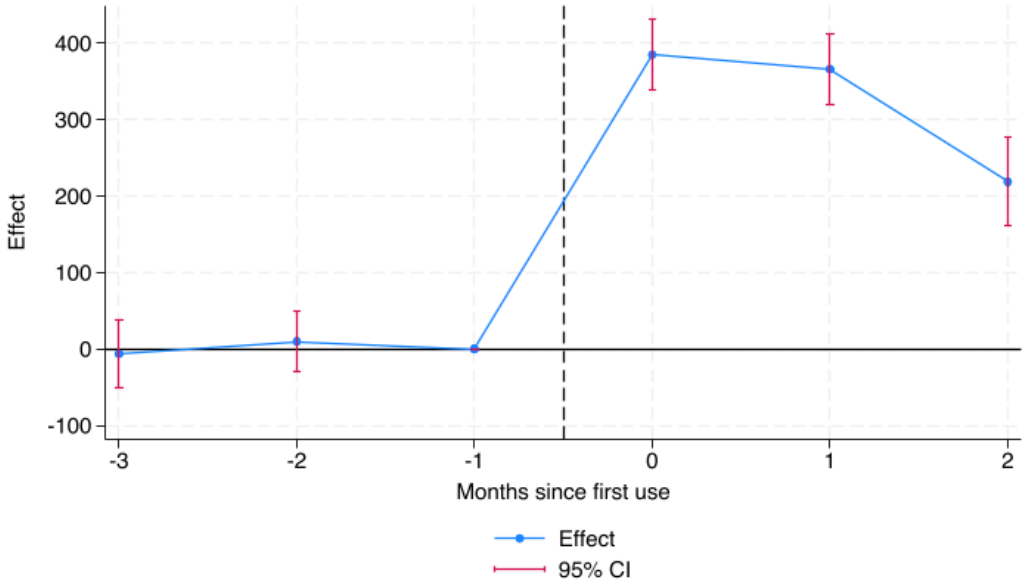
(e) Pharmaceuticals



(f) Credit card payments

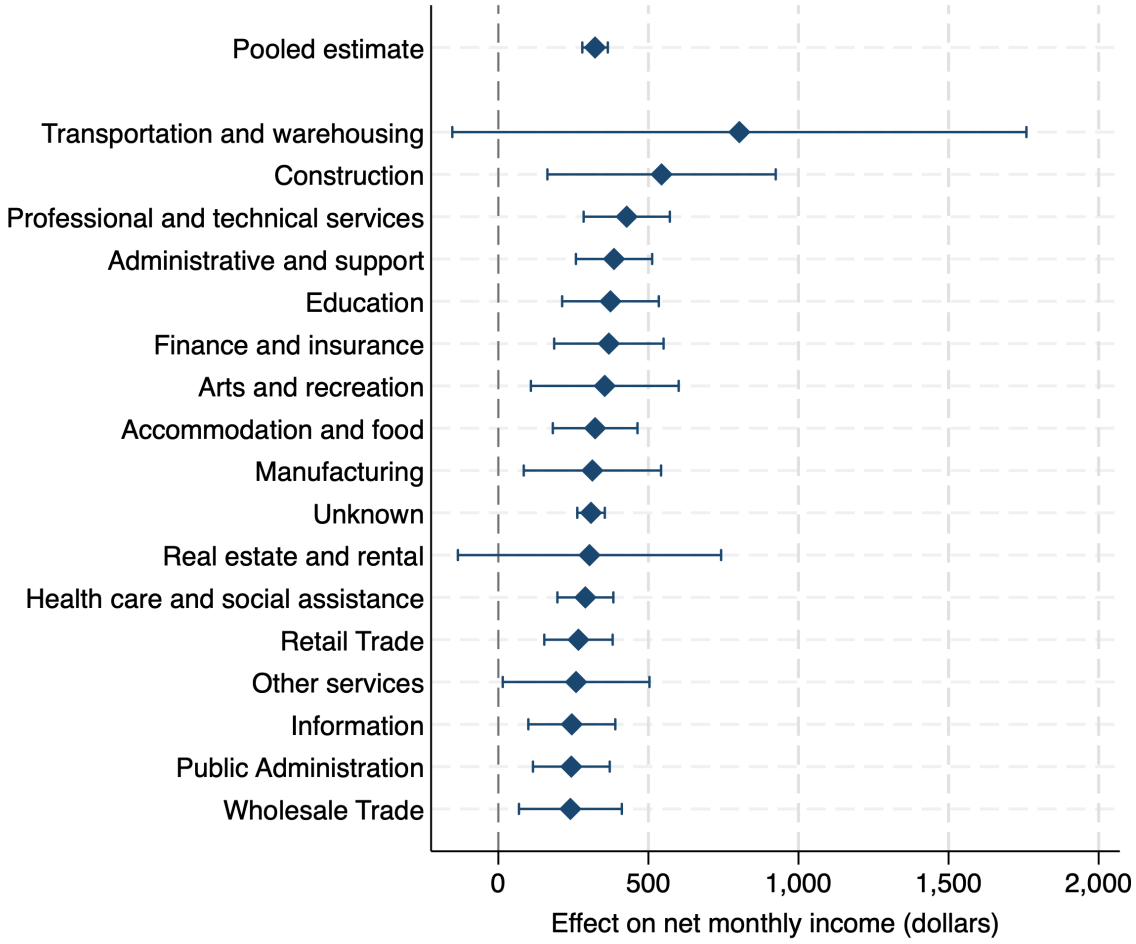
Notes: This figure reports event-study estimates from equation (3). Points denote estimated differences between early EWA adopters and their matched comparisons; vertical bars are 95% confidence intervals. Day -7 is the omitted category. The dashed vertical line separates the pretreatment and post-treatment periods. Standard errors are clustered by user.

Figure 3: The Effects of EWA on Net Monthly Income



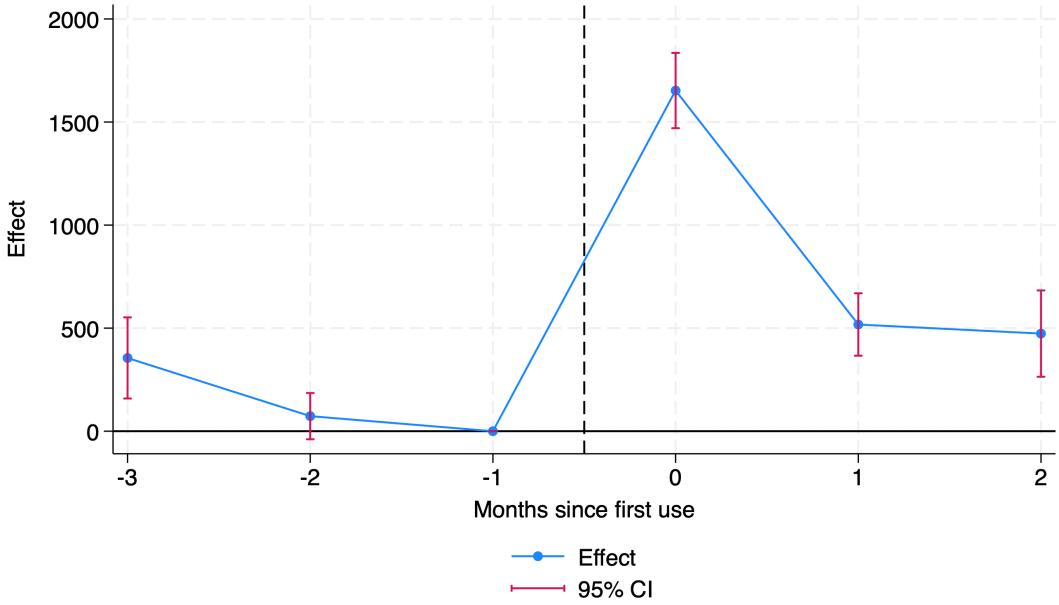
Notes. This figure shows event-study estimates of the dynamic effects of EWA adoption on net monthly income in the matched sample of early and late EWA adopters. Estimates are based on a regression of net monthly income on treatment indicators interacted with time-since-first-EWA-use indicators, with controls for the estimated propensity score for using EWA, and fixed effects for match group, relative time to EWA adoption, calendar month, and early adopter status. Error bars are 95% confidence intervals based on robust standard errors, clustered by user.

Figure 4: Effects of Earned Wage Access on Net Monthly Income by Sector



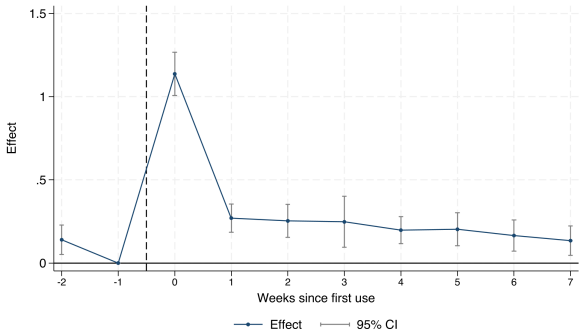
Notes: This figure reports estimated effects of first EWA use on net monthly income separately by sector. The estimates use the matched difference-in-differences specification. Diamonds show point estimates in dollars, and horizontal lines show 95% confidence intervals based on standard errors clustered by user. Sectors are ordered by the estimated effect. The pooled estimate is reported in the top row. Sectors with fewer than 100 matched pairs in the estimation sample are omitted. Sector is measured in the month containing the reference date.

Figure 5: Effects of Earned Wage Access on Monthly Consumption Spending

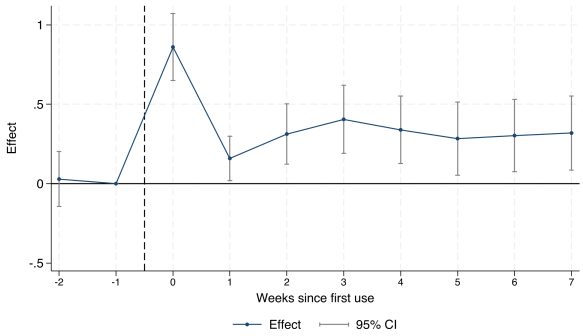


Notes: This figure reports event-study estimates of the effect of first EWA use on monthly consumption spending in the pooled 2024 and 2025 matched samples. Month −1 is the omitted category. Points show estimated effects, and vertical bars show 95% confidence intervals based on standard errors clustered by user. The dashed vertical line separates the pretreatment and post-treatment periods. Consumption spending is defined as in Table 4.

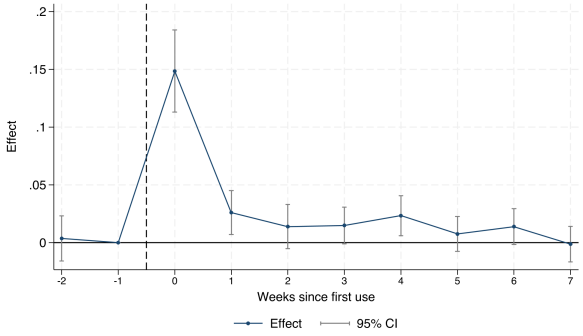
Figure 6: Weekly Event Studies: Impacts of EWA on Bank Fees



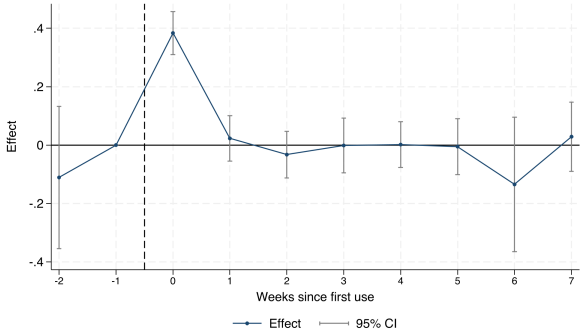
(a) Overdraft Fees



(b) Non-sufficient Funds Fees



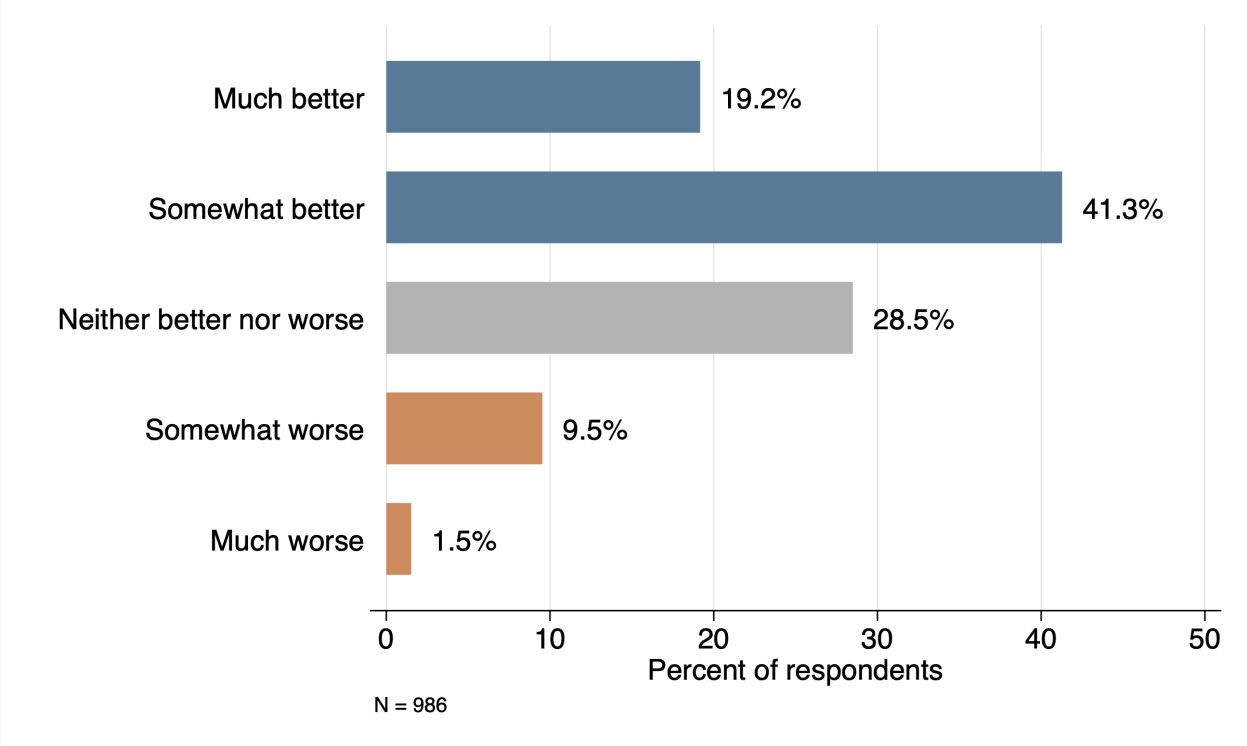
(c) Interest



(d) Other Fees

Notes: Each panel shows a weekly event-study estimate of the impact of first EWA usage on the listed fee category, using cross-fitted propensity scores from the matched difference-in-differences design. Point estimates are dollar effects per day, averaged within each relative week; week −1 is the omitted category. Error bars are 95% confidence intervals based on standard errors clustered by user. The vertical dashed line marks the date of first EWA use.

Figure 7: Perceived Effects of EWA on Financial Well-Being



Notes: Responses to the question, "Overall, how has having access to earned wage access affected your financial situation?" The figure includes 986 nonmissing responses from surveyed regular users.

A The Impact of EWA on Credit and Debt

Credit outcomes are an important input into the welfare consequences of EWA. If EWA substitutes for higher-cost forms of liquidity, users may carry lower credit balances or preserve other borrowing capacity for future financial shocks. In this case, EWA could improve financial resilience even if it does not immediately increase credit scores. Alternatively, if accessing earnings before payday shifts rather than resolves a liquidity shortfall, users may subsequently rely more heavily on credit or have greater difficulty meeting existing obligations. This could increase balances, reduce available credit, or eventually lower credit scores.

I examine these possibilities using information on users' credit scores, outstanding balances, revolving credit limits, and credit utilization. These outcomes capture different dimensions of users' credit positions. Credit scores provide a broad measure of creditworthiness. Total and revolving balances measure reliance on existing debt, while revolving limits and utilization measure the credit available to meet future liquidity needs.

The credit data are available for a much smaller subset of users than the bank-account transaction data. I therefore do not have a sufficient sample to implement the matched difference-in-differences design used in the main analysis. Instead, I compare credit outcomes for the same user before and after first EWA use using the following specification:

$$Y_{it} = \alpha Post_{it} + \mu_i + \lambda_t + \varepsilon_{it}, \tag{4}$$

where Y_{it} is a credit outcome for user i in credit report t, and $Post_{it}$ is an indicator for reports observed after the user's first EWA use. The specification includes user fixed effects, μ_i, which account for characteristics that differ across users but remain constant over time, and calendar-month fixed effects, λ_t, which account for changes in credit outcomes common to all users. Standard errors are clustered by user.

This research design is weaker than the matched design used for the main outcomes. In particular, it does not include a contemporaneous comparison group whose credit outcomes

identify what would have happened to users in the absence of EWA. A causal interpretation requires that users' credit outcomes would not otherwise have changed around the date of first EWA use after accounting for user and calendar-month fixed effects. This assumption may not hold if the same financial event causes a user both to adopt EWA and to change their use of credit. Moreover, the credit data are available for only a selected subset of EWA users. I therefore interpret the estimates as within-user changes following adoption rather than as causal effects of EWA.

Table A5 presents the results. Credit scores remain approximately unchanged following first EWA use. The estimated increase is 0.18 points, with a standard error of 2.25, relative to a pre-use mean of 561.20. This estimate is not statistically distinguishable from zero.

Total open credit balances decline by approximately $1,733 following first use. This represents a 5.5 percent reduction relative to the pre-use mean of $31,559. However, the estimate is statistically significant only at the 10 percent level. The decline in total balances is consistent with users carrying less debt after adopting EWA, but the research design does not establish that EWA caused the reduction.

The estimates for revolving credit provide a more direct test of whether EWA substitutes for flexible borrowing. Open revolving balances decline by approximately $120, or 6 percent relative to the pre-use mean of $1,971. However, the standard error is $117, and the estimate is not statistically distinguishable from zero. Thus, the data do not provide clear evidence that users reduce their reliance on revolving debt.

Revolving credit limits also decline following first EWA use. The estimated reduction is approximately $248, or 6.1 percent relative to the pre-use mean of $4,070. This estimate is statistically significant at the 10 percent level. A lower revolving limit could reduce the credit available to users during future financial shocks. However, limits may also decline when users close or pay off accounts.

Finally, I find essentially no change in revolving credit utilization following first EWA use. The estimated effect is a 0.4 percentage point reduction relative to a pre-use mean of

67.4 percent. The estimate is not statistically distinguishable from zero. Thus, despite the estimated reductions in revolving balances and credit limits, the share of available revolving credit used remains approximately unchanged.

Taken together, credit outcomes change relatively little following EWA adoption. Credit scores and revolving utilization remain approximately unchanged. Total open balances decline and there is no statistically significant change in revolving balances. Revolving credit limits also decline modestly. These estimates provide little evidence that EWA either improves or harms users' broader credit positions. Moreover, because the analysis does not include a contemporaneous comparison group, the observed changes may reflect other financial events occurring around first EWA use.

B Appendix Tables and Figures

Table A1: Effects of First Earned Wage Access Use on Subsequent Usage by Year

	Any Use	Amount Accessed ($)	Any Tip	Tip Amount ($)	Any Lightning Speed Fee	Lightning Amount ($)
2024	0.126***	10.84***	0.052***	0.174***	0.094***	0.409***
	(0.001)	(0.05)	(0.000)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.002)
2025	0.081***	7.57***	0.032***	0.105***	0.056***	0.279***
	(0.000)	(0.03)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.001)
Difference: 2025–2024	−0.045***	−3.28***	−0.020***	−0.069***	−0.038***	−0.130***
	(0.001)	(0.06)	(0.000)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.003)
Comparison-group mean	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Observations, 2024				3,678,780		
Observations, 2025				10,131,520		

Notes: This table reports average daily effects during the first eight weeks after adoption separately for the 2024 and 2025 matched samples. The final row reports the difference between the two estimates. The unit of observation is a person-day. Standard errors, clustered by user, are reported in parentheses. $^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, and $^{*}p < 0.10$.

Table A2: Effects on Subsequent Earned Wage Access Usage by Year and Timing

	Any Use	Amount Accessed ($)	Any Tip	Tip Amount ($)	Any Lightning Speed Fee	Lightning Amount ($)
Panel A. Day of first use						
2024	1.000***	90.04***	0.483***	1.96***	0.033***	0.144***
	(0.000)	(0.21)	(0.003)	(0.02)	(0.001)	(0.005)
2025	1.000***	93.10***	0.483***	1.94***	0.057***	0.277***
	(0.000)	(0.20)	(0.002)	(0.01)	(0.001)	(0.005)
Difference: 2025–2024	−0.000	3.06***	−0.000	−0.01	0.024***	0.133***
	(0.000)	(0.30)	(0.004)	(0.02)	(0.001)	(0.007)
Panel B. Days after first use						
2024	0.110***	9.40***	0.044***	0.141***	0.095***	0.414***
	(0.001)	(0.04)	(0.000)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.002)
2025	0.064***	6.01***	0.024***	0.072***	0.056***	0.279***
	(0.000)	(0.02)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.001)
Difference: 2025–2024	−0.046***	−3.39***	−0.021***	−0.070***	−0.039***	−0.134***
	(0.001)	(0.05)	(0.000)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.003)

Notes: This table decomposes usage effects during the first eight weeks after adoption into the date of first use and subsequent days, separately by year. The day zero and subsequent-day effects are estimated in a single regression. The unit of observation is a person-day. The 2024 and 2025 samples contain 3,678,780 and 10,131,520 observations, respectively. Standard errors, clustered by user, are reported in parentheses. $^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, and $^{*}p < 0.10$.

Table A3: Effects of Earned Wage Access on Bank Fees by Year

	2024	2025	Difference: 2025–2024
Panel A. Overdraft fees			
All days	0.14^{**}	0.30^{***}	0.16^{**}
	(0.07)	(0.04)	(0.08)
Day 0	6.80^{***}	5.21^{***}	-1.60^{**}
	(0.76)	(0.30)	(0.81)
After day 0	0.02	0.21^{***}	0.19^{**}
	(0.07)	(0.04)	(0.08)
Panel B. NSF fees			
All days	0.43^{***}	0.33^{***}	-0.09
	(0.14)	(0.09)	(0.16)
Day 0	6.21^{***}	4.09^{***}	-2.12
	(1.69)	(0.52)	(1.77)
After day 0	0.32^{**}	0.27^{***}	-0.06
	(0.13)	(0.09)	(0.16)
Panel C. Interest			
All days	0.03^{**}	0.03^{***}	-0.00
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Day 0	1.26^{***}	0.54^{***}	-0.72^{***}
	(0.26)	(0.07)	(0.26)
After day 0	0.01	0.02^{***}	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Panel D. Other bank fees			
All days	0.09	0.09	0.00
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.11)
Day 0	2.76^{***}	2.16^{***}	-0.60^{*}
	(0.27)	(0.19)	(0.32)
After day 0	0.04	0.05	0.01
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.11)

Notes: This table reports estimated effects on daily fee amounts separately by year. The final column reports the difference between the 2025 and 2024 estimates. Day 0 and subsequent-day effects are estimated in a single regression. The unit of observation is a person-day. Standard errors, clustered by user, are reported in parentheses. $^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, and $^{*}p < 0.10$.

Table A4: Effects of Earned Wage Access on Net Monthly Income with Day 0 Financial-Distress Controls

	Treatment Effect			Difference
	Pooled	2024	2025	2025–2024
EWA effect	330.58***	275.57***	361.64***	86.07
	(29.66)	(32.15)	(42.70)	(53.45)
Comparison-group mean	2,679.69	2,815.08	2,603.22	–
Observations	924,144	333,576	590,568	–
Matched pairs	77,012	27,798	49,214	–

Notes: This table reports estimated effects of first EWA use on net monthly income from the day 0-adjusted specification. The propensity-score model includes spending and financial-fee measures observed on the day of first EWA use, and the same measures are included as controls in the income regressions. The first column pools the 2024 and 2025 matched samples. The second and third columns report estimates separately by first-use cohort. The final column reports the difference between the 2025 and 2024 estimates. Standard errors, clustered by user, are reported in parentheses. The comparison-group mean is calculated among matched later adopters in the corresponding estimation sample. Monetary amounts are measured in nominal dollars. This specification is intended as a robustness check because it conditions on contemporaneous day-0 variables. $^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, and $^{*}p < 0.10$.

Table A5: Changes in Credit Outcomes Following First EWA Use

	Credit Score	Total Open Balance	Open Revolving Balance	Open Revolving Limit	Revolving Utilization
Post-first-use difference	0.18	−1,733.20*	−118.50	−247.90*	−0.004
	(2.25)	(1,006.90)	(116.90)	(140.50)	(0.021)
Pre-use mean	561.20	31,558.70	1,970.50	4,069.50	0.674
Unit of observation	Person-report	Person-report	Person-report	Person-report	Person-report
Observations	114,545	114,546	114,546	114,546	81,849

Notes: This table reports within-user changes in credit outcomes following first EWA use. Each regression includes user and calendar-month fixed effects. Standard errors, clustered by user, are reported in parentheses. The pre-use mean is calculated using observations before first EWA use. Balance and credit-limit outcomes are measured in dollars. Revolving utilization is expressed as a share. Because the analysis does not include a matched comparison group, the estimates should be interpreted as within-user changes rather than causal effects. $^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, and $^{*}p < 0.10$.

Table A6: Survey and Administrative Measures of EWA Usage

	Survey N	Survey	Admin.
Uses in the past 30 days	956	4.65	3.18
Amount accessed at last use	990	173.49	105.81
Fees and tips at last use	913	8.31	5.34

Notes: Administrative amounts and fees are transaction averages for 2024–2025, whereas survey measures refer to respondents' most recent transaction. Survey usage counts assign 6 to "5–7 times" and 8 to "8 or more times". Amount categories are assigned 12.5, 37, 75, 150, and 225 dollars; fee categories are assigned 0, 2.5, 7, 14.5, and 20 dollars. Survey N varies with available responses.

Table A7: Selected Characteristics of Survey Respondents

	N	Percent
A. Demographics and household		
Age 25–54	985	87.2
Annual earnings of $30,000–$74,999	985	65.1
Household of three or more people	986	52.6
Children under 18 in household	983	45.9
B. Pay arrangements		
Pay frequency: every two weeks	986	67.3
Pay frequency: twice a month	986	13.4
Pay frequency: weekly	986	13.1
Paid hourly	984	64.3
Salaried	984	31.9
C. Three most common industries		
Healthcare or social assistance	986	21.7
Government or public sector	986	10.5
Office or administrative work	986	10.6

Notes: The survey contains 991 respondents. N is the number with a recorded response, including "Prefer not to say".

Table A8: Alternatives Without EWA and Their Perceived Costs

Alternative	Alternative N	Percent	Cost N	Cost ($)
Could not cover the expense	187	21.4	116	42.92
Pay a bill late or incur a late fee	137	15.7	106	40.14
Overdraft checking account	109	12.5	94	52.34
Use a credit card	88	10.1	67	35.48
Payday or cash advance loan	79	9.1	71	53.39

Notes: The table reports selected alternatives and their perceived costs, in descending order of frequency. Alternative N counts respondents selecting each alternative; percentages use all 872 respondents with a coded alternative, including categories omitted here. The question asks for the single most likely alternative. Cost N counts nonmissing cost responses within each category. Cost categories are assigned 0, 5, 17, 37, 74.5, and 100 dollars.

Table A9: Expected and Administrative Persistence in EWA Usage

	Survey	Administrative
Persistence coefficient	0.685	0.640
Robust standard error	(0.024)	(0.00014)
Observations	878	>20 million
R^2	0.498	0.470

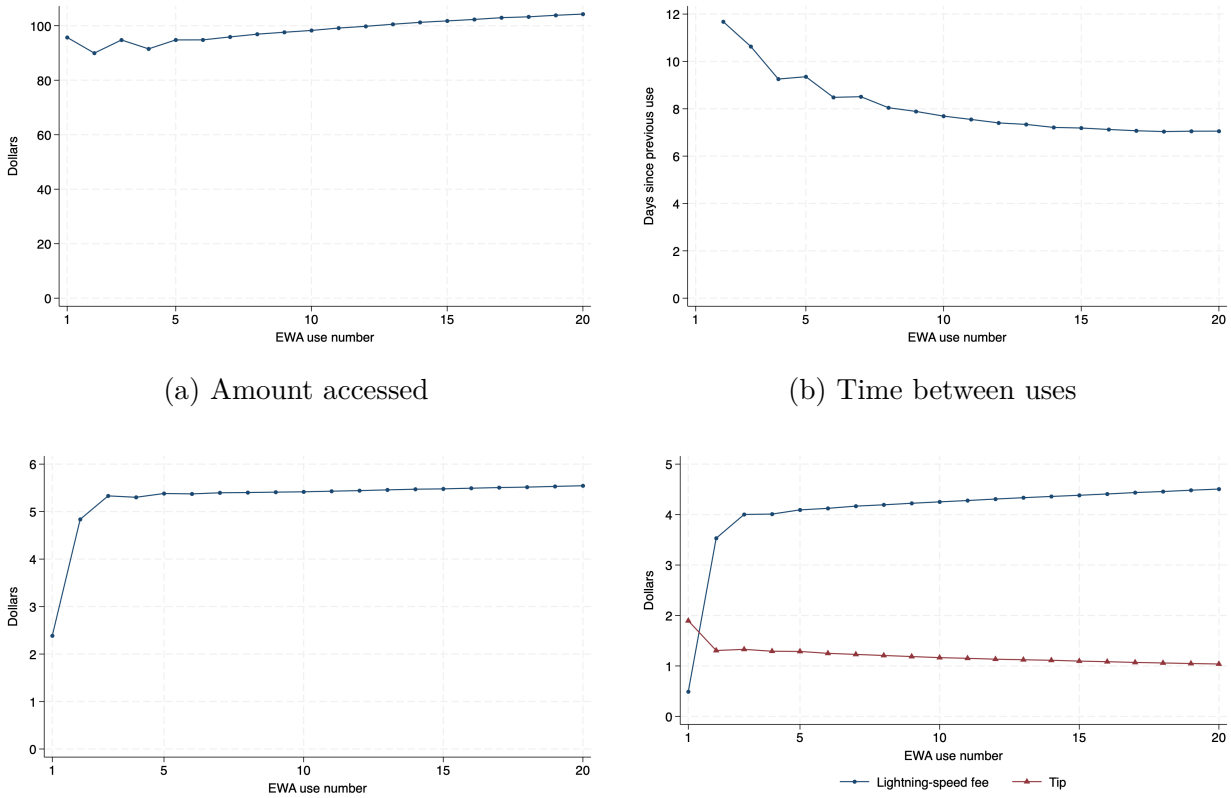
Notes: The survey regression relates expected usage over the next 30 days to reported usage over the past 30 days. The administrative regression relates actual monthly usage to usage in the preceding month, with both coded to match the survey variable. Counts of 5–7 are coded as 6 and counts of 8 or more as 8. Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

Table A10: Themes in Optional Survey Comments

	Count	Percent
A. Benefits and appreciation		
Express appreciation	132	49.6
Provides liquidity when needed	64	24.1
Improves finances	36	13.5
Low costs or preferable alternatives	19	7.1
Convenience or service features	12	4.5
B. Concerns		
Repeat use	57	21.4
Request lower fees	39	14.7
Request higher daily limits	24	9.0
Request flexible payback	14	5.3
C. Other (neutral comments)		
Financial circumstances	21	7.9
Usage habits or plans	15	5.6
No substantive response	725	—

Notes: Counts report overlapping themes in 266 substantive comments. A comment may appear in multiple rows or panels. Benefits include short-run relief even when a comment also raises concerns. Concern labels include complaints as well as requests. Panel C records neutral descriptions of financial circumstances and usage habits. Themes with fewer than 10 comments and unclear themes are not displayed.

Figure A1: EWA Usage Across Successive Transactions



(a) Amount accessed

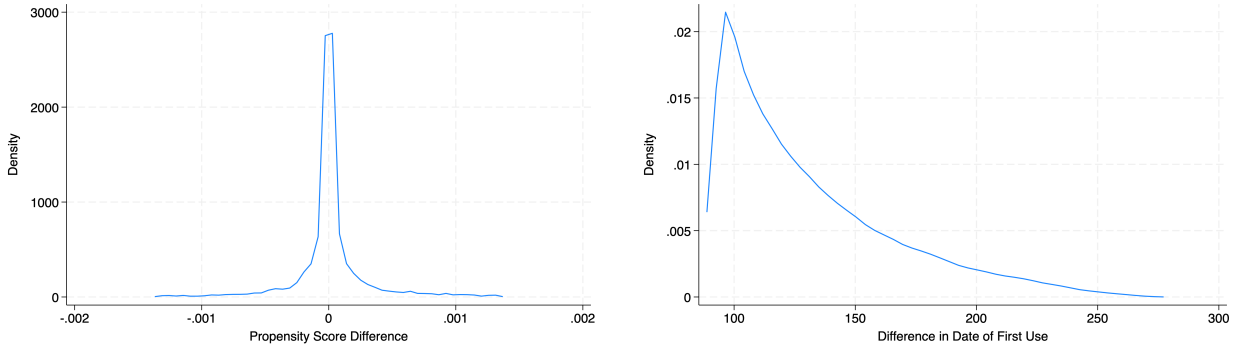
(b) Time between uses

(c) Total fees

(d) Fee composition

Notes: This figure reports mean transaction characteristics by cumulative EWA use number among workers who use EWA at least 20 times. The same set of workers contributes to each use number. Panel A reports the amount accessed. Panel B reports the number of days since the worker's previous EWA use. Panel C reports total fees, defined as the sum of tips and lightning-speed fees. Panel D reports tips and lightning-speed fees separately. The patterns are descriptive and may reflect changes correlated with use number rather than the causal effect of repeated EWA use.

Figure A2: Match Quality

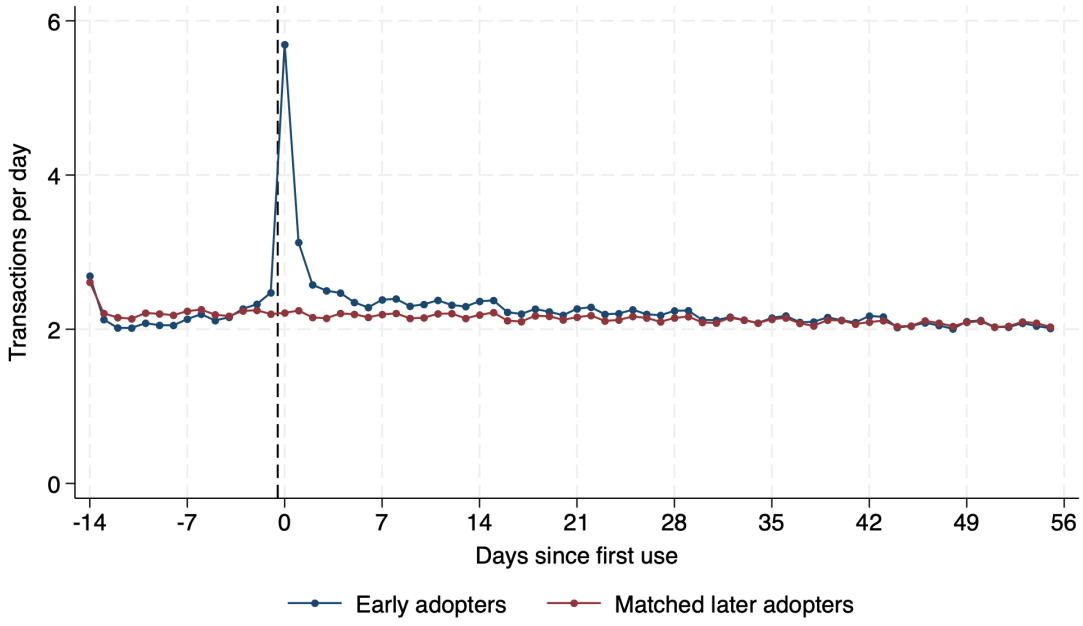


(a) Difference in propensity scores

(b) Difference in first-use dates

Notes: This figure describes match quality in the matched sample of early and late EWA adopters. Panel (a) shows the distribution of the difference in estimated propensity scores within matched pairs. Panel (b) shows the distribution of the difference in first-use dates within matched pairs.

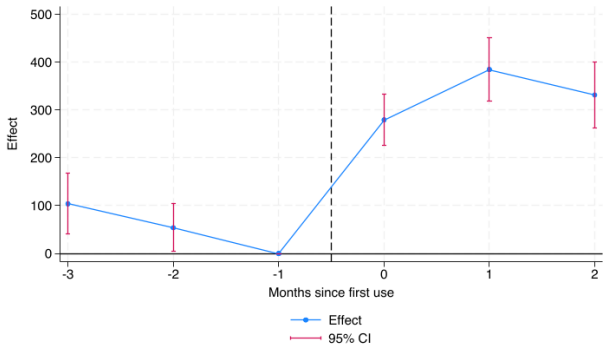
Figure A3: Observed Non-EWA Bank Transactions Around First Use



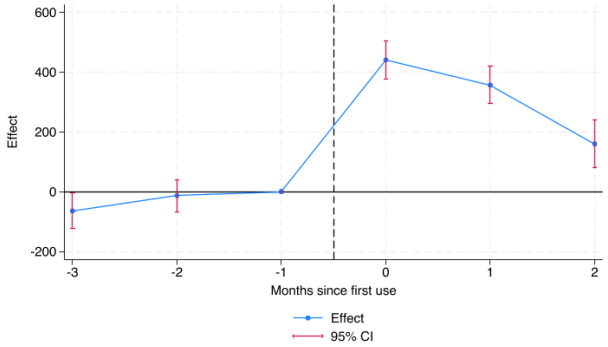
Notes: This figure presents the raw mean number of observed non-EWA bank transactions per day for early adopters and matched later adopters. Day 0 is the date of first EWA use among early adopters and the corresponding matched reference date among later adopters. Transactions that could represent EWA disbursements or repayments are excluded.

Figure A4: The Effects of EWA Usage on Net Monthly Income by Year

(a) 2024

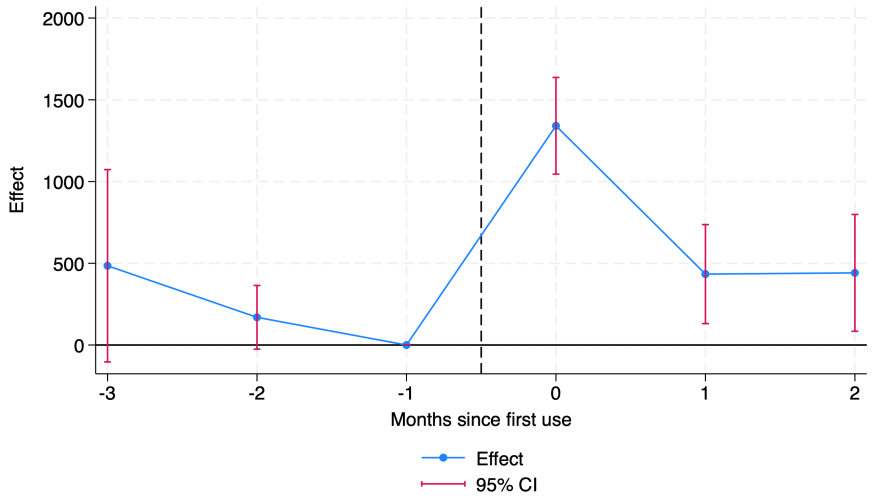


(b) 2025

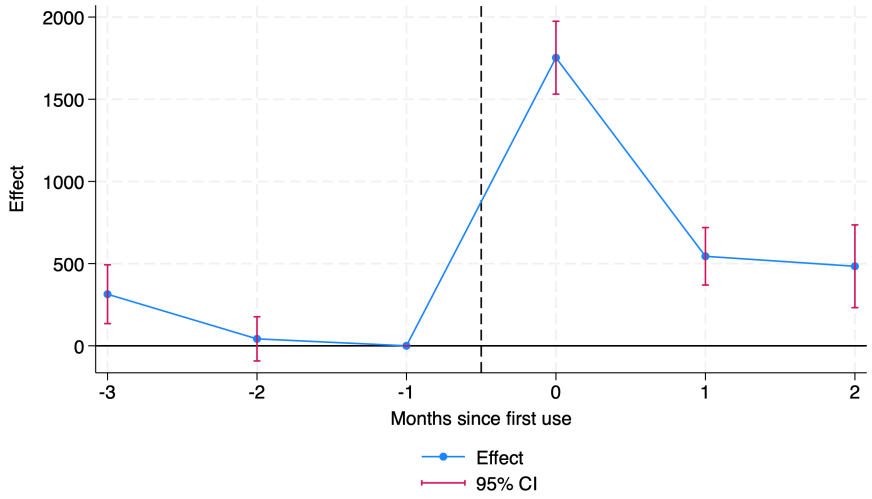


Notes: This figure shows event-study estimates of the dynamic effects of EWA adoption on net monthly income in the matched sample of early and late EWA adopters separately by year. Estimates are based on a regression of net monthly income on treatment indicators interacted with time-since-first-EWA-use indicators, with controls for the estimated propensity score for using EWA, and fixed effects for match group, relative time to EWA adoption, calendar month, and early adopter status. Error bars are 95% confidence intervals based on robust standard errors, clustered by user. The p-values on the null hypothesis that the pre-period effects are jointly zero are 0.01 in both 2024 and 2025.

Figure A5: Effects of Earned Wage Access on Monthly Consumption Spending by Year



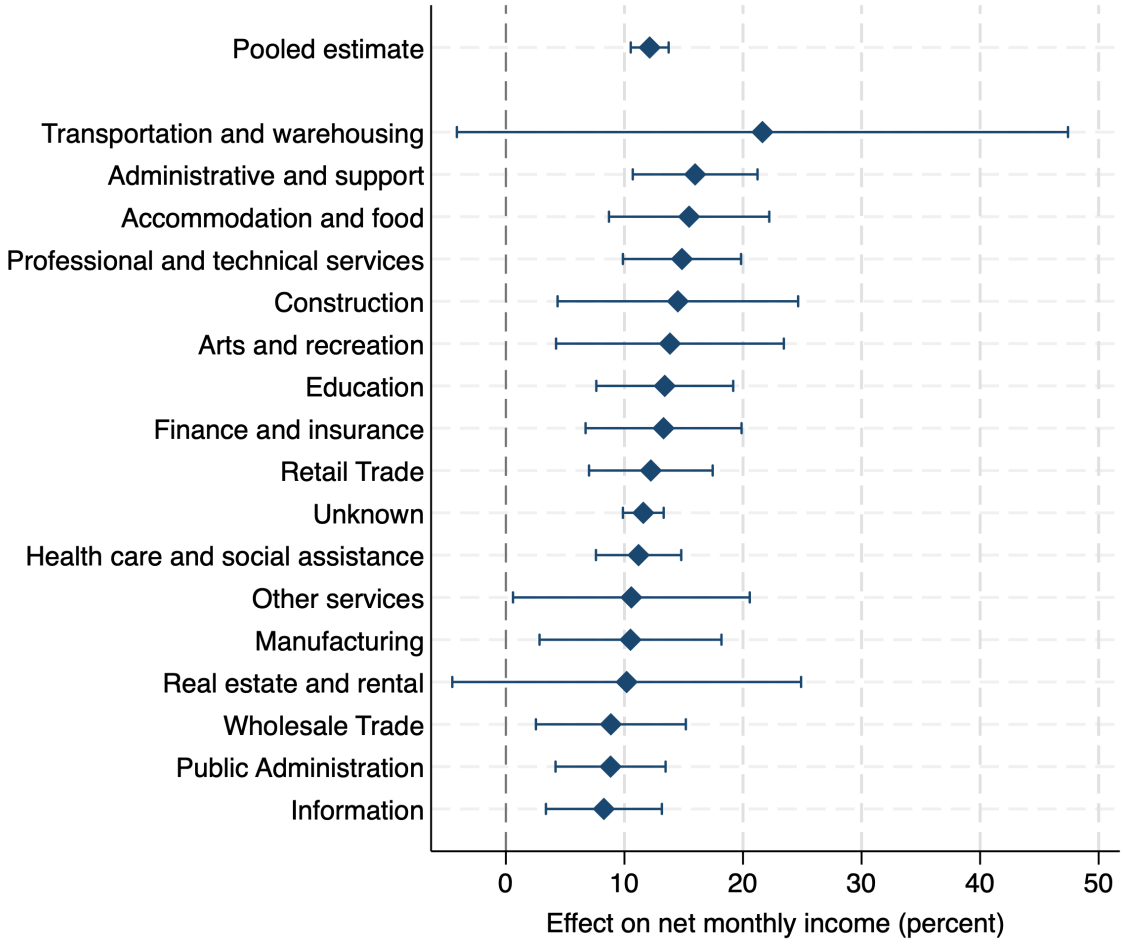
(a) 2024



(b) 2025

Notes: This figure reports event-study estimates of the effect of first EWA use on monthly consumption spending separately for the 2024 and 2025 matched samples. Month −1 is the omitted category. Points show estimated effects, and vertical bars show 95% confidence intervals based on standard errors clustered by user. The dashed vertical line separates the pretreatment and post-treatment periods. Consumption spending is defined as in Table 4.

Figure A6: Proportional Effects of Earned Wage Access on Net Monthly Income by Sector



Notes: This figure reports the sector-specific income effects from Figure 4 as a share of each sector's matched comparison-group mean income. Confidence intervals are rescaled by the same sector-specific mean. Diamonds show point estimates, horizontal lines show 95% confidence intervals based on standard errors clustered by user, and the top row shows the pooled estimate as a share of the pooled comparison-group mean. Sectors with fewer than 100 matched pairs in the estimation sample are omitted. Sector is measured in the month containing the reference date; this is the month of first EWA use for early adopters but not for their matched later-adopting comparisons.

C Survey questionnaire

Recent EWA Usage

1. How long have you been using earned wage access?

- Less than one month
- 1-3 months
- 4-6 months
- 7-12 months
- More than one year

2. During the past 30 days, on how many separate occasions did you use earned wage access?

- Zero times
- 1 time
- 2 times
- 3 times
- 4 times
- 5-7 times
- 8 or more times
- Not sure

3. How many times do you expect to use earned wage access over the next 30 days?

- Zero times
- 1 time
- 2 times
- 3 times
- 4 times
- 5-7 times
- 8 or more times
- Not sure

4. Thinking about the most recent time you used earned wage access, approximately how much did you access?

- Less than $25
- $25-$49
- $50-$99
- $100-$199
- $200 or more

5. Approximately how many days remained until your next scheduled paycheck when you most recently used EarnIn?

- It was the same day as payday
- 1 day
- 2-3 days
- 4-7 days
- 8-14 days
- 15-21 days
- More than 21 days
- I don't remember

6. Think about the last time you used earned wage access. What did you use the money for? Select all options that apply.

- Rent or mortgage
- Utilities (electricity, gas, water, internet, phone)
- Groceries or household essentials
- Transportation (gas, car repair, transit, rideshare)
- Medical or healthcare costs
- Childcare or child-related expenses
- Paying down debt or a credit card bill
- An unexpected emergency expense
- Everyday discretionary spending (eating out, entertainment, shopping)
- A planned purchase or special occasion (gift, travel, event)
- Something else *[Free-text response]*
- I don't remember

7. Thinking about the last time you used earned wage access, was any of the money used for an expense that helped you work or get to work—for example, transportation, childcare, phone service, or work equipment?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

8. During the past 30 days, how, if at all, has the ability to use earned wage access affected the number of hours you worked?

- Decreased substantially
- Decreased somewhat
- Did not affect my hours
- Increased somewhat
- Increased substantially
- Not sure

9. Approximately how much did you pay for your most recent earned wage access transaction, including any expedited transfer fee or optional tip?

- $0
- $1-$4
- $5-$9
- $10-$19
- $20 or more
- Don't remember

What would happen without EWA

10. Think about the last time you used earned wage access. If earned wage access had not been available, what would you most likely have done instead? Please select one option.

- Taken out a payday loan or cash advance loan
- Used a credit card
- Overdrafted my checking account
- Borrowed from family or a friend
- Used "Buy Now, Pay Later" (e.g., Afterpay, Klarna, Affirm)
- Paid a bill late or paid a late fee
- Skipped or delayed the expense entirely
- Sold or pawned something
- Used savings
- Asked my employer for an advance on my paycheck
- Worked extra hours or picked up a side gig
- I would not have been able to cover the expense
- Something else *[Free-text response]*
- I don't know

11. During the past 12 months, have you personally used the alternative you selected above when you needed money before payday?

- Yes
- No
- Don't remember

12. About how much would this alternative have cost you in fees, interest, penalties, or other charges by the time the expense was paid or the money was repaid?

- $0
- $1-$9
- $10-$24
- $25-$49
- $50-$99
- $100 or more
- Don't know or not applicable

13. Without earned wage access, when would you have likely paid for or made this expense?

- At approximately the same time
- Later, but before my next paycheck
- When my next paycheck arrived
- After my next paycheck
- I would have reduced or skipped the expense
- I would not have been able to cover it
- Don't know

Attention check

14. Attention check: To show that you are reading carefully, please select "Sometimes."

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Overall experience with earned wage access

15. Overall, how has having access to earned wage access affected your financial situation?

- Much worse
- Somewhat worse
- Neither better nor worse
- Somewhat better
- Much better

Planning

16. When do you usually decide whether to use earned wage access during a pay period?

- Before the pay period begins
- Near the beginning of the pay period
- When a particular expense or need arises
- I do not have a usual approach
- Not sure

17. EarnIn already limits how much users can access. People differ in whether they would prefer additional limits. Which option would you prefer?

- No additional limits
- The option to set a maximum dollar amount per pay period
- The option to set a maximum number of transfers per pay period
- Stricter limits that apply to everyone
- No preference
- Not sure

18. When would you prefer an increase to that limit to take effect?

- Immediately
- After 24 hours
- At the beginning of my next pay period
- I would want to choose the timing when setting the limit
- Not sure

Free response

19. Is there anything else you would like us to understand about the benefits or drawbacks of using earned wage access?
[Free-text response]

Demographics

20. What is your age?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-61
- 62 or older

21. How often are you usually paid by your main employer?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Every 2 weeks
- Twice a month
- Monthly
- Irregularly
- I don't have a regular employer
- Prefer not to say

22. How is your pay from your main job structured?

- Hourly wage
- Salary (fixed annual or monthly amount)
- Commission or tips (with or without a base wage)
- Piece rate or per-job pay (e.g., per delivery, per task)
- Other / varies
- Prefer not to say

23. What were your approximate total earnings from your main job last year, before taxes?

- Less than $30,000
- $30,000 to $49,999
- $50,000 to $74,999
- $75,000 to $99,999
- $100,000 or more
- Prefer not to say

24. Which of the following best describes the industry where you work? If you have multiple jobs, please choose the one for your main job.

- Retail or wholesale trade
- Restaurants, food service, or hospitality
- Healthcare or social assistance
- Construction or skilled trades
- Manufacturing
- Transportation, warehousing, or delivery
- Personal services (cleaning, beauty, fitness, repair)
- Childcare, education, or tutoring
- Office or administrative work
- Professional services (legal, accounting, consulting, finance)
- Technology, IT, or software
- Government or public sector
- Nonprofit or religious organization
- Gig or platform work (rideshare, delivery, freelance platforms)
- Agriculture, landscaping, or outdoor work
- Other (please specify) *[Free-text response]*
- Prefer not to say

25. Including yourself, how many people currently live in your household?

- 1 (just me)
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6 or more
- Prefer not to say

26. Do any children under age 18 live in your household?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Compensation and follow-up contact

27. Thank you for completing the survey! The first 1,000 respondents will receive a $5 Amazon gift card. To receive your compensation, please enter your email address below. Your email address will be linked to your survey responses in the study dataset. It will be shared with EarnIn for two purposes only: to deliver your payment, and — if you give permission in the next question — so that EarnIn may invite you to their interviews and forums. It will not be used for any other purpose, and it will not appear in any research report or publication. *[Free-text response]*

28. EarnIn occasionally hosts interviews and customer forums with its users. These are run by EarnIn and are not part of this research study. May we share your email address with EarnIn so they can consider you for these events? Most people will not be contacted. Your answer does not affect your compensation or your standing with EarnIn.

- Yes
- No