Ally Establishes New Benchmark for What Traditional Economic Indicators Miss

New Cost of Life Today platform and proprietary Joy Index reveal only 15% of Americans say joy is easy to afford, highlighting the connection between financial well-being and quality of life

CHARLOTTE, N.C., Aug. 26, 2026 /PRNewswire/ -- Ally Bank today launched Cost of Life Today, a new consumer research platform dedicated to understanding how economic realities shape everyday life. At the center of the initiative is the inaugural Joy Index, Ally's proprietary annual benchmark that quantifies the relationship between financial realities and consumers' ability to experience joy.

Traditional economic indicators help explain how the economy is performing, but they don't always reveal how people are actually experiencing it. The Joy Index is designed to add that missing dimension, measuring whether consumers have the financial flexibility to enjoy the people, experiences and moments that make life meaningful. The proprietary Joy Index and broader Cost of Life Today platform aim to holistically complement traditional economic reporting and deepen the conversation around how financia realities shape everyday life.

"Financial well-being is about so much more than an account balance. It's about having the confidence and flexibility to prepare for tomorrow, while still making room for life today," said Lindsay Sacknoff, president of consumer banking at Ally. "The Cost of Life Today report gives us a deeper understanding of the real pressures, priorities and tradeoffs shaping people's financial decisions, sc that we can keep building a banking experience that works harder for the everyday person and impacts their life in a meaningful way, both now and in the future."

Developed in partnership with YouGov and fielded among a nationally representative sample of more than 5,000 U.S. adults involved in household financial decision-making, the Joy Index is designed to build a trusted, empirical view of how Americans' financial realities, priorities and experiences evolve over time. Through the Joy Index and ongoing research, Cost of Life Today examines the choices consumers make every day: what they prioritize, what they postpone and what feels worth protecting, offerin a richer perspective on how financial well-being is experienced in real life.

The inaugural findings suggest Americans haven't stopped choosing joy, but they are working harder to protect it: nearly four in five (79%) experience something that brings them joy at least monthly, yet only 15% say joy is easy to afford. Through annual reporting and year-round insights, Ally is establishing the Joy Index as an annual benchmark to understand how Americans' relationship with money and joy changes over time.

The platform builds on Ally's role as a pioneer in financial wellness and bespoke consumer research exploring the choices and pressures behind Americans' financial lives, from friendship and sports fandom to wedding culture and showing up for loved ones' milestone celebrations. Ally's newest research extends that work by exploring how people make spending choices that reflect both their obligations and what matters to them personally. As the nation's largest all-digital bank dedicated to helping consumers achieve financial confidence, Ally is uniquely positioned to explore what people earn, spend and save, and how those realities ultimately affect quality of life.

Key Findings: How Americans Are Making Room for Life Today

The Cost of Life Today report and Joy Index provide one of the clearest pictures yet of how Americans are navigating the tension between financial responsibility and living meaningfully today. The findings reveal an encouraging but nuanced reality: Americans have not abandoned joy, but financial pressure is making it harder to sustain. Sixty-eight percent spend on joy at least monthly, yet only 15% say the purchases and experiences that bring them joy are easy to afford.

- **Balancing today with tomorrow:** Fifty-four percent try to balance long-term financial goals with enjoying life today, even when it means making slower progress. Consumers are also more than three times as likely to prioritize future financial goals over present-day enjoyment as the reverse.
- **Joy spending can trigger guilt — even without overspending:** Seventy-two percent feel at least some guilt when spendin on joy instead of other financial goals, although 68% believe they spend the right amount on joy, or close to it, and only 6% believe they spend too much. That guilt is especially pronounced among women: 75% feel at least some guilt and 25% feel a lot, compared with 68% and 15% of men, respectively.
- **Gen Z is making room for joy on its own terms:** Gen Z reports experiencing joy more frequently than any other generation, and it is most likely to spend on joy at least monthly, at 76%. The young cohort is also the most likely to maintain a dedicated joy budget, at 56%, compared with 46% of millennials, 32% of Gen X and 29% of Boomers+. Yet Gen Z's average monthly jo spend, $295, is nearly identical to Boomers+, at $298.
- **Mindset shapes the experience of joy:** Consumers with a "joy mindset" — regularly experiencing appreciation, gratitude, optimism and wonder — are nearly twice as likely to report joy weekly as those without one, at 88% compared with 45%.

Experience scores are also nearly identical across income levels, although the overall Joy Index still rises with income.

"One of the most striking findings is how intentionally Gen Z is protecting joy," said Jack Howard, head of money wellness at Ally. "They lead all cohorts in spending on joy regularly and are the most likely to plan for it through a dedicated budget. Yet 77% still fee at least some guilt when spending on joy instead of another financial goal. That tells us the tension is not simply about overspending. Many consumers are second-guessing whether they should make room for joy at all. These findings get to the heart of money wellness and represent the balancing act people navigate every day: building security for tomorrow while still making room for a meaningful life today."

Read the full Cost of Life Today report.

Measuring What Matters Most: The Joy Index

The inaugural findings are rooted in the Joy Index, Ally's proprietary framework for understanding how Americans balance money, priorities and well-being.

Built from four equally weighted pillars — Affordability, Importance, Experience and Resiliency — the Index measures consumers' financial capacity to make room for joy, how intentionally they prioritize it, how frequently they experience it and how financial responsibilities and stress affect their ability to balance today with tomorrow. The score is informed by questions about how often consumers experience joy, whether they can afford the things that bring them joy, how important those experiences are relative to other priorities and how resilient joy remains during periods of financial stress.

The average U.S. adult scored 54.2 out of 100, placing Americans in Joy Pressured territory, where joy remains present, but financial pressure makes it harder to sustain consistently. Experience is the strongest-scoring pillar nationally, at 16.0 out of 25, while Affordability is the weakest, at 11.8.

A higher score suggests greater financial flexibility and capacity to prioritize joy, while a lower score indicates heavier constraints and more difficult tradeoffs. As an inaugural benchmark, the national score of 54.2 establishes a baseline rather than a verdict, creating a new way to track how consumers' capacity for joy evolves over time across economic conditions, life stages and generations.

The Index reinforces the report's core insight: Americans are still finding joy, but many lack the financial breathing room to do so easily, confidently or consistently.

Building the Cost of Life Today Platform

The annual report and Joy Index are just the beginning. Together, they serve as the flagship expression of Ally's broader Cost of Life Today platform, which will continue throughout the year with research exploring the financial decisions, tradeoffs and emotions shaping modern life.

By examining the behaviors, tradeoffs and emotions that shape financial decision-making, the platform offers a richer view of evolving consumer priorities, financial decision-making and quality of life. That perspective can help consumers better understand their own relationship with money while giving Ally — and the broader marketplace — greater insight into what people value, where they feel pressure and how their priorities are changing.

For Ally, investing in that understanding is a natural extension of its approach to financial wellness: helping people feel more informed, confident and in control of their money so they can make thoughtful choices about both the future they are building and the life they are living today. Those insights can also inform future research, tools and experiences designed to meet consumers in the moments that matter.

That commitment to making finance more human also comes to life through **Money Roots®**, Ally's free financial wellness program designed to help people understand how their money mindset shapes their spending, saving and investing decisions. For more information, visit **ally.com/moneyroots.**

Press Kit: The full Cost of Life Today report, Joy Index findings and supporting materials are available here **[LINK]**.

Survey Methodology: The Joy Index is a proprietary index designed to capture how well consumers are able to balance financial responsibilities while maintaining a joyful and fulfilling life. The Joy Index is a composite score based on four components — Affordability, Importance, Experience and Resiliency. Each component is equally weighted with a maximum of 25 points to create a index score ranging from 0 to 100. The research was conducted by YouGov and fielded in July 2026 among a nationally representative sample of more than 5,000 U.S. adults ages 18 and older who have some role in household financial decision-making.

About Ally Financial

Ally Financial Inc. (NYSE: ALLY) includes the nation's largest all-digital bank and an industry leading auto finance business, driven by a mission to "Do It Right" for its customers and communities. Ally is a U.S. financial holding company with $200 billion in assets and 9.6 million customers (June 30, 2026). Ally Bank, Member FDIC, offers online banking products, including high-yield savings and no hidden fee checking, and was the first major U.S. bank to eliminate overdraft fees. Ally also provides investing solutions through Ally Invest, including online brokerage, automated investing, IRAs and personal financial advice. As a leader in auto finance, Ally provides consumer and dealer financing, insurance, and vehicle remarketing services. Ally's seasoned corporate finance business provides capital to equity sponsors and middle-market companies. Visit ally.com.

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