



INDUSTRY TOOLKIT

FinHealth Standards for Credit Products

Designing Credit Cards To Support
the Financial Health of Young Adults

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About This Toolkit

This installment of our FinHealth Standards builds on the Financial Health Network’s previously released FinHealth Standards for Spending Management Products, which outline how checking accounts and credit cards can serve as tools for positive impact in how people manage their day-to-day spending. While those standards addressed spending more broadly, this toolkit focuses more specifically on credit cards and how they shape credit outcomes, especially for young adults ages 18-25.

For many young adults, a credit card is the first entry point into the credit system. When structured well, credit cards can help establish credit histories and provide a cushion to manage cash flow volatility or unexpected expenses. But when revolving balances become unmanageable, or when young adults are not equipped with the tools they need to use credit cards effectively, these products can create compounding financial challenges that last for years to come.

Grounded in behavioral research and informed by industry leaders, the following standards are designed to redefine what a “good” credit card is and help providers structure products in ways that support positive credit outcomes from the beginning of a consumer’s financial journey.

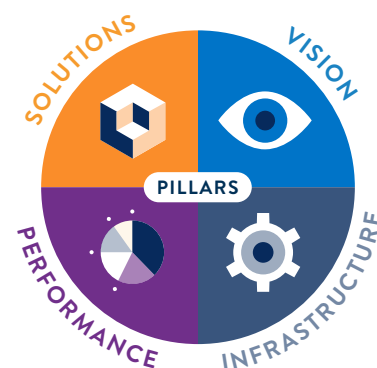


About the FinHealth Standards

This toolkit is part of the FinHealth Standards, a Financial Health Network initiative built on our two decades of expertise in shaping industry practices to support consumers' financial lives. Grounded in rigorous research and deep collaboration, the FinHealth Standards offer evidence-based guidance on building financial health solutions that improve consumer outcomes across the key aspects of financial health: spending, saving, borrowing, and planning and protection.

WHY USE THE FINHEALTH STANDARDS?

Businesses have the potential to be architects of financial health—but only if they deliver solutions that truly meet customer needs. These standards align with the Solutions pillar of our FinHealth Maturity Assessment Program (MAP) framework, which defines four key areas where institutions can embed financial health into their overall strategy. By aligning product strategies with the MAP framework, institutions can build toward a more holistic and mature approach to financial health—one that not only delivers better outcomes for customers but also drives long-term business value.



HOW TO IMPLEMENT THE FINHEALTH STANDARDS

No matter your starting point, these standards will help you put financial health at the heart of your work and give your customers the support they need to thrive. These standards are intentionally designed to be adaptable—offering pathways for both incremental improvement and bold innovation. For example:

A large institution may **embed dynamic repayment recommendations** into its credit card experience, helping cardholders better understand their options.

A regional bank or credit union that partners with a third-party credit card issuer may work with that partner to **activate existing features or advocate for roadmap changes aligned with these standards.**

A consumer advocate might use this toolkit to **inform research, engage in strategic conversations with partners, and support industry adoption of the standards.**

WHO SHOULD USE THESE STANDARDS?

- Financial institutions that issue credit cards, and the partners that deliver them, including banks, credit unions, and fintechs
- Policymakers and advocates focused on credit access and quality
- Product design teams, marketers, and organizational leaders working to create credit cards that are responsible, accessible, and supportive of financial health

WHICH TYPES OF CREDIT CARDS DOES THE TOOLKIT ADDRESS?

In developing the standards in this toolkit, we considered the pathways and products many young adults use to establish and build credit, such as student cards, entry-level rewards cards, and secured and unsecured options. While we did not explicitly examine premium or high-fee rewards cards, many of the standards may still be relevant in those contexts. The primary focus is on general purpose cards issued on major networks, though we acknowledge that guardrails around features common in private-label products, such as promotional financing periods and deferred interest structures, remain important considerations for providers.



A NOTE ON INTEREST AND FEES

Credit cards play a central role in the U.S. credit market, serving borrowers across credit tiers and income levels and reflecting substantial variation in risk, pricing, and terms. Within this market, interest and fees drive the cost of carrying debt, especially for revolvers—cardholders who carry balances from month to month. According to the Financial Health Network’s FinHealth Spend Report, fees and interest assessed on revolving general purpose credit card balances reached \$165.1 billion in 2024.¹ Financially Vulnerable households who carried balances paid \$48.1 billion—30% of this total—despite comprising just 15% of the population.

The standards in this toolkit focus on product features, policies, and onboarding experiences, and do not directly address the pricing of interest rates or fees. Nonetheless, interest and fee structures remain highly consequential for consumers’ financial health. For consumers who revolve balances, finance charges and fees can limit the impacts of the standards outlined in this report, particularly for groups disproportionately burdened by these costs.

Many factors influence and inform how credit card products are priced, including borrower risk profiles, card features and rewards structures, competitor pricing, servicing costs, and the cost of funds. Federal policies like the Credit CARD Act of 2009 have also played a role in shaping interest and fee practices and fee disclosure requirements.² Providers should carefully consider whether, for any given product or customer segment, pricing aligns with underlying costs and represents a fair return on the money that is lent. Providers should also evaluate how their pricing structures may interact with these standards and affect consumers’ ability to manage debt.

¹ Hannah Gdalmann, Shira Hammerslough, Amber Jackson & Meghan Greene, “[FinHealth Spend 2025: The Cost of Financial Services For American Households](#),” Financial Health Network, October 2025.

² “[CFPB Finds CARD Act Helped Consumers Avoid More Than \\$16 Billion in Gotcha Credit Card Fees](#),” Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, December 2015.

A Closer Look at Standards for Credit Cards

We've organized the standards in this toolkit into three key areas, each addressing a critical layer of the customer experience:

Account Features



Elevate credit cards with features that support credit building and manageable debt balances.

Account Policies



Shape policies that help customers navigate hardship and support progress in their credit journey.

Onboarding and Access



Expand access to credit and set new cardholders up for success through proactive onboarding.

Each standard includes:

- A short statement of the practice
- The rationale for its financial health impact
- Examples of implementation strategies across different types of institutions³

Scoring Your Own Credit Solutions

At the end of the toolkit, you'll also find a [scorecard](#) that your institution can use to evaluate your offerings and prioritize areas for action. By identifying areas for improvement, your business can build solutions grounded in industry best practices and meaningfully advance the financial health of those you serve.

³ Examples throughout this toolkit are illustrative and do not constitute endorsements.

Credit Cards To Advance the Financial Health of Young Adults

Early credit experiences can shape long-term financial health. For many consumers, a first credit card is not just a payment tool but an entry point into the formal credit system. Research from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) shows that nearly 36% of 18-24 year olds who establish a credit history did so first through a credit card, making it the single most common entry product for both young adults and adults of any age.^{4,5}

Yet many young adults face unique challenges as they enter the credit system. Many have limited or no prior credit history, which can restrict access to credit cards, especially those with rewards or other premium features.⁶ At the same time, they are often navigating financial products independently for the first time and may experience difficulty comparing cards and understanding terms and conditions, APRs, and fees as well as the practices card issuers use to process payments and assess interest. Younger adults often have lower and more volatile incomes, which can further increase both the need for credit as well as the challenge of managing outstanding debt.^{7,8}

When used well, credit cards can help individuals establish and build credit histories, smooth consumption during cash flow shortfalls, and provide an important cushion to cope with unexpected expenses. But when balances become unmanageable, the ongoing cost of interest and fees can create a financial burden that undermines long-term financial health.

As debt balances continue to reach record highs, the need for clear, accessible credit card standards is all the more critical.⁹ Well-designed credit cards, especially early in the consumer's journey, can help address these challenges and foster high-quality credit experiences and long-term outcomes.

Younger adults often have lower and more volatile incomes, which can further increase both the need for credit as well as the challenge of managing outstanding debt.

⁴ "CFPB Data Point: Becoming Credit Visible," Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, June 2017.

⁵ A more recent paper from the U.S. Census Bureau similarly shows that most people obtain their first tradeline through a credit card, though student loans have also become a common first tradeline, especially among Black young adults. See: Trevor J. Bakker et al., "Credit Access in the United States," Center for Economic Studies (CES), July 2025.

⁶ "Who are the credit invisibles?," Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, December 2016.

⁷ Forty-eight percent of 18-25 year olds reported that their monthly income varied at least occasionally over the previous 12 months. See: Andrew Warren, Shira Hammerslough, Wanjira Chege & Taylor C. Nelms, "Financial Health Pulse® 2025 U.S. Trends Report," Financial Health Network, September 2025.

⁸ "Gen Z Consumers Are Using Credit More, and Differently, than Their Millennial Counterparts at the Beginning of their Credit Journeys," TransUnion, May 2024.

⁹ "Quarterly Report on Household Debt and Credit," Federal Reserve Bank of New York, February 2026.



While this toolkit is framed by the financial health implications of credit cards for young adults, the insights and standards themselves are broadly applicable. If a credit card works well for consumers at the start of their credit journey, it sets a higher standard for the market as a whole. Products that work well for early-career, credit-thin consumers may also better serve:

- Immigrant populations or returning citizens with minimal U.S. credit histories
- Low- and moderate-income consumers
- Second-chance or credit-rebuilding customers

This toolkit supports financial institutions, product designers, and policymakers in building credit card products that promote long-term financial health. The standards in this toolkit help define universal principles that make a “good” credit card from a financial health perspective through thoughtful product design, account policies, and user experiences. The toolkit itself provides guidance for applying those standards through a young adult lens, highlighting where these decisions may have an outsized impact.

RELATED TOPIC

The Evolving “Buy Now, Pay Later” Ecosystem

Buy now, pay later (BNPL) is a fast-growing payment option, especially among young adults. BNPL loans typically split a purchase into four equal bi-weekly installments, with the first installment due at the point of sale and often no interest charged. Financial Health Pulse® research finds that nearly one-quarter (22%) of respondents ages 18-25 used a BNPL service between spring 2024 and spring 2025. Among those users, the majority did so more than once.

When paid on time, BNPL can function as a useful interest-free liquidity tool for those struggling with cash flow and seeking easy access to credit. However, risks remain. BNPL users commonly report spending more than they otherwise would have and many “stack” multiple loans from different providers, which can make repayment burdens difficult to manage.^{10,11} In addition, because most BNPL payments are not yet reported to the credit bureaus, these purchases generally do not help consumers build credit.

At the same time, many credit card issuers now offer post-purchase installment options that allow cardholders to convert specific purchases into structured payoff plans, typically with a monthly fee or fixed interest rate.^{12,13} These plans allow consumers to pay down a portion of their balance over time while avoiding interest on new purchases if they are paid in full. These tools provide a fast and convenient way to access a structured repayment plan and may also help repayment feel more manageable by breaking larger credit card balances into clear sub-goals.¹⁴

However, depending on the context, these installment plans can also increase the complexity of managing and understanding the total cost of debt. With varied fee structures, cardholders may face difficulty comparing the total cost of the plan against other credit options.

As products like BNPL and credit card installment features continue to evolve, ongoing research and monitoring will be critical to ensuring they support, rather than undermine, consumer financial health.

¹⁰ Hannah Gdalmann, Shira Hammerslough, Amber Jackson & Meghan Greene, “[FinHealth Spend 2025: The Cost of Financial Services For American Households](#),” Financial Health Network, October 2025.

¹¹ “[Consumer Use of Buy Now, Pay Later and Other Unsecured Debt](#),” Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, January 2025.

¹² Chase’s “Pay Over Time,” Citi’s “Flex Pay,” and American Express’s “Plan It” are some examples of such plans.

¹³ There is some evidence that younger consumers are using these credit card installment plans at high rates, as well. See: “[Gen Z Fuels 20 Percent Surge in Store Card Installments](#),” PYMNTS, November 2025, and “[Speed vs. Strategy: How Consumers Choose Between BNPL and Card Installments](#),” PYMNTS, March 2026.

¹⁴ An online study with Commonwealth Bank of Australia found that customers who opted to use a “Pay by Category” feature paid more towards their debt balances than those in the standard payment experience. See: Grant Donnelly, Cait Lambertson, Stephen Bush & Zoë Chance, “[Repayment-by-Purchase’ Increases Consumer Debt Repayment](#),” Journal of Marketing Research, June 2023.

Credit Standards for Financial Health

Designed well, credit cards can help consumers manage both their spending and credit outcomes, like balancing income and spending and establishing and maintaining a prime credit score. Previous standards focused on the features, policies, and onboarding processes that help consumers manage their spending and bills.

This toolkit shifts the focus toward the elements that most directly drive positive credit outcomes, while recognizing the two are closely linked. Features that help consumers better manage their spending can often also help them better manage their borrowing. For example, setting a spending limit or using a budget tool can help control credit utilization and, in turn, improve credit scores.



Spend less than income

Pay bills on time



Have manageable debt

Have a prime credit score

The table below includes a selection of foundational standards originally outlined in the [FinHealth Standards for Spending Management Products](#) toolkit specific to credit cards, along with new standards focused more specifically on credit outcomes. Taken together, these standards illustrate what a “good” credit card looks like from a financial health perspective.

Financial Health Standards For Credit Cards

	Account Features	New
Payment Amount Levers: Encourage higher repayment amounts.		✓
Rewards for Repayments: Reward repayment behavior as well as purchasing behavior.		✓
Utilization Limit Alerts: Prompt customers to set credit use alerts.		✓
Free Credit Score Tools: Offer high-quality credit score monitoring tools.		✓
Money Labeling: Allow labeling and setting aside money for specific purposes.		
Budget Tools: Provide a high-quality budget tool.		
Recurring Expenses: Allow review of all recurring expenses in one place.		
Spending Controls: Allow customers to place limits on spending.		
Credit Limits: Offer credit limit increases on a request-only basis.		
	Account Policies	New
Hardship Options: Make relief programs clearly visible and easy to access early.		✓
Consecutive Late Fees: Prevent compounding penalties during delinquency.		✓
Automatic Graduation: Automatically move secured cardholders to unsecured credit.		✓
Payment Due Dates: Allow customers to choose their monthly payment due date.		
	Onboarding and Access	New
Counteroffers for Denials: Proactively consider applicants for alternatives when applicants are denied.		✓
Eligibility Checks: Let applicants check eligibility without impacting their credit score.		✓
Financial Education: Elevate high-quality guidance on credit card ownership.		✓
Onboarding Experience: Highlight key tools early to drive engagement and adoption.		✓
Product Comparisons: Display key account tradeoffs across fees, policies, and benefits.		
Alternative IDs: Accept non-U.S. government ID or ITIN to open an account.		
Phone Services: Offer free phone access to complete essential account tasks.		
Spanish Language: Make information fully available in Spanish.		
Trusted Contacts: Enable account holders to designate trusted contacts.		



Account Features

By giving consumers the ability to demonstrate responsible borrowing over time, credit cards are essential tools for establishing and building credit. This is especially important for young adults starting both their credit journeys and their path toward Financially Healthy lives.

The standards in this section outline the features that support positive credit outcomes by encouraging timely and higher payments and by clearly linking credit card behaviors to credit score impact.

The Standards	
PAYMENT AMOUNT LEVERS Encourage higher repayment amounts.	UTILIZATION LIMIT ALERTS Prompt customers to set credit use alerts.
REWARDS FOR REPAYMENTS Reward repayment behavior as well as purchasing behavior.	FREE CREDIT SCORE TOOLS Offer high-quality credit score monitoring tools.

Enhancing Features for FinHealth

For account features to deliver their full impact, they must be easy to find. When relevant, the following standards highlight opportunities to strengthen account features through findability.

FINDABILITY

Ensure customers can find the feature within one click of the main account page.

Making a financial health feature easily findable can increase the customer's awareness and usage of the feature.

Proactive and Timely Messaging

Making features easy to find is important, but proactive, well-timed reminders can further increase engagement. Research shows that reminders and just-in-time education can improve financial decision-making and follow-through.^{15,16} This can be especially valuable for young adults navigating a credit card for the first time.

Credit card providers can consider strategies such as:

- Using upcoming payment reminders to encourage on-time payments or higher repayment amounts
- Triggering information about hardship programs after missed payments
- Surfacing a credit score tool when credit score changes
- Delivering brief, relevant financial education (e.g., how interest accrues, how minimum payments affect payoff timelines) or coaching resources when a customer activates a card, carries a balance, or makes a large purchase
- Offering reminders (e.g., upcoming payments, balance or spending alerts, account status updates, hardship and assistance prompts) through preferred channels, such as email, text message, or push notifications
- Celebrating milestones (e.g., paying off a balance, improving a credit score) as a way to engage users on an ongoing basis

¹⁵ Katherine Milkman et al., "[Can reminder emails compel Americans to save? A two-million-person megastudy](#)," PNAS Nexus, September 2025.

¹⁶ Daniel Fernandes, John G. Lynch Jr., & Richard G. Netemeyer, "[Financial Literacy, Financial Education, and Downstream Financial Behaviors](#)," Management Science, August 2014.



Payment Amount Levers

Encourage higher repayment amounts through:

1. Interactive payment interface design
2. Emphasizing higher payment amounts during payment selection
3. Autopayment enrollment design

1. Interactive payment interface design

Dynamic payment interfaces can make the financial benefits of higher repayment immediately apparent by visualizing how different payment amounts affect total interest costs.

WHY IT MATTERS

Drawing a clear connection between payment amount and future interest charges (or interest savings) can help support higher repayment habits. Experimental research shows significant increases in repayment amounts when participants used a slider interface compared with entering an amount into an open field, especially when the slider's default position was set above the minimum payment.¹⁷ This can be particularly useful for young adults who may underestimate the impacts of compound interest over time.¹⁸

HOW TO IMPLEMENT IT

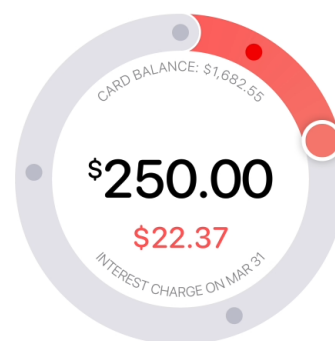
Providers should design digital payment interfaces to clearly display the connection between payment amount and the cost of carrying a balance. Interactive interfaces—like sliders, dials, or wheels—can help illustrate the relationship between payment amount and future interest charges, and/or the estimated time required to pay off any existing balance. Interfaces should not default to the minimum payment.



PAYMENT AMOUNT LEVERS IN ACTION

Apple Card's payment wheel displays the current balance and projects future interest charges based on the payment amount chosen along the wheel. Stoplight colors indicate whether cardholders will incur interest charges or not.

Image source: ["Apple Card,"](#) Apple, accessed June 2026.



¹⁷ ["A behavioural approach to managing money: Ideas and results from the Financial Capability Lab,"](#) Money Advice Service, Behavioural Insights Team, and Ipsos MORI, May 2018.

¹⁸ See discussion of exponential growth bias: Hannah Gdalmann, Heidi Johnson & Zaan Pirani, ["Behavioral Design Guide: A Financial Health Approach to Credit Card Products,"](#) Financial Health Network, May 2023.

2. Emphasizing higher payment amounts during payment selection

Payment interfaces or monthly statements can help encourage higher payments by highlighting options other than the minimum payment.

WHY IT MATTERS

A credit card's minimum payment, which is typically one percent of end-of-month balances or a floor amount such as \$35, can act as an anchor and decrease the amount that consumers would otherwise pay toward their balance.¹⁹ Anchoring, a behavioral economics concept, describes how simple exposure to a number can influence decision-making by driving people subconsciously toward the anchor amount.²⁰ Researchers estimate that at least 22% of those who make minimum payments toward their credit card balances do so because of anchoring.²¹

HOW TO IMPLEMENT IT

For customers making manual payments, providers can minimize the anchoring effect of the minimum payment by visually highlighting an option other than the minimum in payment interfaces and on statements. Providers can instead emphasize the current balance (typically the highest amount) or a personalized suggested amount.

For example, for customers who consistently pay only the minimum, providers could use customer data to generate an amount that is higher than the minimum but lower than the current balance, and realistic based on prior repayment activity, such as the minimum payment plus \$25. Providers could also include a custom amount based on how quickly the cardholder would like to pay down their existing balance, or personalized dynamic payment suggestions tied to cashflow (e.g., "Your income this week looks lower than usual. A \$40 payment keeps you on track without risking overdraft.").²² These options can help encourage higher payments while preventing the risk of overpaying, especially for young adults with limited or volatile incomes.

WHAT "HIGHLIGHTING" A PAYMENT OPTION MEANS

"Highlight" does not necessarily mean removing or obscuring the minimum payment. For example, when payment options are displayed:

In digital interfaces

Highlight the current balance as a preselected option (e.g., radio button, tile, or dropdown menu item).

In digital or paper statements

Bold the current balance or suggested amount, or otherwise visually emphasize it (e.g., placing it first in the list of options).

¹⁹ Jennifer Tescher & Corey Stone, "Revolving debt's challenge to financial health and one way to help consumers pay it off," Brookings Institute, June 2022.

²⁰ Hannah Gdalmán, Heidi Johnson, & Zaan Pirani, "A Financial Health Approach to Credit Card Design," Financial Health Network, May 2023.

²¹ Benjamin J. Keys & Jialan Wang, "Minimum payments and debt paydown in consumer credit cards," Journal of Financial Economics, March 2019.

²² This approach would require that cardholders enroll by identifying a period of time in which they would like to pay off their balance. See: "Providing a Pay-Down Payment Amount" in "A Financial Health Approach to Credit Card Design," Financial Health Network, May 2023.

3. Autopayment enrollment design

For cardholders enrolling in autopayment, providers can help encourage higher payment amounts through smart prompts.

WHY IT MATTERS

Over one-quarter of active credit card accounts (27%) were enrolled in autopay in 2024.²³ Autopay can support on-time payments by avoiding missed payments due to forgotten due dates. However, it does not necessarily support faster debt reduction given that autopayment is associated with a higher likelihood of making only the minimum payment.²⁴ While the financial health implications of autopay enrollment remain mixed, the “set-it-and-forget-it” nature of the feature makes the initial selection especially consequential. As a result, providers have an important opportunity at the point of enrollment to encourage higher payment amounts, rather than defaulting to the minimum due.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT IT

Providers should design autopayment enrollment interfaces to clearly emphasize the full balance option. Listing it first or making it visually prominent can counter the anchoring effect of the minimum payment amount.

If a customer chooses the minimum payment or a custom amount below the full balance, providers should display a prompt at the point of selection that either:

- Explains that paying only the minimum amount will result in interest charges
- Encourages supplemental manual payments throughout the month to help pay down the balance and reduce interest
- Offers an option to increase the autopayment amount

These prompts should function as supportive nudges. Because the optimal autopay amount will look different from customer to customer, providers should avoid automatic settings that could cause overdrafts or missed payments for customers with cash flow constraints.

²³ “[The Consumer Credit Card Market Report to Congress](#),” Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, December 2025.

²⁴ Jialan Wang, “[To Pay or Autopay? Fintech Innovation and Credit Card Payments](#),” National Bureau of Economic Research, April 2024.



Rewards for Repayments

Reward repayment behavior as well as purchasing behavior

Credit card rewards are typically designed to incentivize spending. This standard encourages rewards card providers to also reward repayment behavior, reinforcing habits that build credit and reduce revolving debt over time.

WHY IT MATTERS

Rewards meaningfully influence consumer behavior. Research shows that even modest incentives such as 1% cash back can increase credit card spending and contribute to higher long-term debt accumulation.²⁵ Traditional rewards structures therefore primarily stimulate purchase volume, not balance reduction.

Designing rewards around repayment behavior may help counterbalance this effect. Incentivizing higher or more frequent payments—especially payments above the minimum—may help cardholders reduce interest costs, avoid a cycle of revolving balances, and build positive payment histories.



HOW TO IMPLEMENT IT

When offering rewards, providers should include incentives that reinforce repayment behavior in addition to purchase volume. Rewards can be tied directly to the amount of principal repaid (e.g., 1% cash back on every dollar of principal repaid). Customers should be able to apply any earned cash back rewards directly toward paying down their balance. Providers may also offer nonmonetary incentives that reward higher payment amounts, while still ensuring that these incentives do not unintentionally encourage overextension.²⁶

When applicable, providers can consider enabling cardholders to route cash back rewards to a savings account or investment vehicle, further reinforcing saving or investment behavior.²⁷ Clear, simple disclosures and trackers should help cardholders understand how repayment translates into rewards and interest savings, ensuring the structure is transparent and aligned with long-term financial health.

FINHEALTH FEATURE ENHANCEMENT

Findability Ensure customers can find the feature within one click of the main account page.

²⁵ Sumit Agarwal, Swee Hoon Ang, Yonglin Wang, & Jian Zhang, “Cash-Back Rewards: Effects on Spending and Debt Accumulation,” SSRN, October 2024.

²⁶ For example, rewarding payment behavior with a lower interest rate could potentially make carrying a balance feel more acceptable to the cardholder, when the best outcome would be to pay the balance in full.

²⁷ For example, the Fidelity® Rewards card allows rewards to be deposited into eligible accounts. See: “Your card. Your choice of rewards,” Fidelity, accessed April 2026.



REWARDS FOR REPAYMENTS IN ACTION

Though not an entry-level card offering, **Citi Double Cash**[®] offers 1% cash back on purchases and an additional 1% cash back when cardholders pay off those purchases. Rewards cards geared toward young adults could benefit from similar split-incentive models.

CITI DOUBLE CASH[®] CREDIT CARD



2% unlimited cash back:
1% when you buy, 1% as you pay

Apply Now

Get a response in under a minute

¹Important Pricing & Information + Call to apply +

Image source: “Citi Double Cash[®] Credit Card,” Citi, accessed June 2026.

GUARDRAILS FOR REWARDS AND PROMOTIONS

Though a popular and attractive feature, credit card rewards can be complex and require significant effort to maximize value.²⁸ Consumers often face challenges understanding, tracking, or redeeming these benefits, and rewards structures tend to provide greater value to higher-income transactors than to revolvers.²⁹

Promotional offers like 0% APR balance transfers can carry their own tradeoffs, such as upfront transfer fees or significant interest rate increases when the promotional period ends. Guardrails are key to ensure rewards programs support, rather than undermine, financial health.

Providers should ensure rewards programs and promotions are transparent and simple. The benefits of rewards cards should be presented alongside their costs (such as interest rates and annual fees) in card comparison tools, a standard detailed in our [FinHealth Standards for Spending Management Products](#) toolkit.³⁰ For balance transfers and cash advances, transparency and clarity are important to help consumers understand the financial implications of these transactions.³¹

²⁸ The proliferation of awards-tracking apps and platforms, such as The Points Guy, underscores the complexity of managing credit card rewards. See: Trina Paul, “These are the best apps for tracking your credit card, airline and hotel rewards,” CNBC, December 2025, and Benji Stawski & Danyal Ahmed, “Maximizing credit cards to be points-rich with minimal spend,” The Points Guy, June 2025.

²⁹ “Credit Card Rewards Issue Spotlight,” Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, May 2024.

³⁰ See: MK Falgout et al., “FinHealth Standards for Spending Management Products: Checking Accounts and Credit Cards,” Financial Health Network, June 2025.

³¹ CFPB research shows that the legalization of sports betting corresponds with increases in cash advance fees and consumer complaints, suggesting many consumers do not realize that using a credit card for gambling can trigger costly cash advance fees. See: “Data Spotlight: Credit card cash advance fees spike after legalization of sports gambling,” Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, December 2024.



Utilization Limit Alerts

Prompt customers to set credit use alerts

Utilization alerts allow cardholders to set a utilization threshold and receive a notification when their balance approaches or exceeds that limit.


WHY IT MATTERS

Credit utilization, or the percentage of available credit a cardholder is using, is one of the most important factors in credit scoring models, accounting for up to 30% of an individual's credit score.³² Consumers with good credit scores generally use 30% or less of available credit, while those with the best credit scores use less than 10%.³³ Because young adults and new cardholders may be unfamiliar with how credit utilization affects their score, alerts that create awareness around spending relative to their credit limit can be valuable, especially for those starting out with lower credit limits, where even small balances can result in high utilization.³⁴

HOW TO IMPLEMENT IT

Providers should allow cardholders to set a target utilization rate and trigger dedicated alerts when they approach or exceed that threshold (e.g., "You are currently using 32% of your available credit limit. Paying \$50 toward your balance would bring it back below 30%."). Presenting this information as both a dollar amount and a percentage is useful for budgeting and signaling impact on credit score.³⁵ Providers should pair this feature with clear guidance on utilization ranges commonly associated with good credit score health.

FINHEALTH FEATURE ENHANCEMENT

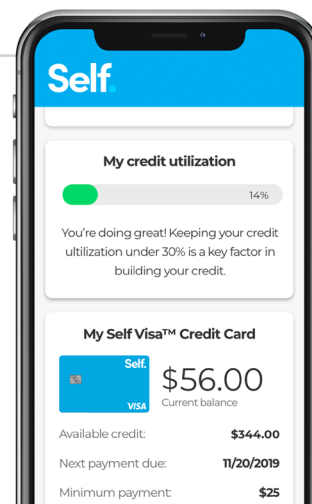
 **Findability** Ensure customers can find the feature and set a target rate within one click of the main account page.



UTILIZATION LIMIT ALERTS IN ACTION

Self's credit utilization tracker uses traffic-light colors to let customers know where they are currently tracking. Self notifies users by email when they hit 30% utilization and advises them to slow down spending in order not to harm their credit score.

Image source: James Garvey, "[Credit Utilization Tracker Helps Card Users Build Credit Wisely](#)," Self, October 2019.



³² Ben Luthi, "What Should My Credit Utilization Ratio Be?," myFICO, February 2022.

³³ "The Consumer Credit Card Market Report to Congress," Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, December 2025.

³⁴ A study from the United States Automobile Association (USAA) found that 45% of Gen Zers lacked an understanding of the factors that affect their credit score. See: "Nearly Half of Gen Z Doesn't Know What Affects Their Credit Score, According to New USAA Report," USAA, August 2025.

³⁵ See the **Spending Controls** standard from the Spending Management toolkit: alerts that notify cardholders when current balance approaches or exceeds a certain dollar threshold. "FinHealth Standards for Spending Management Products: Checking Accounts and Credit Cards," Financial Health Network, June 2025.



Free Credit Score Tools

Offer high-quality credit score monitoring tools

Credit tools that are personalized and encourage action by reinforcing the connection between credit card behaviors and credit health can support positive credit outcomes.

WHY IT MATTERS

Financial Health Network research shows that nearly half (47%) of young people did not check their credit score within the prior year.³⁶ Field research among student loan borrowers finds that highlighting credit scores can help make the impacts of on-time payments more salient. In a randomized control trial, borrowers who received quarterly email communications that included a link allowing them to view their FICO® Score at no cost were 4% less likely to have late payments and had slightly higher FICO Scores than those who did not receive the communications.³⁷


HOW TO IMPLEMENT IT

Credit score tools should be free to access, with no payment, trial conversion, or upgrade required. At minimum, these tools should provide access to a credit score, but may also include detailed, personalized credit data and key factors driving that score, including payment history, credit utilization, and length of credit history.

Providers should offer free credit monitoring alerts for events that will likely impact credit scores and deliver actionable advice on how users can improve or maintain good credit scores (e.g., “You’ve made three on-time payments in a row. Payment history is one of the most important factors in your credit score.”). Tools may also include simulators that demonstrate how specific behaviors, like making on-time payments or paying down balances, would impact scores over time, making the connection between actions and outcomes more concrete.

FINHEALTH FEATURE ENHANCEMENT

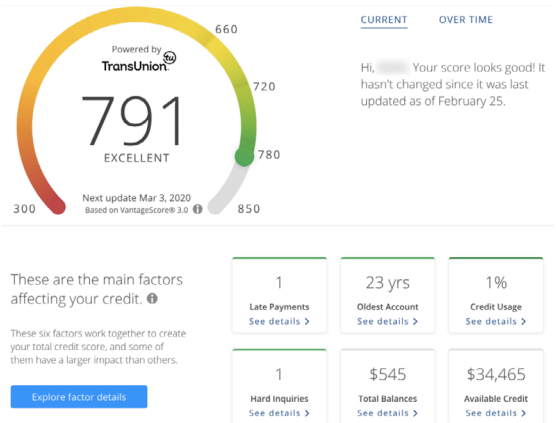
Findability Ensure customers can find the feature within one click of the main account page.



FREE CREDIT SCORE TOOLS IN ACTION

Chase Bank’s Credit Journey provides customers with free access to their credit scores and credit monitoring through its digital banking platform, highlighting key factors that affect the score and offering a credit simulator that shows how financial actions, such as paying off balances or opening new accounts, may impact their score over time.³⁸

Image source: Sean Brison, “[Chase Credit Journey: A Free Credit Monitoring Service \[REVIEW\]](#),” Listen Money Matters, accessed June 2026.



³⁶ Wanjira Chege, Kennan Cepa, Ph.D., & Angela Fontes, Ph.D., “[Strategies To Encourage Credit Score Monitoring Among Young People](#),” Financial Health Network, March 2024.

³⁷ Tatiana Homonoff, Rourke O’Brien, & Abigail B. Sussman, “[Does Knowing Your FICO Score Change Financial Behavior? Evidence from a Field Experiment with Student Loan Borrowers](#),” The Review of Economics and Statistics, 2021.

³⁸ “[Meet Credit Journey®](#),” Chase, accessed April 2026.



Account Policies

Credit card providers can support consumers through periods of financial stress and help individuals build credit over time through thoughtful account policies. The standards in this section emphasize clear and accessible hardship options, limits on consecutive fees during distress, and structured pathways from secured to unsecured credit to help consumers navigate setbacks and expand access to mainstream credit.

The Standards

HARDSHIP OPTIONS

Make relief programs clearly visible and easy to access early.

AUTOMATIC GRADUATION

Automatically move secured cardholders to unsecured credit.

CONSECUTIVE LATE FEES

Prevent compounding penalties during delinquency.

FINDABILITY

Ensure customers can find the feature within one click of the main account page.

Making a financial health feature easily findable can increase the customer's awareness and usage of the feature.



Hardship Options

Make relief programs clearly visible and easy to access early

Provide clear information about modification programs available when a cardholder cannot meet their payment obligations.


WHY IT MATTERS


According to the Urban Institute, nearly 1 in 6 young adults with a credit record (16%) had some sort of debt in collections as of August 2025.³⁹ Hardship support can help consumers avoid delinquency, especially when they engage early, before fees compound. Making relief options clearly visible and easy to access through digital channels, not solely via phone-based outreach, can reduce friction and encourage consumers to seek help at the first signs of financial stress. Young adults and first-time credit users may be less aware of hardship options and more hesitant to call providers, making clear, easy access especially important.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT IT

Information about hardship programs such as reduced APR, fixed-payment arrangements, waived or refunded fees, or short-term payment deferrals or “payment holidays” that pause repayment should be readily available to customers on the provider’s website. While hardship programs are often tailored to the individual customer’s situation, which might limit the level of detail on the website, providers can still offer clear guidance about available options and next steps. Providers can also consider proactively offering temporary modifications when there are clear signs of hardship, such as automatically offering a structured payment plan for customers who have missed a payment or two, rather than requiring consumers to request assistance.

FINHEALTH FEATURE ENHANCEMENT

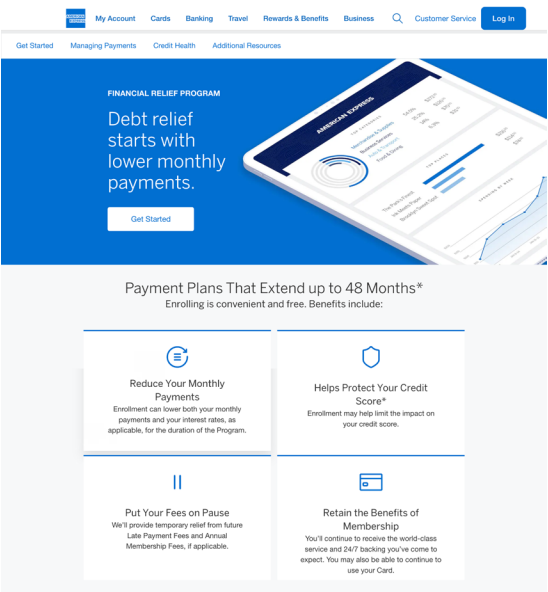
 **Findability** Ensure customers can find the feature within one click of the main account page.



HARDSHIP OPTIONS IN ACTION

American Express’s financial relief landing page lists program benefits and outlines steps cardholders can take to enroll, along with an option to call or chat with a representative.

Image source: “[Financial Relief Program](#),” American Express, accessed June 2026.



³⁹ “[Debt in America: An Interactive Map](#),” Urban Institute, August 2025.



Consecutive Late Fees

Prevent compounding penalties during delinquency

Consecutive late fees on delinquent accounts can make it harder for borrowers to get current by increasing the total balance owed.

WHY IT MATTERS

CFPB analysis shows that late fee revenue is concentrated among Financially Vulnerable borrowers, with subprime consumers accounting for a disproportionate share of late fee volume relative to their share of accounts.⁴⁰ Young adults and first-time credit users may be especially vulnerable to accumulating fees during periods of financial instability.

Once a borrower falls behind, additional late fees increase the amount needed to bring the account current. Minimum payments generally include past due amounts and assessed late fees, so repeated penalties can raise required payments without reducing principal. For borrowers facing financial stress, this dynamic can prolong delinquency rather than accelerate recovery.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT IT

Providers should stop charging late fees after no more than three consecutive occurrences. By that point, the consumer is likely facing serious hardship, and issuers typically suspend charging privileges and commence collection activities. Additional penalties are unlikely to change payment behavior.

Instead of continuing to add late fees, providers can encourage repayment by restoring charging privileges as consumers make progress toward catching up on their balance. Providers may also consider offering card products that eliminate late fees altogether.



CONSECUTIVE LATE FEES IN ACTION

Petal 2 is a “cash back, no fees” Visa credit card that charges no late fees, no penalty rate, and no annual fee.

Image source: “[Petal 2 Visa Card](#),” Petal, accessed June 2026.

Lose the fees.



Build credit without fees.

No annual membership fee, late fee, or returned payment fee.



Petal 2 travels well.

There are no foreign transaction fees.



⁴⁰ “[The Consumer Credit Card Market Report to Congress](#),” Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, December 2025.



Automatic Graduation

Automatically move secured cardholders to unsecured credit

Cardholders who demonstrate responsible use of a secured card (e.g., consistent on-time payments, no other delinquent accounts, and low credit utilization rate) should be automatically considered for graduation to an unsecured credit card.⁴¹

WHY IT MATTERS

Secured credit cards offer an accessible entry point into the credit system for consumers with no credit history or for those looking to rebuild damaged credit. Research from the Federal Reserve found that consumers who graduate from secured to unsecured cards go on to demonstrate sustained, responsible credit use and are generally no riskier than comparable borrowers who open unsecured card accounts directly.⁴²

However, when graduation requires proactive requests rather than automatic review, users may remain in more restrictive products longer than necessary, tying up deposit funds, limiting access to larger credit lines, and slowing opportunities to build stronger credit histories.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT IT

Evaluate secured cardholders regularly: Providers should automatically evaluate secured cardholders for graduation at regular intervals without requiring action from the cardholder. When a cardholder meets the graduation criteria, the provider should notify them and clearly explain what will change and what will remain the same. During the onboarding process, secured cards should be framed as a temporary stepping stone, reinforcing that on-time payments and a low credit utilization ratio can lead to expanded access.

Avoid increasing interest rates: Providers should avoid increasing interest rates upon graduation and clearly disclose any changes to fees or terms. When possible, graduation should not require closing the existing account, or triggering a hard inquiry, to minimize negative impacts on the cardholder's credit score.

Offer a “partially secured” option: Providers may also consider offering a “partially secured” option as a lower-risk transitional step before full graduation, by increasing the available credit line without requiring an additional deposit.⁴³ Modest increases may be particularly appropriate for secured cardholders with consistently high utilization and strong on-time payment histories. Because these cardholders are often constrained by very low limits, a small increase may reduce utilization and support credit score improvement, with less incremental spending risk than a similar increase on a higher-limit unsecured account.

⁴¹ Secured cards typically have very small credit limits. Graduation generally results in modest increases and primarily expands access to mainstream unsecured credit cards. The purpose of auto-graduation is to normalize access based on demonstrated repayment behavior, not to encourage aggressive credit line expansion.

⁴² Peter Psathas, “[Top of the Class: Assessing the Credit Performance of Graduates from Secured Credit Card Programs](#),” Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, Consumer Finance Institute, November 2024.

⁴³ This recommendation represents an exception to the request-only standard for credit limit increases. Because secured cardholders are often constrained by very low limits that impede credit building, a provider-initiated modest increase may be appropriate in this context. See “[Credit limits](#),” [FinHealth Standards for Spending Management Products: Checking Accounts and Credit Cards](#),” Financial Health Network, June 2025.

AUTOMATIC GRADUATION IN ACTION

KeyBank reviews Key Secured Credit Card accounts on a quarterly basis to determine whether cardholders meet the criteria to graduate from a secured to an unsecured credit card. In 2024, 59% of cardholders graduated within 12 months, according to the bank.⁴⁴

Features of the Key Secured Credit Card

- **No Annual Fee.**
- **Make a refundable deposit.** Your secured credit card requires a refundable security deposit, and your credit line will equal your deposit amount, starting at \$300.²
- **Grow your savings.** Your security deposit must be kept in a [Key Active Saver account](#), so you can save money while you work on your credit.
- **Build your credit.** Unlike most debit or prepaid cards, the Key Secured Credit Card is a real credit card that reports your history to credit bureaus.
- **Make progress.** We'll review your account quarterly to determine whether you meet the criteria to graduate from a secured to an unsecured credit card.

Benefits of KeyBank Credit Cards

- **Know your credit score.** Opt in to view your FICO[®] Score anytime without impacting your credit score in [KeyBank online and mobile banking](#).³
- **Mastercard benefits[®]:** Enjoy all the [Key Secured Mastercard benefits](#) including ID Theft Protection[™], Zero Liability Protection,⁴ and more.
- **Secure and easy to use.** Check out quickly and securely with contactless Tap & Go[®] technology.



Image source: “[Key Secured Credit Card[®] Terms & Conditions](#),” KeyBank, accessed June 2026.

⁴⁴ “[Key Secured Credit Card[®] Program Surpasses 40,000 Graduates, Driving Credit Score Growth and Financial Resilience](#),” KeyBank, September 2025.



Onboarding and Access

The standards in this category highlight opportunities to expand access to credit cards through eligibility practices and consumer education. Credit card providers should design their application, onboarding, and education practices to ensure that more people—regardless of credit history or familiarity with credit—can access the tools they need to support their financial health.

The Standards

COUNTEROFFERS FOR DENIALS

Proactively consider applicants for alternatives when applicants are denied.

ELIGIBILITY CHECKS

Let applicants check eligibility without impacting their credit score.

FINANCIAL EDUCATION

Elevate high-quality guidance on credit card ownership.

ONBOARDING EXPERIENCE

Highlight key tools early to drive engagement and adoption.

Enhancing Features for FinHealth

For account features to deliver their full impact, they must be easy to find. When relevant, the following standards will note opportunities to further strengthen account features with these financial health-backed techniques.

FINDABILITY

Ensure customers can find the feature within one click of the main account page.

Making a financial health feature easily findable can increase the customer's awareness and usage of the feature.



Counteroffers for Denials

Proactively consider applicants for alternatives when applicants are denied

Second looks or alternative products can expand access for applicants who don't initially qualify.

WHY IT MATTERS

A significant number of applicants are denied credit cards each year. Among larger issuers, the approval rate in 2024 for general purpose cards fell to 41%, with considerably lower rates for subprime applicants.⁴⁵ The consequences of denial extend beyond the application itself. A majority (65%) of surveyed applicants who were denied a credit card or loan said the rejection negatively impacted their finances in some way, such as increasing their stress levels about the state of their finances (22%) or pushing them to pursue alternative financing, such as cash advances or payday loans (14%).⁴⁶ Consumers who are denied credit may not be aware of alternative products that could help them build credit, and without clear steps, they may turn to higher-cost options.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT IT

When denying a credit card applicant, providers should offer customers a second look using alternative data, such as cash flow data drawn from bank account transactions, that does not require an additional hard credit pull.⁴⁷ A working paper published by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) suggests that models using alternative data may be more inclusive for young, low-income, and minority borrowers who may have shorter credit histories.⁴⁸

Providers should also have a process in place to check whether a denied applicant qualifies for an alternative product, such as a lower-tiered card, a secured card, or partially secured line. To minimize friction, counteroffers should require minimal additional steps rather than requiring a brand-new application or additional hard inquiries. Providers can consider partnering with second-look vendors to expand the options available to consumers who were declined.

⁴⁵ "The Consumer Credit Card Mark Report to Congress," Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, December 2025.

⁴⁶ The survey also finds that younger consumers have higher rejection rates. See: Sarah Foster, "[Survey: Almost half of loan applicants have been denied over the past 12 months](#)," Bankrate, February 2025.

⁴⁷ Note that this would require securing consumers' consent to obtain alternative data.

⁴⁸ Stefania Albanesi & Domonkos F. Vamossy, "[Credit Scores: Performance and Equity](#)," National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), September 2024.



Eligibility Checks

Let applicants check eligibility without impacting their credit score

Many consumers hesitate to apply for credit due to fear of damaging their score. Soft-credit pulls remove this barrier by enabling eligibility checks with no credit impact.

WHY IT MATTERS

Many consumers do not apply for credit because they expect to be turned down, with estimates of discouraged borrowing ranging from about 8% to as high as 27% of consumers.⁴⁹ This hesitancy may be compounded by concern that applying for credit triggers hard inquiries that can negatively impact a person's credit score. Soft-credit eligibility checks may address these barriers by allowing applicants to check their preliminary eligibility without any impact to their credit score before formally applying.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT IT

Hard inquiries can dissuade uptake. To implement soft-credit eligibility checks, issuers should allow applicants to check eligibility with a soft credit pull that does not affect their credit score. This approach reduces barriers to entry and encourages applicants to explore their options. For those who may not qualify for unsecured products, secured cards should be included among the available alternatives.



ELIGIBILITY CHECKS IN ACTION

Capital One allows users to check if they are preapproved for credit card offers before formally applying.

Image source: “[See If You're Pre-Approved for a Capital One Credit Card](#),” Capital One, accessed June 2026.

Capital One

Build, rebuild or establish your credit

Find a card to build credit with responsible use. Check your eligibility **before you apply**.

- ✓ No risk to your credit score
- ✓ Find out in as little as 90 seconds
- ✓ Apply with confidence

[See if I'm pre-approved](#)

⁴⁹ The share of discouraged borrowers was about 8% in October 2025 according to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York's Survey of Consumer Expectations, and nearly 27% in the 2024 CFPB Making Ends Meet Survey, or even higher among adults <40. See: “[SCE Credit Access Survey](#),” Federal Reserve Bank of New York and “[Making Ends Meet in 2024](#),” Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, November 2024.



Financial Education

Elevate high-quality guidance on credit card ownership

Educational content for first-time cardholders helps guide new users through the essentials of credit card ownership.

WHY IT MATTERS


Research shows that financial knowledge is positively associated with helpful credit card behaviors, such as making on-time payments and comparing cards before applying, and is negatively related to costly behaviors like carrying high balances.⁵⁰


Beyond individual impact, financial education programs may increase customer loyalty. When customers think their primary financial institution supports their financial health, they are more satisfied, loyal, and likely to expand their relationships with additional products and services.⁵¹

HOW TO IMPLEMENT IT

Credit card providers should offer front-and-center educational materials that help new and current users understand how to use their cards, including guidance on maintaining manageable debt and building strong credit. Topics may include credit card limits, utilization rate, impacts of making only minimum payments, and strategies for managing debt. Additionally, providers should find ways to integrate this content during key moments throughout the lifecycle, like when a customer activates a card, when a payment is late, or when a customer approaches their credit limit (see [Onboarding Experience](#) and [Proactive and Timely Messaging](#)).

FINHEALTH FEATURE ENHANCEMENT

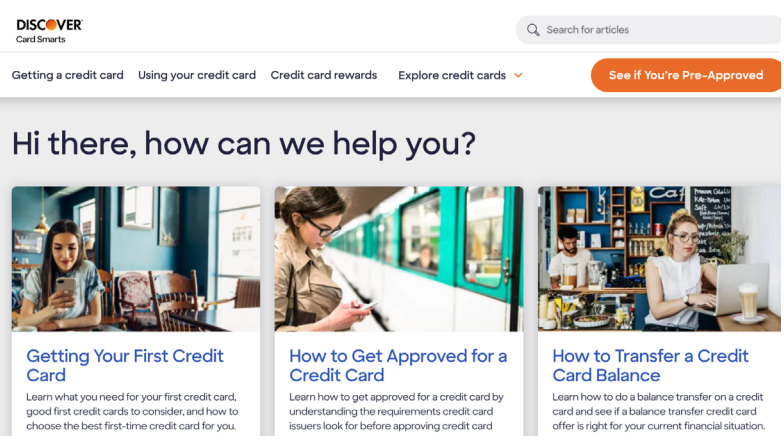
 **Findability** Ensure customers can find the feature within one click of the main account page.



**FINANCIAL EDUCATION
IN ACTION**

Discover's Card Smarts provides educational content covering credit fundamentals, from understanding credit scores and maintaining a healthy utilization limit to managing balances.

Image source: "What is a Maxed-Out Credit Card?" Discover®, September 2025.



The screenshot shows the Discover Card Smarts website interface. At the top, there's a search bar and navigation links: "Getting a credit card", "Using your credit card", "Credit card rewards", and "Explore credit cards". A prominent orange button says "See if You're Pre-Approved". Below this is a heading "Hi there, how can we help you?" followed by three featured articles with images and titles: "Getting Your First Credit Card", "How to Get Approved for a Credit Card", and "How to Transfer a Credit Card Balance". Each article has a brief description of the content.

⁵⁰ Fuzhong Chen, Di Yu, & Zijun Sun, "Investigating the associations of consumer financial knowledge and financial behaviors of credit card use," Heliyon, December 2022.

⁵¹ Marisa Walster, Nadia van de Walle, & Stephen Arves, "Building Valuable Customer Relationships," Financial Health Network, August 2020.



Onboarding Experience

Highlight key features early to drive engagement and adoption

Introducing key features at onboarding helps new cardholders understand and use tools that support engagement from day one.

WHY IT MATTERS


Research on digital product adoption finds that engagement with a product's core features is a leading indicator of customer retention.⁵² When key features are not immediately visible or introduced early, they often remain unused. This can lead to low adoption, increased user frustration, and higher churn.


HOW TO IMPLEMENT IT

For new cardholders, providers should surface a concise set of key features and best practices during digital onboarding to drive early engagement with helpful credit card functionalities. This may include tools such as upcoming payment reminders, utilization limit alerts, credit score monitoring, and other helpful features, with options to set preferred delivery methods or notification preferences. Providers can resurface these at key moments throughout the customer lifecycle to ensure customers are getting the most out of their card (see [Financial Education](#)).

Providers can also use active choice design during onboarding to encourage engagement with critical features, such as prompting users to select their preferred reminder method or opt into alerts.

FINHEALTH FEATURE ENHANCEMENT

 **Findability** Ensure customers can find the feature within one click of the main account page.



ONBOARDING EXPERIENCE IN ACTION

Albert's onboarding is structured around short, digestible "missions" that teach users about one feature at a time.⁵³ This step-by-step approach prevents overwhelm while ensuring users understand and engage with the app's most valuable tools from the start.

Image source: "Albert's mission-based onboarding," GoodUX by Appcues, accessed April 2026.

← Welcome!

Missions

Albert breaks your financial journey down into **individual missions**. Each mission will be timely, unique, and, most importantly, focused on you.

CONTINUE

⁵² Mahendar Singh Rajpurohit, "Product Adoption and Customer Churn: A Data-Driven Analysis of the Primary B2B SaaS Retention Mechanism," International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research, October 2025.

⁵³ "Albert's mission-based onboarding," GoodUX by Appcues, accessed April 2026.

What To Do Next

Transforming financial health starts with intentional action. This section outlines a clear path forward using three key steps: **Assess, Align, and Act.**

1. Assess

Use the scorecards on the following pages to evaluate how well your institution's credit card products align with these standards. This assessment offers a comprehensive view of current strengths, gaps, and areas for improvement—providing a baseline to measure progress over time.

2. Align

Not all standards will require the same level of effort or investment. Some may involve minor adjustments using existing tools or technologies, while others may call for broader collaboration across teams or entirely new solutions. Consider feasibility, customer needs, and where your organization can have the greatest near-term and long-term impact.

3. Act

Turn insights into impact by setting a roadmap for improvement. Use the standards and scorecard to guide internal conversations, shape product development, and build cross-functional buy-in. Whether you're optimizing existing features or launching new offerings, this framework can help you drive better outcomes for customers—and better performance for your business.



Get Help Putting the Standards Into Practice

For more than 20 years, the Financial Health Network has partnered with financial services providers to develop their financial health strategies and innovative solutions that enhance people's financial lives. As you implement these practices, the Financial Health Network can help you assess which standards are most feasible to adopt, create a roadmap for prioritizing initiatives, or recommend ways to adapt your unique offerings to align with this guidance.

[GET STARTED](#)

Interactive Scorecard

FINANCIAL HEALTH STANDARDS FOR CREDIT CARDS

Our FinHealth Standards Scorecard is designed to help you assess and optimize your products. Use this tool to identify gaps, guide enhancements, and align teams around improving financial health.

- **Included:** Check if the feature or policy is already in place.
- **Priority:** Check if it's not yet included but should be prioritized for future improvement.

Factors like institution size, technology investments, or vendor dependencies will determine what level of adoption is feasible and meaningful for your institution. We encourage readers to think about what is “good,” “better,” and “best” based on your institution’s capabilities.

We also encourage institutions to think beyond the checkmark and actively measure the financial health outcomes of implementing these standards. For example, the percentage of users selecting above-minimum payments, usage rates for utilization rate alerts, or timing of hardship program engagement.



Account Features

Included Priority

Payment Amount Levers: Encourage higher repayment amounts.

Rewards for Repayments: Reward repayment behavior as well as purchasing behavior.

Utilization Limit Alerts: Prompt customers to set credit use alerts.

Free Credit Score Tools: Offer high-quality credit score monitoring tools.

Money Labeling: Allow labeling and setting aside money for specific purposes.

Budget Tools: Provide a high-quality budget tool.

Recurring Expenses: Allow review of all recurring expenses in one place.

Spending Controls: Allow customers to place limits on spending.

Credit Limits: Offer credit limit increases on a request-only basis.



Account Policies

Included Priority

Hardship Options: Make relief programs clearly visible and easy to access early.

Consecutive Late Fees: Prevent compounding penalties during delinquency.

Automatic Graduation: Automatically move secured cardholders to unsecured credit.

Payment Due Dates: Allow customers to choose their monthly payment due date.



Onboarding and Access

Included Priority

Counteroffers for Denials: Proactively consider applicants for alternatives when applicants are denied.

Eligibility Checks: Let applicants check eligibility without impacting their credit score.

Financial Education: Elevate high-quality guidance on credit card ownership.

Onboarding Experience: Highlight key tools early to drive engagement and adoption.

Product Comparisons: Display key account tradeoffs across fees, policies, and benefits.

Alternative IDs: Accept non-U.S. government ID or ITIN to open an account.

Phone Services: Offer free phone access to complete essential account tasks.

Spanish Language: Make information fully available in Spanish.

Trusted Contacts: Enable account holders to designate trusted contacts.

Financial Health Measurement Framework

The Financial Health Network developed the FinHealth Score® to provide researchers and stakeholders with a standard metric to understand the financial lives of Americans. The FinHealth Score relies on eight survey questions, two for each financial health pillar: Spend, Save, Borrow, and Plan and Protect (Figure A1). Responses to these questions are used to calculate the FinHealth Score (Figure A2) by first assigning scores to the item responses for each of the eight indicators of financial health and then averaging across all eight indicators.⁵⁴

Figure A1. The 8 indicators of financial health.



Figure A2. Interpreting FinHealth Scores.

FINANCIALLY HEALTHY

These individuals generally report healthy outcomes across all eight financial health indicators.



FINANCIALLY COPING

These individuals generally report healthy outcomes across some, but not all, of the eight indicators.



FINANCIALLY VULNERABLE

These individuals generally report healthy outcomes across few, or none, of the eight indicators.



⁵⁴ We are evolving our framework as we gain new insights and perspectives on measuring consumers' financial health. For our latest updates on this topic, please visit our [FinHealth Score®](#) website page.

Our Approach to Developing Credit Standards

This toolkit builds on more than two decades of the Financial Health Network’s expertise in shaping industry practices to support consumers’ financial lives. The standards in this toolkit are grounded in rigorous research and shaped through deep collaboration with industry leaders.

To ensure these practices are both evidence-based and actionable, we drew from:

- **Behavioral research and design principles**, such as those distilled into the Financial Health Network’s “[Behavioral Design Guide: A Financial Health Approach to Credit Card Products](#).”
- **Our multi-year partnership with J.D. Power**, beginning in 2020, to establish best practices that evaluate how effectively top banks and card issuers support financial health.⁵⁵
- **Ongoing dialogue with our Member network** of financial institutions, fintechs, and providers—ranging from community banks to global platforms—who shared insights, challenges, and examples from their own work to improve consumer outcomes.
- **Guidance from a dedicated Advisory Council**, composed of senior leaders with expertise in product innovation, consumer protection, and the needs and challenges of young adults who helped us shape and refine the standards to be both ambitious and achievable.



⁵⁵ “[Financial Health Support Certification Platform](#),” J.D. Power, accessed April 2026.

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The Financial Health Network is the leading authority on financial health. We are a trusted resource for business leaders, policymakers, and innovators united in a mission to improve the financial health of their customers, employees, and communities. Through research, advisory services, measurement tools, and opportunities for cross-sector collaboration, we advance awareness, understanding, and proven best practices in support of improved financial health for all.

For more on the Financial Health Network, go to www.finhealthnetwork.org and join the conversation online:

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