America’s Women and the Wage Gap

MAY 2019

Nationally, the median annual pay for a woman who holds a full-time, year-round job is $41,977 while the median annual pay for a man who holds a full-time, year-round job is $52,146. This means that, overall, women in the United States are paid 80 cents for every dollar paid to men, amounting to an annual gender wage gap of $10,169.¹ This persistent, pervasive wage gap is driven in part by gender and racial discrimination, workplace harassment, job segregation and a lack of workplace policies that support family caregiving, which is still most often performed by women.²

The gender wage gap is a measure of just how far our nation still has to go to ensure that women can participate fully and equally in our economy – and it is widest for many women of color. Among women who hold full-time, year-round jobs in the United States, Black women are typically paid 61 cents, Native American women 58 cents and Latinas just 53 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.³ White, non-Hispanic women are paid 77 cents and Asian American women 85 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men, and Asian American and Pacific Islander women of some ethnic and national backgrounds fare much worse.⁴

The wage gap also varies by state and congressional district but spans nearly all corners of the country. In Louisiana for example, women are paid 69 cents for every dollar paid to men (a gap of 31 cents for every dollar), while in California, women are paid 89 cents for every dollar paid to men (a gap of 11 cents).

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(see chart). In 401 of the 418 congressional districts for which data are available (96 percent), the median yearly pay for women who work full time, year-round is less than the median yearly pay for men.

**What Does the Wage Gap Mean for America’s Women?**

On average, women employed full time in the United States lose a combined total of **more than $900 billion every year** due to the wage gap. These lost wages mean women and their families have less money to support themselves, save and invest for the future, and spend on goods and services. Women, their families, businesses and the economy suffer as a result.

**If the annual gender wage gap were eliminated, on average, a working woman in the United States would have enough money for approximately:**

- More than 13 additional months of child care;
- One additional year of tuition and fees for a four-year public university, or the full cost of tuition and fees for a two-year college;
- Seven additional months of premiums for employer-based health insurance;
- More than 70 weeks of food (more than one year’s worth);
- Nearly seven more months of mortgage and utilities payments;
- More than 10 additional months of rent;
- Up to 8.4 additional years of birth control;
- Or enough money to pay off student loan debt in just under three years.

**Women, Families and the Country Cannot Afford Discrimination and Lower Wages**

- In the United States, mothers are breadwinners in half of families with children under 18. This includes half of white mothers, 53 percent of Latina mothers, 81 percent of Black mothers, 67 percent of Native American mothers and 44 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander mothers. Yet the wage gap for mothers is larger than for women overall. Mothers with full-time, year-round jobs are paid 71 cents for every dollar paid to fathers.
- Nearly 15 million family households in the United States are headed by women. About 26 percent of those families, or 3.9 million family households, have incomes that fall below the poverty level. Eliminating the wage gap would provide much-needed income to women whose wages sustain their households.
The Wage Gap Cannot Be Explained by Choices

- **The wage gap persists regardless of industry.** In the civilian industries that employ the most full-time employees – health care and social assistance, manufacturing, retail trade and educational services – women are paid less than men. In the health care and social assistance industry, women are paid just 73 cents for every dollar paid to men. In manufacturing, just 78 cents. In retail trade, 79 cents. And in educational services, 87 cents. Across all industries, women are paid lower salaries than men. ²⁰

- **The wage gap is present within occupations.** Among the occupations with the most people working full time, year-round – sales, production, management, service, and office and administrative support – women are paid less than men. In sales, women are paid just 70 cents for every dollar paid to men. In production, just 72 cents. In management, 76 cents. In service occupations, just 75 cents. And in office and administrative support occupations, 91 cents. ²¹

- **The wage gap exists regardless of education level.** Women with master’s degrees working full time, year-round are paid just 75 cents for every dollar paid to men with master’s degrees who work full time, year-round. Further, among full-time, year-round workers, women with associate’s degrees are paid less than men with just a high school diploma, and women with master’s degrees are paid less than men with bachelor’s degrees. ²²

- **Numerous causes contribute to the wage gap, including discrimination and bias.** Compared to men, women tend to hold lower-paying jobs, work in lower-paying industries, and spend less time in the formal workforce. These trends result from factors ranging from pervasive stereotypes and social norms about gender and work, to a lack of workplace support for family caregiving, to gender and racial discrimination, to the devaluation of work when it is primarily done by women – and the effects are both starker and qualitatively different for women of color. ²³ Statistical analysis shows that even after controlling for factors like occupational and industry differences, differences in experience and education, and region and unionization – which themselves are not solely the result of women’s choices – 38 percent of the gap is unaccounted for, leading researchers to conclude that factors such as discrimination and unconscious bias continue to affect women’s wages. ²⁴

**America’s Women Are Concerned About Unfair Pay**

- **Women consider equal pay a top workplace issue.** Ninety-one percent of women voters say that Congress should strengthen equal pay laws for women. ²⁵

- **Less than one-third of women believe they are paid fairly.** Just 28 percent of U.S. working women say they are confident they are paid the same salaries as their male counterparts. Forty-three percent say they do not believe they are paid the same – a substantially higher share than in most other countries with leading economies. ²⁶
Women want Congress to enact policies that would help close the wage gap.
Eighty-four percent of women voters want Congress to pass paid family and medical leave legislation. Eighty-one percent want Congress to protect the Affordable Care Act, especially provisions that protect individuals with pre-existing conditions and provide coverage for preventive health services and access to birth control services. Seventy-seven percent want Congress to protect Roe v. Wade, which allows women to make their own personal reproductive health care decisions.27

A Path Toward Closing the Wage Gap

Despite the federal Equal Pay Act of 1963 and other protections for women, experts warn that women and men will not reach pay parity until 205928 – unless something changes. Right now, the lack of supportive policies and bias combine to make fair pay elusive. But there are federal policy solutions that would help:

- **Fair pay protections and practices.** The Paycheck Fairness Act would prohibit employers from retaliating against employees who discuss their wages and make it easier to demonstrate that discrimination has occurred. It would also prohibit screening of job applicants based on their salary histories. The Fair Pay Act would diminish wage disparities that result from gender-based occupational segregation.

- **A higher minimum wage and elimination of the tipped minimum wage.** The Raise the Wage Act would increase the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour over a seven-year period and gradually eliminate the subminimum wage for tipped workers and workers with disabilities. Greater access to overtime pay through updated U.S. Department of Labor regulations would also help make wages more fair for millions of working people.

- **Stronger protections against and remedies for workplace harassment.** The Ending the Monopoly of Power Over Workplace Harassment through Education and Reporting (EMPOWER) Act would address certain issues related to workplace harassment, including by prohibiting nondisclosure and non-disparagement clauses as a condition of employment, promotion and in other circumstances and requiring companies to disclose the number of harassment claims they settle each year and the amount paid out. Congress should advance additional workplace harassment policy solutions, such as protection of workers not currently protected by federal civil rights laws.

- **Family friendly workplace standards.** The Healthy Families Act would allow workers to earn job-protected paid or unpaid sick days, and the Family And Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act would establish a national paid family and medical leave insurance program for women and men. Both proposals would help keep women attached to the workforce, resulting in higher wages over time. Pregnancy discrimination protections, access to quality, affordable child care and predictable
schedules are also essential for retention and advancement of women in the workforce.

**Full funding for federal agencies that investigate and enforce fair pay.** The Equal Pay Act and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, as well as executive branch initiatives to collect pay information and promote fair pay, are critically important to uncovering and eliminating discriminatory workplace practices that harm women.

**Comprehensive reproductive health care.** Access to comprehensive reproductive health care, including abortion care and contraceptives, allows women to plan out and control their lives, enabling them to pursue education and career opportunities, and can increase workforce attachment and wages over time. Defending policies like the Affordable Care Act’s guarantee of a full range of contraceptives without co-pay, increasing for funding our nation’s Title X family planning program and reversing the domestic gag rule for Title X-funded clinics are critical to ensuring women get the reproductive health care they need. Passage of the Equal Access to Abortion Coverage in Health Insurance (EACH Woman) Act would help reduce barriers to abortion care, improving women’s health and economic security.

Together, these policies will help ensure that women and all working people are free from wage and employment discrimination, have support to meet their responsibilities at work and at home and have the tools to be able to decide whether and when to become a parent or grow their family, and finally help close the gap between the wages paid to women and men.

Learn more about fair pay at NationalPartnership.org/Gap.

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4 Ibid; The overall wage gap for Asian American women in the United States is smaller than for other groups of women of color, but there are substantial variations in median annual pay among Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women of different ethnic and national backgrounds, meaning that many subgroups of AAPI women face significantly greater wage penalties. For more information, see: http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/workplace-fairness/fair-pay/asian-women-and-the-wage-gap.pdf


6 U.S. Census Bureau. (2018). American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2017, Geographies: All Congressional Districts (115th Congress), Table B20017: Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months by Sex by Work Experience in the Past 12 Months (in 2017 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) for the Population 16 Years and Over with Earnings in the Past 12 Months. Retrieved 20 March 2019, from https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_17_1YR_B20017&prodType=table; (In 401 out of 418 congressional districts (excluding Pennsylvania), women who work full time, year-round are paid less than men. In the other 17 districts, women are either paid the same or more than men, or the margin of error is large enough and the earnings ratio is close enough to one that it cannot be said with at least 90 percent confidence that there is a gender wage gap. Due to restricting for the 116th Congress, wage gap numbers for Pennsylvania’s current congressional districts will not be available until September 2019. Statewide, women’s median annual wages in Pennsylvania are $41,929 and men’s are $52,111, with a wage ratio of 0.80)  


8 Child Care Aware of America. (2018). The U.S. and the High Cost of Child Care: A Review of Prices and Proposed Solutions for a Broken System. Retrieved 20 March 2019, from https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/3957809/GOCreport2018_1.pdf; Estimate of $9,170 based on the average cost of center-based child care for a four-year-old. This average is not representative of the mean and is an approximation calculated by weighing state child care cost averages by the number of programs by type reported by each state. It is not to be considered a “national average.”


10 Kaiser Family Foundation. (n.d.) Average Annual Single Premium per Enrolled Employee For Employer-Based Health Insurance, 2017. Retrieved 20 March 2019, from https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/single-coverage/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Employee%20Contribution%22,%22sort%22:%22desc%22%7D


14 Center for American Progress. (2012, February 15). The High Costs of Birth Control: It’s Not As Affordable As You Think. Retrieved 20 March 2019, from https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/pdf/BC_costs.pdf (Calculated from a survey of retail costs of oral contraceptives for the uninsured and average copays, combined with the average cost of doctor visits to obtain the prescription. While the Affordable Care Act greatly advanced access to birth control by requiring coverage of contraceptives without cost sharing, many women still must pay out of pocket because they lack insurance, because their plan is grandfathered and does not cover contraceptives without a copay, or because their plan only covers generics.)


