



WOMEN'S BUREAU  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

# FACT SHEET

## Paid Family and Medical Leave Fact Sheet

### BACKGROUND

The U.S. Department of Labor has prepared this fact sheet so you can learn more about paid family and medical leave. Explore more resources at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/wb/paid-leave>.

### WHAT IS PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE?

Paid family and medical leave refers to policies that enable workers to receive compensation when they take extended time off work for qualifying reasons, such as bonding with a new child, recovering from one's own serious illness or caring for a seriously ill loved one.

### WHO NEEDS PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE?

**Paid family and medical leave can be a lifeline for workers, but too many don't have access to it.**

- As of March 2022, only 24% of private sector workers in the United States had access to paid family leave through their employer and only 43% had access to short-term disability insurance through their employer.<sup>1</sup>
- And among the lowest wage workers, who are predominately women and workers of color, 94% have no access to paid family leave and 89% lack access to short-term disability leave.<sup>2</sup>
- According to a recent survey of both public and private sector employees, only 58% of employees report having any paid time off – even as little as a single day - available to care for a seriously ill family member.<sup>3</sup>

**Every worker may need leave to care for themselves, and the pandemic has demonstrated how the lack of paid and job-protected leave can place impossible demands on workers and families.**

- The need for paid leave is growing as America's population ages. By 2030, all baby boomers will be 65 or older, and many will require some form of care.<sup>4</sup> Millions of adults provide unpaid care for older adults, and many of those caregivers also have paid jobs.<sup>5</sup>
- Some people's caregiving responsibilities are so demanding that under the current system they have to give up paid work entirely or retire early. Paid leave for workers caring for older adults or seriously ill or disabled family members would reduce stress and financial strain on families, while helping workers maintain ties to the labor force.
- Need and access are two different things, and currently, access to paid leave is unevenly distributed by race and across industries and income levels.<sup>6</sup> Having access to paid leave can ensure economic stability and provide critical support for workers and their families, employers and communities – as well as the economy at large.



## HOW DOES PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE BENEFIT WORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES?

- **Paid family and medical leave can improve public health and reduce personal stress.** The pandemic has underscored the need for policies that ensure people can care for their families without jeopardizing their economic security. The pandemic also showed the need for policies to help workers recover from their own unexpected or long-term illness without a drastic loss of income.
- **Access to paid family and medical leave can increase equity.** Currently, low-wage workers and people of color have less access to paid leave than high-wage and white workers, so their caregiving demands can result in lower earnings, wealth building and retirement security.

## HOW DOES PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE BENEFIT U.S. BUSINESSES AND GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS?

- **Paid family and medical leave is already working for several states, thousands of large and small businesses, and the federal government.**
- **The U.S. is the only OECD country without a national paid leave policy.**<sup>7</sup> A national paid family and medical leave policy could strengthen America's global competitiveness, allow smaller businesses to be more competitive with larger ones, and help protect the U.S. economy against potential disruptions.
- **It's time for policies that reflect the realities of working families and fuel economic growth.** Paid family and medical leave is linked to increased business productivity, higher employee morale, recruitment and retention of skilled workers, and reductions in costs associated with turnover.<sup>8</sup>
- **Investing in care infrastructure is investing in America's future.** Paid family and medical leave is a critical policy to support workers and their families with the continuum of care and financial security needed across their lifetimes. Workers can't fully participate in the economy if they and their loved ones aren't receiving the care that they need. That's why policies that reflect the realities of working families and fuel economic growth, like paid family and medical leave, benefit workers and employers alike.

<sup>1</sup> National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2022, "Table 7. Leave benefits by average wage category, private industry workers, March 2022," U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, September 2022, <https://www.bls.gov/ebs/publications/september-2022-landing-page-employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2022.htm>. -----, "Table 5. Short-term disability plans by average wage category, private industry workers, March 2022," U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, September 2022, <https://www.bls.gov/ebs/publications/september-2022-landing-page-employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2022.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Scott Brown, Jane Herr, Radha Roy, and Jacob Alex Klerman, "Employee and Worksite Perspectives of the FMLA: Paid Leave," Abt Associates, July 2020, [https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/evaluation/pdf/WHD\\_FMLA2018PB3PaidLeave\\_StudyBrief\\_Aug2020.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/evaluation/pdf/WHD_FMLA2018PB3PaidLeave_StudyBrief_Aug2020.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> America Counts Staff, "By 2030, All Baby Boomers Will Be Age 65 or Older," U.S. Census Bureau, December 10, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/12/by-2030-all-baby-boomers-will-be-age-65-or-older.html>.

<sup>5</sup> AARP and National Alliance for Caregiving, "Caregiving in the United States 2020," AARP Public Policy Institute, May 14, 2020, <https://www.aarp.org/ppi/info-2020/caregiving-in-the-united-states.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Women's Bureau, "Leave Access," U.S. Department of Labor, Accessed January 6, 2023, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/wb/data/leave-job-flexibilities/leave-access>.

<sup>7</sup> Sarah A. Donovan, "Paid Family and Medical Leave in the United States," Congressional Research Service, updated June 13, 2022, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R44835>.

<sup>8</sup> Kathleen Romig and Kathleen Bryant, "A National Paid Leave Program Would Help Workers, Families," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, April 27, 2021, [https://www.cbpp.org/research/economy/a-national-paid-leave-program-would-help-workers-families#\\_ftn1](https://www.cbpp.org/research/economy/a-national-paid-leave-program-would-help-workers-families#_ftn1).