



FAST FACTS:

Economic Security for Women and Families in Oregon

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***Authors' note:** CAP uses “Black” and “African American” interchangeably throughout many of our products. We chose to capitalize “Black” in order to reflect that we are discussing a group of people and to be consistent with the capitalization of “African American.”*

Oregon has implemented a number of progressive policies statewide that have improved the economic security of women and families, including paid sick days and paid family and medical leave. Lawmakers should continue their commitment by prioritizing policies that advance access to affordable, high-quality child care and quality health care.

Women need policies that reflect their roles as providers and caregivers. In Oregon, mothers are the sole, primary, or co-breadwinners in 60.8 percent of families,¹ and these numbers are higher for some women of color. The following policy recommendations can help support the economic security of women and families in Oregon.

Promote equal pay for equal work

Although federal law prohibits unequal pay for equal work, there is more that can be done to ensure that both women and men across Oregon enjoy the fullest protections against discrimination.

- Oregon women who are full-time, year-round workers earned about 82 cents for every dollar that Oregon men earned in 2017;² if the wage gap continues to close at its current rate, women will not reach parity in the state until 2055.³ The wage gap is even larger for Black women and Latinas in Oregon, who earned 66 cents and 51.3 cents, respectively, for every dollar that white men earned in 2017.⁴
- Due to the gender wage gap, each woman in Oregon will lose an average of \$375,720 over the course of her lifetime.⁵

Increase the minimum wage

Women constitute a disproportionate share of low-wage workers; raising the minimum wage would help hardworking women across Oregon and enable them to better support their families.

- Women make up nearly two-thirds of all minimum wage workers in the United States.⁶ Nearly 60 percent of all minimum wage workers in Oregon are women.⁷
- In Oregon, the current minimum wage is \$11.25 per hour and is on track to rise to \$13.50 per hour by July 1, 2022.⁸ Almost three-quarters of tipped wage workers in Oregon are women.⁹
- Increasing the minimum wage to \$15 per hour by 2024 would boost wages for 252,000 women in Oregon and more than 23 million women nationally. Almost 50 percent of Oregon workers who would be affected by raising the minimum wage to \$15 are women.¹⁰

Guarantee access to quality health care

Women need access to comprehensive health services—including abortion and maternity care—in order to thrive as breadwinners, caregivers, and employees. To ensure women are able to access high-quality care, states should, at minimum, strengthen family planning programs such as Title X; protect Medicaid; and end onerous restrictions that reduce access to abortion care and undermine the patient-provider relationship. At the state level, Oregon should ensure that women have access to the full spectrum of quality, affordable, and women-centered reproductive health services.

- In 2014, more than 270,000 women in Oregon were in need of publicly funded family planning services and supplies, and 18 percent of those women were uninsured.¹¹
- Title X—the nation’s only federal domestic program focused solely on providing family planning and other related preventive care, such as contraception, sexually transmitted infection testing, and cancer screenings—served about 42,000 women in Oregon in 2017, down from about 55,000 women in 2014.¹² Title X funding has itself increased slightly, from slightly less than \$3 million in 2014 to \$3.1 million in 2019.¹³
- Oregon does not have any major abortion restrictions.¹⁴ The state also passed progressive legislation—the Reproductive Health Equity Act—that ensures Oregonians have access to reproductive health services, including abortion care, through their private health insurance plans without cost-sharing.¹⁵
- Oregon’s infant mortality rate—5.4 deaths per 1,000 live births—is lower than the national rate of 5.8 deaths per 1,000 live births.¹⁶ The state’s maternal mortality rate is 17.6 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births,¹⁷ compared with the national rate of 17.2 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births.¹⁸

Ensure workers have access to paid sick days

Everyone gets sick, but not everyone is afforded the time to get better. Many women go to work sick, because they fear that they will be fired for missing work. Allowing employees to earn paid sick days helps keep families, communities, and the economy healthy.

- More than 34 million U.S. employees, or 29 percent of the nation's private sector workforce, do not have access to paid sick days.¹⁹
- Oregon passed a statewide paid sick days law that went into effect in January 2016, allowing eligible employees to accrue one hour of paid sick time for every 30 hours worked. Approximately 473,000 workers formerly without paid sick leave gained access through this law.²⁰

Ensure fair scheduling practices

Many low-wage and part-time workers—approximately 60 percent of whom are women²¹—face erratic work schedules and have little control over when they work and for how long.

- More than 1 in 4 low-wage U.S. workers has a schedule that is nonstandard—that is, outside of the traditional 9-to-5 workweek.²² This can be especially difficult for parents who need to plan for child care.
- In addition to threatening the economic security of these workers and their families, unfair scheduling practices are often accompanied by reduced access to health benefits and increased potential for sexual harassment.²³
- In 2017, Oregon passed the Fair Work Week Act to ensure predictable schedules for employees in retail, hospitality, and food service firms with more than 500 employees worldwide. The law protects approximately 172,000 workers across the state.²⁴

Provide access to paid family and medical leave

Access to paid family and medical leave would allow workers to be with their newborn children during the critical early stages of the child's life; to care for an aging family member; to recover from their own serious illness; or to assist in a loved one's recovery from a serious illness or injury.

- Only 17 percent of civilian workers in the United States have access to paid family leave through their employers.²⁵
- Oregon passed a progressive paid family and medical leave law in July 2019, becoming the eighth state, plus Washington, D.C., to use a social insurance model to provide paid leave. The law will provide 12 weeks of job-protected leave for personal medical reasons, family caregiving, a new child, or safe days and uses an inclusive definition of family. Low-income workers will especially benefit under the law by receiving a 100 percent wage replacement.²⁶

- Oregon's paid family and medical leave law will help the state manage the growing needs for elderly caregiving. For example, nearly 1 in 4 workers in Oregon is at least 55 years old, and in less than 15 years, the state's population that is 65 and older will grow by nearly one-third.²⁷ Oregon's aging population means an increase in older adults with serious medical conditions who will need additional care.

Expand quality, affordable child care

Families need child care to ensure they are able to work, but many lack access to affordable, high-quality child care options that support young children's development and meet the needs of working families.

- Sixty-two percent of Oregon children younger than age 6 have all available parents in the workforce, which makes access to affordable, high-quality child care a necessity.²⁸
- For an Oregon family with one infant and one 4-year-old, the annual price of a child care center averages \$23,114 per year,²⁹ or 33 percent of the median income for an Oregon family with children.³⁰
- Oregon lags far behind the national average in children enrolled in public preschool, with only about 20 percent of 4-year-olds enrolled.³¹

Protect workers against all forms of gender-based violence

Women cannot fully participate in the economy if they face the threat of violence and harassment. There are a number of steps lawmakers can take to prevent violence against women and to support survivors, including establishing greater workplace accountability; strengthening enforcement; increasing funding for survivor support services; and educating the public on sexual harassment in the workplace.³²

- In Oregon, 47.5 percent of women have experienced contact sexual violence in their lifetimes, and 42 percent of women have experienced noncontact sexual harassment.³³ Given that research at the national level suggests that as many as 70 percent of sexual harassment charges go unreported, these state numbers likely only scratch the surface.³⁴
- About 40 percent of Oregon women have experienced intimate partner violence, which can include physical violence, sexual violence, or stalking by an intimate partner.³⁵ Experiencing intimate partner violence has been shown to hinder women's economic potential in many ways, including loss of pay from missed days of work and housing instability.³⁶

Protecting the rights of incarcerated women

The growing problem of mass incarceration in the United States hinders the economic potential of those affected and disproportionately harms communities of color.³⁷ Incarceration can have a particularly destabilizing effect on families with an incarcerated mother, especially if that woman is a breadwinner. The experience of incarceration is also uniquely traumatic for women in ways that can deter long-term economic security, even after release.³⁸

- The incarceration rate in Oregon is 364 per 100,000 people.³⁹ Approximately 8.7 percent of prisoners in Oregon are women.⁴⁰
- Women are the fastest-growing segment of the overall U.S. prison population, but there are fewer federal prisons for women than there are for men, contributing to overcrowding and hostile conditions for incarcerated women.⁴¹
- Incarcerated women suffer from a wide range of abuses at the hands of the prison system, including lack of access to menstrual hygiene products; lack of adequate nutrition and prenatal care; shackling during pregnancy and childbirth; and separation and further disruption from children for whom they are primary caregivers.⁴²

Promote women's political leadership

Across the United States, women are underrepresented in political office: They constitute 51 percent of the population but only 29 percent of elected officials.⁴³

- Women make up 50 percent of Oregon's population but only 31 percent of its elected officials.⁴⁴
- Women of color constitute 11 percent of the state's population but only 3 percent of its officeholders.⁴⁵
- Oregon's state government is led by women, with Gov. Kate Brown (D) and majority of leaders in executive offices, as well as women serving in leadership positions in the state Legislature.⁴⁶

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