



Fast Facts on Our Proposed Social Security Cares Program

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American families have undergone a tremendous transformation since the 1960s. The movement of women out of the home and into the paid labor force changes everything about our daily lives, yet the United States is the only industrialized nation that does not guarantee workers paid time off to provide family care.¹ Consider that:

- Women are now about half (49.3 percent as of February 2012) of all workers on U.S. payrolls, compared to making up only one-third of workers in 1967.²
- In 2010, in nearly two-thirds of families (63.9 percent), a mother was the breadwinner, bringing home either as much or more than her husband or a single working mother, or a co-breadwinner, bringing home at least a quarter of the family's earnings.³
- Fewer than one in three children now have a stay-at-home parent, compared to more than half (54.9 percent) a generation ago. In 2010, among families with children, nearly half (44.8 percent) are headed by two working parents and another one in four families (26.1 percent) are headed by a single parent.⁴

To address this, the Center for American Progress has proposed Social Security Cares,⁵ a new program that would provide up to 12 weeks of paid leave to qualifying workers after the following life events:

- The birth of a newborn, or the arrival of a newly adopted or fostered child
- The serious illness of a spouse, domestic partner, parent, or child
- The worker's own serious illness that limits their ability to work

The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 already provides unpaid, job-protected leave for these types of events, but only about half of the workforce qualifies for thus unpaid leave,⁶ and many more cannot afford to take it because it is unpaid.⁷

The implementation of Social Security Cares would deliver far-reaching benefits for our families, our businesses, and our economy. Here are some fast facts about the program:

- Social Security Cares will give new parents, as well as family caregivers to the elderly, time to care when they and their families need it most because:
 - It is projected that by 2050, up to 20.2 percent of the American population will be over the age of 65.⁸ At present, nearly 20 percent of those over the age of 65 need help with the basic activities of daily living.⁹
 - More than two-thirds of unpaid caregivers for the elderly are women,¹⁰ and most of this care is provided by family members.¹¹
 - Men who provide two or more hours of care to their elderly parents per week experienced a 28 percent reduction in their work hours, and multiple studies have found that women’s work reduction is more than 40 percent.¹²
- Social Security Cares will increase the number of workers with access to paid medical and caregiving leave, and help workers better manage their dual responsibilities as workers and caregivers because:
 - Only about 10 percent of all workers have access to paid family leave that includes time off for caregiving.¹³
 - Women of color are less likely to have access to paid maternity leave than white women, and the odds decrease for all women the younger they are or the less education they have.¹⁴
 - The vast majority of workers would be covered under Social Security Cares. Using the most conservative estimates, nearly 80 percent (78.7 percent) of adults would be eligible for paid leave, including almost three-quarters of women (73.1 percent), and more than 70 percent of parents with young children.¹⁵
- Social Security Cares will increase the labor force participation of caregivers resulting in greater economic security in their retirement while helping to shore up the Social Security Trust Fund because:
 - At present, women are more likely than men to leave a job or shift from full-time to part-time work when a new child arrives or in order to provide ongoing care to an elderly, ailing parent.¹⁶ When men are the workers providing family care, however, their working hours decrease as well.¹⁷
 - Among new mothers who worked while pregnant and were able to take paid leave, 9 in 10 (87.4 percent) returned to work within one year after giving birth. In contrast, among new mothers who had to quit their jobs, just less than half (48.2 percent) returned to work within a year, and among new mothers who were let go, more than half (55.7 percent) returned to work within a year.¹⁸

- In 2001, 25 percent of dual-income couples and 13 percent of single-parent families filed for bankruptcy after having to miss two or more weeks of work due to illness, or the illness of a family member.¹⁹
- Social Security Cares will promote greater gender equity and be an important advance in working to close the wage gap between men and women. Importantly, it also recognizes that men are reporting more work-life conflict than women and they, too, want to be able to spend more time with their families.²⁰
 - The gender wage gap has remained static for the last several years with full-time working women’s median annual income in 2010 coming in at a paltry 77 percent of men’s.²¹ Women of color are disadvantaged even further, as their earnings are even lower relative to white men than for white women.²²
 - The “mother’s wage penalty” is estimated at approximately 7 percent per child, and just less than one-third of the gap is attributed to the consequences of taking leave.
 - Because about 10 percent of the gender wage gap is due to differences in the work histories of men and women, encouraging men to take family leave would help reduce the stigma around leave taking, and is an important component of reducing the gender wage gap. When paid leave is offered, men are much more likely to take it.

Endnotes

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