



## Fast Facts

# Economic Security for Women and Families in Colorado

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Colorado has been working to ensure that women and their families have equal opportunities for economic security and prosperity, through campaigns such as statewide paid sick days and paid family leave legislation.<sup>1</sup> Moving forward, policymakers should prioritize these policies so families can receive higher, livable wages; women can receive equal pay for equal work; and parents can maintain good jobs that allow them to work and raise their children.

Women need policies that reflect their roles as providers and caregivers. In Colorado, mothers are the sole, primary, or co-breadwinners in 51.6 percent of families,<sup>2</sup> 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 Colorado.

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### 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 Colorado enjoy the fullest protections against discrimination.

- Colorado women who are full-time, year-round workers earned about 82 cents for every dollar that Colorado men earned in 2017;<sup>3</sup> if the wage gap continues to close at its current rate, women will not reach parity in the state until 2057.<sup>4</sup> The wage gap is even larger for black women and Latinas in Colorado, who earned 64.3 cents and 53.8 cents, respectively, for every dollar that white men earned in 2016.<sup>5</sup>
- Due to the gender wage gap, each woman in Colorado will lose an average of \$322,320 over the course of her lifetime.<sup>6</sup>

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## Increase the minimum wage

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

- Women make up nearly two-thirds of all minimum wage workers in the United States.<sup>7</sup> Nearly 6 in 10 of all minimum wage workers in Colorado are women.<sup>8</sup>
- In Colorado, the current minimum wage is \$10.20 per hour.<sup>9</sup> Increasing the minimum wage to \$15 per hour by 2024 would boost wages for 402,000 women in Colorado and more than 23 million women nationally. Fifty-four percent of Colorado workers who would be affected by raising the minimum wage to \$15 are women.<sup>10</sup>

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## 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, Colorado should ensure that women have access to the full spectrum of quality, affordable, and women-centered reproductive health services.

- In 2014, more than 325,000 women in Colorado were in need of publicly funded family planning services and supplies, and 20 percent of those women were uninsured.<sup>11</sup>
- 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 44,000 women in Colorado in 2017, down from 47,500 women in 2014.<sup>12</sup> Title X funding has itself increased slightly, from \$3.5 million in 2014 to about \$3.6 million in 2017.<sup>13</sup>
- Colorado has restrictions that bar public family planning funds from going to abortion providers in the state.<sup>14</sup> There are also state restrictions on abortion care itself: Abortion is not covered by insurance policies for public employees; public funding is available for abortion only in cases of life endangerment, rape, or incest; and parental consent for young people under the age of 18 is required.<sup>15</sup>
- Colorado’s infant mortality rate—4.8 deaths per 1,000 live births—is slightly lower than the national rate of 5.9 deaths per 1,000 live births.<sup>16</sup> The state’s maternal mortality rate is 6.2 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births,<sup>17</sup> compared with the national rate of 18 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births.<sup>18</sup>

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## 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.

- About 37 million U.S. employees, or nearly one-third of the nation's private sector workforce, do not have access to paid sick days.<sup>19</sup>
- In Colorado, the rate is even higher: 43 percent of private sector workers, or 816,000 people, do not receive paid sick days.<sup>20</sup>
- While Denver voters rejected a paid sick leave ballot measure in 2011, advocates in Colorado are pushing for a statewide paid sick leave bill in the Colorado Legislature that would partially replace salaries for employees through an insurance program.<sup>21</sup>

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## Ensure fair scheduling practices

Many low-wage and part-time workers—approximately 60 percent of whom are women<sup>22</sup>—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.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup>

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## 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 parent or spouse; to recover from their own illness; or to assist in a loved one's recovery.

- Only 17 percent of civilian workers in the United States have access to paid family leave through their employers.<sup>25</sup>
- Legislators in the Colorado House are pushing for a paid family leave bill that would allow private employees in the state to take paid leave to care for themselves or a family member.<sup>26</sup>

- Unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is inaccessible to 64 percent of working people in Colorado. Workers and families in the state need paid family and medical leave for reasons other than childbirth. For example, more than 1 in 5 workers in Colorado 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.<sup>27</sup> Colorado's aging population means an increase in older adults with serious medical conditions who will need additional care.
- National data show that 55 percent of employees who take unpaid leave through the FMLA use it for personal medical reasons. Twenty-one percent of workers use leave for the birth or adoption of a child, while another 18 percent use it to care for a family member.<sup>28</sup>

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## 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-three percent of Colorado children younger than age 6 have all available parents in the workforce, which makes access to affordable, high-quality child care a necessity.<sup>29</sup>
- For a Colorado family with one infant and one 4-year-old, the annual price of a child care center averages \$26,367 per year, or more than one-third of the median income for a Colorado family with children.<sup>30</sup>
- Colorado lags behind the national average in children enrolled in public preschool, with only 31 percent of 4-year-olds enrolled.<sup>31</sup>

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## 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.<sup>32</sup>

- In Colorado, 36.2 percent of women have experienced contact sexual violence in their lifetimes,<sup>33</sup> and 33.4 percent of women have experienced noncontact sexual harassment.<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup>

- Thirty-seven percent of Colorado women have experienced intimate partner violence, which can include physical violence, sexual violence, or stalking by an intimate partner.<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup>

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## Protecting the rights of immigrant women and families

Immigrants—particularly those seeking asylum and those without legal status—can be vulnerable to social and economic insecurity. A combination of federal and state policies targeting immigrants is cause for concern in Colorado. The Trump administration's decisions to rescind the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and allow Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to expire for more than 300,000 people who have lived and worked lawfully in the country for nearly two decades will force many immigrants out of the workforce, putting them, their families, and the communities in which they reside in economic peril.<sup>38</sup> In addition, immigrant women can be especially vulnerable to domestic and sexual abuse and exploitation.<sup>39</sup>

- In 2016, almost 10 percent of Colorado's population was foreign-born, of which more than half were women.<sup>40</sup>
- In 2016, nearly 1 in 8 workers in Colorado was foreign-born, contributing to the state's economy across various industries.<sup>41</sup>
- More than 276,000 Coloradans live in households with family members who are unauthorized, including nearly 131,000 children.<sup>42</sup>
- If Dreamers are no longer able to renew their DACA, Colorado could lose more than \$856 million annually from its gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>43</sup> There are 34,000 immigrants in the state's workforce who are Dream Act-eligible, and putting them on a pathway to citizenship could increase the state's GDP by up to \$1.4 billion.<sup>44</sup>
- Colorado is home to 1,400 TPS holders from El Salvador, Honduras, and Haiti, as well as their 1,600 U.S.-born children.<sup>45</sup> All of these TPS holders will lose their protected status when the designation expires in 2019, leaving them with two choices: to remain in the United States without legal status or work authorization or to return to a country they haven't known for years.

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## 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.<sup>46</sup> 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.<sup>47</sup>

- The incarceration rate in Colorado is 356 per 100,000 people.<sup>48</sup> Approximately 9.5 percent of prisoners in Colorado are women.<sup>49</sup>
- 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.<sup>50</sup>
- 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.<sup>51</sup>

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## 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.<sup>52</sup>

- Women make up 50 percent of Colorado's population but only 37 percent of its elected officials.<sup>53</sup>
- Women of color constitute 15 percent of the state's population but only 5 percent of its officeholders.<sup>54</sup>

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