



# Fast Facts: Economic Security for Iowa Families

By Ryan Erickson, Sarah Jane Glynn, and Heidi Williamson July 30, 2015

In Iowa and across the United States, we need policies that promote economic security for women and families. Working families need higher livable wages, women need and deserve equal pay for equal work, and parents need to be able to maintain good jobs that allow them to work and raise their children simultaneously. Strong economic security policies will enable Iowa women and families to get ahead—not just get by.

Family structure is shifting significantly. For most Iowans, the days of the full-time, stay-at-home mom are long in the past: Mothers are the sole, primary, or co-breadwinners in 71.7 percent of Iowa families.<sup>1</sup> To promote women's economic security, Iowa's policies should address the needs of working mothers and reflect the roles that women are playing to provide for their families. Here are seven areas in which policymakers and advocates can help women bolster their families' economic security.

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## Provide access to paid sick days

Everyone gets sick, but not everyone is afforded the time to get better. Many women go to work sick or leave their sick children at home alone 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 40 million U.S. employees, or 40 percent of the nation's private-sector workforce, do not have access to paid sick days.<sup>2</sup> In Iowa, the rate is even higher: More than 45 percent of private-sector workers, or over 500,000 people, do not have paid sick days.<sup>3</sup>
- If employees must stay home from work because they or their children are ill, the loss of pay can take a serious toll—particularly on low-income workers, who are the least likely to have access to paid sick leave.<sup>4</sup>

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## Expand paid family and medical leave

Access to paid family and medical leave would allow workers to be with their newborn children during the crucial first stages of a child's life, to care for an aging parent or spouse, or to recover from their own illness.

- The United States is the only developed country that does not guarantee access to paid maternity leave and one of only three developed countries that do not offer broader family and medical leave insurance.<sup>5</sup> Only 12 percent of workers in the United States have access to paid family leave through their employers.<sup>6</sup>
- The National Partnership for Women & Families gave Iowa a “D”—the second-lowest possible grade—on policies that help parents of newborn children. While Iowa offers some protections that go beyond federal law, these protections do not significantly improve upon those already offered by the Family and Medical Leave Act.<sup>7</sup>

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## Ensure equal pay

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

- Women are the primary, sole, or co-breadwinners in nearly two-thirds of U.S. families but continue to earn less than their male counterparts.<sup>8</sup> Latinas and African American women experience the sharpest pay disparities.<sup>9</sup>
- Iowa women earn just less than 78 cents for every dollar that Iowa men earn; if the wage gap continues to close at its current rate, women will not receive equal pay until 2056.<sup>10</sup> The wage gap is even larger for black women and Latinas in Iowa, who both earn 58 cents for every dollar that white men earn.<sup>11</sup>

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## Expand quality, affordable child care

Families need child care to be able to work, but many families lack access to high-quality child care options. Parents want and need child care that supports young children's development and adequately prepares them for school.

- Seventy-seven percent of Iowa children younger than age 6 have all available parents in the workforce, which makes access to affordable, high-quality child care a necessity.<sup>12</sup>

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### Increase the minimum wage

Women make up a disproportionate share of low-wage workers, and raising the minimum wage would help hardworking women across Iowa better support their families.

- Women make up nearly two-thirds of all minimum wage workers in the United States.<sup>14</sup>
- Increasing the minimum wage to \$12 per hour would boost wages for 241,000 women in Iowa and nearly 20 million women nationally.<sup>15</sup> More than 58 percent of the workers in Iowa who would be affected by raising the minimum wage to \$12 are women.<sup>16</sup>

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### Guarantee access to quality health care

Women need comprehensive reproductive health services—including access to abortion care—in order to thrive as breadwinners, caregivers, and employees.

- In 2012, 182,690 Iowa women were in need of publicly funded family planning services and supplies.<sup>17</sup>
- Because federal Title X funding—which covers contraception, pregnancy testing, and cancer screenings—has not kept up with inflation and often faces the threat of cuts at the federal level,<sup>18</sup> Iowa should step in and ensure that women have access to quality family planning resources.<sup>19</sup>

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### Promote women's political leadership

Across the United States, women are dramatically underrepresented in political office: They make up 51 percent of the population but only 29 percent of elected officials.<sup>20</sup>

- Women make up 50 percent of Iowa's population but only 32 percent of its elected officials.<sup>21</sup>
- Women of color make up 6 percent of the state's population but only 3 percent of its officeholders.<sup>22</sup>

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## Endnotes

- 1 Data are taken from Sarah Jane Glynn and Jeff Chapman's analysis of Miriam King and others, "Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 3.0," available at <https://cps.ipums.org/cps/index.shtml> (last accessed July 2015).
- 2 Elise Gould, Kai Filion, and Andrew Green, "The Need for Paid Sick Days: The lack of a federal policy further erodes family economic security" (Washington: Economic Policy Institute, 2011), available at <http://s4.epi.org/files/temp2011/BriefingPaper319-2.pdf>.
- 3 Institute for Women's Policy Research and National Partnership for Women & Families, "Workers' Access to Paid Sick Days in the States" (2015), available at <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/psd/workers-access-to-paid-sick-days-in-the-states.pdf>.
- 4 The percentage of workers with paid sick leave increases with compensation. See Bureau of Labor Statistics, *National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2013* (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013), Table 32, available at <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2013/ebb10052.pdf>.
- 5 International Labour Organization, "Maternity and paternity at work: Law and practice across the world" (2014), available at [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_242615.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_242615.pdf); Jody Heymann and others, "Contagion Nation: A Comparison of Paid Sick Day Policies in 22 Countries" (Washington: Center for Economic and Policy Research, 2009), available at <http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/paid-sick-days-2009-05.pdf>.
- 6 Bureau of Labor Statistics, *National Compensation Survey*, Table 32.
- 7 States' grades in this assessment reflect the degree to which a state's laws improve upon federal law. See National Partnership for Women & Families, "Expecting Better: A State-by-State Analysis of Laws That Help New Parents" (2014), available at <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/expecting-better-2014.pdf>.
- 8 Sarah Jane Glynn, "Breadwinning Mothers, Then and Now" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2014), available at <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Glynn-Breadwinners-report-FINAL.pdf>.
- 9 Anna Chu and Charles Posner, "The State of Women in America: A 50-State Analysis of How Women Are Faring Across the Nation" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2013), available at <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/StateOfWomen-4.pdf>.
- 10 Status of Women in the States, "Iowa," available at <http://statusofwomendata.org/explore-the-data/state-data/iowa> (last accessed July 2015).
- 11 Chu and Posner, "The State of Women in America."
- 12 "Available parents" refers to "resident parents." See Kids Count Data Center, "Children Under Age 6 with All Parents in the Labor Force," available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5057-children-under-age-6-with-allavailable-parents-in-the-labor-force#detailed/2/2-52/false/36,868,867,133,38/any/11472,11473> (last accessed July 2015).
- 13 The average annual cost of child care in Iowa is \$9,185 for an infant and \$7,904 for a 4-year-old. For a family with children in Iowa, the median income is \$65,300 per year. See Child Care Aware of America, "Child Care in America: 2014 State Fact Sheets" (2014), available at [http://www.ks.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/2014-Child-Care-in-America\\_State-Fact-Sheets.pdf](http://www.ks.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/2014-Child-Care-in-America_State-Fact-Sheets.pdf); Kids Count Data Center, "Median Family Income Among Households with Children," available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/65-median-family-incomeamong-households-with-children#detailed/2/2-52/false/36,868,867,133,38/any/365> (last accessed July 2015).
- 14 National Women's Law Center, "Fair Pay for Women Requires a Fair Minimum Wage" (2015), available at <http://www.nwlc.org/resource/fair-pay-women-requires-fair-minimum-wage>.
- 15 Economic Policy Institute, "State Tables: Characteristics of workers who would be affected by increasing the federal minimum wage to \$12 by July 2020" (2015), available at <http://s2.epi.org/files/2015/revise-minimum-wage-state-tables.pdf>; David Cooper, "Raising the Minimum Wage to \$12 by 2020 Would Lift Wages for 35 Million Workers" (Washington: Economic Policy Institute, 2015), Appendix A: Data tables, available at <http://s4.epi.org/files/2015/raising-the-minimum-wage-to-12-dollars-by-2020-would-lift-wages-for-35-million-american-workers.pdf>.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Jennifer J. Frost, Mia R. Zolna, and Lori Frohwirth, "Contraceptive Needs and Services, 2012 Update" (New York, NY: Guttmacher Institute, 2012), available at <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/win/contraceptive-needs-2012.pdf>.
- 18 Rachel Benson Gold, "Going the Extra Mile: The Difference Title X Makes," *Guttmacher Policy Review* 15 (2) (2012): 13–17, available at <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/gpr/15/2/gpr150213.html>.
- 19 Through the Iowa Department of Public Health's Family Planning Program, Iowa provides services using Title X funding. Because these programs are often vulnerable to cuts, however, Iowa lawmakers should ensure that these programs are adequately funded. For more information on the Iowa Department of Public Health's Family Planning Program, see Iowa Department of Public Health, "Family Planning," available at [http://www.idph.state.ia.us/hpcdp/family\\_planning.asp](http://www.idph.state.ia.us/hpcdp/family_planning.asp) (last accessed July 2015).
- 20 Reflective Democracy Campaign, "Who Leads Us?," available at <http://wholeads.us> (last accessed July 2015).
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid.