

STATE-BY-STATE EARNINGS FOR AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE WOMEN: WAGE GAPS ACROSS THE STATES*



- American Indian and Alaska Native women¹ working full-time, year-round were paid just 59.7 cents for every dollar paid to White non-Hispanic men in 2019.
- The median annual earnings for American Indian and Alaska Native women who worked full-time, year-round leave a family with one adult and two children in near-poverty.²
- In 14 states, American Indian and Alaska Native women earn at least \$20,000 less for a year of full-time work than White men.

American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) women have made important advances socially, economically, and politically—they are starting their own businesses, getting elected to congress, and serving essential roles in their families and communities.³ Despite their efforts, they continue to face a range of obstacles to their and their family's economic wellbeing and overall economic security. The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown the overall inequalities facing AIAN women into sharp relief— particularly for AIAN women who live on reservations where economic opportunities may be especially limited, relying heavily on casinos and public sector employment.⁴ Poor quality and overcrowded housing, a lack of access to quality health care, nutrition, and sometimes even basic access to running water make it more difficult to keep families safe.⁵

One obstacle is the gender wage gap. AIAN women working full-time, year-round are paid just 59.7 cents for every dollar paid to their non-Hispanic White male counterpart—\$36,577 compared with \$61,233—for a wage gap of 40.3 percent or \$24,656.⁶ The earnings of AIAN women matter to the economic security of their families. More than six in 10 (60.9%) AIAN women with children under the age of six are active in the labor force; in households with children under the age of 18, AIAN women are single mother breadwinners in 36.9 percent and married mother breadwinners in another 27.2 percent.⁷

*State-by-State earnings for all 30 States for which there are large enough samples to calculate earnings

The wage gap that AIAN women face differs substantially across Native communities. For example, Tohono O’odham women have a wage gap of 53.5 percent with their White male counterparts, and Yaqui, Lumbee, Navajo, and Pueblo women all face a wage gap of 48.3 percent. Chippewa and Inupiat women have the smallest wage gap with White men at 31.1 percent.⁸

AIAN women face a wage gap with their White male counterpart in all 30 states where earnings data are available, but some states offer better opportunities than others (see Table 1).⁹

- Native American and Alaska Native women in Nebraska had the lowest median earnings for a year of full-time work at \$26,000, just barely half (50.8 percent) of White men’s median earnings in that state, a wage gap of 49.2 percent. New Mexico (48.2 percent) and California (46.5 percent) also have large wage gaps (see Table 1).
- Native American and Alaska Native women’s median annual earnings for full-time work were above \$40,000 in six states—Alaska, Alabama, California, Colorado, New York, and Virginia (Table 1).
- Alabama has the smallest wage gap for Native American and Alaska Native women compared with their White male counterpart (21.7 percent; Table 1).

Low Earnings Reflect a Number of Factors

- **Concentration in low-waged occupations:** The low earnings of AIAN women working full-time, year-round reflect their concentration in low-wage jobs such as Cashiers, Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners, Nursing, Psychiatric, and Home Health Aides, Waitresses, and Chefs and Cooks—three of their top five most common occupations. Just two of the 10 most common occupations for AIAN women—Elementary and Middle School Teachers and Registered Nurses—have median annual earnings above 200 percent of the poverty threshold.¹⁰
- **Lower union coverage:** AIAN women are only about half as likely as other women to be covered by a union contract (5.8 percent and 11.5 percent respectively).¹¹ Union coverage is less likely in low wage occupations. Work in low-wage occupations also means less access to health insurance, paid leave, or pension plans.¹²
- **Education:** While earnings disparities reflect lower levels of college level education,¹³ having college-level education does not eliminate the wage gap. AIAN women with at least a four-year college degree have earnings that are \$50,809, compared with White men’s of \$84,681, a gender wage gap of 40.0 percent.¹⁴
- **Unemployment and lack of access to full-time work:** The rate of unemployment for AIAN women was almost twice as high as the rate for all women in in 2016-2018, 7.1 percent compared with 3.8 percent. Among AIAN women who are working, 71.9 percent work full-time.¹⁵ Economic opportunities are particularly restricted for AIAN women living on reservations.¹⁶



- **Interpersonal violence:** More than 4 in 5 Native women report experiencing intimate partner, stalking or sexual violence in some form over their lifetime with more than one-half (55.5 percent) reporting some form of physical violence and 42.4 percent reporting severe physical violence.¹⁷ Exposure to violence makes it more difficult to maintain employment and seek good jobs, while low earnings in turn makes it much harder to leave abusive relationships.¹⁸ The COVID-19 quarantine and related recession has likely increased their exposure to violence.¹⁹

Tackling the gender wage gap through comprehensive policies that address discrimination and ensure that all workers have access to quality health care, are able to care for themselves and their families with paid family leave, earned sick days, and quality and affordable child care and elder care, and that make education accessible and affordable to all students, including those who are parents, will lift up AIAN women and all of society.

Table 1: AIAN Women Earn Less Than White Men in all 30 States for Which There Are Large Enough Samples to Calculate Earnings

Median Annual Earnings and Ratio of AIAN Women's to White Men's Earnings, Full-time, Year-round Workers, Aged 16 and Older, 2018.

State	AIAN Women	Non-Hispanic White Men	Annual Gap in Earnings*	Earnings Ratio
Alabama	\$40,977	\$52,312	\$11,335	78.3%
Alaska	\$40,259	\$64,539	\$24,280	62.4%
Arizona	\$31,783	\$57,278	\$25,495	55.5%
California	\$40,259	\$75,310	\$35,051	53.5%
Colorado	\$40,307	\$61,466	\$21,159	65.6%
Florida	\$35,000	\$51,383	\$16,383	68.1%
Georgia	\$36,619	\$55,000	\$18,381	66.6%
Idaho	\$31,821	\$50,000	\$18,179	63.6%
Kansas	\$36,619	\$52,972	\$16,354	69.1%
Louisiana	\$31,821	\$58,270	\$26,449	54.6%
Michigan	\$33,480	\$53,270	\$19,790	62.8%
Minnesota	\$32,500	\$58,590	\$26,090	55.5%
Missouri	\$32,167	\$50,000	\$17,833	64.3%
Montana	\$30,733	\$48,000	\$17,267	64.0%
Nebraska	\$26,000	\$51,221	\$25,221	50.8%
Nevada	\$37,554	\$57,210	\$19,656	65.6%
New Mexico	\$29,500	\$57,000	\$27,500	51.8%
New York	\$46,000	\$65,563	\$19,563	70.2%
North Carolina	\$32,000	\$51,221	\$19,221	62.5%
North Dakota	\$35,000	\$54,405	\$19,405	64.3%
Oklahoma	\$32,000	\$51,221	\$19,221	62.5%
Oregon	\$33,943	\$54,405	\$20,462	62.4%
South Carolina	\$34,962	\$51,221	\$16,259	68.3%
South Dakota	\$28,786	\$47,145	\$18,359	61.1%
Texas	\$38,000	\$63,642	\$25,642	59.7%
Utah	\$31,388	\$58,270	\$26,882	53.9%
Virginia	\$41,850	\$63,567	\$21,717	65.8%
Washington	\$38,400	\$63,642	\$25,242	60.3%
Wisconsin	\$33,902	\$52,972	\$19,070	64.0%
Wyoming	\$33,480	\$56,000	\$22,520	59.8%

Notes: Samples inadequate to calculate earnings for Native women in Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Vermont, and West Virginia. White men are non-Hispanic. *Gap in 2018 dollars.

Source: IWPR analysis of the 2014-2018 American Community Survey (ACS).

ENDNOTES

- ¹ This brief uses the Census defined 'American Indian and Alaska Native' (AIAN). American Indian and Alaska Native, Native American, Native, and AIAN are used interchangeably.
- ² The federal poverty threshold for a household of one adult and two children in 2019 was \$20,598; see U.S. Census Bureau. 2020. "Poverty Thresholds: by Size of Family and Number of Related Children Under 18 Years." (accessed September 2020). At 200 percent of poverty, or near-poor, this is \$41,195 annually.
- ³ See Asha DuMonthier, Chandra Childers, Jessica Milli. 2017. The Status of Black Women in the United States. IWPR. < http://statusofwomendata.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/SOBW_report2017_compressed.pdf> (accessed September 2020). Native Business Magazine. 2019. An Historic Day: Sharice Davids and Deb Haaland Sworn into Congress. < <https://www.nativebusinessmag.com/an-historic-day-sharice-davids-and-deb-haaland-sworn-in-to-congress/>> (accessed September 2020).
- ⁴ Algernon, Austin. 2013. "Native Americans and Jobs: The Challenge and the Promise." Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute. <<https://files.epi.org/2013/NATIVE-AMERICANS-AND-JOBS-The-Challenge-and-the-Promise.pdf>> (Accessed September 10, 2020). See Allard, Mary Dorinda and Vernon Brundage Jr. 2019. American Indians and Alaska Natives in the U.S. Labor Force. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Monthly Labor Review. <<https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2019/article/pdf/american-indians-and-alaska-natives-in-the-u-s-labor-force.pdf>> (accessed September 2020).
- ⁵ Conger, Kate, Robert Gebeloff, and Richard A. Opiel Jr. 2020. "Native Americans Feel Devastated by the Virus Yet Overlooked in the Data." New York Times. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/30/us/native-americans-coronavirus-data.html>> (accessed September 2020). Schultz, Heidi A. 2020. Native American Communities and COVID-19: How Foundations can Help. Health Affairs, <<https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20200331.659944/full/>> (accessed September 2020).
- ⁶ United States Census Bureau. Table S2002: Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months (In 2019 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) of Workers by Sex and Women's Earnings as a Percentage of Men's earnings by Selected Characteristics. < <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=Earnings%20native%20american%20women&tid=ACSST1Y2019.S2002&hidePreview=false>> (accessed September 2020).
- ⁷ See Elyse Shaw and C. Nicole Mason. 2020. Holding Up Half the Sky: Mothers as Workers, Primary Caregivers, and Breadwinners During COVID-19. Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research. < <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Holding-Up-Half-the-Sky-Mothers-as-Breadwinners.pdf>> (accessed September 2020).
- ⁸ Tucker, Jasmine. 2019. Equal Pay for Native Women. National Women's Law Center. <<https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Native-Women-Equal-Pay-2019.pdf>> (accessed September 2020).
- ⁹ The number of American Indian & Alaskan Native women residents varies substantially between states; in 30 states the ACS sample is large enough to allow the calculation of median annual earnings for full-time work.
- ¹⁰ IWPR analysis of 2014-2018 American Community Survey micro data taken from: Steven Ruggles et al. 2020. IPUMS USA: Version 10.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2020. <<https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V10.0>>; for federal poverty threshold see note 2 above.

¹¹ DuMonthier, Asha, Chandra Childers, and Jessica Milli. 2017. *The Status of Black Women in the United States*. <http://statusofwomendata.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/SOBW_report2017_compressed.pdf>. (accessed September 2020).

¹² As above.

¹³ See Allard, Mary Dorinda and Vernon Brundage Jr. 2019. "American Indians and Alaska Natives in the U.S. Labor Force." *Monthly Labor Review* November <<https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2019/article/pdf/american-indians-and-alaska-natives-in-the-u-s-labor-force.pdf>> (accessed September 2020).

¹⁴ Men are White non-Hispanic; IWPR analysis of American Community Survey Data taken from Ruggles *et al.* (2020), see note 11 above.

¹⁵ IWPR analysis of American Community Survey Data taken from: Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, Erin Meyer, Jose Pacas and Matthew Sobek. IPUMS USA: Version 10.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2020. <<https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V10.0>>. See also Allard, Mary Dorinda and Vernon Brundage Jr. 2019. As note 14 which reports that 2016-2018 data show that 5.2 percent of AIAN part-time workers (women and men) were involuntary part-time workers compared with 3.6 percent of workers overall.

¹⁶ See Algernon (2013), at note 4.

¹⁷ National Institute of Justice. 2016. Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and Men. <<https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/violence-against-american-indian-and-alaska-native-women-and-men>> (accessed September 2020).

¹⁸ See Cynthia Hess and Alona Del Rosario. 2018. *Dreams Deferred: A survey on the Impact of Intimate Partner Violence on Survivors' Education, Careers, and Economic Security*. Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research. <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/C475_IWPR-Report-Dreams-Deferred.pdf> (accessed September 2020).

¹⁹ See Megan L. Evans, Margo Lindauer, and Maureen E. Farrell. 2020. PA Pandemic within a Pandemic—Intimate Partner Violence During Covid-19. *The New England Journal of Medicine* <<https://www.nejm.org/doi/pdf/10.1056/NEJMp2024046?articleTools=true>>, (accessed September 2020).

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