

Paid Sick Leave Access Increased during the Last Decade, but Inequities Remain

Differences by Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Family Income, and Work Schedule

Research Highlights

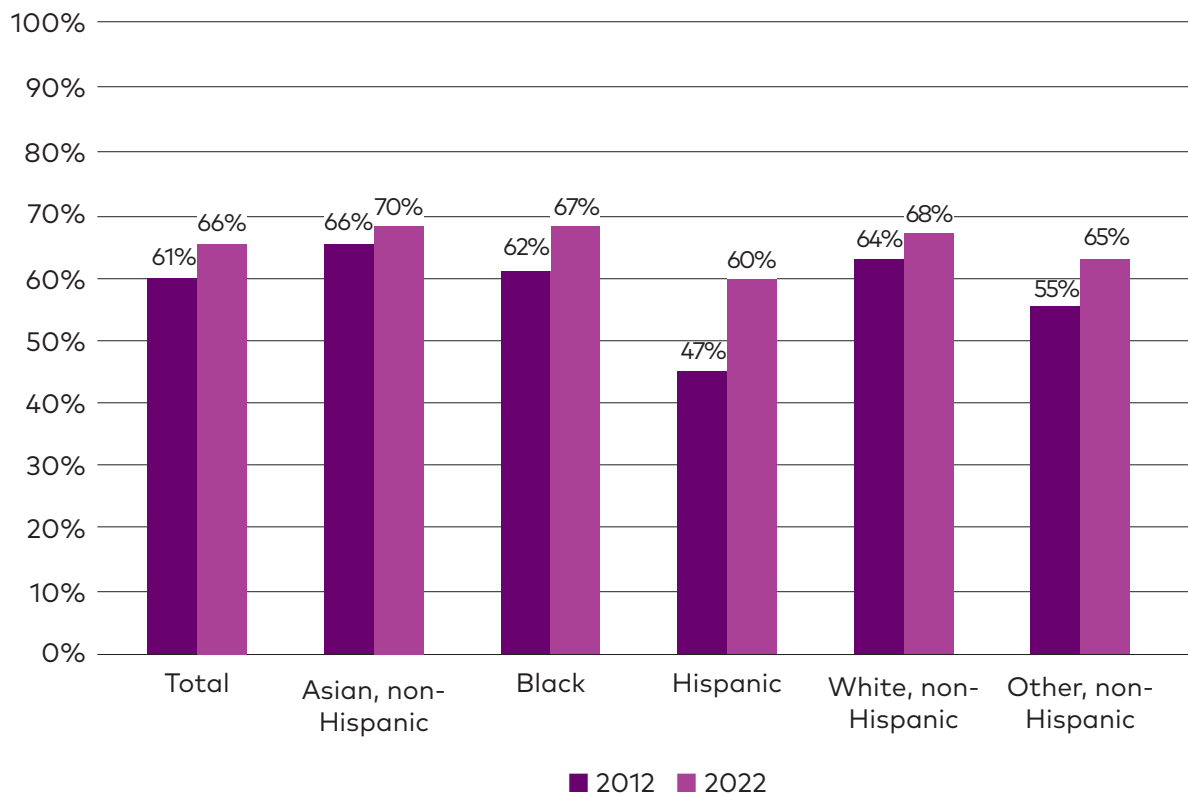
- **IWPR's analysis of the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) data from 2012 to 2022 shows progress made in access to paid sick days.** In 2022, 66 percent of workers aged 18 and older in the United States had access to paid sick leave, up from 61 percent in 2012. Access rates for female and male workers were 66 and 67 percent, respectively, both up from 2012 when the rates were 62 and 60 percent, respectively.
- **Access to paid sick days increased for workers of all racial and ethnic groups.** Hispanic and Latino/Latina¹ workers experienced the largest increases, from 51 percent in 2012 to 59 percent in 2022 for Latina women and from 45 percent to 61 percent for Latino men. Among Black workers, women were more likely than men to have access to paid sick days (69 percent and 65 percent, respectively). Men were more likely than women to have access to paid sick days among Asian (71 percent and 69 percent, respectively), Latino/a (61 and 59 percent, respectively), and White workers (69 percent and 67 percent, respectively).
- **Part-time workers had the largest increase in access to paid sick leave but continue to be much less likely to be covered than full-time workers.** For those working between 10 and 19 hours per week, access increased from 11 percent to 24 percent from 2012 to 2022. In comparison, coverage increased for full-time workers from 70 percent to 77 percent.
- **Access to paid sick time is unequal by family income.** Among those with income below the poverty threshold, 39 percent had access to paid sick days compared with 77 percent of those whose income was four times and more above the poverty threshold.



Paid leave refers to the compensated periodic time off individuals may need for various reasons, including sick leave or for caregiving purposes. Currently, US federal law does not guarantee paid sick leave for employees, with some workers not even eligible for *unpaid* time off.² The United States currently relies on employer policies to provide paid leave. Recent years have also seen an expansion of paid leave protections at the state level: 13 states and the District of Columbia have laws guaranteeing paid leave.³

This fact sheet examines changes in access to paid sick leave between 2012 and 2022. Utilizing data from the 2022 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), the fact sheet updates an earlier IWPR analysis⁴ that utilized data from the same survey released in 2012. The data presented here examine the changes over a decade in access to paid sick leave by demographic characteristics, hours worked, and income level measured by the ratio of family income to the poverty threshold.

Figure 1. Access to Paid Sick Leave Increased for All Workers 18 Years and Older from 2012 to 2022



Source: IWPR analysis of the 2022 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS).

Notes: Access rates were calculated for individuals aged 18 years and older who responded yes or no to the following question: Regarding your job or business, is paid sick leave available if you need it/When you last worked, was paid sick leave available to you if you needed it? "Other race" category includes American Indian or Alaska natives and individuals reporting multiple racial identities. None of these populations were individually large enough for separate analysis; all were kept in the interest of inclusion.

In 2022, 66 percent of workers aged 18 and older in the United States had access to paid sick days, up from 61 percent in 2012. The percentage of workers with access to paid sick days increased for all racial and ethnic groups, with the largest increase happening among Latino/a workers (from 47 percent in 2012 to 60 percent in 2022). However, in 2022, similar to the pattern in 2012, Latino/a workers were still less likely to have paid sick leave than Asian (70 percent), Black (67 percent), or White workers (68 percent; see Figure 1).

Table 1. Access to Paid Sick Leave Increased for Women and Men in All Racial and Ethnic Groups from 2012 to 2022

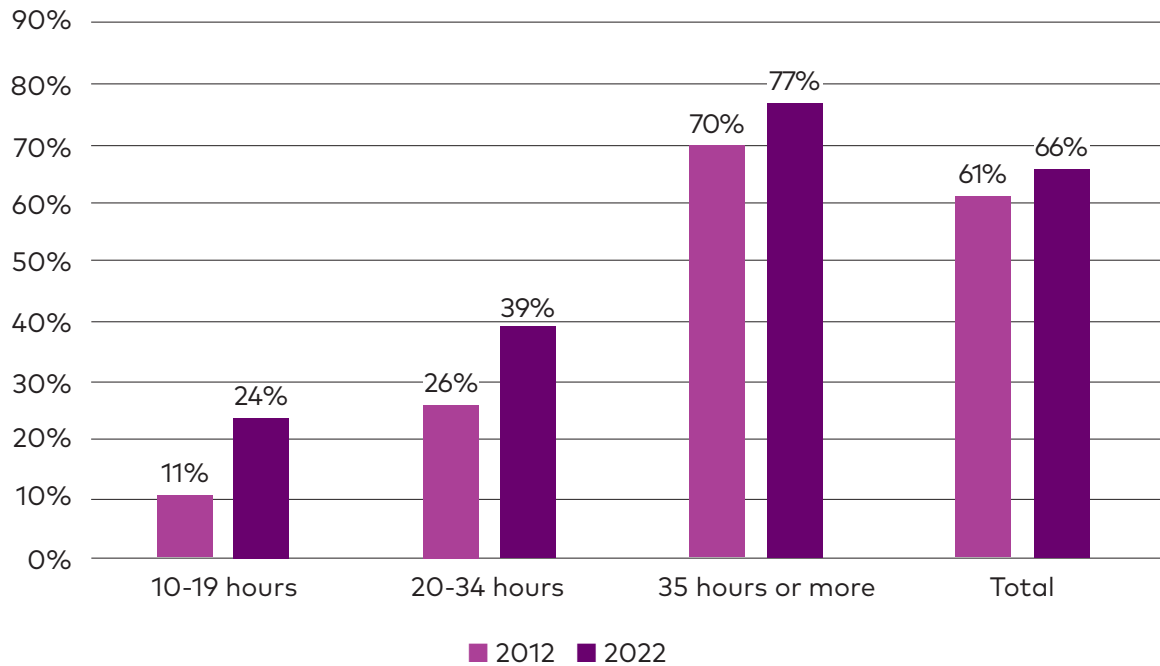
Population group	2012			2022		
	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total
Total	62%	60%	61%	66%	67%	66%
Asian, not Hispanic	66%	66%	66%	69%	71%	70%
Black alone, not Hispanic	64%	60%	62%	69%	65%	67%
Hispanic or Latino/a	51%	45%	47%	59%	61%	60%
White alone, not Hispanic	63%	64%	64%	67%	69%	68%
Other	57%	54%	55%	64%	67%	65%

Source: IWPR analysis of the 2022 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS).

Notes: Access rates were calculated for individuals aged 18 years and older who responded yes or no to the following question: Regarding your job or business, is paid sick leave available if you need it/When you last worked, was paid sick leave available to you if you needed it? "Other race" category includes American Indian or Alaska natives and individuals reporting multiple racial identities. None of these populations were individually large enough for separate analysis; all were kept in the interest of inclusion.

Access rates for female and male workers were 66 and 67 percent, respectively, both up from 2012 when the rates were 62 and 60 percent, respectively (Table 1). Among Black workers, women were more likely than men to have access to paid sick days (69 percent and 65 percent, respectively). The opposite was true for Asian, Latino/a, and White workers, with men being more likely than women to have access to paid sick leave. For Asian workers, 71 percent of men were estimated to have access to paid sick days compared to 69 percent of women. The percentages were 61 percent and 59 percent, respectively, among Latino/a men and women and 69 and 67 percent, respectively, among White men and women.

Figure 2. Part-Time Workers Saw Particularly Large Increases in Access to Paid Sick Leave

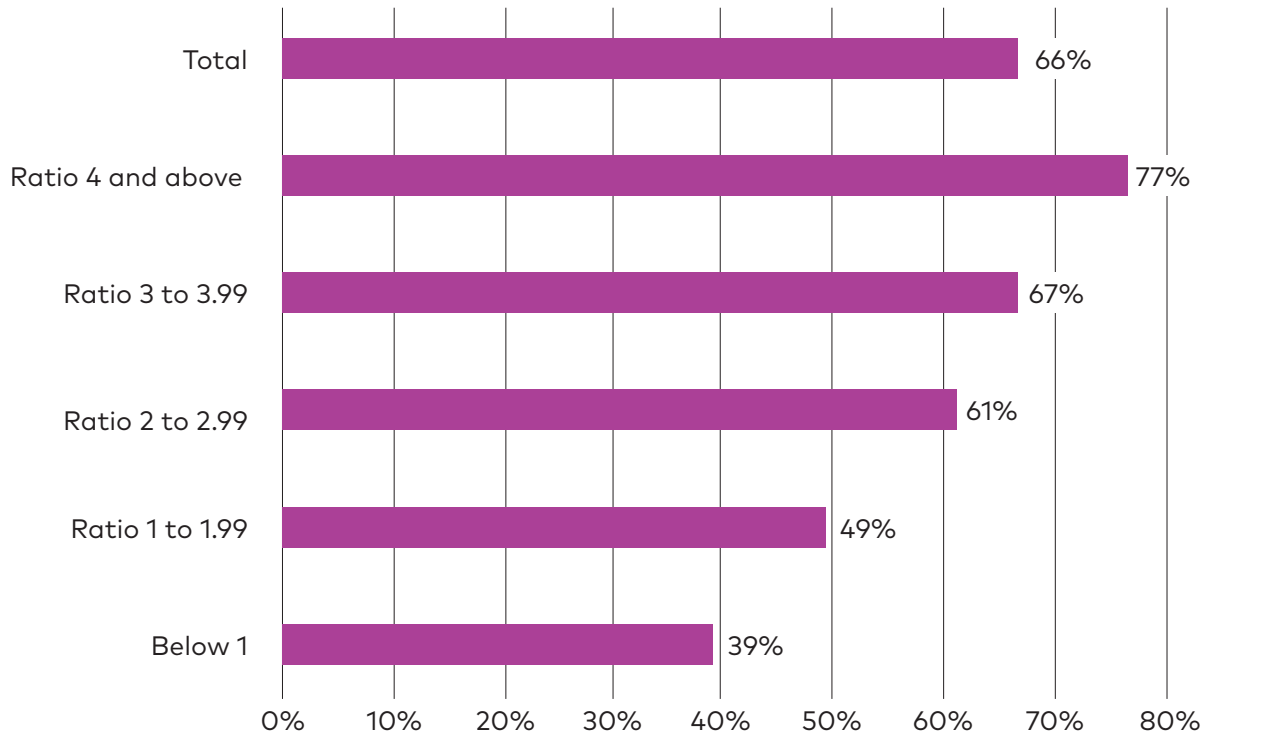


Source: IWPR analysis of the 2022 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS).

Notes: Access rates were calculated for individuals aged 18 years and older who responded yes or no to the following question: Regarding your job or business, is paid sick leave available if you need it/When you last worked, was paid sick leave available to you if you needed it?

The largest increase in access to paid sick days over the past decade happened among part-time workers. About a quarter (24 percent) of those working between 10 and 19 hours had access to paid sick leave in 2022, which was only 11 percent in 2012. A similar increase in access was estimated for those who worked between 20 and 34 hours (from 26 percent to 39 percent). Coverage increased by seven percentage points for full-time workers from 70 percent to 77 percent (Figure 2).

Figure 3. Analysis by Family Income Shows Access to Paid Sick Leave Is Deeply Unequal



Source: IWPR analysis of the 2022 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS).

Notes: Access rates were calculated for individuals aged 18 years and older who responded yes or no to the following question: Regarding your job or business, is paid sick leave available if you need it/When you last worked, was paid sick leave available to you if you needed it? The family income level in the 2022 NHIS is defined as the ratio of family income to poverty threshold, with categories of the ratio ranging from under 1 to 4 and over. In general, a ratio less than 1 means that the income is less than the poverty threshold. When the ratio equals 1, the income and poverty level are the same; when the ratio is greater than 1, the income is higher than the poverty level.

Among those with a family income below the poverty threshold, 39 percent had access to paid sick leave. Among those whose family income was four or more times the poverty threshold, 77 percent had access to paid sick leave (Figure 3). Because this is different from the personal earnings data utilized in the previous IWPR report⁵, a direct comparison to the previous findings is not possible. Nonetheless, it should be noted that in 2012, only 28 percent of workers with annual personal earnings at or below \$19,999 had access to paid sick days.

Sick Leave Access Increased, but Far Too Many Still Remain Unprotected

The analysis of the 2022 NHIS data shows that access to paid sick leave increased among all workers since 2012. Larger increases were observed among Latino/a workers, part-time workers, and those whose income was at or below the poverty threshold. It should be noted that several states passed a paid leave law during this period, which undoubtedly contributed to the increase in access to paid sick leave shown in this fact sheet. Yet, more than one-third of all workers still lack access to paid sick leave, with inequities across racial and ethnic groups and income levels, demonstrating the strong need for federal action. Only the federal government can create a federal baseline policy that guarantees comprehensive paid leave rights to all American workers nationwide, as stated in the latest [IWPR policy brief](#).

This fact sheet was prepared by Afet Dundar and Saniya Jilani. We thank Ariane Hegewisch for her comments and suggestions and Cristy Mendoza and Noura Hassouna for the research assistance they provided. This fact sheet was made possible with the support of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Policies for Action program. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.

ENDNOTES

1. In this fact sheet, we use the term Latina to refer to Hispanic or Latina women and Latino to refer to Hispanic or Latino men.
2. Molly Weston Williamson, "The State of Paid Sick Time in the U.S. in 2024," Fact Sheet (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, January 2024), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-state-of-paid-family-and-medical-leave-in-the-u-s-in-2024/>.
3. National Partnership for Women and Families, "State Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance Laws," (Washington, DC: National Partnership for Women and Families, October 2023), <https://nationalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/state-paid-family-leave-laws.pdf>.
4. Claudia Williams and Barbara Gault, "Paid Sick Days Access in the U.S.: Differences by Race/Ethnicity, Occupation, Earnings, and Work Schedule," Fact Sheet (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, March 2014), <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/B328-FINAL-1.pdf>.
5. Claudia Williams and Barbara Gault, "Paid Sick Days Access in the U.S."

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