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Native Women Lose More Than \$1.1 Million to the Racist and Sexist Wage Gap Over a 40-Year Career

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Despite being original inhabitants and stewards of this land, Native women have never been compensated for the full value of their labor in the U.S. workforce, and this inequity persists today. In 2022, the most recent data available, Native women working full time, year-round were typically paid only 59 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.¹ This gap in pay typically amounts to a loss of \$2,396 every month or \$28,747 every year. If this gap isn't closed, a Native woman entering the workforce today stands to lose \$1,149,880 over a 40-year career.²

As bad as these losses are, the wage gap for full-time, year-round workers doesn't fully reflect the true economic disparities faced by many Native women. The full-time, year-round wage gap leaves out those Native women who were unemployed or out of the labor force for part of the year, or who worked part time, even if they wanted full-time work. When we include part-time and part-year workers in the comparison, Native women were typically paid only 55 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men in 2022.³

Wage gap figures for Native women working full time, year-round vary widely by community. For example, Tohono O'odham women make just 47 cents while Iñupiat women make 89 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men. Whatever the wage gap for Native women, losing earnings because of the racist and sexist wage gap has robbed them of the economic security they need to thrive.

The wage gap will typically cost a Native woman more than \$1.1 million over a lifetime of work.

A loss of 41 cents on the dollar adds up over a month, a year, and a lifetime. Native women working full time, year-round are typically losing \$2,396 each month or \$28,747 each year. This annual wage gap could have paid for 11 months of child care, 10 months of food, and six months of rent.⁴ It could be a lifeline for Native women and their families.

If today's median wage gap does not close, a Native woman beginning her career today stands to lose a staggering \$1,149,880 over the next 40 years. Assuming a Native woman and her white, non-Hispanic male counterpart both begin work at age 20, the wage gap means a Native woman would have to work until she is 88 years old to make what a white, non-Hispanic man was paid by age 60.⁵ In other words, a Native woman would typically have to work 13 years beyond her current life expectancy.⁶ In reality, that means she would never be able to catch up with a white, non-Hispanic man's earnings.

Occupational segregation is one driver of the wage gap for Native women. The share of Native women in the low-paid workforce is roughly double their share in the workforce overall.⁷ Our long underinvestment in economic and social infrastructure and inadequate protections against discrimination leave many Native women stranded at the intersection of the racial and gender inequities.

Some communities of Native women experience substantially wider wage gaps.

Although Native women working full time, year-round typically make 59 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men, the wage gap varies widely and women of many Native communities experience much larger wage gaps compared to white, non-Hispanic men than Native women overall.⁷ For example, Tohono O'odham women make just 47 cents, Blackfoot women make just 51 cents, and Navajo women make just 53 cents while Iñupiat women make 89 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.⁸

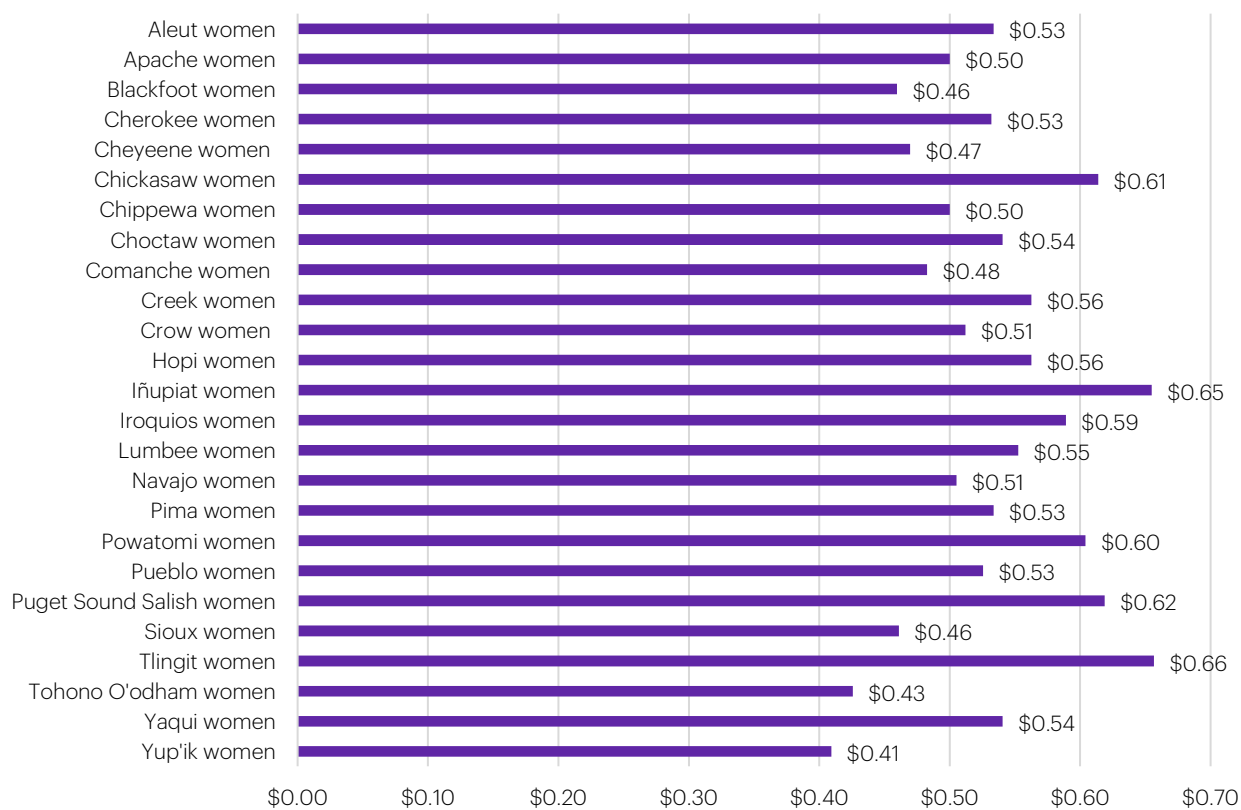
HOW MUCH NATIVE WOMEN WORKING FULL TIME, YEAR-ROUND LOSE TO THE WAGE GAP BY COMMUNITY IN THE UNITED STATES (2017-2021)

Community	Native women's typical earnings	What Native women are paid to every dollar white, non-Hispanic men	Native women's typical annual losses to the wage gap	Native women's typical losses over a 40-year career to the wage gap
Aleut women	\$45,000	\$0.70	\$19,738	\$789,520
Apache women	\$37,681	\$0.58	\$27,057	\$1,082,280
Blackfoot women	\$33,158	\$0.51	\$31,580	\$1,263,200
Cherokee women	\$38,681	\$0.60	\$26,057	\$1,042,280
Chickasaw women	\$40,000	\$0.62	\$24,738	\$989,520
Chippewa women	\$38,843	\$0.60	\$25,895	\$1,035,800
Choctaw women	\$40,785	\$0.63	\$23,953	\$958,120
Creek women	\$41,967	\$0.65	\$22,771	\$910,840
Hopi women	\$36,634	\$0.57	\$28,104	\$1,124,160
Iñupiat women	\$57,568	\$0.89	\$7,170	\$286,800
Iroquios women	\$38,151	\$0.59	\$26,587	\$1,063,480
Lumbee women	\$35,921	\$0.55	\$28,817	\$1,152,680
Navajo women	\$34,541	\$0.53	\$30,197	\$1,207,880
Pima women	\$34,203	\$0.53	\$30,535	\$1,221,400
Powatomi women	\$47,939	\$0.74	\$16,799	\$671,960
Pueblo women	\$37,764	\$0.58	\$26,974	\$1,078,960
Puget Sound Salish women	\$44,237	\$0.68	\$20,501	\$820,040
Sioux women	\$34,527	\$0.53	\$30,211	\$1,208,440
Tlingit women	\$48,553	\$0.75	\$16,185	\$647,400
Tohono O'odham women	\$30,521	\$0.47	\$34,217	\$1,368,680
Yaqui women	\$37,198	\$0.57	\$27,540	\$1,101,600
Yup'ik women	\$38,309	\$0.59	\$26,429	\$1,057,160

Source: NWLC calculations using 2017–2021 American Community Survey five-year sample using IPUMS-USA available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>. 2017–2021 is the most recent five-year available data at the time this factsheet was created. White, non-Hispanic men working full time, year-round typically made \$60,750 between 2017–2021. Figures are based on women's and men's median earnings for full-time, year-round workers. Figures are not adjusted for inflation. Small sample sizes prevented an analysis for Cheyenne women, Comanche women, Crow women, and Seminole women.

When comparing median earnings of all Native women who worked with the median earnings of all white, non-Hispanic men who worked in 2022, including those who worked only part-time or part of the year, Native women are typically paid only 55 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men. This wage gap also varied widely by community compared to white, non-Hispanic men, and was generally larger than the wage gap for full-time, year-round workers. Among all workers with earnings in the United States between 2017 and 2021 (the most recent data available), Yup'ik women made only 41 cents, Tohono O'odham women made only 43 cents, and Blackfoot and Sioux women made only 46 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men. Tlingit women, the Native women community in the United States with the smallest wage gap among all Native women workers with earnings, are still typically paid only 66 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.⁹

What All Working Native Women (Including Part-Time and Part-Year) Are Paid for Every Dollar White, Non-Hispanic Men Are Paid (2017–2021)



Source: NWLC calculations using 2017–2021 American Community Survey five-year sample using IPUMS-USA available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>. 2017–2021 is the most recent five-year available data at the time this factsheet was created. White, non-Hispanic men with earnings typically made \$51,790 between 2017–2021. Figures are based on women's and men's median earnings for all workers. Figures are not adjusted for inflation. Small sample sizes prevented an analysis for Seminole women.

Native women experience a wage gap compared to white, non-Hispanic men at every education level, and Native women with a professional degree stand to lose nearly \$3 million over their lifetime.

Educational attainment is often seen as a path to economic stability. But Native women are typically paid less than white, non-Hispanic men with the same educational attainment and are often paid less than white, non-Hispanic men with less educational attainment.

- Native women working full time, year-round who have a high school diploma are typically paid just 66 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men with the same diploma.¹⁰
- Native women working full time, year-round with a bachelor's degree are typically paid \$53,158 annually, which is less than what white, non-Hispanic men working full time, year-round with some college but no degree are typically paid (\$62,539).
- Native women working full time, year-round have to earn a master's degree (\$67,750) to be paid more than white, non-Hispanic men with just an associate's degree (\$64,623).
- Some of the most educated Native women have some of the most striking pay gaps compared to their white non-Hispanic men counterparts. Native women with a professional degree stand to lose nearly \$3 million to the wage gap over a 40-year career.
- Native women with a bachelor's degree, master's degree, or doctorate degree stand to lose roughly \$1.5 million to the wage gap over a 40-year career.

NATIVE WOMEN'S WAGE EQUALITY BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AMONG FULL-TIME, YEAR-ROUND WORKERS

Educational attainment	Native women's earnings	White, non-Hispanic men's median earnings	What Native women are paid for every dollar paid to White, non-Hispanic men
No high school diploma	\$31,269	\$43,777	\$0.71
High school diploma	\$34,396	\$52,116	\$0.66
Some college, no degree	\$38,566	\$62,539	\$0.62
Associate's degree	\$41,692	\$64,623	\$0.65
Bachelor's degree or more	\$60,454	\$99,020	\$0.61
Bachelor's degree	\$53,158	\$89,639	\$0.59
Master's degree	\$67,750	\$105,273	\$0.64
Professional degree	\$83,385	\$156,347	\$0.53
Doctorate degree	\$87,554	\$125,077	\$0.70

Source: NWLC's calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey microdata available at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>. "What Latinas Are Paid for Every Dollar Paid to White, Non-Hispanic Men" is the ratio of Latina female and white, non-Hispanic male median earnings for full-time, year-round workers. Earnings are in 2022 dollars. Workers without a high school diploma exclude those who have not completed at least 9th grade.

Native women face a wage gap in the occupations where they are most likely to work, many of which are low-paid occupations.

Native women experience occupational segregation due to sexism and racism and are often employed in low-paid jobs, which is a driver of the wage gap. Even within occupations, however, Native women face pay inequity compared to white, non-Hispanic men in the same occupation.

- Nearly two in five Native women (38.4%) were employed in one of 10 occupations in 2022. While data is not available for each of these occupations, in all but one of those for which we have data, Native women working full time, year-round were paid less than white, non-Hispanic men working full time, year-round.
- The most common occupation for Native women is cashiers and retail salespersons, and Native women working full time, year-round in this occupation were paid just 67 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men working full time, year-round as cashiers and retail salespersons.

TEN MOST COMMON OCCUPATIONS FOR NATIVE WOMEN

Occupation	Percent of employed Native women	Median hourly wage for Native women working full time, year-round	Median hourly wage for White, non-Hispanic men working full time, year-round	What Native women are paid for every dollar paid to White, non-Hispanic men
1 Cashiers and retail salespersons	7.0%	\$15.03	\$22.55	\$0.67
2 Maids and housekeeping cleaners, janitors, building cleaners	5.8%	\$13.53	\$19.04	\$0.71
3 Secretaries and administrative assistants, except legal, medical, and executive; receptionists and information clerks; office clerks	5.7%	\$18.04	\$22.05	\$0.82
4 Nursing, home health, personal care, and psychiatric aides and orderlies	4.7%	\$16.04	\$16.04	\$1.00
5 Elementary and middle school teachers, teaching assistants	4.3%	\$22.55	\$30.07	\$0.75
6 Registered nurses, licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses	2.7%	\$32.57	\$38.08	\$0.86
7 Cooks	2.3%	-	\$13.53	-
8 Customer service representatives	2.2%	\$17.79	\$24.05	\$0.74
9 Waiters and waitresses	2.1%	-	\$15.03	-
10 Child care workers	1.6%	-	-	-

Source: “-” values indicate insufficient sample sizes for calculations for full-time, year-round workers. NWLC calculations based on 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) microdata available at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>. Figures are in 2022 dollars. Median hourly wages are for full-time, year-round workers. “What Native women are paid for every dollar paid to White, non-Hispanic men” is the ratio of Native Women female and white, non-Hispanic male median earnings for full-time, year-round workers. Hourly wages are derived by dividing median annual earnings by 2,080 hours, which assumes a 40-hour work week for 52 weeks.

Native women need action that closes the wage gap.

Unequal pay means Native women have less money to cover their current expenses and leaves them economically insecure. It also has ripple effects that mean Native women miss key opportunities throughout their lifetimes to build wealth and future economic security for themselves, their families, and their communities. The wage gap means many cannot save enough to afford a down payment on a home, cannot afford to pay for their own or a child's higher education, cannot start a business or save for retirement. Native women's work has been undervalued for far too long and they cannot afford to wait.

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FOOTNOTES

- 1 NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey [hereinafter 2022 ACS], tables B20017C and B20017H. Figures are for full-time, year-round workers. Men and women self-identify their sex and race/ethnicity in the ACS. Native women self-identified themselves as American Indian or Alaskan Native. White, non-Hispanic men self-identified as white and specified that they were not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. Wage gap figures are calculated by taking the median earnings of women and men working full time, year-round. Median earnings describe the earnings of a worker at the 50th percentile—right in the middle.
- 2 NWLC calculations based on 2022 ACS, tables B20017C and B20017H. Figure assumes a wage gap of \$28,747—the gap in median earnings between full-time, year-round working Native American women (\$41,228) and white, non-Hispanic men (\$69,975) in 2022—each year for 40 years. Figures are not adjusted for inflation.
- 3 NWLC calculations 2022 ACS, tables B20017C and B20017H. Men and women self-identify their sex and race/ethnicity in the ACS. Native women self-identified themselves as American Indian or Alaskan Native. White, non-Hispanic men self-identified as white and specified that they were not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. Wage gap figures for all workers are calculated by taking the median earnings of women and men working any number of hours or week. Median earnings describe the earnings of a worker at the 50th percentile—right in the middle.
- 4 NWLC calculations using 2022 ACS tables B20017C and B20017H; Child Care Aware of America, Price of Care: 2021 Child Care Affordability Analysis Appendices, <https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/Child%20Care%20Affordability%20Analysis%202021.pdf> [https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/Demanding Change Appendices.pdf](https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/Demanding%20Change%20Appendices.pdf); U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Food Plans: Cost of Food Report for September 2023, using low-cost food plan for a family of four (one adult man and one adult woman ages 19-50 and children 6-8 and 9-11), <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cnpp/usda-food-plans-cost-food-monthly-reports>; U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey, Selected Housing Characteristics, Table DP04, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=dp04&tid=ACSDP1Y2021.DP04>.
- 5 This assumes workers begin work at age 20 and work for 40 years, retiring at age 60. In order to make up the nearly \$1 million lost to the wage gap, Native American women would need to work 28 more years in order to catch up.
- 6 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, Life expectancy at birth, age 65, and age 75, by sex, race, and Hispanic origin: United States, selected years 1900-2019, Table LExpMort, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/2020-2021/LExpMort.pdf>. American Indian or Alaskan Native, not Hispanic women's life expectancy at birth was 75 years in 2019.
- 7 Jasmine Tucker and Julie Vogtman, "When Hard Work Is Not Enough Women in Low-Paid Jobs," National Women's Law Center, July 2023, <https://nwlc.org/resource/when-hard-work-is-not-enough-women-in-low-paid-jobs/#>.
- 8 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2017–2021 American Community Survey (ACS), five-year estimates, using Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, Erin Meyer, Jose Pacas, and Matthew Sobek, IPUMS USA, Version 13.0, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.
- 9 NWLC calculations using 2017–2021 ACS, accessed through Ruggles et al., IPUMS USA.
- 10 NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) microdata available at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>. "What Native women are paid for every dollar paid White, non-Hispanic men" is the ratio of Native females and white, non-Hispanic male median earnings for full-time, year-round workers. Earnings are in 2022 dollars. Workers without a high school diploma exclude those who have not completed at least 9th grade.