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Native Women Lose More Than \$1.2 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 2023, the most recent data available, Native women working full time, year-round were typically paid only 58 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.¹ This gap in pay typically amounts to a loss of \$2,505 every month or \$30,055 every year. If this gap isn't closed, a Native woman entering the workforce today stands to lose \$1,202,200 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 52 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men in 2023.³

Wage gap figures for Native women vary widely by community. For example, among full-time, year-round workers, Blackfoot women are paid just 48 cents while Iñupiat women are paid 86 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.⁴ 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 \$1.2 million over her career.

A loss of 42 cents on the dollar adds up over a month, a year, and a lifetime. Native women working full time, year-round are typically losing \$2,505 each month or \$30,055 each year. This annual wage gap could have paid for 11 months of child care, nine months of food, and seven months of rent.⁵ 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 \$1,202,200 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 89 years old⁶—20 years beyond her current life expectancy⁷—to make what a white, non-Hispanic man was paid by age 60. In reality, that means she would never be able to catch up with a white, non-Hispanic man's earnings.⁸

Some communities of Native women experience substantially wider wage gaps than Native women overall.

Although Native women working full time, year-round typically make 58 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. For example, Blackfoot women make just 48 cents, Tohono O'odham women make just 52 cents, and Navajo women make just 54 cents while Iñupiat women make 86 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.

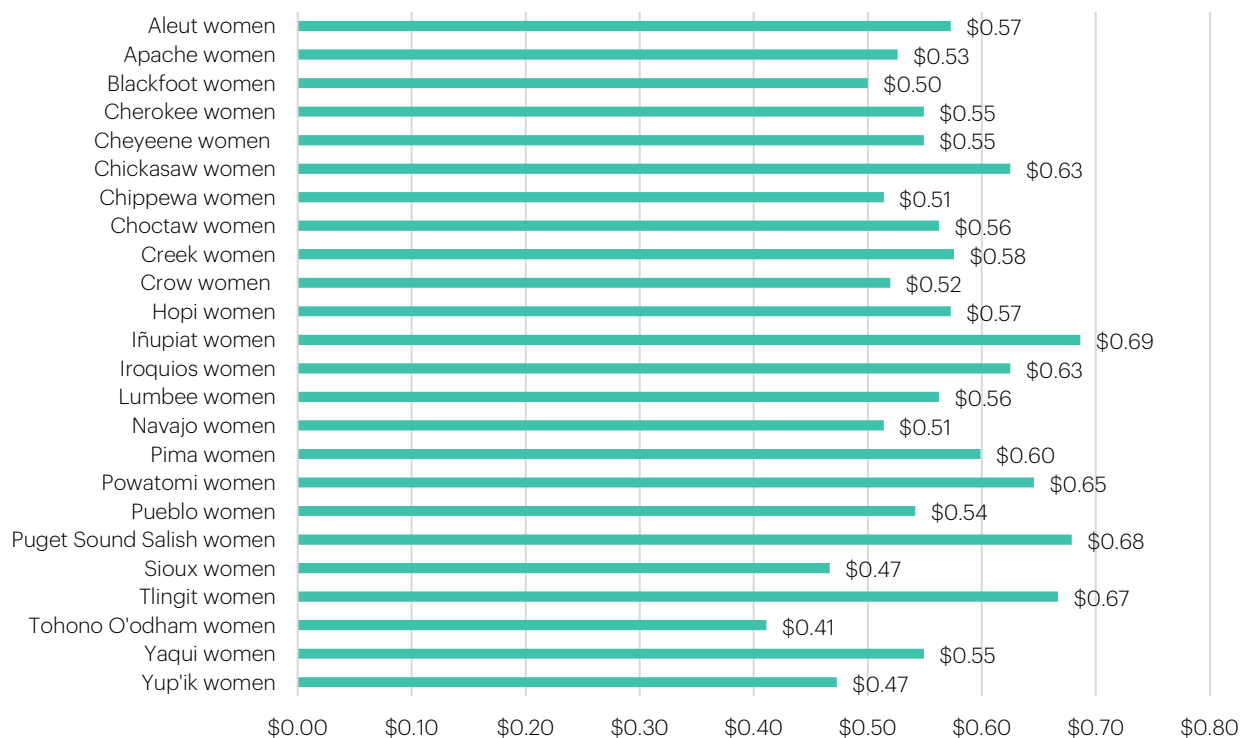
HOW MUCH NATIVE WOMEN WORKING FULL TIME, YEAR-ROUND LOSE TO THE WAGE GAP BY NATION IN THE UNITED STATES (2018-2022)

Nation	Native women's typical earnings	What Native women are paid for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic	Native women's typical annual losses to the wage gap	Native women's typical losses over a 40-year career to the wage gap
Apache women	\$39,994	\$0.58	\$29,184	\$1,167,360
Blackfoot women	\$33,000	\$0.48	\$36,178	\$1,447,120
Cherokee women	\$41,336	\$0.60	\$27,842	\$1,113,680
Chickasaw women	\$42,254	\$0.61	\$26,924	\$1,076,960
Chippewa women	\$40,917	\$0.59	\$28,261	\$1,130,440
Choctaw women	\$44,000	\$0.64	\$25,178	\$1,007,120
Creek women	\$44,424	\$0.64	\$24,754	\$990,160
Hopi women	\$39,660	\$0.57	\$29,518	\$1,180,720
Iñupiat women	\$59,450	\$0.86	\$9,728	\$389,120
Iroquios women	\$45,000	\$0.65	\$24,178	\$967,120
Lumbee women	\$38,579	\$0.56	\$30,599	\$1,223,960
Navajo women	\$37,500	\$0.54	\$31,678	\$1,267,120
Pima women	\$38,913	\$0.56	\$30,265	\$1,210,600
Powatomi women	\$50,000	\$0.72	\$19,178	\$767,120
Pueblo women	\$43,173	\$0.62	\$26,005	\$1,040,200
Puget Sound Salish women	\$52,608	\$0.76	\$16,570	\$662,800
Sioux women	\$37,832	\$0.55	\$31,346	\$1,253,840
Tlingit women	\$52,608	\$0.76	\$16,570	\$662,800
Tohono O'odham women	\$35,670	\$0.52	\$33,508	\$1,340,320
Yaqui women	\$41,200	\$0.60	\$27,978	\$1,119,120
Yup'ik women	\$40,000	\$0.58	\$29,178	\$1,167,120

Source: NWLC calculations using 2018–2022 American Community Survey five-year sample using IPUMS-USA available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>. White, non-Hispanic men working full time, year-round typically made \$69,178 between 2018–2022. 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 Aleut women, 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 2023, including those who worked only part-time or part of the year, Native women are typically paid only 52 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 between 2018 and 2022 (the most recent data available), Tohono O’odham women made only 41 cents, Yup’ik women and Sioux women made only 47 cents, and Blackfoot women made only 50 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men. Iñupiat 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 69 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(2018–2022)



Source: NWLC calculations using 2018–2022 American Community Survey five-year sample using IPUMS-USA available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>. 2018–2022 is the most recent five-year available data at the time this factsheet was created. White, non-Hispanic men with earnings typically made \$55,114 between 2018–2022. 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 and Comanche 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 lifetimes.

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 70 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men with the same diploma.¹⁰
- Native women working full time, year-round must get a bachelor's degree (typical pay of \$58,113) to be paid more than white, non-Hispanic men working full time, year-round with high school diploma (typical pay of \$50,976).
- Some highly educated Native women have incredibly striking pay gaps compared to their similarly educated white non-Hispanic men. 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 over \$1.3 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	Annual loss	Lifetime loss	What Native women are paid for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men
Less than ninth grade	\$19,371	\$774,834	\$0.61
No high school diploma	\$18,351	\$734,053	\$0.63
High school diploma	\$15,293	\$611,711	\$0.70
Some college, no degree	\$21,206	\$848,239	\$0.65
Associate's degree	\$23,449	\$937,957	\$0.65
Bachelor's degree or more	\$39,761	\$1,590,448	\$0.61
Bachelor's degree	\$33,644	\$1,345,764	\$0.63
Master's degree	\$42,820	\$1,712,791	\$0.62
Professional degree	\$74,425	\$2,976,993	\$0.53
Doctorate degree	\$40,781	\$1,631,227	\$0.68

Source: NWLC calculation using U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) microdata available at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>. "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. Earnings are in 2023 dollars. Workers without a high school diploma exclude those who have not completed at least ninth grade.

Native women are over-represented in low-paid jobs and typically make less than white, non-Hispanic men within low-paid occupations.

Occupational segregation is one driver of the wage gap for Native women where they are overrepresented in low-paid jobs and underrepresented in high-paying jobs. The share of Native women in the low-paid workforce is roughly double their share in the workforce overall and their share of high-paid jobs is roughly half their share of the overall workforce.¹¹ While occupational segregation contributes to the wage gap, it does not explain the entire gap, as Native women are typically paid less than white, non-Hispanic men even within the same occupations. Among full-time, year-round workers in the 40 lowest paying occupations, including critical, undervalued jobs such as child care workers, home health and personal care aides, maids and housekeeping cleaners and janitors, Native women are paid only 68 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men. Native women workers in these jobs face a loss of over \$13,000 every year and a lifetime loss of over \$530,000 as compared to white, non-Hispanic men in the same occupations. Native women in the 40 highest paying occupations face an even greater wage gap, making only 57 cents for every dollar white, non-Hispanic men make in those same jobs. This amounts to a loss of over \$57,000 annually and a staggering nearly \$2.3 million over a lifetime.¹² Our long underinvestment in economic and social infrastructure and inadequate protections against discrimination leave many Native women stranded among inequities.

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, or 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 any longer for action to close the wage gap.

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FOOTNOTES

- 1 NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey [hereinafter 2023 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 2023 ACS, tables B20017C and B20017H. Figure assumes a wage gap of \$30,055—the gap in median earnings between full-time, year-round working Native American women (\$41,939) and white, non-Hispanic men (\$71,994) in 2023—each year for 40 years. Figures are not adjusted for inflation.
- 3 NWLC calculations 2023 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 U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) microdata available at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>.
- 5 NWLC calculations using 2023 ACS tables B20017C and B20017H; Child Care Aware of America, “Annual Price of Care,” <https://www.childcareaware.org/thechildcarestandstill/#PriceofCare>; U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Food Plans: Cost of Food Report for August 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, 2023 American Community Survey, Selected Housing Characteristics, Table B25064, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2023.B25064?q=b25064>.
- 6 This assumes workers begin work at age 20 and work for 40 years, retiring at age 60. In order to make up the more than \$1.2 million lost to the wage gap, Native American women would need to work 29 more years in order to catch up.
- 7 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, “United State Life Tables, 2021, Table A. Expectation of life, by age, Hispanic origin and race, and sex: United States 2021”, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr72/nvsr72-12.pdf>. American Indian or Alaskan Native, not Hispanic women’s life expectancy at birth was 69 years in 2021.
- 8 NWLC calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, 2018–2022 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 2018–2022 ACS, accessed through Ruggles et al., IPUMS USA.
- 10 NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 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 2023 dollars. Workers without a high school diploma exclude those who have not completed at least 9th grade.
- 11 Native women make up 0.4% of the overall workforce but 0.8% of the low-paid workforce and 0.2% of the high paid workforce. Low-paid and high-paid workforce are those with the lowest 40 paying jobs and the highest 40 paying jobs. NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) microdata available at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>.
- 12 NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) microdata available at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>.