



**NATIONAL
WOMEN'S
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Indigenous Women Have Been Undervalued and Underpaid for Far Too Long

BY ASHIR COILLBERG

Despite being original inhabitants and stewards of this land, Indigenous women¹ 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, Indigenous women were paid 58 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.² Moreover, the wage gap widens when part-year and part-time workers are included: Indigenous women were typically paid just 52 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.³

We need public investments and economic policies that support economic opportunity and address the problematic inequities failing Indigenous women every day, robbing them of hundreds of thousands of dollars over their lifetimes, making it more difficult to make ends meet, and preventing them and their families from building wealth.

The wage gap will cost Indigenous women over \$1.2 million dollars over a lifetime

Indigenous women working full time, year-round lose 42 cents on the dollar to the racist and sexist wage gap, which adds up over time. Indigenous women working full time, year-round lose \$2,505 each month—or \$30,055 each year.⁴ This annual loss could have paid for over 10 months of a family's groceries,⁵ six months of child care,⁶ and 10 months of rent.⁷ And an Indigenous woman starting her career today stands to lose \$1,202,200 over the course of a 40-year career if we don't close the gap. This money could be life-changing for Indigenous women and their families, making it easier to make ends meet, and offering them opportunities to invest in their education or their children's, purchase a home, or save for retirement.

Some communities of Indigenous women experience substantially wider wage gaps than Indigenous women overall

Although Indigenous women working full time, year-round typically made 58 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men, the wage gap varies widely by Indigenous communities. For example, Blackfoot women are paid just 51 cents, Hopi and Sioux women are paid just 54 cents, and Iñupiat women are paid 85 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.⁸

HOW MUCH INDIGENOUS WOMEN WORKING FULL TIME, YEAR-ROUND LOSE TO THE WAGE GAP BY NATION IN THE UNITED STATES (2019–2023)

Nation	Indigenous Womens' Median Wages	What Indigenous Women Were Paid for Every Dollar Paid to white, non-Hispanic Men	Indigenous Womens' Typical Annual Loss	Indigenous Womens' Typical Losses Over a 40-Year Career
Apache women	\$36,000	\$0.55	\$29,000	\$1,160,000
Blackfoot women	\$33,000	\$0.51	\$32,000	\$1,280,000
Cherokee women	\$37,000	\$0.57	\$28,000	\$1,120,000
Chickasaw women	\$40,000	\$0.62	\$25,000	\$1,000,000
Chippewa women	\$38,000	\$0.58	\$27,000	\$1,080,000
Choctaw women	\$40,000	\$0.62	\$25,000	\$1,000,000
Creek women	\$40,000	\$0.62	\$25,000	\$1,000,000
Hopi women	\$35,000	\$0.54	\$30,000	\$1,200,000
Iñupiat women	\$55,000	\$0.85	\$10,000	\$400,000
Iroquios women	\$42,200	\$0.65	\$22,800	\$912,000
Lumbee women	\$35,000	\$0.54	\$30,000	\$1,200,000
Navajo women	\$36,000	\$0.55	\$29,000	\$1,160,000
Powatomi women	\$45,800	\$0.70	\$19,200	\$768,000
Pueblo women	\$40,000	\$0.62	\$25,000	\$1,000,000
Puget Sound Salish women	\$51,000	\$0.78	\$14,000	\$560,000
Sioux women	\$35,000	\$0.54	\$30,000	\$1,200,000
Tohono O'odham women	\$38,900	\$0.60	\$26,100	\$1,044,000
Yaqui women	\$38,400	\$0.59	\$26,600	\$1,064,000
Yup'ik women	\$35,000	\$0.54	\$30,000	\$1,200,000

Source: NWLC calculations using 2019–2023 American Community Survey five-year sample. White, non-Hispanic men working full time, year-round typically made \$65,000 between 2019–2023. 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.

Indigenous women experience a wage gap at every education level, including those who have earned a graduate degree

Women account for more than half of college-educated adults in the U.S. labor force. However, Indigenous women are still typically paid less than white, non-Hispanic men with the same or even lower educational attainment:

- Indigenous 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.
- Indigenous women working full time, year-round with a bachelor's degree are typically paid \$57,000, which is less than what white, non-Hispanic men working full time, year-round with some college but no degree are typically paid (\$60,000).

- Indigenous women working full time, year-round must earn a master’s degree (\$68,000) to make more than white, non-Hispanic men with an associate’s degree (\$66,000).
- Also striking is the typical difference in wages between the most educated Indigenous women— those with professional degrees, such as juris doctorate degrees or medical doctor degrees—and their white, non-Hispanic male counterparts. Among professional degree holders, an Indigenous woman working full time, year-round typically makes 53 cents for every dollar made by a white, non-Hispanic man with the same education working full time—an annual loss of \$73,000, or over \$2.9 million over the course of a 40-year career.⁹

INDIGENOUS WOMEN’S WAGE GAP BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AMONG FULL TIME, YEAR-ROUND WORKERS

Educational attainment	Indigenous Women’s Median Wages	White Non-Hispanic Men’s Median Wages	Typical Annual Loss	What Indigenous Women Were Paid for Every Dollar Paid to White, Non-Hispanic Men
Less than 9th Grade	\$30,000	\$49,000	\$19,000	\$0.61
No high school diploma (at Least 9th Grade)	\$30,000	\$48,000	\$18,000	\$0.63
High school diploma	\$35,000	\$50,000	\$15,000	\$0.70
Some college, no degree	\$39,200	\$60,000	\$20,800	\$0.65
Associate’s degree	\$43,000	\$66,000	\$23,000	\$0.65
Bachelor’s degree or more	\$61,000	\$100,000	\$39,000	\$0.61
Bachelor’s degree	\$57,000	\$90,000	\$33,000	\$0.63
Master’s degree	\$68,000	\$110,000	\$42,000	\$0.62
Professional degree	\$82,000	\$155,000	\$73,000	\$0.53
Doctorate degree	\$85,000	\$125,000	\$40,000	\$0.68

Source: National Women’s Law Center (NWLC) calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey (ACS), using IPUMS-USA, available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/sda/>. Respondents self-identify their sex as either male or female and self-identify their race, whether they are of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.

We can’t wait to close the wage gap for Indigenous women

Racism, sexism, and structural inequalities rob Indigenous women and their families of tens of thousands of dollars every single year. We need public investments and public policies that allow Indigenous women to succeed and thrive.

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FOOTNOTES

- 1 Data for this analysis comes from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey (ACS). Respondents to this survey self-identify their sex as either male or female and their race and ethnicity. In the racial identity question, respondents self-identify with the overall category “American Indian or Alaska Native” and then self-identify from a list of Indigenous tribal or national identities.
- 2 National Women’s Law Center (NWLC) calculations using 2023 ACS Table B20017C. <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/all/tables?q=b20017c> and Table B20017H <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/all?q=b20017h> This figure is the ratio between the median earnings of full time, year-round Indigenous women (\$41,939) and white, non-Hispanic men (\$71,994) in 2023.
- 3 NWLC calculations using 2023 ACS, Table B20017C. <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/all/tables?q=b20017c>. and Table B20017H <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/all?q=b20017h> This figure is the ratio between median earnings including part-time and part-year worker for Indigenous women, (\$31,034) and white, non-Hispanic men (\$59,178) in 2023.
- 4 NWLC calculations using 2023 ACS, Table B20017C. <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/all/tables?q=b20017c>. and Table B20017H <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/all?q=b20017h> Figure assumes a median wage gap of \$30,055—the gap in median earnings between full time, year-round working Indigenous women (\$41,939) and white, non-Hispanic men (\$71,994) in 2023—each year for 40 years. Figures are not adjusted for inflation.
- 5 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Official USDA Food Plans: Cost of Food at Home at Three Levels, U.S. Average, October, 2024 (accessed December, 2024) Official USDA Food Plans: Cost of Food at Home at Three Levels: Low, Moderate, Liberal; October 2024. Calculation is based on the USDA low-cost food plan for a family of four (two adults age 19 to 50 and children ages 6 to 8 and 9 to 11) estimated at \$1,072.8 per month.
- 6 “Child Care at a Standstill: Price and Landscape Analysis,” Child Care Aware, <https://www.childcareaware.org/thechildcarestandstill/>. Average costs for child care for a child in the United States (including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico) is \$11,582 annually in 2023, or \$965.17 per month.
- 7 NWLC calculations using 2023 ACS, Table DP04. DP04: Selected Housing Characteristics - Census Bureau Table. Median housing costs for renters was \$1,348 per month in 2023.
- 8 NWLC calculations based on 2019–2023 ACS, five-year estimates available at <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data/pums/2023/5-Year/>.
- 9 NWLC calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 ACS, using IPUMS-USA, available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/sda/>. Respondents self-identify their sex as either male or female and self-identify their race, whether they are of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.