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Equal Pay Would Cut Poverty in Half for Colorado's Working Women and Grow the State Economy

New report finds that women in Colorado will not see equal pay until 2057 if current trends continue

Washington, DC—According to a new briefing paper, “The Economic Status of Women in Colorado,” released today by the [Institute for Women's Policy Research](#) (IWPR) in partnership with the [Women's Foundation of Colorado](#), women in Colorado earn \$10,000 per year less than their male counterparts, are 30 percent more likely to live in poverty, and are 65 percent less likely than men to own businesses. The briefing paper finds that if women in Colorado earned the same as comparable men, the poverty rate for all working women would be cut in half and the state economy would grow by an additional \$9.2 billion, or 3.0 percent of the state's 2014 GDP. Yet, equal pay remains elusive: if progress continues at the current rate, the state's gender wage gap will not close until the year 2057.

The briefing paper ranks Colorado at fourth in the nation for the percent of women with at least a bachelor's degree, at 37.5 percent, compared with 29.7 percent in the United States overall. Between 2001 and 2013, the proportion of all employed women in managerial or professional occupations—jobs that mostly require at least a college degree and offer opportunities for higher earnings for women—increased by 6.2 percentage points, from 36.4 percent to 42.6 percent.

The briefing paper identifies significant disparities across racial and ethnic groups. Only 13.4 percent of Hispanic women, and 26.4 percent of black women in Colorado hold at least a bachelor's degree, compared with 43 percent of white women and nearly half (47.5 percent) of Asian/Pacific Islander women. Only one in four employed Hispanic women (25.2 percent) and approximately one in three employed black women (32.0 percent) work in managerial and professional occupations. In addition, Hispanic women in Colorado earn about half of their white male counterpart's earnings, at 53.8 cents on the dollar, and black women earn only 65.5 cents on the dollar.

“There are some signs of progress for women in Colorado” said IWPR Executive Director and Vice President Barbara Gault, Ph.D. “but large racial and ethnic disparities persist across nearly all measures, and we've seen declines in women's earnings and labor force participation, along with increasing female poverty. The state needs focused efforts to pick up the pace of change in these areas.”

Women's poverty rates in the state remain higher than men's—13.0 percent of women live in poverty in Colorado, compared with 10.0 percent of men. A large share of households headed by single mothers with children under 18 in Colorado—36.5 percent, or 45,171 households—live in poverty. Hispanic and black women are much more likely than white, Native American, and Asian American women to be poor, with 23.2 percent of black women and 23.1 percent of Hispanic women living with family incomes below the federal poverty line.

Recommendations

To improve women's status in the state, the briefing paper makes several policy recommendations, including better enforcement of equal employment opportunity laws; developing policies that address a lack of work/family supports, such as paid sick days; improving access to educational opportunities for Hispanic, Native American, and black women; ensuring that career advice for women includes information on the earnings potential of different fields of study and occupations; and making government contracts more accessible to women-owned businesses.

“The findings in this briefing paper are a call to action for Coloradoans,” said Lauren Y. Casteel, President & CEO of The Women's Foundation of Colorado. “Accelerating all women's progress is not only key to improving the well-being of women, children, families, and communities, it is critical for improving the economy for everyone in Colorado.”

[The Institute for Women's Policy Research \(IWPR\)](#) is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization that conducts rigorous research and disseminates its findings to address the needs of women and their families, promote public dialogue, and strengthen communities and societies.

The mission of [The Women's Foundation of Colorado](#) is to build resources and lead change so that every woman and girl in Colorado achieves her full potential. We are committed to leading systemic change to advance economic opportunity for all women and girls in Colorado through research, education, public policy, community partnerships, and strategic philanthropy. To see the report, visit wfco.org.

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