

Fathers Need Paid Family and Medical Leave

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Men increasingly want to be involved parents and caregivers in their families,¹ and men's unpaid caregiving is worth more than \$400 billion annually.² Yet most men still do not have access to paid family leave that would allow them to take time away from work after the birth or adoption of a child or to care for a loved one with a serious health condition. Even when their employers provide some paid leave, it often is not fully gender-neutral or inclusive of all family structures. As a result, men must often forgo leave or take shorter periods than they need to avoid losing income and facing workplace stigma.³

Everyone, regardless of gender, should be able to take time away from their jobs to care for their families without facing financial hardship or workplace discrimination. A national paid family and medical leave insurance program would provide all working people with the critical income they need to welcome a child, address a medical condition or provide family care.

Men's Caregiving Has Become a Norm, But Most Men Lack Access to Paid Family Leave

Since 1965, fathers in the United States have nearly tripled the time they spend caring for children, and working fathers are now just as likely as working mothers to say they find it difficult to manage work and family responsibilities.⁴ Half of men in the workforce expect to need time to care for a sick, disabled or older family member — the same share as women.⁵ In 2023, nearly 3 million men were single parents,⁶ and more than 333,000 men were parenting in same-sex couples.⁷

- Yet just 27 percent of all workers have access to paid family leave through an employer.⁸
- Employer-based policies often are not equitable within workplaces. Only 13 percent of private sector workers are employed at worksites that offer paid paternity leave to *all* male employees.⁹

TAKING CARE OF MY FAMILY IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING I DO AND AM.

— **Dave S., business executive, New America. (2019). *Lifting the Barriers to Paid Family and Medical Leave for Men in the United States.***

- Employer policies commonly provide less bonding time for “secondary caregivers” – too often code for “fathers” – and for adoptive and foster parents, which particularly impacts same-sex couples.¹⁰ And even when men have access to other forms of paid time off from an employer, such as paid sick days, they often cannot use that leave to bond with a new child, to care for a family member’s medical condition or for elder care.¹¹
- One study found that only one in 20 fathers in professional jobs took more than two weeks off after their most recent child was born – and a staggering three out of four took one week or less.¹² Low-income fathers face even higher barriers: one study of disadvantaged families found that nearly 60 percent of fathers reported taking zero weeks of paid time away from work after the birth or adoption of a child.¹³ In the past 30 years, the share of new fathers who take no time at all has fallen dramatically, but more than one-third still take no leave. Among new fathers who take some time off, only one-third use paid paternity leave.¹⁴
- Men without paid leave often feel pressure to limit their time off of work in order to keep a steady income¹⁵ and be a good financial provider, which continues to be seen as an important part of being a good father.¹⁶

Many Men Face Stigma for Taking Leave

Many fathers want to be more involved with their families, play a larger caregiving role, and support their partners’ careers.¹⁷ But outdated, gendered norms in too many workplaces still assume that being a caregiver is incompatible with success at a job,¹⁸ and taking time away from work for family caregiving can bring harassment, discrimination or mistreatment¹⁹ or negative career impacts²⁰ that discourage fathers from taking leave.

Creating More Supportive Workplaces Would Help Men, Their Families, Businesses and Taxpayers

A growing body of evidence makes clear that paid family leave has a positive impact on children and parents, families’ economic security, employers and taxpayers. And it can help support more caregiver-friendly workplace cultures.

- **Gender-equal paid leave promotes children’s development and family well-being.** Among different-sex parents, fathers who take two or more weeks off after the birth of a child are more involved in that child’s direct care nine months after birth than fathers who take no leave,²¹ and are more likely to have a stable marriage or relationship with the other parent.²² Involved fathers promote children’s educational attainment and emotional stability and reduce maternal stress,²³ and

involvement in the first six months after birth can also mean both mother and baby sleep better.²⁴ When men attend prenatal medical appointments and remain involved throughout the pregnancy, women have safer births and decreased risk of postpartum depression.²⁵ New mothers have fewer postpartum health complications and improved mental health when new fathers can also take paid leave.²⁶

- **Households are more equal when fathers have paid leave.** When new dads in different-sex couples take paid leave, parental responsibilities are divided more equitably, including household chores and direct caregiving.²⁷ Fathers who take paid family leave also say they are more comfortable as active, responsible co-parents.²⁸
- **Paid leave for men supports working mothers.** In 72 percent of U.S. households with children (nearly 50 million households), all parents are in the workforce,²⁹ and 70 percent of women in families with children are breadwinners or co-breadwinners.³⁰ Yet women are still more likely than men to stop working or to work part time after the birth of a child.³¹ Paid paternity leave may increase women's labor force participation by promoting men's involvement at home and making it easier for women to return to the workforce.³² Research from Sweden shows that each additional month of parental leave taken by a child's father increases the mother's wages by nearly 7 percent,³³ which affects women's income and retirement security over their lifetimes.
- **Fathers with paid leave are less likely to need public assistance.** Having a baby is expensive. Even for people with health insurance, the average out-of-pocket cost of childbirth in the United States ranges from \$1,875 to \$1,962, depending on the type of delivery³⁴ – quickly followed by clothing, diapers, formula or lactation support and many other expenses. But new fathers who take paid leave are significantly less likely than fathers who do not report needing to use the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the year following their child's birth (controlling for other relevant factors).³⁵ On average, men who take paid leave report receiving \$420 less in public assistance in the year following their child's birth than men who do not take leave.³⁶

Fathers Need Paid Family Leave No Matter Where They Live or Work

Fourteen states including the District of Columbia have passed paid family and medical leave programs that provide time to bond with a new child, care for a family member with a serious health condition or address their own serious medical needs, regardless of gender.³⁷ Over time, men's use of these programs for parental leave and family caregiving has become more equal. In California, men now file over 44 percent of claims for paid family leave to care for a new child, up from 15 percent when the law took effect in 2004.³⁸ In Rhode Island, which implemented paid family leave in 2014, 45 percent of child bonding leaves in 2024 were taken by men.³⁹

Evidence from existing programs shows how policy details matter for men.

When men take an equal share of leave, it has significant benefits for their families and for gender equality. To fully support men's leave-taking, paid leave programs must:

- **Replace most or all of a worker's usual wages.** Men are significantly less likely to use leave that is unpaid or replaces only a small share of usual wages, likely due in part to gender norms about breadwinning roles. In addition, because of the gender wage gap, when different-sex couples face a period of unpaid leave, they often resolve that dilemma by keeping the higher-earning man at work.⁴⁰ Higher wage replacement rates, even up to 100 percent, substantially increase men's use of leave.⁴¹
- **Cover the range of caregiving needs.** Nationally, three-quarters of instances of leave-taking are for purposes other than bonding with a new child.⁴² While about 30 percent of men expect to need paternity leave, fully half anticipate needing leave to care for a seriously ill, disabled or older family member.⁴³ Paid leave programs should address the range of health and care needs as reflected in the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).
- **Provide equal time and not force couples to split leave.** Evidence from European parental leave programs consistently shows that when new mothers and fathers are given a shared amount of leave that they must split, women end up taking the vast majority of leave time, resulting in inequities in the workplace and in caregiving and negative consequences for new mothers' health.⁴⁴ State paid leave programs and the FMLA follow a more equitable model, providing leave individually to each worker.
- **Protect a worker's job.** Three-quarters of adults say that penalties, such as job loss or retaliation, are a major deterrent for men taking leave.⁴⁵ A national policy must follow the lead of state paid leave programs in including strong anti-retaliation protections and expanded or provided universal job protection.

The Family And Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act would create a national paid family and medical leave insurance program that would enable the lowest-paid workers to earn up to 85 percent of their normal wages, with the typical full-time worker earning around two-thirds of their wages for up to 12 weeks to address their own serious health condition, including pregnancy and childbirth recovery, to deal with the serious health condition of a family member, the birth or adoption of a child, address the effects of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking and/or to make certain arrangements arising from the military deployment of a spouse, child or parent. The FAMILY Act would establish a reasonable standard that would bring the nation's public

policies more in line with the needs of the workforce, benefiting women and men, workers, their families, businesses and our economy.

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<https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/centers/cwf/research/publications/researchreports/BCCWF%20The%20New%20Dad%202014%20ExecutiveSummary.pdf>; Barker, G., Hayes, C., Vlahovicova, K., & Gupta, T. (2023, July). *State of America's Fathers 2023: Mobilizing men for a better care ecosystem*. Equimundo and MenCare Publication. Retrieved 5 June 2025, from <https://www.mencare.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/State-of-Americas-Fathers-2023.pdf>

² Gallagher Robbins, K., & Mason, J. (2024, June). *Americans' Unpaid Caregiving is Worth More than \$1 Trillion Annually – and Women are Doing Two-Thirds of The Work*. Retrieved 5 June 2025 from National Partnership for Women & Families website: <https://nationalpartnership.org/americans-unpaid-caregiving-worth-1-trillion-annually-women-two-thirds-work/>

³ Coltrane, S., Miller, E. C., DeHaan, T., & Stewart, L. (2013). Fathers and the Flexibility Stigma. *Journal of Social Issues*, 69(2), 279-302. doi: 10.1111/josi.12015; Dove Men+Care & Promundo. (2018, June). *Helping Dads Care: New National Survey Confirms That Societal Expectations, Limited Paternity Leave and Insufficient Support Keep Fathers from Taking Leave*. Retrieved 5 June 2025, from <https://www.unilever.com/files/f5202c91-9e9f-4300-b2cf-b768b67db2d5/promundo-dmc-helping-men-care-report-final.pdf> Boyens, C., Karpman, M., Smalligan, J. (2022 July). *Access to Paid Leave is Lowest among Worker with the Greatest Need*. Retrieved 5 June 2025 from Urban Institute: <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/access-paid-leave-lowest-among-workers-greatest-needs>

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⁵ Lenhart, A., Swenson, H., & Schulte, B. (2019, December 4). *Lifting the Barriers to Paid Family and Medical Leave for Men in the United States*. Retrieved 5 June 2025, from New America website: <https://www.newamerica.org/better-life-lab/reports/lifting-barriers-paid-family-and-medical-leave-men-united-states/>

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2023, Geographies: United States (Table S1101. Households and Families)*. Retrieved 5 June 2025, from <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2023.S1101> (Number of men with no spouse heading households with one or more children under 18)

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample (2023)*. Retrieved 5 June 2025, from <https://data.census.gov/app/mdat/ACSPUMS1Y2023/table?cv=ACSPUMS1Y2023&cv=R18&rv=SEX,CPLT&wt=PWGTP>. (Total men living in household with same-sex spouse or same-sex unmarried partner and one or more children under 18.)

⁸ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023, September). *National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2023 (See Excel tables, Civilian workers, Leave)*. Retrieved 5 June 2025, from <https://www.bls.gov/ebs/publications/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march2023.htm>

⁹ Brown, S., Herr, J., Roy, R., & Klerman, J. A. (2020, August). *Employee and Worksite Perspectives of the Family and Medical Leave Act: Results from the 2018 Surveys (Exhibit 3-3)*. Retrieved 5 June 2025, from https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/evaluation/pdf/WHF_FMLA2018SurveyResults_FinalReport_Aug2020.pdf

¹⁰ National Partnership for Women & Families. (2020, June). *Leading on Leave: Companies With New or Expanded Paid Leave Policies (2015-2019)*. Retrieved 5 June 2025, from <https://nationalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/new-and-expanded-employer-paid-family-leave-policies.pdf>; Maxwell, M. B., Johnson, A., Lee, M., & Miranda, L. (2018). *2018 U.S. LGBTQ Paid Leave Survey*. Retrieved 5 June 2025, from HRC website: https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/2018-HRC-LGBTQ-Paid-Leave-Survey.pdf?_ga=2.136232115.301839260.1579104902-1852936393.1579104902

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¹³ Pragg, B., & Knoester, C. (2017). Parental Leave Use Among Disadvantaged Fathers. *Journal of Family Issues*, 38(8), 1157-1185. doi: 10.1177/0192513X15623585; the National Partnership found similar patterns in its analysis of leave-taking by gender and income level in state paid leave program. See [NationalPartnership.org/PaidLeaveReport](https://nationalpartnership.org/PaidLeaveReport) for more information.

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⁴² See note 9, Brown, S., Herr, J., Roy, R., & Klerman, J. A. (2020).

⁴³ See note 5.

⁴⁴ See notes 5 and 25.

⁴⁵ See note 19, Berdahl & Moon

The National Partnership for Women & Families is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, reproductive health and rights, access to quality, affordable health care and policies that help all people meet the dual demands of work and family. More information is available at NationalPartnership.org.

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