

# Paid Leave Means a Stronger Iowa



## FACT SHEET /// FEBRUARY 2026

Most working people in the United States do not have paid family leave through their jobs, including about 79 percent — about 1.4 million workers — in Iowa.<sup>1</sup> Even unpaid leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act is inaccessible for 64 percent of Iowans.<sup>2</sup> The lack of paid leave has devastating costs for Iowans and their families and for the entire state's economy by shrinking the workforce and lowering productivity, cutting workers' incomes and harming public health amid a scarcity of reproductive and maternal health care.

### IOWA'S ECONOMY AND FAMILIES ARE SUFFERING

Impossible choices between work and family are hurting Iowa's economy — and this country's economy overall — leaving millions of workers suffering. **Paid leave means people — especially women — aren't forced to leave the labor force to care for their families or health.**

- » In Iowa, there is an 8 percentage-point gap in labor force participation between women and men.<sup>3</sup>
- » Nationally, if women participated in the U.S. labor force at the same rate as in Germany and Canada, our economy would have benefited from more than \$6.7 trillion in additional economic activity over the past decade.<sup>4</sup>
- » Each year, Iowans are unable to take 131,000 leaves that they need and lose \$484 million in wages due to unpaid or partially paid leave, including \$245 million lost by women.<sup>5</sup>
- » Nationwide, 79 percent of small business owners support a national paid leave program.<sup>6</sup> Paid leave improves employee retention, morale and productivity, reducing turnover for employers of all sizes and boosting the economy. But small employers often cannot provide the benefit — and universal paid leave would help them do that.<sup>7</sup>

### PEOPLE IN IOWA BOTH WORK AND PROVIDE CARE

Everyone benefits from paid leave. **Paid leave means all workers can take time off to provide the care their families need.**

- » In 79 percent of all Iowa households with children — nearly 555,000 homes — all parents report to work, and about 36,100 children are born in Iowa each year.<sup>8</sup>
- » Women's wages support their households. In Iowa, 79 percent of Black mothers, 51 percent of Latina mothers, 53 percent of white mothers and 52 percent of AAPI mothers are key family breadwinners. State-level data is limited, but

nationally 64 percent of Native American mothers are breadwinners.<sup>9</sup>

» Women make up nearly one-half of Iowa's labor force (47 percent) and more than one-quarter of its business owners (26 percent).<sup>10</sup>

» More than 80 percent of men believe that men and women should share care responsibilities equally,<sup>11</sup> but men only make up about 40 percent of caregivers for disabled and older adults.<sup>12</sup> Men want to participate more in caregiving, but unsupportive policies and stigma hold them back.<sup>13</sup>

## THE STATE'S CAREGIVING NEEDS ARE GROWING

Families' caregiving needs are increasing in Iowa. **Paid leave means older adults and disabled people can give and receive care, and our care workforce is more resilient.**

» Nearly one-quarter of Iowa workers are 55 and older,<sup>14</sup> and in the next 25 years, the number of Iowans who are 65 and older will grow by 56,000.<sup>15</sup>

» Nationwide, nearly one third of all adults aged 55-64 — and 41 percent of older Black women and 43 percent of older Latinas — hold a physically demanding job.<sup>16</sup> These jobs can worsen or cause serious medical conditions that require care, particularly in older workers and workers with disabilities.<sup>17</sup>

» Just 25 percent of Iowa nursing facilities meet recommended nurse staffing levels.<sup>18</sup> Paid leave reduces nursing home use<sup>19</sup> and can help recruitment and retention of care workers.<sup>20</sup>

» Paid leave helps family caregivers and disabled people (who are often caregivers themselves) manage their health and care needs while maintaining their income and employment.<sup>21</sup>

## A NATIONAL PAID LEAVE PLAN IS THE SOLUTION

**Iowans need a common sense, national paid leave program. We recommend one that:**

- includes all workers, no matter where they live or work or what kind of job they have;
- replaces enough income that workers at any income level can afford leave;
- provides enough time and covers the range of major needs workers face, including addressing their own health conditions, caring for seriously ill, injured or disabled family members and welcoming newborn, newly adopted or foster children;
- provides education and outreach to ease implementation for workers and small businesses;
- has a sustainable funding source without harming other essential programs.

**National paid family and medical leave means a stronger economy, healthier families and businesses, and greater equality for all women and families.**

To learn more, visit [NationalPartnership.org/PaidLeave](https://NationalPartnership.org/PaidLeave).

- 1 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023, September). *National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2023 (Excel tables)*. Retrieved 3 December 2025, from <https://www.bls.gov/ebs/publications/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2023.htm> (Percent of civilian workers who have access to paid family leave by Census division); U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2025, September). *Current Population Survey: State Employment and Unemployment (Table 1. Civilian labor force and unemployment by state and selected area, seasonally adjusted)*. Data for August 2025. Retrieved 3 December 2024, from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/laus.t01.htm>
- 2 diversitydatakids.org. (2024, March). *Indicators of FMLA Eligibility and Affordability for Working Adults*. Retrieved 3 December 2024, from Brandeis University, The Heller School, Institute for Child, Youth and Family Policy website [https://data.diversitydatakids.org/dataset?vocab\\_Subtopic=FMLA& ga=2.14449139.551199344.1673292061-1693714331.1656615545](https://data.diversitydatakids.org/dataset?vocab_Subtopic=FMLA& ga=2.14449139.551199344.1673292061-1693714331.1656615545); Workers are considered unable to take unpaid FMLA leave because they are either ineligible based on employer size or job tenure requirements or because 12 weeks of lost wages from unpaid leave would result in their family income dropping to or below 200 percent of the Supplemental Poverty Measure.
- 3 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2025). *Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Expanded State Employment Status Demographic Data (2024 Annual Averages)*. Retrieved 3 December 2025, from <https://www.bls.gov/lau/ex14tables.htm>
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- 5 Andrews, E., Mehta, S. & Milli, J. (2024, September). *Working People Need Access to Paid Leave*. Retrieved 3 December 2025, from Center for Law and Social Policy website: <https://www.clasp.org/publications/report/brief/working-people-need-access-to-paid-leave/>
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- 7 National Partnership for Women & Families. (2025, January). *Paid Leave Works: Evidence from State Programs*. Retrieved 3 January 2026, from <https://nationalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/paid-leave-works-evidence-from-state-programs.pdf>
- 8 Osterman, M. J. K., Hamilton, B. E., Martin, J. A., Driscoll, A. K., & Valenzuela, C. P. (2025, March). Births: Final Data for 2023 (Table 6. Births, by race and Hispanic origin of mother: United States, each state and territory, 2023). *National Vital Statistics Reports*, 74(1). Retrieved 3 December 2025, from <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr74/nvsr74-1.pdf>; U.S. Census Bureau. (2025, September). *2024 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (Table DP03)*. Retrieved 3 December 2025, from <https://data.census.gov/>
- 9 Shaw, E., Mason, C. N., Lacarte, V., & Jauregui, E. (2020, May).  *Holding Up Half the Sky: Mothers as Workers, Primary Caregivers, & Breadwinners During COVID-19*. Retrieved 3 December 2025, from Institute for Women's Policy Research website: <http://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Holding-Up-Half-the-Sky-Mothers-as-Breadwinners.pdf>; “Key breadwinner” means a single mother who heads a household or a married mother who contributes 40 percent or more of the couple’s joint earnings. Nationally, 79 percent of Black mothers, 64 percent of Native American mothers, 60 percent of mothers identifying as multiracial or “other” race, 49 percent of Latina mothers, 48 percent of white mothers and 43 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander mothers are key breadwinners.
- 10 See note 3, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; Institute for Women's Policy Research. (2021). *Status of Women in the States (Table 4.1)*. Retrieved 3 December 2025 from <https://statusofwomendata.org/explore-the-data/poverty-opportunity/additional-state-data/composite/>
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- 19 Arora, K., & Wolf, D. A. (2017, November.) Does Paid Family Leave Reduce Nursing Home Use? The California Experience. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 37(1), 38-62. doi: 10.1002/pam.22038
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