

# Fathers Need Paid Family and Medical Leave

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Men increasingly want to be involved parents and caregivers in their families,<sup>1</sup> and the vast majority of the public says it's equally important for mothers and fathers to bond with babies.<sup>2</sup> Although some employers recognize that nearly all employees will at some point need paid leave to care for a new child or other loved one – and provide gender-neutral leave for parents and family caregivers – most still do not. As a result, men must often forgo parental leave or take shorter periods of family leave to avoid losing income and facing workplace stigma.<sup>3</sup>

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 critical income when they need time to welcome a child, address a medical condition or provide family care.

## 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> Yet most men still do not have access to 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.

- Just 23 percent of all workers have access to paid family leave through an employer.<sup>6</sup>
- Employer-based policies often are not equitable, even within a workplace. Only 13 percent of private sector workers are employed at worksites that offer paid paternity leave to *all* male employees.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> And even when men

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**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.***

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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.<sup>9</sup>

- 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup>
- Being a good financial provider continues to be seen as an important part of being a good father,<sup>12</sup> and outdated, gendered norms in too many workplaces still assume that being a caregiver is incompatible with success at a job.<sup>13</sup> As a result, men, especially those without paid leave, often feel pressure to limit their time off of work in order to keep a steady income.<sup>14</sup>
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, an inability to access paid leave amid increased family caregiving needs has exacerbated the financial strain on working parents. While women’s unpaid work increased more, fathers on average provided nearly 20 hours per week of unpaid care during the COVID-19 crisis. If paid at a living wage of \$15 per hour, the value of fathers’ unpaid care in 2020 would add up to \$426.2 billion.<sup>15</sup>

## Many Men Face Stigma for Taking Leave

Men need greater access to paid family leave. The United States also needs a cultural shift in attitudes about men as caregivers so they can be confident that they can use the leave that is available to them without negative repercussions.<sup>16</sup> Many fathers want to be more involved with their families, play a larger caregiving role, and support their partners’ careers.<sup>17</sup> But taking time away from work for family caregiving can bring harassment, discrimination or mistreatment<sup>18</sup> that result in fathers being less likely to take the leave that is available to them. It is also a disincentive to take leave if doing so negatively affects their careers and their families’ economic opportunities due to lower pay or being passed over for promotions.<sup>19</sup>

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**THREE-QUARTERS (74 PERCENT) OF ADULTS POINT TO THE PENALTIES OTHER MEN HAVE SUFFERED AS A DETERRENT FOR MEN TAKING LEAVE.**

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

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## 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.

- **Gender-equal paid leave promotes children's development and family well-being.** Among opposite-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,<sup>20</sup> and are more likely to have a stable marriage or relationship with the other parent.<sup>21</sup> Involved fathers promote children's educational attainment and emotional stability and reduce maternal stress,<sup>22</sup> and involvement in the first six months after birth can also mean both mother and baby sleep better.<sup>23</sup> When men attend prenatal medical appointments and remain involved throughout the pregnancy, women have safer births and decreased risk of postpartum depression.<sup>24</sup> New mothers have fewer postpartum health complications and improved mental health when new fathers can also take paid leave.<sup>25</sup>
- **Households are more equal when fathers have paid leave.** When new dads in households with a mother and father take paid leave, their families experience a more equitable division of parental responsibilities, including household chores and direct caregiving.<sup>26</sup> Fathers who take paid family leave also say they are more comfortable as active, responsible co-parents.<sup>27</sup>
- **Paid leave for men supports working mothers.** In 71 percent of U.S. households with children (more than 48 million households), all parents are employed,<sup>28</sup> and women are key breadwinners in nearly two-thirds of families with children.<sup>29</sup> Yet women are still more likely than men to stop working or to work part time after the birth of a child.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> Access to paid leave also affects women's wages and, thus, their families' economic security. 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,<sup>32</sup> 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 the most expensive health event many families face during reproductive years.<sup>33</sup> But new fathers who take paid leave are significantly less likely than fathers who do not to report receiving public assistance or food stamps (now known as SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) in the year following their child's birth (controlling for other relevant factors).<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup>

## Fathers Should Have Access to Paid Family Leave No Matter Where They Live or Work

Public policies help change culture and practice. Ten states including the District of Columbia have passed paid family and medical leave programs that include coverage for working people who need 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. Over time, men's use of these programs for parental leave and family caregiving has become more equal. In California, men now file nearly 40 percent of claims for paid family leave to care for a new child, up from 17 percent when the law took effect in 2004.<sup>36</sup> In Rhode Island, which implemented paid family leave in 2014, 42 percent of child bonding claims in 2020 were filed by men.<sup>37</sup>

### 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.** When leave is unpaid or replaces only a small share of usual wages, men are significantly less likely to use it. This is likely due in part to gender norms about breadwinning roles. In addition, few couples can afford to lose two incomes during a period of unpaid leave – and because of the gender wage gap, heterosexual couples often resolve that dilemma by keeping the higher-earning man at work.<sup>38</sup> Higher wage replacement rates, even up to 100 percent, substantially increase men's use of leave.<sup>39</sup>
- **Cover the range of caregiving needs.** Nationally, three-quarters of instances of leave-taking are for purposes other than bonding with a new child.<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup> 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 American Families Plan and Building an Economy for Families Act would create a national paid family and medical leave program** that would enable workers to receive up to 85 percent of their wages for up to 12 weeks to address their own serious health condition; to deal with the serious health condition of a family member (defined inclusively); to bond with a new child; or for certain military caregiving purposes. The American Families Plan would also provide up to 12 weeks of paid safe leave for needs related to domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking, and up to three days of leave for bereavement.

Learn more at [NationalPartnership.org/PaidLeave](https://NationalPartnership.org/PaidLeave).

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<sup>2</sup> Horowitz, J. M., Parker, K., Graf, N., & Livingston, G. (2017, March 23). *Americans Widely Support Paid Family and Medical Leave, but Differ Over Specific Policies*. Retrieved 8 June 2021, from Pew Research Center website:

<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2017/03/23/americans-widely-support-paid-family-and-medical-leave-but-differ-over-specific-policies/>

<sup>3</sup> 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 8 June 2021, from [https://promundoglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Promundo-DMC-Helping-Men-Care-Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://promundoglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Promundo-DMC-Helping-Men-Care-Report_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Parker, K., & Wang, W. (2013, March 14). *Modern Parenthood: Roles of Moms and Dads Converge as They Balance Work and Family*. Retrieved 8 June 2021, from Pew Research Center website: <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/03/14/modern-parenthood-roles-of-moms-and-dads-converge-as-they-balance-work-and-family/>

<sup>5</sup> 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 8 June 2021, from New America website: <https://www.newamerica.org/better-life-lab/reports/lifting-barriers-paid-family-and-medical-leave-men-united-states/>

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2021, September). *National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2021* (Table 33). Retrieved 29 September 2021, from <https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2021/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2021.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> 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 8 June 2021, from [https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/evaluation/pdf/WHD\\_FMLA2018SurveyResults\\_FinalReport\\_Aug2020.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/evaluation/pdf/WHD_FMLA2018SurveyResults_FinalReport_Aug2020.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> National Partnership for Women & Families. (2020, June). *Leading on Leave: Companies With New or Expanded Paid Leave Policies (2015-2019)*. Retrieved 8 June 2021, from <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-leave/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 8 June 2021, from HRC website: [https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/2018-HRC-LGBTQ-Paid-Leave-Survey.pdf?\\_ga=2.136232115.301839260.1579104902-1852936393.1579104902](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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<sup>36</sup> State of California Employment Development Department. (n.d.). *Paid Family Leave (PFL) Program Statistics*. Retrieved 8 June 2021, from [https://www.edd.ca.gov/about\\_edd/pdf/qspfl\\_PFL\\_Program\\_Statistics.pdf](https://www.edd.ca.gov/about_edd/pdf/qspfl_PFL_Program_Statistics.pdf). Note: For claims made as part of the Paid Family Leave Program in California in 2004–2005, figures are no longer published on the CA EDD website; please contact the National Partnership for more information.

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<sup>40</sup> See note 7.

<sup>41</sup> See note 5.

<sup>42</sup> See notes 5 and 25.

<sup>43</sup> See note 16, 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](http://NationalPartnership.org).

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