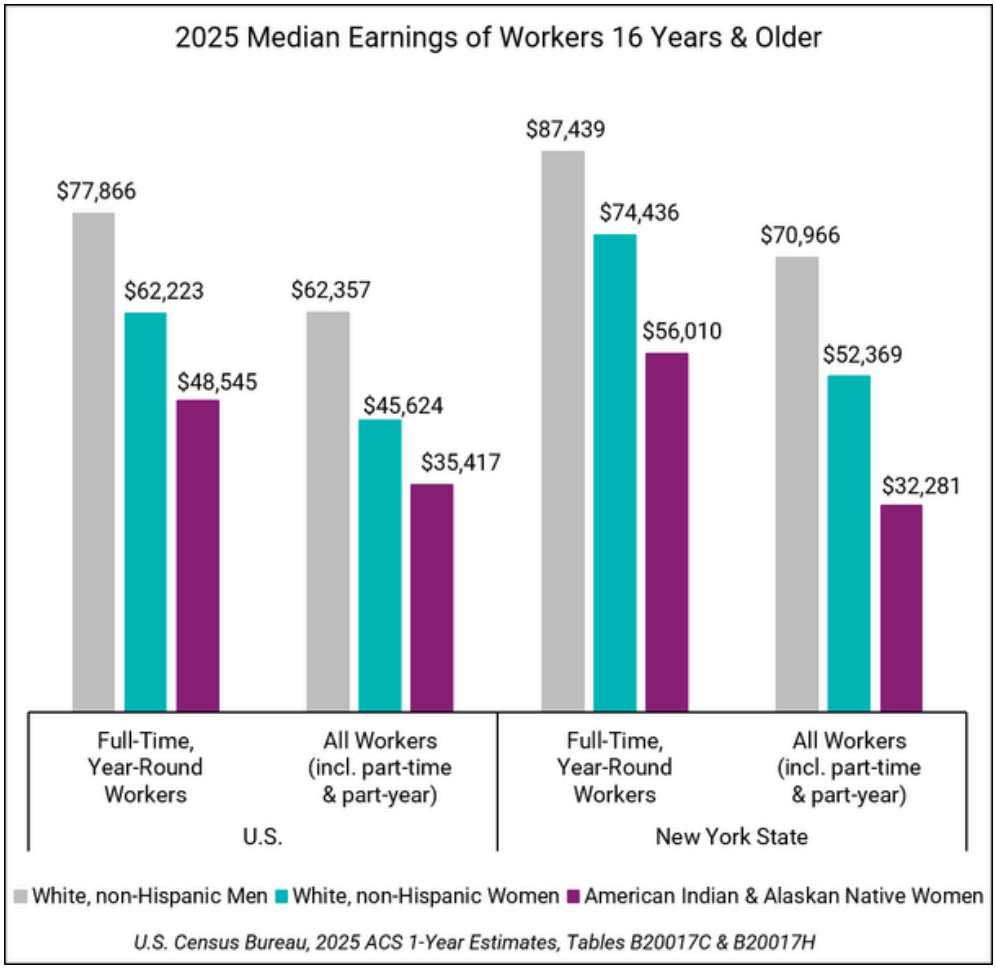
Pay Equity

Native Women's Equal Pay Day

WNY WOMEN'S FOUNDATION

Native Women's Equal Pay Day marks how far into the current year Native women must work to be paid what White, non-Hispanic men were paid in the previous year. This year, that date falls on November 19, meaning nearly a full year more. This highlights the intersection of gender, racial, and ethnic biases and the enduring impact of colonization and displacement, whose effects show up today in barriers such as discrimination, occupational segregation, and limited educational and economic opportunities.

In 2025, Native women in the U.S. working full-time, year-round were paid **62 cents** for every dollar paid to White, non-Hispanic men. The 38-cent wage gap translates to an **annual loss of over $29,300.** When part-time and part-year workers are included, the gap widens to 43 cents *(U.S. Census Bureau, 2026)*.



U.S. Census Bureau, 2025 ACS 1-Year Estimates, Tables B20017C & B20017H

Native women's economic experiences differ across Tribes and communities, and wage disparities also vary by geography. Among full-time, year-round workers, the wage gap for Native women in New York State (NYS) is slightly smaller than the national gap, with **Native women paid 64 cents** for every dollar paid to White, non-Hispanic men. However, when part-time and part-year workers are included, **Native women are only paid 45 cents**, compared with 57 cents nationally *(U.S. Census Bureau, 2026)*.

If the **$31,400 annual wage gap** for Native women working full-time, year-round in NYS were eliminated for one year, they could pay for:

- 61 months of groceries OR
- 29 months of housing OR
- 22 months of child care for 1 infant

(NYS DOL, Self-Sufficiency Estimator)

For More Information: **VISIT** wnywomensfoundation.org | **EMAIL** wnywfdn@wnywfdn.org
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While women overall have been slowly moving toward equal pay, Native women have been left behind. In fact, in 2005, Native women working full-time, year-round were paid 62% of what White, non-Hispanic men were paid. Over the past twenty years, the ratio has risen and fallen but never exceeded 62%, and **today it is the same as it was two decades ago** *(IWPR, 2026)*.

If progress continues at the same rate as the past 20 years, Native women working full-time, year-round won't reach pay parity with White, non-Hispanic men until

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(IWPR, 2025)

While the causes of the wage gap are complex, occupational segregation is a significant factor. **Native women are overrepresented in lower-wage jobs**, such as health care support and cleaning and maintenance, and **underrepresented in leadership and management**. More than half of employed Native women work in service or sales and office occupations *(Equal Rights Advocates, 2026)*. These sectors are often undervalued and underpaid, frequently lack benefits such as paid sick leave, parental leave, health insurance, or retirement plans, and may offer limited opportunities for advancement.

Lifetime Wage Gap

For Native women, the long-term economic consequences of the wage gap are staggering. Over the course of a 40-year career, Native women in NYS working full-time, year-round lose more than **$1.2 million** *(U.S. Census Bureau, 2026)*.

Part-time and part-year work is also common among Native women, which contributes to a wider wage gap when all workers are included. **In 2025, nearly 4 in 10 Native women worked part-time or seasonally** *(NPWF, 2026)*. Limited job opportunities make steady, full-time work harder to find, especially in rural and reservation communities, where long distances to work, limited access to child care, and a lack of public transportation create further barriers *(Equal Rights Advocates, 2026)*. Native women also face higher rates of poverty, unemployment, sexual harassment, and violence, all of which further limit economic security *(Equal Rights Advocates, 2026)*.

The lack of sufficient data on Native women reflects real challenges in ensuring that this group of workers has the supports they need to achieve economic security and career advancement. A proposed U.S. Census Bureau rule would remove race and ethnicity questions from the decennial census, data that researchers rely on to produce reliable estimates from surveys *(U.S. Census Bureau, 2026)*. Without this data, the full extent of the economic inequalities Native women face would be hidden *(KFF, 2026)*.



In 2024 alone, Native women workers **lost approximately $37 billion** to the wage gap *(NPWF, 2026)*.

Native Women's Equal Pay Day, falling in November, is a reminder that eliminating the wage gap, one of the widest of any group, requires action from employers, policymakers, and society. Native women deserve fairness, economic security, and safety. Expanding access to child care and paid family leave, enforcing equal pay laws, and protecting data are essential steps. The way forward starts with listening to Native communities, respecting their right to self-govern and their cultural traditions, and ensuring that they have the resources they need to thrive. The path may be challenging, but pay equity for all women is within reach.

A note on terms: This fact sheet uses "Native women" to refer to women who self-identify as American Indian and Alaska Native in U.S. Census Bureau and other federal data. We recognize that Native women belong to many distinct Tribes and communities, and that such data cannot fully reflect their identities or experiences.

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