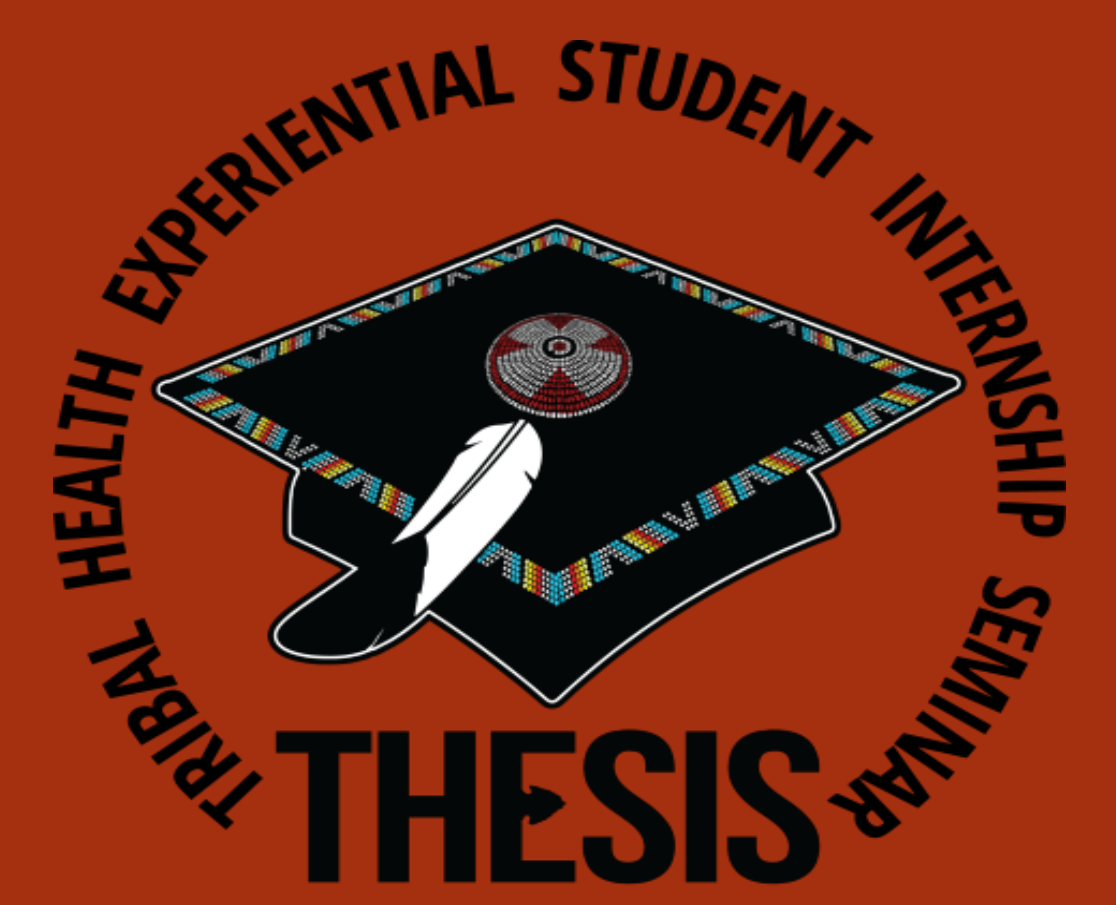


Addressing the Impact of Wage Inequality on American Indian/Alaska Native Women

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Introduction

Wage Inequality is the method in which wages are distributed unevenly among a population. Earning just 60 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men, American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) women in the United States lose roughly 1-million-dollars in earned income over the course of a 40-year career. As a result of racism, sexism, and lack of pay protection, the wage gap among AIAN women varies by tribe and increases with education level. The consequences are dire for women and families and lead to **Increased Poverty Rates, Increased Food Insecurity, and Increased mortality rates from preventable diseases.**

Why is it a Public Health Issue

Food Deserts can exist both in rural areas and large cities.

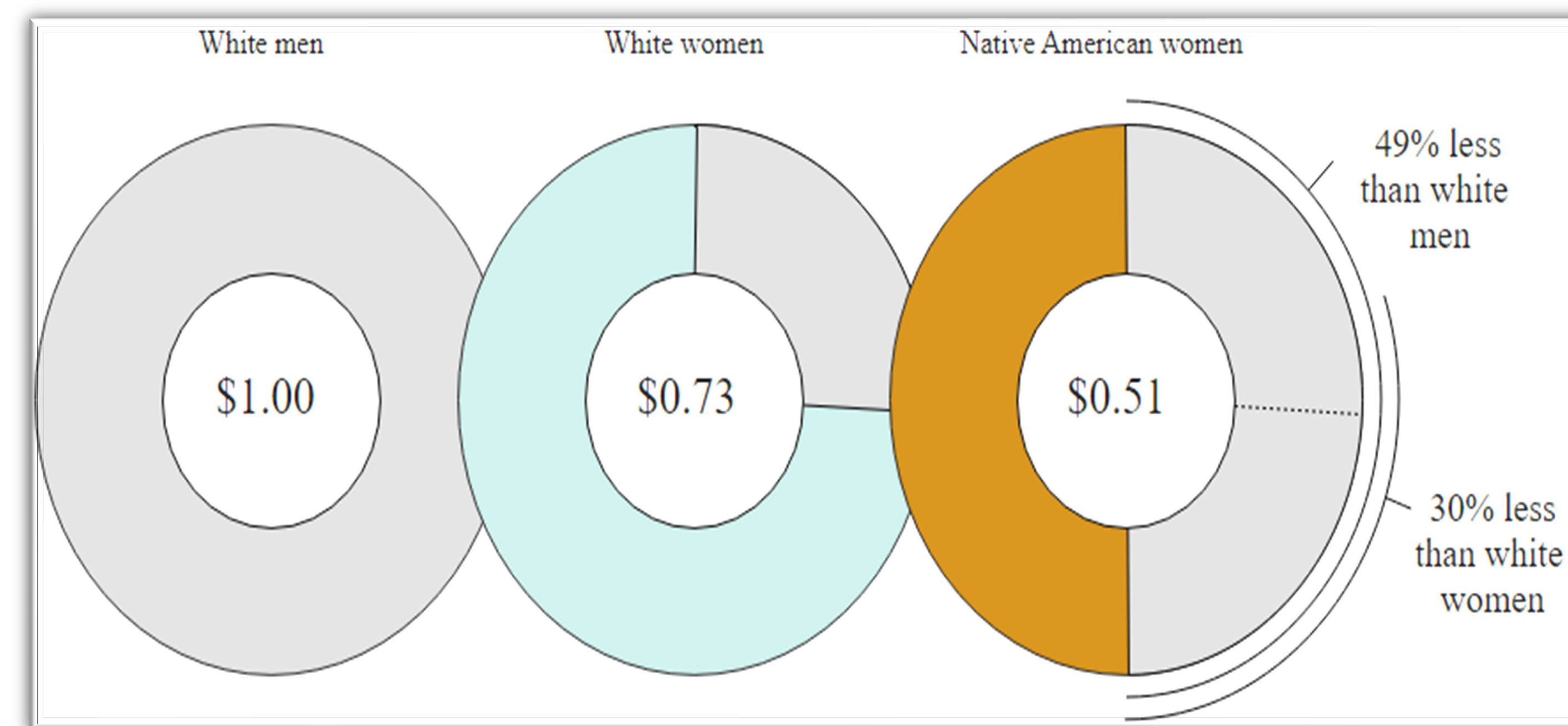
Nearly 3 in 5 Native women are breadwinners in their families, therefore, inadequate income increases food instability for the entire household. Limited access to healthy choices, an inability to afford nutritious alternatives, and the historic destruction of traditional foodways, force families to rely on cheap bulk foods due to the long shelf life.

Natives are more likely to die from preventable illness, including chronic liver disease and cirrhosis, diabetes, and chronic lower respiratory diseases.

The Indian Health Service (IHS) provides health care to an estimated 2.2 million Native Americans in the U.S., but chronic underfunding leads to limited services and a shortage of medical personnel. Coupled with the inability to pay for private insurance, many women are unable to receive adequate medical care for preventative services. Lack of paid sick days or family and medical leave means women lose even more money due to illness.

Native Americans have the highest national poverty rate.

Although poverty tends to be higher in rural areas, the poverty gap in rural and urban areas is still greater for Natives than whites living in the same locations. This means that poverty is not merely driven by location and instead job loss and availability. Women are often employed in very low-wage, part-time, service-sector jobs, or public-sector work in education and public administration. The wage gap means many working women have less money to pay for necessities such as rent, groceries or utilities.



Eliminating the wage gap would give Native women enough money to (on average):

- More than **two and a half years** of childcare
- More than **two and a half additional years** of tuition and fees for a four-year public university, or the full cost of tuition and fees for a two-year community college
- Nearly **17 additional months** of premiums for employer-based health insurance
- **Two and a half years** (158 weeks) of food for her family
- **Fifteen months** of mortgage and utilities payments
- Almost **two years** of rent
- More than **21 additional years** of birth control or
- Enough money to pay off the average student loan debt in about **one and a half years**

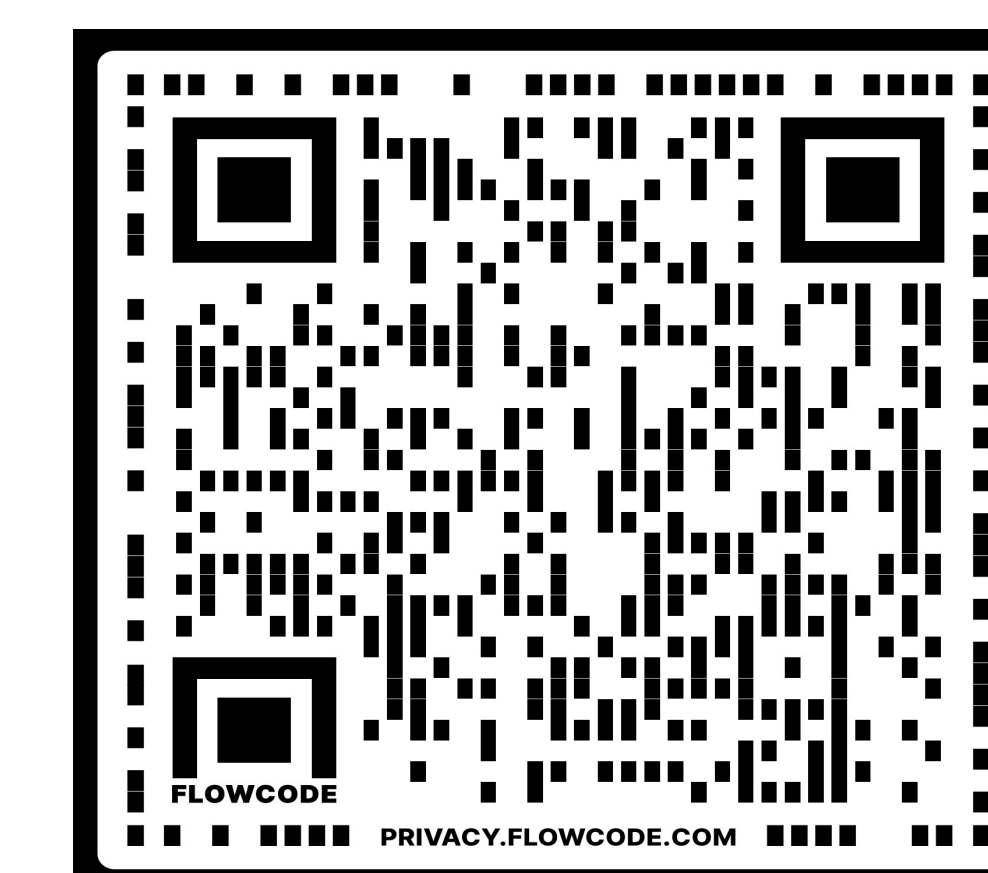
How can equity be achieved

- Federal agencies must collaborate with tribal governments, Native experts, and Native communities to develop better data about Native women's economic experiences in ways that tribal policies.
- Support data enforcement tools such as Component 2 of the Employer Information Report (EEO-1) which would require employers to provide information on compensation broken down by race, gender, and ethnicity in addition to data about the structure of their workers by race, gender, and ethnicity across 10 occupational categories.
- Pass the Paycheck Fairness Act. This would reduce wage inequality and increase equal pay protections by requiring employers to prove that pay variations between men and women are job-related and prohibit retaliation against workers who discuss their pay with co-workers.
- Expand policies that provide all workers with paid family and medical leave and affordable childcare and elder care. This ensures workers can care for themselves and their families without losing out on pay.
- Leverage the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in enforcing federal laws that protect job applicants and employees from discrimination due to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability or genetic information. For example, in 2020 the Justice Department reached a settlement with the South Dakota Department of Social Services as a result of alleged discriminated against Native American job applicants at its Pine Ridge Indian Reservation Office.

Conclusion

- Current organizations include Native American Rights Fund, Native Women Lead, Native Movement, Indigenous Women Rising, Seeding Sovereignty, Honor the Earth, Indigenous Peoples Power Project, and NDN Collective. These groups advocate for Indigenous communities by creating awareness and providing support and resources.
- Food sovereignty activities help Native communities by restoring traditional food systems and increasing access to healthy foods via mobile grocery markets, worksites, and convenience stores.

References



Wage Inequality Digital Story

