



# **PATHS TO PROVIDING SUPPORTS FOR WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS**

**/ KATE BAHN INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN'S POLICY RESEARCH**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Workforce development programs, and the funding behind them, are designed to expand skills development and labor market opportunities to those who face barriers to upward mobility. Women without a college degree are emblematic of those who should be targeted by such programs, which offer an alternative career pathway for women who have been limited by gendered segregation in our labor market — particularly, women seeking work in male-dominated fields like construction or high-growth fields like technology. Even within women-dominated fields such as health care and education, upward mobility may be limited without additional training and certification. These pathways are also often associated with better pay and benefits and more long-term job security for women.

Yet, supporting a dynamic labor market with more opportunities for women is easier said than done. Many of the barriers that women face in the labor market are not fully addressed through education and training alone, resulting in a persistent and unacceptable gender wage gap at all levels of training and education. In fact, recent research from the U.S. Census Bureau finds that short-term certificates have

the greatest gender wage gap.<sup>270</sup> In contrast, women with a certificate from a longer-term one- to two-year program, like those for dental hygienists and phlebotomists, have a smaller gender wage gap than those with a certificate from a short-term program. In other words, training is a necessary but not sufficient condition: It's the first step to upward mobility, but on its own will not guarantee that women will be able to reap the same labor market benefits as men.

► In other words, training is a necessary but not sufficient condition: It's the first step to upward mobility, but on its own will not guarantee that women will be able to reap the same labor market benefits as men.

Wraparound services and other supportive services in workforce development programs are essential to overcoming some of these barriers and ensuring that training is accessible to all potential learners. Wraparound services commonly include basic needs such as child care, food access, and transportation that facilitate participation in training programs. Under a more expansive definition, these services can also include income supports, such as stipends during training, public benefits, housing subsidies, and health care. These services can be directly provided by a workforce development program, or the program can facilitate access to existing services. Wraparound services are often part of the design of programs that are specifically targeted to disadvantaged groups. Research on barriers to women's upward mobility clearly demonstrates their importance for women looking to grow their skill sets and career pathways.

Supportive services are not just important for accomplishing the goals of workforce development programs targeted to specific groups like women; they also lead to broader benefits across the economy. The United States is unique among advanced economies in having experienced declining female labor force participation since 2000<sup>271</sup>, despite some signs of improvement in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>272</sup> Indeed, the research on women's declining labor force participation speculates that it is precisely the lack of social support that has left U.S. women behind compared to other advanced economies like those in Europe.<sup>273</sup> And broadly, a better-trained workforce improves

---

270 Ariel J. Binder et al., "The Gender Pay Gap and Its Determinants across the Human Capital Distribution" (Discussion Paper CES 23-31, U.S. Census Bureau, Center for Economic Studies, Washington, D.C., June 2023).

271 Sandra E. Black, Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach, and Audrey Breitwieser, "The Recent Decline in Women's Labor Force Participation," Brookings Institution, October 19, 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-recent-decline-in-womens-labor-force-participation/>.

272 "Labor Force Participation Rate - Women." Federal Reserve Economic Data (FRED), February 7, 2025. <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/LNS11300002>.

273 Francine D. Blau and Lawrence M. Kahn, "Female Labor Supply: Why Is the United States Falling Behind?" *American Economic Review* 103, no. 3 (May 2013): 251–56.

overall economic productivity, ensuring the continued resiliency and competitiveness of the U.S. economy.<sup>274</sup> When more women have access to workforce development that is paired with social supports and jobs with adequate benefits, the pool of talent available to businesses expands, and women's labor force participation has the potential to grow.

▶ Supportive services are not just important for accomplishing the goals of workforce development programs targeted to specific groups like women; they also lead to broader benefits across the economy.

## THE NEED FOR SUPPORTS IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Wraparound supports are not a monolith; key to their success is understanding the barriers the targeted groups face. Women workers are one of the primary targets of workforce development efforts, particularly women in traditionally male-dominated fields such as building trades or in high-tech occupations that offer good salaries without college degree requirements. Looking to the broader literature on the barriers to upward mobility that women face, we can begin to understand what supports would be most helpful to their success.

Note that many of the barriers that women face to participation in these programs — including housing instability, family responsibilities, and discrimination and biases within industries — are true of many marginalized groups like justice-involved individuals,<sup>275</sup> displaced workers, and workers from low-income communities, so the findings here apply broadly.

While women are now half of the workforce, they still face significant barriers to full inclusion. Women are increasingly likely to be breadwinners for their families,<sup>276</sup> either supporting children as a single parent or earning at least half of the family income in a two-parent household. Yet women continue to be primarily responsible for providing for caregiving needs — which can include child care, elder care, spousal care, and care for disabled family members — even as

---

274 V. Scott H. Solberg, "Career and Workforce Development and Its Role in Maintaining a Competitive Global Economy," in *The Handbook of Career and Workforce Development*, ed. V. Scott H. Solberg and Saba Rasheed Ali (New York: Routledge, 2017), 15–38.

275 "Justice involved" refers to current or prior experience with arrest and/or incarceration, including as a juvenile.

276 Sarah Jane Glynn, "The New Breadwinners: 2010 Update," Center for American Progress, April 16, 2012, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-new-breadwinners-2010-update/>.

their families depend on their earnings.<sup>277</sup> As an organizing principle, the supports for participants of workforce development programs need to be designed to meet family needs so that women are able to participate. “Family needs” is a conceptually broad term but includes income and the material needs it otherwise provides — such as housing, food, transportation, and health care. It also includes the flexibility and supports to facilitate caregiving, such as alternative schedules and child care access.

▶ As an organizing principle, the supports for participants of workforce development programs need to be designed to meet family needs so that women are able to participate.

## INCOME SUPPORTS

Income supports are among the most basic needs for workers who want to invest in additional training but face labor market barriers. Rather than creating a disincentive to work, antipoverty income supports, according to research findings, facilitate upward mobility beyond low-wage work,<sup>278</sup> as does more generous unemployment insurance.<sup>279</sup> While income supports are not commonly included as a so-called wraparound support for workforce development, income during training can help participants access the other needs they have — such as food, transportation, and housing — to facilitate entrance into and completion of a program.

Though they are increasingly likely to be breadwinners, women still have less access to wealth,<sup>280</sup> making income a fundamental necessity while seeking additional training. Yet insufficient alternative income streams while in training may lead many women to live paycheck to paycheck in dead-end jobs rather than invest in new career pathways.

▶ The growing cost of rental housing in the United States effectively forces many workers to choose to make ends meet through low-wage work rather than invest in additional training.

277 Katherine Gallagher Robbins and Jessica Mason, “Americans’ Unpaid Caregiving Is Worth More Than \$1 Trillion Annually — and Women Are Doing Two-Thirds of the Work” (blog), National Partnership for Women and Families, June 27, 2024, <https://nationalpartnership.org/americans-unpaid-caregiving-worth-1-trillion-annually-women-two-thirds-work/>.

278 Michael A. Schultz, “Bring the Households Back In: The Effect of Poverty on the Mobility of Low-Wage Workers to Better Wages” (working paper, Washington Center for Equitable Growth, August 2021).

279 Ammar Farooq, Adriana D. Kugler, and Umberto Muratori, “Do Unemployment Insurance Benefits Improve Match and Employer Quality? Evidence from Recent U.S. Recessions,” (Working Paper w27574, National Bureau of Economic Research, July 2020).

280 Angela Wang Lee, “The Gender Wealth Gap in the United States: Trends and Explanations,” *Social Science Research* 107 (September 2022): 102745.

For example, Chapters 8 and 9 of this volume describe the living stipends provided to participants during training through the nationwide Google Career Certificate Fund and through New Jersey's Pay It Forward program.

Some training programs, particularly those involving apprenticeships, directly provide income to participants. However, women seeking these opportunities must contend with two major barriers: the small pool of available apprenticeships in the U.S. and the gender gaps and biases<sup>281</sup> within the ones that are available. The United States has fewer than 700,000 registered apprenticeships, and they are more prevalent in male-dominated fields; women make up only 14% of participants in these programs.<sup>282</sup> Additionally, research from Canada finds that women still tend to earn less than men in apprenticeships in male-dominated fields.<sup>283</sup>

## HOUSING

Similar to the necessity of income supports, a stable foundation for basic needs like housing is an input to upward mobility rather than a disincentive. Housing costs can be an additional barrier to participation in workforce development programs. The growing cost of rental housing in the United States<sup>284</sup> effectively forces many workers to choose to make ends meet through low-wage work rather than invest in additional training. Publicly funded programs designed to alleviate housing costs often have income limits, which, combined with the already insufficient availability of subsidies,<sup>285</sup> may not support participation in workforce development programs.

## CAREGIVING SUPPORTS

From child care to elder care, as well as caring for one's own health, research finds that for women, care responsibilities limit schedule flexibility and total time available to devote to traditional workforce development programs. Though more than half of low-income parents have a high school degree or less, and less than 10% are actively

---

281 See Alison Fuller and Lorna Unwin, "The Challenges Facing Young Women in Apprenticeships," in *Gender Differences in Aspirations and Attainment: A Life Course Perspective*, ed. Ingrid Schoon and Jacquelynne S. Eccles (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014): 182–99, and Linda Simon and Kira Clarke, "Apprenticeships Should Work for Women Too!" *Education + Training* 58, no. 6 (July 2016): 578–96.

282 Ariane Hegewisch, "As Apprenticeships Expand, Breaking Down Occupational Segregation Is Key to Women's Economic Success: Gender, Race, and the Wage Gap in Apprenticeship," Institute for Women's Policy Research, March 2024.

283 Kristyn Frank and Marc Frenette, "How Do Women in Male-Dominated Apprenticeships Fare in the Labour Market?" Statistics Canada, March 13, 2019.

284 Whitney Airgood-Obrycki, Alexander Hermann, and Sophia Wedeen, "The Rent Eats First: Rental Housing Unaffordability in the United States," *Housing Policy Debate* 33, no. 6 (2023): 1272–92.

285 James A. Riccio, "Subsidized Housing and Employment: Building Evidence of What Works," in *Revisiting Rental Housing: Policies, Programs, and Priorities*, ed. Nicolas P. Retsinas and Eric S. Belsky (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute Press, Harvard University Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2008): 191–224.

engaged in seeking additional training or education,<sup>286</sup> caregiving responsibilities have been found to limit women's labor force participation, with little effect on similar men. Research finds that, in the workplace, a culture of flexibility given to care responsibilities can reduce the psychological distress resulting from work-life conflict more than offering flexible scheduling or flexible work locations, particularly for women workers.<sup>287</sup>

## HEALTH CARE

An additional common need among workforce development program participants in general — and women in particular — is access to health care. In one survey of workforce development programs in Chicago, program participants — the majority of whom were women — listed physical and psychological health conditions as being among the most common causes of difficulty finding employment.<sup>288</sup> While many traditional four-year colleges require students to have health insurance and may offer their own insurance programs, typically the only path for training program participants to get health insurance through the program is if the sponsoring institution or employer already offers it to other students or workers — and even then, the participant may not be eligible.

▶ Though more than half of low-income parents have a high school degree or less, and less than 10% are actively engaged in seeking additional training or education, caregiving responsibilities have been found to limit women's labor force participation, with little effect on similar men.

Medicaid is one option that may be available to workforce development program participants, but accessibility varies across the states, and proposals proven harmful in some cases have been made to connect reciprocity to work requirements<sup>289</sup> that could limit participation in workforce programs.<sup>290</sup> For example, when Arkansas experimented with Medicaid work requirements in 2018, one-quarter

---

286 Yeonjung Lee and Fengyan Tang, "More Caregiving, Less Working: Caregiving Roles and Gender Difference," *Journal of Applied Gerontology* 34, no. 4 (2015): 465–83.

287 Deniz Yucel and Wen Fan, "Workplace Flexibility, Work–Family Interface, and Psychological Distress: Differences by Family Caregiving Obligations and Gender," *Applied Research in Quality of Life* 18, no. 4 (2023): 1825–47.

288 Dana Madigan and Tessa Bonney, "Reemployment Needs and Barriers of Users of Workforce Development Programs: A Mixed-Methods Study," *Workplace Health & Safety* 69, no.11 (2021): 494–505.

289 Benjamin D. Sommers et al., "Medicaid Work Requirements in Arkansas: Two-Year Impacts on Coverage, Employment, and Affordability of Care," *Health Affairs* 39, no. 9 (September 2020): 1522–30.

290 Anna Cielinski, "Workforce System Not Funded or Structured to Help Medicaid Recipients Keep Health Care," fact sheet, Center for Law and Social Policy, October 2018, [https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2018/10/2018\\_workforcesystemnotfunded.pdf](https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2018/10/2018_workforcesystemnotfunded.pdf).

of the state's Medicaid recipients lost coverage within the first half year.<sup>291</sup> Other economics research supports this connection between health, labor market mobility, and gender, finding that states with more generous Medicaid eligibility have higher rates of upward occupational mobility, with greater impacts on women workers.<sup>292</sup>

▶ In one survey of workforce development programs in Chicago, program participants — the majority of whom were women — listed physical and psychological health conditions as being among the most common causes of difficulty finding employment.

Material needs and caregiving needs are two broad areas that must be satisfied for women to be able to invest time and energy into workforce development programs. Given women's role as the primary breadwinners and caregivers with families, lack of access to these supports while in training may deter many women from starting or completing additional training — even though doing so may limit their own upward economic mobility as well as that of their families.

## EXISTING APPROACHES TO SUPPORTING WOMEN IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Many workforce development programs are aware of the barriers that women and other disadvantaged groups face in participating in career training. From directly providing supports to helping participants navigate publicly available supports and connecting with third-party intermediaries, workforce development programs must match barriers of the particular populations they serve with appropriate solutions to help them complete the training successfully.

Some supports may be easy to provide or offer light-touch support but have minimal impact on program success or long-term outcomes. Other approaches require overhauling workforce development systems or forming innovative new partnerships to support those who are seeking new skills along new career pathways. And public policy can also be improved upon with these goals in mind.

## PAID TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

While not typically considered a “wraparound support,” apprenticeships and other paid training programs are the most straightforward way for program participants to ensure basic income needs are met while

291 LaDonna Pavetti et al., “Expanding Work Requirements Would Make It Harder for People to Meet Basic Needs,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, March 15, 2023, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/expanding-work-requirements-would-make-it-harder-for-people-to-meet>.

292 Ammar Farooq and Adriana Kugler, “Impacts of Public Health Insurance on Occupational Upgrading,” ILR Review 75, no. 1 (2022): 225–50.



advancing their careers. When a training program offers its participants an hourly wage or a living stipend, the need for additional and custom supportive services is alleviated: Participants can use the cash income to exercise their own preferences related to housing, transportation, and food, thus enabling them to better provide for their needs as well as those of their families.<sup>293</sup>

▶ Given women's role as the primary breadwinners and caregivers with families, lack of access to these supports while in training may deter many women from starting or completing additional training — even though doing so may limit their own upward economic mobility as well as that of their families.

Yet many paid training opportunities are not available or accessible to women seeking additional career training. Targeted program recruitment outreach to women, as well as antidiscrimination training within apprenticeship programs, is necessary to overcome the biases that limit participation. And of course, adequate program funding is needed to offer income supports to all training participants.

Some workforce development programs offer living stipends, short-term grants, or loans, which may be tied to program success. Participants in New Jersey's Pay It Forward fund, outlined in Chapter 9 of this volume, can receive emergency grants,<sup>294</sup> for last-minute small-dollar issues that could otherwise forestall program completion. These grants do not need to be repaid. Other programs, including Google's Career Certificate Fund<sup>295</sup>, offer a living stipend with repayment dependent on earning at least a minimum annual salary following completion.

## CONNECTING PARTICIPANTS TO EXISTING SUPPORTS

Broadly, directly providing supportive services to program participants is an inefficient practice for workforce development programs. Instead, they should actively partner with local public assistance offices, direct service providers, and/or third-party intermediaries to connect participants to existing supports — an approach illustrated by the First Step Staffing model described in Chapter 5 of this volume.

Workforce development programs have also supported participants in their basic income and material needs by helping to connect them

---

293 Pieta Blakely et al., "Labor Market Study of Greater New Haven and the Valley," Community Foundation for Greater New Haven, June 2023, <https://d33euwcbjqjuo.cloudfront.net/documents/RLMA-Full-Report-TCFVCF-FINAL-8-31-23CB.pdf>.

294 Georgia State University, "Panther Retention Grants," Student Success Programs at Georgia State, June 22, 2022, <https://success.students.gsu.edu/panther-retention-grants/>.

295 See chapter 8 of this volume, "Google Career Certificates Fund: Investing in the Next Generation of Tech Workers."



with publicly available antipoverty and income support programs. This so-called comprehensive approach takes a holistic view of program participants and offers professional guidance, usually through a social worker on staff, in identifying material needs and finding solutions available in the current social services ecosphere.<sup>296</sup> This additional programmatic support is ever more critical for women's participation and completion.

However, the design of public policy itself may limit some of the effectiveness of this approach. For example, many antipoverty programs require an individual to be actively looking for work or currently working. Being enrolled in a training program may or may not meet this threshold, depending on the state and the training program itself. In addition, while Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) emphasizes short-term training, we know that short-term certificates have greater gender wage gaps compared to longer-term certificates, and states are limited by what programs can be included while maintaining TANF eligibility.<sup>297</sup> TANF also has a work requirement, and unemployment insurance requires the recipient to be actively looking for work. Notably, however, the training programs approved by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) expand TANF and unemployment insurance benefits to people currently in training. Even with this exception, these programs still have limitations — largely based on how long someone can receive support while in training.

▶ ...many antipoverty programs require an individual to be actively looking for work or currently working. Being enrolled in a training program may or may not meet this threshold, depending on the state and the training program itself.

While transportation is perhaps less of a fundamental material need, many workforce development programs have encouraged participation and completion through directly supporting transportation needs, such as through pretax transportation passes, which are often available to employed workers. Existing research has found that such programs are popular for workers but underprovided, particularly for low-income workers,<sup>298</sup> suggesting unmet demand for transportation support through subsidies in existing systems. The emergency grants available

---

296 Elizabeth Weigensberg et al., "Inside the Black Box: What Makes Workforce Development Programs Successful?" Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2012, <https://www.atlantafed.org/-/media/Documents/podcasts/economicdevelopment/InsidetheBlackBox.pdf>.

297 Heather Hahn et al. "Supporting the Child Care and Workforce Development Needs of TANF Families," Urban Institute, April 2016, <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/79481/2000692-Supporting-the-Child-Care-and-Workforce-Development-Needs-of-TANF-Families.pdf>.

298 Ugo Lachapelle, "Employer Subsidized Public Transit Pass: Assessing Disparities in Access, Use, and Latent Demand," Case Studies on Transport Policy 6, no. 3 (September 2018): 353–63.

to New Jersey Pay It Forward participants, for instance, can be used to cover one-time transportation expenses like unexpected car repairs.<sup>299</sup>

Caregiving remains one of the starkest barriers to women seeking time and energy to participate in additional training. Public funds available through WIOA can be used to support child care services, but the low overall level of resources means many programs opt out of using their limited funds for this purpose.<sup>300</sup> Workforce development systems can also support participants in accessing child care supports through other existing programs, including Head Start, subsidies from Child Care Development Block Grants and Community Development Block Grants, universal prekindergarten, and many others,<sup>301</sup> but waitlists that already exist for these programs make them difficult to access.

Limitations on the types of training programs compliant with care subsidies or accessibility also impose challenges. Like other public supports, states must tailor eligibility to ensure people can participate in long-term, high-quality workforce development programs while receiving public support, rather than time-limited programs that may have less successful labor market outcomes. Programs can also be designed with schedules tailored to school schedules or other caregiving needs.

▶ Like other public supports, states must tailor eligibility to ensure people can participate in long-term, high-quality workforce development programs while receiving public support, rather than time-limited programs that may have less successful labor market outcomes.

While some attention has been paid to the child care challenges of low-income parents seeking to advance their careers, less attention has been devoted to other family caregiving needs, such as elder care, spousal care, or care for disabled family members. On any given day, over 15% of women workers over age 55 provide care for another adult.<sup>302</sup> Some lessons from innovation in providing child care can be applied to other types of care, including support for navigating subsidies and schedule flexibility. For workforce development

---

299 “New Jersey Pay It Forward Program,” Social Finance, December 4, 2024, <https://socialfinance.org/work/new-jersey/>.

300 Sapna Mehta and Emily Andrews, “Updating WIOA to Empower Workers and Create Shared Prosperity,” Center for Law and Social Policy, April 19, 2022, <https://www.clasp.org/publications/report/brief/updating-wioa-to-empower-workers-and-create-shared-prosperity/>.

301 Shayne Spaulding, “The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and Child Care for Low-Income Parents,” Urban Institute, July 16, 2015, <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/workforce-innovation-and-opportunity-act-and-child-care-low-income-parents>.

302 Gretchen Livingston, “Older Women and Unpaid Caregiving in the U.S.,” Issue Brief, Women’s Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, November 2023, <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WB/2023OlderWomenUnpaidCaregiving.pdf>.

programs to be available to older women, other types of care supports must be included in the full suite of wraparound supports.

For programs to be successful in offering supportive services, they also need to be in tune with what is needed for the field that a person is getting training in. While many workforce development programs offer such direct training, they may not offer a holistic approach inclusive of the supports that would be required to advance in a field.<sup>303</sup> For women looking to advance in male-dominated fields, existing skills can be leveraged for success, such as the normative perception of women's adeptness at "soft skills" that can make one successful in an office place.

Existing approaches to wraparound supports highlight pathways to greater inclusion of women but also point to limitations within current frameworks of training programs and public policy. Therefore, effective solutions must be bold and broad, combining the efforts of workforce development programs and local workforce development boards along with public policy advocacy to create a reinforcing system that supports women looking to advance their skills.

▶ Existing approaches to wraparound supports highlight pathways to greater inclusion of women but also point to limitations within current frameworks of training programs and public policy.

## BEST PRACTICES FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT WOMEN AND OTHER DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

Three fundamental requirements are needed for workforce development programs and their ecosystems to support women's career pathways:

1. Workforce training providers partnering with local agencies and care support providers to ensure access and flexibility.<sup>304</sup>
2. Holistic support of participants through social worker support within programs.
3. Workforce development programs and local workforce development boards advocating for increased public services available locally through improving eligibility and increased funding from both public and private sources, such as third-party

303 Vanessa Bennett and Sara Lamback, "Transforming IT Training Programs into Successful Career On-Ramps," Jobs for the Future, July 2020.

304 Gina Adams and Semhar Gebrekristos, "Local Workforce Development Boards and Child Care: Insights from Five Sites," Urban Institute, August 2018, [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/98850/local\\_workforce\\_development\\_boards\\_and\\_child\\_care\\_0.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/98850/local_workforce_development_boards_and_child_care_0.pdf).

intermediaries. This includes outcomes-based financing initiatives that pool capital from public, nonprofit, and private sources.

To connect participants to available wraparound supports, well-trained and adequately paid social workers are the linchpin to ensuring a holistic approach is adopted. Social workers have the appropriate training to meet program participants where they are and work within systems to ensure needs are met. Unfortunately, social workers are undervalued, and research finds they are likewise often underpaid.<sup>305</sup> To satisfy the need for wraparound supports, workforce development programs must recognize this essential service as core to their operations.

Local workforce development boards and programs must also strongly advocate for public policy changes so systems can work together to support women as breadwinners and caregivers. Many of the most promising approaches to supporting women in workforce development programs rely on public policies that are generous and accessible. For example, existing public policies with work requirements or requirements to actively seek work clearly limit participants' ability to enroll in long-term, high-quality workforce development programs, like one- to two-year certificate programs.

Other social services that are linked to stringent income eligibility may be a disincentive to program participation, since they could foster future instability without the stable foundation that subsidized housing and Medicaid provide. And, perhaps most important, the already low levels of generosity in publicly funded programs have been shown to consistently limit upward mobility rather than incentivize work. Workforce development boards can be a powerful force in advocating for policy changes that would benefit their participants as well as their broader communities.

Finally, advocating for increased funding for wraparound supports is a perennial objective but even more necessary when considering the needs of women seeking to advance their careers through workforce development. Inadequate funding is an imperfect trade-off since it exacerbates existing inequalities regarding access to and outcomes from training. Those who would benefit the most from gaining skills in new, high-growth fields cannot participate if these programs are not funded sufficiently to provide supportive services.

*Kate Bahn is the Chief Economist and Senior Vice President at the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) and previously served as the director of research for WorkRise, a research-to-action network hosted by the Urban Institute.*

---

305 Wage Equity Study Team, "Wage Equity for Non-profit Human Services Workers: A Study of Work and Pay in Seattle and King County," School of Social Work, University of Washington, February 2023, [https://socialwork.uw.edu/wp-content/uploads/WageEquityStudy\\_Summary\\_0\\_0.pdf](https://socialwork.uw.edu/wp-content/uploads/WageEquityStudy_Summary_0_0.pdf).