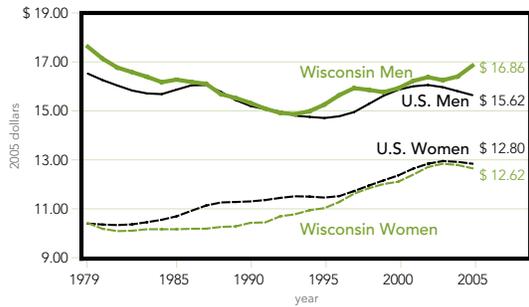




Wisconsin Women and Economic Opportunity

Median Wages by Gender, Wisconsin and U.S., 1979–2005

(three-year moving averages, 2005 dollars)



Source: COWS, *The State of Working Wisconsin 2006*.

Median Hourly Wages by Gender and Race, Wisconsin and U.S., 2005

(2005 dollars)

	Wisconsin	United States
All	\$ 14.62	\$ 14.28
White	14.99	15.47
Black	11.83	11.88
Hispanic	10.13	10.60
Men	16.84	15.62
White	17.19	17.40
Black	13.40	12.47
Hispanic	11.90	11.14
Women	12.62	12.80
White	13.04	13.77
Black	10.89	11.22
Hispanic	8.89	9.99

Source: COWS, *The State of Working Wisconsin 2006*.

It should come as no surprise that the women of Wisconsin are a powerful economic force. The women of the state are strongly committed to work, more educated than ever, and some are attaining positions that were unimaginable just a generation ago. Still, the challenges are equally clear: women continue to face a significant wage disadvantage compared to men; single mothers are mired in responsibility and poverty; women carry family and work expectations in ways that continue to overwhelm; and women of color continue to struggle disproportionately with low wages and poverty.

Hard Working Women

Wisconsin's women are some of the working-est in the nation. According to the Institute of Women's Policy Research, Wisconsin women have a labor force participation rate of 66.6 percent ranking it fifth in the nation. That is substantially higher than the national rate of 59.2 percent. Wisconsin women's work adds money to family budgets. Though Wisconsin median wages are roughly equal to national wages, Wisconsin families have income substantially above national levels due in part to the strong commitment of our women to work. Their earnings bring family income up.

Women in Wisconsin are more connected to work; still many are unemployed and underemployed. One-in-twenty women in the state (4.6 percent) are unemployed and actively seeking work. And 8.3 percent of women in the state are "underemployed:" looking for work, looking for full-time work and only able to find part-time work, facing a substantial barrier to work, or having recently given up on finding a job.

Although 35.5 percent of working women nationally are employed in managerial and professional positions, Wisconsin ranks a lowly 46th of all states in the category with a rate of only 29.8 percent.

A Continuing Gender Gap in Wages

Women in Wisconsin have experienced steady median wage progress over the past generation. Adjusting for inflation, women's median wage grew 21.7 percent from 1979 to 2005. Even so, at \$12.62 per hour in 2005, the median wage full-time woman worker in the state earns just over \$25,000 each year.

Women's wages continue to lag substantially behind men's. Wisconsin women's median wage of \$12.62 is 25 percent below the men's median. Discouragingly, Wisconsin's inflation-adjusted gender gap actually grew from 2000 to 2005, even as the national gap closed. Wisconsin's gender wage gap is substantial and discouraging, given dramatic increases in labor force participation, commitment to work, and educational and experience levels.

Black and Latina women's wages lag behind those of white women. In 2005, white women in Wisconsin earned a median wage of \$13.04, a 26.2 percent increase over their inflation adjusted 1979 earnings. At the same time, the black women's median was just \$10.89, a 5.1 percent decrease from 1979. Latina women have the lowest median wage at \$8.89 (due to the sample size, we are not able to track wages changes over time for this group).

Educational Attainment of Wisconsin Women by Race and Ethnicity, 2005

	White	Black	Hispanic	Native American	Asian
Less than high school	9.0 %	20.9 %	39.7 %	14.2 %	21.9 %
High school degree	35.4	30.8	24.9	34.5	18.7
Some college	20.7	28.2	14.8	28.6	10.3
Associate's degree	9.5	6.3	6.0	9.1	7.3
Bachelor's degree or more	25.4	13.8	14.5	13.7	41.9

Source: American Community Survey data.

Education, especially securing a four year college degree, has an increasing pay-off for women. Since 1979, and adjusting for inflation, the median wage for women with Bachelors degrees or more education grew 37 percent. Median wages grew 16 percent for women with some college, short of the bachelors, and just 10 percent for women with no education beyond high school.

Educational Attainment Varies By Race and Ethnicity

Nearly one-fourth of Wisconsin women have 4 year college degrees, on par with men. However educational attainment varies significantly by race and ethnicity. While 25.4 percent of white and 41.9 percent of Asian women in Wisconsin had at least a 4-year degree, only 14.5 percent of Hispanic, 13.8 percent of African American and 13.6 percent of Native American women had 4-year college degrees. The rates for Wisconsin's African American women are nearly 23 percent below those of African American women nationwide.

Women and Women-Headed Households, More Likely to be in Poverty

If you are a women living in Wisconsin you are 35 percent more likely to live in poverty than if you are a man. Even more staggering, one in four families headed by women are poor while only one in fourteen of all families face the same challenge. The good news is that the percentage of Wisconsin's women living in poverty decreased between 1995 and 2005, while women nationally have seen a slight increase in the numbers living in poverty.

Strong Health Insurance Tradition in Decline

Wisconsin, with a health insurance coverage rate for women of 88.6 percent, ranks number two in the nation. This high coverage rate is the result of a strong employer and state insurance system.

Unfortunately women's coverage may be in jeopardy considering the decline in employer-sponsored insurance from 1979 to 2004. In 1979, 73 percent of private sector employees obtained health insurance from their employers, while only 57 percent did in 2004.

For More Information About Women in Wisconsin

The State of Working Wisconsin, Center on Wisconsin Strategy
www.cows.org/soww

The Status of Women in the States and the Best and Worst State Economies for Women, Institute for Women's Policy Research
www.iwpr.org

The Status of Women in WI Counties, WI Women's Council
www.womenscouncil.wi.gov

The Center on Wisconsin Strategy

The Center on Wisconsin Strategy (COWS), based at the UW-Madison, is a non-profit, nonpartisan "think-and-do tank" dedicated to improving economic performance and living standards in the state of Wisconsin and nationally.

Web: www.cows.org
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The Wisconsin Women's Council

The Wisconsin Women's Council is state government's statutory commission on the status of women and works to develop long-term solutions to barriers and inequities that prevent women in Wisconsin from participating fully and equally in all aspects of life.

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