

Executive Summary

THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN WISCONSIN

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The Institute for Women's Policy Research

Overview of Key Indicators

Wisconsin's national rank among 50 states and the District of Columbia:

	2002	2004
<u>Composite Political Participation Index</u>	15	12
Women's Voter Registration, 1998 and 2000	8	8
Women's Voter Turnout, 1998 and 2000	5	5
Women in Elected Office Composite Index, 2002	26	19
Women's Institutional Resources, 2002	20	22
<u>Composite Employment and Earnings Index</u>	20	30
Women's Median Annual Earnings, 1999	24	28
Ratio of Women's to Men's Earnings, 1999	39	45
Women's Labor Force Participation, 2000	3	5
Women in Managerial and Professional Occupations, 1999	37	43
<u>Composite Social and Economic Autonomy Index</u>	19	17
Percent with Health Insurance among Non-elderly Women, 2000	3	2
Percent of Women with Four or More Years of College, 1990	31	29
Women's Business Ownership, 1997	33	33
Percent of Women Above the Poverty Level, 1999	4	8
<u>Composite Reproductive Rights Index</u>	48	34
<u>Composite Health and Well-being Index</u>	18	19

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Women in Wisconsin continue to make progress in many areas of their lives, but serious obstacles to their equality remain. This update to the 2002 Status of Women in Wisconsin report provides new information on the status of Wisconsin women utilizing data only recently available. While Wisconsin experienced some gains and losses, most changes were not sufficiently significant to warrant changes in grades for achievement of women's equality. Following are some of the changes, both gains and losses, experienced by Wisconsin women since the last report.

Political Participation

Wisconsin women's political participation continues to rank highly at 12th among states, but the proportion of women in the state legislature continues to lag behind men, only recently moving past less than one quarter to 27.3 percent. Since the 2002 report, women now claim three of the most visible statewide offices, adding one position--- lieutenant governor to the previous two--attorney general and state superintendent of education. As of November 2004, only two women will serve in Wisconsin's ten-seat congressional delegation. Newly elected Gwen Moore, will be the first Wisconsin woman of color elected to congress.

Employment and Earnings

Women in the state continue to be among the most likely to be in the labor force, at 5th in the country, yet median annual earnings for women in Wisconsin rank 28th in the nation. Wisconsin ranks among the bottom ten states, dipping to 45th in the nation from 39th in the previous report, for the ratio of women's to men's earnings for full-time, year-round work. Women in Wisconsin rank 30th, down from 20th, in the nation on the employment and earnings composite index. Women of color in Wisconsin fare much worse in terms of employment and earnings than white women.

Poverty

Wisconsin's poverty rate for single-mother families decreased from 30.4 to 23.5 percent and it continues to be lower than the national rate of 28.9. However, women of color of all races and ethnicities, especially those who are single with children, are much more likely to live in poverty than white women.

Reproductive Rights

Wisconsin continues to fare worse than most states in reproductive rights for women, although a few gains have been made. In 2004, it joined 20 other states that require private insurers to provide comprehensive contraceptive coverage. A pro-choice governor was elected in 2000, but the majority of members of the state senate and

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house of representatives continue to be anti-choice. With no comprehensive law governing the reproductive rights of lesbian women, state courts currently hold considerable power over their choices in building families. Court rulings in 24 states specifically extend second-parent adoption to lesbians and gays. In Wisconsin, an appellate court has ruled that the non-legal parent in a gay/lesbian couple cannot adopt his/her partner's child. Disparities and discrimination in access to reproductive resources have seriously compromised minority and indigenous women's reproductive health as well as their children's health.

Health

The mortality rate from heart disease among women continues to rise in Wisconsin, from 132.6 per 100,000 in the 2002 report to 185.4 in 2004, as it has for women throughout the nation, although the rate for Wisconsin women continues to be lower than the nation. The rate continues to be much higher among most women of color. However, women in Wisconsin continue to experience comparatively high rates of chlamydia ranking 30th in the nation and Wisconsin ranks 48th for the number of poor mental health days among women.

Women of Color

Recognizing that certain groups of women face greater challenges than others to improving their economic, political and social status, the Status of Women update report includes newly available data that allows Wisconsin to take a deeper look at the significant disparities women of color in the state face in their achievement of equality. The update focuses on four groups of women of color; a glimpse of the significant disparities each faces follows.

Native American represent .9% of the state's female population, with 7,204 women reporting as Chippewa, followed by Oneida/Iroquois, Menominee, Winnebago, Mohican and Potawatomi.

- Native American women are among the most likely to experience low birth weight in their infants even though they are among the most likely women to access prenatal care.
- 19.9 percent of Native American women in Wisconsin lived below poverty in 1999.
- Approximately one in four Native American single-mother families in the state is poor, representing the largest difference in poverty rates between Wisconsin and the country as a whole. However, these families have a poverty rate that is much lower than the national rate among Native Americans 25.7 percent compared with 37.8 percent nationally. This rate is lower than that for single-mother families from any other racial or ethnic group in the state except whites.

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- In Wisconsin, levels of college education are lower for Native American women than for women from any other racial or ethnic group. The percentage of Native American (15.9) women in Wisconsin with college degrees is about half that of white women.
- Native American women's health status is worse in Wisconsin than nationally. They face significant challenges accessing health care, including reproductive, due to location, eligibility restrictions and funding.
- Rates of heart disease mortality are lower in Wisconsin than nationally for women of every race and ethnicity except Native Americans.
- In Wisconsin Native American women have the highest rates of lung cancer mortality.

African Americans are the largest group of Wisconsin's women of color, representing 5.7 percent of Wisconsin women, which is less than the 12.4 percent for the nation overall.

- In Wisconsin, at 18.7 per 1,000, infant mortality rates are more than three times that of whites and higher in WI than nationally (13.5).
- African American women in Wisconsin are the least likely to live above poverty than all racial groups and are the only group for which poverty is more prevalent in Wisconsin than in the nation.
- Unemployment rates of African American women in Wisconsin, at 16.7 percent, are nearly four times that of white women (3.8 percent) and nearly double that of African American women nationwide (9.8 percent).
- The 2001-02 high school graduation rate for African American females in Wisconsin increased from the previous year's 59.03 to 64.77, but was noticeably lower than the rate of 92.33 for all Wisconsin females.
- African American women are about half as likely to have college degrees as white women.
- African American women experience mortality from heart disease at the highest rate of all racial groups at 241.9 per 100,000. White women are more likely to die from lung cancer than African American women nationwide, but the reverse is true in Wisconsin.
- Mortality rates from breast cancer are much higher among African American women than they are among white women in Wisconsin: 26.1 white women and 32.7 African American women per 100,000 died of breast cancer annually in 1999-2001.
- Wisconsin is first among states in the birth rate for African American teens. The Wisconsin rate of 111 per 1,000 exceeds the national rate of 77.

Asian American women in Wisconsin comprise 1.9 percent of the population; they are an extremely diverse group including Hmong, Asian Indian, Chinese, Korean, Filipino,

Laotian, Vietnamese, Japanese, Pakistani, Thai, Cambodian, Indonesian, Sri Lankan and Malaysian.

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- Asian American women tend to fare better than other women of color in the nation, but this is not true for Wisconsin, where the largest and fastest-growing Asian American population is Hmong.
- Wisconsin ranks near the bottom, at 40th of 45 states, for Asian American women's earnings. In Wisconsin, Asian American women earn less than both Native American and African American women.
- 16 percent of Asian American women in Wisconsin live in poverty, compared with 13 percent nationally.
- Wisconsin's Hmong population increased by 106% from 1990 to 2000, compared to a 4.8% increase for whites.
- 73% of Hmong women have less than a high school education compared with 14.4% of all women in the state. Only 13.5% of Hmong women over 25 have a high school diploma and 3.5% have a Bachelor's degree or higher. By contrast, 21.3 percent of other Asian women in Wisconsin have Bachelor's degrees.

Hispanic women in Wisconsin represent approximately 88,500 or 3.2 percent of the female population, a proportion much lower than the national average of 12.0 percent. The large majority are Mexican, followed by Puerto Rican, Central American, South American and Cuban.

- Mortality rates among Wisconsin Hispanic infants is higher than for their national counterparts. Unlike nationally, Hispanic infants are more likely than white infants to die before age one in Wisconsin.
- Unemployment rates for Hispanic women in Wisconsin are lower than their US rate, as well as lower than Wisconsin's white women. However, as in the rest of the country, Hispanic women in Wisconsin earn the lowest wages of all major racial and ethnic groups.
- Hispanic workers are also less likely to be union members than those from other racial and ethnic groups.
- One in three Hispanic single-mother headed families is poor.
- In Wisconsin, while they are more likely to have a college degree than Hispanic women nationally, they are much less likely to have a college education than whites.
- Unlike national patterns, Hispanic women have the highest AIDS rates among those with available data in Wisconsin.
- 37 percent of Hispanic women lacked health insurance coverage as of 2001, compared to 16 percent of white women 20 percent of African American women.

Lesbians

Lesbian women come from every race and social economic background and face unique challenges. Yet they remain largely invisible as a group, because Census data does not adequately track them, nor is it perceived “safe” for lesbian women to document their identity. The result is that lesbian women are largely left out of

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discussions about the status of women. Following are some of the significant challenges known to be faced by lesbians in Wisconsin.

- Lesbians are less likely than their heterosexual counterparts to have regular check-ups, mammograms or PAP tests, and are less likely to seek routine health care because of the discomfort of coming out to health care providers.
- Lesbians exhibit greater risk factors than heterosexual women for smoking, alcohol use and obesity and are less likely to undergo routine medical exams that can identify cancer and other problems at early stages.
- Obtaining benefits for same sex partners continues to be a significant challenge for lesbians in Wisconsin, as for the nation.
- While court rulings in 24 states specifically extend second-parent adoption to lesbians and gays, in Wisconsin, an appellate court has ruled that the non-legal parent in a gay/lesbian couple cannot adopt his/her partner’s child.
- Lesbians of color face even greater challenges to equality given the added challenges that result in disparities based on race.

Ending Comment

Women of color in the Wisconsin are particularly disadvantaged in their political, social, and economic status. Wisconsin’s lesbians also face barriers to equality. Ensuring that all women have the opportunity to contribute their best efforts as full and equal partners in work, politics, and communities is essential to their prosperity and that of Wisconsin.

Wisconsin could make a difference in the lives of all women and in the prosperity of the state by learning from other states where women of color fare better, making a serious attempt at building diversity regionally, prioritizing the reduction of teen pregnancy, increasing educational attainment and union participation for women of color, and recruiting and retaining more bilingual and bicultural health care workers.

For a complete copy of the *Status of Women In Wisconsin Report*, visit www.womensfund.com

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