

FACT SHEET

Security & Stability

Paid Family and Medical Leave and Its Importance to People with Disabilities and their Families

KALI GRANT, T.J. SUTCLIFFE, INDIVAR DUTTA-GUPTA, AND CASEY GOLDVALE

WHAT IS PAID LEAVE?

Paid family and medical leave

(PFML) refers to the ability of workers to receive partial or full compensation for job-protected short- to long-term leave while providing or receiving care/rest for:

- One's own or a family member's serious and/or chronic health condition, or
- Caring for a newborn or newly adopted child.

Paid family and medical leave (PFML or “paid leave”)

empowers workers with the freedom to balance competing personal, financial, and workplace responsibilities. Research has demonstrated that access to paid leave can be [transformative](#) for health, employment, and socioeconomic well-being.

Like all workers, workers with disabilities may need to access paid leave to welcome a new child, provide care for a family member with a serious medical condition, or if they experience their own serious medical condition. However, workers in the U.S. who need paid leave the most are often the least likely to have access to it. And despite policymakers' apparent interest in both [paid leave](#) and in [increasing](#) employment and economic security among people with disabilities, the two issues are rarely discussed together.

Here are some key facts from the [report](#) about the importance of paid family and medical leave for people with disabilities and their families:

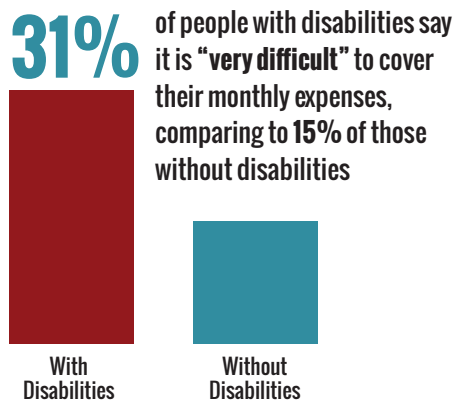
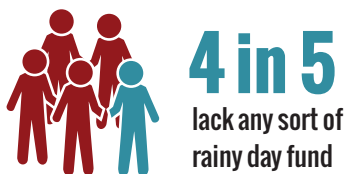
- **The need for paid family and medical leave is universal.** In the U.S. workforce, **only 1 in 7 workers** has access to paid family leave to care for a family member with a serious health condition. Roughly 2 in 5 workers report they lack access to any paid leave.
- **The prevalence of disabilities across the lifespan and demographic changes indicate the need for more comprehensive policies that can address the realities of modern work-family balance needs.** Nearly [1 in 5 people](#) in the U.S. have a [disability](#), and **over 1 in 4 households includes** at least one person with a disability. Physical, mental, and sensory disabilities affect people of [all ages](#), including around 3.7 million children, 26.3 million working-age adults, and 17.4 million seniors.
- **Paid leave boosts economic security and opportunity.** People with disabilities and their families often experience greater [financial insecurity](#) and are more likely to face barriers to employment that can render the financial impact of unpaid time off particularly devastating. Job-protected PFML can [reduce poverty](#) and mitigate the potential for workforce discrimination and exclusion. It can also [positively affect wages](#) and [allow](#) families to plan, adjust their spending, and avoid premature depletion of savings.

This document is a summary of the Fall 2017 report, “Security & Stability: Paid Family and Medical Leave and its Importance to People with Disabilities and their Families.” Full report and related materials available at <http://www.thearc.org/paidleave> and <http://www.georgetownpoverty.org/issues/tax-benefits/pfml/>.



- Paid leave helps workers, including people with disabilities and their families, care for themselves.** Addressing one’s own illness is the most common [reason](#) U.S. workers take unpaid leave, making up **55 percent of all leave taken**. Paid leave increases opportunities to take time off for a serious medical condition without seeing a sharp [drop](#) in income or putting one’s job or employer-based [health insurance](#) at risk. In addition, it can [increase](#) access to preventive care, such as going to doctor’s appointments, and lead to better overall health and well-being.
- Paid leave helps workers care for family members with disabilities.** Approximately **2 in 5 adults** [report](#) caring for an adult or child with significant health issues. This caregiving is most often [unpaid](#) and can [impact](#) one’s own [employment](#). Access to PFML can help workers balance their personal care needs while working and providing support to a family member.

FIGURE 1. Many people already struggle to pay for the basics. Paid leave is a must.



Source: Source: Graphic by GCPI.
Data from [National Disability Institute, 2014](#).

- Paid leave improves family well-being and health.** For a parent, PFML can have positive [effects](#) on one’s own emotional health as well as the physical and emotional health of one’s child. By [empowering](#) families with more flexibility and [resources](#), paid leave may even help [mitigate](#) the impacts of gender and race on family-work expectations and arrangements. [Women of color](#), who disproportionately lack any paid leave, may especially benefit from increased access.
- Access to paid leave is particularly limited for individuals with disabilities and their families—** especially those who are [low-income](#), women, [young people](#), LGBTQ, and/or people of color. **Workers with disabilities** are more likely to be in [part-time](#), low-wage jobs that often don’t offer even basic benefits—much less paid family and medical leave. Over 2 in 3 part-time workers don’t have even one sick day. Workers with disabilities are twice as likely as workers without disabilities to be part-time.
- The U.S. has no national paid family and medical leave program, and lags far behind peer nations in the world,** who typically offer robust national paid family and medical leave programs. National momentum for paid leave is growing, with a handful of states leading the way. **Over 3 in 4 voters** and 7 in 10 [small businesses support](#) creating a national PFML program.
- A national system of universal and equitable paid leave that fully includes people with disabilities and their families** should include measures that expand coverage and job protections; increase stability and security; and ensure robust, accessible public outreach and education.