

Lifting the Barriers to Paid Family and Medical Leave for Men in the United States

Rather than thinking caregiving is something only women should do, Americans' attitudes toward men giving care and taking caregiving leaves are evolving, most notably among men themselves. Based on a nationally representative survey conducted in partnership with NORC at the University of Chicago and five online focus groups, this report points to key barriers men face that may prevent them from taking time off from work to engage in caregiving. These include financial concerns, inadequate workplace and manager support, and family and cultural barriers. These barriers are particularly challenging for low and median-wage earners who have the least access to paid leave. None of these barriers are adequately addressed in the current ad hoc system in the United States that relies on private companies to voluntarily offer paid caregiving leave, or in public policy, where a piecemeal system benefits only those lucky enough to live in a state that offers and enables residents to use its paid leave benefits.



Key Findings

- Nearly half of mothers and fathers didn't take even two days off work, paid or unpaid, following the birth or adoption of a child.
- Six in 10 adults say they anticipate needing to take time off in the future to care for a new child or adult family member.
- Men and women equally anticipate needing to take leave, but men lag behind women in actually taking it: 48 percent of fathers versus 55 percent of mothers have taken time off to care for a newborn, and 28 percent of working men versus 31 percent of working women have taken time off to care for a family member.
- 87 percent of adults say a reason men don't take leave from work for caregiving is that they can't financially afford it.
- Of men who were able to take leave from work, 65 percent reported receiving some pay. Only 53 percent of women who took leave reported receiving some pay.
- Workers in low-income households are the least likely to have access to paid leave. Just 41 percent of workers in households earning less than \$30,000 annually had leave that was partly or fully paid, compared with nearly three-quarters of workers earning \$100,000 or more annually.

American values around men and caregiving have evolved tremendously in recent decades. American men today are participating in caregiving in significant ways, with benefits to themselves, their families, and U.S. society more broadly. But simply asking men to step up to care without implementing the policy and workplace supports that make such participation possible will continue to result in limited uptake and impact. It's time for our policy structures and work culture to catch up with changing attitudes.