QUALITY CHECK

Family leave is a valuable prescription for child health

Family leave plays a vital role in children’s healthy development by allowing parents who work (about 75% of all parents) to take time off to provide care after the birth or adoption of a child and when a child is sick. Research shows that when parents are present to provide care, children (1) recover faster from illnesses and injuries, (2) have shorter hospital stays, and (3) are more likely to receive preventive care.

The FMLA is landmark legislation that guarantees unpaid leave

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) guarantees eligible workers the right to 12 weeks of job-protected, unpaid leave to care for themselves or their family members in case of serious illness, or after childbirth or adoption. Eligibility is determined by several factors including employer firm size and number of hours worked.

New data highlight working parents’ limited eligibility for FMLA leave by race/ethnicity...

New diversitydatakids.org indicators for working parents with children under 18 (who constitute over one third of the workforce) provide the first national and state-level estimates of FMLA eligibility among parents by race and ethnicity. These data show that FMLA eligibility criteria exclude just over half of working parents.

Across racial/ethnic groups, just under 50% of working parents are eligible for FMLA leave. Hispanic parents have the lowest eligibility rate.

Hispanic and black parents are the least able to afford unpaid leave to care for their children.

...And show that unpaid leave granted under the FMLA is unaffordable, especially for Hispanic parents.

Not only are less than half of working parents eligible for FMLA unpaid leave, but even fewer can actually afford to take it. This ‘affordability gap’ is especially pronounced for Hispanic and black parents. In response, states such as California, Rhode Island and New Jersey have passed paid leave legislation to make family leave more affordable. Go to diversitydatakids.org to explore indicators of state FMLA eligibility and affordability gaps that may inform data-driven efforts to expand equitable access to paid leave.

Fewer than 40% of working parents are eligible under the FMLA and can afford to take unpaid leave

Hispanic and black parents are the least able to afford unpaid leave to care for their children.