

CLOSING THE GAPS

To Economic Opportunity for Texas Women

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Texas Women's Economic Opportunity Index is intended to provide a quick understanding of where economic opportunity for women is strongest and weakest across the state. Over the ten-plus years that Texas Women's Foundation has been reporting data on the economic security and overall wellbeing of Texas women, the findings have been consistent: As the state with the strongest economy in the nation, Texas has the potential to be a place where economic opportunity is within reach for Texas women, their families, and their futures – creating a strong and vibrant Texas for *all.*

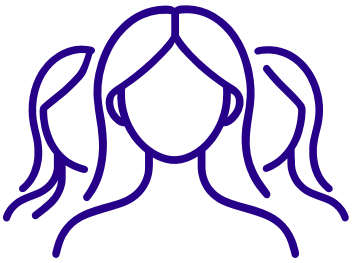
These policy recommendations, coupled with robust public-private partnerships and strategic philanthropy, are essential to creating true opportunities for Texas women and their families. Texas lawmakers, along with business and community leaders, are asked to review the data in this report and work together to accelerate the changes needed to create sustainable and scalable solutions that will ensure the state's economic resilience and continue to move us forward.

INVEST IN CHILDCARE & FAMILY SUPPORT

Childcare is the domain where Texas counties most often fall short: it is the weakest of the four domains in 30% of counties, more than any other, and public pre-K enrollment is the single indicator most likely to pull a county's score down, even though it lifts others. The cost and scarcity of care are direct barriers to women's economic participation, and addressing them should be the state's top priority in the next legislative session.

- Lawmakers should fully fund universal pre-K and expand access to quality childcare facilities, particularly in underserved areas.
- Legislators should increase childcare subsidies for lower-income families and create incentives for providers to meet higher quality standards. Counties and cities can also adopt locally funded programs to support childcare and thus enhance local economic activity. In Dallas County alone, reducing families' childcare costs by $100 to $400 a month could bring an estimated 1,700 to 6,900 more mothers into the workforce and generate $65 million to $260 million in new annual earnings.
- Employers can adopt family-supporting practices such as paid leave, dependent care reimbursement, flexible and remote work options, on-site childcare and/or care partnerships.

STRENGTHEN WORK AND ECONOMIC SECURITY



Work and economic security closely tracks a county's overall score: where women can work and earn enough, overall opportunity tends to follow. The persistence of The wage gap is of particular concern, along with the revenue gap for women-owned firms, where women own 44% of Texas's non-employer firms yet take in only about a quarter of the receipts. Lawmakers should strengthen and rigorously enforce equal pay laws so that women, particularly women of color, are paid equitably across all sectors.

- Policymakers should enact paid family and medical leave and paid sick leave, enabling women to care for themselves and their families without sacrificing ncome or employment.
- State and private-sector leaders should support women's business ownership through access to capital, mentorship, and contracting opportunities.

EXPAND HEALTH COVERAGE AND ACCESS



Health-related indicators weaken county indices, particularly where insurance coverage and access to care, including maternal care, are limited.

- Texas should join the majority of states in expanding Medicaid to adults in the coverage gap.
- Texas should streamline and simplify Medicaid and CHIP enrollment for women and their families, fixing administrative barriers that lead to incorrect coverage and care denials.
- Texas should reinstate funding for qualified enrollment assistance and restore automatic enrollment from Medicaid for Pregnant Women into Healthy Texas Women, helping eligible women retain continuous coverage.

SUPPORT EDUCATIONAL AND WORKFORCE ADVANCEMENT



The workforce development and education domain does the most to separate high-scoring counties from low-scoring ones, and it is where Texas women outpace men: 35% hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 33% of men. Yet the wage gap shows that these educational gains do not fully carry through to earnings. Decision-makers must close the gap that exists between educational attainment and economic reward.

- State legislators should address college affordability by increasing funding for TEXAS Grants and College Promise programs, particularly for women of color burdened by student debt.
- State and federal policymakers should expand student loan forgiveness and cancellation for Texans carrying educational debt.
- Business and philanthropic leaders should support education and training programs that prepare women for living-wage jobs, with attention to the industries where women's participation is declining.