

Washington  
**Paid Family & Medical Leave**

# Annual Report



**Employment Security Department**  
WASHINGTON STATE

December

**2021**

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# Paid Family & Medical Leave Program Report to Legislature December 2021

## Background & implementation

The Washington state legislature enacted the Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program in 2017 with bipartisan support.<sup>1</sup> Washington was the fifth state in the nation to implement such a paid leave program and the first to do so from scratch, rather than building on a long-standing temporary disability program.<sup>2</sup> It is a social insurance program paid for by both employees and employers. Premium assessment began in 2019 and benefits became available in 2020.

Generally, Washington's Paid Family and Medical Leave program allows for up to 12 weeks of paid family leave or paid medical leave for eligible Washington workers who have worked at least 820 hours during a qualifying year. Under certain circumstances, individuals may qualify for 16 or 18 weeks of combined family and medical leave. The law requires employment protection and continuation of employer-provided health care benefits for many employees<sup>3</sup> – those in larger companies who have been with their employer for at least a year and worked 1,250 hours in the past year. Benefits are progressive, providing up to 90 percent of participants' weekly pay for each week of leave and are portable across jobs.<sup>4</sup>

The program is committed to providing a benefit that is easily accessible and available to customers when they most need it. In the first year of benefit availability, we received far more applications than anticipated, which proved to be an ongoing challenge as we worked to increase staff and streamline processes. By summer 2020, the program had successfully decreased average application processing times from over ten weeks to under two weeks.<sup>5</sup> By then, we were also facing the challenges and unknowns of the COVID-19 pandemic along with the communities we serve – adapting to administering the program and continuing implementation while working remotely, helping our agency address unprecedented levels of unemployment and navigating the ambiguity of which programs could support what situations. From fall 2020 through the rest of the fiscal year, claims volumes generally increased, with some week-over-week fluctuation. We have continued to assess workflow and capacity needs based on a two-week processing goal and have kept processing times relatively low. As of the end of June 2021, the average time from initial application to decision was 2.2 weeks.<sup>6</sup> However, as a result of this effort to keep claim and weekly payment processing times low, telephone wait times and responses to correspondence

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<sup>1</sup> SSB 5975, codified as RCW 50A. Subsequently amended by SHB 1399.

<sup>2</sup> California, New Jersey, Rhode Island and New York all had existing temporary disability insurance systems in place prior to implementing the family leave component.

<sup>3</sup> Continuation of employer-provided healthcare benefits is dependent upon concurrency of FMLA leave.

<sup>4</sup> For more information about the Washington Paid Family and Medical Leave program, see [the 2020 Annual Report to the Legislature](#).

<sup>5</sup> These efforts were supported by the 2020 supplemental budget (ESSB 6168).

<sup>6</sup> The median processing time was 1.9 weeks.

have suffered. ESD has requested additional full time equivalent (FTE) staff to keep up with increasing caseload and to improve response times.

### **Premium rates**

Beginning in January 2021, the variable premium rate went into effect. The first premium calculation occurred in October 2020, based on the family and medical leave insurance trust fund account balance ratio as of September 30. The premium rate remained at 0.4 percent for 2021. The premium rate for 2022 will be 0.6 percent. More information about premium rates can be found on [page 9](#).

### **Small business assistance**

In addition, the Small Business Assistance program went live on December 16, 2020, with applications becoming available. Targeted communications were initially sent to small businesses (49 or fewer employees) that were known to be eligible. In January 2021, communications were sent to all businesses with fewer than 150 employees. Applications may be retroactive to the previous year,<sup>7</sup> while premium assessment begins after receipt of the grant for a three-year period. More information about the small business assistance grant program can be found on [page 13](#).

### **Legislative changes**

Two bills were passed during the 2021 Legislative Session that made changes to the Paid Family and Medical Leave program. Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5097 expanded the definition of family member to include “any individual who regularly resides in the employee’s home or with whom the relationship creates an expectation that the employee care for the person and that individual depends on the employee for care.”<sup>8</sup> Implementation was successful and this this amended definition went into effect on July 25, 2021.

Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 1073 provides pandemic leave assistance grants to employees who did not meet the 820 hours worked eligibility threshold due to a reduction in hours in 2020 and the first quarter of 2021 related to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>9</sup> The alternative qualifying periods these grants provide is available for leaves taken from 2021 through March 31, 2022. We successfully launched pandemic leave assistance on August 1, 2021, with benefits available retroactively for leave starting since January 2021. The fiscal note for this bill was difficult to predict since there was no data on who among the workers appearing to be potentially eligible in wage reports had work hours reduced because of Covid-19, nor how many would have a qualifying event and decide to use the program in the timeframe. There also was no way to be sure how quickly economic recovery would occur, nor the effect enhanced federal unemployment benefits continuing during this same period would have on employment and paid leave benefit uptake. The pandemic leave assistance program utilizes federal funding from the American Rescue Plan Act.

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<sup>7</sup> Applications could be for assistance related to an employee who took leave in 2020 until April 30, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> “Family member” includes any individual who regularly resides in the employee’s home, except that it does not include an individual who simple resides in the same home with no expectation that the employee care for the individual. For more information, see [Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5097](#).

<sup>9</sup> It also provides pandemic leave assistance employer grants to help offset small business employers’ costs related to employees on leave who are receiving a pandemic leave assistance employee grant. For more information, see [Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 1073](#).

### **Communications & outreach**

We have continued to build on the previous year's communication and outreach efforts with a focus on accessibility, but our needs have shifted from increasing general awareness of the program to ensuring customers have access to the information and resources they need. With the stay-at-home orders in place, in-person outreach and printed materials in community spaces were no longer practical. We worked to identify and reach underserved communities, providing timely information for those interacting with our program and supporting our staff working directly with those customers.

With many Washington workers relying on the program as a source of income, our highest communications priority was helping customers access the benefits they needed as quickly and easily as possible. We focused our efforts largely on improving the Paid Leave website and mass email communications, informed by customer and employer feedback. More information about our communications and outreach efforts can be found on [page 14](#).

### **Research & evaluation**

In the last year, we have engaged in short-term evaluation efforts and operational reporting related to program participation, non-utilization and the benefit application and weekly claims processes to inform improvements to operations, technology, policies, and communications. We have continued to work with the Evaluation Consultation Group that we established in collaboration with researchers from the University of Washington and support from a private grant to guide our short- and long-term research plans. We look forward to more deeply assessing impact as the program matures.

## Program participation

### Projected & actual Paid Family and Medical Leave benefits

Most employees in Washington state who have worked at least 820 hours during a qualifying year period are eligible for benefits if they also have a qualifying event prompting their need for family and/or medical leave.<sup>10</sup> In 2015, Washington state received a Department of Labor grant to study possibilities for a paid family and medical leave program in the state. The work under this grant included simulation models estimating program participation and costs under various parameters. The simulation model closest to Washington’s program formed the basis for program projections supporting the 2017 fiscal note, with adjustments made to more closely approximate program parameters and subject matter expert expectations.

As shown here, projected claims paid with the first payment in Fiscal Year 2020 (July 2019 – June 2020) were expected in the pre-implementation projections to reach 36,033, but instead came in at 47,960. In projections revised at the beginning of Fiscal Year 2021, we expected claims first paid to reach 131,150 in that fiscal year. Actual claims with the first payment in FY21 came in a little higher, at 133,014.

Year	Projected at beginning of year	Actual claims
<b>FY2020</b>	36,033	47,960
<b>FY2021</b>	131,150	133,014

We continue to refine our methodology for calculating projections to enhance accuracy, working in collaboration with our Advisory Committee to develop assumptions about future experience. Where possible, we use program historical data as the basis for projections, rather than approximating with census or unemployment data. As our program administrative data continues to grow, we have been focusing on analyzing historical experience to improve revenue and cash flow projections. We also plan to procure actuarial services to bolster our efforts in projecting future claim volumes and cash flow.

Initial projections focused on how many claims would have their *first payment* in a year since their intended use was for fiscal estimates. A more global indicator of program participation and the need for leave is the number of claims *submitted* to ESD. Figures 1.A., 1.B. and 1.C. show claim applications submitted by leave type in the most recently completed fiscal year.<sup>11</sup> “Family leave” includes leaves listed as bonding, care and military. “Bonding leave” is to care for a new child (birth, adoption, or foster child placement). “Care leave” is for workers to care for a family member with a serious health condition. “Military leave” is family leave related to military exigencies, such as short-notice deployment. “Medical leave” is for workers to take for their own serious health condition, including healthy pregnancy and childbirth recovery. “Pregnancy complications” is medical leave for pregnancies that involve serious complications for which the law allows two additional weeks of leave.

<sup>10</sup> Exemptions include federal employees, tribal employees and certain employees under collective bargaining agreements (time-limited duration for this exemption).

<sup>11</sup> July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021.

Figure 1.A. Claim applications submitted by type, July 2020 – June 2021

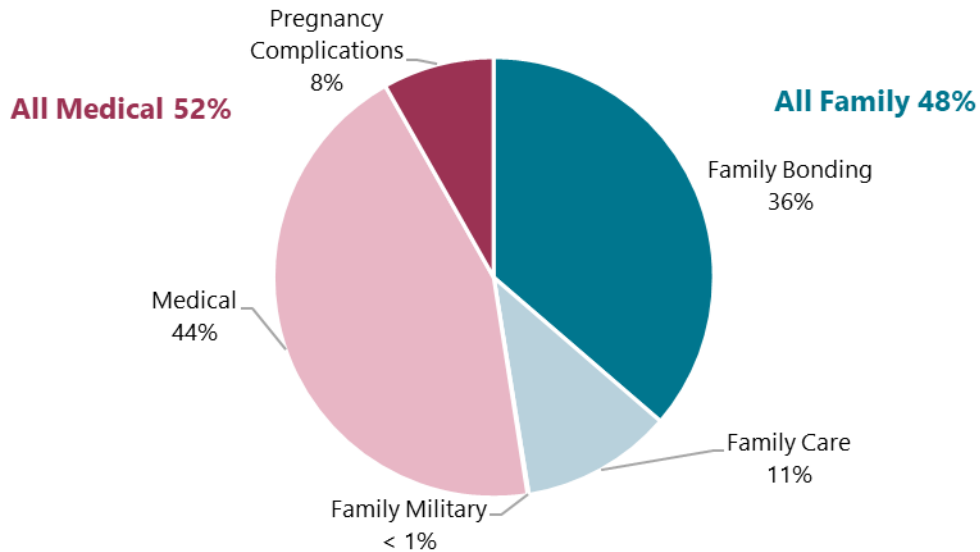
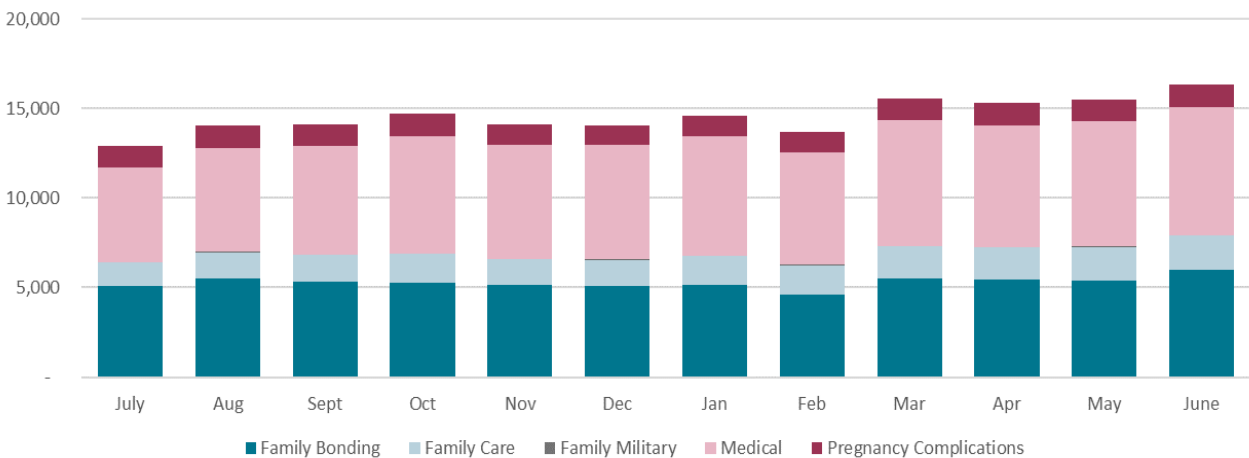


Table 1.B. Claim applications submitted by type of leave & month, July 2020 – June 2021

	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June
<b>Bonding</b>	5,109	5,528	5,321	5,278	5,135	5,100	5,126	4,612	5,497	5,446	5,408	5,997
<b>Care</b>	1,276	1,446	1,519	1,595	1,467	1,453	1,663	1,648	1,818	1,787	1,876	1,896
<b>Military</b>	11	16	10	7	15	13	14	16	13	17	14	13
<b>Medical</b>	5,319	5,796	6,084	6,562	6,347	6,390	6,650	6,294	6,999	6,810	6,979	7,199
<b>Pregnancy Complications</b>	1,179	1,267	1,206	1,250	1,130	1,101	1,147	1,099	1,245	1,233	1,240	1,245
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,894</b>	<b>14,053</b>	<b>14,140</b>	<b>14,692</b>	<b>14,094</b>	<b>14,057</b>	<b>14,600</b>	<b>13,669</b>	<b>15,572</b>	<b>15,293</b>	<b>15,517</b>	<b>16,350</b>

Figure 1.C. Claim applications submitted by type of leave & month, July 2020 – June 2021



## Benefit Application approval rates and denial reasons

**Table 2.A. Applications submitted and approval rates by type, July 2020 – June 2021**

	Benefit applications submitted	Application approval rate
Bonding	63,554	87%
Care	19,432	77%
Military	159	58%
Medical	77,451	79%
Pregnancy	14,335	81%
<b>Total</b>	<b>174,931</b>	<b>82%</b>

*Source: WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021*

A benefit application may be denied for more than one reason and not all applications have a denial reason recorded in a summary extractable way in the database data. This system functionality continues to be enhanced to provide more comprehensive summary information. The most common reasons why benefit applications were denied in this period are as follows:

1. The customer did not provide sufficient medical certification, a requirement of medical leave and for family leave to care for a family member with a serious health condition.
2. The customer has not provided documentation for hours worked or has not met the eligibility requirement of having worked 820 hours in the qualifying period.
3. The customer applied for leave for a date that is too far in the past but was unable to establish a good cause to backdate it.
4. The customer applied for leave but did not have any leave hours left in their bank of hours for the year.
5. The customer failed to respond to fact finding – a request for additional needed information – so the benefits application was ultimately denied.

## Elective coverage participation

Those who are self-employed or working as independent contractors may choose to opt-in. This includes individuals who work independently and business owners who may have employees already covered by the program and would like to obtain coverage for themselves. The initial participation period for elective coverage is three years, after which participation changes to an annual basis. Those electing coverage become eligible for leave at the beginning of the quarter after they opt-in and they have met the eligibility criteria of having worked 820 hours in the previous year.

As of the end of June 2021, we had 1,984 active elective coverage accounts, representing 1,929 individuals opting in.<sup>12</sup> Of the individuals who opted into elective coverage, 20 percent filed claims during this fiscal year; 78 percent of these claims were approved.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> People who own or work as more than one business entity have more than one elective coverage account.

<sup>13</sup> Compared to overall rate of 82 percent of applications approved during the time period.



Table 3.A. show the number of unique accounts and individuals grouped by the month that their elective coverage started. Table 3.B. shows the premium contributions by elective coverage participants as of the second quarter of 2021.

Recognizing the wide-ranging employment characteristics of potential elective coverage participants and that awareness is likely to be lower among this group of workers, in spring 2021, we partnered with a team of student consultants from the UW Evans School of Public Policy & Governance. We conducted a survey and interviews with self-employed workers in the state with the intent of being able to better identify and communicate with them about the program.

**Table 3.A. New Elective Coverage Participation by Coverage Start Date**

	2019				2020				2021		Total as of 6/30/21
	Jan	Apr	Jul	Oct	Jan	Apr	Jul	Oct	Jan	Apr	
<b>Accounts</b>	428	36	71	52	71	493	223	161	189	260	<b>1,984</b>
<b>Individuals</b>	415	36	71	52	71	480	214	158	181	251	<b>1,929</b>

**Table 3.B. Elective Coverage Premiums by Quarter**

Quarter	Amount
<b>2019 Q1</b>	\$8,927
<b>2019 Q2</b>	\$9,861
<b>2019 Q3</b>	\$9,521
<b>2019 Q4</b>	\$8,817
<b>2020 Q1</b>	\$7,968
<b>2020 Q2</b>	\$15,053
<b>2020 Q3</b>	\$15,465
<b>2020 Q4</b>	\$17,293
<b>2021 Q1</b>	\$18,649
<b>2021 Q2</b>	\$22,202

Source: WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021, retrieved 10/4/2021

### Voluntary plan participation

Employers may offer their own leave program to employees instead of participating in the state Paid Family and Medical Leave program. An employer will only be approved if their proposed plan meets or exceeds state plan requirements, such as the amounts of leave offered and employee eligibility thresholds.

At the end of fiscal year 2021, there were 277 active employers with approved voluntary plans. Most employers (88 percent) operating a voluntary plan do so for both family and medical leave, with only 11 percent offering only a medical plan and one percent offering only a family plan.

**Table 4.A. Voluntary plan employers by plan type offer & employer size**

	Family and Medical Plan	Medical Only Plan	Family Only Plan	All Plan Types
Known Employer Size	221	28	3	252
<i>Small Employers (&lt;50 Employees)</i>	144	12	3	159
<i>Large Employers (50+ Employees)</i>	77	16	0	93
Unknown Employer Size <sup>14</sup>	23	1	1	25
<b>All Voluntary Plan Employers</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>277</b>

Small employers make up 57 percent of all voluntary plan employers, with large employers accounting for 34 percent and the remaining 9 percent coming from businesses whose size we do not know. Table 4.B. depicts employment and wages for the 252 voluntary plan employers with known wage and employment data. In total, 116,916 employees are covered by voluntary plans, which account for about 3 percent of all statewide employment.<sup>15</sup> In FY 2021, these employees earned an estimated \$31.7 billion gross wages, with about \$276 million coming from employees at small businesses and the remaining \$31.4 billion coming from employees at large businesses. In sum, this accounted for 13 percent of all gross wages earned statewide in FY 2021.

**Table 4.B. Employment & gross wages of voluntary plan employers by size**

	Employment	Share of Statewide Employment	Total Gross Wages <sup>16</sup>	Share of Statewide Gross Wages
Small Employers <i>(&lt;50 Employees)</i>	1,908	0.2%	\$276,478,033	0.5%
Large Employers <i>(50+ Employees)</i>	115,009	5%	\$31,466,243,837	17%
<b>All Employers</b>	<b>116,916</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>\$31,742,721,870</b>	<b>13%</b>

Source: WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021, retrieved 10/11/2021

<sup>14</sup> Employer size only becomes available through employer quarterly reporting. Currently there are several voluntary plan employers being audited to assure accurate reporting.

<sup>15</sup> For more information about voluntary plan benefit usage, see the 2021 report for legislature as directed in ESSB 5097.

<sup>16</sup> Employment and wages are estimates based on quarterly averages taken from FY21 due to reporting inconsistencies.

## Premium rates

Premiums are assessed quarterly and remitted to ESD in conjunction with employer reporting in each month following a quarter: April, July, October, and January. Premium responsibility is split between employees and employers. Employers may withhold from employees up to 100 percent of the family leave premium and up to 45 percent of the medical leave premium. Employers with 50 or more employees are responsible for 55 percent of the medical leave premium. Small employers that receive grants to offset the costs of having an employee take leave pay the employer portion for three years afterward. Those who are self-employed and independent contractors electing coverage are responsible only for the employee share of the premium.

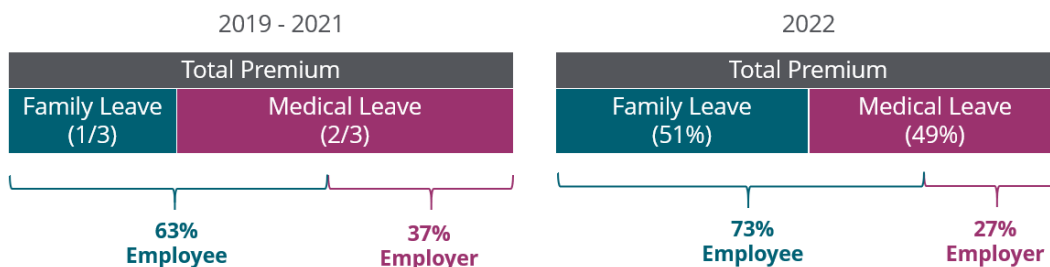
## Premium Rate Calculation

As prescribed by law, in October 2020, the Paid Family and Medical Leave premium began to be calculated annually based on the trust fund account balance ratio as of September 30 of the current year.<sup>17</sup> The balance ratio is calculated by dividing the balance of the family and leave insurance account by total gross covered wages for the prior fiscal year. That ratio determines the premium rate. The premium rate taking effect January 1, 2022, will be 0.6%, up from 0.4% in 2021.<sup>18</sup>

Account Balance Ratio =	Trust fund account balance as of 09/30/2021	Account Balance Ratio	Premium Rate
	Prior fiscal year of total covered wages	<b>0.0% to 0.09%</b>	0.6%
		<b>0.1% to 0.19%</b>	0.5%
		<b>0.2% to 0.29%</b>	0.4%
		<b>0.3% to 0.39%</b>	0.3%
		<b>0.4% to 0.49%</b>	0.2%
		<b>0.5% or greater</b>	0.1%

## Family-Medical Split

For calendar years 2019, 2020 and 2021, the premium split between family and medical leave was set at 1/3 family and 2/3 medical. This translated to employers contributing 36.67 percent and withholding up to 63.33 percent of the total premium from employees. Per law, as of January 1, 2022, the split of total premium into family leave premium and medical leave premium becomes variable based on the number of paid claims in the prior fiscal year.<sup>19</sup> According to this calculation, in 2022, the family premium will be 51.31 percent and the medical premium will be 48.69 percent of the total premium. This means employees will contribute 73.22 percent and employers will contribute 26.78 percent towards the total premium for 2022.



<sup>17</sup> As described in [RCW.50A.10.030](#).

<sup>18</sup> Premiums are assessed on wages/salaries up to the Social Security maximum taxable earnings cap (\$147,000 in 2022).

<sup>19</sup> Claims paid include leave claims with at least one payment in the prior fiscal year.

## Benefit payments

Applicants approved to take leave submit weekly claims for each week of leave, relaying information about how many leave hours they took, whether they used other benefits (e.g., unemployment) and other information necessary to calculate the week's benefit payment. Between July 1, 2020, and June 30, 2021, the program covered about 35 million hours of leave and paid approximately \$779 million in benefits to over 122,000 Washingtonians. On average, approved customers took 32 hours of leave and received \$715 each week.<sup>20</sup>

**Table 5.A. Benefit claims & approved payments by month, July 2020 – June 2021**

	Employees with at least one approved weekly claim payment	Claims with at least one approved weekly claim payment	Benefits paid (millions)	Leave hours (millions)
<b>July</b>	20,316	20,956	\$50.4	2.35
<b>Aug</b>	23,067	23,868	\$61.2	2.84
<b>Sept</b>	25,456	26,538	\$65.0	3.01
<b>Oct</b>	25,122	26,094	\$61.3	2.84
<b>Nov</b>	24,766	25,759	\$64.5	2.99
<b>Dec</b>	27,218	28,233	\$70.2	3.25
<b>Jan</b>	23,669	24,502	\$57.9	2.67
<b>Feb</b>	22,079	22,731	\$58.0	2.61
<b>Mar</b>	24,770	25,651	\$72.9	3.18
<b>Apr</b>	24,500	25,364	\$66.3	2.86
<b>May</b>	24,971	25,878	\$73.0	3.12
<b>June</b>	26,848	27,823	\$77.7	3.31
<b>July - June<sup>21</sup></b>	<b>122,598</b>	<b>147,162</b>	<b>\$779</b>	<b>35</b>

Source: WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021. The month and years of benefits paid in this table correspond to the date that each employees' weekly claim was adjudicated.

<sup>20</sup> Washington workers taking Paid Leave may do so intermittently and some start or end mid-week, which results in proration of the weekly benefit.

<sup>21</sup> Figures are deduplicated totals for the year and are not equal to the sum of the columns.

## Operating & implementation costs

In the second year of operations, we continue to leverage efficiencies where we can and aim to make the best use of resources to serve our customers. Claims volumes have been increasing since August 2020, after recovering from a brief dip a few months earlier at the beginning of the pandemic. We expect utilization to continue increasing over the next few years as awareness of the program and how to access benefits grows. While we have managed to keep benefits processing wait times relatively low, this has come at the cost of responsiveness to customer phone calls and correspondence. For example, in June 2021, average phone hold time was nearly an hour and many customers received a high-call-volume message in lieu of being put on hold. As claims volumes increase, both claim processing time and customer contact responsiveness will suffer.

We have taken learnings and data from the program’s first year of providing benefits to develop an improved operational staffing model and plan. More detail is available in the [2021 Paid Leave Program Needs and Resources report](#). We identified the average times each work activity takes and aligned that to expected volumes. Using that information, we then determined how many staff would be needed to enable us to keep up with increasing claims and to be responsive in addressing customer inquiries. We have requested to add Customer Care Team specialists, support staff, and a Quality Assurance team that helps with benefits application processing to improve service delivery. We will continue to enhance technology and processes to improve customer service and refine our operational staffing plan as we learn more in the coming year.

**Table 6.A. Operating & implementation costs, fiscal years 19 through 22**

	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22*
<b>Paid Family and Medical Leave implementation &amp; operating costs (out of 22F Fund)</b>	\$40,696,000	\$50,720,500	\$43,379,744	\$70,621,000

\* FY19-FY21 are historical amounts, FY22 is expenditure authority for the current year.

## Trust fund

Table 7.A. provides the quarterly account balance from July 2020 to June 2021.<sup>22</sup> As benefits payments were higher than expected in 2020 and continue to trend upward, while the pandemic affected statewide employment and thus assessed premiums, the fund balance has trended consistently downward. The premium rate for 2022, discussed above, will mean premiums collected will increase starting in April 2022. However, since benefits payments are also expected to increase, despite the increased premium rate we expect the fund balance at the end of each quarter to continue be under a level equivalent to a quarter’s worth of benefits payments.

**Table 7.A. Fund balance**

	2020		2021	
	Sept	Dec	Mar	June
<b>Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance Account 22F book balance at end of each quarter (millions)</b>	\$426.79	\$376.40	\$326.61	\$286.52
<b>Projected Fund Balance at the end of each quarter (millions)</b>	\$424.86	\$370.12	\$307.87	\$285.39
<b>Ratio (actual/projected)</b>	100.5%	101.7%	106.1%	100.4%

Table 7.A. also shows how the actual balance at the end of each quarter compared to the projected balance, as estimated from the Q1 2021 fund projections. For all quarters in FY 2021, the projections have slightly underestimated the true value of the fund, but by only a small amount. The largest variation comes from the end of Q1 in 2021, where we under-projected the fund balance by about 6 percent, largely due to the uncertainty behind the recovery from the pandemic-induced recession leading to volatile wage projections and expected premium collections.

Revenues coming into the account include premiums and voluntary plan application fees, along with interest accumulated on the fund. Expenditures in the projections include benefits payments, operating and implementation costs, small business grants and transfers to the Unemployment Compensation Account to cover unemployment claims resulting from replacement workers hired to backfill employees on leave. The program also has an enforcement account that will be used for compliance activities.

True to our commitment to continuous learning and improvement, this past year we have created a standard cycle for trust fund projections, with methodological enhancements and assumptions validations each summer and periodic updates through the year in alignment with the Economic and Revenue Forecast Council’s cycle.

<sup>22</sup> For those who are interested, we have also been developing a more detailed quarterly report of revenue and expenditure inputs to trust fund balance projections.

## Small business assistance

The Paid Family and Medical Leave program includes provisions to support smaller businesses, which may be disproportionately affected when employees take leave. Businesses with 150 or fewer employees are eligible to apply for grants. Employers with fewer than 50 employees that receive a grant pay the employer portion of premiums for the three subsequent years. The small business assistance grant program launched on December 16, 2020, with grants made retroactively<sup>23</sup> to cover costs related to 2020 leaves. The release of this functionality was previously delayed in order to ensure benefit payments could be made by January 2020 and subsequently to cope with the unprecedented demand for leave and the changes to work necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

For each employee on leave, employers may receive a grant of \$3,000, if they have hired a temporary worker to replace an employee on Paid Leave for at least a week or a grant of up to \$1,000 for significant wage-related costs associated with an employee's use of Paid Leave. Employers may apply for up to 10 grants per year and must provide documentation of replacement worker and/or wage-related costs incurred due to use of Paid Family and Medical Leave. Pandemic leave assistance grants are also available to small businesses to help offset costs related to employees on leave who are receiving a pandemic leave assistance employee grant, enacted by ESSHB 1073 during the 2021 legislative session.

A total of 437 applications were submitted during the fiscal year, 64 percent of which were approved. Approximately \$686,005 in grants went out to 190 small businesses.

Associated with these grants are 249 employers and 350 approved leave claims. Approximately 54 percent of approved claims were for leaves taken in 2020 and 46 percent were for leaves taken in 2021.

**Table 8.A. Approved grants by type**

Grant Type	Count	Percent
Grants to cover wage-related costs associated with an employee's use of Paid Leave	72	26%
Grants to hire a temporary worker to replace an employee on Paid Leave	207	74%
<b>Total Approved Grants</b>	<b>279</b>	

**Table 8.B. Approved grants by business size**

Employer Size	Count	Percent
49 or fewer employees	166	59%
50-150 employees	113	41%
<b>Total Approved Grants</b>	<b>279</b>	

Source: WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021, as of 10/4/2021

<sup>23</sup> For applications submitted until April 30, 2021.

## Communications & outreach

We are building on our previous communications efforts with a focus on accessibility. During our preparation and launch of benefits in early 2020, we used communication strategies and resources to emphasize education and awareness about the program. For example, we led in-person events and created webinars, videos and informative website content to teach employers, workers and healthcare providers about the new program.

However, by mid-2020, our communications needs shifted from awareness of the program to ensuring people could access the information and resources they needed. Amid a global pandemic with much of the state shut down, it was unsafe to continue in-person outreach and impractical to rely on posters or brochures in community spaces to inform our audiences. Instead, we focused our efforts on the [Paid Leave website](#) and mass email communications that could safely and effectively inform those who use our system. We also used customer and employer feedback to improve our systems and communicate changes. With many Washington workers unemployed, underemployed, or currently relying on the program as a source of income, our highest communications priority was helping customers get the benefits they needed – and were eligible for – as quickly and easily as possible.

We worked to identify and reach underserved communities, provide timely information for those interacting with our program and support our staff – particularly those who work directly with our customers.

### Website

One of our biggest communication endeavors was translating more materials for people with limited English proficiency and expanding the information on our website to include answers to common questions about the program as well as the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Translated materials & webpages

To support our customers with limited English proficiency, we added to our online translated materials and webpages. Paid Leave's website now has essential information in 16 languages.

The Spanish version of the website ([paidleave.wa.gov/es](http://paidleave.wa.gov/es)) mirrors the English site, with similar subsections, FAQs and downloadable materials. One of these documents is a packet containing the Certification of Serious Health Condition form and Proof of Birth form, along with instructions, in both English and Spanish. This allows patients and healthcare providers who may not speak the same language to confidently review and certify the medical information we request, and the combined document allows someone to easily find the forms they need in one place on the website.

We also added webpages to support 14 other languages. Each of these landing pages has translated information about the program and step-by-step directions for the application process. Translated, downloadable application packets and weekly claim FAQs are also available in each language.



## Help Center

Our website addresses three distinct audiences: individuals and families, employers and healthcare providers. Each of these audiences interacts with Paid Leave differently, and we want all of them to visit our website and easily find the information they need – without having to also contact our Customer Care Team for assistance. To help users self-serve, we worked with a marketing firm and their usability and development experts to create the “Help Center.”

The Help Center debuted in November 2020. The link is prominently located on our homepage. When users visit the [Help Center page](#), they select the audience they identify with, so they are directed to relevant information, materials and FAQs. For example, someone applying for family bonding leave can click the Individuals and Families heading to view a Help Center page that has direct links to our Benefit and Parents guides, plus a list of FAQs about creating a benefit account, filing weekly claims and more. A small business owner could click the Employer heading and find information about reporting, small business grants and a prominent link to our Employer Toolkit. The Help Center received more than 245,000 pageviews from its launch through the end of June 2021.

We also translated the Help Center FAQs into Spanish. These questions appear on the Spanish version of the website, [paidleave.wa.gov/es](https://paidleave.wa.gov/es). We continue to update and edit our web materials as changes occur.

## Coronavirus

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the critical nature of this benefit program and the ongoing priority to support access to it. We created and maintain a webpage with resources for those impacted by COVID-19. This page is part of our answer to consistent questions we get from customers about whether certain pandemic-related circumstances qualify for Paid Leave benefits.

The [paidleave.wa.gov/coronavirus](https://paidleave.wa.gov/coronavirus) page has FAQs about benefits and the pandemic, as well as links to other Employment Security Department resources. It also answers cross-program questions like whether someone can qualify for both Unemployment Insurance and Paid Leave. At the end of June 2021, the page had more than 49,000 views.

## Mass email communications

We continue to use mass communication to inform our audiences about updates, technology improvements and ongoing rulemaking.

## Employer newsletter

Employers are a key audience for our communications. Employers need up-to-date information and resources to share with their employees, and timely and accurate employer reporting allows us to have the information we need to process benefit applications.

In an effort to consolidate and maximize the agency’s outreach to employers, Employment Security Department began a cross-program monthly newsletter. The newsletter includes relevant updates from Paid Leave, Unemployment Insurance Tax & Wage and WA Cares Fund, our state’s new long-term services and supports program. This recurring email is a way for us to keep employers informed with timely and

consistent messages for three of ESD's largest programs. It also allows us to share links, downloadable materials and highlight pertinent updates for employers.

### **Rulemaking emails**

We maintain [paidleave.wa.gov/rulemaking](https://paidleave.wa.gov/rulemaking) with information about rules hearings, legislative updates and ongoing rulemaking. We share this information via a GovDelivery topic with stakeholders and Washingtonians interested in participating in or learning about the legislative process.

### **Targeted messaging**

To support our operations team, we use mass email communications to message employers and workers experiencing common situations. The messages are confidentially sent through GovDelivery, which maintains our customers' privacy while allowing us to efficiently reach these customers. We send messages weekly to lists of benefit applicants who need to upload additional documentation to finish their application, to alert customers if their redetermination request is denied and to provide resources about frequently asked questions. We also use mass email communications to remind employers who need to finalize their quarterly reports.

### **Social media**

We continue to update and interact with the public on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. These platforms allow us to alert users to system outages or updates, share information about the program, garner real-time feedback and share relevant content from other stakeholders.

## **Outreach**

### **Small business employers**

Employment Security Department continues to do outreach to small business employers. We provide updates on Paid Leave content and ways to support staff. ESD partnered with the Governor's Office of Innovation and Assistance, DOR and L&I to give monthly webinars from January-June 2021 in a series called Small Business Resources and Requirements. We gave an overview of the program during these webinars in both English and Spanish.

### **Stakeholders & partners**

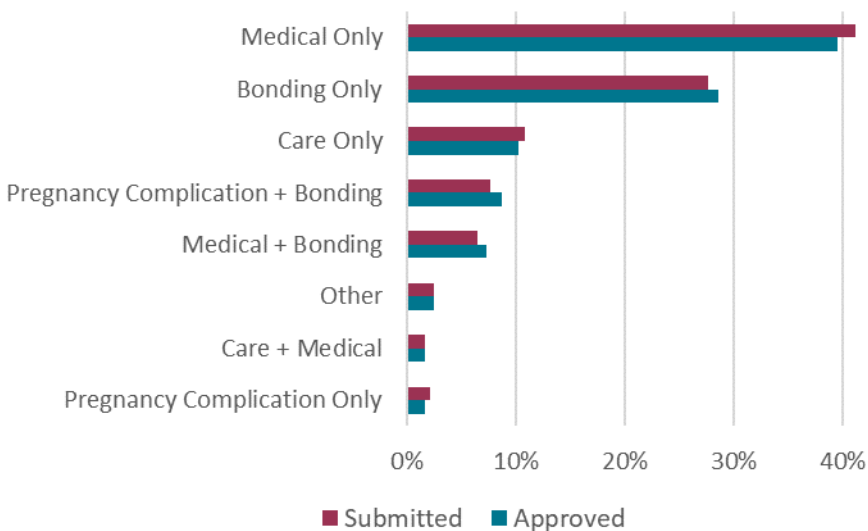
We continue to work with stakeholders through the Paid Leave Advisory Committee and to collaborate with other agencies. We have ongoing partnerships with organizations that support parents, such as MomsRising and Help Me Grow, as well as with community-based organizations that support dual-language users. In partnership with the Perigee Fund, we are developing a pilot program of technical assistance workshops that are being implemented in English and Spanish.

## Program participant demographics

As part of the application process, we ask benefit customers for information about their age, gender and race/ethnicity in order to better understand our program participants and identify gaps that may potentially be addressed through improvements to our outreach, product and operations efforts.

The following section focuses on the characteristics of approximately 136,500 customers who submitted benefit applications between July 2020 and June 2021, and, within that, approximately 119,500 customers who were approved. Figure 9.A. shows the most common combinations of leave types within the sample – each customer is represented once.

**Figure 9.A. Most Common Leave Subtype Combinations (Customer Level)**



Source: WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021

To determine if participation was proportionate relative to the eligible worker population, comparisons were drawn to an estimate of eligible Washington workers<sup>24</sup> to identify any differences. Customers were only counted once, regardless of whether they filed more than one claim in the time period.<sup>25</sup> Second, the differences were brought to scale by calculating the percent difference for each group using the following equation:

$$\text{Percent Difference} = \frac{\text{Customer mean}}{\text{Population mean}} - 1$$

<sup>24</sup> The 2019 One-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample from the American Community Survey includes approximately 3.8 million adults ages 18 and over in Washington who were employed and met an approximation of the WA Paid Leave eligibility requirement of working at least 16 hours per week in the previous 12 months.

<sup>25</sup> Except for the claim level analysis of leave subtypes and lengths of leave, where customers may be counted more than once if they had more than one claim in the time period.

This scaling allows for a more direct comparison of relative participation across groups with large differences in population size. For example, a five percentage point difference between customers and WA workers in a subgroup that comprises 90 percent of the population is substantively different than a five-percentage point gap for a subgroup that comprises just 10 percent of the population.

Age, gender, and racial-ethnic identity were examined alone and together through crosstabulations to determine if there were differences in specific sub-groups using the percent difference equation referenced above. County of residence was also examined. Finally, z-tests were conducted for each group to determine which differences were statistically significant.

The key takeaways are:

- Age appears to be the most significant driver behind program participation. Customers ages 30-39 made up the majority of the customer base and appeared to have much higher participation rates, while all other ages appeared to have lower participation. We expect this is because of the high number of claims related to childbirth, placement and bonding.
- Those who identified as female had the highest participation rates, compared to those who identified as male, nonbinary or who preferred not to disclose their gender. These participation patterns are also likely in part related to claims for pregnancy/childbirth. They are also likely shaped by broader gendered patterns of care work. That said, we are seeing substantial male program participation; male customers represented just under half of family bonding claims.
- When looking at racial-ethnic identity alone, it appeared that certain groups had relatively high participation rates respective to their share of the eligible worker population. However, when gender and age were considered together with racial-ethnic identity, this changed. For a more detailed look at subgroup participation rates, [see pages 22-25](#).
- An examination of participation at the county level showed that the percentage of approved applications differed from that of the worker population in most counties. Notably, the counties with the lowest participation relative to their share of the workforce were Garfield, Skamania, Wahkiakum, Ferry and Columbia counties. For more information, see [page 26](#) and [Appendix A](#).

## Age

Table 10.A. shows the percentage breakdown of those who submitted applications, those who were approved and the corresponding sample of eligible workers in Washington. Customers ages 30-39 made up the majority of the customer base and appeared to have much higher participation rates, while all other ages appeared to have lower participation rates. Although the medical event information saved in the administrative database does not allow us to distinguish between medical claims for childbirth/pregnancy without complications and other medical events, it is likely that the high number of claims related to childbirth and bonding contributed to this pattern.

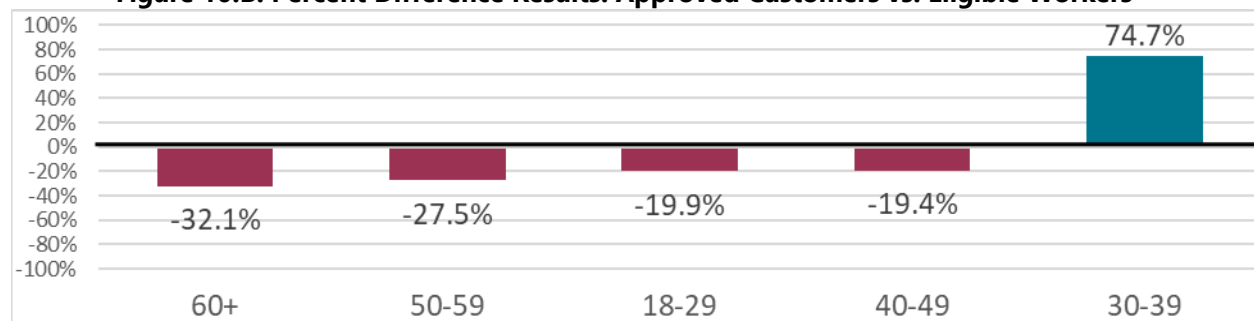
**Table 10.A. WA Paid Leave Customer Comparison to Eligible WA Workers by Age**

	Submitted Applications	Approved Applications	Eligible WA Workers
<b>18-29</b>	21.0%	20.0%	25.0%
<b>30-39</b>	40.7%	41.6%	23.8%
<b>40-49</b>	16.4%	16.3%	20.2%
<b>50-59</b>	13.2%	13.3%	18.3%
<b>60+</b>	8.5%	8.6%	12.7%
<b>Not available</b>	0.2%	0.2%	NA

Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates-Public Use Microdata Sample 2019 & WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021, retrieved 10/5/2021

Figure 10.B. shows the percent difference results between approved customers and eligible workers. Customers ages 30-39 had the highest participation rates, while all other age groups had lower participation. Statistical tests showed that the proportion of approved customers in all age groups differed from that of the eligible worker population.

**Figure 10.B. Percent Difference Results: Approved Customers vs. Eligible Workers<sup>26</sup>**



Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates-Public Use Microdata Sample 2019 & WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021. Statistical tests showed that the proportion of the customers in all age groups differed from that of the eligible worker population.

<sup>26</sup> These figures were calculated using the percent difference equation referenced above, where zero indicates the customer participation rate was equal to the subgroup's population size.

Table 10.C. shows the percent breakdown of claims by age group and leave type, at the claim level. For those ages 30-39, the majority of claims are concentrated in family bonding and medical pregnancy complication, consistent with the assumption that the high participation rates of customers in that age group is related to childbirth/placement and bonding. In contrast, family care leave shows more evenly distributed customer ages between 30 and 59 years old.

**Table 10.C. Percent Breakdown of WA Paid Leave Customers by Age & Leave Type**

	Family Bonding		Family Care		Family Military		Medical		Pregnancy Complication	
	Subm <sup>27</sup>	Appr	Subm	Appr	Subm	Appr	Subm	Appr	Subm	Appr
<b>18-29</b>	29.2%	28.2%	10.8%	9.2%	28.9%	23.9%	16.8%	15.2%	29.3%	28.9%
<b>30-39</b>	61.0%	62.1%	27.9%	26.7%	45.3%	54.3%	28.0%	28.2%	59.1%	62.4%
<b>40-49</b>	8.8%	8.8%	25.3%	25.7%	17.6%	18.5%	20.3%	20.5%	7.8%	7.2%
<b>50-59</b>	0.6%	0.6%	23.3%	24.8%	6.3%	3.3%	20.7%	21.3%	2.3%	0.9%
<b>60+</b>	0.1%	0.1%	12.4%	13.4%	1.9%	-	14.0%	14.6%	1.3%	0.6%

Source: WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021

## Gender

Table 11.A. shows the percentage breakdown of the customer populations by gender, compared to the corresponding sample of eligible workers in Washington. Those who identified as female had the highest participation rates, compared to those who identified as male, nonbinary or who preferred not to disclose their gender. Relative to their respective shares of the eligible worker population, female participation was higher while male participation was lower. As was addressed previously, the high numbers of claims related to childbirth and pregnancy likely contributed to the high participation rates of female customers, along with broader societal gendered patterns in care work.

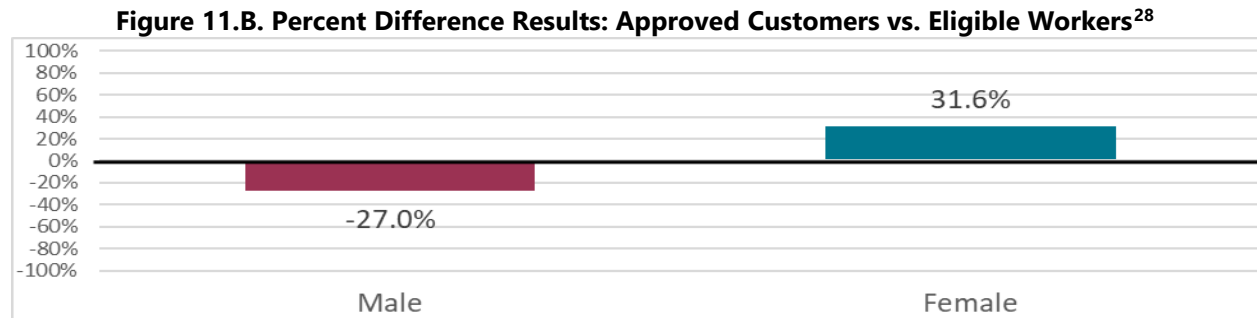
**Table 11.A. WA Paid Leave Customer Comparison to Eligible WA Workers by Gender**

	Submitted Applications	Approved Applications	Eligible WA Workers
<b>Female</b>	59.0%	59.2%	45.0%
<b>Male</b>	40.3%	40.2%	55.0%
<b>Nonbinary</b>	0.3%	0.3%	NA
<b>Prefer not to say</b>	0.4%	0.4%	NA

Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates-Public Use Microdata Sample 2019 & WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021

<sup>27</sup> Subm = Submitted Applications and Appr = Approved Applications

Figure 11.B. shows the percent difference results between approved customers and the eligible worker population. Male participation was 27 percent lower and female participation 31.6 percent higher relative to their share of the eligible worker population. Statistical tests showed that both approved customer populations differed from that of the greater eligible worker population.



Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates-Public Use Microdata Sample 2019 & WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021. Statistical tests showed that both customer populations differed from that of the greater eligible worker population.

Table 11.C. shows the percent breakdown of claims by leave type and gender identity, at the claim level. While the data above shows that male participation was low relative to the population, male customers represented about half of family bonding claims. Notably, female customers accounted for approximately two-thirds of family care and medical claims.

**Table 11.C. Percent Breakdown of WA Paid Leave Customers by Gender & Leave Type**

	Family Bonding		Family Care		Family Military		Medical		Pregnancy Complication	
	Subm	Appr	Subm	Appr	Subm	Appr	Subm	Appr	Subm	Appr
<b>Female</b>	50.6%	51.2%	62.8%	63.9%	86.2%	91.3%	64.8%	65.7%	97.0%	98.9%
<b>Male</b>	49.1%	48.5%	36.6%	35.5%	13.2%	7.6%	34.2%	33.4%	2.8%	1.0%
<b>Nonbinary</b>	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%	-	-	0.5%	0.5%	0.1%	0.03%

Source: WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021

<sup>28</sup> A comparison of those with nonbinary gender identities was not included here because the ACS does not report on gender identities outside of the binary structure.

### Racial-Ethnic Identity

Table 12.A. shows the percentage breakdown of customers by racial-ethnic identity, compared to the corresponding sample of eligible workers in Washington.<sup>29</sup> Those who identified as American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian/Asian American, some other racial-ethnic identity and white appeared to have lower participation rates relative to the eligible worker population. Those who identified Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander appeared to have higher participation rates.

**Table 12.A. WA Paid Leave Customer Comparison to Eligible WA Workers by Racial-Ethnic Identity**

	Submitted Applications	Approved Applications	Eligible WA Workers
<b>American Indian/ Alaska Native</b>	2.1%	2.0%	2.6%
<b>Asian/Asian American</b>	8.9%	9.1%	12.2%
<b>Black/ African American</b>	6.7%	6.3%	5.6%
<b>Hispanic/Latinx</b>	14.6%	14.1%	12.4%
<b>Some Other Race</b>	2.1%	2.0%	4.9%
<b>Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander</b>	2.4%	2.2%	1.4%
<b>Prefer not to say/ Unavailable</b>	3.8%	3.9%	NA
<b>White</b>	69.6%	70.5%	78.3%

Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates-Public Use Microdata Sample 2019 & WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021

<sup>29</sup> Customers and workers in this comparison may be represented more than once if they selected more than one race.

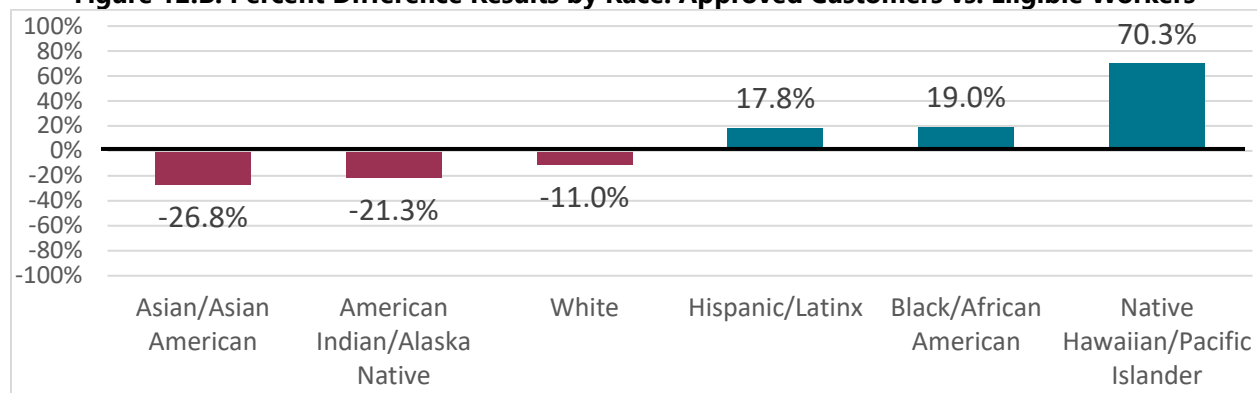


## Washington Paid Family & Medical Leave

Figure 12.B. shows the percent difference results by race. Those who identified as Asian/Asian American, American Indian/Alaska Native and white all had lower participation relative to the eligible worker population. Those who identified as Hispanic/Latinx, Black/African American and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (NHOPI) had higher participation rates. Statistical tests showed that all six racial subgroups of approved customers differed from that of the eligible worker population.

These differences vary in magnitude for each group relative to their share of the eligible worker population. For example, while the data showed that Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander customers have significantly higher participation relative to the eligible worker population, their participation constituted less than one percent of customers and the eligible worker population.

**Figure 12.B. Percent Difference Results by Race: Approved Customers vs. Eligible Workers**



Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates-Public Use Microdata Sample 2019 & WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021. Statistical tests showed that all six racial subgroups differed from that of the eligible worker population.

Table 12.C. shows the percentage breakdown of customers by racial-ethnic identity across leave types, at the claim level.

**Table 12.C. Percent Breakdown of WA Paid Leave Customers by Race & Leave Type**

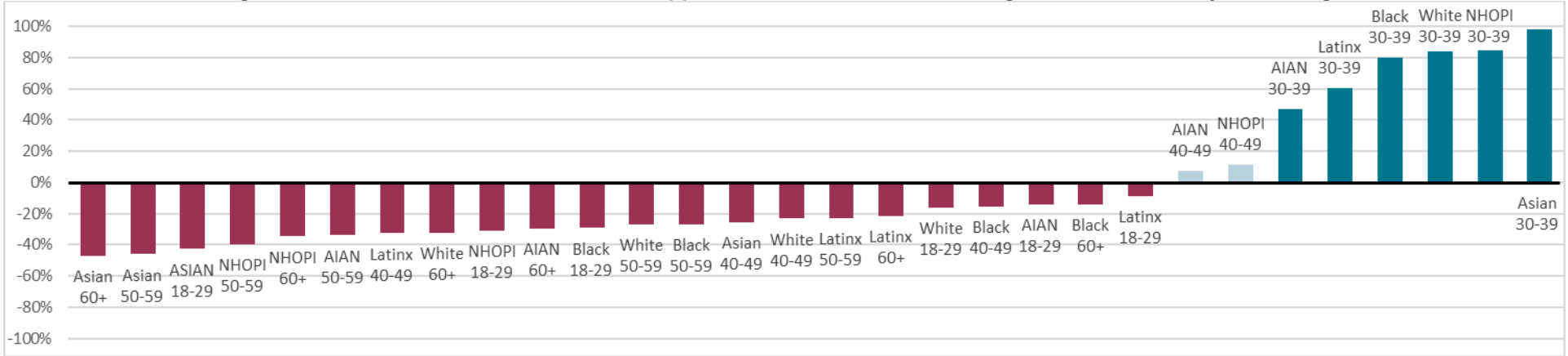
	Family Bonding		Family Care		Family Military		Medical		Pregnancy Complication	
	Subm	Appr	Subm	Appr	Subm	Appr	Subm	Appr	Subm	Appr
<b>AIAN</b>	1.8%	1.7%	2.2%	2.2%	0.6%	-	2.3%	2.2%	2.0%	1.8%
<b>Asian/Asian American</b>	11.9%	11.8%	8.4%	8.3%	10.7%	13.0%	7.0%	7.0%	12.3%	12.6%
<b>Black/African American</b>	6.5%	6.1%	8.2%	7.3%	7.5%	4.3%	6.5%	6.0%	7.6%	7.0%
<b>Hispanic/Latinx</b>	15.2%	14.9%	16.6%	15.5%	15.7%	12.0%	13.4%	12.7%	15.6%	15.5%
<b>NHOPI</b>	2.6%	2.4%	2.8%	2.5%	-	-	2.3%	2.0%	2.7%	2.5%
<b>White</b>	67.4%	68.1%	64.1%	66.0%	72.3%	80.4%	72.8%	73.9%	66.9%	67.6%

Source: WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021

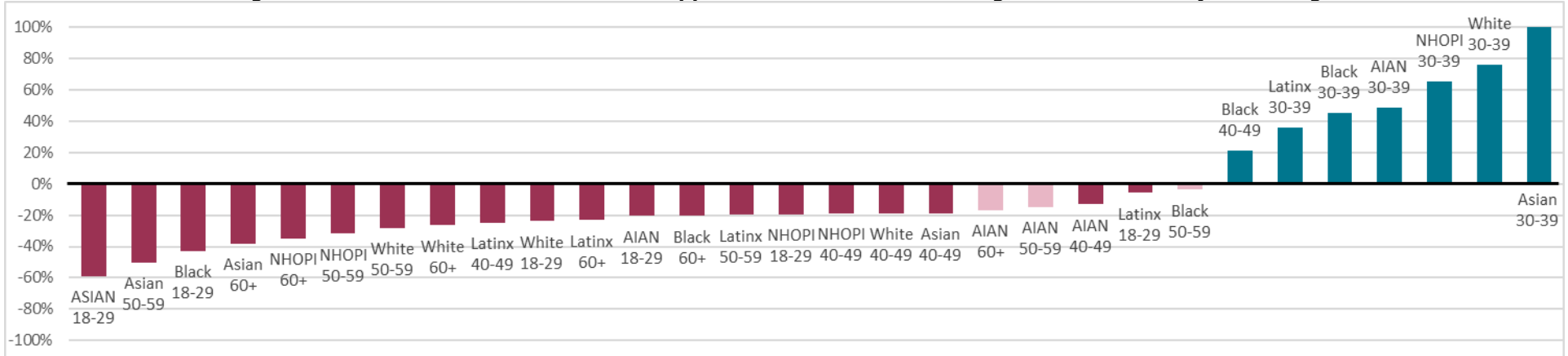
### Gender, age and racial-ethnic identity

A closer examination of gender, age and racial-ethnic identity together revealed a more nuanced story about participation relative to population size. For example, when looking at race, ethnicity or gender alone, it appeared that certain groups had higher participation, but when age and gender were considered, this changed. Figure 13.A. shows the comparison of approved female customers by age and racial-ethnic identity. It appeared that Asian women ages 60+, Asian women ages 50-59, Asian women ages 18-29, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (NHOPI) women ages 50-59, NHOPI women ages 60+ and American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) ages 50-59, among other subgroups, had low participation rates relative to their population size. This is even though earlier figures showed women and those who identified as Native Hawaiian at higher participation rates. Figure 13.B. shows the comparison of approved male customers by age and racial-ethnic identity. It appeared that Asian men 18-29, Asian men ages 50-59, Black men 18-29, Asian men 60+, NHOPI men ages 60+ and NHOPI men ages 50-59 had low participation rates relative to their population size. In both figures, statistical tests showed that most approved customer groups were different than the eligible worker population, except for those groups shown in a lighter color, which were not statistically different.

**Figure 13.A. Percent Difference Results of Approved Female Customers to Eligible WA Workers by Race & Age**



**Figure 13.B. Percent Difference Results of Approved Male Customers to Eligible WA Workers by Race & Age**



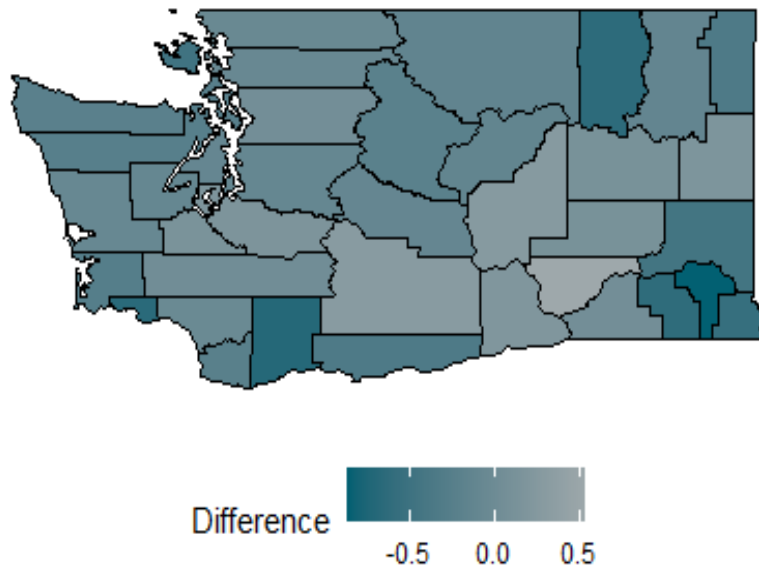
Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates-Public Use Microdata Sample 2019 & WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021. In both figures, statistical tests showed that the majority of customer groups were different than the eligible worker population, with the exception of those groups shown in a lighter color, which were not statistically different.

## Geography

Figure 14.A. shows the comparison of approved applications to the Washington worker population by county,<sup>30</sup> using the percent difference formula referenced previously. Apart from Adams, Lewis, Lincoln and Walla Walla counties, the percentage of approved applications differed from that of the worker population in all other counties. The counties with the lowest participation relative to the Washington workforce are shown in the darker color, while the counties with the highest participation are shown in the lighter color. Garfield, Skamania, Wahkiakum, Ferry and Columbia counties were some of the counties with the lowest participation (darker color) relative to their share of the workforce. These differences in participation are small in magnitude, as these counties are rural with small workforce populations. Some of the counties with the highest participation (lighter color) were Franklin, Yakima, Grant, Benton and Pierce counties. A more detailed county-level breakdown of participation by application status and leave type is available in [Appendix A](#).

In addition to the number of claims reflected by the map and the tables in the appendix, 2,600 applications (1.9 percent) were submitted with an out-of-state mailing address.<sup>31</sup> Workers must have Washington employment to qualify for Paid Leave but may reside in bordering states or may temporarily be living with family members for whom they are providing care.

**Figure 14.A. Percent Difference Results of Approved Customers to Eligible WA Workers by County**



*Source: US Census LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics Data 2018 & WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021. Results were top coded at 1 (100 percent), where zero is full participation relative to workforce size. All counties were statistically different than the Washington worker population, except for Adams, Lewis, Lincoln and Walla Walla counties.*

<sup>30</sup> Counties are approximated using zip codes so may not match future data reports once address allocation to counties is built into the data system. At that time, legislative district reporting will also become available. While several free geocoding and mapping applications exist, using them would require uploading applicant address data to an external site, which would compromise applicant privacy by, in effect, disclosing identity.

<sup>31</sup> There is no residency requirement under RCW 50a.

## Program participant employment characteristics

As part of the application and eligibility verification process, each claim is linked to the customer’s employer wage records and additional documentation of hours and wages the employee provides to determine the amount of leave available to them and their weekly benefit amount. We used quarterly wages, quarterly hours worked, average employee count and employer count from the employer wage reports to estimate average hourly wage and business size for each customer and to construct a comparison sample of eligible Washington workers. An average hourly wage was calculated by taking the average of quarterly wages over hours worked for each customer in each quarter that reports were available and linked to a claim. Like the gender, race, ethnic identity and age comparisons, we compare approved customers with an estimate of eligible Washington workers.

The key takeaways are:

- Customers in the lowest wage group, making up to \$16 per hour, appeared to have the lowest participation rates.
- Likewise, customers that worked for small employers<sup>32</sup> appeared to have lower participation than those who worked for large employers.
- Closer examination of wage and employer size together revealed that lower participation rates persisted for those in the lowest wage group, across both small and large employers.

### Average hourly wage

Table 15.A. shows the percentage breakdown of the customer populations compared to eligible workers by average hourly wage range. It appeared that those who made up to \$16 an hour and \$54 or more per hour had lower participation, while those in the middle wage groups, between \$16-\$54, had higher participation relative to the eligible worker population.

**Table 15.A. WA Paid Leave Customer Comparison to Eligible WA Workers by Average Hourly Wage**

	Submitted Applications	Approved Applications	Eligible WA Workers
<b>Up to \$16/hour</b>	11.3%	10.1%	18.4%
<b>\$16-\$22/hour</b>	22.8%	22.4%	20.8%
<b>\$22-\$32/hour</b>	23.7%	24.4%	20.0%
<b>\$32-\$54/hour</b>	24.6%	25.9%	20.8%
<b>\$54+/hour</b>	16.2%	17.2%	19.7%
<b>Not available</b>	1.3% <sup>33</sup>	0.1%	0.3%

Source: WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021

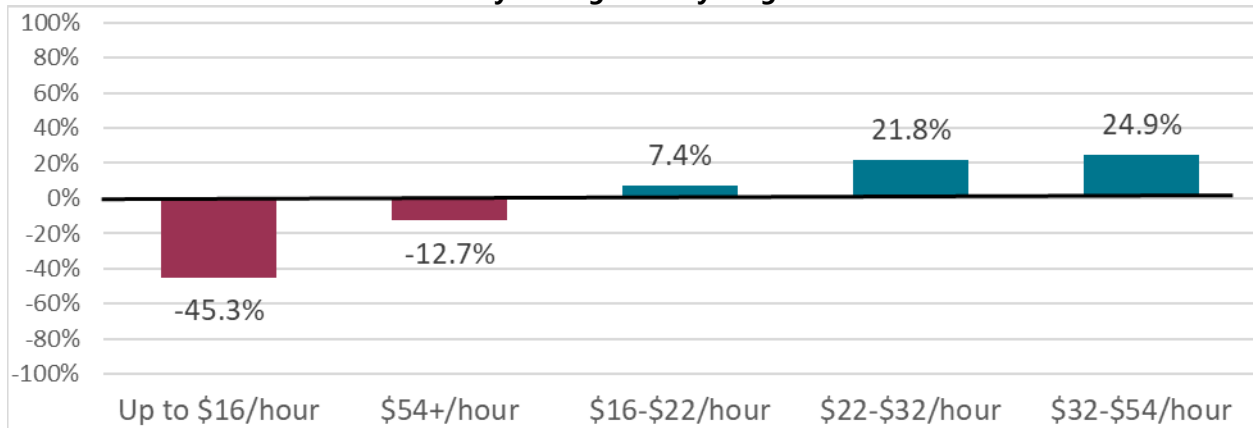
<sup>32</sup> Defined as 49 or fewer employees.

<sup>33</sup> We were unable to calculate average hourly wage using the method described above for a small portion of customers. Factfinding during the adjudication process addresses missing information on these claims, though not all of it is addressed in a way that affords analysis of extractable quantitative data from the system. These claims that were submitted but had missing information would also include some of those that were denied for failure to respond to factfinding or for non-work-hours-related reasons.

## Washington Paid Family & Medical Leave

Figure 15.B. shows the percent difference comparison of approved customers to eligible workers by average hourly wage, confirming the participation rates we saw in table 15.A. All five wage groups were statistically different than that of the eligible population, with those making up to \$16 an hour having the lowest participation rates.

**Figure 15.B. Percent Difference Results of Approved Customers to Eligible WA Workers by Average Hourly Wage**



Source: WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021. All five wage groups were statistically different than that of the eligible population.

Table 15.C. shows the percent breakdown of customers by average hourly wage and leave type, at the claim level. It appears that those making more than \$22 an hour had slightly higher approval rates across claim types, while those making less than \$22 an hour had slightly lower approval rates. Higher wage workers also appear to be more likely to take bonding leave relative to other types of leave.

**Table 15.C. Percent Breakdown of WA Paid Leave Customers by Average Hourly Wage & Leave Type**

	Family Bonding		Family Care		Family Military		Medical		Pregnancy Complication	
	Subm	Appr	Subm	Appr	Subm	Appr	Subm	Appr	Subm	Appr
<b>Up to \$16/hour</b>	10.3%	9.4%	10.4%	9.0%	6.9%	5.4%	11.9%	10.4%	12.7%	11.3%
<b>\$16-\$22/hour</b>	19.3%	19.0%	25.1%	24.6%	23.9%	19.6%	24.7%	24.1%	23.2%	22.6%
<b>\$22-\$32/hour</b>	21.1%	21.5%	27.4%	28.3%	31.4%	35.9%	25.3%	26.1%	20.5%	20.8%
<b>\$32-\$54/hour</b>	27.0%	27.9%	24.0%	25.5%	27.7%	30.4%	23.6%	25.0%	24.9%	26.2%
<b>\$54+/hour</b>	21.2%	22.1%	11.6%	12.5%	8.2%	8.7%	13.4%	14.3%	17.6%	19.0%

Source: WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021

### Employer size

Table 16.A. shows the percent breakdown of customers compared to eligible workers by employer size. It appears that customers that worked for small employers had low participation relative to the eligible worker population. Those who worked for large employers had higher participation relative to the eligible worker population. We were unable to determine employer size for approximately 8 percent of submitted applications and 7 percent of approved applications, but even if they did all work for small employers, it would not account for the 12 percentage point gap in participation for customers that work for small employers.

**Table 16.A. WA Paid Leave Customer Comparison to Eligible WA Workers by Employer Size**

	Submitted Applications	Approved Applications	Eligible WA Workers
<b>Large (50 or more employees)</b>	74.8%	76.2%	71.2%
<b>Small (49 or fewer employees)</b>	16.9%	17.1%	28.8%
<b>Not available</b>	8.3%	6.7%	0.04%

Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates-Public Use Microdata Sample 2019 & WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021

Figure 16.B. shows the percent difference results of the approved customer comparison to eligible Washington workers. It appears that those who worked for a small employer had lower participation, while those who worked for a large employer had slightly higher participation. While employees that work for small employers are a much smaller portion of the eligible worker population, it does appear that participation is relatively low. Statistical tests showed that the differences between approved customers and eligible workers across both small and large employers were statistically significant.

**Figure 16.B. Percent Difference Results of Approved Customers to Eligible WA Workers by Employer Size**



Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates-Public Use Microdata Sample 2019 & WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021. Statistical tests showed that the differences across both groups were statistically significant.

Table 16.C. shows the percentage breakdown of the customer population by employer size across leave types, at the claim level. It appears that customers who worked for large employers had slightly higher approval rates than those who worked for small employers.

**Table 16.C. Percent Breakdown of WA Paid Leave Customers by Employer Size & Leave Type**

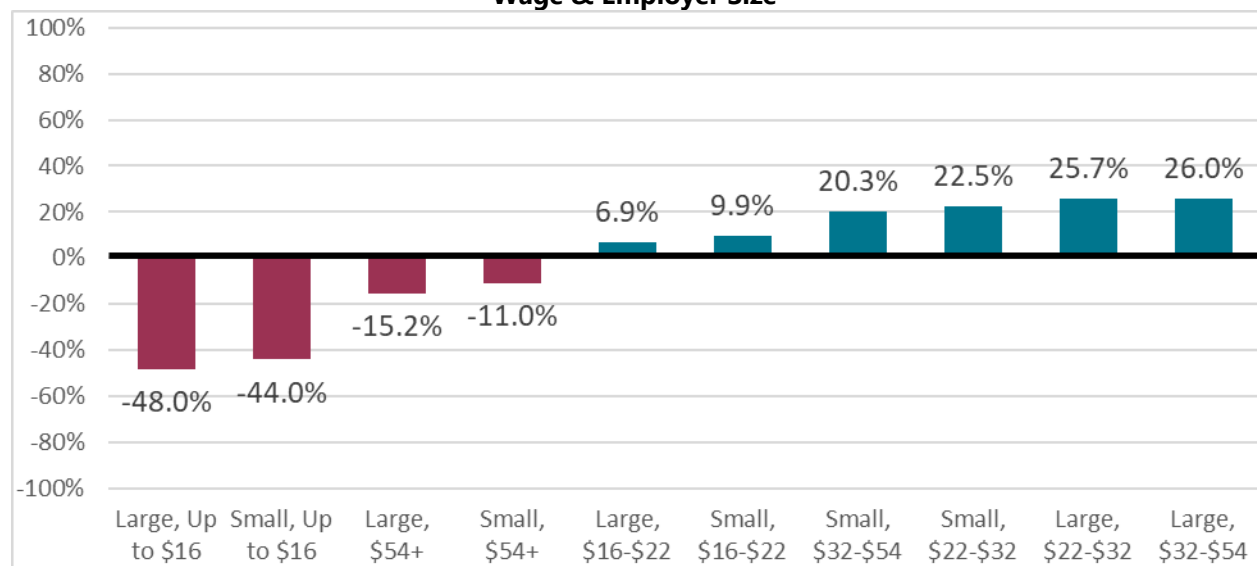
	Family Bonding		Family Care		Family Military		Medical		Pregnancy Complication	
	Subm	Appr	Subm	Appr	Subm	Appr	Subm	Appr	Subm	Appr
<b>Large Employer</b>	72.2%	73.4%	79.9%	81.5%	74.2%	79.3%	77.9%	78.9%	73.9%	74.6%
<b>Small Employer</b>	19.9%	19.9%	13.2%	13.1%	18.2%	16.3%	14.7%	15.0%	18.7%	19.1%

Source: WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021

### Wage and employer size

Figure 17.A. shows the percent difference comparisons of approved customers to eligible workers by wage and employer size. Closer examination revealed that lower participation rates persisted for those in the lowest wage group, across both small and large employers. Statistical tests showed that all these subgroups of approved customers were different than that of the eligible worker population.

**Figure 17.A. Percent Difference Results of Approved Customers to Eligible WA Workers: Wage & Employer Size**



Source: WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021. Statistical tests showed that all these subgroups of approved customers were different than that of the eligible worker population.



## Lengths of leave

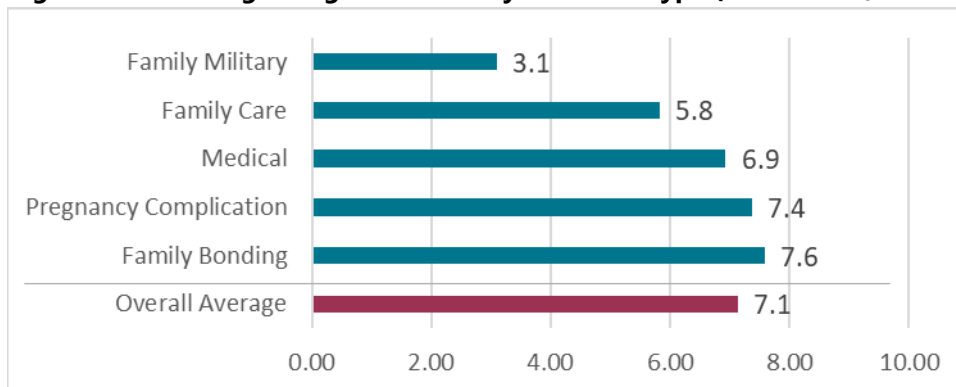
We examined average lengths of leave at the claim level and the customer level. To capture leave-taking behaviors most accurately, the sample was adjusted for this analysis to include any customer with an approved claim between July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021, whose claim year has ended as of September 30, 2021.<sup>34</sup>

Lengths of leave are not calculated in terms of calendar weeks, but rather workweeks as determined by each customer’s typical workweek hours. A customer’s typical workweek hours are determined based on whether they are salaried or otherwise at the time of filing the initial application. For salaried employees, their typical workweek hours are 40 hours, regardless of the number of hours worked in the qualifying period. For all other employees, the department determines typical workweek hours by dividing the sum of all hours reported in the qualifying period by fifty-two and rounding down to the nearest hour. Once an individual is approved to take paid leave, they must file weekly claims at a minimum of eight consecutive hours to receive benefits. Customers may use leave intermittently; weekly payment amount is prorated based on reported hours worked and non-supplemental paid time off used each week.

### Claim Level Lengths of Leave

At the claim level, average length of leave was calculated by dividing the sum of all leave hours used across approved weekly claims by each customer’s typical workweek hours, including any hours reported during the wait week. The result was averaged across all claims within the sample. Figure 18.A. shows the average length of leave at the claim level for each subtype, compared to the overall average length of just over 7 weeks<sup>35</sup>. Those who took family care and family military leave had the shortest lengths of leave, while those who took medical, pregnancy complication and bonding leave had longer lengths.

**Figure 18.A. Average Length of Leave by Claim Subtype (Claim Level, weeks)**



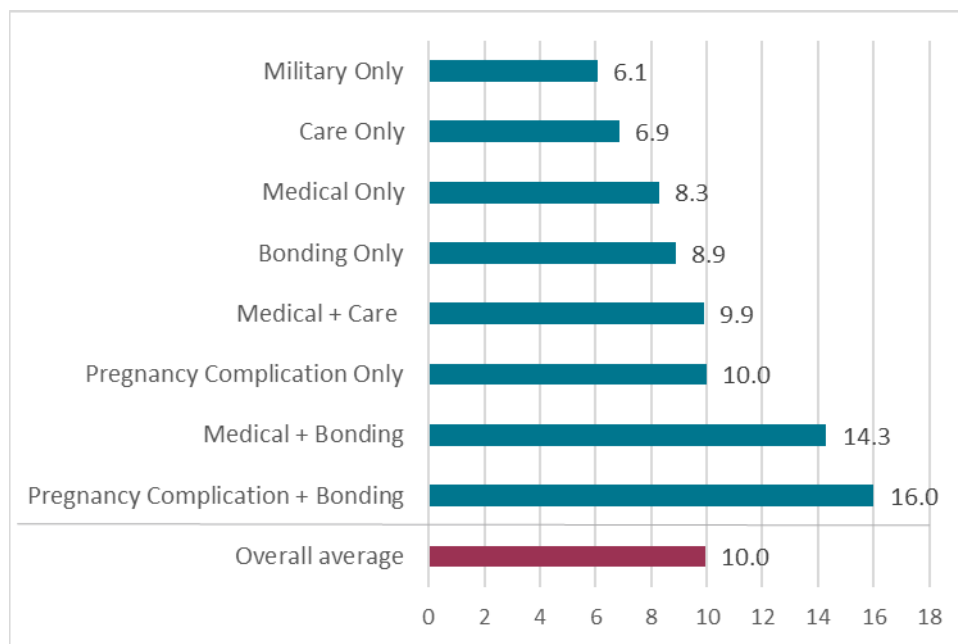
<sup>34</sup>This narrowed the sample of customers with approved claims from approximately 119,500 to 38,481 customers. We limited our analysis to those whose claim year has ended because we know they won’t be taking any more leave associated with those claims. Those whose claim years have not ended (n = 81,085) used a median of 10 weeks of leave and an average of 9 weeks.

<sup>35</sup>The median was 6.8 weeks.

### Customer Level Lengths of Leave

At the customer level, average length of leave was calculated by dividing the sum of all leave hours used across claims within the customer’s claim year by their typical workweek hours. The result was averaged across customers in the sample. The average length of leave was nearly 10 weeks, with customers using a median of nearly 12 weeks. Approximately five percent of customers in this group were approved but did not use any leave. Figure 18.B. shows the average lengths of leave of the most common leave type combinations, compared to the overall average for customers within the sample. Approximately 33 percent of customers used all the possible leave available to them in their claim year. Customers in this group used an average of 75 percent and a median of 88 percent of maximum possible leave hours.<sup>36</sup>

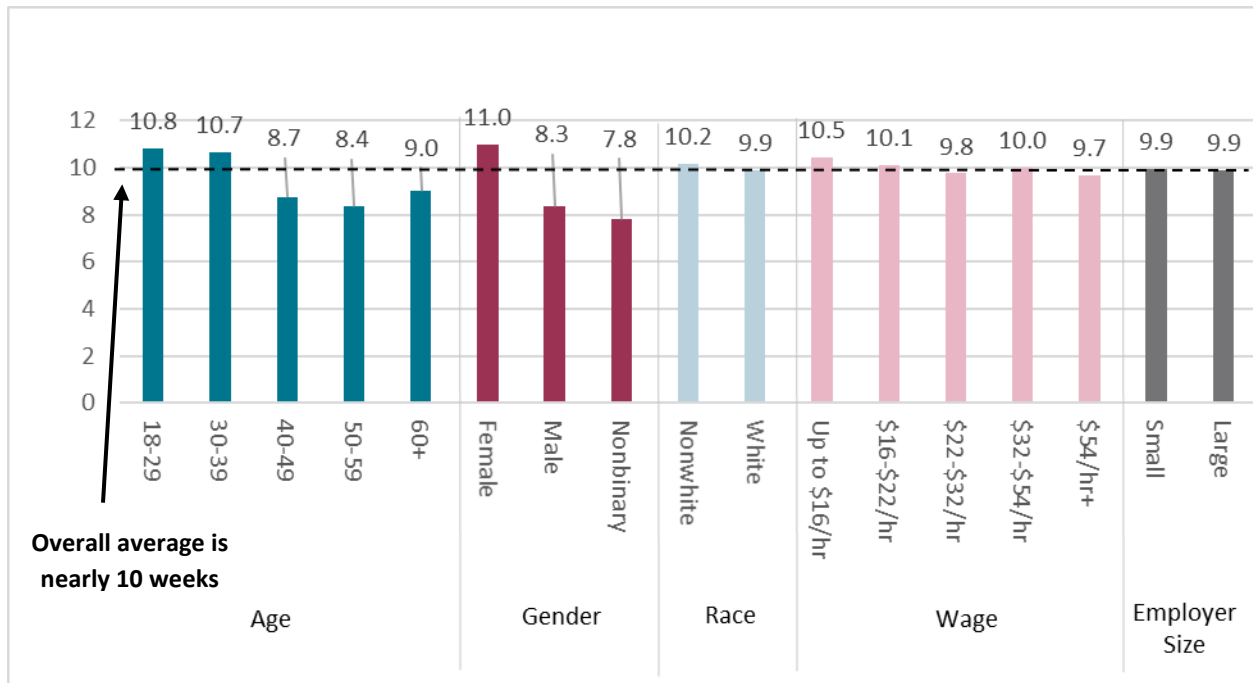
**Figure 18.B. Average Length of Leave (Customer Level, weeks)**



<sup>36</sup> Only customers who take bonding leave are automatically approved for a set amount of leave (12 weeks). For the other types of leave, we are unable to distinguish in the extractable quantitative data the amount of leave for which they were approved. To estimate, we compared how much leave they used to how much leave was potentially available in the claim year, given their claim type(s).

Figure 18.C. illustrates the average length of leave across various subgroups, compared to the average overall length of nearly 10 weeks, denoted by the dotted black line. Lengths of leave tended to be shorter for older customers, for white customers, for those who identified as male and nonbinary and for those in the higher wage groups. However, length of leave did not vary much for customers who worked for small (49 or fewer employees) and large (more than 50 employees) employers.

**Figure 18.C. Average Length of Leave across Subgroups (Customer Level, weeks)**



Source: WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021

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Questions about this report or the Paid Family and Medical Leave Program?  
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## Appendix A: County comparisons

### WA Paid Leave Customer Comparison to Eligible WA Workers by County of Residence

	Submitted Applications	Approved Applications	WA Workers
Adams	0.23%	<b>0.22%*</b>	0.2%
Asotin	<b>0.14%*</b>	<b>0.13%*</b>	0.3%
Benton	<b>3.25%*</b>	<b>3.20%*</b>	2.7%
Chelan	<b>0.89%*</b>	<b>0.86%*</b>	1.1%
Clallam	<b>0.68%*</b>	<b>0.69%*</b>	0.9%
Clark	<b>4.99%*</b>	<b>4.95%*</b>	6.5%
Columbia	<b>0.04%*</b>	<b>0.04%*</b>	0.1%
Cowlitz	<b>1.45%*</b>	1.43%	1.5%
Douglas	<b>0.52%*</b>	<b>0.52%*</b>	0.6%
Ferry	<b>0.04%*</b>	<b>0.04%*</b>	0.1%
Franklin	<b>1.69%*</b>	<b>1.68%*</b>	1.1%
Garfield	<b>0.01%*</b>	<b>0.01%*</b>	0.1%
Grant	<b>1.30%*</b>	<b>1.26%*</b>	1.0%
Grays Harbor	<b>0.82%*</b>	<b>0.82%*</b>	0.9%
Island	<b>0.68%*</b>	<b>0.67%*</b>	0.9%
Jefferson	<b>0.22%*</b>	<b>0.22%*</b>	0.3%
King	<b>28.94%*</b>	<b>29.38%*</b>	32.8%
Kitsap	<b>2.48%*</b>	<b>2.49%*</b>	2.8%
Kittitas	<b>0.43%*</b>	<b>0.44%*</b>	0.5%
Klickitat	<b>0.13%*</b>	<b>0.13%*</b>	0.2%
Lewis	1.06%	<b>1.02%*</b>	1.0%
Lincoln	0.10%	0.11%	0.1%
Mason	<b>0.62%*</b>	<b>0.63%*</b>	0.7%
Okanogan	<b>0.34%*</b>	<b>0.34%*</b>	0.4%
Pacific	<b>0.16%*</b>	<b>0.15%*</b>	0.2%
Pend Oreille	<b>0.07%*</b>	<b>0.07%*</b>	0.1%
Pierce	<b>13.18%*</b>	<b>13.01%*</b>	11.3%
San Juan	<b>0.11%*</b>	<b>0.10%*</b>	0.2%
Skagit	<b>1.56%*</b>	<b>1.58%*</b>	1.7%
Skamania	<b>0.06%*</b>	<b>0.06%*</b>	0.2%
Snohomish	<b>12.15%*</b>	<b>12.29%*</b>	11.8%
Spokane	<b>7.77%*</b>	<b>7.64%*</b>	6.6%
Stevens	<b>0.44%*</b>	<b>0.43%*</b>	0.5%
Thurston	<b>3.92%*</b>	<b>3.94%*</b>	3.5%
Wahkiakum	<b>0.03%*</b>	<b>0.03%*</b>	0.1%
Walla Walla	0.73%	0.73%	0.7%
Whatcom	<b>2.56%*</b>	<b>2.60%*</b>	2.8%
Whitman	<b>0.26%*</b>	<b>0.27%*</b>	0.5%
Yakima	<b>4.09%*</b>	<b>3.97%*</b>	3.1%

Source: US Census LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics Data 2018 & WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021. An asterisk (\*) denotes percentages that are statistically significant or different from that of the general population.

**Percent Breakdown of WA Paid Leave Customers by County & Leave Type**

	Family Bonding		Family Care		Family Military		Medical		Pregnancy Complication	
	Subm	Appr	Subm	Appr	Subm	Appr	Subm	Appr	Subm	Appr
Adams	0.25%	0.25%	0.23%	0.21%	-	-	0.20%	0.19%	0.24%	0.22%
Asotin	0.09%	0.10%	0.10%	0.11%	-	-	0.16%	0.16%	0.10%	0.10%
Benton	2.92%	2.89%	3.60%	3.67%	2.52%	1.09%	3.35%	3.31%	2.81%	2.70%
Chelan	0.81%	0.82%	1.09%	1.01%	-	-	0.85%	0.81%	0.74%	0.75%
Clallam	0.56%	0.55%	0.82%	0.89%	-	-	0.70%	0.73%	0.56%	0.54%
Clark	4.53%	4.45%	4.85%	4.96%	3.14%	1.09%	5.51%	5.48%	4.88%	4.82%
Columbia	0.03%	0.04%	0.03%	0.03%	-	-	0.04%	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%
Cowlitz	1.21%	1.19%	1.49%	1.42%	1.26%	1.09%	1.63%	1.62%	1.14%	1.06%
Douglas	0.51%	0.51%	0.57%	0.54%	-	-	0.48%	0.48%	0.41%	0.41%
Ferry	0.04%	0.04%	0.04%	0.04%	-	-	0.02%	0.02%	0.06%	0.03%
Franklin	1.75%	1.77%	1.96%	1.80%	2.52%	-	1.57%	1.55%	1.72%	1.77%
Garfield	0.01%	0.01%	0.02%	0.01%	-	-	0.01%	0.01%	-	-
Grant	1.25%	1.24%	1.50%	1.47%	0.63%	-	1.28%	1.23%	1.18%	1.16%
Grays Harbor	0.61%	0.60%	0.96%	1.00%	-	-	0.89%	0.92%	0.75%	0.74%
Island	0.53%	0.51%	0.83%	0.91%	7.55%	4.35%	0.70%	0.73%	0.50%	0.46%
Jefferson	0.13%	0.13%	0.33%	0.36%	-	-	0.26%	0.26%	0.15%	0.15%
King	32.95%	33.38%	25.77%	25.81%	8.81%	6.52%	26.96%	27.26%	33.02%	33.97%
Kitsap	2.34%	2.34%	2.43%	2.48%	10.69%	13.04%	2.50%	2.54%	2.56%	2.49%
Kittitas	0.38%	0.39%	0.47%	0.53%	-	-	0.43%	0.46%	0.30%	0.28%
Klickitat	0.10%	0.10%	0.21%	0.23%	-	-	0.14%	0.13%	0.09%	0.07%
Lewis	0.89%	0.87%	1.35%	1.29%	0.63%	-	1.06%	1.02%	0.79%	0.73%
Lincoln	0.05%	0.05%	0.14%	0.13%	-	-	0.14%	0.15%	0.06%	0.06%
Mason	0.45%	0.45%	0.73%	0.76%	1.89%	3.26%	0.71%	0.72%	0.46%	0.44%
Okanogan	0.31%	0.31%	0.34%	0.35%	-	-	0.34%	0.34%	0.21%	0.18%
Pacific	0.13%	0.11%	0.14%	0.12%	-	-	0.18%	0.16%	0.11%	0.11%
Pend Oreille	0.04%	0.03%	0.09%	0.09%	-	-	0.08%	0.09%	0.04%	0.03%
Pierce	12.84%	12.64%	12.97%	12.61%	22.64%	28.26%	13.60%	13.39%	13.30%	12.99%
San Juan	0.10%	0.10%	0.13%	0.15%	0.63%	1.09%	0.10%	0.10%	0.09%	0.09%
Skagit	1.54%	1.52%	1.56%	1.53%	3.14%	3.26%	1.54%	1.61%	1.41%	1.37%
Skamania	0.05%	0.05%	0.07%	0.07%	-	-	0.06%	0.06%	0.02%	0.02%
Snohomish	13.48%	13.53%	11.65%	11.57%	7.55%	7.61%	11.54%	11.61%	12.45%	12.79%
Spokane	6.58%	6.55%	7.36%	7.60%	14.47%	17.39%	8.74%	8.61%	6.80%	6.71%
Stevens	0.31%	0.30%	0.54%	0.58%	-	-	0.52%	0.52%	0.27%	0.26%
Thurston	3.55%	3.60%	4.31%	4.39%	8.18%	8.70%	4.03%	4.02%	3.98%	3.91%
Wahkiakum	1.76%	1.73%	2.09%	2.13%	1.89%	2.17%	1.96%	1.92%	1.75%	1.60%
Walla Walla	0.01%	0.01%	0.03%	0.03%	-	-	0.05%	0.04%	0.03%	0.04%
Whatcom	0.51%	0.51%	0.81%	0.86%	0.63%	1.09%	0.84%	0.86%	0.63%	0.66%
Whitman	2.41%	2.41%	2.70%	2.86%	0.63%	-	2.66%	2.73%	2.34%	2.30%
Yakima	0.30%	0.31%	0.19%	0.16%	-	-	0.26%	0.27%	0.21%	0.18%
Unavailable	3.68%	3.60%	5.51%	5.23%	0.63%	-	3.91%	3.87%	3.79%	3.78%

Source: WA Paid Leave Administrative Data 7/1/2020 - 6/30/2021