

What We Know Today About Equal Pay

By Monique Lemus

What is the pay gap between a man and a woman?

Since 1996, the National Committee on Pay Equity has issued a calendar whose date “symbolizes how far into the year women must work to earn what men earned in the previous year.” Yet, there are more layers of complexity to be acknowledged when discussing the pay gap. One layer is identity. When accounting for race and ethnicity, the 2021 pay gap calendar looks like this:

- March 9: Asian American and Pacific Islander Women’s Equal Pay Day. Those women earn 87 cents for every dollar paid to white men.
- March 24: All Women’s Equal Pay Day. Women working full time and year round are paid 82 cents for every dollar paid to a man who works full time and year round.
- August 3: Black Women’s Equal Pay Day. Black women are paid 63 cents for every dollar paid to white men.
- September 8: Native American Women’s Equal Pay Day. Native women are paid 60 cents for every dollar paid to white men.
- October 21: Latina’s Equal Pay Day. Latinas are paid 55 cents for every dollar paid to white men.

A second layer of complexity was added by the coronavirus pandemic. Record numbers of women are leaving the workforce, especially women of color. In January 2021 alone, more than 275,000 women left the workforce, which accounts for 80% of those over the age of 20 who left the labor market.

As the number of women employed since 1988 has plummeted, several questions arise not only about the pay gap, but also about the intersection between pay gap and the identities of women from marginalized communities. Today it seems that pay equity is further away than it was 12 months ago. To fill the gap across identities we as a community need to work more intentionally around programs, policies and infrastructure.