

# THE FUTURE OF WORK: EDUCATION & WORKFORCE GAPS AFFECTING COLORADO WOMEN

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Women are critical to the future of work and the stability and growth of Colorado's economy. In 2018, the Bell Policy Center looked at [the changing world of work from a gender lens](#), including trends in automation and emerging technology, the growth in alternative work arrangements, and changing education and training needs. This brief builds on that work by taking a closer look at two aspects of Colorado's learning and work environment for women: Attainment in two- and four-year degree programs and growth in women-dominated professions.

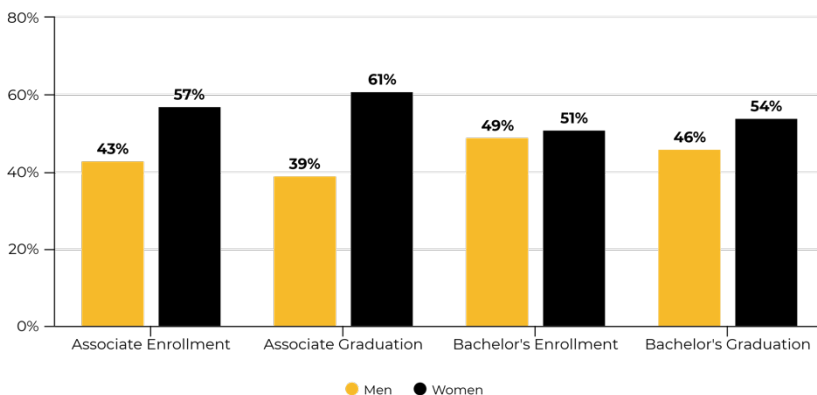
## Policy Recommendations

- Funding [tuition assistance programs](#) for women would help decrease student debt and increase graduation rates.
- Investing in programs supporting student parents, such as on-campus child care, would ease child care costs and assist in balancing parenting and schoolwork. A successful example Colorado could expand upon is the [Strengthening Working Families Initiative \(SWFI\)](#).
- Developing career pathways and stackable credential programs that focus on women-dominated industries, making it easier for women to advance throughout their careers.
- Increasing public investment in [caring industries](#) could create more job opportunities and increase wages in industries that primarily employ women.
- Strengthening and extending workplace protections — including minimum wage, overtime, and fair scheduling laws — can help cover more industries and workers, such as tipped workers.

## Postsecondary Education: Higher Pursuit for Lower Returns

### ENROLLMENT & GRADUATION RATES

COLORADO PUBLIC POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS 2017-2018



Source: Bell analysis of enrollment and completion data from the Colorado Department of Higher Education

By next year, an estimated 74 percent of all jobs in Colorado will require some level of postsecondary education and training.<sup>1</sup> The good news is Colorado women are pursuing degrees in greater numbers. Consistent with [national trends](#), data from Colorado's community colleges and four-year postsecondary institutions show women are both enrolling and completing postsecondary degrees at higher rates than men.<sup>2</sup>

In the 2017-2018 academic year, women received about 60 percent of the associate degrees awarded by Colorado's community colleges and nearly 54 percent of bachelor's degrees from Colorado's four-year postsecondary institutions.<sup>3</sup> Comparatively, 49 percent of students enrolled in bachelor's degree programs were men, but only 46 percent completed degrees. As for associate programs, men made up about 44 percent of students enrolled and 40 percent of completed degrees.

Women with postsecondary degrees have better prospects than those without them, but these degrees aren't translating to higher paying jobs for Colorado women. Colorado trends are consistent with national ones that show women must make larger investments in further education and training to match men's salaries. As researchers at Georgetown University find, a woman needs one additional degree, on average, to earn as much as a man.<sup>4</sup>

This need for more education leads to additional inequities along gender lines. For instance, student debt in Colorado has [grown to approximately \\$26.4 billion](#) and this burden is disproportionately held by women. A [report by the American Association of University Women \(AAUW\)](#) finds women have \$2,700 more student debt, on average, than men when they graduate college. [Student debt also leads to larger racial wealth inequities over time](#). Women of color both [borrow more and pay back their loans at a slower rate](#) than white students, especially white men. The pay gap complicates loan repayment for all women, but it affects black and Latinx women more acutely, as they're paid less than white women.

Student debt carries a deeper impact for student parents, especially women, who make up [70 percent](#) of student parents nationally. While student parents earn higher GPAs on average than students without children, they take longer to complete a degree and have [lower graduation rates](#). They also typically leave with student debt, regardless of completion. This may have deeper implications for racial inequity due to student parents being [more likely to be students of color](#), who are often obligated to take on [disproportionate amounts of student loans](#).

Despite the majority of student fathers being married, the [majority of student mothers are single parents](#). Oftentimes child care does not accommodate student schedules, and those that do aren't always near postsecondary programs. A [2016 study from the Institute for Women's Policy Research \(IWPR\)](#) shows only 50 percent of Colorado's two- and four-year colleges had care available on campus. For the more than [50,000 student parents in Colorado](#), addressing these shortcomings is essential to ensuring all students can succeed.

## Women-Dominated Industries

Across the board, the U.S. economy is heavily divided by gender, with most industries dominated either by men or women. This split has strong implications for women's pay: 23 of the 30 lowest paying occupations in the U.S. are held predominantly by women, while 26 of the highest paying ones are dominated by men.<sup>5</sup> This isn't the result of women choosing lower paying jobs: When the gender dynamics in an industry shift, so do wages. For instance, between 1950 and 2000, biologists, designers, and ticket agents all went from being predominantly men to majority women. The inflation-adjusted wages decreased by 18 percent (biologists), 34 percent (designers), and 43 percent (ticket agents). The reverse has been observed when traditionally women-dominated occupations — such as computer programming — pivot to predominantly employ men.<sup>6</sup>

### COLORADO INDUSTRIES DOMINATED BY ONE GENDER (BY SHARE OF INDUSTRY WORKFORCE)

Men Dominated			Women Dominated		
Industry	Percent Men	Colorado Median Hourly Wage	Industry	Percent Women	Colorado Median Hourly Wage
Construction	87%	\$22.54	Child day care services	94%	\$12.92
Truck transportation	86%	\$16.91	Beauty salons	90%	\$11.94
Automotive repair	84%	\$21.34	Home health care	89%	\$12.14
Landscaping services	84%	\$15.15	Skilled nursing	88%	\$35.03
Mining support	81%	\$22.90	Outpatient care	79%	\$15.06
Animal production	80%	\$13.25	Individual & family services	77%	\$12.05
Security services	76%	\$14.53	Offices of physicians	73%	\$17.97
Crop production	74%	\$14.35	Other health care	73%	\$19.31

Source: Bell analysis of reported occupations of respondents in the American Community Survey from 2013-2017 and BLS employment and wage estimates for Colorado by industry for May 2018

Women-dominated industries are some of the fastest growing in Colorado. Based upon an analysis of projected growth in occupations in Colorado, the top occupation by percentage growth is health care support, which is projected to grow by 38 percent by 2028. Not far behind are personal care services (26 percent) and education (19 percent). These occupations fall within women-dominated industries, yet they continue to pay low wages and have fewer career advancement opportunities despite their importance to Colorado’s economy.

### The Caring Workforce

In addition to offering lower wages, industries dominated by women tend to be related to the care of others and are often connected to direct public investment. For example, home health care services, nursing care facilities, and day care facilities in Colorado all employ more than 80 percent women.<sup>7</sup> The Bell has previously outlined the [challenges and opportunities](#) of Colorado’s caring workforce, highlighting our state’s critical need for quality early childhood education and long-term care.

Despite the importance of such jobs, they often have low pay, poor benefits, inadequate training, and a lack of career ladders. Because pay within these care industries often directly connects to public investments — such as Medicaid reimbursement rates for health care activities or Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) subsidies — additional public investments would not only help the career advancement and earnings of women in these jobs, but also ensure the state meets the needs of working families and older Coloradans.

For instance, prioritizing investments in early education, affordable child care, respite for unpaid older adult care providers, and nursing care facilities could increase access to these critical programs across Colorado. In doing so, this would not only free up Colorado women currently engaged in unpaid roles to enter the paid workforce, but could also improve the wages and working conditions in these predominately women-dominated industries.

### Low Wages & Tipped Work

Given the concentration of women in low-wage industries, proposals such as minimum wage increases would have a greater benefit for women. The [Economic Policy Institute](#) (EPI) estimates 55.6 percent of minimum wage workers are women. If the federal minimum wage is raised to \$15 per hour by 2024, 34.4 percent of working women in Colorado would get a raise. On average, affected workers would see a 5.2 percent raise, equivalent to an additional \$1,200 per year for year-round Colorado workers.

Unfortunately, many women in low-wage industries might not see the benefit of an increased minimum wage unless the practice of providing a “subminimum wage” to tipped workers is corrected. For workers who customarily and regularly receive tips, state law allows these workers to be paid \$3.02 less per hour. Known as a “tipped credit,” the credit is supposed to account for the amount of tips that would supplement a server’s wage to levels comparable to other employees within the industry. The data of wages nationally [repudiate the notion these workers make substantial tipped income](#).

TIPPED WORKERS IN COLORADO BY OCCUPATION SHARE OF WOMEN	
Occupation	Percent Women
Hairdressers	92%
Personal appearance workers	92%
Hosts/hostesses	87%
Waiters	69%
Bartenders	56%
Other personal care workers	53%
Dining room helpers	39%
Gaming service workers	27%
Barbers	36%
Taxi drivers/chauffeurs	16%

*Source: Bell analysis of reported occupations of respondents in the Current Population Survey from 2013-2017*

The practice of tipping in many industries exacerbates both gender and racial discrimination. A larger [EPI study](#) of tipped workers shows even though women make up two-thirds of tipped workers nationally, they make less in average wages than their male counterparts. Another [study from Cornell University](#) finds consumers of multiple races discriminate against black service providers by tipping them less than white service providers. While the practice of tipping may be beneficial to employers, allowing them to pass along the cost of wages directly to the customer, it creates great volatility for women's paychecks, particularly those of women of color.

In equal treatment states — states that have eliminated a tipped wage credit — the [service industry thrives and workers do better](#). Both increases to the minimum wage and decreases to the tipped wage credit are measures that can directly help ensure Colorado women are able to benefit from our strong economy.

### **Valuing Worker Time in Women-Dominated Industries**

Women-dominated industries and occupations are often subject to unpredictable and unstable work schedules that lead to additional hardships, including paying for housing, finding quality child care, and maintaining appointments such as doctor visits or school activities. [New research from the Shift Project](#) finds workers in the retail and food service sector (both of which have a preponderance of women) have little advance notice and notes “just-in-time” scheduling is significantly worse for workers of color, particularly women of color.

In addition to the women struggling with unpredictable shift work schedules, hundreds of thousands of Colorado women work in salaried positions that aren't covered by overtime protections. Whether misclassified or unaware they should receive protections, salaried employees in Colorado aren't often paid for the hours they work over the standard 40-hour work week.

Recently, the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) proposed raising the salary threshold for determining overtime exemptions to \$57,500 by 2026. The Bell estimates this would benefit over 100,000 women, including 27,000 mothers. In further analysis determining which workers would benefit from updated overtime protections, the Bell finds the largest industries that would see a positive impact are [education and health care services](#) — both women-dominated industries.

### **Conclusion**

Today, women make up the majority of postsecondary students and degree earners, but many still find themselves funneled into caring careers with low pay and little opportunity for advancement. While it's unclear exactly why this breakdown occurs, it does offer distinct opportunities for strategic public investment to shape Colorado's future of work and women's place in it.

Though women face systemic discrimination that's far beyond the scope of this brief, Colorado can prioritize programs that assist women through the pipeline from postsecondary education into stable, well-compensated employment. By providing tuition assistance, parental supports like on-campus child care, and targeted career pathways, Colorado can ameliorate some of the hardships women face before they enter the workforce. By increasing public investment in industries where primarily women work and strengthening workplace protections and opportunities for advancement, our state can ensure Colorado women have a strong foothold in the economy of tomorrow.



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<sup>1</sup> Carnevale, Anthony P., et al. *Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements through 2020*. Center of Education and the Workforce, Georgetown University, June 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Because of limited data at this time, we were unable to analyze workforce development programs.

<sup>3</sup> These statistics are based on our own calculations using enrollment and completion data from the Colorado Department of Higher Education.

<sup>4</sup> Carnevale, Anthony P., Nicole Smith, and Artem Gulish. (2018). "Women Can't Win." *Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce*. Available at: [https://1gyhoq479ufd3yna29x7ubjn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/Women\\_ES\\_Web.pdf](https://1gyhoq479ufd3yna29x7ubjn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/Women_ES_Web.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Bornstein, Stephanie. (2018). "Equal Work." *Maryland Law Review*, 77(3): 581-648.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> These statistics are based on our own calculations based on reported occupations of respondents in the American Community Survey from 2013-2017.