Workforce & Economic Mobility

Abt Associates has been at the forefront of rigorous workforce development research and evaluation for more than 30 years. We build rigorous evidence and identify promising practices to help workers find and retain jobs and advance to higher-paying positions. Our experts partner with government agencies, education institutions, employers, and community organizations to identify and develop effective workforce strategies, evaluate promising programs, and disseminate user-friendly results to practitioners and policymakers. These strategies include everything from **job search and apprenticeships to career pathways; approaches to address the needs of specific populations, such as those with disabilities, substance use disorder, and justice system involvement; health workforce strengthening; and worker protections such as family and medical leave.**

Featured Projects

CAREER PATHWAYS LONG-TERM OUTCOMES STUDY

Abt rigorously evaluated the long-term impacts of career pathways programs providing training and supports to prepare people to enter and advance through a series of occupations in an industry sector, requiring progressively higher levels of skill and offering increasing levels of pay. Funded by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), within the US Department of Health and Human Services, this study examines the results from the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) and Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE), two large-scale rigorous evaluations of career pathways programs for low-income adults, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients. The long-term study reports on the programs' impact on educational progress, employment, and earnings over a six-year period, and is a follow-on to previous related studies examining program implementation, participant experiences and perspectives, and short-term outcomes. It was Abt's work on PACE that brought attention to the Year Up program serving disadvantaged young adults — one of the most successful employment programs evaluated using rigorous methods.

BUILDING EVIDENCE ON REEMPLOYMENT SERVICES FOR UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE CLAIMANTS

The US Department of Labor's (DOL) Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program was established in 2018 to provide reemployment services to Unemployment Insurance claimants to speed their return to work. RESEA is at the forefront of federal efforts to implement evidence-based approaches to drive program improvement in workforce development. RESEA implementation requires standards by which to rate state program effectiveness; and states are expected to conduct rigorous evaluations of their programs. Abt is working with DOL to develop standards on the effectiveness of different reemployment interventions; design innovative evaluation options to build evidence on effective approaches; and provide evaluation technical assistance to states, including customized assistance provided through learning communities.

EXAMINING RACIAL BIAS IN LOW-WAGE LABOR MARKET

Abt is partnering with with the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in ACF to identify and address racial barriers in employment processes to increase employment equity and opportunity for workers in the low-wage market. The team is assessing the presence of racial bias in various phases of the employment process, including how employers advertise jobs, screen applications, assign tasks and work hours, offer mentoring, set compensation, and decide on retention and promotions. The project focuses on the experiences of people of color who have lived experience in low-wage work, engaging them in the development of all project activities and products. Abt will identify potentially promising strategies to address racial biases in the low-wage labor market and recommend research questions for further study.

EVALUATION OF THE AMERICAN APPRENTICESHIP INITIATIVE

In 2015, DOL funded the American Apprenticeship Initiative (AAI), with the goal of expanding apprenticeships to underrepresented populations and beyond construction to new industries such as healthcare and information technology. The Abt-led implementation, employment and earnings outcomes, and return-on-investment studies showed that the AAI programs diversified the industries implementing apprenticeships; recruited participants from populations historically underrepresented in apprenticeships, including women, people of color, veterans, and people with disabilities; produced a substantial increase in earnings, including for all racial and ethnic groups and women; and resulted in a positive return for employers.
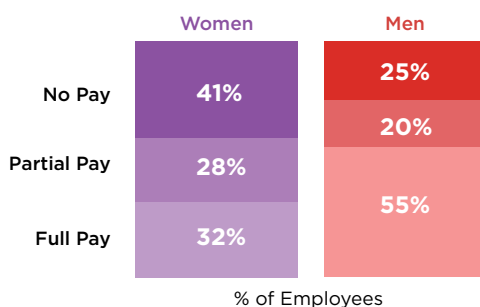
EVALUATING GUARANTEED INCOME PROGRAMS

Abt is conducting mixed-methods, impact evaluations of guaranteed income (GI) pilot programs in eight cities across the country. GI programs provide cash—rather than services or goods—directly to individuals, with no strings attached. The theory is that participants are in the best position to understand what they most need and can best decide how to spend money to benefit themselves and their families. The cities included are members of Mayors for a Guaranteed Income (MGI), a national coalition of more than 100 mayors that support GI. Every GI pilot is different, but all share the same approach of offering monthly stipends to help families meet their expenses. The monthly amounts range from $375 to $1,000 and are targeted to different populations, including youth, single mothers, and others living in poverty. Abt's research will focus on how GI impacts participants' incomes and financial well-being, quality of life, and other outcomes.
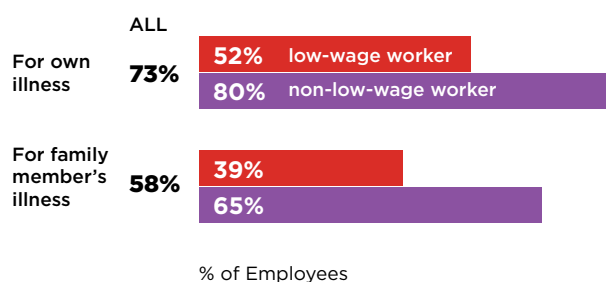
THE FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE ACT (FMLA) SURVEYS

FMLA requires certain employers to provide employees job protected but unpaid leave for specified medical and family reasons. Abt conducted large national surveys to understand employees' leave usage patterns, unmet needs, and access to pay while on leave, as well as employers' experiences with and perceptions of FMLA. This included examining the extent to which FMLA supports U.S. workers in taking leave from work for a family or medical reason without significant economic impact and the extent to which access is equitable for disadvantaged workers.

How much pay while on leave?

	Women	Men
No Pay	41%	25%
Partial Pay	28%	20%
Full Pay	32%	55%

% of Employees

Who has access to paid sick time?

ALL

For own illness — **73%**
- 52% low-wage worker
- 80% non-low-wage worker

For family member's illness — **58%**
- 39%
- 65%

% of Employees

2018 Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) Surveys
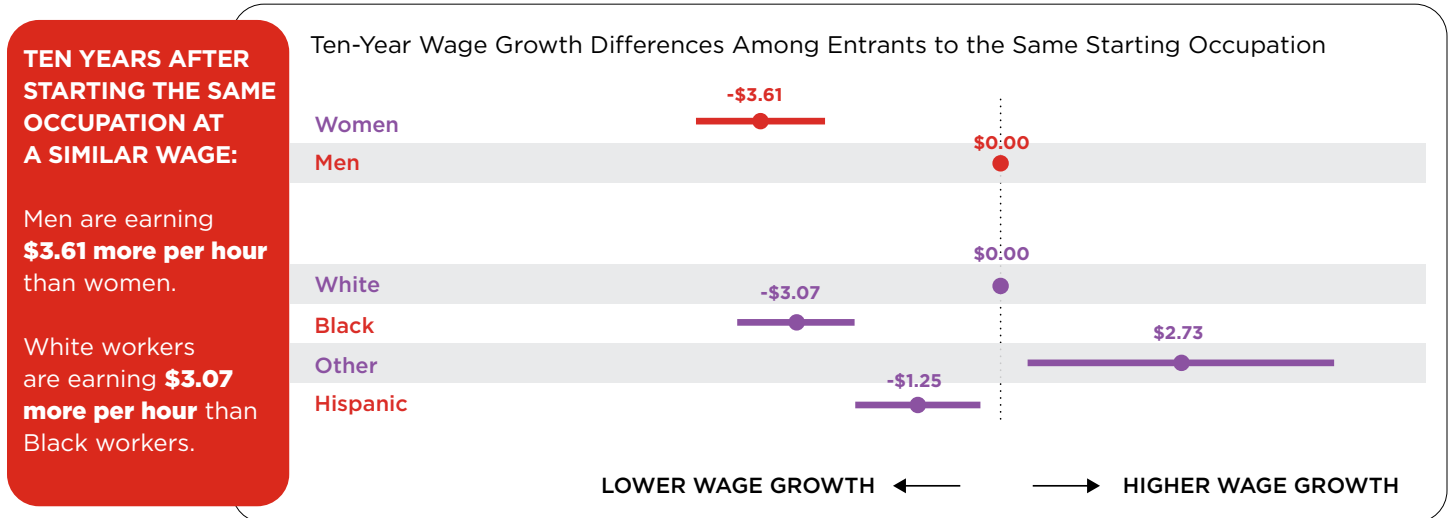
DESCRIPTIVE AND ANALYTICAL CAREER PATHWAYS PROJECT

With the goal of advancing the evidence base in the career pathways field and addressing key research gaps using existing data, this project included three studies: (1) examining long-term wage growth for a wide range of career trajectories, including those that are reliable "launchpads" to advancement and how they vary race and gender (with an interactive dashboard for practitioners to help understand wage growth potential in different occupational training areas); (2) conducting a meta-analysis of characteristics associated with career pathways program impact; and (3) examining the use of machine learning to synthesize a large body of data on career pathways programs.

Ten-Year Wage Growth Differences Among Entrants to the Same Starting Occupation

TEN YEARS AFTER STARTING THE SAME OCCUPATION AT A SIMILAR WAGE:

Men are earning **$3.61 more per hour** than women.

White workers are earning **$3.07 more per hour** than Black workers.

Women: -$3.61
Men: $0.00

White: $0.00
Black: -$3.07
Other: $2.73
Hispanic: -$1.25

LOWER WAGE GROWTH ← → HIGHER WAGE GROWTH

An Analysis of Career Trajectories and Occupational Transitions Final Report December 2021. Data Source: NLSY97 and PSID

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR LABOR EVALUATION AND RESEARCH (CLEAR) ADVANCEMENT, REVIEWS, INNOVATIONS, AND SYNTHESES OF EVIDENCE

The goal of DOL's CLEAR is to make research on labor topics more accessible to practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and the public so that it can inform their decisions about labor policies and programs. Abt is working with DOL to expand this evidence clearinghouse and produce materials that increase audience engagement and use of CLEAR's evidence to inform policy and practice. Our work includes conducting evidence reviews; creating research syntheses; developing dissemination products such as webinars, desk references, and videos to expand audiences' awareness of CLEAR, its value, and how to use it to inform decision-making; and enhancing the CLEAR website to ensure its usability for audiences.

IMPROVING EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES FOR THOSE WITH SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

Many communities face a crisis stemming from the widespread increase in substance use disorders (SUD), particularly opioids but also alcohol and other drugs. Abt is evaluating programs in four states, funded by DOL's Support to Communities Fostering Opioid Recovery through Workforce Development grants, aimed at improving the economic and recovery outcomes of those affected by the misuse of opioids and other SUDs. Using a mixed-methods implementation study, the project will provide new and critical information on promising practices and implementation challenges in providing services that address both employment and SUD treatment needs.

EVALUATING PROGRAMS ASSISTING YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES TRANSITION TO EMPLOYMENT

In new project for DOL, Abt is conducting the Equitable Transitions Model Evaluation, a large-scale study of up to four programs designed to improve outcomes for youth and young adults with disabilities. This population faces unique and often difficult challenges in transitioning to the workforce and, along with their families, must navigate complex benefit and educational systems to obtain supports. The Abt team will design and carry out implementation, outcomes, and customer experience studies and develop future research options.

For More Information

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Pursuing Equity. Looking for the Intersections. Driving Real-World Impact.

Abt Associates is a global consulting and research firm that combines data and bold thinking to improve the quality of people's lives. We partner with clients and communities to advance equity and innovation—from creating scalable digital solutions and combatting infectious disease, to mitigating climate change and advancing economic growth.

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