

The Status of Women in Illinois: An Overview

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IMPACT

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Women in Illinois exemplify both the achievements and shortfalls of women's progress over the past century. While Illinois' women are witnessing real improvements in their economic, political, and social status, serious obstacles to their equality remain. **The state's rankings are near the top of the nation for reproductive rights, at 7th; about average for women's social and economic autonomy, employment and earnings, and political participation, at 15th, 19th, and 22nd, respectively; but below average for women's health and well-being, at 26th (Chart 1).**

Chart 1.
How Illinois Ranks on Key Indicators

Indicators	National Rank*	Regional Rank*
Composite Political Participation Index	22	3
Women's Voter Registration, 1998 and 2000 (67.1% registered)	26	3
Women's Voter Turnout, 1998 and 2000 (52.0% voted)	25	4
Women in Elected Office Composite Index, 2004	27	3
Women's Institutional Resources, 2004	1	1
Composite Employment and Earnings Index	19	1
Women's Median Annual Earnings, 2002 (\$30,700, 2003 dollars)	15	1
Ratio of Women's to Men's Earnings, 2002 (75.1%)	24	1
Women's Labor Force Participation, 2002 (60.2% of women are in the labor force)	30	4
Women in Managerial and Professional Occupations, 2001 (32.9%)	23	1
Composite Social and Economic Autonomy Index	15	1
Percentage with Health Insurance Among Non-elderly Women 2001-2002 (84.2%)	29	5
Educational Attainment: Percentage of Women with Four or More Years of College, 2000 (24.5%)	16	1
Women's Business Ownership, 1997 (27.2% of businesses were owned by women in 1997. By 2002, 29.8% of businesses were women-owned.**)	10	1
Percentage of Women Above the Poverty Level, 2002 (88.9%)	25	4
Composite Reproductive Rights Index	7	1
Composite Health and Well-Being Index	26	2

Notes:

See Appendix II of *The Status of Women in the States* for a detailed description of the methodology and sources used for the indices presented here.

* The national rankings are of a possible 51, referring to the 50 states and the District of Columbia, except for the Political Participation indicators, which do not include the District of Columbia. The regional rankings are of a maximum of five and refer to the states in the East North Central region (IL, IN, MI, OH, and WI).

**Because 2002 data on women's business ownership were released after the 2004 *Status of Women in the States* reports were compiled, the composite index relies on business ownership data from 1997.

Even the state's better rankings speak only to the status of its women relative to women in other states: despite improvements and the high ranks of some states, in no state do women fare as well as men, and even those states with better policies for women do not ensure equal rights. With below-average rankings on many indicators, women in Illinois still face significant problems that demand attention from policymakers, advocates, and researchers concerned with women's status.

The Status of Women in the States project contains indicators describing women's status in five main areas: employment and earnings, social and economic autonomy, reproductive rights, health and well-being, and political participation. For the five major issues areas, the Institute for Women's Policy Research compiled composite indices based on the indicators presented to provide an overall assessment of the status of women in Illinois and to compare women in Illinois with women in each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia (for more information about the methodology for the composite indices, see Appendix II of *The Status of Women in the States*).

Illinois joins Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin as part of the East North Central region. **Among those five states, Illinois ranks near the top for most issue areas: the state is 1st in the region in employment and earnings, social and economic autonomy, and reproductive rights, 2nd in health and well-being, and 3rd in political participation.**

Overall, while Illinois' women are witnessing real improvements in their economic, political, and social status, serious obstacles to their equality remain.

Women in Illinois: What's Promising

- Illinois ranks 1st in the East North Central region for the composite employment and earnings index and for the gender wage ratio.
- Asian American women in Illinois have the 6th highest earnings and 6th highest rates of employment in professional and managerial occupations of all Asian American women in the U.S.
- African American women in Illinois with a high school diploma earn, on average, \$26,500 per year, the same amount earned by white women.
- Illinois is one of only 25 states to offer abortion services without a waiting period.
- Illinois ranks among the top five of all states for its low annual incidence rate of AIDS among Hispanic women.
- In 2004, Illinois has a bicameral women's caucus in the state legislature, earning it the nation's top ranking for the number of institutional resources available to women.

Women in Illinois: What's Disappointing

- Nearly 25 percent of African American women in the state live in poverty.
- 49.7 percent of Hispanic women in Illinois have not earned a high school diploma, compared with only 24.3 percent of African American women, 22.0 percent of Native American women, 16.0 percent of Asian American women, and 13.4 percent of caucasian women.
- Illinois ranks in the bottom half of all states for the infant mortality rate and the percentage of low-birth-weight babies. Thirty-five states have better infant mortality rates than Illinois.
- Illinois has one of the highest mortality rates from breast cancer of all states, with 39.5 per 100,000 African American women, 27.9 per 100,000 white women, 12.7 per 100,000 Hispanic women, and 11.9 per 100,000 Asian American women dying from breast cancer each year.
- Illinois ranks in the bottom third of all states for the wage ratio between white, Native American, and Hispanic women and white men.
- No women of color from Illinois served in the U.S. House of Representatives or in statewide elected executive offices in 2004. Women of color held only 9.6 percent of the seats in the Illinois state legislature in 2004.

Chart 2.
Overview of the Status of Women in Illinois

	All Women	White Women	African American Women	Hispanic American Women	Asian American Women	Native American Women
Political Participation						
Number of Women in Elected Statewide Executive Office, 2004	2	2	0	0	0	0
Number of Women in U.S. Congress, 2004	2	2	0	0	0	0
Employment and Earnings						
Median Annual Earnings (for full-time, year-round employed women), 1999 (in 2003 dollars)*	\$32,000	\$33,100	\$32,000	\$23,200	\$36,400	\$27,800
Earnings Ratio Between Women and White Men, 1999*	64.4%	66.7%	64.4%	46.7%	73.3%	56.0%
Women's Labor Force Participation, 2000*	59.9%	60.7%	59.4%	54.7%	58.9%	62.2%
Women in Managerial and Professional Occupations, 2000*	36.6%	39.0%	31.6%	19.4%	50.0%	28.1%
Social and Economic Autonomy						
Percentage of Women with Four or More Years of College, 2000	24.5%	26.5%	15.8%	9.5%	53.4%	10.3%
Percentage of Women Above the Poverty Level, 1999*	89.2%	92.9%	75.3%	83.7%	89.9%	85.6%
Reproductive Rights						
Percentage of Mothers Beginning Prenatal Care in the First Trimester of Pregnancy, 2001	84.0%	90.0%	73.0%	77.0%	86.0%	84.0%
Infant Mortality Rate (deaths of infants under age one per 1,000 live births), 2001	7.6	6.1	15	5.8	6.6	N/A
Percentage of Low-Birth-Weight Babies, 2001	8.0%	6.7%	13.8%	6.6%	8.4%	9.6%
Health and Well-Being						
Female Heart Disease Mortality, per 100,000, 1999-2001	216.2	207.3	291.7	130.9	104.2	90.6
Female Lung Cancer Mortality, per 100,000, 1999-2001	41.2	42.5	47	14.6	9.2	N/A
Female Breast Cancer Mortality, per 100,000, 1999-2001	28.7	27.9	39.5	12.7	11.9	N/A
Average Annual Incidence Rate of AIDS Among Women (per 100,000 adolescents and adults), 1999	5.5	1.6	26.5	4.6	N/A	N/A

Notes:

*The numbers presented here are based on 2000 Census data for the year 1999. They differ slightly from the data in Chart 1, which are based on the 2003 Current Population Survey data for the year 2002 and are used to calculate the rankings.

N/A = Not Available.

Hispanics may be of any race or two or more races. Racial categories (Whites, African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans) do not include Hispanic women. See Appendix III of *The Status of Women in the States* for sources and a description of how race and ethnicity are defined for the economic data presented here.

Compiled by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

Demographics

Illinois has the 6th largest population of women in the nation, with 6.3 million women of all ages. **As in the nation overall, the population of Illinois women is very diverse. Illinois has a larger proportion of African American women (15.5 percent) and a smaller proportion of Native American women (0.2 percent) than in the nation as a whole.** Asian American women make up 3.4 percent of the state's women and 11.4 percent are Hispanic. Illinois has a similar percentage of female-headed households as the nation as a whole, with 19.9 percent of all households with children under 18 headed by women. Illinois also has the 11th largest percentage of the female population that is foreign-born, with 4.9 percent of the population foreign-born Hispanic, 3.6 percent foreign-born white, and 2.5 percent foreign-born Asian American or Pacific Islander. Throughout the country, women's status varies by race and ethnicity; Chart 2 shows that it does in Illinois as well.

Employment and Earnings

Women in Illinois rank 19th overall on the employment and earnings composite index. **Illinois scores within the top third of the nation, at 15th, for women’s median annual earnings, and around the middle of the nation for the percentage of women in managerial and professional occupations (23rd), the earnings ratio between women’s and men’s earnings (24th), and the percentage of women in the labor force (30th).** Illinois ranks 1st in its region for women’s earnings, the earnings ratio, and the percentage of women in managerial and professional occupations. In Illinois, women earn, on average, \$30,700 per year, or 75.1 percent of what men earn. Women of color in the state tend to have lower earnings, with African American women earning only 64.4 percent of what white men earn; Native American women earning only 56.0 percent of what white men earn; and Hispanic women earning only 46.7 percent of what white men earn. Racial and ethnic disparities in women’s employment in professional and managerial jobs are also distinct, with Hispanic, Native American, and African American women less likely than other groups to be employed in these occupations. Clearly, Illinois women still face substantial barriers in the labor market.

Chart 3.
How Illinois Fares on Key Education Indicators

Indicators	All Women		White Women	African American Women	Hispanic Women	Asian American Women	Native American Women
	Value	National Rank					
Proportion of Women with a High School Diploma Only, 2000	28.8%	N/A	31.0%	25.6%	22.7%	13.3%	26.0%
Proportion of Women with Some College Only, 2000	28.5%	N/A	29.1%	34.3%	18.2%	17.2%	41.7%
Proportion of Women with a Four-Year College Degree or More, 2000	24.5%	16	26.5%	15.8%	9.5%	53.4%	10.3%
Median Annual Earnings of Full-Time, Year-Round Employed Women with a High School Diploma Only, 1999 (in 2003 dollars)	\$25,400	17	\$26,500	\$26,500	\$22,100	\$22,100	N/A
Median Annual Earnings of Full-Time, Year-Round Employed Women with Some College Only, 1999 (in 2003 dollars)	\$30,900	N/A	\$30,900	\$31,500	\$27,600	\$29,000	\$27,800
Median Annual Earnings of Full-Time, Year-Round Employed Women with a Four-Year College Degree Only, 1999 (in 2003 dollars)	\$42,500	11	\$43,100	\$42,500	\$39,800	\$42,000	N/A
Earnings Ratio between Full-Time, Year-Round Employed Women and White Men with a High School Diploma Only, 1999	63.8%	N/A	66.6%	66.6%	55.5%	55.5%	N/A
Earnings Ratio between Full-Time, Year-Round Employed Women and White Men with Some College Only, 1999	66.6%	N/A	66.6%	67.9%	59.5%	62.5%	59.9%
Earnings Ratio between Full-Time, Year-Round Employed Women and White Men with a Four-Year College Degree Only, 1999	70.0%	41	71.0%	70.0%	65.6%	69.2%	N/A

Notes:

N/A = Not Available.

Hispanics may be of any race or two or more races. Racial categories (Whites, African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans) do not include Hispanic women.

Calculated by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research.

National rankings for the education indicators range from 1 to 52 and include the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

See Appendix I of *The Educational Status of Women in the States* for a detailed description of the methodology and sources presented here.

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Social and Economic Autonomy

Women in Illinois rank in the top half of all states for most indicators of social and economic autonomy, earning the state an overall rank of 15th in the nation, placing Illinois in the top third of all states, and 1st in the region for this index. The state falls around the middle of all states for women's health insurance coverage (29th). It is worth noting that Illinois receives the lowest ranking in the region for health insurance coverage, with 15.8 percent of its women uninsured. Among women and men in Illinois who are uninsured, people of color are disproportionately more likely to be uninsured. Of those who were uninsured in 2002-2003, however, 27 percent were Hispanic, 22 percent were African American, and 47 percent were white.¹ In contrast, Illinois ranks near the top of all states for women's business ownership, at 10th in the nation and 1st in its region. In fact, in 2002, 29.8 percent of businesses in Illinois were women-owned, up from 27.2 percent in 1997.²

Illinois ranks in the top third of all states for women's educational attainment, as Illinois boasts the 16th largest proportion of the female population to have a four-year college degree or more in the nation. Educational attainment differs by race and ethnicity, with 53.4 percent of Asian American women and 26.5 percent of white women in Illinois holding a four-year college degree or more, compared with only 15.8 percent of African American women, 10.3 percent of Native American women, and 9.5 percent of Hispanic women (Chart 3). These disparities are also present in the percentage of women with a high school education: nearly half of all Hispanic women in Illinois had less than a high school education in 2000. Illinois'

women's earnings also vary by educational attainment and race. Those with a four-year college degree have earnings that are nearly 70 percent higher than women in the state with just a high school diploma. Among women with a four-year college degree, white women have higher earnings than other groups, earning \$43,100 compared with \$42,500 for African American women, \$42,000 for Asian American women, and \$39,800 for Hispanic women.

Illinois ranks 25th among all the states for women's poverty, and rates differ substantially among Illinois' women by race and ethnicity.³ In 1999, 7.1 percent of white women and 10.1 percent of Asian American women lived below the federal poverty level, compared with 14.4 percent of Native American women, 16.3 percent of Hispanic women, and 24.7 percent of African American women. Illinois must make significant strides toward ensuring equal access to key resources for all of the state's women.

Violence Against Women

Each year, 4.8 million acts of intimate partner violence are committed against women in the United States, and nearly a quarter of women have been raped and or physically assaulted by an intimate partner (current or former spouse, cohabiting partner, or date) in their lifetime.⁴ Violence against women is a serious social problem that can significantly affect women's physical health, well-being, and economic and social stability, but there is no national source for state-by-state information on incidence rates of domestic violence.

The Illinois State Police, however, report that in 2003 violent crimes perpetrated by a spouse, ex-spouse, or common-law spouse made up 47 percent of all

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reported family-related domestic crimes and that violent crimes perpetrated by a boyfriend or girlfriend made up 75.5 percent of all reported non-family domestic crimes.⁵ As of June 2005, domestic-related calls for police service in Chicago numbered 104,914 for 2005 and domestic crimes totaled 28,922 (with simple battery making up 67.4% of those crimes).⁶ The reports describing these crime rates unfortunately do not break the data down by sex of victim.

Women who experience domestic violence, stalking, sexual assault, and other violence need appropriate social services, health care, and economic support to help them escape violent situations. Illinois has adopted some policies and provisions that help curtail violence and protect survivors, but still lacks others. For example, in Illinois, the second domestic violence offense may be treated as a felony. Illinois does require domestic violence training for new police recruits, but does not require in-service domestic violence police training.⁷

Reproductive Rights

Illinois women lack many important reproductive rights and resources, yet due to challenges to reproductive rights across the nation, the state earns a fairly high ranking, 7th out of 51, on the reproductive rights composite index.

Reproductive rights in Illinois, as in most states, are plagued by racial and ethnic disparities, in part due to

inequalities in factors such as education, access to health care, and socioeconomic status, and in part due to a history of discrimination and racism specific to reproductive health policies. Only 73 percent of African American women and 77 percent of Hispanic women have access to prenatal care in the first trimester of pregnancy, compared with 90 percent of white women in Illinois. In addition, infant mortality rates and the percentage of low-birth-weight babies are much higher for African American women than for other groups.

Illinois' performance on guaranteeing women the right to an abortion is also mixed. Although 70 percent of women live in counties with abortion providers, for many women, especially those in rural areas, abortion is virtually inaccessible; the majority of counties in Illinois, 90 percent, do not have an abortion provider, and women living in rural counties may have to travel a considerable distance to access abortion services. While the state does not require a waiting period for abortion services, Illinois does not provide public funding for abortions under any circumstances other than those required by the federal Medicaid law, which are when the pregnancy results from reported rape or incest or threatens the life of the woman. Illinois still does not guarantee many basic reproductive rights, and continued disparities by race and ethnicity harm many of Illinois' women.

Illinois has one of the lowest incidence rates in the country of AIDS among Hispanic women.

Health and Well-Being

Women in Illinois experience many obstacles to good health and well-being compared with women in other states. Illinois ranks 26th of all the states on this composite index. Its ranking of 2nd in its region indicates that its region as a whole ranks poorly on this composite. **Although Illinois women have lower than average incidence rates of AIDS and score better on mental health indicators, they have higher than average mortality rates from breast cancer and incidence of chlamydia.**

Women's health outcomes in Illinois also differ substantially by race and ethnicity, with African American women facing especially high mortality rates from heart disease, lung cancer, and breast cancer. Incidence rates of AIDS are also higher for African American women than for any other group. Illinois has one of the lowest incidence rates in the country of AIDS among Hispanic women. Women in Illinois would benefit from better health care access and from more preventive services, including screening programs and services to reduce smoking and to provide good nutrition and exercise.

Political Participation

Illinois ranks 22nd overall and 3rd in its region on the political participation composite index. **With a bicameral women's caucus in the state legislature Illinois ties for 1st in the nation, along with 15 other states, for the number of institutional resources available to women.** Illinois ranks in the middle third of all states for the percent of women who register and vote, with 67.1 percent registering to vote and 52.0 percent voting in the 1998 and 2000 elections. However, Illinois ranks below average on the composite index for women in elected office, with women holding only 10.5 percent of Illinois' seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and no women of color

serving in national or statewide elected office from Illinois (as of October 2004). As with most states, Illinois' performance on indicators of political participation does not approach equality for women and disparities by race and ethnicity persist. No Asian American or Native American women hold statewide legislative office, and African American and Hispanic women together hold only 9.6 percent of all state legislative offices in Illinois.

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

While women in Illinois and the United States as a whole are seeing important changes in their lives and improved access to political, economic, and social rights, they by no means enjoy equality with men, and they still lack many of the legal guarantees that would allow them to achieve that equality. Disparities by race and ethnicity continue to diminish women's health, education, earnings, and rights. Illinois could clearly invest more in its women; both to improve women's status and to increase the well-being of all its citizens.

Policies and programs designed to diminish both gender- and race-based inequities should remain at the forefront of local, state, and national policymaking efforts.

- Women's physical security can be enhanced by better police and judicial training to ensure that a woman reporting domestic violence or sexual assault is accorded dignity and provided with the full protection of the law in all settings, including the workplace. For example, seven states require in-service domestic violence training for police officers.⁸

- Businesses should regularly evaluate their wage and promotion practices to ensure that men and women of all races and ethnicities are fairly compensated for their work. Employers could be required by federal, state, or local policies or by union contracts to show that comparable jobs are paid fairly, using tools such as job evaluation systems that measure job content on many dimensions. For example, in 2005, Hawaii passed a law prohibiting gender discrimination in employee salaries, with the exception of differences tied to seniority or systems tying productivity to wages. The same legislation also established a pay equity task force to collect data on wage inequalities and propose solutions.⁹

- Illinois and additional local governments should consider passing living wage laws, and the state minimum wage should be increased to bring it closer to the federal poverty line for a family of three and tied to cost-of-living increases. These measures raise public awareness about the importance of setting a reasonable wage floor, which disproportionately affects women workers – and particularly women of color – because they are more likely to be in low-wage work. For example, Cook County and Chicago both have living wage ordinances requiring county and city contractors and subcontractors to pay at least \$9.43 to employees. The living wage ordinance with the highest hourly pay is in Fairfax, California, where city contractors are required to pay employees at least \$13.00 per hour.¹⁰

- Educational attainment should be encouraged among all women, and

especially women of color, through affirmative action policies encouraging women's enrollment in higher education and through increased federal and state financial aid and scholarship programs designed to reduce economic barriers. Native American women's educational opportunities can be expanded by increased investment in tribal colleges and universities. For example, Maine has been a state leader in allowing low-wage women to pursue two-year and four-year post-secondary education as a work activity through the state welfare program.¹¹

- Women workers would benefit from greater availability of paid parental and dependent-care leave policies – benefits often least available to the lowest-paid workers. These benefits can be expanded through federal and state policy mandates, including strategies such as using unemployment insurance funds or establishing new temporary disability programs, and extending coverage of all such programs to include family care benefits. Employers in the private sector could incorporate such benefits into worker compensation packages and collective bargaining agreements. For example, Illinois should follow California's example of providing six weeks of partial pay for leave from work for care for a new child or sick family member.

- Public health programs should be expanded to reach a wider range of at-risk and uninsured women, including non-English speakers and low-income women not eligible for Medicaid but still in need of public services. For example, Arizona, Delaware, District of Columbia, Maine, New York, Oregon, and

...the state minimum wage should be increased to bring it closer to the federal poverty line for a family of three...

Vermont offer publicly funded health coverage, with services similar to Medicaid, to otherwise uninsured adults whose incomes are at or above 100 percent of the federal poverty line, regardless of parental status, age, or disability.¹²

- Increased investment in targeted health prevention and treatment, including women's reproductive health, could improve women's health and reduce disparities in health status associated with race and socioeconomic status. There is a wide disparity between states' mandates regarding private insurers' coverage of preventative screenings. While 49 states and the District of Columbia require insurers to cover mammography and half of states require cervical cancer screening coverage, only three, Georgia, Maryland, and Tennessee, require that insurers cover chlamydia screenings. Maryland is the only state to mandate that insurers cover all five of the following tests that are crucial to women's health: mammography, and screenings for cervical cancer, colorectal cancer, bone density, and chlamydia.¹³
- Enhanced reproductive rights and policies, particularly for low-income women, would allow women more control over their overall economic, health, and social status by giving them more control over their reproductive lives. For example, New Hampshire approved legislation in 2005 to allow women to obtain emergency contraception without a prescription.¹⁴
- Policies and practices that encourage women to run for office are integral to increasing women's political voice. This is especially true for women of color who are poorly represented in government. Such policies include recruitment of female, minority candidates by political parties and other organizations, fair and equal media treatment for male and female candidates, and campaign finance reform. For example, in New Jersey, Rutgers University has established the *Ready to Run* program to encourage women in New Jersey to run for public office.¹⁵
- Women can increase the visibility of the issues facing them by striving to assume leadership positions in a variety of places – on reservations and in tribal governments, in Native corporations, in towns and cities, in state and federal government, in businesses and corporations, in community groups, and in any other place where leadership is needed.

This Briefing Paper is based on selected findings from IWPR reports, *The Status of Women in the States* (2004), *The Educational Status of Women in the States* (published by the American Association of University Women), *Women's Economic Status in the States: Wide Disparities by Race, Ethnicity, and Region*, and additional IWPR analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data. National funding for *The Status of the Women in the States* project came from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Levi Strauss Foundation, Merck & Co., the Otto Bremer Foundation, and the Rockefeller Family Fund. This Briefing Paper was funded by the Chicago Foundation for Women. *The Status of Women in the States* project is designed to inform citizens about the progress of women in their state relative to women in other states, to men, and to the nation as a whole.

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) is a scientific research organization dedicated to informing and stimulating debate on public policy issues of critical importance to women and their families. The Institute works with policymakers, scholars, and public interest groups to design, execute, and disseminate research that illuminates economic and social policy issues affecting women and families, and to build a network of individuals and organizations that conduct and use women-oriented policy research. See www.iwpr.org for more information.

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