

Employment Quality in Illinois

Fact Sheet Series of the Project for Middle Class Renewal

Workers in greater need have less access to employer benefits and supports

Researchers with the **Project for Middle-Class Renewal** conducted a survey of more than 3,500 workers across the state of Illinois in the fall of 2021 to collect data on aspects of employment quality, including health insurance, paid time off, and other benefits.

This research confirms that **low-wage workers have limited access to employer-provided benefits in Illinois**. It also shows that workers in greater need of insurance and paid leave—those with health issues, unsafe workplaces, and single parents—have the least access to these resources. Public programs and mandates, like **Chicago's Paid Sick Leave Ordinance**, can help close the gap between the benefits employers offer and what their workers need.



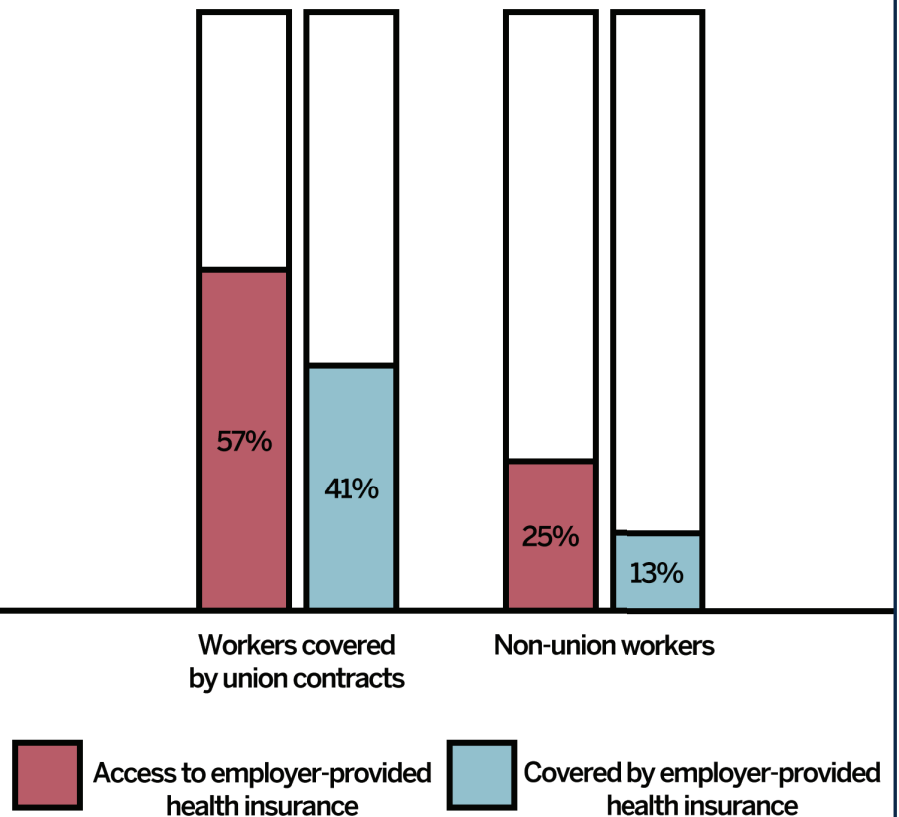
Lack of benefits exacerbates low pay

Only 1 in 3 workers paid less than \$2,000 per month have access to employer-provided health insurance, compared to 85% of those paid \$4,000 or more per month.

Even when they do have access, lower paid workers are less likely to enroll in an employer health plan. Among workers offered health insurance by their employer, only 39% of those making less than \$2,000 a month are covered by this plan, compared to 86% of those making at least \$4,000 a month. Whether due to high costs or poor quality of coverage, most lower paid workers do not actually benefit from their employer's health plan.

Nearly half (47%) of workers paid less than \$2,000 per month are covered by government health insurance. Still 9% of lower paid workers are not covered by any health insurance.

Access and Use of Employer-Provided Benefits by Union Contract Coverage and Monthly-Income



Overall, 75% of workers covered by a union contract have access to an employer health plan and 59% of union workers are covered by an employer plan. Among workers paid less than \$2,000 per month, 57% of those in a union have access to an employer health plan and 41% are covered by it. For non-union workers in the same pay bracket, only 25% have access to employer-provided health insurance and 13% are covered by it.

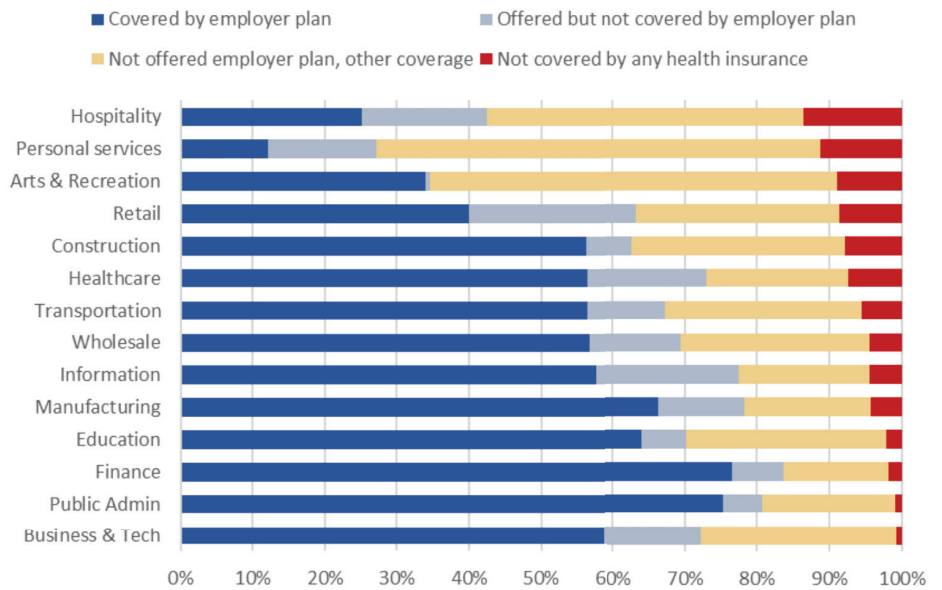


Benefits contribute to worker well-being and employment quality

Employer-provided health coverage is related to higher-rated health and overall employment quality.

- 56% of workers covered by an employer health plan rate their health as very good or excellent, compared with 47% of those covered by another form of health insurance and 44% of those not covered by any health insurance.
- Health benefits are associated with higher overall employment quality. 69% of workers covered through an employer health plan rate their employment quality above average, compared with 54% of those with other forms of coverage and 48% of the uninsured.

Gaps in employer health benefits by industry



Workers are more likely to be uninsured in industries with poor employer health benefits. Retail, recreation, hospitality, and personal services have the highest uninsurance rates and lowest rates of employer coverage. Despite the expansion of Medicaid eligibility in Illinois, many low-wage service workers continue to struggle to access or pay for health insurance.

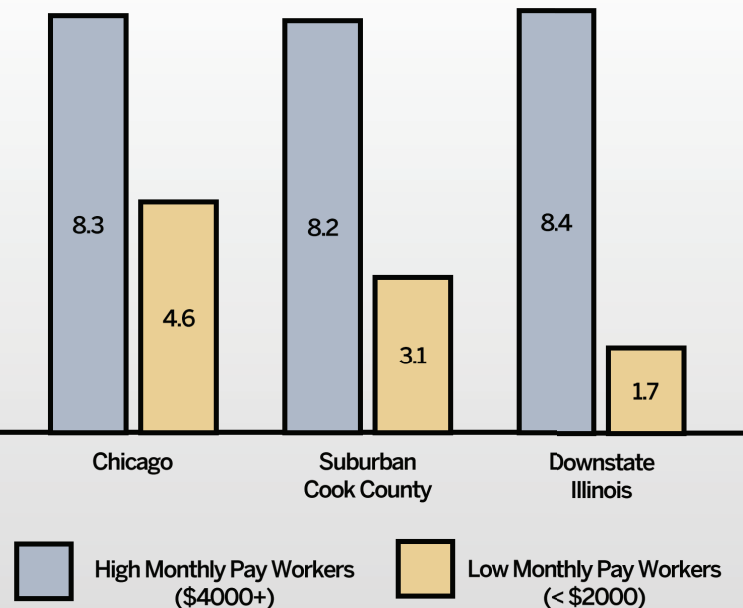


Public policy can help vulnerable workers by raising the floor for job-related benefits

Single parents, women, Black or Latinx workers, and workers with disabilities tend to have less access and lower quality benefits than partnered parents, men, White workers, and workers without disabilities. While these workers are already disadvantaged in the labor market, their lack of benefits makes them more vulnerable to unsafe working conditions and economic hardship. By the same token, public policies that raise the floor for job-related benefits can improve economic security, health, and employment quality first and foremost for these vulnerable workers.

- Overall, 2 in 3 workers in Illinois receive paid leave at their main job, but nearly 40% of single parents and 43% of workers with a disability have no paid leave.
- Policies like Chicago's Paid Sick Leave Ordinance can make a difference by requiring employers to provide a minimum amount of paid leave, in this case up to 40 hours of paid sick leave per year for eligible workers. More than half (51%) of workers in Chicago say they have paid sick leave, compared to only 47% of Illinois workers outside of Cook County.

Average Number of Sick Days



On average, workers in Chicago have 6.6 days of paid sick leave per year, compared to 5.5 days outside of Cook County. However, the benefits of the Chicago Paid Sick Leave Ordinance are most apparent among lower paid workers, who receive two and a half times the number of sick days reported by workers in downstate Illinois.