WAGE | EQUITY | STUDY

Wage Equity for Non-Profit Human Services Workers:

A study of work and pay in Seattle and King County

FEBRUARY 2023

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Executive Summary

Non-profit human services workers play a critical role in building and maintaining the human, social, and institutional strengths of communities. Yet, as documented elsewhere and confirmed by this study, pay for human services work lags behind compensation for other kinds of work. This report presents study findings that compare pay in non-profit human services organizations to pay in other sectors and industries and offers a series of recommendations to help provide a path to more equitable compensation for these workers.

Comparable worth, the principle of equal pay for equivalent work, guided this examination of the extent of wage inequity facing non-profit human services workers in Seattle and King County. This approach acknowledges that various forces have shaped employment patterns and suppressed wages in the non-profit human services sector over time, including race and gender discrimination, wage penalties for caring labor, and decisions made by federal and local policymakers. These factors continue to affect current wages for the local human services workforce, which is overwhelmingly female (roughly 80%) and in which workers of color are overrepresented.

There are different ways to define and assess wage equity and the extent of the wage gap experienced by non-profit human services workers. This study used two separate empirical approaches. First, the market analysis compared pay for human services workers and workers in other industries using state and federal quantitative employment data. Key findings from that analysis include:

- Holding constant worker characteristics such as education level or age, human services workers are paid less than workers in other care industries (education and healthcare) and at least 30% less than workers in non-care industries. For human services workers in the non-profit sector, median annual pay is 37% lower than in non-care industries.
- Workers who leave the human services industry for a job in a different industry see a net pay increase of 7% a year later (relative to workers who stay in human services) after accounting for observable worker and employer characteristics.

Second, a systematic job evaluation analysis allowed us to compare a subset of specific human services jobs to jobs in other industries using in-depth questionnaires and interviews (N=22) and analyzing results using a detailed, multi-factor, points-based classification method.

- The job evaluation results show that the work done by human services workers is undervalued relative to its required levels of skill and difficulty as measured by the job evaluation tool. The job evaluation comparisons demonstrate that the gaps revealed in the market analysis between human services workers and workers in other industries do not reflect lower pay because human services work is easier, less skilled, or less demanding than other jobs. Rather, the pay is less *despite* the high level of skill, responsibility, and difficulty of human services jobs.

These analyses inform our broad conclusion:

Achieving wage equity for workers at non-profit human services organizations requires substantially increasing wage rates.

Based on strong and consistent evidence that workers at non-profit human services organizations are underpaid, we recommend that these organizations and their funders work together to increase wages for human services employees. Our specific recommendations include four short-term and three longer-term steps.

By 2025:

RECOMMENDATION 1. Raise real wage rates by a minimum of 7% for non-profit human services workers in the near term.

Non-profit human services organizations and their governmental and non-governmental funders should increase human services workers' compensation by at least 7% (net of inflation) beginning in the next one to two years, while concurrently exploring how to design and implement a comprehensive overhaul of pay scales for the entire sector over the longer-term. This amount is based on the most conservative estimate in the market analysis, the multivariate analysis of the sub-set of workers who changed jobs, and was the net wage increase observed for human services workers leaving the human services industry. We believe this amount represents a starting point for the minimum increase needed immediately to reduce the number of workers leaving human services posts for significantly higher paying jobs in other industries.

RECOMMENDATION 2. Make adjustments for inflation separate from equity adjustments and build in future inflation adjustments.

Calculate wage increases to address pay inequity in addition to annual inflation adjustments. Wage adjustments to match inflation and wage adjustments for pay inequity are different issues and should be addressed separately.

RECOMMENDATION 3. Maintain or improve non-wage benefits and job characteristics throughout the wage equity increase process.

Decreasing the generosity of fringe benefits or increasing job demands to increase salaries will erode the value of any increase in pay and make it meaningless.

RECOMMENDATION 4. Consider wage increases as a necessary part of ongoing racial and gender equity work in the City of Seattle and King County.

Public agencies and non-profit organizations need to include wage equity – in addition to equal pay – as an action step within their anti-racism, gender equity, and diversity-equity-inclusion (DEI) plans. While organizations legally must make sure that they are paying women, persons of color, and other protected groups equivalently for the same jobs, equal pay measures alone are insufficient to achieving racial and gender equity. Race and gender discrimination shape the wage differentials between non-profit human services and other jobs in several interrelated ways.

By 2030:

RECOMMENDATION 5. Substantially increase wages for non-profit human services workers to align with those of workers doing comparable work in other sectors and industries.

While establishing a specific pay raise amount is necessarily a political task, the analysis in this report yields what we believe is a useful range of estimates of the magnitude of the current underpayment. The 30% - 37% wage gap found in our analysis imply that wage increases of 43% or more would be needed to align wages for non-profit human services workers with workers with similar job responsibilities and training in non-care work industries. Not increasing wages substantially and systematically equates to ignoring the most basic and severe inequities and further perpetuating the structural racial and gender inequities affecting this sector.

RECOMMENDATION 6. Create a salary grade system and establish minimum pay standards based on job characteristics.

Human services organizations should develop a broad salary grade system linking minimum salary requirements with job characteristics, including a job's knowledge and skills required, initiative and independence, effort, responsibilities, and environmental demands. The range of types of work and different sizes of organizations in the non-profit human services sector means that this grading system will need to have considerable flexibility.

RECOMMENDATION 7. Use public contracts to further wage equity.

City and county contracts for human services work should make sure that public contracts do not reinforce wage inequities in the economy as a whole. To avoid decreasing prevailing wages in more powerful industries, this means that government should adequately fund human services contracts so that employee wage levels do not fall below similar local jobs in the public sector.

Introduction

Non-profit human services organizations and their employees play important roles in the social infrastructure, in community health, and in the well-being of individuals and families in our region. Human services support persons across the lifespan, from growing young children's cognitive and social skills in high quality early learning settings, to equipping teens and adults with the creative and technical capabilities needed to succeed in life through development and employment programs, serving as emergency responders to families and persons in crisis, and supporting seniors to successfully age in place.

Despite the importance these jobs play in people's lives and the critical social foundation they provide, the pay for workers in human services organizations lags behind pay for workers in other parts of the economy. As this report will show, recent annual median earnings for a full-time human services worker were $33,995 in 2019 dollars; the median worker in non-caregiving industries was paid $54,831, almost 40% higher (Appendix 4, Table 2).

Non-profit and government leaders connect low wages to problems with hiring and retaining employees to perform crucial human services work. Recently, non-profit organizations in Seattle have experienced staffing shortages, some severe enough to restrict the City's capacity to open new housing units (Greenstone 2021; Patrick 2022). As one leader noted, "There are not enough people doing this work. And there are not enough people who can afford to do this work."

This report summarizes a study of human services wages in Seattle and King County. This study starts from the premise that human services jobs are essential to individual and community health and well-being, and that this work may be undervalued relative to work in other industries. However, this study confirms the findings of a wide body of research that human services workers are underpaid relative to other workers. We undertook a rigorous and multi-faceted examination of evidence to estimate the extent of that underpayment and to identify contributing factors. As the data consistently show, human services workers earn less than workers in other industries—for doing jobs that are complex, skilled, and demanding. The report concludes with recommendations for non-profit organizations, local government, and funders towards building a more equitable pay structure for human services.

About this study

The City of Seattle, in partnership with the Seattle Human Services Coalition, commissioned this report and study led by the University of Washington and conducted by a team of local and external experts. (See Box 1. About this Study and Appendix 1). The goals of the study are three-fold: to compare wages between non-profit human services work and other types of work; to empirically estimate the size of wage penalties involved; and to make recommendations about how to remedy inequities in Seattle and in King County, Washington.

We begin with an overview of the overall human services field and its contours in our region, followed by a discussion of factors that contribute to lower wages for human services workers in the non-profit sector.[1] As a supplement to that discussion, Appendix 2 provides an overview of selected major national and local historical and policy developments that have shaped wages and the conditions of work over the last century.

[1] This report summarizes work from a policy review and two sets of original empirical analyses. The complete text of these works appear as appendices to the report and can be found at https://socialwork.uw.edu/wageequitystudy along with an interactive wage equity timeline.

Pay structures reflect, in part, value-based judgements about worth, and – as such – pay practices are partially subjective. However, empirical study can yield solid evidence about the extent and nature of wage differences. With the goal of estimating the magnitude of human services wage penalties, this study used rigorous and complementary research methods and undertook two different empirical analyses:

- The **market analysis** draws on large-scale national, state, and local economic data to compare wages (median earnings) across occupations and industries. These statistical analyses estimate the extent to which workers may be "penalized" in the form of lower earnings by working in human services relative to other industries. Multivariate analyses allow us to compare workers net of their observable traits, including age, level of education, gender and race, but they cannot fully account for the ways in which discrimination and other subjective factors show up in market wages.
- The **job evaluation analysis** uses in-depth questionnaires and interviews with a small sample of employees working within and outside of the non-profit human services sector. By collecting and comparing detailed, comprehensive, and current data on the required knowledge, skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions of different jobs across different sectors and industries, the job evaluation analysis demonstrates whether compensation in human services equitably reflects the underlying nature and demands of the work.

This report includes summaries of the methods and key findings for each of these two analyses. (Appendices 3 and 4 present complete and detailed reports.) These findings inform a set of seven recommendations about human services pay structures.

Box 1. About the Wage Equity for Non-Profit Human Services Study

In May 2022, the City of Seattle, in partnership with the Seattle Human Services Coalition (SHSC), released an RFQ for a consultant to "conduct a comparable worth wage analysis of the City of Seattle and King County human services sector."[a] The RFQ sought a consultant who would work collaboratively with the City and the SHSC to design and implement an analysis that would cover multiple employers and sectors of human services work. The study is meant to complement prior work by King County and 501 Commons in their King County Nonprofit Wages and Benefits Survey Report.

The University of Washington (UW) was selected for the project. The UW team includes faculty and staff from a number of universities and research organizations in the U.S., a former local human services non-profit leader, and an expert from the United Kingdom versed in performing and implementing comparable worth/pay equity analyses. Appendix 1 details project personnel and responsibilities.

Beginning in August 2022 and continuing through February 2023, the UW project team met regularly with SHSC's Pay Equity Analysis Steering Committee, which includes City stakeholders, leaders of Seattle and King County-based non-profit agencies that provide a range of human services, and local and national policy experts.[b] The team finalized the project design and implementation in consultation with the Steering Committee. During the project, SHSC facilitated connections with human services agencies and workers from a range of organizations and provided background information on the human services sector in the City and County.

The Steering Committee provided feedback on recommendations and assistance interpreting preliminary findings, however the analyses and conclusions are the authors' alone.

In partnership with the SHSC, the UW team will present findings to and engage with local stakeholders throughout Spring 2023. Presentation audiences will include the Seattle Human Services Coalition's Wage Equity Funding Roundtable, City of Seattle and King County leadership, City of Seattle Mayor's Office and City Council, King County Executive and Council, Seattle and King County non-profits, and community members who engage with non-profit organizations.

[a] Funding from the study was provided by City Council (CBA HSD-002- B-001). The RFQ is available here: https:// www.seattle.gov/human-services/for-providers/funding-opportunities/2022-comp-worth-wage-analysis

[b] Steering Committee members are listed in Appendix 1.

Human services work

This report focuses on non-profit human services jobs in Seattle and throughout King County, Washington. Human services work is a type of caring labor, work that nurtures the well-being of others. This report and our recommendations focus on the non-profit sector, although our data and comparisons sometimes include human services workers in all sectors (see Box 2. Key terms and concepts), and our recommendations apply across the industry.

Human services organizations operate early childhood learning centers, special education programs, teen programs focused on youth behavioral health, job training and employment supports for young and less experienced workers, and supports for elders such as home health care. Human services workers also provide essential services to support the well-being of individuals, families and communities experiencing crises, such as domestic violence, homelessness, food insecurity, or living through environmental natural disasters.

In King County, human services employees comprise approximately two percent of the workforce; most work in individual and family services (50%) or child day care services (40%).[2] The remaining 10% are split between vocational rehabilitation and community food and housing and emergency services. In King County, the most common occupations among human services workers are childcare workers (15%), social workers (11%), and social and community service managers (6%).

Human services workers are employed in the public sector (in local city, county or state government, such as court social workers), in the for-profit sector, or in the non-profit sector. According to Census data for 2005-2019, just under half (48%) of human services workers in King County were employed in the non-profit sector. Much of this work is performed under contracts with local, county, and state governments to deliver services to residents. Of the remaining human services workers in King County, 10% worked in the public sector, and 42% worked in the for-profit sector (mostly in child care). As Figure 1 shows, human services workers in King County are less likely to work for the public sector and more likely to work for the non-profit sector compared to human services workers nationwide.

While the racial and ethnic composition of the human services workforce roughly matches the composition of the King County overall workforce, several other characteristics stand out (see Figure 2).

- Women are over-represented, making up almost 80% of workers in the industry.

[2] Unless otherwise noted, figures in this section draw from Table 1 of the market analysis found in Appendix 3.

- Black/African American workers are almost three times as likely to work in human services as they are to work in non-care industries.
- Overall, human services workers have a high level of formal education; 61% have a Bachelor's degree or other advanced degree.
- Fewer human services workers are employed full-time relative to other care or non-care workers.

Appendix 3, Table 1 shows more details on this workforce.

Box 2. Key terms and concepts

Care work is work that nurtures the well-being of others. Human services is one type of care industry. Other care work industries include education and health care.

Human services includes the following Census industry categories: individual and family services; community food and housing and emergency services; vocational rehabilitation services; and child day care services.

Industry refers to a group of enterprises engaged in providing the same goods or services. This report focuses on the human services industry.

Job refers to a paid position working for an employer. Workers who hold jobs typically have job titles that provide some indication of their role and responsibilities.

Occupation is another term for a profession or line of work. Common human services occupations include childcare worker, social worker, and program manager.

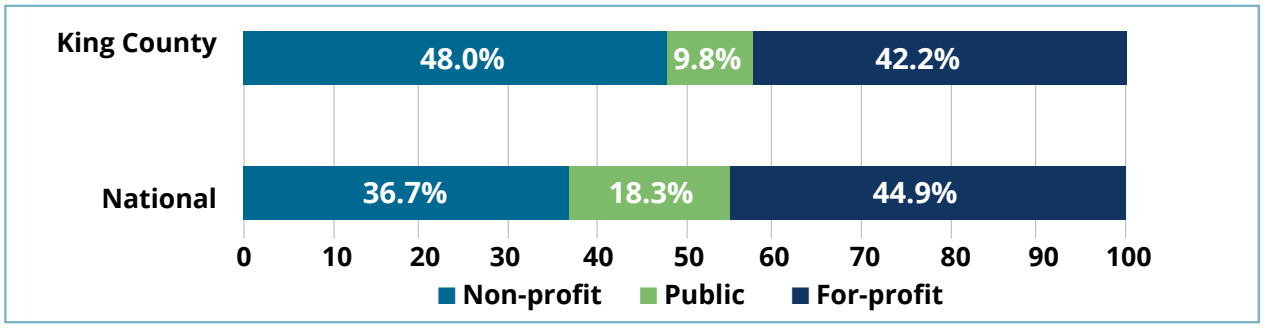
Sector, as used in this report, refers to parts of the economy as arranged by control and profit status. This includes the public sector (federal, state, and local governments), for-profit entities including businesses, and non-profit organizations.

STUDY COMPARISON GROUPS

The different data sources in this study include varying types of information on industry and sector, and hence require slightly different comparison groups. These comparison groups are specific combinations of the categories listed above.

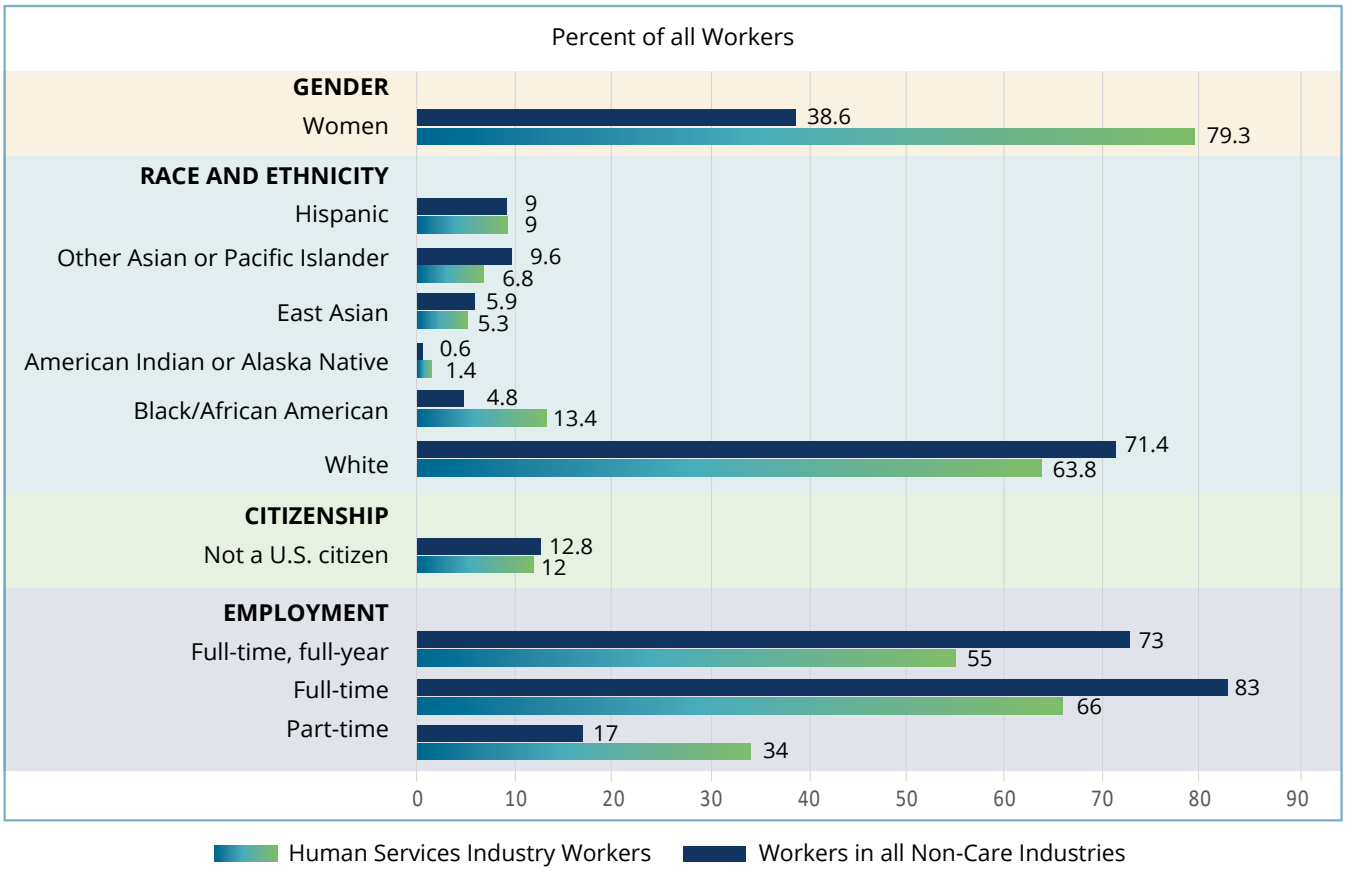
- **Other care industries** refers to education and health care. Some parts of the market analysis use this as a comparison group. Unless the non-profit sector is specified, comparisons in the market analysis refer to all sectors (non-profit, public, and for-profit).
- **Non-care industries** refers to industries other than human services, education, and health care. Some parts of the market analysis use this as a comparison group, and it includes all sectors unless non-profit is specified.
- **Other industries** refers to all industries other than human services. This combines the "other care" and "non-care" industries. Again, this includes the non-profit, public, and for-profit sectors unless otherwise specified.
- **Comparator jobs** refer to jobs not in non-profit human services. The job evaluation analysis uses this category, which includes a combination of public sector, education, and for-profit jobs in industries other than human services.

Figure 1. Human services employment by sector, King County and nationally



Source: Analysis of American Community Survey data, 2005-2019. All currently employed wage and salary workers between the ages of 18 and 64. See Appendix 3, Table 1.

Figure 2. Selected characteristics of King County workers by industry category



Source: Analysis of American Community Survey data, 2005-2019. All currently employed wage and salary workers between the ages of 18 and 64. See Appendix 3, Table 1.

Understanding wage inequity

Wages are shaped by many intersecting historical and societal forces. Ideas about how to think about equity in the context of wages, how wage levels are determined, and mechanisms for changing wage structures are foundational for understanding and interpreting the work of this report. In this section, we discuss these topics and their impact on wages in human services jobs.

Equity is the quality of being fair or just. No one arrangement is indisputably "equitable" or "inequitable"; rather, equity is a matter of contest or consensus. One common idea about wage equity is that people doing the same work should be paid the same. The concept of "equal pay for equal work," as codified in the federal Equal Pay Act of 1963, holds that persons in substantively the same jobs within the same organization should have equivalent pay.

Comparable worth theory

Comparable worth theory aims to address more deeply rooted differences in the economy. Comparable worth – also known as "pay equity" or "wage equity" – moves beyond a call for equal pay for equal work and moves to "equal pay for *equivalent* work." This approach rests on the understanding that prevailing pay levels are subject to the distortions and biases in society and asserts that workers ought to be paid the same for jobs that: require similar skills, knowledge, and initiative; take place in similarly demanding environments; and have comparable levels of responsibilities.

Comparable worth as a concept was first developed to address gender-based pay inequities, and we will use gender examples to explain it here. However, the concept applies to racism and other structural forces, including the multiple factors leading to wage penalties in human services as discussed below.

Because of occupational segregation, women and men often do not work in the same occupations or industries.[3] Female-dominated industries tend to pay less than male-dominated industries. Comparable worth theory recognizes that work done by women has been systematically devalued, with women segregated into different occupations than men, and that this bias continues to affect current wages in jobs that are, or historically were, dominated by women.

A comparable worth approach addresses the pay disparity between "men's jobs" and "women's jobs" by systematically examining the dimensions of a job via a job evaluation tool that identifies the component parts of a job. For instance, jobs that involve similar levels of manual dexterity, should – all else held equal – have the same level of pay, regardless of whether the job was done by men (as is often the case with metal milling equipment) or women (as is the case with sewing machines). By analyzing and comparing the distinct tasks that make up a job, comparable worth job evaluations allow for a comparison between the pay of different jobs (England 1999).

The value of the comparable worth approach can go far beyond addressing gender-based inequities. Salary levels reflect multiple social forces, many of which give rise to systematic inequities. Before turning to the specific reasons why wages are lower in the non-profit human services field, this next section discusses academic theories about how salaries are determined in general.

How wages are set

Economic theory provides one entry-point into understanding wage determination. Standard economic theory informs many

[3] We recognize that gender-based inequities apply beyond the woman-man binary but use binary language to mirror the categories used in Census data. We also use Census terms for race and ethnicity.

people's perspectives about compensation, but in its basic form it cannot account for some important labor market forces. A classical economic model holds that a worker's compensation is in proportion to their skills and productive outputs. Generally, compensation rewards education or experience with higher pay, or links compensation in some way to productivity. In many ways, this theory presumes equal access to experience and education, and meritocracy.

While standard economic theory can explain some variation in individuals' salaries, it is limited in important ways. For instance, in a classical economic model, discrimination (based on race, gender, or other characteristics) is illogical because only workers' contributions should matter. In actuality, discrimination in the labor market is well-documented (see, for example, Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Small and Pager 2020).

Standard economic theory is also limited in its ability to explain variation in salaries across occupations or industries. In addition to differences in required levels of training and education, wage differences across occupations also reflect forces including the status of the individuals holding those jobs, the value placed on the work being done, historical patterns of pay and their remnants, and the power of employees relative to their employers (e.g., legislation governing the conditions of work, access to enforcement agencies, and unionization and collective bargaining). Wage inequities can arise through systematic discrimination linked to race or gender, through inequalities in worker power across industries, and through policies that advance or support strong wages in one sector or allow wages in another sector to languish (such as the policies detailed in Appendix 2).

Once wage inequities are created and established, inertia and emulation solidify them over space and time (Rosenfeld 2021). For example, wage scales tend to persist as new employees join an organization with an existing pay structure and accept and use that as a guideline for their own pay. This type of "organizational inertia is evident when we think of a job as 'naturally' paying a certain amount" (Rosenfeld 2021, p. 16). Common business practices – such as pegging the wages within a new organization to the industry standard – mean that wage structures also get replicated across locations. In time, wage levels in one locale or one organization spread from one place to another or one employer to another via such mimicry.

Labor market inequities become durable when these forces of inertia and emulation act on top of discrimination. Consider race and gender discrimination present in the labor market in the late 19th or early 20th century. Women were restricted to a small number of industries and occupations, and these paid lower wages than the jobs open to men. Similarly, African Americans, other racialized minorities, and immigrants were shunted into some jobs and kept out of others, with the best-paying jobs held primarily by U.S.-born White workers. As the economy evolved and discriminatory labor restrictions gradually loosened, the wages in these minority- and woman-dominated industries remained lower due to inertia. As such, discrimination from 100 years ago affects wage structures today, even if women and persons of color are not legally or strongly socially restricted to certain industries.

This is not to say that wage structures are immutable. As market dynamics, social dynamics, and laws change, relative wages change as well. Below and in Box 2, we discuss state and local policies attempting to interrupt inequitable processes.

Policy can change wage-setting practices

Government policies shape the conditions of work and commensurate wages through federal and state policy (e.g., minimum wage and work hour laws) and local rulemaking

(e.g., rules governing unions and collective bargaining). (For an overview of the historical and policy context relevant to human services work, see Appendix 2.) For example, federal laws, including the Equal Pay Act of 1963 prohibit discrimination in salaries based on gender or other ascribed characteristics. Despite decades of federal prohibitions on gender discrimination in employment and wages, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 was a reminder that some employers continue to pay women less than men for the same job.

Spurred by persistent gender and racial wage gaps, occupational segregation, and growing recognition of the role that structural factors play in setting wages across occupations, wage equity efforts acorss the U.S. have gained momentum over the past two decades (National Women's Law Center 2020). States and localities have undertaken various additional efforts to try to reduce pay disparities by gender and race that generally fall into two broad categories:

- **Pay transparency:** Some states, including Washington state,[4] have passed laws that prohibit companies from asking job applicants about their salary history and/or prohibit employers from restricting employees from disclosing their salaries. Some of these laws also require employers to provide salary ranges on posted job descriptions for potential employees.
- **Require employers to track and report pay disparities by gender and race:** Some states and localities have added requirements that contractors and/or governments report wages by gender and race on a regular basis. For example, San Francisco, California requires companies to report employment data by gender and race. New York City's Pay Equity Law requires the city to produce and share data on municipal employees' salaries by gender and race.[5]

These laws enable tracking of pay inequities and trends. Most of these efforts are targeted at ensuring equal pay for the same or similar work. While they are a step towards remedying some barriers to pay inequity, they do not address other major causes of pay inequity, including occupational segregation and the differentiated values and pay on work based on factors such as gender, race, and ethnicity.

Wages for human services work

Explanations of how employers set compensation need to recognize the influence of the relative power of workers and the role of factors such as individual and structural discrimination, cultural norms, institutional factors, and the ability to capture and monetize the value of services provided. All these factors, which influence the relative bargaining power of workers, come into play in human services wage levels. From the literature and previous work of some contributing scholars to the Wage Equity report, we know that "penalties" exist regarding wages in the following domains: gender, race, care, client power, and sectoral (see Figure 3 and Appendix 2). These factors act individually and interactively to drive wages down.

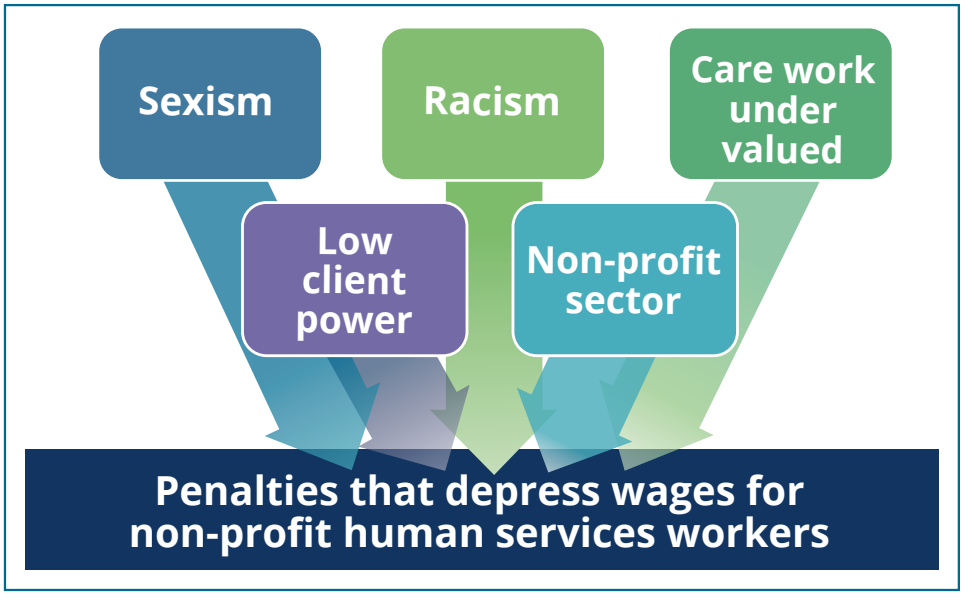
- **Gender penalty:** Human services workers are overwhelmingly women today and historically. Today's human services workers face lower wages because industry wages have carried forward historic gender discrimination and because women's labor market prospects are still affected by gender-based discrimination.

[4] Washington State's Equal Pay and Opportunities Act (RCW 49.58.005-110) addresses pay transparency. It requires employers to post salary ranges to job seekers, prohibits employers from requiring that applicants provide salary histories, and protects the rights of workers to disclose and discuss salaries without employer retaliation.
[5] San Francisco Administrative Code Section 12B.2(f)(2); New York City Council 2019 Local Law 18.

- **Racial penalty:** Workers of color have historically experienced and still experience discrimination in employment that constricts their opportunities and reduces their bargaining power. Discrimination is also associated with a cultural devaluation of skills and commitments of people of color that shows up in lower wages. Furthermore, workers of color are over-represented in the lowest-paid human services jobs, including frontline care work.
- **Care penalty:** Employers may undervalue the knowledge and skills embedded in "emotional labor," often gained through mothering and caring within households and voluntary school-based activities, as well as formal qualifications. While these skills are utilized in many human services jobs, they are not reflected in pay and conditions of work.
- **Low client power penalty:** Non-profit human services workers' wages may be depressed because the clients they serve and the populations receiving social services lack political or economic power.
- **Outsourcing/Sector penalty:** Non-profit human services workers face lower wages than their peers in the for-profit and public sectors. This penalty may have been exacerbated by the increased reliance on public subcontracting to human services non-profit organizations since the 1980s (Smith and Lipsky 1993; National Council of Nonprofits 2022), which has put additional downward pressures on wages.

In addition to these penalties, many human services workers do not have full-time employment. Part-time workers face lower wages, and access to benefits may be limited relative to full-time workers. Unionization is one way for workers within an industry to gain power and increase pay. Almost a century ago, social workers were heavily involved with unions (Leighninger 2001). Today, however, unionization rates among human service workers are low, and fiscal pressures contributing to new management practices have tended to reduce workers' participation in management (Cunningham et al. 2017), both of which may contribute to wage stagnation. In sum, workers in human services are vulnerable to intersecting pay penalties related to their individual and collective bargaining power that result in systematically lower wages.

Figure 3. Conceptual model of factors depressing wages for non-profit human services work



Box 3. Comparable worth/wage equity in other contexts

Comparable worth analyses move beyond "equal pay for equal work" to try to determine how we would compensate jobs typically done by less powerful groups (such as racialized minorities or women) if the work they did was valued in the same way as comparable jobs performed by members of more powerful groups (such as White workers or men).

One state, Minnesota, implemented a comparable worth system in the 1980s for both its state and local government. Separate equal pay rules in Minnesota prohibit employers from paying women employees less than men for equal work or for jobs that require equal skill, effort, responsibility, and have similar working conditions. A more recent reform requires that businesses with large contracts with the State and more than 40 employees apply for a certificate of compliance declaring that they have no gender wage gap within occupational categories and describing how they set wages. Certificates must be updated every four years.

The Minnesota efforts were intended to address gender pay inequities, and the State reports that the comparable worth system has resulted in an average increase in salaries for women of roughly 11% after the four-year phase-in period (Minnesota Legislative Office on the Economic Status of Women 2016) The law applies to classes of jobs and to equity in the pay structure within the state and local government, not to individual jobs (Rothchild, Watkins, and Faith 2016). In the 1980s, efforts in Washington state to narrow the gender wage gap and mandate comparable worth pay for women state workers were unsuccessful in court. While comparable worth efforts have been limited in the U.S. in recent years, such methods are used in various contexts in other countries, including New Zealand; Ontario, Canada; the European Union; and the United Kingdom. The experiences of places that have used comparable worth approaches suggest that this approach is not easy or straightforward, but that it can yield gains for less powerful workers.

Market analysis

To better understand the wages of human services workers relative to other workers in our region, we conducted three types of original data analyses using existing Census and Washington state administrative data. Appendix 3 contains full details of this work.[6] The overarching goal of this market analysis is to understand the wages paid to human services workers relative to two different comparison groups: other care industry workers (in education and health care), and workers in non-care industries (the remaining parts of the economy, including retail, business services, manufacturing, and others).

We first calculated median earnings using the most local data available. Second, we estimated the pay penalty faced by workers in human services relative to other industries; these estimates are based on multivariate statistical analyses that allow us to estimate the wage gap net of any observable worker characteristics, such as age, gender, or race. We also analyze changes in wages among the sub-set of

[6] Appendix 3 also contains a fourth analysis, a comparison of specific occupations in human services, other care work industries, and non-care industries. These comparisons parallel and confirm the findings of the more localized and detailed Job Evaluation, so for brevity we do not discuss them in this summary report.

Table 1. Purpose of analysis and data sources for market analysis

Purpose of Analysis	Data source
Assess the human services pay penalties in Washington state • Median pay statistics • Multivariate analysis	The US Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS)
Assess the effects of switching jobs within and outside of human services jobs in Seattle and King County • Hourly and annual pay changes • Multivariate analysis	Earnings records from the Washington state Employment Security Department (ESD)

workers who switch jobs, which is a third way to understand the differences in pay between industries.

Table 1. summarizes the data used for these analyses. While the overall report focuses on non-profit human services work in Seattle and King County, limitations in available data mean that this analysis often takes a slightly broader angle. Except when noted, analyses in this section focus on the human services industry regardless of sector, meaning we combine non-profit, for-profit, and governmental human services providers. In some cases, further data limitations mean that we conduct analyses at the state level, rather than for King County or Seattle specifically. Finally, the small annual samples in the Census' American Community Survey (ACS) data require combining data across years in order to have sufficient sample sizes to estimate our models.[7]

Median earnings are lower in human services than in other industries

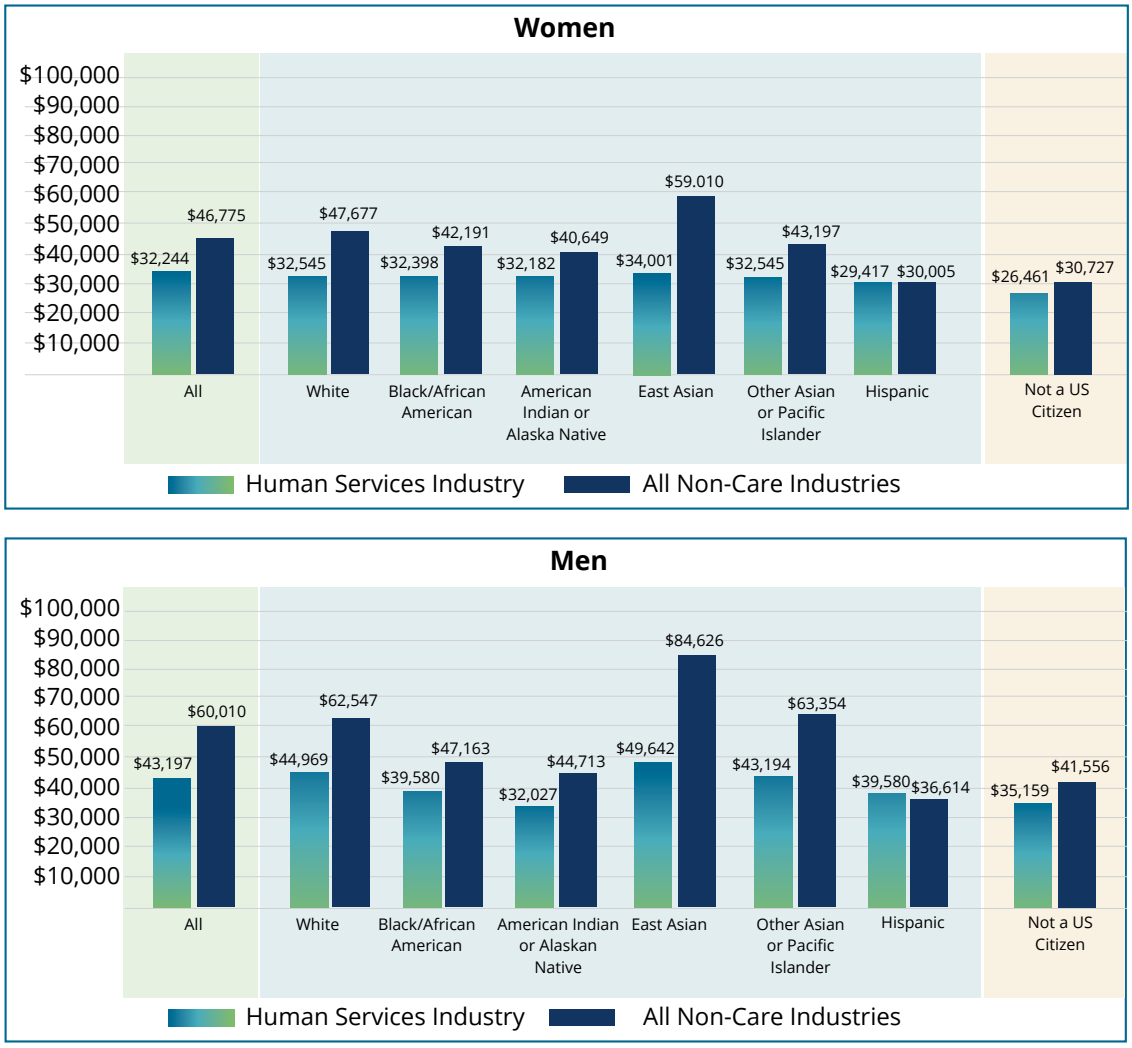
Median annual earnings among all full-time human services workers (all sectors) in Washington state were $33,995 over the study observation period of 2005-2019 (all figures are in 2019 dollars).[8] This is 38% less than the $54,831 median paid to full-time workers in non-care industries. Median annual earnings for full-time workers in other care industries (education and healthcare) were $52,331 (all figures from Appendix 3, Table 2).

These differences between human services and other industries show up across combinations of gender with race, ethnicity, and citizenship. Figure 4 shows median annual earnings for full-time human services and non-care industry workers for women (panel a/top panel) and men (panel b/bottom panel). Human services workers are paid less than workers in other industries in every demographic sub-group except one (Hispanic men are paid slightly more in human services than they are in other industries). Within human services, women's earnings are similar across several racial groups, with median annual earnings of around $32,000 for White, Black, and American Indian/Alaska Native, and other Asian or Pacific Islander women.

[7] We combined data over the period 2005-2019 with inflation adjustments so that all figures are in 2019 dollars. We do not use 2020 or later data due to pandemic-related disruptions in both the economy and in public data collection procedures.

[8] We compare earnings across sectors for only those workers who work full-time (35+ hours per week) and have earnings in at least 50 weeks of the year. Wage differences between industries would be even larger if we considered all workers because human services workers are more likely than workers in other industries to work part-time and/or part-year.

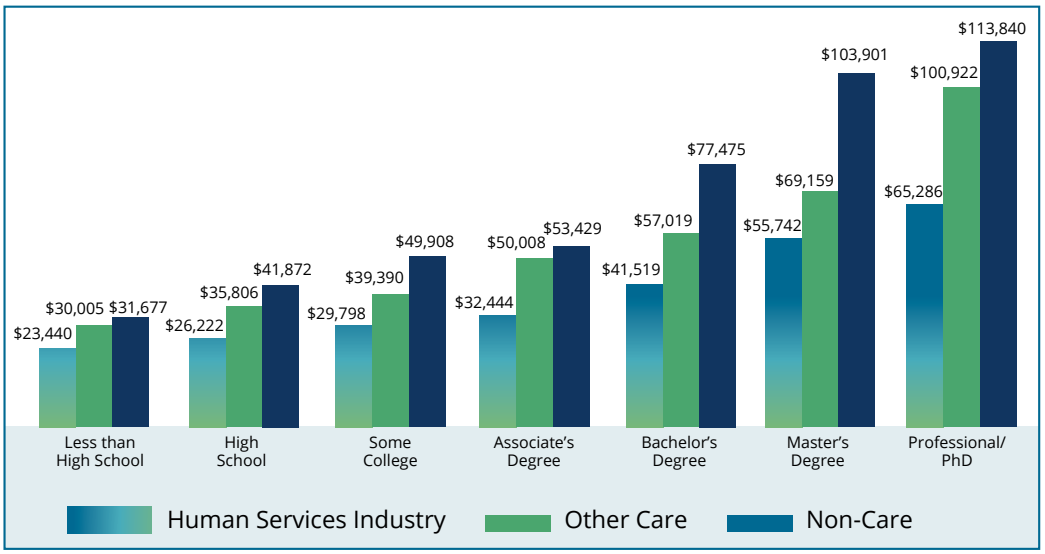
Figure 4. Median annual wages for Washington workers by industry category, gender, race/ethnicity, and citizenship



Source: Analysis of American Community Survey data, 2005-2019. All full-time, full-year wage and salary workers between the ages of 18 and 64. Figures in 2019 dollars. See Appendix 3, Table 3.

Differences between human services and other industries also show up at all levels of education. As shown in Figure 5, as education levels increase, wages increase. As with overall earnings, median annual earnings in human services are lower than in both other care industries and non-care industries, across all educational categories. Median annual wages for full-time Washington workers in human services with a bachelor's degree (but no higher degree) are about $41,500 per year, compared to $57,000 for similarly educated workers in other care industries, and $77,500 for similarly educated workers in non-care industries. These numbers translate into a 27% wage penalty relative to other care workers and a 46% wage penalty relative to workers in non-care industries among bachelor's degree holders.

Figure 5. Median annual earnings by industry and education, Washington workers



Source: Analysis of American Community Survey data, 2005-2019. All full-time, full-year wage and salary workers between the ages of 18 and 64. Figures in 2019 dollars.See Appendix 3, Table 4.

The consistency of the gaps between human services and other industries provides strong evidence of a human services pay penalty, but factors other than inequities may contribute to these differences in medians. For instance, workers in human services may be younger than workers in other industries. Thus, differences in median wages might overstate the difference between sectors because wages tend to rise with experience. For reasons like this, we conducted multivariate analyses that can estimate differences net of possible observable correlated factors.

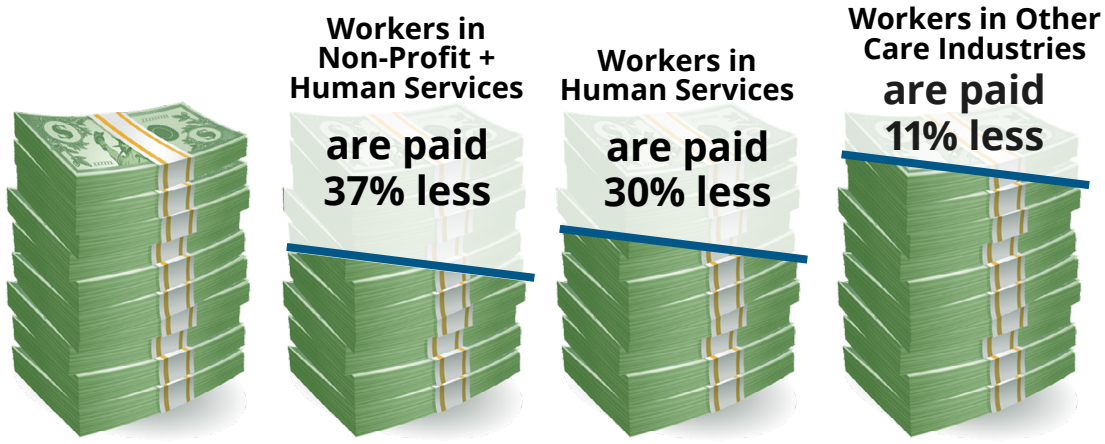
Multivariate analyses show wage gaps controlling for worker characteristics

Using econometric approaches, we looked more closely at differences between human services employees, other employees in care work industries, and employees in all other non-care industries to estimate the pay penalty when observable individual and job characteristics are accounted for in the analysis.[9] Net of these control variables, Washington state human services workers are paid 30% less than workers in non-care industries. Non-profit workers face an additional 7% penalty relative to workers at for-profit employers. Taken together, this means that non-profit human services workers experience a wage penalty of 37% relative to observably similar workers in for-profit, non-care industries. Workers in other care industries are paid more than human services workers but less than workers in non-care industries. Figure 6 illustrates these differences.

[9] These analyses control for sector (for-profit, non-profit, public), education, gender, whether married, presence of own child in the household, race, Hispanic ethnicity, citizenship, occupation, usual hours worked per week, age in years, and year of data. The methods used in this and the following analysis parallel the approach used in the study team members' recent peer-reviewed publication on care work penalties (Folbre, Gautham, and Smith 2023).

Figure 6. Wage penalties by industry and sector, Washington state

Relative to workers in non-care industries...



Source: Multivariate analysis of American Community Survey data, 2005-2019. Analysis controls for individual worker characteristics and time trends

Leaving human services jobs increases pay

Lastly, we examine the impact on wages of changing jobs within and across industries using more detailed data for workers that allows us to zero in on employers located or headquartered in Seattle.[10] This provides different insight into wage penalties because we can observe the exact same workers in different jobs and see how their pay changes. As such, things that are unobservable in the analyses above – like individual skills, dedication, or work habits – are held constant.

This method offers a way to confirm the findings above but takes a different approach in several ways. Workers change jobs for reasons, and the reasons for changing jobs may also affect wages. In some cases, workers switch jobs to get better pay or more challenge, reasons that should increase wages. In other cases, changes in workers' health or family circumstances make a job not sustainable; such switches may lead to lower pay. We cannot know why workers switch, only that they do. Second, by design, this analysis cannot tell us about wage penalties for workers who stay in their jobs. Finally, leaving a job or industry is particularly difficult for longer tenured or more highly trained workers who have expertise and experience that are specific to human services. As such, although there are complexities to studying how job changes affect wages, this analysis offers a different and complementary approach to the prior estimates.

We created and analyzed six categories of workers in human services and other industries based on whether they: remained with their employer; switched employers but stayed within their industry type; or switched both employer and industry from the previous quarter.[11] For both "stayers" and "switchers," we calculated changes in their hourly wage rates one year after switching or staying.

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[10] This work uses the full population Employment Security Department (ESD) data, which allows us to look within Seattle rather than statewide. As Appendix 3 details, we replicated all the prior analyses as closely as possible with the ESD data, and overall earnings ratios were very similar. ESD data do not contain demographic, occupational, or education information, which is why we did not use this data source for all analyses. Appendix 3 also contains these same analyses for employers based within King County. Findings for King County are similar to the Seattle findings presented in this summary.

[11] For this analysis, other care work was combined with all other industries yielding two industrial grouping, the human services industry and all other industries. The six categories were: 1. Stay with an other industry employer, 2. Switch from one other-than-human services employer to another, 3. Switch from another industry to the human services industry, 4. Stay with a human services employer, 5. Switch employers but remain in human services, and 6. Switch from human services to another industry.

On average, workers' hourly wages go up over the course of a year, regardless of whether they stay at an employer or move. However, wage rate changes vary depending on whether a worker begins in or stays in human services.

Seattle workers who stay in human services, whether at a new employer or the same employer see annual increases of 6.1% and 6.3%, respectively. For workers in all industries other than human services, staying with the same employer yields a raise of 4.5% whereas switching to another employer not in human services leads to an increase of 9.1% in hourly pay.

However, moving into or out of human services yields different patterns. Workers who leave a job not in human services and move into a human services industry job see a wage increase of 5.9%. In contrast, workers who leave human services for a job in another industry get paid 14.2% more per hour than they were paid in human services.

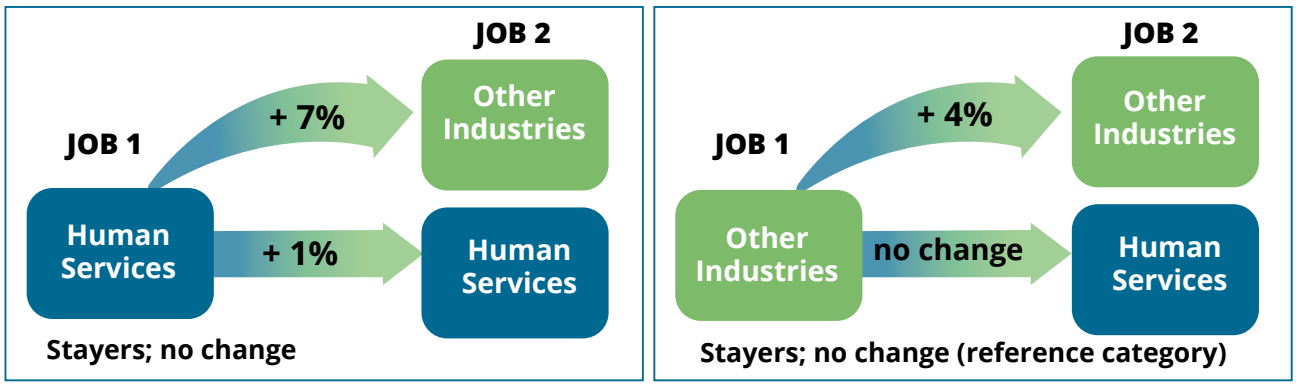
The largest gains go to workers who leave human services. Furthermore, the percentage point hourly wage gains by leaving the human services industry are 56% higher than the next highest gain from switching employers.

We also performed a multivariate version of this switching analysis, summarized in Figure 7. This allows us to estimate changes in hourly wages not otherwise accounted for by observable characteristics such as hours worked and employer size. This analysis confirms the prior finding that leaving the Seattle human services industry yields increases in pay.

- Switching jobs and leaving the human services industry is associated with an hourly wage increase premium of 7% relative to the reference category of staying at the same job not in human services.
- In contrast, workers who enter the human services industry from another industry see no change in pay beyond what "stayers" report, nor do workers who stay with the same human services employer.

Note that both the calculated wage change and the multivariate estimates of wage change premiums refer to hourly wages; actual earnings gains from switching are larger because switching jobs also is associated with more total hours of work. Switching out of human services, where part-time work is common, into work in a different industry yielded a 31% total earnings premium relative to the reference category of workers who stayed with the same employer in another industry.

Figure 7. Hourly wage rate change premium for Seattle job stayers and switchers, within and across industries (from multivariate analysis)



Source: Analysis of 2010-2017 Washington State Employment Security Department earnings records. See Appendix 3, Exhibit M2 for details.

These findings provide additional insight into the relative wages of human services work versus work in other industries. As noted above, this switching analysis should not be interpreted as a general estimate of the full penalties affecting human services pay levels. We believe that this is better thought of as a lower-bound estimate because it is most generalizable to workers most likely to switch jobs, those at the beginning of their careers who are also often the lowest paid workers.

All three market data analyses show wage gaps

All three approaches – the descriptive wage tabulations, multivariate analysis, and the switching analysis – yield consistent results. **Workers in human services get paid substantially less than workers in non-care services industries and even less than workers in other care industries**. Controlling for worker characteristics, human services workers face a wage penalty of 30% and an additional non-profit wage penalty of 7%. Wage gaps are found even when we follow the same workers over time as they switch jobs, suggesting that the differences are not due to characteristics of the worker.

One reading of these findings is as confirming that wages for non-profit human services work are indeed depressed by the set of the penalties outlined above. An opposing view might hold that the lower pay for human services work relative to other industries is a function of the nature of the work itself. The job evaluation analysis that follows provides a detailed and comparative look at the nature of human services jobs.

Job Evaluation Analysis

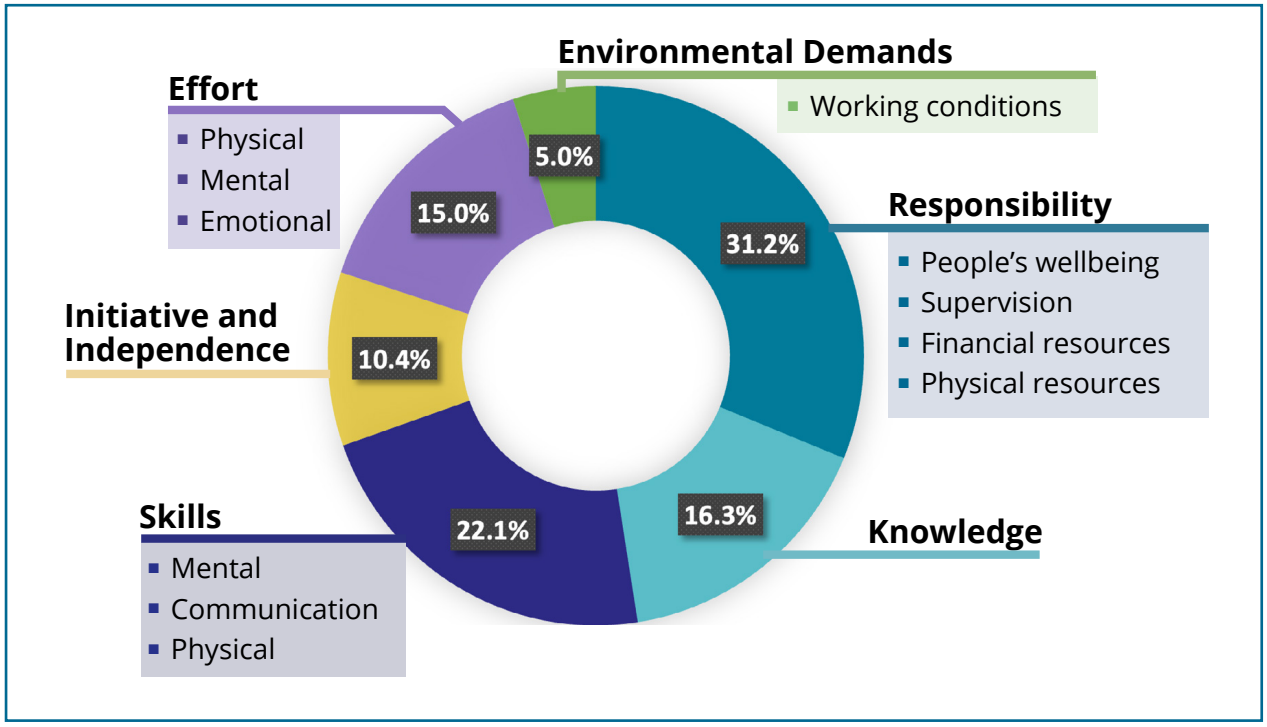
The job evaluation analysis portion of the study was designed to complement the market analysis of large-scale national and regional data. The job evaluation analysis uses a different approach from the market analysis, directly assessing a small number of jobs on a comprehensive range of factors to assess the relative levels of knowledge, skills, responsibility, effort, initiative, and demands. Job evaluation methods hence more precisely capture the "equivalent work" component within the comparable worth principle of "equal pay for equivalent work."

The job evaluation uses in-depth data from a small, purposive sample of current jobholders within King County and Seattle. These data allow us to directly compare jobs in the non-profit human services industry to jobs in other industries and sectors.

About the job evaluation instrument

To assess comparable worth, this study used a purpose-built job evaluation questionnaire and scoring rubric, the National Joint Council Scheme (NJCS), developed by UK-wide local governments, unions, and leading job evaluation experts. The NJCS was developed to comply with UK legislation requiring "equal pay for work of equal value" – the equivalent of "comparable worth" in the U.S. – and also with regard to the protected characteristics in the UK's Equality Act 2010, "age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation" (Equality Act 2010). Unlike other widely used job evaluation tools, the NJCS is specifically designed to address gender bias by accounting for job demands that might be devalued in the labor market, including relating to interpersonal and communication skills, emotional demands, responsibility for people, and knowledge related to people and human behavior.

Figure 8. Job evaluation factors



Source: NJCS job evaluation instrument, see text for details

The NJCS instrument is a points-based, analytical tool that is designed to be used across sectors and levels of hierarchy. As shown in Figure 8, the NJCS is based on 13 weighted factors within six major categories: Knowledge, Skills, Responsibility, Effort, Initiative and Independence, and Environmental Demands (Working Conditions). Each factor has up to 8 different point levels, with a maximum total score of 1,000 possible points for a given job. Box 4 shows an example of how these factors are scored, and Appendix 4 contains more information about the NJCS instrument, including a full copy of the questionnaire used in this study.

In the present study, job holders completed a slightly modified version of the NJCS Job evaluation questionnaire, adapted to use U.S. terminology and with questions relating to the Working Conditions factor slightly amended to reflect the impact of Covid and the potential for micro-aggressions in the workplace.

Participants

The Job Evaluation portion of the Wage Equity study used purposive sampling to recruit non-profit human services workers in Seattle and King County with jobs in commonly occurring "benchmark" positions (N=12) as well as a sample of "comparison job" holders (N=10) in jobs outside of the non-profit sector and human services industry. The human services benchmark jobs in this study include four common positions:

- Caseworker
- Director
- Coordinator
- Child Care Worker

These jobs were selected to represent an array of job types at different levels of responsibility.

Box 4. How the job evaluation instrument works

To be reliable and meaningful, job ratings need to be done systematically using set criteria. The NJCS is an established, structured, and comprehensive system for rating jobs on multiple factors. Data from completed questionnaires and interview transcripts are analyzed to assess and rate the job on each of the 13 factors measured by the NJCS. Points for each factor are totaled to allow for comparisons of jobs both within and across sectors.

For each factor, there are multiple levels and the NJCS has specific guidelines for rating and assigning points to indicate the level of a given job characteristic. For example, the factor "Responsibility for People – Well-being" measures the responsibility of the jobholder for individual, or groups of, people (members of the public, service users and recipients, clients), other than employees supervised or managed by the jobholder. This factor emphasizes the job holder's responsibilities for the physical, mental, social economic and environmental well-being of people, including their health and safety.

For this factor, the NJCS scoring rubric assesses the job on a scale of 1-6, depending on the level at which the job is assessed. The following summary guidance illustrates the substantive differences between levels for the factor "Responsibility for People--Well-being"

Level 1: Limited, or no direct impact on well-being of individuals or groups.

Level 2: Some direct impact on well-being through tasks or duties which are to their direct benefit, or impact directly on their health and safety.

Level 3: Considerable direct impact on well-being through either a) an assessment of needs and implementation of appropriate care for those reliant on jobholder for their basic needs or b) implementing regulations with direct impact on health, safety, or well-being.

Level 4: High direct impact on well-being through either a) an assessment of needs and implementation of appropriate programs of care for those reliant on the jobholder; or b) enforcing regulations which have high direct impact on the health, safety or well-being.

Level 5: Major direct impact on well-being of people reliant on the jobholder; involves assessment of their complex needs and arranging for delivery of appropriate programs of care; responsibility for making decisions which may affect future well-being and circumstances of clients.

Level 6: Very major direct impact on well-being of substantial numbers of people reliant on services for their care; involves assessment of needs of relevant groups of people and determining how appropriate programs of care should be delivered; responsibility for making decisions which will affect future well-being of individual, and groups of clients.

For the factor "Responsibility for People," each level contributes 13 points, meaning that a job scoring at level 3 in the above example would contribute 39 points to the overall job evaluation score. Other factors have up to 8 levels, and each level contributes 10, 13, or 20-21 points, depending on the weight of the factor. This summary is based the NJC Green Book collective agreement (Local Government Association, 2022, p. 79-80) which also provides scoring criteria for the other factors that comprise the job evaluation.

The Seattle Human Services Coalition helped with recruitment of benchmark job holders. The range of types of human services organizations represented include those providing support services for housing and for unsheltered people, domestic violence services, multi-service community centers, and early learning care providers. The sample also represents jobs in different-sized organizations.

To identify comparators, the Job Evaluation team sought individuals from a range of occupations outside of the non-profit, human services sector. The goal was to include occupations either predominantly performed by men – such as construction or IT – or administrative and professional occupations, from entry to senior executive level. The team also aimed to include individuals from a range of organizations, including smaller and larger employers, and from the for-profit as well as the public sector. The research team, Steering Committee, and SHSC networks identified potential comparator job interviewees via direct outreach, including a snowball principle drawing on pre-existing relationships and acquaintances. Six comparator job holders in the sample work in the for-profit sector, one works in the public sector, one works in a private school (a non-profit), and two are trade union workers.

With the support of the Steering Committee, a locally based member of the Job Evaluation team oversaw recruitment, obtained informed consent, ensured that participants completed the NJCS questionnaire, and conducted most of the interviews. Appendix 4 provides additional information on the data collection and analysis.

Data and analysis

Data collected for the job evaluation includes the modified NJSC questionnaire, and simultaneous transcription of the interviews which were conducted virtually from October through December 2022. In addition, job holders or their supervisors provided copies of their contracts, personnel policies, benefits information, and organizational charts where possible.

Transcripts and completed questionnaires were analyzed to assess and score the job on each of the 13 factors measured by the NJCS, following a structured scoring rubric and protocol. Analysis and scoring of the NJCS job evaluation questionnaire and interview transcript data was carried out by a member of the team who was involved in establishing the original NJCS job evaluation tool and who has twenty years of experience applying the scoring rubric in job evaluation analyses across local government, schools, and the non-profit sector in the UK. Points for each factor were totaled to allow for comparison of salaries across job evaluation scores both within and across sectors.

Job evaluation study findings

The non-profit human services jobs included in this analysis rate at different point levels based on the NJCS job evaluation instrument; the same is true for the comparator jobs. Tables 2 and 3 show job evaluation scores for the benchmark jobs and the comparator jobs, respectively. As shown, the twelve benchmark job evaluation scores range from 404 to 716. Eight of the 12 (67%) fall between 400 and 600 points. The ten comparator scores range from a low of 367 – lower than the lowest benchmark score of 404 – to a high of 710, which is marginally lower than the highest benchmark score of 716. Seven of the 10 comparator jobs (70%) fall between 400 and 600 points.

Table 2. Job evaluation (JE) scores and median King County salaries, non-profit human services jobs

JE score	Job title	Area median salary
404	Teaching Assistant	$39,177
430	School Age Enrichment Worker	$45,752
447	Youth Advocate	$43,663
460	Office Assistant/Intake Coordinator	$41,600
505	Early Learning Director/Site Coordinator	$66,048
522	Case Manager	$60,099
528	Program Manager	$66,048
581	Manager – Housing Services	$58,033
601	Coalition Director Programs and Membership	$66,048
669	Children's Advocate	$55,059
684	HR Director, Housing Organization	$140,442
716	Director – Housing Services	$78,162

Source: Job evaluation scores from study analysis (see text and Appendix 4 for details). Salary data from 2021 King County Nonprofit Wage and Benefit Report (501 Commons, 2021).

Table 3. Job evaluation (JE) scores and median area salaries, comparator jobs

JE score	Job title	Area median salary
367	Office Manager	$62,710
370	Public Sector Administrator/Project Manager	$76,860
427	Journey Electrician	$79,020
449	Dispatcher/Office Manager	$55,070
492	Business Representative	$130,750
512	Facilities Manager/Administrator	$81,465
577	Private School Equity Director	$133,243
593	Attorney	$129,147
599	Compliance Director	$132,230
710	Construction Project Manager	$104,458

*Source: Job evaluation scores from study analysis (see text and Appendix 4 for details). Salary data from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data reported via the O*Net system (National Center for O*NET Development, n.d.).*

Tables 2 and 3 also show the area median salaries for the job title closest to the evaluated job. Within the category of non-profit human services jobs, higher job evaluation scores roughly align with higher wages. The lowest-paid non-profit human services worker, the teaching assistant, is also the lowest, and the two highest paid jobs, the HR Director and the Housing Services Director also ranked the highest. The higher relative pay for the HR director reflects the immediate transferability of human resources work outside of the industry and sector.

The side-by-side comparison of Tables 2 and 3 also shows that pay for the human services benchmark jobs is lower than that of comparator jobs for all similar job evaluation scores. The median pay of the lowest-scoring comparator – Office Manager – is 60% higher than that of the lowest-scoring human services benchmark job – Teaching Assistant, despite the latter job scoring higher on the job evaluation. The pay of the highest job evaluation scoring comparator – Construction Project Manager – is over a third higher than the highest scoring benchmark job – Director, Housing Services even though the Housing Services job scores six points higher on the evaluation. Salary differences are even larger when workers' actual pay, rather than the area median, is considered. After an annual bonus is applied, the for-profit sector construction manager makes well over twice what the Housing Services Director makes (shown in Appendix 4).

The gaps between scores and pay illustrate the devaluation of the types of work done by non-profit human services workers. For jobs rated as similarly complex and demanding, human services workers are paid less than other workers in this sample. See Figure 9 and Figure 10 for examples of job-to-job comparisons. These comparisons suggest that the gaps revealed in the market analysis between human services workers and workers in other industries do not reflect lower pay because human services work is easier, less skilled, or less demanding than other jobs. Rather, the pay is less *despite* the high level of skill, responsibility, and difficulty of the jobs.

Figure 9. Teaching Assistant Job Comparison

Comparing job evaluation factor scores and pay for a non-profit human services job and a similarly-scored job not in human services



TEACHING ASSISTANT
NON-PROFIT SECTOR
Median Pay **$39,177/year**
Job Evaluation Score **404**

ADMINISTRATOR/PROJECT MANAGER
PUBLIC SECTOR
Median Pay **$76,860/year**
Job Evaluation Score **370**

FACTOR	SCORE	
Knowledge	80	60
Skills		
Mental	39	39
Interpersonal Communication	52	52
Physical	26	26
Demands		
Physical	20	10
Mental	30	20
Emotional	20	10
Responsibility		
For People	39	26
For Supervision	13	26
For Financial Resources	13	26
For Physical Resources	13	26
Working Conditions	20	10
Initiative/Independence	39	39
TOTAL	**404**	**370**

Source: Job evaluation scores from study analysis (see text and Appendix 4 for details). Human services salary data from 2021 King County Nonprofit Wage and Benefit Report (501 Commons, 2021). Comparison salary data from Bureau of Labor Standards (2022) for Seattle-Bellevue-Tacoma metro area.

Figure 10. Director of Housing Services Job Comparison

Comparing job evaluation factor scores and pay for a non-profit human services job and a similarly-scored job not in human services



DIRECTOR OF HOUSING SERVICES
NON-PROFIT SECTOR
Median Pay **$78,162/year**
Job Evaluation Score **716**

CONSTRUCTION PROJECT MANAGER
FOR-PROFIT SECTOR
Median Pay **$104,458/year**
Job Evaluation Score **710**

FACTOR	SCORE	
Knowledge	121	142
Skills		
Mental	65	78
Interpersonal Communication	65	65
Physical	26	39
Demands		
Physical	20	20
Mental	40	40
Emotional	40	20
Responsibility		
For People	65	52
For Supervision	65	39
For Financial Resources	52	65
For Physical Resources	39	52
Working Conditions	40	20
Initiative/Independence	78	78
TOTAL	**716**	**710**

Source: Job evaluation scores from study analysis (see text and Appendix 4 for details). Human services salary data from 2021 King County Nonprofit Wage and Benefit Report (501 Commons, 2021). Comparison salary data from Bureau of Labor Standards (2022) for Seattle-Bellevue-Tacoma metro area.

Additional observations from the Job Evaluation analysis

Our key finding, as noted, is that non-profit human services job salaries are lower than those of comparator jobs for all similar job evaluation scores. Our interviews and analysis also revealed other observations with implications for plans to raise wages in the non-profit sector, including:

- Job descriptions are not a clear indicator of what jobs entail nor the complexity of the role.
- Non-profit human services workers seem unaware of the pay structure and grade classification systems operating in their organizations; in particular, confusion exists about whether there is a defined pay scale for each grade level or job classification.
- Non-profit human service workers who cover for vacant jobs must often exercise an even wider range of skills than required by their job descriptions.

These observations are not surprising, given both the diversity of clients, constituents, and issue areas with which human services organizations work and the current staffing shortages that helped motivate this study. However, the current variation in job titles and lack of defined salary grade classification systems will make it harder to establish and monitor uniformly equitable higher wages for human services non-profits. These considerations inform our recommendation below to create a common salary grade system.

Summary

Wage equity is important to stabilize the human services workforce and shore up the capacity of the non-profit human services organizations that build and maintain the social infrastructure that Seattle and King County residents rely on. Human services wages reflect prior policy decisions as well as historical and structural race and gender discrimination, all of which contribute to systemic inequities between human services wage levels and those in the public sector and other industries.

Informed by a deep understanding of the multiple and interacting wage penalties experienced by human services workers, the Wage Equity study used different and complementary methods of analysis. The study report describes findings which provide evidence of systematic inequity in wages for non-profit human services workers and provides estimates of adjustments needed to advance wage equity.

Comparable worth, the principle of equal pay for equivalent work, guided our two-part empirical investigation. First, we estimated the gap between market pay for human services workers and workers in other industries using large-scale state and national quantitative labor market data.

- The market analysis found that human services workers are systematically paid less than workers in non-care industries, with estimated pay gaps of 30% or more across different econometric models.
- While switching jobs generally results in a pay increase, exiting human services for a job in a different industry garners a net pay premium of 7% a year later after accounting for observable worker and employer characteristics.

Second, we conducted a focused job evaluation analysis in which we compared a set of benchmark human services jobs to jobs in other industries by using in-depth surveys and interviews and analyzing results via a detailed, multi-factor, points-based classification method designed to ensure comparability across very different types of jobs.

- The job analysis found that human services workers are paid less than workers in other industries or sectors whose tasks are rated as comparable by the job evaluation process. While the sample size is small, the job evaluation analysis finding of a substantial non-profit human services wage gap is consistent with findings from other analyses and measures in this study.

These consistent and strong findings inform the conclusion and recommendations below. We also want to note several limitations of the type that are common to empirical studies.

Limitations

Several constraints on the analysis are detailed within the appendices. We highlight three limitations below:

Pandemic effects on long-term labor market trends are not yet knowable. The market analyses used Census and state administrative data from 2005-2019. Because the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted both the economy as a whole and the collection of survey data, we did not think that data from 2020 and early 2021 would be informative. Standard delays in the public release of labor market data mean that sufficient post-peak pandemic data are not yet available. While these data are not old, the pandemic was consequential for human services workers in ways that we cannot capture well here but are noted often elsewhere (see, for example, Magruder et al 2022). We think the core findings of the market analysis would be consistent if this study was replicated with post-peak-pandemic data, but we cannot rule out the possibility of different findings. See Appendix 3 for additional discussion of limitations of the data

and analytic approaches used in the market analysis.

Current inflation levels limit the durability of specific findings. After years of annual inflation of less than three percent, inflation has recently more than doubled. The Bureau of Labor Statistics calculates inflation every two months. As of December 2022 (the most recent available data as of this writing), annual inflation for the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue area was estimated at 8.4% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). High and ongoing inflation means that the nominal (dollar amount) figures in this report will quickly become outdated. High inflation should not affect our estimates of the wage gaps, as all workers in the economy are subject to inflation. However, inflation – especially the current inflation which is particularly high for food and energy costs – disproportionately affects lower-paid households because such households spend more of their income on core expenses. As far as the larger goal of creating more financially viable careers for non-profit human services workers, high inflation poses a real-world threat beyond its effects on the logic of this study's conclusions.

The job evaluation is based on a small sample and does not cover all human services jobs. By design, the job evaluation analysis focused on a small number of benchmark human services jobs that spanned different skill, responsibility and pay levels.[12] To achieve the study goal of comparing across different jobs in different sectors and industries, we prioritized gathering highly systematized and granular information on a small set of jobs in both the non-profit human services sector and in other industries. This strategy allowed for ranking and thereby direct comparisons across different industries and sectors, but we did not examine all jobs within the human services industry. For this reason, as noted below, we recommend that a pay scale policy be based on a complete job evaluation process covering all jobs within the sector.

These limitations are worth noting, and the results presented may not reflect very recent changes in wages brought about by the pandemic or recent increases in inflation [although more recent data suggest wages remain depressed for human services workers. See 501 Commons 2021].

Despite any limitations in the individual pieces of the project, the convergence of findings speaks to the overall credibility of this work. Because of the complexity of the study questions, we approached the study from multiple angles, triangulating across different sources of data, from detailed first-person interviews (the job evaluation data) to analyzing the full population of over a million King County workers covered by the state Unemployment Insurance system (the market analysis data). Our central findings are consistent across these different data sources. Moreover, we were cautious in making decisions regarding analysis strategies, and we report conservative estimates in this summary report.[13]

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[12] The public Request for Qualifications that established this study outlined the strategy of extrapolating from a small set of "benchmark" jobs, defined as jobs "that [have] a relatively standard and consistent set of responsibilities from one organization to another" (City of Seattle 2022). While this idea guided our selection of human services interviewees for the job evaluation, the data instead showed a broad range of job duties within the same or similar titles. Hence our results can confirm the direction and magnitude of the wage gap found in the market analysis but cannot, as hoped, be used as the basis for a broader salary structure. Recommendation 6 proposes a way forward.

[13] For instance, the gap in median annual salaries between human services and non-care industries reported from the market analysis is 38%. Had we included part-time workers in this estimate and our other analyses, the gaps would have been higher: 45%. Similarly, in reporting wages alongside job evaluation scores, we used area salary medians from survey data rather than the actual salaries paid to our interviewees. Using actual salaries would have shown an even greater disparity. These choices follow standards common within peer-reviewed academic literature and reflect team members' scholarly training and affiliations.

Comparisons

Our key market analysis finding that human services workers are paid at least 30% less than workers in other industries – further validated by the job evaluation – suggest that an increase of more than 43% is required to fully counter the wage penalties faced by human services workers.[14] While this seems like a substantial wage increase, it is within the magnitude of other comparisons. For the purpose of illustration, this section compares the estimates from the current study to two other measures: living wages and public sector wages.

Comparison to living wages/Self Sufficiency Standard

Advocates for "living wages" maintain that workers should be able to afford the basic needs of living in the community in which they work. While this is a different basis for wage increases than the comparable worth approach used here, the use of living wage approaches is widespread enough to warrant a comparison.

We use the University of Washington Center For Women's Welfare's Self-Sufficiency Standard (SSS) as our living wage indicator (Pearce 2020). The Self-Sufficiency Standard uses fine-grained data to calculate the amount of pay that a worker needs to afford basic needs (food, shelter, childcare, transportation) without public assistance. We use figures for one-adult/one-child and two-adult/two-child families to illustrate the pay levels needed to maintain a stable community. The self-sufficiency income level for a Seattle household with a single adult and a preschooler is $69,215 in 2020; in a two-parent household with two children, each adult would need to earn $43,097. After adjusting for inflation, this suggests that non-profit human services Intake Coordinators (one of our benchmark job categories) would need a raise of 9% to be at the self-sufficiency level if they were one of two working parents and a raise of 75% if they were a single parent.[15] Another widely-used living wage estimator, the MIT Living Wage calculator, gives slightly higher figures than the SSS, meaning that even larger raises would be needed (Glasmeier 2022). Overall, the wage increases implied by the current analysis would get some - but not all – workers to a living wage level.

Comparisons to public sector wages

While not all non-profit human services jobs have parallels in the public sector, some do. As noted by others, public sector wages tend to be higher than wages in the non-profit sector (Non-profit Association of Washington 2022). The difference between non-profit sector and public sector jobs may be comparable to the wage increase implied by our findings. For instance, the King County Nonprofit Wage & Benefits survey estimates that the median salary for the title "Program coordinator, Social Services/ Mental Health" in 2022 is $57,468 (based on 2021 figure of $55,794 plus reported median annual increase of 3%). The City of Seattle 2022 salary schedule for "Human Services Coordinator" range is $68,931-$80,226 ($33.14-$38.57 per hour), which is 20%-40% higher than the non-profit median (Seattle Department of Human Resources, 2022). The City's "Assistant Human Services Coordinator" salary schedule is $60,382-$70,262, which is 5%-22% higher than the non-profit median pay for the "Coordinator" position. Not all non-profit human services jobs have parallels in the public sector, and we did not systematically track all possible parallels. However, for this example, the wage gap found in the current study's market analysis is of the same magnitude as the difference between these two comparable jobs.

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[14] Because of the asymmetry of percentages, closing a 30% wage gap requires a 42.9% wage increase in the lower wage. To illustrate this, consider a worker paid $70,000 (worker A) and a worker paid $100,000 (worker B). Worker A is paid 30% less than worker B. For them to be paid the same, worker A would require a 42.9% wage increase (30,000 ÷ 70,000 = .429).

[15] The 2020 figures were adjusted for inflation using June-to-June figures for the Consumer Price Index for Urban consumers (CPI-U) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2022). The CPI-U likely under-estimates the true local increase in costs over 2020 since housing costs were accelerated faster during this time-period in the Seattle metro area than in the nation as a whole. The full Self-Sufficiency Standard methodology would account for increases in all the essential expenses, but the 2020 report is the most recent available as of this report writing.

Conclusion and Recommendations

CONCLUSION: Achieving wage equity for workers at non-profit human services organizations requires substantially increasing wage rates.

Based on strong and consistent evidence that workers at non-profit human services organizations are underpaid, we recommend that these organizations and their funders work together to increase wages for human services employees.

We have seven specific recommendations about a path toward wage equity.

Recommendations 1-4 are short-term, and we believe they can be achieved by 2025; recommendations 5-7 are longer-term, and we suggest aiming to implement those by 2030.

By 2025:

RECOMMENDATION 1. Raise real wage rates by a minimum of 7% for non-profit human services workers in the near term.

Non-profit human services organizations and their governmental and non-governmental funders should increase human services workers' compensation by at least 7%, beginning in the next one to two years, while concurrently exploring how to design and implement a comprehensive overhaul of pay scales for the entire sector over the longer-term. This increase should be a real raise, net of inflation, which we address in the next recommendation.

Rationale: The longstanding wage disparities noted in this report date back at least to the early 2000s. Further, the gap between non-profit wages and the cost of living in Seattle and King County has grown substantially over the past 20 plus years. We recommend a short-term simplified pay increase because developing, funding, and implementing a comprehensive salary equity process will require several years. The 7% differential is based on the most conservative estimate in the market analysis, the multivariate analysis of the sub-set of workers who changed jobs, including those who left human services work. We believe this amount represents a starting point for the minimum increase needed immediately to reduce the number of workers leaving human services posts for significantly higher paying jobs in other industries. As noted below, future wage increases of a 7% or similar magnitude will be needed for several years to substantially counter the full 30%+ wage gap identified in this study's market analysis.

RECOMMENDATION 2. Make adjustments for inflation separate from equity adjustments and build in future inflation adjustments.

Calculate wage increases to address pay inequity in addition to annual inflation adjustments.

Rationale: Inflation, the general increase of prices within the economy, causes the value of a nominal (dollar amount) wage to decline in terms of buying power. Wage adjustments to match inflation and wage adjustments for pay inequity are different issues and should be addressed separately.

RECOMMENDATION 3. Maintain or improve non-wage benefits and job characteristics throughout the wage equity increase process.

Employers should commit to at a minimum maintaining their current non-wage benefit levels,

including health insurance quality and cost to employees, retirement contributions, paid time off, training benefits, and others. Furthermore, employers should ensure that the intensity of job demands do not increase because of a wage increase.

Rationale: Salary increases should not come at the cost of workers' benefits or job conditions. Wage increases need to be instituted in a way that makes workers practically better off. Decreasing the generosity of fringe benefits or increasing job demands to increase salaries will erode the value of any increase in pay and make it meaningless. When there are job vacancies, organizations will need to resist the pressures and expectations to maintain the same level of client service with a reduced workforce.

RECOMMENDATION 4. Consider wage increases as a necessary part of ongoing racial and gender equity work in the City of Seattle and King County.

Public agencies and non-profit organizations need to include wage equity – in addition to equal pay – as an action step within their anti-racism, gender equity, and diversity-equity-inclusion (DEI) plans.

Rationale: While organizations legally must make sure that they are paying women, persons of color, and other protected groups equivalently for the same jobs, equal pay measures alone are insufficient to achieving racial and gender equity. Race and gender discrimination shape the wage differentials between non-profit human services and other jobs in several interrelated ways. First, historic associations between care work and women – and women of color, in particular – established lower pay levels for any work that involves directly caring for others. Second, historic patterns of occupational segregation, in which women and persons of color were excluded from some jobs in the economy and over-represented in non-profit human services jobs, also suppressed the pay. These historic forces create a path-dependence that persists regardless of the characteristics of the current workforce. Additionally, non-profit human services jobholders continue to be disproportionately women and people of color, demographic groups who are paid less throughout the economy. These current workforce demographics limit potential upward pressure on wages, further perpetuating prevalent and longstanding inequities. Organizational commitments to DEI work that do not address wage equity are hence incomplete.

By 2030:

RECOMMENDATION 5. Substantially increase wages for non-profit human services workers to align with those of workers doing comparable work in other sectors and industries.

Non-profit human services organizations and their funders should commit to a substantial increase in worker pay over the next five years. One possible approach would be to continue the 7% increases recommended above for five years. With compounding, that would yield a 40% raise from current salary levels.[16]

Rationale: While establishing a specific pay raise amount is necessarily a political task, the analysis in this report yields what we believe is a useful range of estimates of the magnitude of the current

[16] Note that wage increases may trigger "benefit cliff" losses of publicly funded health coverage or child care supplements for some lower-paid workers with dependent children. Childcare program leaders brought this issue to our attention in the context of this report, although it is a longstanding recognized problem in our country's safety net (see, for example, Romich 2006). Such conditions arise in the context of means-tested (as opposed to universal) childcare and health insurance provision. While a full consideration of benefit cliffs is beyond the scope of this report, we note that employers who believe this is an issue for their employees may need to adapt compensation structures and employee work hours to avoid benefit cliffs in the short run.

underpayment. Market analysis estimates show that human services employees, particularly those at non-profit organizations) in Seattle and Washington state are paid 30% - 37% less than workers with similar job responsibilities and training requirements in non-care industries; wage increases of 43-59% would be needed to fully close this market wage gap. Increasing wages by more than 40% would most fully recognize the demands, complexity, and conditions of non-profit human services work. Not increasing wages substantially and systematically equates to ignoring the most basic and severe inequities and further perpetuating the structural racial and gender inequities affecting this sector.

RECOMMENDATION 6. Create a salary grade system and establish minimum pay standards based on job characteristics.

Human services organizations should develop a broad salary grade system linking minimum salary requirements with job characteristics including a job's knowledge and skills required, initiative and independence, effort, responsibilities, and environmental demands.

Rationale: Currently, fewer than half of non-profit organizations in King County use salary grade systems (501 Commons, 2021). Our job evaluation analysis revealed wide differences within job titles between organizations. To avoid having requirements "creep" up within a given job and pay level [and to allow for implementation and monitoring of a more equitable pay scale], we recommend a salary grade system to which organizations can peg their compensation levels. The job evaluation recommendation from the City of Seattle Gender Equity Task Force might provide a helpful starting point for this work (Gender Equity in Pay Taskforce 2014).

Attention must be paid to make sure the job evaluation method used has been designed to fully capture care-related tasks.[17] This is particularly important because the non-profit human services sector includes both human services occupations such as case managers, who are subject to all wage penalties noted above, as well as non-human services occupations, such as human resources specialists or information technology staff members, whose compensation is currently closer to levels found in other industries. Hence an across-the-board increase without a full salary grade system will not address within-sector inequities.

The range of types of work and different sizes of organizations in the non-profit human services sector means that this grading system will need to have considerable flexibility. Rather than aiming for a salary system that covers all jobs, as is the case in collective bargaining contracts or public sector plans, non-profit human services employers and workers might be better served by a general scale with several broad tiers linking job characteristics to minimum pay levels. The job evaluation tool used in this study could be used as a starting point for that work. Once a salary grade system based on job characteristics is developed and implemented, the rating scale could be publicized with information about scoring to allow workers to self-assess whether their job responsibilities match their pay level.

RECOMMENDATION 7. Use public contracts to further wage equity.

City and county contracts for human services work should make sure that public contracts do not reinforce wage inequities in the economy as a whole. To avoid decreasing prevailing wages in

[17] The study team gratefully acknowledges the input from leaders and workers at non-profit human services organizations that helped refine this recommendation.

more powerful industries, this means that government should adequately fund human services contracts so that employee wage levels do not fall below similar local jobs in the public sector.

Rationale: Our analysis shows that King County, including the City of Seattle, relies particularly heavily on non-profit organizations to deliver human services. This is significant because public sector pay rates are higher. Moreover, our job evaluation included several workers who also work for firms that obtain public contracts, including construction laborers and managers. In this male-dominated industry, workers at these contracting firms out-earn public sector employees. Insofar as public contracting rules allow some industries to pay sub-public sector wages and other industries to pay wages above the public sector, the existing gender and racial inequities caused by occupational segregation will be maintained. We recommend that the local governments, at a minimum, start collecting gender, race, and salary information for all sub-contractors and analyze the data for disparities across the full set of public-funded work.

Table 4. Steps for implementing the recommendations, by sector and timescale

By 2025			
Recommendation	**Steps for government**	**Steps for non-governmental funders**	**Steps for non-profit organizations**
1. Raise real wage rates by a minimum of 7% for non-profit human services workers in the near term.	Build an across-the-board wage increase into funding contracts as soon as possible. Plan for several years of similar wage increases.	Increase grants to provide for an across-the-board wage increase. Plan for several years of similar wage increases.	Pass through significant increases in funding fully to employee pay and benefit packages.
2. Make necessary adjustments for inflation separately from equity raises and build in future inflation adjustments.	Establish – if needed – and follow laws requiring inflation adjustments to match inflation for all human services contracts.	Include inflation increases grant agreements with non-profit human services providers.	Design and implement two-part salary adjustment policies that include performance adjustments as separate from inflation adjustments.
3. Maintain or improve non-wage benefits and job characteristics throughout the wage equity increase process.	Provide for adequate fringe benefit costs in funding levels.	Provide for adequate fringe benefit costs in funding levels.	Avoid cutting benefits or increasing job responsibilities as a mechanism for absorbing pay scale increases.
4. Consider wage increases as a necessary part of racial and gender equity work in the City of Seattle and King County.	Review and amend DEI and other strategic plans.	Examine how funding practices and contracting rules affect wages.	Review and amend DEI and other strategic plans.

By 2030			
Recommendation	**Steps for government**	**Steps for non-governmental funders**	**Steps for non-profit organizations**
5. Substantially increase wages for non-profit human services workers to align with those of workers doing comparable work in other sectors and industries	Adjust budgets to fund increased wages. Require that contractors pass along increased funding to workers.	Adjust budgets to fund increased wages.	Raise pay standards and dedicate additional funding to increasing worker compensation.
6. Create a salary grade system and establish minimum pay standards based on job characteristics.	Help create a set of job categories that organizations could draw upon when applying for funding. Eventually include adherence to the regional salary grade system as a contracting requirement.	Provide technical assistance to organizations (especially small ones) to create a salary grade system. Consider funding a public-facing salary grade information effort.	Work with existing coalitions, like the Seattle Human Services Coalition to come up with standard job categories
7. Use public contracts to further wage equity.	Examine how funding practices and contracting rules affect wages. Develop an occupational segregation analysis to determine how there may be disparities between contracts to human services non-profits and private contractors within the city's contracting practices.	Support non-profit human services staffing models that benchmark salaries to public sector.	Benchmark salaries to public sector salaries.

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Appendices

Available at https://socialwork.uw.edu/wageequitystudy

Appendix 1. Study personnel

Appendix 2. Overview of the historical and policy context for human services wages

Appendix 3. The relative earnings of human services workers in Washington state, King County, and Seattle: A market analysis

Appendix 4. Human services workers: A job evaluation study

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