

Eliminating the Gender Wage Gap in Alaska

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The Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (ANDVSA) is a statewide dual domestic violence and sexual assault coalition with 19-member organizations. Their vision is to promote and sustain a collective movement to end violence and oppression through social change. As a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [DELTA Impact](#) grantee, ANDVSA is working with the YWCA of Alaska to close the gender wage gap as part of its efforts to improve economic supports for women and families and prevent sexual and domestic violence. The [CDC's technical packages](#) on sexual and domestic violence include this approach as a promising practice based on research showing that economic inequality is a known risk factor for both sexual and domestic violence.

GETTING STARTED ON PROMOTING ECONOMIC SUPPORTS BY FIRST UNDERSTANDING ALASKA'S ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE

Being new to focusing on economic supports as part of their prevention work, the Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (ANDVSA) started off by learning more about economic issues in their state. The state of Alaska is currently in a recession, dating back to 2015 where they began to see a steady decline in jobs within the three prominent industries: oil and gas, government, and construction. An April 2018 report by the Alaskan Department of Labor and Workforce Development reported that the Alaskan economy had been losing jobs for 31 consecutive months causing many businesses to make drastic changes in response to the recession. At the same time, Alaskan women earn 68 cents on the dollar in relation to men, which is a larger disparity than most other states. With the economy being front and center on people's minds, ANDVSA sees this as an opportunity to leverage the attention that the issue is garnering across the state to work on closing the gender wage gap.

IDENTIFYING A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN ANSVDA AND YWCA

ANDVSA knew that they didn't want to dive into the issue of gender pay equity alone and they recognized the need to partner with someone already working on the issue who could help them understand the full context. They learned that the YWCA of Alaska has been focused on economic empowerment for many years and has specifically engaged in the issue of the gender pay gap through a project called EconEquity. Starting in 2014, EconEquity resolves to eliminate the gender pay gap in Alaska by 2025 by ensuring equal pay for equal work and providing women with more and better opportunities to participate in the workforce at all levels.

With the help of a local connection, ANDVSA was introduced to the YWCA and right away recognized that the EconEquity project closely aligned with both the DELTA Impact grant as well as with the new direction their prevention work to address community and societal conditions that contribute to violence. With the YWCA already building momentum on closing the gender pay gap, ANDVSA saw this as an opportunity to collaborate and bring their voice. For the YWCA, partnering with ANDVSA brings a network that has the knowledge, expertise, and engagement of advocates to broaden the impact of EconEquity across the state. Jaci Ree, YWCA's Women's Economic Empowerment Manager says, "It's invaluable being able to work with an organization that has a statewide reach, and their policy background helps us too."

ENGAGING BUSINESSES AS CRITICAL PLAYERS IN ADVANCING GENDER PAY EQUITY

YWCA is intentionally avoiding legislation or political routes as the main solutions to the problem because they believe that the impact will be greater felt by working in communities. Instead, they focus on the role businesses and organizations can play in creating a gender-balanced workplace and furthering the education of women and girls on issues related to career choice and salary negotiation. The YWCA has been able to identify beneficial policies and practices in place that promote gender pay equity and share them with others. For example, one action employers can take is to remove identifying information from resumes during hiring practices or another is re-examining paternity leave policies. YWCA also encourages public endorsements of the EconEquity project, facilitate community forums and have created a social marketing campaign.

To support and compliment these efforts, ANDVSA will be working with the YWCA on engaging businesses and educating the public by crafting messages, getting key information out, and strategizing with partner organizations with the goal of shifting how people think about the problem of gender pay inequity. Kristen Rankin, Prevention Specialist of ANDVSA says, "I like this approach of working a little earlier on the 'causal chain.' We're not necessarily jumping towards huge changes right away but providing information and engaging business in conversations first."

Considering the political and social climate in the state, the YWCA of Alaska and ANDVSA are framing their work around the economic impact of the pay gap, rather than the social injustice



An infographic created by YWCA Alaska detailing how the gender pay gap affects a woman over her lifetime.

of unequal pay. For both partners, a major message they want to drive home as they talk to businesses is how pay equity is beneficial for business and the Alaska economy and what steps forward might look like, instead of only focusing on the issue as an inequity. This is important in their risk-averse climate. Being able to show businesses how investing in closing the gap reduces violence and contributes to other areas such as housing affordability is a way that ANDSVA hopes to add value to the efforts underway. ANDSVA also plans to connect businesses who want to delve deeper into the topic to the YWCA. "It's about using our network and policy efforts to complement what the YWCA is doing," says Natasha McClanahan, Policy Specialist of ANDVSA.



*A legislative lunch signifying the 9th anniversary of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act.
Photo provided by: ANDVSA*

Both ANDVSA and YWCA of Alaska plan to leverage their partnership to engage more organizations and businesses on the importance and benefit of gender pay equity with the goal of closing the pay gap as a key strategy to decrease sexual and domestic violence in the state.

Kristen Rankin is the prevention specialist at the Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault and the project director of the CDC grant DELTA Impact in Alaska. Kristen comes from a global health background, with additional experience in microfinance and financial inclusion, and has a M.S. in international development management. Prior to this position, she conducted research on the state of intimate partner violence prevention evidence globally.

Natasha McClanahan, now no longer with ANDVSA, was the sole policy specialist for the Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. A public servant at heart, she has extensive experience in crafting and influencing policy to bring the voices of underserved populations to the forefront. Prior roles include but are not limited to assistant legislative director to the Governor, chief of staff to Senator Mia Costello, legislative liaison with the Department of Corrections, insurance agent, and sole proprietor of a small business. With her experience in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors she brings a wealth of knowledge to the domestic violence/sexual assault field that will be particularly helpful in engaging with prevention and gender pay equity efforts.

Jaci Ree is the women's economic empowerment manager with YWCA Alaska. Jaci has an extensive background in community development and financial education program design. Prior to working at YWCA, she worked to create and implement programs for Native Community Development Financial Institutions across the country.

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RESOURCES

- [YWCA's Page on Economic Empowerment](#)
- [ANDVSA's website](#)

DISCLAIMER: This publication was supported by the Cooperative Agreement Number U1V/ CE002204, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the Department of Health and Human Services.