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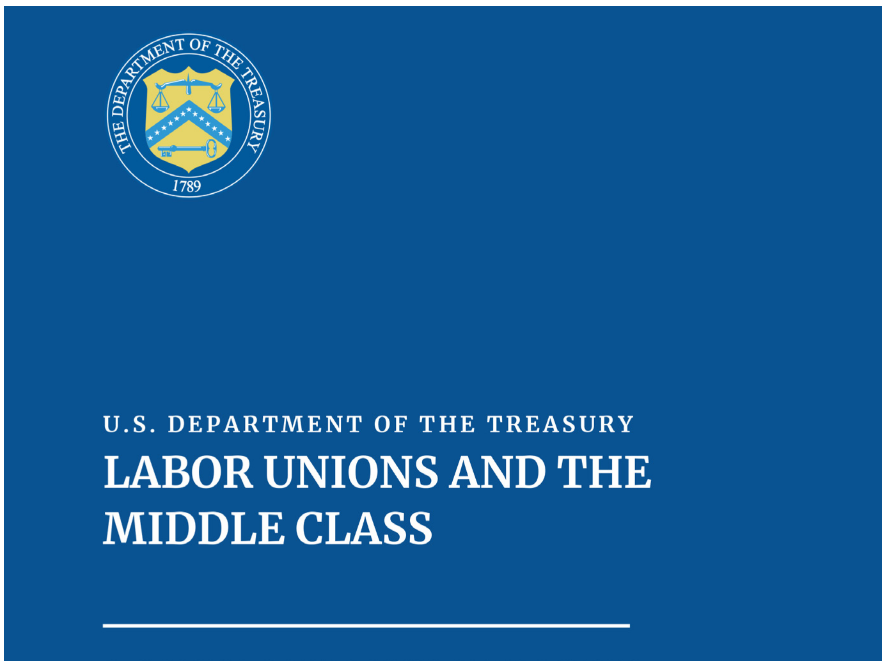
Groundbreaking Report Underscores How Unions Benefit National Economy



Above (left) is the cover of the Treasury Department's report. In the right photo, Vice President Kamala Harris shakes hands with a construction worker and union member in Pittsburgh. (photo courtesy of AFL-CIO).

The U.S. Treasury Department in early September released its most comprehensive ever look at the role that labor unions play in the American economy with a new report by the Department's Office of Economic Policy. The report represents one of the more than 70 actions implemented by the White House Task Force on Worker Organizing and Empowerment, chaired by Vice President Kamala Harris.

"The report finds that unions play an important role in addressing longstanding challenges faced by the middle class – including stagnant wages, high housing costs, and reduced inter-generational mobility," the Treasury Department said in a news release. "In doing so, unions contribute to a more robust and resilient economy.

"President Biden, Vice President Harris, (Treasury) Secretary (Janet) Yellen and the Administration have consistently championed the rights of workers and the role of strong labor unions in contributing to a thriving middle-class and economy – including through good-paying jobs, safe working conditions, and equitable treatment for workers," the department continued.

The report's key findings include:

- Middle-class workers reap substantial benefits from unionization. Unions raise the wages of their members by 10 to 15 percent compared to unrepresented workers. Unions also improve fringe benefits and workplace procedures such as retirement plans, workplace grievance policies, and predictable scheduling. These workplace improvements contribute substantially to middle-class financial stability and worker wellbeing. For example, one study has estimated that the average worker values their ability to avoid short-notice schedule changes at up to 20 percent of their wages.
- Unionization also has spillover effects that extend well beyond union workers. Competition means workers at nonunionized firms see increased wages, too. Heightened workplace safety norms can lift up whole industries.
- Union members improve their communities through heightened civic engagement; they are more likely to vote, donate to charity, and participate in a neighborhood project. And, the higher pay and job security of both union and nonunion middle-class workers can further spill over to their families and communities through more stable housing, more investment in education, and other channels.
- Unions help create a fairer economy by benefiting all demographic groups. By encouraging democratic wage practices, unions serve to reduce race and gender wage gaps. And modern unions have broad representation across race and gender. In 2021, Black men had a particularly high union representation rate at 13 percent, as compared to the population average of 10 percent. The diverse demographics of modern union membership mean that the benefits of any policy that strengthens today's unions would be felt across the population.
- Unions can boost businesses' productivity by improving working environments and by giving experienced workers more of an input into decisions that design better and more cost-effective workplace procedures.
- The news release added, "The Biden-Harris Administration recognizes the benefits of unions to the middle class and the broader economy and continues to take steps to strengthen their role. Promisingly, there have been recent signs of a reinvigorated labor movement, as union election petitions in 2022 bounced back from the pandemic to their highest level since 2015, and public opinion of labor unions is at its highest level in over 50 years. Actions taken and planned by the Biden-Harris Administration to advance this progress include:
- Prioritizing the passage of the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act and the Public Sector Freedom to Negotiate Act.
- Appointing a General Counsel and Board Members to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) committed to protecting the right of workers to organize in the workplace.
- Increasing the funding of the NLRB to enable them to expand enforcement activities.
- Creating the White House Task Force on Worker Organizing and Empowerment, which, under the leadership of Vice President Harris, works with agencies on ways to use their existing statutory authority to support worker organizing and bargaining.
- Signing Executive Order 14063, which requires the use of project labor agreements on federal construction projects of $35 million or more.
- Signing Executive Order 14003 to promote the rights of federal employees to collectively bargain.
- Launching the Good Jobs Initiative to ensure the provision of critical information to workers, employers, and government – including about the union advantage – as they work to improve job quality and create access to good jobs free from discrimination and harassment for all working people.
- Promoting "know your rights" initiatives to provide workers with better information about their organizing and bargaining rights.
- Announcing a new rule to raise wage standards of construction workers by updating prevailing wage regulations issued under the Davis-Bacon and Related Acts, which require payment of locally prevailing wages and fringe benefits to more than one million construction workers.
- Requiring employers to pay prevailing wages and abide by apprenticeship requirements to claim the full value of many clean energy tax incentives in the Inflation Reduction Act, as part of the Treasury Department's implementation of the law."

Dept. of Labor Shares Labor Day Highlights

To commemorate Labor Day, the Department of Labor (DOL) underscored their latest achievements and some recently passed rules. Check out the infographic on Page 2 to see some of the DOL's most recent developments.

From the President

Life Is Better in a Union

David Heindel

A couple of recent news items brought well-deserved positive attention to the labor movement. As reported elsewhere in this edition, a new report from the Treasury Department clearly explains some of the ways that unions benefit not just their own respective members, but the overall national economy. And, a new Gallup poll shows widespread support for our movement.

Standing together with co-workers in a union makes a tangible difference in our lives that we feel every day. Workers in labor unions make 18% more in wages than their unrepresented counterparts. We are more likely to have health care benefits. We work in safer workplaces. We have more job security – even and especially in moments of economic crisis. Countries where most workers are in a union are among the happiest and healthiest on Earth. As the AFL-CIO slogan says, life is better in a union.

Being in a union also means building a better future for ourselves and our families, generations down the line. Young people know this – that's why 88% of young workers under the age of 30 approve of unions. It means access to a good, sustainable job in the industries of the future. It means earning wages that help us afford a home and keep up with rising rents, and it means knowing that your retirement is secure. Our future – and the future of our families – is better in a union.

Union representation also amplifies the voices of America's working families. After decades of anti-union propaganda, misinformation and corporate attacks, workers are on the rise. People all over the country are realizing unions are the single best tool we have to stand up to the historic inequity and corporate greed we are up against. Every day, more workers are seeing past the lies and the well-funded anti-union campaigns from corporate America and deciding to come together.

Unions are more popular with the public now than at any time since the mid-1960s, and unions are winning. Let's keep the momentum going so we help ensure that a rising tide does indeed lift all boats.

After Election Day

By the time this edition goes to print (and gets posted online), there will be around a month remaining before Election Day. No matter which candidates you support, I'll bet we can all agree on the relief we'll feel when the campaign ads go away.

But on a more serious note, I encourage all of our members to vote – and to engage in civil discussions if you indeed choose to talk about politics. One thing that stood out to me from the September presidential debate is the point that we all have a lot more in common than what separates us. In this age of social media and constant connectivity, it's regrettably easy to end up in an echo chamber – and to fall victim to believing the worst about an individual or an organization just because they're not perfectly aligned with our views.

We're in this together and we'll need to keep working after Election Day, at every level of government, to promote workplace fairness and workers' rights. Politics affects our livelihoods in numerous ways, and that's why we always stand with pro-worker candidates, regardless of political party.

Let's focus on our goals and remember that we're really one team.

The United Worker

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International Labor Communications Association — ILCA — AFL-CIO/CLC

DOL Shares Labor Day Highlights

At the Department of Labor, we're building a worker-centric economy from the bottom up and the middle out by leveraging federal investments to create good jobs, while protecting workers' rights, wages, health and safety, and supporting workers' rights to organize for better conditions. This Labor Day, we're celebrating workers by building an equitable, empowered workforce for all. Including the infographic below, here are some of the most recent rules higlighted by the DOL.

- **Final Rule: Restoring and Extending Overtime Protections**
  On April 23, 2024, the U.S. Department of Labor announced a final rule, Defining and Delimiting the Exemptions for Executive, Administrative, Professional, Outside Sales, and Computer Employees , which will take effect on July 1, 2024. The final rule updates and revises the regulations issued under section 13(a)(1) of the Fair Labor Standards Act implementing the exemption from minimum wage and overtime pay requirements for executive, administrative, and professional (EAP) employees. Revisions include increases to the standard salary level and the highly compensated employee total annual compensation threshold, and a mechanism that provides for the timely and efficient updating of these earnings thresholds to reflect current earnings data.
- **Final Rule: Employee or Independent Contractor Classification Under the Fair Labor Standards Act, RIN 1235-AA43**
  On January 10, 2024, the U.S. Department of Labor published a final rule, effective March 11, 2024, revising the Department's guidance on how to analyze who is an employee or independent contractor under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). This final rule rescinds the Independent Contractor Status Under the Fair Labor Standards Act rule (2021 IC Rule), that was published on January 7, 2021 and replaces it with an analysis for determining employee or independent contractor status that is more consistent with the FLSA as interpreted by longstanding judicial precedent. The misclassification of employees as independent contractors may deny workers minimum wage, overtime pay, and other protections. This final rule will reduce the risk that employees are misclassified as independent contractors while providing a consistent approach for businesses that engage with individuals who are in business for themselves.
- **Retirement Security Rule: Definition of an Investment Advice Fiduciary**
  This rule protects retirement investors from harmful conflicts of interest when getting advice about their investments in retirement accounts. It also outlines when investment advice providers are acting in a fiduciary role and therefore must follow strict rules of conduct.

For more information,visit dol.gov/laborday.

Jane Lescallett Retires after 41 Years with UIW

After over four decades of employment in the Piney Point Print Shop, UIW member Jane Lescallett has retired. Officials and staff threw her a retirement party at the end of August to celebrate her achievements and work history. Lescallet began her career as a UIW member working for SIU in 1983. During the party, she received a plaque to honor her hard work and dedication throughout the years and to commemorate her 41 years of dedicated service.

Comparing Institutions' Respect : Unions Yes, Others No

The following article has been adapted from a Press Associates Union News Service article by Mark Gruenberg.

A near-record seven out of every 10 Americans support unions, according to the latest annual Gallup Poll on the popularity of the labor movement. Additionally, in another indication of the backing unions enjoy, the gap between labor support and opposition is the widest in at least half a century.

The poll, done yearly around Labor Day, shows 70%-23% support/opposition regarding unions. The rest are undecided. The "favorable" percentage is down one percentage point from the most recent record high, set two years ago, and up four percentage points from last year.

But the 47-point gap between favorable support and unfavorable opposition this year exceeds the prior modern record, 45 points, two years ago.

Before that, the favorable-unfavorable ratios hovered around two-to-one, Gallup records show, except in 2009. That was the only year when less than half the poll respondents (48%) favored unions, just edging those who viewed organized labor unfavorably (45%).

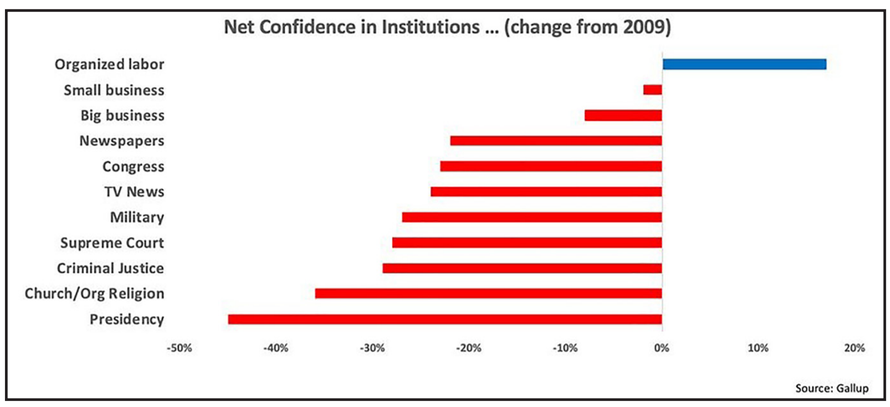
The support for unions is in sharp contrast to the lack of it for the corporate class, at least on divisive social issues, according to another Gallup survey three months ago. In essence, overwhelming majorities of people want corporations to remain silent about abortion, religion and political endorsements.

Former AFL-CIO Political Director Michael Podhorzer posted the following interesting graphic on his Twitter/X feed. Unions get more respect, and other institutions get less.

Podhorzer noted that since the Great Recession 15 years ago, respect for the union movement has skyrocketed, to a near-record high this year of 70%. The gap between respect and disrespect, though Podhorzer didn't say so, is now a record +47 percentage points.

While respect for organized labor rose sharply, the respect for all but one major institution in society plummeted—his word--during those same years. The exception, small business, had a slight decline. "You probably haven't heard just how big a deal that is in the context of the last 15 years," he adds. The chart (shown left) includes the Gallup poll figures.

The Gallup data joins other evidence of union popularity. That data includes record numbers of union election filings with the National Labor Relations Board and overwhelming support for the Auto Workers in their strike against the Detroit auto firms last year, and for performers and screenwriters in SAG-AFTRA's and the Writers Guild of America's strikes against the movie studios, TV producers and video streaming moguls.



The above chart measures the sample population's net confidence in institutions, all of which have trended down since 2009 EXCEPT for organized labor (chart courtesy of Press Associates and Gallup).

"Americans want the freedom to organize," said AFSCME President Lee Saunders, who chairs the AFL-CIO Committee on Political Education. "From cultural institutions to health care and child care, working people across the country are showing the power they have in a union to negotiate better pay, to strengthen benefits and job security, to improve worker safety, and to invest in a strong retirement. Americans know that unions give working people the freedom to get ahead.

"We have an opportunity in 2024 to elect pro-worker leaders to the White House, Congress, governorships, state legislatures and beyond who believe unions are essential to growing the middle class and will pass legislation to guarantee workers a seat at the table," he continued. "With public support for unions near an all-time high, we know a better future for all working families is within reach. And we're ready to organize and mobilize to realize that future."

United States Online Passport Renewal Service Goes Live

Photo above courtesy of John Morris via wheelchairtravel.com

The following article is sourced form a CNN article by Jennifer Hansler.

Americans who are renewing their passports will now be able to do so online, a top State Department official announced Wednesday.

"This is a new service which will allow Americans to pay to upload a photo and to apply completely online, with no need to appear in person or to send documents through the mail," Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs Rena Bitter said, noting that it "will be available 24/7."

The service is open to adults who are renewing a regular 10-year passport that has expired within the past five years or expires in the coming year. At this point, the online passport renewal service is only accessible for Americans with a US address.

The service will be accessible at travel.state.gov, and customers "will be able to walk you through a few questions to make sure that you're eligible to use the service," Bitter said.

"We estimate that up to 5 million Americans a year will be able to use the service," she said, adding that the agency intends to expand it.

"This is not going to be the last thing that we do. We want to see how this goes, and then we'll start looking at ways to continue to make this service available to more American citizens in the coming months and years," Bitter said.

The program has been in beta testing for several months, she said, and "we've been getting very good customer reviews."

The processing time for passport renewals is six to eight weeks – "a historic low," Bitter said.

"We don't expect to have a different service standard for people who apply online versus people who apply by mail. We just want to make sure that we give the American people a choice to be able to do either," she said.

"The benefit of online passport renewal is that it's a more convenient service," Bitter said.

Beatty's Birthday Bash

UIW Great Lakes Region VP Monte Burgett (right) and Congresswoman Joyce Beatty pose for a photo at her birthday celebration event.

UIW Reps Attend AFL-CIO's 2024 Constitutional Convention in NY

Union representation was strong at the New York State AFL-CIO's Constitutional Convention. In the bottom photo (from left to right) UIW Representative Ray Henderson, AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler, and UIW Representative Jordan Esopa pose for a photo at the event.

Bethesda Game Studios Joins Communications Workers of America, Becomes first Wall-to-Wall Union at Microsoft

Pictured above are some of Bethesda Game Studios most popular game titles/franchises.

The following article has been adapted from a press release from the Communication Workers of America's Campaign to Organize Digital Employees.

This past July, workers at Bethesda Game Studios have joined the Communications Workers of America, forming the first wall-to-wall union at a Microsoft video game studio. A majority of the 241 developers, including artists, engineers, programmers, and designers, have either signed a union authorization card or indicated that they wanted union representation via an online portal. Microsoft has recognized the union. Bethesda Game Studios, which is based in Rockville, Maryland, produces popular games including Elder Scrolls, Fallout and Starfield.

"We are so excited to announce our union at Bethesda Game Studio and join the movement sweeping across the video game industry. It is clear that every worker can benefit from bringing democracy into the workplace and securing a protected voice on the job. We're thrilled to get down to brass tacks and win a fair contract, proving that our unity is a source of real power to positively shape our working conditions, our lives, and the company as a whole," said Mandi Parker, Senior System Designer and member of CWA.

The Bethesda Game Studios workers join a surge of workers who have recently formed unions in the video game industry, which had previously been seen as hostile to worker organizing. They will be members of CWA Locals 2108 in Maryland and 6215 in Texas and join other CWA members at SEGA of America, Activision Blizzard, ZeniMax and Tender Claws.

"In a groundbreaking achievement, the dedicated professionals at Bethesda Game Studios have demonstrated that, no matter your job title, you too can benefit from having a union. Through securing a protected voice on the job, workers are taking a step forward to negotiating better working conditions, helping to raise standards across the industry. We are incredibly proud to welcome these workers into our union and are confident that together, we will secure a brighter future for all workers in the video game industry," said Johnny Brown, President of CWA Local 2108.

"The labor movement in the South is strong and growing. As the video game and tech industries continue to expand in Texas, it is critical that workers have a protected voice on the job to ensure they receive their fair share. We welcome Austin and Dallas based workers at Bethesda Game Studios to CWA and are looking forward to meeting Microsoft at the bargaining table to secure a fair union contract," said Ron Swaggerty, President of CWA Local 6215.

Workers at Bethesda Game Studios in Montreal also filed for union recognition with the Quebec Labor Relations Board in late June to be represented by CWA Canada. When the process is complete, they will be represented by CWA Canada.

The Campaign to Organize Digital Employees (CODE-CWA) is a network of worker-organizers and their staff working to build the voice and power necessary to ensure the future of the tech, game, and digital industries in the United States and Canada. CODE-CWA is a project of the Communications Workers of America which launched in 2020 and represents hundreds of thousands of workers throughout tech, media, telecom, and other industries.

New UIW Pensioners

Manfred Zsiros
Argo International Corp.
Elmhurst, NY

Andrew Finney
Portus
Miami, FL

Sharon Chance
Franklin International Inc.
Columbus, OH

Lynn Ireland
Paulsen Wire Rope Corp.
Houston, TX

Faatamalii Peau
Ruvilla Solutions
Twentynine Palms, CA

Kurt Ferro
Portus
Jacksonville, FL

Juan Espericueta
Severson Group LLC
Las Vegas, NV

Maria Espinoza
Authentic Specialty Foods
Fontana, CA

Sonia Harlan
Superior Services Inc
Twentynine Palms, CA

Bogdan Kobak
Victory Refrigeration
Marlton, NJ

John Poplaski
Argo International Corp.
Brick, NJ

Charles Walden
Progressive Driver Services Inc.
White Stone, VA

Donald Hoover
Paulsen Wire Rope Corp.
Sunbury, PA

Frank Segal
Victory Refrigeration
Cherry Hill, NJ

David Cooley
Crown Cork & Seal
Abilene, TX

Gone But Not Forgotten

ALBERT ROSS KEEFER

Pensioner Albert Ross Keefer, 85, passed away on June 23. Brother Keefer was born in Santa Anna, Texas and he became a member of the union in 1979. He worked at Crown Cork & Seal until he began receiving retirement stipends in 2004. He made his residence in Abilene, Texas.

KIYOE THOMPSON

Pensioner Kiyoe Thompson, 74, died on June 28. Brother Thompson was born in Japan. A military veteran, Brother Thompson joined the UIW in 1989 and was employed at several companies throughout his career. He worked at Severson Group LLC until he began receiving his pension in 2016. Brother Thompson made his residence in Twentynine Palms, California.

MICHAEL FARRELL

Pensioner Michael Farrell, 91, died on June 5. He was born in Paisley, Scotland. Brother Farrell became a UIW member in 1963. He worked at Victory Refrigeration until he began receiving retirement stipends in 1987. Brother Farrell resided in Brigantine City, New Jersey.

KENNETH LAMBERT SR

Pensioner Kenneth Lambert Sr, 89, passed away on June 1. Brother Lambert was born in Madison County, Ohio. He served in the air force. Brother Lambert became a member of the UIW in 1970 and was employed at Church Dwight & Company Inc. He started receiving his pension in 1992. Brother Lambert made his residence in South Vienna, Ohio.

GLENN WERNER

Pensioner Glenn Werner, 67, has passed away. He was born in Lindenwold, New Jersey. Brother Werner became a UIW member in 1979. He worked at Victory Refrigeration until he began receiving retirement stipends in 1996. Brother Werner resided in Lindenwold, New Jersey.

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8 things to know about OSHA's Proposed Heat Rule

The following statement was adapted from a September U.S. Dept. of Labor blog post by Doug Parker, Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health:

Heat is a leading cause of death among all weather-related phenomena in the United States. And it's a serious occupational hazard for many workers, both indoors and out. That's why the Occupational Safety and Health Administration has proposed a new standard that would protect approximately 36 million workers from heat hazards.

We've gotten a lot of questions about the proposed rule. Here are answers to some of those FAQs – but remember, this is a proposed rule and it is subject to change based on input from the public:

1. What workers would be covered?

Anyone working outdoors or indoors in general industry, construction, maritime and agricultural sectors where OSHA has jurisdiction. That includes many occupations where we know workers are at high risk of heat hazards, such as farmworkers, restaurant workers, construction workers, delivery drivers and many more. In states with their own State Plans, OSHA monitors those plans – and they must be at least as effective in protecting workers and in preventing work-related injuries, illnesses and deaths.

2. Who isn't covered?

People who telework; those who perform work with no reasonable expectation of exposure to a heat index at or above 80°F (indoors or outdoors); those whose work is performed in indoor work areas or vehicles where air conditioning consistently keeps the temperature below 80 °F; people doing emergency response work; those doing indoor sedentary activities, such as sitting at a desk; and workers who may be exposed to a heat index at or above 80°F for a short time (15 minutes or less in any 60-minute period).

3. How would heat hazards be identified at my worksite?

For outdoor work, employers would need to track the local heat index (temperature + humidity) forecasts, or measure the heat index or the "wet bulb globe temperature" (WBGT).

For indoor work, employers would need to identify work areas with hazardous heat exposure, and to develop and implement a monitoring plan for those areas by measuring the heat index or WBGT.

4. What happens when the heat index reaches 80°F at my worksite?

A heat index of 80°F is the initial heat trigger. At or above the initial heat trigger, an employer would be required to:

- ensure workers have readily accessible, cool drinking water (at least 1 quart per hour)
- allow paid rest breaks if needed
- at outdoor work sites, provide one or more readily accessible break areas with shade OR air-conditioning if in an enclosed space, like a trailer, vehicle or structure
- at indoor work sites, provide one or more readily accessible break areas with air-conditioning OR increased air movement and, if appropriate, de-humidification
- implement an acclimatization plan for the first week of work for new and returning employees
- communicate regularly with employees

At or above the high heat trigger, when there is a heat index of 90° F, an employer would also be required to:

- provide paid rest breaks – a minimum of 15 minutes every two hours (a meal break – whether paid or unpaid – may also serve as a rest break)
- set up an observation system to check employees for the signs and symptoms of heat-related illnesses
- maintain effective two-way communication with employees who are alone at a work site at least every 2 hours
- provide a heat hazard alert to employees on the importance of drinking water, taking rest breaks and following lifesaving emergency procedures

5. Will employers be required to provide training on heat hazards?

Yes, the proposal includes a requirement that supervisors, heat safety coordinators and employees be provided with both initial and annual refresher training, as well as supplemental training in specific scenarios – such as if a heat injury or illness occurs at the worksite.

6. Is a plan for acclimatization included in the proposed rule?

Yes. We know that nearly 3 out of 4 workers who die from heat-related causes die in their first week on the job. The proposed rule would require employers to follow acclimatization procedures for the first week of work for all new employees, as well as returning employees who have been away from work for more than 14 days.

The proposed rule provides two options for acclimatization: implementing a plan that, at minimum, includes incorporating the high-heat requirements at the initial heat trigger or following a schedule that gradually increases exposure to heat over time.

7. What is included to ensure workers are protected during a heat-related emergency?

As part of their work site heat injury and illness prevention plan, employers are required to include site-specific information to evaluate and control heat hazards in their workplace. This includes developing procedures – including immediate actions – for responding to an employee experiencing a heat emergency or showing signs of heat illness.

8. How can I give my feedback on the proposed rule?

To help shape the final rule, share your comments via the Federal Register by Dec. 30 . Here are some tips for submitting an effective comment:

- Tell us your story – share how the issue impacts you, other workers or your industry
- provide as much detail as possible
- include any ideas or suggestions you have for addressing the issue
- where possible, include data, research and supporting evidence

Check out osha.gov/heat-exposure/rulemaking to learn more about the proposed rule, including updates on a future public hearing.

Annual Vaccinations at UIW HQ

In the photo on the left (from left to right), Union Official Augie Tellez and UIW Representive Lance Thompson submit their completed health forms to Lauren Moxley before receiving their vaccinations. In the remaining photo, Dr. Antwan Proctor (right) adds the finishing touch (a bandaid) after administering Darnisha Toye's vaccine.

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The United Worker

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OSHA's New Heat Rule
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White House Announces Rule that would Cut Insurance Red Tape over Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Care

The following article has been sourced from a CNN article by Carma Hassan and Jamie Gumbrecht, published on September 9.

The Biden administration announced a final rule on Monday meant to expand access and lower costs for care for mental health and substance use disorders. Most provisions in the rule will apply to group health plans and health insurance issuers for plan years starting January 1 or after.

Under this rule, mental health and substance use disorder care on private insurance plans should be covered at the same level as physical health benefits. That may mean "adding more mental health and substance use professionals to their networks or reducing red tape for providers to deliver care," according to a White House fact sheet shared with CNN ahead of Monday's announcement.

"Mental health care is health care. But for far too many Americans, critical care and treatments are out of reach. Today, my Administration is taking action to address our nation's mental health crisis by ensuring mental health coverage will be covered at the same level as other health care for Americans. There is no reason that breaking your arm should be treated differently than having a mental health condition," President Joe Biden said in a statement.

The rule reinforces the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act, known as MHPAEA, a 2008 federal law that requires that insurance plans that cover mental health do so at the same level as physical health. Despite the law, insurers have often made it difficult for people to access in-network mental health care, White House Domestic Policy Adviser Neera Tanden said during a briefing. Instead, people have still paid high costs for mental health care, often needing to go out of network and pay out of pocket.

The rule instructs insurers to evaluate coverage based on several criteria, including the plan's provider network, how much plans pay for out-of-network coverage and how often prior authorization is required and approved under existing plans, according to the administration.

"No one should have to drain their savings or go into debt to get help for themselves or their loved ones," Tanden said, adding that the change could help 175 million people with private insurance access care using their own plans.

The final rule will also close a loophole that exempted federally provided health insurance plans from complying with the MHPAEA — a move that requires more than 200 additional health plans to improve mental health care for 120,000 consumers, the administration estimates.

Tanden emphasized that access to mental health care is "crucial for the well-being of our families."

"As you all know, mental challenges touch every corner of the country. As many as two in five American adults have anxiety or depression. Tragically, suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people at ages 10 to 24 years old," Tanden said, calling the numbers "unacceptable."

Enforcement of the rule will fall to the departments of Labor, Treasury and Health and Human Services, administration official have said.

"For too long, workers have faced unnecessary hurdles in accessing mental health and substance use disorder treatment – barriers that can mean the difference between life and death. The Biden-Harris administration is committed to tearing down these walls, ensuring that every worker has equal access to the care they need to thrive, both physically and mentally," Acting Secretary of Labor Julie Su said in a statement.

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Still, the law doesn't require employers to offer mental health benefits to employees. The ERISA Industry Committee, a major employer group known as ERIC, had said some of the proposed changes were "so burdensome that many of our members will have no other choice but to re-think the type and level of their plans' coverage."

Melissa Bartlett, senior vice president of health policy for ERIC, said in a statement Monday that the final rule incorporated some stakeholder feedback but "adds complexity" for employers offering behavioral health benefits.

"As ERIC evaluates this rule and assesses the implications for its member companies, we will consider all possibilities to prevent further harm to employers offering behavioral health benefits, and the employees and families who count on them – up to and including litigation," Bartlett said.

In a joint statement, the Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness, the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association and ERIC said the rule would have "unintended consequences" that could raise costs and jeopardize access to mental health care. Addressing the shortage of mental health providers is a top priority, the groups said, but "the final rule will complicate compliance so much that it will be impossible to operationalize, resulting in worse patient outcomes."

Biden administration officials said the final rule provides clarity for insurers about their obligations and departments will assist plans to bring them into compliance. It noted that some provisions won't apply until January 2026.

"Health care, whether for physical or behavioral conditions, is health care. No one should receive lesser care for one or the other," US Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra said in a statement. "That's the law. The rules we issue today make that clear."

BLS Shares New Employment Projections

Editor's note: The following article is sourced from a report by An Nyugen and Stanislava Ilic-Godfrey which was featured on the Department of Labor's blog.

When thinking about a new career, what information do you look for? You probably want to know if jobs in that field are growing and whether the demand for those jobs is increasing or decreasing in the future.

This information is available in the employment projections data, which is published every year by Bureau of Labor Statistics covering a 10-year period. The latest employment projections data for 2023 to 2033 were released on Aug. 29, showing that the economy is projected to add 6.7 million new jobs, with total employment growing 4.0%. Here are some of the highlights:

1. Fastest growing occupational groups

The healthcare support occupational group is expected to see the fastest employment growth and to add the most jobs over the projections decade. Combined with the healthcare practitioners and technical occupations group, these two healthcare groups account for over 1 in 4 projected new jobs to be added from 2023-33. Among the occupations included in the groups, the largest is home health and personal care aides. It's projected to grow 20.7% and add 820,500 jobs by 2033, partly due to a growing elderly population and higher instances of chronic conditions.

Strong demand for information technology (IT) products and services, including automation and machine learning technologies, are fueling the fast growth of computer and math occupations.

Community and social service occupations, the fourth-fastest growing occupational group, includes workers such as counselors, social workers, and religious workers.

2. Growth of STEM occupations

Strong demand for many products and services will drive fast growth in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) occupations. In fact, as a group, STEM occupations are projected to grow 10.4% by 2033 – faster than the average for all occupations (4.0%).

Demand for services and products related to IT, cybersecurity, and research and development in automation and machine learning technologies (like artificial intelligence and robotics) will contribute to the fast growth that is expected for computer and math occupations. Additional demand from businesses for data analysis is expected to drive growth for math occupations.

3. Changes in labor force share by age group

While the majority of the labor force will remain workers ages 25-54, the youngest group, those ages 16-24, is projected to see a decline in their share of the labor force by 2033, in part the result of lower birth rates in recent years.

In contrast, people ages 65 and older are projected to experience the fastest increase in their share of the labor force, although they will still account for the smallest share of the labor force among all age groups in 2033.

To learn more about the latest employment projections, visit bls.gov/ooh and check out the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Outlook Handbook.