

Human Impact Partners

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In Open Letter, **Public Health Experts Urge Walmart to Increase Wages**

New Research Estimates Massive Public Health and Health Equity Benefits from a \$5 Hourly Base Pay Increase at Nation's Largest Private Employer

[Text of Letter \(PDF\)](#)

Oakland, Calif. — Researchers sent a letter on Monday, October 11, 2021 to executives and board members of Walmart, including CEO Doug McMillon, making an urgent case for a \$5 hourly base pay increase for all associates as a matter of public health. The letter from Human Impact Partners (HIP) shares the group's new research findings, which predict that increasing Walmart's hourly base pay from the current rate of \$12 to \$17 would have particularly powerful health benefits for women associates and associates of color.

The letter, signed by **Sukhdip Purewal Boparai, Research Project Director** and **Lili Farhang, Co-Director** of HIP, states: *"As the largest corporate employer of women and people of color in the US, Walmart plays a significant role in the economic security of these communities, their quality of life, and gender and racial equity broadly. Increasing wages would help close the country's staggering racial and gender wage gaps, in alignment with Walmart's commitment to racial equity."*

HIP, whose calculations draw from peer-reviewed research studies and epidemiologic population-level datasets, estimates that a \$5 an hour wage increase at Walmart would lead to:

- An improvement in self-reported health status among associates
- A reduction in mental health symptoms among associates
- An increase in the lifespan of associates
- The prevention of more than 150 low birth weight births annually
- Health improvements that would benefit women associates and associates of color the most

During the pandemic, Walmart executives refused to [provide \\$5 an hour hazard pay](#) to employees and ignored a call from shareholders to start all associate wages at at least \$15 per hour. Walmart's \$12 an hour base pay remains far below a living wage for most individuals, especially those with children at home, according to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Living Wage Calculator.

Recent coverage of Walmart's associates reflects the hardship of poverty wages. In Louisiana, [Peter Naughton](#), 45, had to give up his apartment and move back in with his parents despite working full time, because he couldn't afford rent with his \$11.55 an hour wage. He says the

stress of his low-wage work environment is a trigger for his seizures. In Arkansas, [Mendy Hughes](#), 47, has been at the company for 11 years and still only makes \$12.85 per hour. She endures exhausting working conditions, exacerbated by understaffing caused by the company's struggle to retain workers. Hughes pays for diabetes medication as well as treatment for her son's asthma, and she has had trouble keeping up with her medical bills and affording groceries.

As an increasing number of retail companies, including Walmart-owned Sam's Club, boost their minimum wage to at least \$15 an hour, Walmart associates are asking: "Where's Walmart?"

In a statement issued on September 27, Walmart associate [Cat Davis](#) said: *"Walmart associates deserve to live full, thriving lives and for years now we have fought for an end to poverty wages. It's shameful that even through a pandemic that brought the corporation record-breaking profits, CEO Doug McMillon and the Waltons still had the audacity to announce they are eliminating our MyShare bonuses. In spite of the fear, illness, and death around us in this global pandemic, we are getting less and less while being expected to produce more and more. So enough with empty accolades like calling us 'essential workers' and 'heroes.' If Walmart truly wants to honor the dignity and respect that Walmart associates deserve, we need a \$15/hr base and unconditional, quarterly inflation-adjusted wages for all associates, full-time hours with adequate paid time off, and the creation of a pandemic task force of associates working in partnership with executives to make sure all Walmart stores are safe, healthy, and efficient."*

An earlier HIP study from April 2021 [quantified the public health impacts of Walmart's failure to implement a paid sick leave policy](#) that met the needs of associates and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic. Human Impact Partners found that had Walmart established an adequate paid sick leave policy before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, [at least 7,618 employee cases of COVID-19 and 133 deaths from COVID-19 could have been prevented](#).

The letter from HIP's **Purewal Boparai** and **Farhang** to Walmart concludes: *"All people deserve the right to economic security — and as public health experts, we know how critical livable wages are to health and wellbeing. Walmart has the opportunity to set a precedent of how essential workers are valued in our society. We are asking you to institute a \$5 an hour wage increase for all associates immediately to ensure that Walmart associates and their families can live healthier lives."*

Full report here: [A Five Dollar Raise Could Transform Walmart Associates' Health and Well-being](#)

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Human Impact Partners transforms the field of public health to center equity and builds collective power with social justice movements.