

# FACT SHEET



## Support NOVA airport workers' health

**Problem:** Approximately 2,000 essential airport workers at IAD and DCA airports – including wheelchair attendants, baggage handlers, terminal cleaners, cabin cleaners and non TSA security – **have no paid sick days or employer-provided health insurance.** This creates a crisis for the largely Black, brown, and immigrant workers performing critical jobs who must choose between taking care of themselves or their children and getting paid. Workers who go to work sick endanger their co-workers, the public, and passengers. Many workers have lost their lives due to COVID-19 and/or the lack of access to health care.

**Solution:** The Metro Washington Airports Authority should set a standard to ensure that all airport workers have paid sick days and employer-provided health insurance. The Authority has the ability to set such a standard that would allow workers to protect themselves, their families, and airline passengers. Seven other airports have established similar standards.

**Who benefits:** Almost everyone benefits from airports implementing a paid sick day standard and having employer-provided health insurance for all of their employees. These policies help:

**Workers and their families** – When a worker takes 3.5 unpaid sick days, the average family loses a month's worth of groceries. Studies repeatedly demonstrate that uninsured people are less likely than those with insurance to receive preventive care and services for major health conditions and chronic diseases. Workers are forced to choose between caring for themselves or their children and retaining employment.

**Public health** – Workers in low-wage industries are the least likely to have paid sick days or employer provided health care. Yet these policies are proven to

be highly effective tools in reducing the spread of the coronavirus, and that ensuring the quality of care available in a given locality remains high for all. Studies reveal that when a sizeable uninsured population exists in a given locality, quality of care and access to critical services such as trauma care become less available for uninsured and insured people alike.

**Businesses** – Employers lose \$160 billion annually in productivity due to “presenteeism” (the practice of coming to work despite illness or injury). Providing paid sick days and health care benefits so employees can access preventive care results in reduced turnover – saving businesses money.

**People of color** – In the U.S., 38 percent of African Americans and 50 percent of *Latinx* people do not have access to a single paid sick day. People of color make up 43 percent of the nonelderly U.S. population but account for more than half of the total nonelderly uninsured population. Employer-provided health insurance and paid sick days are tangible investments in equity.

**Can airlines afford these policies?** The pandemic has made clear that airports need paid sick leave and employer-provided health insurance not just for their employees' sake, but for the sake of public health outcomes. Airports have accepted billions in public dollars during the COVID-19 pandemic, and are seeing dramatic increases in travel. Airport workers keep the global economy running even in times of dire circumstances. It is past time for their well-being to be prioritized.

*Sources: Family Values @ Work, National Partnership for Women & Families, United Health Foundation, U.S Bureau of Labor & Statistics, EPI, Kaiser Family Foundation, Federal Aviation Administration*