



The mission of the California Labor Lab is to extend the pursuit of health and safety for workers in traditional employment to those in a wide range of alternative arrangements in partnership with affected communities.

Data Brief #13: App-based Workers

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Introduction

The California Work and Health Survey addresses the relationship between work and health among working age Californians. In 2022-2023, 4,014 Californians aged 18-70 were interviewed, and the same individuals were contacted for a follow-up interview in 2025, with a response rate of 45%. As part of both the baseline and follow-up surveys, respondents who were employed in the week prior to interview were asked whether they did app-based work at that job, and if they did, were then asked the names of the app(s) they used in their work.

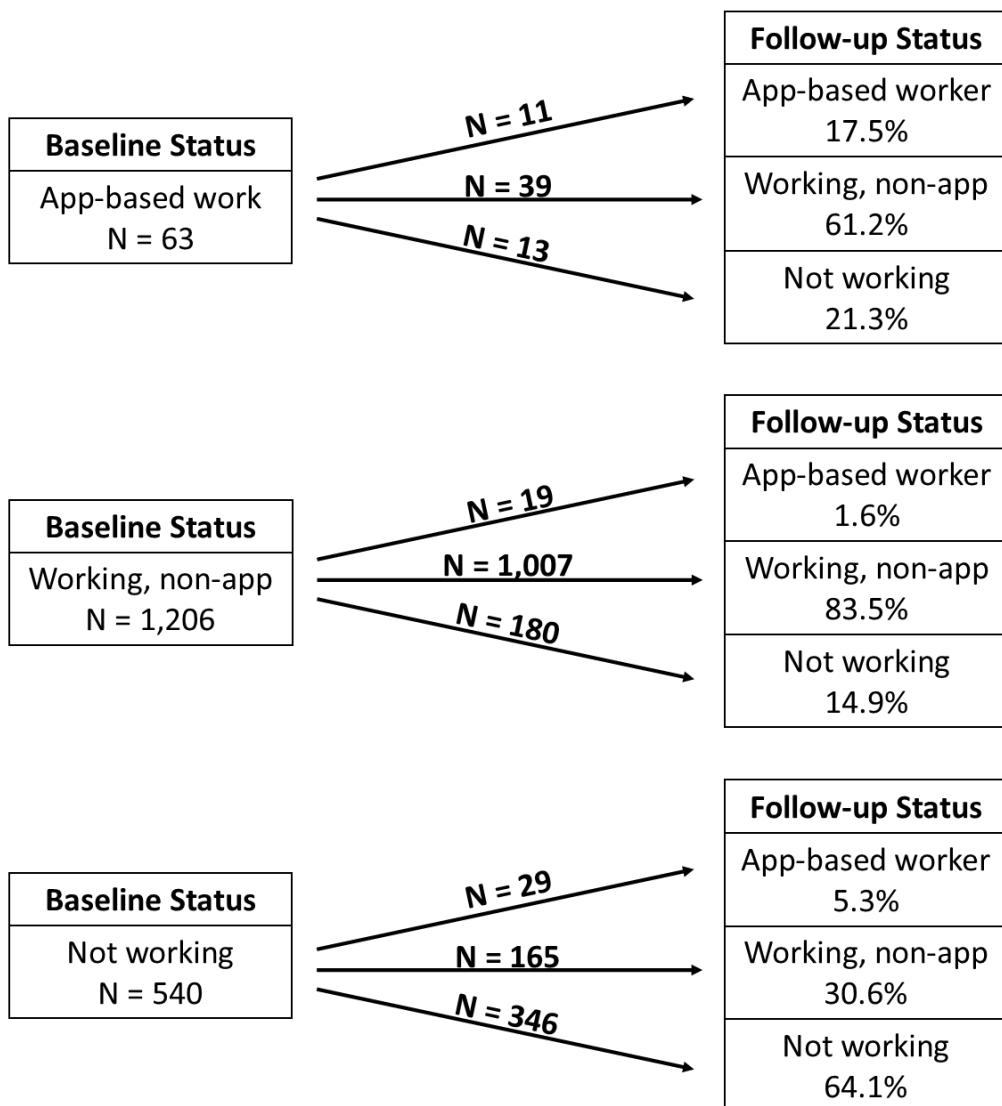
In this Data Brief, we report on the prevalence of app-based work in both the baseline and follow-up waves of the survey. We track how app-based work status changed between waves to assess turnover rates and examine possible antecedents and consequences of participation in app-based work. This Data Brief examines the prevalence of transitions into and out of app-based work across demographic characteristics, categories of app-based work, and economic status indicators. It is a first step towards adding nuance to researchers' understanding of app-based work.

Prevalence of App-based Work

Stable prevalence. The prevalence of app-based work was stable among workers who worked in each respective wave. In the baseline survey, 5% of those employed did app-based work, while in the follow-up survey 4.7% of those employed at follow-up did app-based work. The difference between the prevalences is not statistically significant.

Transitions into and out of App-based Work

Transition Matrix: Movement into and out of App-based Work in the California Work & Health Survey



Transitions into and out of App-based Work, continued

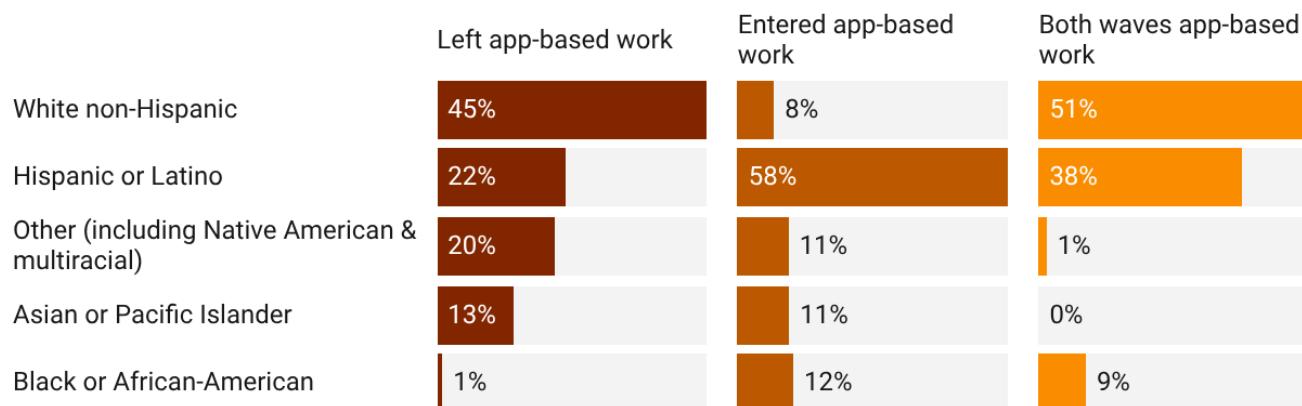
High turnover among app-based workers. The majority of app-based workers left app-based work between waves. Only 17.5% of baseline app-based workers were also doing app-based work at follow-up. 61.2% of baseline app-based workers were doing non-app-based work, and 21.3% were not working.

Nonworkers more likely to start doing app-based work than non-app-based workers.

Only 1.6% of respondents who did non-app-based work at baseline started doing app-based work between waves, while 5.3% of respondents who were not working at baseline started doing app-based work between waves. Out of the respondents who started doing app-based work between waves, 29 of them were not working at baseline and 19 of them were doing non-app-based work at baseline.

Demographics of App-based Workers

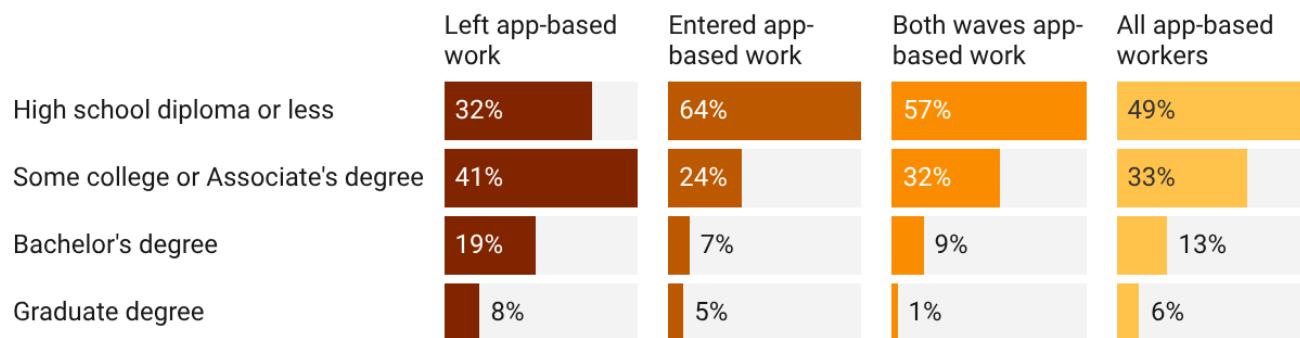
App-based Workers across CWHS 2022-2025 by Race



The majority of new app-based workers were Latino (58.2%), while the majority of app-based workers who left and those doing app-based work in both waves were white (45% and 51.2%, respectively).

Black or African-American app-based workers were more likely to enter or be in app-based work in both waves than to have left app-based work.

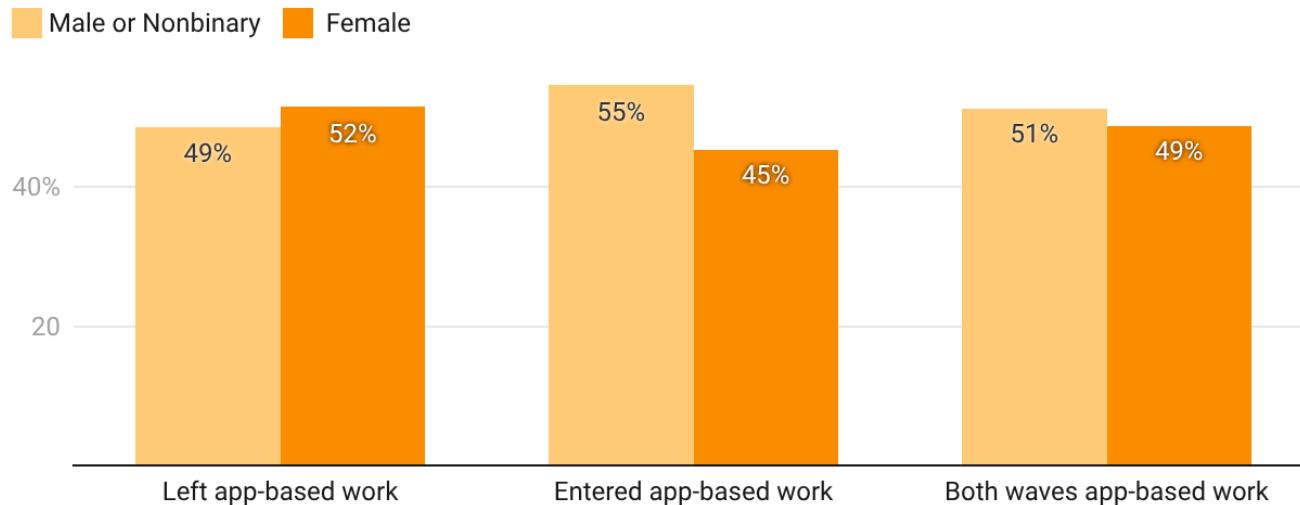
App-based Workers across CWHS 2022-2025 by Educational Attainment



Individuals with any amount of education beyond high school were more likely to leave app-based work were less likely to enter app-based work or do app-based work in both waves.

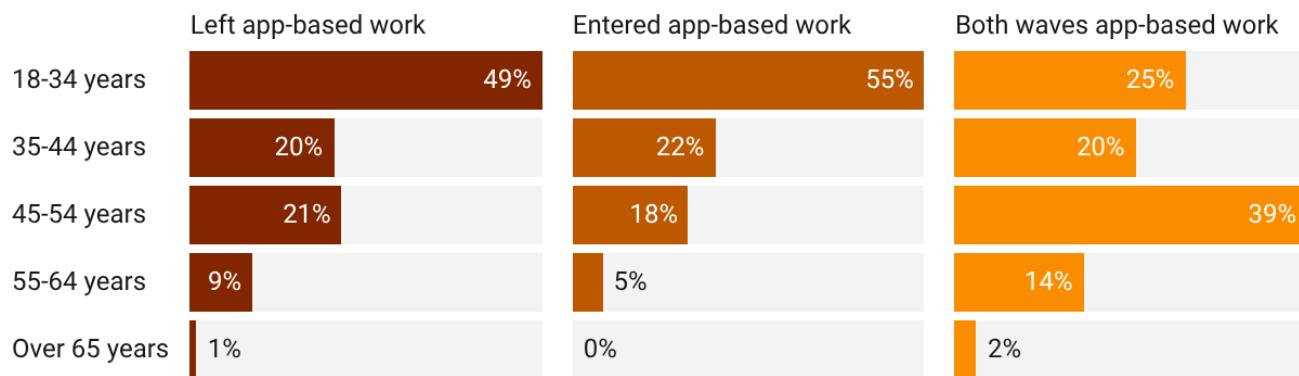
63.9% of new app-based workers and 57.4% of both-wave app-based workers had completed high school or less, but on the whole only 48.7% of all app-based workers in either wave had completed high school or less.

App-based Workers across CWHS 2022-2025 by Gender



More men entered app-based work between waves than women. 54.6% of new app-based workers were men, and 45.4% were women. The gender ratio was more balanced among respondents who left app-based work and who did app-based work in both waves

App-based Workers across CWHS 2022-2025 by Age



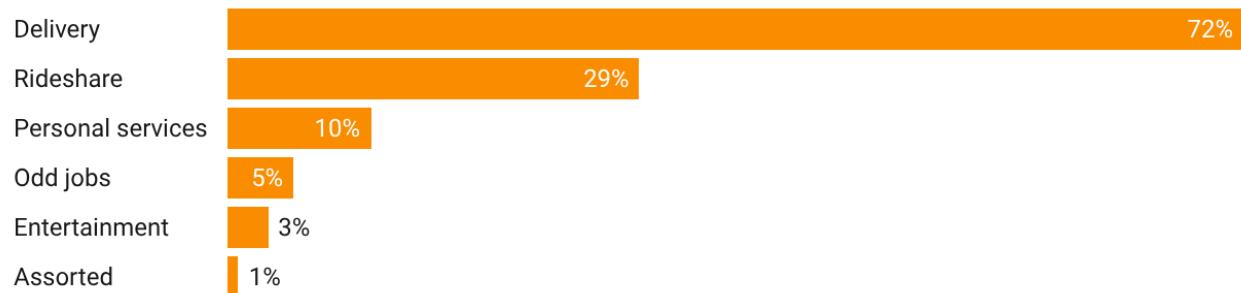
App-based workers doing work in both waves tended to be older than app-based workers who left or entered app-based work. Only 25.2% of respondents doing app-based work in both waves were age 18-34, in comparison to 49.2% of respondents who entered app-based work and 55% of respondents who left app-based work. 38.6% of respondents doing app-based work in both waves were age 45-54, versus only 21.2% and 18.1% of respondents who left or entered app-based work between waves, respectively.

One possible explanation for this observation is that older app-based workers more frequently do app-based work as a career, especially in the 45-54 age range, while younger app-based workers more frequently use app-based work as a way of entering the job market.

Categories of App-based Work

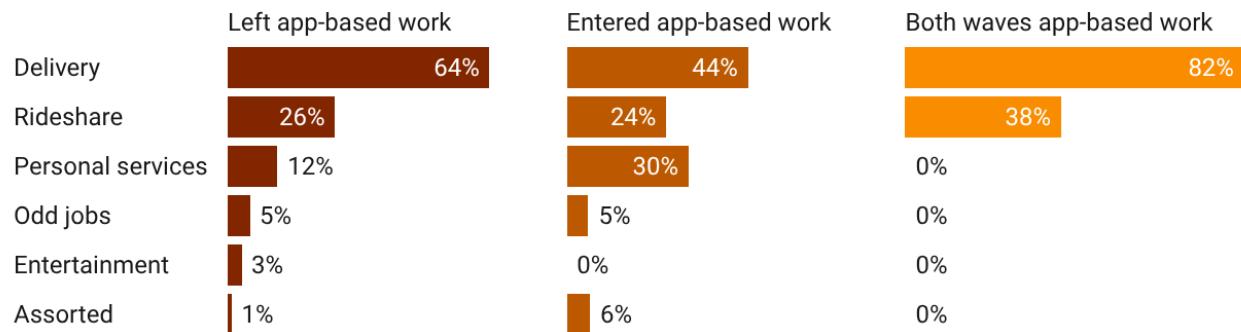
All app-based work responses to the CWHS were categorized into at least one of six categories: rideshare, delivery, personal services, odd jobs, entertainment, and assorted (see Appendix 1 for detailed descriptions of the categories). Some respondents use apps from multiple categories, so they are not mutually exclusive.

Prevalence of Categories of App-based Work in CWHS Baseline



Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive because respondents could select multiple apps during survey.

Prevalence of Categories of App-based Work across CWHS App-based Work Transitions

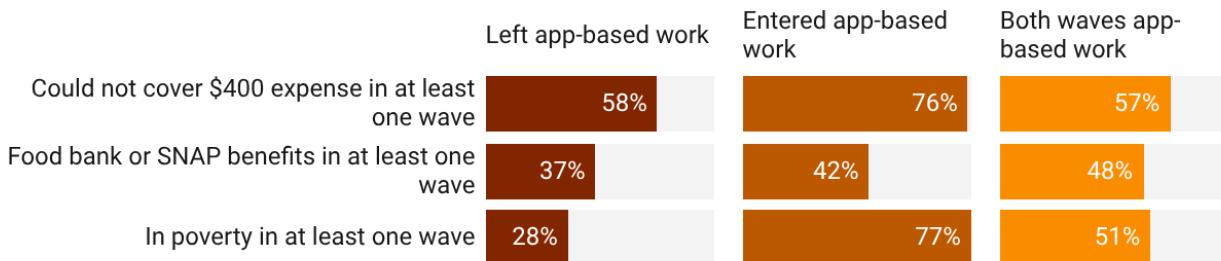


Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive because respondents could select multiple apps during survey.

- Rideshare and delivery driving made up the bulk of app-based work in both waves. 83.4% of baseline app-based workers and 71.3% of follow-up app-based workers did either or both rideshare or delivery driving.
- Respondents who left or entered app-based work participated in more diverse types of app-based work than app-based workers who did app-based work in both waves.
 - All respondents doing app-based work in both waves only did rideshare and/or delivery driving, and did not participate in any of the other categories of app-based work in either wave.
 - In comparison, 39.7% of new app-based workers and 12.1% of ex-app-workers used apps from the personal services app-based work category.

Economic Wellbeing and App-based Work

Prevalence of Economic Difficulty across CWHS App-based Work Transition Statuses



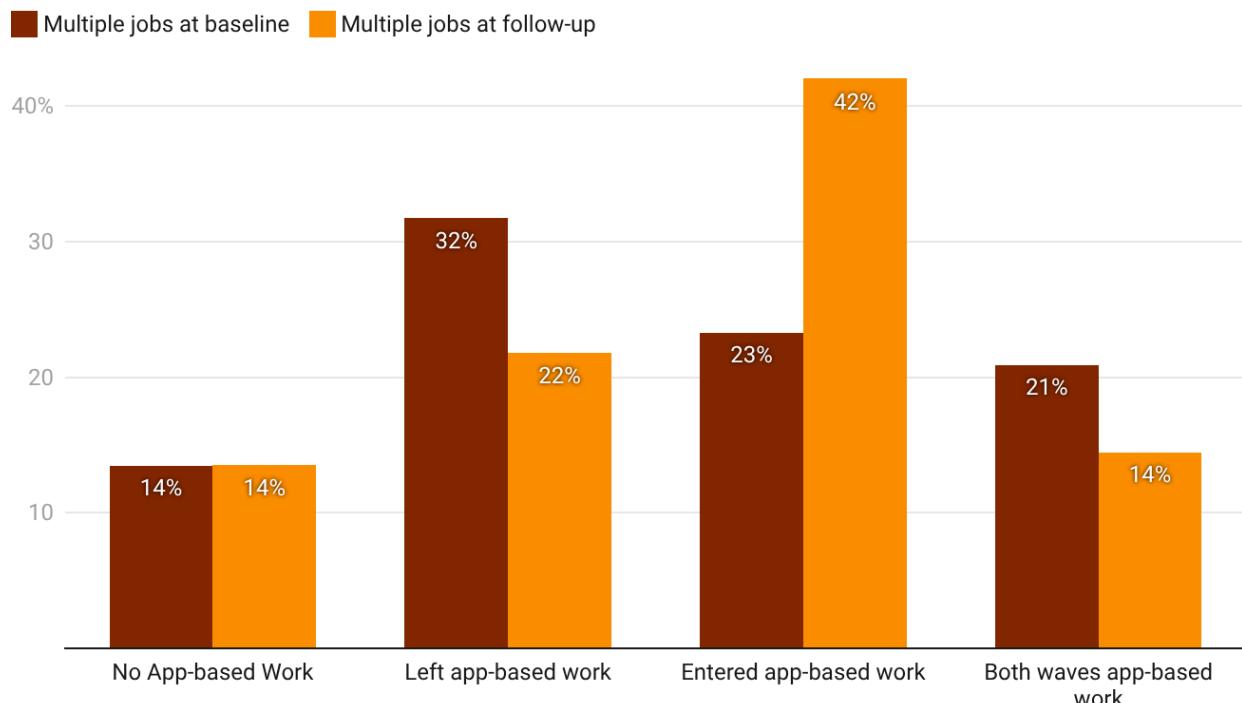
The lowest poverty rates were among those who left app-based work. 27.8% of respondents who left app-based work were in poverty, defined as having earnings below 125% of the Federal Poverty Level in the year prior to interview, in at least one wave. 76.8% of new app-based workers and 50.6% of respondents doing app-based work in both waves reported household poverty. In the follow-up survey, workers who left app-based work since the baseline survey also reported slightly lower rates of food insecurity than other app-based workers. Food insecurity is proxied by respondent's use of a food bank or public food benefit program (specifically Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP) in the year prior to either baseline or follow-up interview.

Financial insecurity is most common among new app-based workers. New app-based workers were more likely to be unable to cover an unexpected \$400 expense in either wave than respondents who left app-based work or respondents who did app-based work in both waves. 75.8% of new app-based workers said they could not cover an unexpected \$400 expense in at least one wave, versus 57.9% of app-based workers who left app-based work and 57.2% of respondents doing app-based work in both waves.

Multiple Jobholding among App-based Workers

“Multiple jobholding” means that the respondent said they worked more than one job in the week prior to interview.

Prevalence of Multiple Jobs in Week prior to Interview at Baseline and Follow-up across App-based Work Status and Transitions



App-based workers were more likely to have multiple jobs than non-app-based workers. In the baseline, 29.9% of app-based workers versus 13.7% of non-app-based workers held multiple jobs in week prior to interview. In the follow-up survey, 36.9% of app-based workers held multiple jobs versus only 13.8% of non-app-based workers.

Among app-based workers who left app-based work, multiple jobholding fell from 31.8% to 21.8% between waves. Multiple jobholding also fell slightly among workers doing app-based work in both waves, from 20.9% to 14.5%. Multiple jobholding increased between waves among respondents who entered app-based work between waves: 23.3% at baseline, and 42.1% at follow-up.

Conclusion and Summary

With the second wave of CWHS data now available, we have the ability to track the behavior of app-based workers over time. We can see what kind of workers stay in, enter, and leave app-based work over time. App-based workers in the CWHS showed high turnover rates: only 17% of baseline app-based workers also did app-based work at follow-up. 62% of baseline app-based workers were doing non-app-based work at follow-up instead. The majority of new app-based workers in the follow-up were previously not working in the baseline.

There were more Hispanic/Latino & Black/African-American respondents who entered app work or did app work in both waves than left app-based work, and more men than women entered app-based work.

App-based workers who did app-based work in both waves only did delivery and/or rideshare driving, while app-based workers who entered or exited app-based work participated in a wider variety of categories of app-based work. It is noteworthy that all the app-based workers observed doing app-based work in the long term by the CWHS do rideshare and/or delivery driving as their main job, and no other forms of app-based work. Perhaps not all categories of app-based work are created equal, and future research would benefit from attempts to differentiate between rideshare or delivery work using apps, and other types of app-based work.

App-based workers who left app-based work differed from other app-based workers in key ways. They had higher educational attainment and lower rates of financial strain and food benefit recipiency than other app-based workers. These observations may suggest that leaving app-based work improves economic outcomes, and may additionally suggest that individuals with access to greater financial or other environmental resources are more able to leave app-based work than people with more limited resources. Economic security and a college education make it easier in myriad ways for an individual to access jobs that provide health insurance, higher wages, reliable hours and payment – all things consistently missing for app-based workers.

The rights and protections provided to rideshare drivers in California were recently expanded when Governor Newsom signed AB 1340 into law in October this year. AB 1340 gave rideshare drivers the right to form unions and collectively bargain with rideshare companies

despite their persistent status as independent contractors. It's an important first step towards improving working conditions for rideshare drivers, and future research using the CWHS and other sources of data can help guide and support app-based workers as they organize.

Appendix 1

Categories of App-based Work Used in the CWHS:

1. **Rideshare:** Includes apps such as Uber or Lyft which workers use to provide ride hailing services on-demand to customers.
2. **Delivery:** Includes apps such as Grubhub or Amazon Flex which workers use to complete delivery of food, groceries, or packages to customers.
3. **Personal services:** Includes apps such as Rula or SuperPROF which workers use to provide their skills in areas such as education, healthcare, domestic services, pet care, etc.
4. **Odd jobs:** Includes apps such as Thumbtack or Angi which workers use to provide their skills to customers in areas such as home repair, plumbing, lawn care, etc.
5. **Entertainment:** Includes apps such as Field Agent and Everyset which workers use to find gigs as actors, editors, camera crew, or other roles in the entertainment industry.
6. **Assorted:** Any responses which could not otherwise be clearly categorized.

About the Survey

The California Work and Health Survey (CWHS) used a random sample of cell phones to develop its study cohort of 4,014 working age Californians. The CWHS was administered between November 2022 and May 2023 by telephone interviewers or completed on-line at the respondents' choice. Both the telephone-administered and on-line surveys could be completed in English or Spanish. The survey covered current employment status, working conditions among the employed, health status, and economic well-being. The results were weighted to reflect known characteristics of the working age population of California.
