



COVID-19: Selected Financial and Social Service Resources for Older Americans

Updated September 20, 2021

This Insight links to selected resources for older constituents who have been financially affected by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

Social Security

During the pandemic, the Social Security Administration (SSA) [continues to pay benefits](#). Although Social Security offices are [closed for walk-in service](#), many services are available [online](#). Additional guidance appears on [SSA's Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\) webpage](#) and [SSA's blog](#).

Other resources include

- SSA (Workers): [Your Options: Working, Applying for Retirement, or Both?](#);
- SSA (Workers): [Benefits Planner, Retirement](#);
- SSA (Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and COVID-19 Financial Assistance): [Monthly Benefits and Other Financial Help](#);
- CRS Report R44948, *Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI): Eligibility, Benefits, and Financing*; and
- CRS Report R44670, *The Social Security Retirement Age*.

Retirement Income

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (P.L. 116-136) allowed for penalty-free coronavirus-related distributions (CRDs) from certain retirement accounts in 2020 and suspended required minimum distributions for 2020, among other provisions. The deadline to take a CRD was December 30, 2020; however, individuals with employer-sponsored plans may be able to take a hardship distribution or loan (if the plan permits).

Participants in the federal Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) can find revisions to plan operations at the TSP's [COVID-19: Latest Information](#). Information is also available from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) at [Coronavirus-related relief for retirement plans and IRAs questions and answers](#).

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

IN11410

Other resources include

- Department of Labor, Employee Benefits Security Administration: [Response to COVID](#);
- IRS Retirement Topics – [Plan Loans](#);
- IRS Retirement Topics – [Hardship Distributions](#);
- TSP: [Changes to Required Minimum Distribution](#) (for 2020);
- TSP: [COVID-19 Withdrawals and Repayments](#);
- CRS In Focus IF11482, *Retirement and Pension Provisions in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act)*; and
- CRS In Focus IF11369, *Early Withdrawals from Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs) and 401(k) Plans*.

Unemployment Compensation

Older Americans may face job loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To cushion lost wages, older workers may be eligible for [Unemployment Compensation \(UC\)](#), a joint federal-state program. To receive regular unemployment benefits, individuals apply through the UC office in the state where they worked.

Additionally, the CARES Act, as amended, temporarily expanded UC benefits for unemployed workers, including for self-employed or contract workers. Under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (P.L. 117-2), these CARES Act UI benefits expired on September 4, 2021, or earlier in states that opted to terminate them prior to expiration.

UC benefits may be affected by other sources of income. According to CRS Report R46687, *Current Status of Unemployment Insurance (UI) Benefits: Permanent-Law Programs and COVID-19 Pandemic Response*:

[Federal law requires](#) that states reduce an individual’s weekly UC benefit “[by the amount](#), allocated weekly, of any governmental or other pension, retirement or retired pay, annuity, or any other similar periodic payment which is based on the previous work of such individual.” States may reduce UC benefits on less than a full offset basis by considering any employee contributions to the retirement plan. But states may not reduce UC benefits based on any [rollover distributions from pension plans](#). In addition, states may reduce the UC benefits of workers receiving [Social Security or SSDI payments](#).

For more information, see

- DOL: Unemployment Benefits Finder Help, [Learn more about unemployment benefits and COVID-19 provisions](#);
- SSA: FAQ, [Will unemployment benefits affect my Social Security benefits?](#);
- CRS Report R46687, *Current Status of Unemployment Insurance (UI) Benefits: Permanent-Law Programs and COVID-19 Pandemic Response*;
- CRS In Focus IF11786, *Unemployment Insurance Provisions in the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021*; and
- CRS Report R46789, *Unemployment Insurance: Legislative Issues in the 117th Congress*.

Home and Community-Based Services

[Administration for Community Living \(ACL\)](#) administers grants to states to support a range of home and community-based services for individuals aged 60+. These include supportive services (such as personal care, chore services, and rides to medical appointments), home-delivered nutrition (sometimes known as

“Meals on Wheels”), and family caregiver support. The Older Americans Act (OAA) authorizes these grant programs. OAA programs received additional funding in response to the COVID-19 pandemic; see CRS Report R43414, *Older Americans Act: Overview and Funding*.

Constituents interested in OAA services may contact their local Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), which oversee the delivery of most OAA services and other home and community-based services to older adults. Constituents can find AAAs through the [Eldercare Locator](#) (1-800-677-1116), an information and referral service that connects older adults and caregivers with local resources and services. For more resources to connect constituents to health services, see CRS In Focus IF11694, *Connecting Older Adults and Individuals with Disabilities to Health Services: Resources for Constituents*.

ACL also funds resource centers that assist with benefits and financial issues.

- [Benefits Check-Up](#) (1-800-794-6559) helps older adults identify benefits for which they may be eligible.
- [Benefits Enrollment Centers](#) help Medicare beneficiaries identify and apply for other programs for which they may be eligible, including Medicaid.
- [National Pension Assistance Resource Center](#) helps with pension-related questions and problems.
- [National Resource Center on Women and Retirement](#) produces fact sheets on retirement planning and other financial topics.
- [Aging and Disability Resource Centers](#) provide personalized assistance with planning for and accessing [long-term services and supports](#).

Economic Impact Payments

Older Americans may have benefited from direct payments authorized by the American Rescue Plan (ARPA) Act of 2021 (P.L. 117-2), the CARES Act (P.L. 116-136), and the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (P.L. 116-220). These payments are described in CRS Insight IN11605, *COVID-19 and Direct Payments: Comparison of First and Second Round of “Stimulus Checks” to the Third Round in the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA; P.L. 117-2)* and IRS’s [“Recovery Rebate Credits and Economic Impact Payments.”](#)

Frauds and Scams

Several federal agencies have provided guidance relevant for older Americans who may be targeted by scams. SSA has compiled information on “Protecting Yourself from Frauds and Scams.” Consumer Financial Protection Bureau’s “Resources to help you avoid scams” includes resources for older adults. DOL provides guidance at “Report Unemployment Identity Theft.” Additionally, see “Frauds and Scams” in CRS Insight IN11359, *COVID-19: Financial Relief and Assistance Resources for Consumers* and “Reporting COVID-19 Scams” in CRS Insight IN11640, *Tabulating COVID-19-Related Fraud and Financial Loss*.

Author Information

Tamar B. Breslauer
Senior Research Librarian

Abigail R. Overbay
Senior Research Librarian

Angela Napili
Senior Research Librarian

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.