



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

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The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has caused economic distress to many older Americans due to job loss, business closings, and financial market conditions. This Insight provides links to selected CRS products and related resources that address some issues for older populations.

Social Security Benefits

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Social Security Administration (SSA) is [continuing to pay benefits](#). Social Security offices are [closed for walk-in service](#). SSA states that “In-person service is by appointment only and for limited, dire need situations.” Many SSA services are available [online](#). Additional guidance appears on [SSA’s Coronavirus Disease – COVID-19 FAQ](#), which covers topics such as “Economic Impact Payments,” “Getting Help from Social Security,” “Hearings,” “Monthly Benefits and Other Financial Help,” and “Representative Payees.” To find a specific question, [click on the category or search by keyword](#) in the search box. A few FAQs that might be helpful include

- SSA FAQ: Will unemployment benefits affect my Social Security benefits? (4/27/2020);
- SSA FAQ: Can I request a waiver for an overpayment debt incurred during COVID-19? (8/31/2020); and
- SSA FAQ: Can SSA help me by phone? (6/29/2020).

Individuals considering whether they are eligible for Social Security retirement or disability benefits may consult the following resources:

- SSA (Workers): [Your Options: Working, Applying for Retirement, or Both?](#);
- SSA (Workers): [Benefits Planner, Retirement](#);
- SSA (Workers): [Benefits Planner, Disability](#);
- SSA (Survivors): [Benefits Planner, Survivors](#);
- 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*.

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Retirement Income

The CARES Act allows for penalty-free coronavirus-related distributions from certain retirement accounts and suspends required minimum distributions for 2020, among other provisions.

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

Other resources that explain some of these provisions include

- Department of Labor (DOL)/Employee Benefits Security Administration: [COVID-19 FAQs for Participants and Beneficiaries](#);
- FINRA: [CARES Act 2020: Retirement Fund Access and Student Loan Relief](#);
- TSP: [Changes to Required Minimum Distribution](#);
- TSP: [Extended rollover periods and Withdrawals for participants affected by COVID](#);
- TSP: [Loans](#);
- CRS In Focus IF11482, *Retirement and Pension Provisions in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act)*;
- CRS Insight IN11349, *The CARES Act and Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs): Options for Certain Individuals*; and
- CRS Insight IN11441, *Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Guidance for Coronavirus-Related Distributions, Plan Loans, and Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) Rollovers*.

Unemployment Compensation

Older Americans experiencing unemployment may be eligible for financial assistance. [Unemployment Compensation \(UC\)](#) is a joint federal-state program. UC is financed by federal taxes under the [Federal Unemployment Tax Act \(FUTA\)](#) and by state payroll taxes under the [State Unemployment Tax Acts \(SUTA\)](#). To receive any benefit, individuals must first apply for UC in the state where they most recently worked.

[FUTA requires](#) that states “reduce the weekly benefit amount of any individual 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....’” In addition, states [may reduce](#) unemployment benefits to workers receiving Social Security payments or Social Security Disability Insurance payments. Social Security retirement and disability benefits are never reduced due to unemployment compensation.

The CARES Act [extended unemployment insurance \(UI\) benefits](#) through several provisions.

- Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation extended benefits by 13 weeks.
- Pandemic Federal Emergency Unemployment Compensation provided an additional \$600 weekly.
- Pandemic Unemployment Assistance extended benefits to individuals not previously eligible (self-employed and independent contractors).

Resources providing additional guidance include the following:

- DOL: [Links to State Unemployment Offices](#);
 - DOL: [FAQ On Unemployment Insurance Relief During COVID-19 Outbreak](#);
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- CRS Insight IN11492, *COVID-19: Supplementing Unemployment Insurance Benefits (Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation vs. Lost Wages Assistance)*;
- CRS In Focus IF11475, *Unemployment Insurance Provisions in the CARES Act*; and
- CRS Report R45478, *Unemployment Insurance: Legislative Issues in the 116th Congress*.

Social Services Support

The [Administration for Community Living \(ACL\)](#) administers grants to states to support a range of social services and programs for individuals aged 60 years and older, among other activities. These include supportive services (such as personal care and chore services and rides to medical appointments), home-delivered nutrition (sometimes informally referred to as “Meals on Wheels”), and family caregiver support. The Older Americans Act (OAA) authorizes these ACL grant programs. Congress provided ACL supplemental funding under the OAA in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For more information, see CRS Report R43414, *Older Americans Act: Overview and Funding*.

Constituents interested in OAA services and programs should contact their local Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), which oversee the delivery of most OAA services and other community-based long-term services and supports to older individuals. Constituents can find their AAAs through the Eldercare Locator, at <https://eldercare.acl.gov>, or call 1-800-677-1116. The Eldercare Locator is an information and referral service that connects older persons and caregivers with local resources, benefits, and services, including OAA programs.

ACL also funds resource centers that assist with financial issues.

- [Benefits Check-Up](#) (1-800-794-6559) helps older persons identify benefits for which they may be eligible.
- [Benefits Enrollment Centers](#) help Medicare beneficiaries identify and apply for other programs they may be eligible for, including Medicaid.
- [National Pension Assistance Resource Center](#) helps constituents with their pension-related questions and problems.
- [National Resource Center on Women and Retirement](#) produces consumer guides and 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.

Frauds and Scams

Several federal agencies have provided guidance relevant for older Americans who may be targeted by scams. SSA has compiled information on how to “Protect Yourself from Scams” ([select header from the menu](#) or consult [this FAQ](#)). The ACL has gathered information on “Protecting Personal Finances” on their [Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#) web page. In addition, CRS Insight IN11359, *COVID-19: Financial Relief and Assistance Resources for Consumers* includes a “Frauds and Scams” section.

Author Information

Tamar B. Breslauer
Research Librarian

Abigail R. Overbay
Senior Research Librarian

Angela Napili
Senior Research Librarian

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