

FINANCIAL CONNECTIONS



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INVESTOR
EDUCATION

While the pumpkins are piling up and the costumes are coming out, don't let your finances turn into a trick instead of a treat. This month, we've got strategies to help you rake in the benefits and avoid spooky surprises in the market. Let's make sure your portfolio stays more treat than trick.

Sources of Retirement Income: Worker Expectations vs. Retiree Realities

About 90% of retirees say they rely on Social Security, approximately the same as the percentage of workers who expect Social Security to help them meet their retirement income needs. Similarly, about 60% of workers expect a traditional pension plan to provide income, which is only slightly higher than the percentage of retirees who say a pension helps pay their bills. In other cases, worker expectations differ dramatically from retiree realities.

Worker expectations for retirement income vs. retirees' actual experience



Source: Employee Benefit Research Institute, 2024

If You Don't Have a Will Yet, Why Not?

A will is a fundamental estate planning document. It outlines how you wish your property to be distributed, who should handle matters related to settling your estate, and who you want to care for your children after you pass, among other things.

If you don't yet have a will, you're not alone. According to a recent survey by Caring.com, 64% of Americans think having a will is important, but only 32% have one.¹ There are many reasons people put off drafting a will — here are four that you might relate to.

1. Just haven't gotten around to it

It's easy to procrastinate when it comes to drafting a will. Even if it's something you think you should do, it's probably not high on the list of things you want to do. Perhaps you're uncomfortable thinking about your own mortality, or maybe you're worried about how complicated or costly the process will be.

Focusing on some of the benefits of having a will might give you the motivation you need to get started. A will is a way to make sure your loved ones are cared for and that your last wishes are honored. A legally binding will gives you more control over what happens to your property and helps ensure that your treasured possessions end up in the right hands. You can name an executor or personal representative who you believe will responsibly handle the details of settling your estate. And having a will is especially important if you have minor children and want to protect them by naming a guardian who will best be able to handle the responsibility of raising them.

If making these decisions sounds daunting, there's help available. An estate planning attorney can help address your concerns and guide you through the process.

2. It's not the right time

Too young? Not married? Childless? In good health? Not wealthy enough? People often think it's not the right time to draft a will, but there's no better time than now. Most adults have money or possessions that they would like to leave to someone, and waiting until the circumstances seem perfect is risky. Health problems may come on suddenly, and trying to draft a will at that time can be stressful. Even worse, if you suddenly become incapacitated, it may be too late.

Your life will inevitably change as the years pass, and any will drafted now can (and should) be reviewed and revised occasionally to account for family and financial changes.

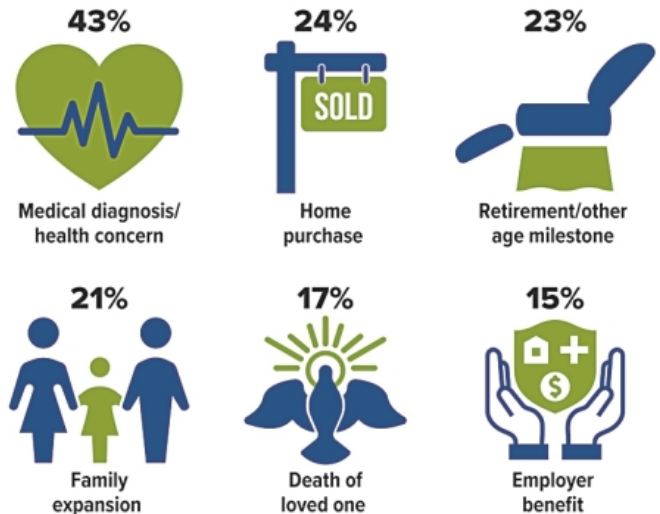
3. Don't think it's important

Unless you have personal experience with settling an estate, you may underestimate the consequences of dying without a will (called dying intestate). Decisions

will be made by the court on your behalf, and your property will be distributed according to the laws of your state. Who is entitled to your assets will depend on those laws, and handling that when there is no will can be especially complicated, time-consuming, stressful, and expensive for your family.

Motivating Situations

Almost one out of four Americans without a will say that nothing would motivate them to get one. Here are the percentages of those without a will who say these situations would motivate them.



Source: 2024 Wills and Estate Planning Study, Caring.com (multiple responses allowed)

4. Family dynamics are complex

Putting off drafting a will might seem logical when you are facing deep-rooted family issues or complicated situations. Why not just leave it to others to sort out after you're gone? Unfortunately, not having a legal document that outlines your specific intentions can make an already difficult situation worse. Leaving the disposition of your assets up to the court to decide may have unintended consequences for family members and lead to irreparable rifts or even litigation.

A will is only part of an estate plan

Finally, as important as a will is, it's just one component of your estate plan. You may need other legal documents such as trusts, powers of attorney, and advance medical directives to fully address your needs. Ask an estate planning attorney to evaluate your individual situation and help you put a plan in place.

1) 2024 Wills and Estate Planning Study, Caring.com

Do You Know Your Medicare Coverage Options?

There are two ways to obtain Medicare coverage: (1) Original Medicare (Part A hospital insurance and Part B medical insurance), often combined with a Medigap supplementary policy and a Part D prescription drug plan; and (2) Medicare Advantage (Part C), which replaces Original Medicare and often includes prescription drug coverage as well as features similar to those provided by a Medigap policy.

New beneficiaries can choose among these options when they enroll, while current beneficiaries can make changes during the annual Open Enrollment Period from October 15 to December 7 (see chart). Some changes can also be made at other times of the year.

Original Medicare with Medigap and Part D

Original Medicare is administered directly by the federal government and includes standardized premiums, deductibles, copays, and coinsurance payments. While these out-of-pocket costs are relatively moderate for doctor visits, laboratory tests, short hospital stays, and other medical services, there is no out-of-pocket maximum, so a serious illness or extended hospital stay could be financially devastating.

For this reason, beneficiaries often purchase a Medigap policy offered by private insurers, which pays nearly all or a percentage of Medicare out-of-pocket costs, and for some services not covered by Medicare such as emergency medical care outside the United States. In most states, Medigap policies are labeled by letter (for example, Plan A). Benefits for each plan are standardized, but premiums vary by insurance company, location, gender, tobacco use, and marital status.

The best time to buy a Medigap policy is when you first enroll in Medicare Part B. You then have a six-month period during which you can buy any Medigap policy in your state for the same premium the insurance company charges to healthy enrollees, even if you have health problems. If you miss this opportunity, a company can charge you more for coverage or refuse coverage altogether, depending on your health.

Part D prescription drug plans are offered by private insurers under Medicare supervision. Monthly premiums, deductibles, and out-of-pocket costs vary by plan.




Medicare Advantage

Medicare Advantage (MA) is offered by private insurers but mostly funded by Medicare. These "all-in-one" plans are generally more cost-effective than the combined costs of Original Medicare, Medigap, and Part D. All MA plans have out-of-pocket maximums and may offer additional benefits such as dental care and eyeglasses. In return for lower costs, MA plans strongly encourage or require the use of

network providers and may deny claims that would be paid by Original Medicare.

Annual Open Enrollment

Medicare beneficiaries can make the following changes during annual Open Enrollment from October 15 to December 7, with changes effective January 1.

	Change from Original Medicare to a Medicare Advantage (MA) plan or from an MA plan back to Original Medicare
	Switch from one MA plan to another MA plan
	Join a Medicare Part D prescription drug plan, switch from one Part D plan to another, or drop Medicare prescription drug coverage completely

In addition, you can change from MA to Original Medicare or switch MA plans during the Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment Period from January 1 to March 31. You may also be able to make changes during other special enrollment periods.

Personalized comparisons

The best place to start exploring optional plans is at [medicare.gov/plan-compare](https://www.medicare.gov/plan-compare). After entering your zip code, you will have a choice to find a Medicare Advantage Plan, a Medicare Part D drug plan, or a Medigap policy. If you are already a Medicare beneficiary, you can save time by logging in to your online account, or create a new account. When exploring MA plans, be sure that your preferred providers are included in the plan's network. Recently, an increasing number of providers have left MA networks due to claim denials and stringent preauthorization requirements.¹

Open Enrollment offers the opportunity to change MA plans or return to Original Medicare. Keep in mind, however, that when you change from an MA plan to Original Medicare, you may pay a higher premium for a Medigap policy, or be unable to obtain a policy, depending on your health.

When exploring Part D drug plans, be sure to accurately enter the name, dosage, and frequency of your prescription drugs. Slight differences, such as a tablet vs. a capsule or generic vs. brand, can make a big difference in the cost of the medication. Note that Medicare Part D out-of-pocket costs will be capped at \$2,000 starting in 2025.²

1) KFF Health News, November 29, 2023

2) The Part D cap will be adjusted annually based on the change in Medicare Part D per capita spending (i.e., the amount that Medicare spends on each Part D beneficiary).

FAFSA for 2025-2026 School Year Opens December 1

For the second year in a row, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, commonly known as the FAFSA, will be delayed. The FAFSA for the 2025–2026 school year will open on December 1 instead of the typical October 1 date. Last year, despite a redesigned FAFSA that was supposed to be easier to complete, families faced a perfect storm — a delayed rollout, technical glitches, and processing delays, which led to confusion and late financial aid packages from colleges. By one estimate, as of March 2024, FAFSA completions for the class of 2024 were down 40% from the prior year, with only about 27% of the class of 2024 successfully completing a FAFSA, compared to 45% for the class of 2023.¹

Tips for submitting the FAFSA

The 2025–2026 FAFSA is the same as the redesigned, streamlined version from last year. Here's what you need to know about completing the form.

- **FSA ID.** To file the FAFSA online, parents and students each need their own FSA ID, which is a username/password combination that functions as a legal signature. You can create an FSA ID online, and the same ID can be used for all years of college.
- **Income and assets.** The FAFSA requires two key types of information: income and assets. For income, the 2025–2026 FAFSA will rely on information from your 2023 federal income tax return (it essentially looks back two years). This data will be automatically imported from the IRS. For assets, the FAFSA will

use the value of your assets as of the date you submit the form.

- **Student Aid Index.** The FAFSA calculates a figure called the "Student Aid Index," which is a yardstick that measures aid eligibility. Colleges use this figure to craft a financial aid package that attempts to meet a student's financial need (colleges are not obligated to meet 100% of need).
- **Eligibility for Direct Loans.** All students who file the FAFSA are eligible for an *unsubsidized* federal Direct Loan, regardless of financial need. But students who demonstrate need on the FAFSA are eligible for a *subsidized* Direct Loan, which means the government pays the interest that accrues during school and any loan deferment periods. Students with a high level of financial need may also qualify for a federal Pell Grant.
- **College aid.** Some colleges might require the FAFSA before awarding students certain college-based aid, including merit scholarships and grants, so filing it can still be beneficial, even if a student does not plan on taking out any federal loans.

The FAFSA must be submitted every year for students to be eligible for federal aid. For more information, families can visit the federal student aid website at studentaid.gov.

1) National College Attainment Network, April 8, 2024

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