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Social Security Planning for Retirement

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Women and Claiming Freedom

In 2025, the Social Security program celebrates 90 years of delivering its founding promise: providing retirement security for American workers. Established as a modest safety net for wage earners, the program quickly expanded to include dependent, survivor, and disability benefits, broadening its relevance and impact, particularly for women.

Ironically, and perhaps fittingly, the first monthly Social Security check, dated January 31, 1940, was paid to a never-married woman named Ida May Fuller, a retired legal secretary from Vermont, in the amount of \$22.54. Over the next 35 years, she collected nearly 1,000 times the \$24.75 that she paid into the system during her three working years under the new program, a striking example of the longevity-focused protection Social Security was designed to provide.

Ida's story is more than a historical footnote. It is a timely reminder that Social Security remains one of the most reliable and consistent sources of retirement income, especially for women. And in today's uncertain economic landscape, that reliability is more critical than ever. Concerns about market volatility, persistent inflation, rising healthcare costs, and the projected depletion of the Social Security trust funds have left many Americans questioning how, and whether, they can retire securely. For women, these concerns are amplified

by a unique set of challenges often underappreciated in traditional retirement planning conversations.

Behind the Proverbial 8-Ball

One of the most consistent contributors to retirement insecurity among women is lower lifetime earnings. According to the [SSA's March 2025 beneficiary data](#), a man's average monthly retirement benefit is \$2,203, compared to just \$1,801 for a woman — a gap of roughly 22%. When spousal and survivor benefits are included, the disparity widens even more. Further, according to [SSA's projections by beneficiary type](#), over one-third of women rely on a spouse's or ex-spouse's record for a portion of their overall benefit. 6-8% rely exclusively on their spouse to receive a Social Security benefit.

The underlying causes of this earnings gap are as varied as the women behind the numbers. The gender wage gap, while narrowing, still results in lower lifetime earnings. Women are also more likely to experience non-linear career paths, often pausing or scaling back their professional lives to care for children or aging parents. A recent [Nationwide study](#) found that 67% of women surveyed said caregiving responsibilities had negatively impacted their ability to save for retirement. These career interruptions limit contributions to retirement plans

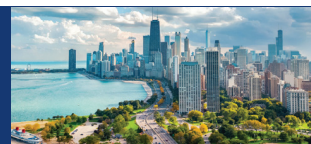
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