

POLICY AGENDA



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Moving Forward: Solutions to The Retirement Crisis for Women and LGBTQIA+ People

Introduction:

Just as the challenges women and LGBTQIA+ people face throughout their lives are interconnected, mutually reinforcing, and systemic, so are the solutions to the resulting retirement inequities. We need to make bold policy changes to ensure a secure and dignified retirement for women and LGBTQIA+ people, especially those facing multiple forms of discrimination.

Low wages, unequal pay, and workplace discrimination mean lower lifetime earnings, and thus lower retirement savings and income. Policies that would increase wages, promote fair pay, and dismantle workplace discrimination include:

- **Raise the minimum wage and set higher standards for employers**, so that every job pays fair wages—without exclusions for tipped workers, disabled workers, or any other worker—and provides working people with the input and stability in their work hours, as well as the paid time off, that they need to balance their jobs with the rest of their lives.
- **Grant workers input and predictability in their work schedules**, along with access to full-time hours for workers who want them.
- **Increase opportunity** by, for example, strengthening and enforcing protections against workplace discrimination, requiring pay transparency, and supporting worker organizing and collective bargaining.
- **Expand refundable tax credits** in ways that support the families most in need of assistance, including by making the Child Tax Credit fully refundable and restoring the 2021 expansions to the Earned Income Tax Credit for low-paid workers not claiming children.
- **Make sure that older women workers are able to access unemployment insurance**, including if they are unable to continue on the job because of caregiving responsibilities.

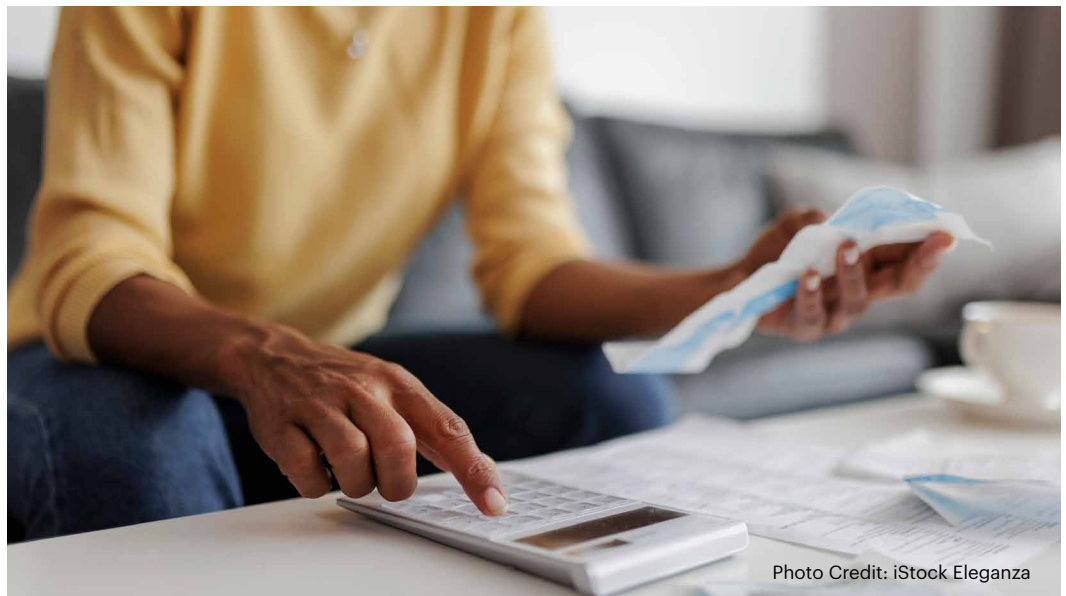


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A broken caregiving system hurts women the most. Investments and policies that would better support and value caregiving include:

- **Make sustained and robust investments in child care and home- and community-based services** to ensure that everyone has access to high-quality care and that child care workers, home care workers, and many more essential service providers have good jobs.
- **Establish a national, comprehensive paid family and medical leave program** that will guarantee at least twelve weeks of paid parental, caregiving, and personal medical leave, and will replace at least two-thirds of workers' average wages (with higher replacement rates for the lowest-paid workers so they can meaningfully access this benefit).
- **Ensure fair scheduling and paid sick leave** so that every job provides working people with the input and stability in their work hours, as well as the paid time off, that they need to balance their jobs with the rest of their lives. These policies should include paid safe days that allow survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and/or stalking to seek services related to these incidents.

Health inequities and discrimination in health care lead to higher costs and worsen health outcomes. Policies that would support health and provide comprehensive, equitable health care include:

- **Guarantee access to comprehensive health care**, inclusive of reproductive health care, that is affordable and free from discrimination, at every stage of life. This would reduce coverage and care inequities, eliminate many barriers to good health, and yield significant health benefits over the lifespan of women, especially women of color.
- **Expand eligibility for Medicaid and Medicare savings programs.** Federally, expanding and aligning eligibility for Medicare Savings Programs and the Part D Low-Income Subsidy would ensure more women enrolled in Medicare with limited income can get help with premiums and cost-sharing.
- **Increase access to mental health care** by incorporating mental health care into existing care delivery systems, increasing the number of geriatric professionals in behavioral health, and incentivizing providers to care for older adults under payment models.
- **Ensure healthcare free from discrimination** by enshrining robust antidiscrimination protections into state law, addressing bias in delivery care systems and establishing clear consequences to systemic deviations from standards of care.
- **Make clear connections between health and economic security**, including by developing policies to address “weathering,” the increased likelihood of poorer health outcomes due to the cumulative wear and tear on the body caused by enduring systemic inequities.
- **Eliminate medical debt to reduce economic and emotional hardship.** Policies that expand health care affordability and benefits can reduce the amount of medical debt older women accrue. At the same time, states must preserve Medicaid retroactive coverage protections to ensure older women are not subject to high medical costs when they face a sudden medical emergency or need long-term services and supports unexpectedly. Federal investment in financial literacy programs, consumer protection programs, and services to assist older people in managing and reducing their debt while protecting their assets are also important strategies to help women achieve a secure retirement.
- **Increase research, education, and patient support for menopause and for chronic conditions that disproportionately impact women.** Reducing the chronic disease burden on older women is key to bettering their health status and economic security. Federal investment and programs that prioritize midlife health concerns are critical to improving the health care services available for older women.



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Women and LGBTQIA+ people with disabilities face even higher rates of poverty and economic insecurity than women and LGBTQIA+ people more generally, and experience significant disparities in caregiving, health inequities, and discrimination in the workforce. Detailed policy recommendations to support working women with disabilities can be found at <https://nationalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/systems-transformation-guide-disability-economic-justice-jobs-employment.pdf>. Income supports for older disabled people, like Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), have restrictive eligibility requirements, are difficult to access, and are insufficient to meet basic needs. And other public benefits that have exceptions or expanded eligibility for people with disabilities often have burdensome administrative requirements. Detailed policy recommendations to make public benefits better serve and support women with disabilities can be found at <https://nationalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/systems-transformation-disability-economic-justice-public-benefits.pdf>.

Retirement systems that are based on employment put women and LGBTQIA+ people at a disadvantage. Policies that would boost retirement savings and benefits include:

- **Lift the cap on earnings subject to payroll tax.** Social Security is primarily funded through payroll taxes, which are imposed on wages up to the taxable maximum of \$168,600 (in 2024). Eliminating the tax cap would raise more revenues that would help stabilize the Social Security Trust Fund and ensure that Social Security can pay for full benefits beyond 2033.
- **Create a caregiver credit** to boost Social Security retirement benefits for people who have taken time out of the workforce to care for children or family members. This would especially help women, who are more likely to be caregivers for their families.
- **Improve Social Security's Special Minimum Benefit (SMB)**, an alternative benefit formula for workers who had low earnings for many years. The current SMB serves virtually no beneficiaries, and provides an annual benefit that is below the federal poverty level. Improving the SMB, such as by making it easier to earn credits, allowing workers to earn partial credit (as they can under the regular Social Security formula), indexing initial benefits to wage growth, and increasing the maximum level of the benefit to 125% of the federal poverty level, would enable women and LGBTQIA+ people, who are overrepresented in the low-paid workforce and who have lower lifetime earnings, to qualify for and meaningfully benefit from the SMB.
- **Increase access to payroll deduction IRAs** among employers who do not offer pensions or retirement savings plans so working women and LGBTQIA+ people have the chance to save for retirement even if their employers do not offer retirement savings plans.
- **Increase access to emergency savings plans** at work, to make it easier for women and LGBTQIA+ people to save for a rainy day through payroll deductions. Having emergency savings means people do not have to drain their retirement savings when they face unexpected expenses.
- **Expand the refundable Savers Credit**, a tax credit that provides a government "match" for people with low and moderate incomes to boost their retirement savings, to help women, people of color, and LGBTQIA+ people who have lower incomes and assets.

Older women and LGBTQIA+ people experience higher rates of poverty and economic insecurity. Economic policies that would better support their well-being include:

- **Modernize the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program**, which is outdated in ways that harm beneficiaries. Increase SSI benefits, which are available to people with extremely low incomes ages 65 or older, and children and adults with a severe disability, so that benefits exceed the federal poverty level. Increase the level of assets that beneficiaries may have (currently \$2,000 for individuals and \$3,000 for married couples), to support beneficiaries' financial stability and ability to manage unexpected expenses.
- **Expand nutrition and housing assistance**, as well as help with other basic goods and services, to boost the ability of older women and LGBTQIA+ people to afford necessities. Also conduct outreach so the older women and LGBTQIA+ people most in need of these supports can access them.
- **Increase funding for administration of Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)**. SSDI insures workers who have experienced a serious and long-lasting disability, providing modest but essential income to support them and their families if they are unable to work. But applicants for SSDI benefits face significant delays—up to 7 months in early 2024—in processing their claims, and in 2023, 30,000 people died while waiting for their claims to be resolved. Increasing funding for the Social Security Administration would support additional staff to review and process benefit claims.

Conclusion

Enacting and implementing policy solutions that address the lived experiences of women and LGBTQIA+ people will increase their economic security throughout their lives and further the secure, dignified, and healthy retirement they deserve.

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