AWM Financial Planning

What is IRMAA?

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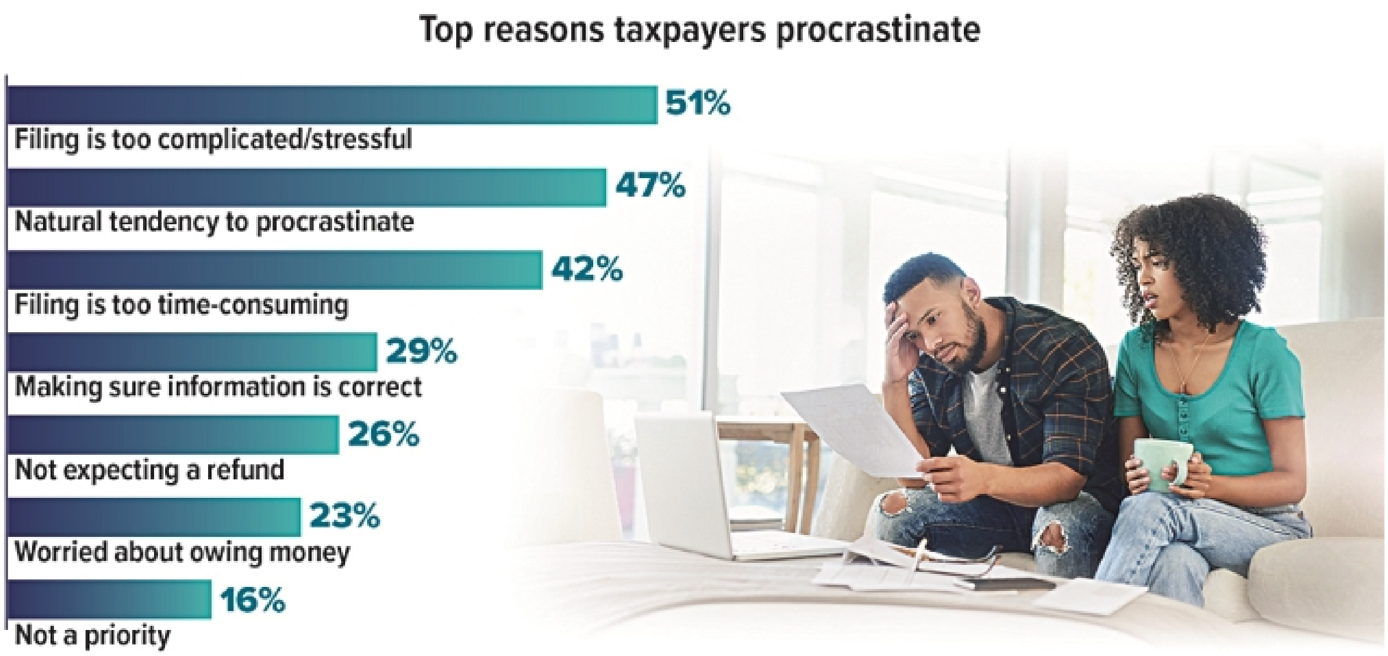
Newsflash: retirement is expensive! One expense that you may have control over with tax planning is IRMAA. IRMAA is the abbreviation for the Medicare Income-Related Monthly Adjustment and is a premium surcharge added to the base premium for Part B and Part D if your income is above a certain level. For 2025, one pays an extra monthly premium (per participant) of $74.00 for Part B and $13.70 for Part D. The IRMAA surcharge is calculated on your Modified Adjusted Gross Income (MAGI) and scales up as your income increases. IRMAA surcharges begin at a MAGI of $106,000 for single filers and $212,000 for married filing jointly. The Social Security Administration calculates the extra premium, and for 2025 recipients, is based on 2023 income.

IRMAA premiums can be triggered by infrequent items such as a big stock sale, Roth conversion or a large bonus – all of which you may have some control on timing. Good tax planning may avoid, or reduce, this expense. Give us a call to discuss!

Tax Time: Procrastination Is Common and Can Be Costly

April 15, 2025, is the tax filing deadline for most taxpayers. In a nationwide survey, three out of 10 Americans said they wait until the last minute to file their tax returns, and 50% rush to complete the filing process as quickly as possible. If you procrastinate, you might face an unexpected tax bill with little or no time to come up with the money. It may also be too late to act on opportunities to reduce your tax burden. In fact, taking a thoughtful approach to tax planning throughout the year could help you keep more of your earnings and improve your finances.



Source: Chamber of Commerce, 2024

Catch Up for a More Comfortable Retirement

A 2024 survey found that only a third of U.S. workers age 50 and older feel that their savings contributions have them on track to enjoy a comfortable retirement.[1]

If your retirement account balance is lagging — or even if your nest egg seems robust — you can give your savings a boost by taking advantage of catch-up contributions that are available to those age 50 or older. This is often a time when salaries are highest, and you may thank yourself later if you put your current income to work for the future.

This opportunity is available for IRAs and employer-sponsored retirement plans — and there is a new opportunity in 2025 for some workers to make even bigger contributions to employer plans. You might be surprised by how much your savings could grow late in your working career.

Employer plans

Employer plans offer the most generous tax-advantaged contribution limits, and employers often match employee contributions up to a certain percentage of salary. Employer plan contributions for a given tax year must be made by December 31 of that year, but employers will generally allow you to adjust your contributions during the year.

For 2025, the individual contribution limit for 401(k), 403(b), and government 457(b) plans is $23,500, with an additional $7,500 catch-up contribution for those age 50 and older, for a total of $31,000. However, beginning in 2025, workers age 60 to 63 can make a larger catch-up contribution of $11,250 for a total of $34,750. Like all catch-up contributions, the age limit for this "super catch-up" is based on age at the end of the calendar year. It is not prorated, so you are eligible to make the full $11,250 contribution if you are age 60 to 63 at any time during 2025 and do not turn 64 by the end of the year.

SIMPLE retirement plans have lower but still generous limits: $16,500 in 2025 plus an additional $3,500 catch-up contribution for employees age 50 and older or an additional $5,250 for employees age 60 to 63. (Some plans have higher standard and age-50 catch-up limits: $17,600 and $3,850, along with the $5,250 super catch-up.)

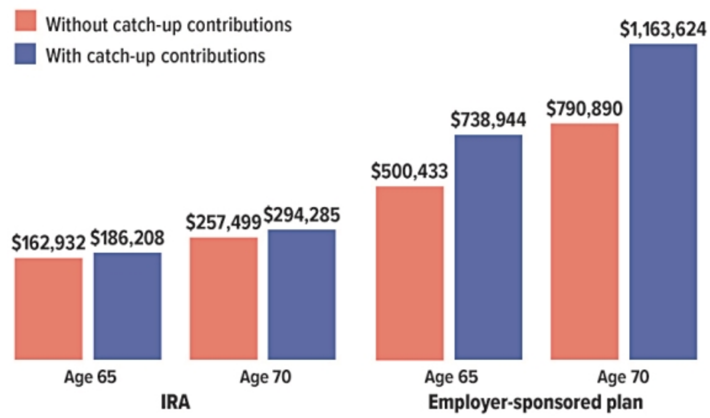
IRAs

Unlike contributions to employer plans, IRA contributions can be made for the previous year up to the April tax filing deadline. So you can make contributions for 2024 up to April 15, 2025, and contributions for 2025 up to April 15, 2026. Make sure your IRA administrator knows which year the contributions are for.

The federal contribution limit in 2024 and 2025 for all IRAs combined is $7,000, plus a $1,000 catch-up contribution for those 50 and older — for a total of $8,000 each year. An extra $1,000 might not seem like much, but it could make a big difference by the time you're ready to retire. If only one spouse is working, a married couple filing a joint return can contribute to an IRA for each spouse as long as the working spouse has earned income that is at least equivalent to both contributions.

Savings Boost

Additional amounts that might be accrued between age 50 and age 65 or 70, based on making maximum annual contributions at current limits to an IRA or an employer-sponsored plan (includes additional catch-up for ages 60 to 63)



Assumes a 6% average annual return. If annual inflation adjustments to maximum contribution amounts were included, actual totals could be higher. This hypothetical example of mathematical compounding is used for illustrative purposes only and does not represent any specific investment. It assumes contributions are made at end of the calendar year. Rates of return vary over time, particularly for long-term investments. Fees and expenses are not considered and would reduce the performance shown if they were included. Actual results will vary.

IRA MAGI limits

IRA contributions up to the combined limit can be traditional, Roth, or both. If an individual is an active participant in an employer-sponsored retirement plan, the ability to deduct traditional IRA contributions phases out in 2025 at a modified adjusted gross income (MAGI) of $79,000–$89,000 for single filers or $126,000–$146,000 for joint filers ($77,000–$87,000 and $123,000–$143,000 in 2024). If one spouse is an active participant in an employer-sponsored plan and the other is not, deductions for the nonparticipant phase out from $236,000–$246,000 in 2025 ($230,000–$240,000 in 2024).

The ability to contribute to a Roth IRA phases out in 2025 at a MAGI of $150,000–$165,000 for single filers and $236,000–$246,000 for joint filers ($146,000–$161,000 and $230,000–$240,000 in 2024).

1) AARP Financial Security Trends Survey, 2024

Debt After Death: What Happens to Debt When Someone Dies?

Losing a loved one is never easy. In addition to the emotional challenges you may face, you might also be worried about what will happen to their debts once they are gone.

Generally, with limited exceptions, when a loved one dies you will not be liable for their unpaid debts. Instead, their debts are typically addressed through the settling of their estate.

How are debts settled when someone dies?

The process of settling a deceased person's estate is called probate. During the probate process, a personal representative (known as an executor in some states) or administrator if there is no will, is appointed to manage the estate and is responsible for paying off the decedent's debts before any remaining estate assets can be distributed to the beneficiaries or heirs. Paying off a deceased individual's debts can significantly lower the value of an estate and may even involve the selling of estate assets, such as real estate or personal property.

Debts are usually paid in a specific order, with secured debts (such as a mortgage or car loan), funeral expenses, taxes, and medical bills generally having priority over unsecured debts, such as credit cards or personal loans. If the estate cannot pay the debt and no other individual shares legal responsibility for the debt (e.g., there is no cosigner or joint account holder), then the estate will be deemed insolvent and the debt will most likely go unpaid.

Estate and probate laws vary, depending on the state, so it's important to discuss your specific situation with an attorney who specializes in estate planning and probate.

What about cosigned loans and jointly held accounts?

A cosigned loan is a type of loan where the cosigner agrees to be legally responsible for the loan payments if the primary borrower fails to make them. If a decedent has an outstanding loan that was cosigned, such as a mortgage or auto loan, the surviving cosigner will be responsible for the remaining debt.

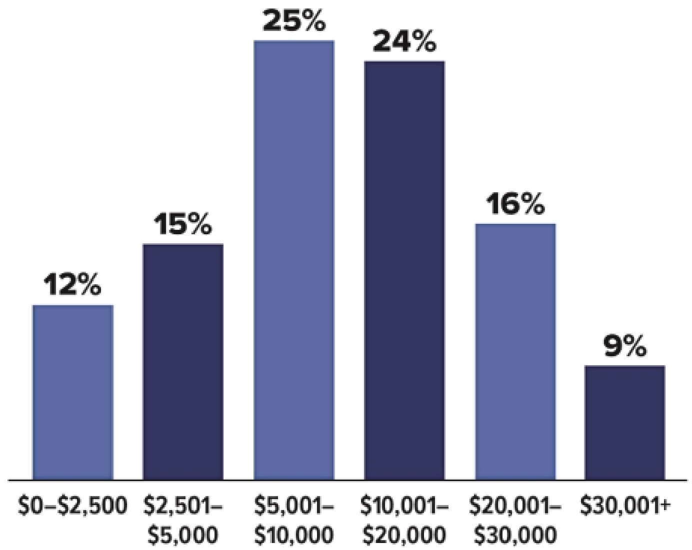
For cosigned private student loans, the surviving cosigner is usually responsible for the remaining loan balance, but this can vary depending on the lender and terms of the loan agreement.

If a decedent had credit cards or other accounts that were jointly held with another individual, the surviving account holder will be responsible for the remaining debt. Authorized users on credit card accounts will not be liable for any unpaid debt.

Are there special rules for community property states?

If the decedent was married and lived in a community property state, the surviving spouse is responsible for their spouse's debt as long as the debt was incurred during the marriage. The surviving spouse is responsible even if he or she was unaware that the deceased spouse incurred the debt.

How much debt Americans expect to leave behind when they die



Source: Debt.com Death and Debt Survey, 2024

What if you inherit a home with a mortgage?

Generally, when you inherit a home with a mortgage, you will become responsible for the mortgage payments. However, the specific rules will vary depending on your state's probate laws, the type of mortgage, and the terms set by the lender.

Can you be contacted by debt collectors?

If you are appointed the personal representative or administrator of your loved one' s estate, a debt collector is allowed to contact you regarding outstanding debts. However, if you are not legally responsible for a debt it is illegal for a debt collector to use deceptive practices to suggest or imply that you are. Even if you are legally responsible for a debt, under the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (FDCPA), debt collectors are not allowed to unduly harass you.

Finally, beware of scam artists who may pose as debt collectors and try to coerce or pressure you for payment of your loved one's unpaid bills.

The Lock-In Effect: Will It Ever Let Go of the Housing Market?

Since 2022, many homeowners have been reluctant to sell and move because they would have to finance their next homes at much higher rates than they pay on their current mortgages. According to a federal analysis, this widespread conundrum — known as the *lock-in effect* — has contributed to a nationwide housing shortage and a steep rise in home prices. Geographies with high home values, and affluent borrowers with larger mortgages, appear to be more sensitive to the lock-in effect.[1]

In the second quarter of 2024, the average mortgage had a fixed rate that was 2.54 percentage points lower than the current market rate for similar loans. This was below the peak of 3.06 percentage points reached near the end of 2023 but still much greater than the 0.86 percentage-point difference in Q2 2022.[2]

Here's a look at several market trends that may influence the decisions of homeowners and buyers in the coming months.

Home prices

In 2024, the median price of an existing single-family home increased 6.0%, mainly because the supply of homes for sale was below normal levels.[3] Home prices have risen more than 35% nationwide since the beginning of 2021.[4]

Mortgage rates

The Federal Reserve began to cut the benchmark federal funds rate in September 2024, a long-awaited shift that many people hoped would usher in lower mortgage rates. But the rates for 30-year fixed mortgages (which tend to track the yield on the 10-year Treasury note) are influenced by a mix of complex factors that includes Fed policies, longer-term inflation expectations, and government bond market dynamics, so they could stay elevated for some time. The average rate for a 30-year fixed mortgage was still hovering above 6.5% in February 2025.[5]

Supply shift

Housing inventory is still tight in many markets, but October 2024 marked the 12th straight month of growth. In December 2024, the supply of homes for sale was up 16.2% from a year earlier.[6] If this trend continues in 2025, qualified borrowers and downsizing or move-up buyers with plenty of cash may find more desirable options to choose from in their target price range and in some cases may wield more negotiating power.

The lock-in effect has already begun to ease because some households want or need to sell regardless of current rates. Although the lock-in effect may linger to some degree for years to come, it could fade more quickly if mortgage rates fall significantly.

1–2) Federal Housing Finance Agency, 2024; 3, 6) National Association of Realtors, 2025; 4) Dow Jones Indices, 2025; 5) Freddie Mac, February 2025