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THIS ISSUE

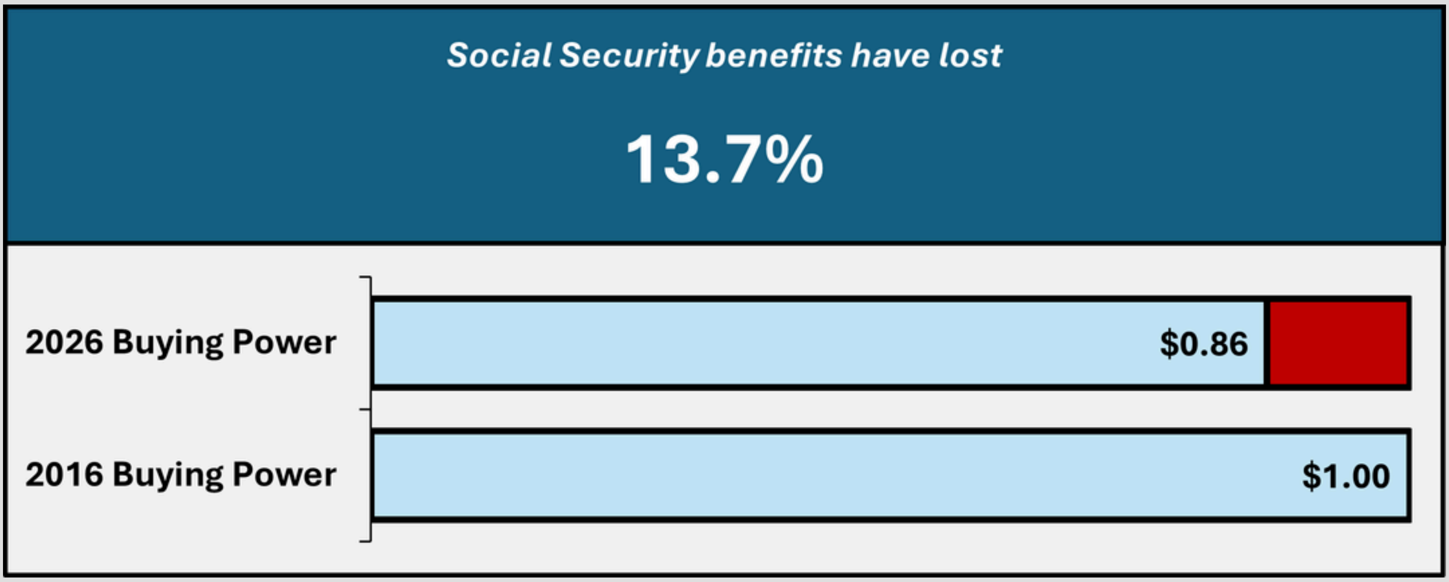
Social Security Benefits Have Lost 13.7 Percent of Their Buying Power Since 2016

By: John I. Adams, Chairman, TSCL

Last month, TSCL published the latest edition of its long-running *Loss of Buying Power* studies. This research (available for free) suggests that Social Security benefits in 2026 are only worth about 83.6 cents on the dollar compared to their 2016 value. The study estimates that benefits have lost 13.7 percent of their buying power due to Cost-of- Living Adjustments (COLAs) that do not keep up with real-world inflation.

These findings corroborate what seniors like you already tell us: They're under immense financial pressure! Our previous research has found that 79 percent of seniors believe inflation substantially outpaced the COLA in 2024, while 39 percent depend on Social Security for all of their income.

Insufficient COLAs, even small misses against inflation, quickly add up for seniors who depend on their benefits to get by. The *2026 Loss of Buying Power* estimates that, for the average senior shopping as affordably as possible,



overall inflation since 2016 comes out to about 43.55 percent, while the government figure used to calculate the COLAs (the CPI-W) measures 10-year inflation at 37.60 percent.

How Did TSCL Get Its Loss of Buying Power Number for 2026?

TSCL built its own proprietary dataset for this study. Primarily using a tool called the Wayback Machine, which acts like a time machine for the internet, we compiled historical prices for 70 products and services for 2016 and 2026. Then, we calculated the percentage change, making sure to weight different expense categories (such as housing and transportation) so they make up the right proportion of a typical budget when calculating inflation. We then compared our figure to the CPI-W's 10-year inflation figure.

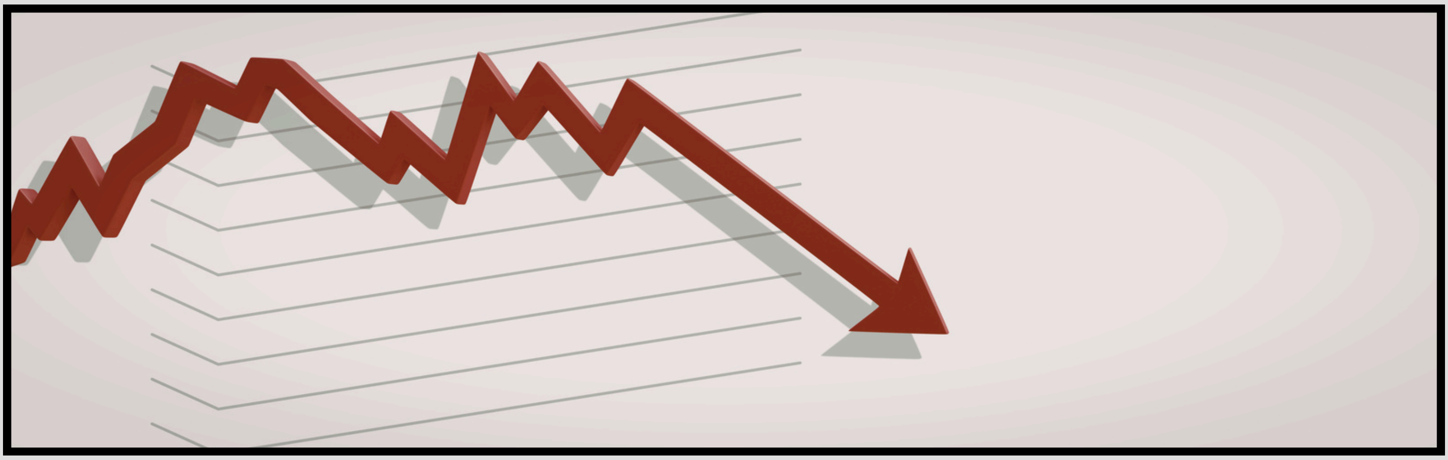
You can find a detailed description of how we built our dataset (including all our sources) in the study's methodology section. However, the most important detail to note is that we built our index as if we were shopping affordably. We asked ourselves, "How would a senior living on only Social Security shop?" as a guiding question when selecting data to include in the index.

Which Prices Rose the Most From 2016 to 2026?

Among the 70 items in the 2026 Loss of Buying Power Index, housing and transportation costs rose the most in total value since 2016. Homes, new cars, used cars, vehicle ownership costs (including fuel, insurance, and maintenance), and rent all made the top 10. Of these, the only item whose price didn't rise at a faster rate than overall inflation was the average used car price.

What Does Social Security's Lost Buying Power Mean for Retirees?

In two words, economic distress. TSCL's study estimates that benefits would need to rise by 15.7 percent across the board to make up for the purchasing power they've lost over the last decade. For the average Social Security beneficiary to get the same value from their benefits today as they did in 2016, we project that the monthly checks would need to increase by $295.85 per month, or about $3,550.20 annually.

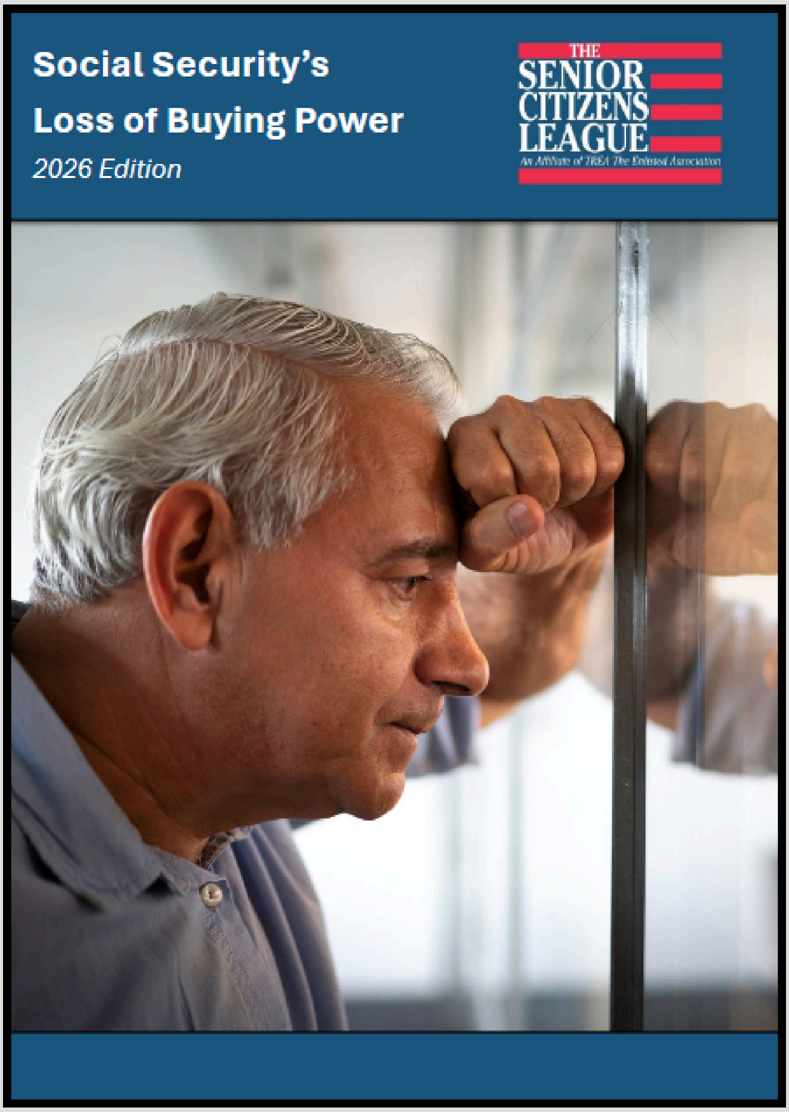


How Can Seniors Recover Their Lost Benefits?

This one is going to take an act of Congress. To bring benefits back into line with their historic purchasing power, Congress would need to approve a one-time increase of 15.7 percent to monthly checks. However, this would only rectify the situation for future payments, not make up the lost value for seniors who've watched their benefits steadily erode for years.

TSCL calls for Congress to issue seniors a raise on current benefits, then issue a one-time stimulus of $3,550.20 for all Social Security beneficiaries to at least partially refund people for years of lagging COLAs. Next, to fund these improved benefits, TSCL advocates for what our research identified as seniors' favorite way to strengthen Social Security's finances: Eliminating the tax loophole that lets people stop paying payroll taxes into Social Security on income above $184,500.

If you'd like to get involved, visit our website's Action Center. Here, you can sign our petitions for Congress, participate in the surveys we use to collect data for our policy research, and make toll-free calls to your Representative and Senators to express your support for strengthening Social Security for today's and tomorrow's Americans.



COLA Watch

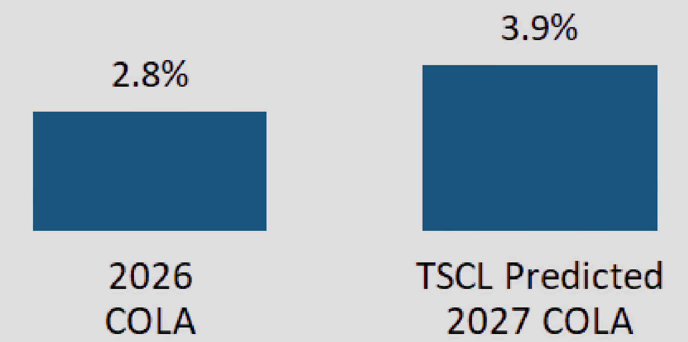
What will your benefits look like next year?

Average Social Security Benefit:

as of March 2026

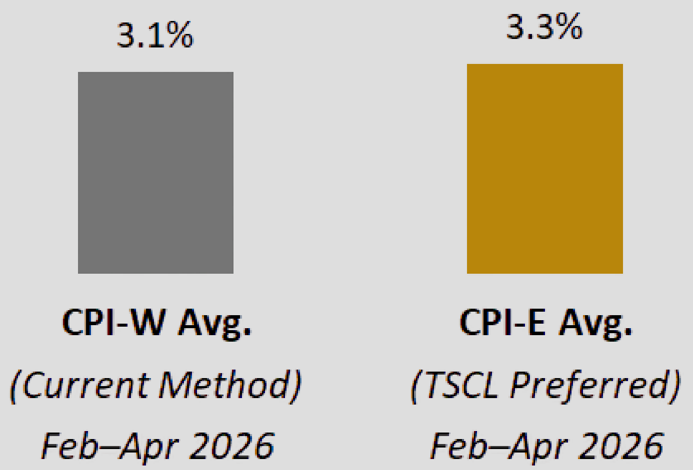
The 2027 COLA will be announced in

5 Months



A better inflation measure

would give you a better COLA.



Take a deep dive here.

New Proposal Would Cap Social Security Benefits at $100,000

By Danial Amjad, Policy Analyst

With automatic Social Security benefit cuts of up to 28 percent looming as soon as 2032, with the program paying out more in benefits than it takes in via taxes, a new proposal from the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget (CRFB) would cap the program's benefits to cut its expenses. Called the "Six Figure Limit," the proposal would limit Social Security benefits at $100,000 per year for couples (or $50,000 for individuals) as part of a broader effort to strengthen the program's finances.

This proposal would not change how benefits are calculated for most people. Instead, it would place a limit on the highest possible benefit amounts. Once a person's benefit formula reaches the cap, they would only be able to increase their benefits by waiting until after full retirement age to retire (your benefits can increase by up to 24 percent if you delay retirement until the age 70).

For most retirees, this change would have no impact. CRFB estimates show that only about 1 in 2,000 beneficiaries currently receive benefits above $100,000 annually. These retirees all had high earnings during their careers to qualify for these benefits. One version of the proposal would immediately index the cap to average wages, leaving this proportion relatively stable over time. However, two other versions would grow the proportion of people subject to the rule by waiting 20 or 30 years before indexing the cap to wages.

However, TSCL cannot support this policy. All three versions of the policy amount to a benefits cut, which our supporters overwhelmingly oppose, and the versions that would keep the benefits cap for 20-30 years are sneakily a huge benefits cut.

Think about it this way: The value of the dollar has fallen by approximately half since the turn of the century. If current inflation patterns held as we implemented a $100,000 cap on benefits and held it steady for 20 or 30 years, that cap would end up feeling a lot more like $50,000 (or $25,000 for couples).

While the policy might affect just 0.05 percent of beneficiaries today, this trick would make that figure go up quite a lot.

Instead, we support the policy that American seniors most favor. Right now, for people earning over $184,500, no income above that amount is taxed toward Social Security.

Eliminating this limit would extend the program's solvency by 90 years and allow us to pay more benefits, says Social Security's Chief Actuary. Our research finds that about three in four seniors support this policy, regardless of party affiliation. In other words, while the Six Figure Limit would certainly help program finances, we prefer the solution that accomplishes this without cutting benefits.

Sun and Move: Live Better, and Avoid the Doctor's Office

By Susan Stewart, Licensed Insurance Agent

When I sit down to write my piece for *The Advisor* every month, I consider what you need to know about Medicare that will make it easier to use. But this month, I can't get over the recurring thought, "to not need it." What if you could reduce the necessity of seeing the doctor? No networks to worry about. No copays to pay. Let's think about small changes in how you live, eat, and how that can have long-term payoff for your health.

Morning Sun:

According to an excellent blog post by Stephanie Thurrot at Banner Health, morning sun resets your circadian rhythm. Not only does that improve your sleep, but it also makes you more alert throughout the day. Early morning sun tells the brain to lower melatonin (a sleep hormone) and raise cortisol (an alertness hormone).

Even on a cloudy day, the sun's light is brighter than unnatural lights inside the house. Sure, it might require longer exposure, but the benefits remain. You'll reap the most benefits if you get morning light within 60 minutes of waking when your body is most sensitive to light. Consistent morning light exposure will not only improve sleep and increase alertness but also can lift symptoms of depression and anxiety. Can't go outside? Open the curtains. Sit near a sunny window and open it, if you can.

Fresh air! As I chat with clients, I frequently ask about the weather where they are. It's not uncommon for them to say, "I don't know. I've not looked outside or opened the curtains." And it's the middle of the afternoon!

If you live in a northern climate, as I do, Seasonal Affective Disorder is real. Depression, isolation, and anxiety increase over the winter months, and it seems Spring will never come. I started cruising decades ago in February to get some sun and lift myself out of Seasonal Affective Disorder. Winter and Spring sun feels like my body is literally drinking in light with long, thirsty gulps. Have you noticed how much you perk up when the days lengthen, as do the people around you? Natural light does that. No drugs or doctor visit required. People have long recognized sunlight as a natural source of Vitamin D. Your body needs Vitamin D to help you absorb calcium, necessary for bone health.

Things to remember: Don't stare directly into the sun. Just be IN it. If you wear tinted or UV glasses, take them off if you can. Try to get light within 60 minutes of waking.

Even 5 to 15 minutes will do wonders. If you're sitting in light, take deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth while you take it in. Your brain will perk up with the extra oxygen, and your anxiety level will dip while you breathe. Your sense of peace will increase with deep breath practice. In the morning, your body needs the nutrition of light.

Move Your Body:

Each person has their own ability and limitations to body movement. Start small if you must. Can you walk to the corner and back? If you do that every day, you'll soon be walking the second block and the third. You breathe fresh air. Can you hear birds singing? Your muscles, joints, heart, and lungs will expand their capacity to function. Stiffness eases. You will even get natural light and check off two healthy activities at once. If going outside isn't possible, start by doing movement from your chair. There are loads of chair yoga apps and ideas to help you stretch and breathe deeply, even while sitting.

Unlike the quick fix we expect with medicine, sun and movement will become more and more beneficial with consistency. Stick with them, and you'll see results. You could even lower your blood pressure and insulin levels. Wouldn't it be wonderful to decrease or even no longer need some prescription drugs you currently use? You may need less pain medication because your body aches less. To a lot of my clients, the thought of getting off any medication is a welcome idea. It requires your effort and accountability. There is no cost to either activity, but both offer exponentially increasing benefits that your healthcare professional would confirm.

Next month, we will consider the truth that healthy food is medicine and discuss small dietary changes that can increase your health.

Legislative Update: New Law Would Reform Pharmacy Benefit Manager Practices

By Daisy Brown, Legislative Correspondent, TSCL

Do you remember when the government partially shut down back in February, when Congress couldn't come up with a deal to keep the lights on amid a political fight over funding for the Department of Homeland Security? Well, the law eventually passed to end that impasse, the 2026 Consolidated Appropriations Act, also made some pretty big changes affecting Medicare Part D.

The Act set forth new regulations governing the behavior of Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBMs), who are like middlemen between insurers, pharmacies, and drug manufacturers. Criticized for lack of transparency and helping drive up costs for patients, PBMs negotiate drug prices, manage lists of covered medications, and process pharmacy claims for patients and insurers.

Key provisions for PBMs in the 2026 Consolidated Appropriations Act include requiring PBMs to provide detailed, semiannual reporting on spending, rebates, and spread pricing arrangements. It prohibits PBMs from receiving Medicare Part D payments for anything other than market-value fees for services actually performed starting in 2028, and forces Part D sponsors to allow any pharmacy that meets standard contract terms to participate in their network starting in 2029.

These changes will likely benefit seniors over the long haul, with some power in the healthcare system shifting from middlemen and drug manufacturers back to the pharmacies. "The abuses of the dominant PBM middlemen are widely recognized, and this landmark federal action reflects the broad, bipartisan commitment to confront and remedy them," said Steven C. Anderson, president and CEO of the National Association of Chain Drug Stores, in a statement about the changes. "This is the most important federal achievement yet for PBM reform, and it will build and sustain momentum for further reforms where needed."

Social Security Brings Disability Reviews In-House

By Danial Amjad, Policy Analyst

The Social Security Administration (SSA) recently announced a change in how it handles Continuing Disability Reviews (CDRs), a key part of ensuring that disability benefits go to those who still qualify. CDRs are routine reviews used to determine whether someone receiving disability benefits continues to meet medical eligibility requirements. These reviews are required by law and help protect the long-term stability of the program while ensuring it fairly delivers benefits.

Historically, organizations called the Disability Determination Services (DDS), run by individual states, have handled CDRs. However, the new policy will transition the process to a centralized federal team known as Disability Case Review (DCR). This means SSA will now oversee all CDRs directly, not the states.

The goal of the policy change is to refocus the attention of state DDS services on expediting paperwork for people who make new disability claims or ask the states to reconsider their claims, and both processes currently face a massive backlog. According to the SSA's press release accompanying the rule change, the DDS claims backlogs sat at 831,000 as of February 2026, a 33 percent decrease from 2024, but still far too high. This move should drive further improvements.

For current beneficiaries, CDRs will continue as required, though they may be handled more uniformly under SSA's direct oversight.

This change reflects an ongoing effort to improve SSA's service quality that its commissioner, Frank Bisignano, first set out during his nomination hearing, "I will make the agency a premier services organization, as I have done multiple times with other institutions over my career," he said at the time, pointing to his experiences in C-level roles at financial technology firms that process even more payments than Social Security each month. His explicit goals? Improve phone waiting times, web user experiences, and (you guessed it), the disability backlog.

What's TSCL Working On This Month?

Gathering Petition Signatures

TSCL is actively gathering signatures on several petitions to shine a spotlight on challenges seniors face with Social Security and Medicare. We use these petitions to show Congress how important these issues are to our supporters. It is a vital part of our lobbying efforts.

Make your voice heard and sign one of our seven active petitions today:

- Address Social Security's Imminent Insolvency Now
- A Fair COLA for Social Security Benefits
- Pass the Social Security Expansion Act
- Protect Social Security from Harmful Cuts
- Provide a $1,400.00 Stimulus Check to Social Security Recipients
- $200 Social Security Increase for Six Months
- Expand Medicare to Include Vision, Hearing, and Dental Benefits.

Sign now!

Watch Our Webcast Recording on Social Security Myths, Facts and Fixes

On April 29th, TSCL hosted a webcast on Social Security's looming financial crisis. We explained what exactly it means when they say Social Security's going "insolvent" and what that means for beneficiaries. Then, we explored a few common misconceptions: What do people most often get wrong about insolvency? Last, we covered some potential fixes, focusing on the policies our research shows seniors most prefer.

If you'd like a preview of our Members-Only Webinar, a one-time free recording is available here.