Health & Retirement Services of Illinois

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OUR NEWS LETTER HRSI

In Our Newsletter

Best Credit Cards for 2015

by Tasha Lockyer **October 19, 2015**

Whether you've got a balance you can't fully pay off from some big purchases, are looking to earn some extra rewards or want to save up for that vacation, getting the right credit card can easily save you hundreds or thousands of dollars. With the economy on the upswing, right now credit card issuers are courting potential cardholders by offering spectacular bonuses, lengthy 0% intro APRs and generous reward programs. If your credit card falls short, it may be time to upgrade your wallet. Help improve your financial situation by taking advantage of these terrific credit card offers for 2015 while they're still available.

Best Cash Back Card : Blue Cash Preferred Card from American Express

The winner of our cash back card analysis, Blue Cash Preferred Card from American Express (a NextAdvisor advertiser) combines excellent cash back rewards with a generous 15-month 0% APR period. You'll earn **6% cash back at supermarkets** (on up to $6K in purchases annually), **3% at gas stations and select department stores** like Sears, JCP, Kohls, Nordstrom and Macy's, and **1% cash back on all your other purchases**. Plus, there's a **$150 bonus** after spending $1,000 in the first 3 months – pretty easy to earn if you use your card like a typical consumer. On top of this you can take advantage of its 0% intro APR for the first 15 months on purchases and balance transfers (although there is a 3% balance transfer fee). I really like this card because of its huge cash back potential. Anyone who spends a lot on groceries and gas can really rack up the cash back rewards. And you don't have to sign up quarterly to get your cash back – it's automatic. There is a $75 annual fee, which can be off-putting to some, but honestly if you use your card like a typical consumer you should more than earn this back. If you prefer a card with no annual fee, generous and straightforward cash back rewards (effective 2% cash back on everything!) and a 15-month 0% intro APR period, check out the Citi Double Cash Card. Or to find out which cash back card is the best for your spending patterns, use our free Personalized Cash Back Calculator.

Best Balance Transfer Card: Chase Slate

If you overdid it on some shopping purchases and can't fully pay off your balance on one or more credit cards, Chase Slate is the card for you. Instead of starting to rack up huge interest fees, you can transfer your balances to the Chase Slate. With a **15-month 0% intro APR** on balance transfers and purchases, as well as **no balance transfer fees** and no annual fee, this card can save you a ton in interest payments. It's the only card we've found that offers both no balance transfer fee and a lengthy 0% intro APR. And unlike other cards with stellar features like these, people with merely good credit (often viewed as a credit score above 660) have a chance to be approved for this card. Note that the $0 balance transfer fee is only available for the first 60 days, but since the reason most people get this card is to transfer their balances immediately that shouldn't be an issue. If you're in the market for a balance-transfer card and aren't sure which one is best for your situation, take a look at our free Balance Transfer Calculator to determine which card will save you the most.

Best Low APR Card: Citi Simplicity

Leading the pack with an outstanding **21-month 0% intro APR** (the longest we've found) and no annual fee or late fees, Citi Simplicity will carry you well into 2017 interest-free. You'll enjoy a 0% intro APR period for 21 months (that's over 1.5 years!) on both purchases and balance transfers. Plus you won't pay late fees, penalty rates or an annual fee. Although we encourage our readers to pay their cards on time to maintain a healthy credit score, having no late fees and no penalty rates is a huge bonus for anyone who may be late with a payment every now and then. Now is the time to get this card, as any purchases you make will be interest-free until 2017. This extended 0% APR period will allow you to pay down your balance over time without costing you anything in interest fees. Note this card does have a 3% balance transfer fee.

Best Travel Card: Capital One Venture Rewards Card

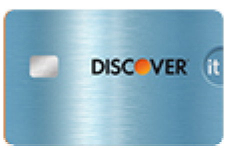
If you're saving up for that big vacation or are just a frequent traveler, you should strongly consider the Capital One Venture Rewards Card. It starts off with a 40,000 point bonus – equal to $400 in travel – after you spend $3,000 in the first 90 days. Plus you'll earn 2 miles for every dollar you spend. That's **2x miles on every purchase**, not just in certain categories or on special deals you have to sign up for quarterly. Using your earned miles is easy too- just book your travel and then redeem your miles as a statement credit against your travel costs. You can travel however and wherever you'd like; on any airline, at any hotel and with any rental car company (or cruise!). You can also make your travel plans however you would like; online, with a travel agent or over the phone. The bottom line is that you just need to pay for the travel with this card, it's as simple as that.

The Capital One Venture Rewards Card had a very high reward value of $2.00 for every $100 spent in both the flight and hotel categories in our Travel Rewards Credit Card Analysis. This high value means that your miles are worth more than with other popular travel cards on the market today. And an added perk is that when you travel outside the U.S. you won't have to pay foreign transaction fees and it has chip and signature technology. The card does have a $59 annual fee, but it's waived the first year so you'll have a year to determine if this card is right for you before having to pay an annual charge. As an added bonus, the card was designed for people with good to excellent credit, making it a little more accessible than cards that require excellent credit.

Best Card for Anyone with Good (but not Great) Credit: Chase Freedom

If you're in the market for a credit card but don't necessarily have terrific credit, Chase Freedom might be right up your alley. It was developed for those with "Good" credit, which is typically considered to be a credit score between 660 and 724 on the FICO credit score scale (if you don't know your credit score you can get it for free). The card doesn't skimp on extras either – to start with you'll get an enormous **$100 intro bonus** after spending just $500 in the first 3 months. You'll also earn **5% cash back on up to $1,500 in purchases in categories that rotate quarterly** (note: you need to register each quarter to receive this cash back), and 1% back on everything else you buy. Plus there's no annual fee to worry about paying. We really like this card because it has the great features that cards typically oriented towards consumers with great credit do, but it's available to those who might have a hit or two on the credit report.

Best Card for Students: Discover it for Students



Offering both cash back rewards and a 0% intro APR, Discover it for Students hits the mark for the college-bound. First off, you'll earn **5% cash back on up to $1,500 in purchases in categories that rotate quarterly** and 1% cash back on all other purchases. You will need to register online quarterly to receive the 5% back, but it's worth it. Plus, you can take advantage of a 6-month 0% intro APR on your purchases. That means you'll pay no interest at all for the first 6 months you have this card. We're not encouraging student debt, but it's nice to know if you put a gift or two and some textbooks on your card you'll have 6 months to pay for them without owing any interest. Just make sure you practice responsible use of your card and you'll be able to build a credit history and boost your credit score. And did we mention there is no annual fee AND no foreign transaction fees? So if you travel outside the U.S. you won't pay any additional fees to use your card, which can save you a ton of money. Overall this is a great card for any college (or grad school) student that combines strong rewards with a 0% intro APR on purchases and very reasonable ongoing interest rate.

Best Card for Businesses: Ink Cash Business Card

Ink Cash Business Card is a terrific pick for business. It serves up some great business-oriented features including generous cash back rewards, a 0% intro APR and no annual fee. Plus there's a **$200 bonus** after spending $3,000 in the first 3 months. In addition you'll earn **5% cash back on purchases at office supply stores and on landline, cellular phone, internet and cable TV services** (on up to $25,000 in combined purchases). You'll also get 2% cash back on the first $25,000 in combined purchases at restaurants and gas stations and an unlimited 1% cash back on all other purchases. On the downside, the 5% and 2% cash back rewards are issued annually on your account anniversary, but the 1% cash back rewards are issued monthly. The 12-month 0% intro APR on purchases and balance transfers can be very helpful to new businesses looking to make some big purchases they don't need to pay off for a year, or to mature businesses who just want to take advantage of paying no interest on their purchases and balance transfers for a year.

How Social Security Cuts Your Benefits If You're Still Working

And if you sign up for Social Security before full retirement age while staying on the job, your benefits could be doubly reduced.

By **Kimberly Lankford**, November 5, 2015

If I sign up for Social Security at age 62 but am still working, will that affect my benefits?

Yes. If you sign up

for benefits *before* your full retirement age (age 66 for workers born in 1943 through 1954), your benefits

will be reduced by as much as 25% for claiming early -- and reduced further if you earn more than a certain amount of money from a job or self-employment. (Investment earnings, pension benefits or withdrawals from an IRA or 401(k) don't count; pretax contributions to a 401(k) or other retirement plan do count if the amount is included in your gross wages.)

For 2016, you'll lose $1 from your benefits for each $2 you earn above $15,720. Say, for example, you turn 62 in January 2016 and plan to take Social Security

benefits. If you were to fully retire, you would receive $600 per month ($7,200 for the year). You know, however, that you will be working and earning $20,800 (which is $5,080 above the $15,720 limit). In that case, you should let Social Security know about the estimated extra income when you apply for benefits. Social Security will then withhold $2,540 of your Social Security benefits ($1 for every $2 earned over the limit).

Rather than withholding a portion of your benefits each month, Social Security will withhold all benefit

payments from January 2016 through May 2016. (Because benefits will be withheld for the full month of May, the total amount withheld will, in this example, be $3,000 rather than $2,540.) Beginning in June 2016, you will receive your $600 benefit and continue to receive that much every month for the rest of the year. In 2017, you will receive the additional $460 that was withheld in May 2016. For more examples, see Social Security's How We Deduct Earnings From Benefits.

A different limit applies in the year you reach *full* retirement age. In that year, you'll lose $1 for every $3 in earnings over $41,880 until the month you reach full retirement age. At that point, there's no earnings test; you can keep all of your benefits, no matter how much you earn.

What happens if you are subject to the earnings test and you make more or less than you estimated? When you file your tax return, the IRS will let the Social Security Administration know how much wage and self-employment earnings you report. That figure will be compared with your estimate, and the government will reconcile the books by either sending you a check -- if your estimate of earnings was too high and the earnings test withheld too much of your benefits -- or requiring you to pay the balance.

If you unexpectedly return to work and anticipate exceeding the earnings test, let the SSA know of the change in circumstances as soon as possible so your benefits can be withheld. If the tax return you file shows earnings that should have triggered reduced benefits, you'll be asked to pay back the excess in a lump sum or see future benefits reduced.

Even though the earnings test affects your benefits, the money isn't lost forever. If your retirement benefits are withheld for several months because of your earnings, then your monthly benefit will be recalculated at your full retirement age and increased to make up for the months when your benefits were withheld because of the earnings test.

The New Retirement Plan That Banks Don't Want Seniors Knowing

November 11, 2015

When seniors visit the NewRetirement official website, they may be surprised to find out how much money they can receive through a Reverse Mortgage.

Still unknown to many, this brilliant retirement method is helping senior citizens across the country by eliminating their monthly mortgage payments and putting cash in their bank account through what's called a "Reverse Mortgage Loan". You can bet that your current mortgage holder might not be too thrilled about this, since they would be losing your business.

So while your mortgage holder may secretly hope you don't find out about how a Reverse Mortgage works, an innovative online tool by NewRetirement has been setup to educate homeowners about Reverse Mortgage loans and how much you are eligible to receive. This new retirement method has been ***gaining a lot of attention in 2015***. If eliminating your monthly mortgage payments, generating additional retirement cash, all while being able to live in your home during your lifetime sound good to you, it's vital you act now.

Millions of seniors across the country are in financial stress with high mortgage payments and other medical bills. Many are unable to work, while they are in need of extra retirement income. A Reverse Mortgage loan is often a great solution to eliminate your monthly mortgage payments and generate retirement cash. Calculate how much you can get now >>

What exactly is a Reverse Mortgage and How Does it Work?

A reverse mortgage is essentially a loan. You are borrowing against your home equity. You can get a lump sum amount, line of credit or get monthly checks. However, unlike traditional mortgages, with a reverse mortgage you do not have to pay back the money you have borrowed as long as you are living in the home.

Reverse Mortgages are ideal for you if:

- You'd like to eliminate your monthly mortgage payment, or if you struggle with bills every month. Could you use an extra $600-$1500 per month?
- You plan to stay in your home for the rest of your life.
- You could use the extra money that it provides you (tax free).
- You are 62 years or older and have 50% or more equity in your home.

Although a Reverse Mortgage sounds like a no-brainer, there are many things to consider when exploring this retirement method. Here are a few:

- **Interest:** Since a reverse mortgage is a loan, it does accumulate interest. But there are no monthly payments due on a reverse mortgage. So the amount you will eventually have to pay back does grow larger over time, but the loan isn’t due until you decide to sell your home or when both you and your spouse have died. (To avoid foreclosure, borrowers must keep property taxes & insurance paid up and keep the property in good repair.) The loan repayment amount will never exceed the value of your home.
- **Estate Value:** Your estate value may lower over time. Something to take into consideration if you plan to leave your assets to children.
- **Not Enough Cash Can Be Tapped:** If you have a lot of home equity, you might be frustrated that a Reverse Mortgage only enables you to use some of it. The HECM loan rules will evaluate your equity using

a maximum home value of $625,500, even if your home is worth more. However, your actual loan amount is determined by a calculation that uses the appraised value of your home, the amount of money you owe on the home, your age and current interest rates.

- **Complicated:** To many, Reverse Mortgage Loans are somewhat complicated. Luckily, NewRetirement has setup an innovative online tool to help homeowners find out if it's right for them and how much they can receive.

Where Do I Start?

With hundreds of Reverse Mortgage lenders and brokers available, it can take consumers hours to simply contact each one separately and request a quote. The good news is that there are services that will connect you with the best lender for you. One such service is NewRetirement, who can help you fully understand how a Reverse Mortgage works and also calculate how much money you can get with their innovative online tool.

If you would like more information on how a Reverse Mortgage works or if you'd like to calculate your loan amount you'll want to take this reverse mortgage suitability test. It takes about five minutes, and the service is 100% free. You have nothing to lose, except for your money problems!

Millions Face Premium and Deductible Sticker Shock under Obamacare

THE Fiscal TIMES

By Eric Pianin November 2015

Millions of Americans who recently began shopping for new health insurance coverage under Obamacare may be suffering from sticker shock.

Increases in 2016 premiums for health insurance coverage -- ranging from basic to top-flight policies -- will be in the double digits and easily eclipse premium hikes recorded between 2014 and 2015, according to a new analysis from consulting firm McKinsey & Co.

For instance, monthly premiums for the lowest-price Silver plan under the Affordable Care Act will rise by a median rate of 11 percent in the coming year, compared to just a 7 percent rate increase between 2014 and 2015, the study shows.

Across the board, the projected rate hikes for the lowest-priced options in each tier of coverage – Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum – will contrast sharply with those increases of the previous year.

The median cost of the Bronze plans, one of the most popular offerings because of its relatively low premiums, will rise by 13 percent in 2016, compared to the 7 percent increase in this year's premium. As for the high-end health insurance coverage for wealthier consumers, Gold's median premium rate will jump 15 percent compared to 8 percent last year while Platinum's rate will rise by 12 percent, compared to 10 percent this year.

The premium increases shouldn't come as much of a surprise because numerous health experts and critics of the program have been predicting sizeable increases since last summer. That's when a number of major insurers across the country sought regulatory approval for significant increases for 2016 to cover higher than anticipated claims from sick people who re-enrolled for individual policies, according to the Wall Street Journal.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), a leading opponent of Obamacare, told reporters earlier this week, "If you look at how it unfolded over the years, everything we predicted is coming true. Higher premiums, higher co-payments, higher deductibles, lost jobs."

The Affordable Care Act provides government subsidies in the form of federal tax credits for many lower-income Americans who must purchase insurance on their own because they can't obtain it through an employer or through a government program like Medicare. The federal subsidies will blunt the impact of price increases for some but not all enrollees for the 2016 coverage season.

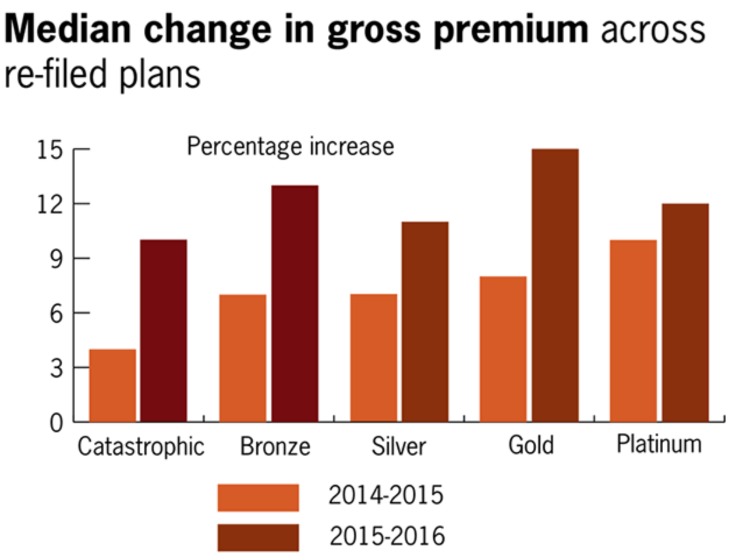
The price hikes will be a mixed bag throughout the country, with consumers in some states seeing relatively modest hikes while others slapped with median price increases for the lowest-price Silver plans of between 18 percent and 26 percent. According to the McKinsey study, consumers in Arizona will see a 20 percent increase, Montana and Tennessee 22 percent, Hawaii 25 percent and Oklahoma 26 percent.

According to Modern HealthCare, most enrollees on the federal-run insurance exchanges have chosen Bronze or Silver plans because of their relatively low premiums. From the looks of signups since the start of the new enrollment period on

Nov 1, those two plans remain the most popular. However, a majority of the options have high deductibles, in which people could potentially be stuck with large medical expenses before insurance kicks in, the publication reported.

Along those lines, Modern HealthCare cited the example of family of four living in Tinley Park, Ill, that makes $90,000 a year and has 69 health plan options available for 2016. But 58 of those 69 program options are considered high-deductible plans, meaning people covered by them must pay a certain percentage of their medical costs up-front before the coverage kicks in.

For the least expensive bronze plans, the average deductible for individuals is $5,731—and 11 percent increase. Silver plans are a little less onerous at $3,117 or an increase of 6 percent for individuals.



. Source: McKinsey Center for U.S. Health System Reform; Modern Healthcare graphic

Social Security, Medicare changes are coming with new budget law

Robert Powell, Special for USA November 12, 2015

President Obama signed into law a bipartisan budget bill last week that, among other things, changes — for better and worse — Social Security and Medicare laws. Here's a wrap-up:

• **File and suspend.** Currently, a married person — typically the higher wage earner in a couple — who's at least full retirement age could file for his or her own Social Security benefits and then immediately suspend those benefits while the spouse could file for spousal benefits. By doing this, the higher wage earner's benefits would grow 8% per year. In the meantime, the couple still get a Social Security check, and down the road the surviving spouse could get a higher benefit.

That option is ending for new filers starting May 1, 2016, so if you're interested, now's the time to apply. People already using this strategy will be grandfathered in until age 70.

• **Restricted application.** This is also being phased out. Currently, individuals eligible for both a spousal benefit based their spouse's work record and a retirement benefit based on his or her own work record could choose to elect only a spousal benefit at full retirement age, according to Social Security Timing. That would let them collect a higher benefit later on.

Under the new law, however, only those born Jan. 1, 1954, or earlier can use this option. Anyone younger will just automatically get the larger of the two benefits, according to Social Security Timing.

• **Social Security Disability.** The Social Security Disability trust was on pace to run out money next year and, as a result, millions of Americans were going to receive an automatic 19% reduction in their disability benefits in the fourth quarter of 2016. The new law fixes that by shifting payroll tax revenue from one Social Security trust fund — the Old-Age and Survivors Insurance Trust fund — to another, the Disability Insurance Trust fund.

• **Medicare Part B.** Some 30% of Medicare beneficiaries were expecting a 52% increase in their Medicare Part B medical insurance premiums and deductible in 2016. Under the new law, those beneficiaries — an estimated 17 million Americans — will pay about $119 per month, instead of $159.30, for Part B. (Some 70% of Medicare beneficiaries will continue to pay the same premium in 2016 as they did in 2015, $104.90.)

Beneficiaries, however, will also have to pay an extra $3 per month to help pay down a loan the government gave to Medicare to offset lost revenue. Plus, all Part B beneficiaries will see their annual deductible increase by 15% to about $166 in 2016.

Morning Briefing: Drug manufacturers under scrutiny from insurers, policymakers

by Steve Randall | Nov 16, 2015

Drug manufacturers under scrutiny from insurers, policymakers
As the cost and scale of prescription drugs continues to increase insurance companies are seeking assurances that they are getting value for money and legislators are also keen to ensure that the manufacturers are not being excessive in pricing.

Manulife is one of the insurers that is tightening its coverage for prescription drugs and will be examining new-to-market treatments to see if their effectiveness warrants their high cost. This will end the practice of new treatments being automatically added to the list of drugs that the insurer will pay for as soon as they are approved by Health Canada. It may mean that some clients will find claims for new treatments will be declined.

Meanwhile US lawmakers are increasing their efforts to curb excessive pricing by the pharmaceutical industry. The Wall Street Journal reports that The Health and Human Services Department is looking at plans to tackle the issue and presidential candidates across the parties are also adding pressure to the drugs makers.

The pharma industry says that legislators should be looking at insurers though. The Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America says that insurance companies forcing clients to pay deductibles before drugs coverage takes effect needs to be addressed.

HHS proposes more consumer-friendly rules for ACA health plans

By Amy Goldstein November 20

Federal health officials Friday proposed changes to the rules for health coverage sold through insurance exchanges, including a possible floor for how many doctors and other providers each plan must include.

The rules are intended to make it easier for consumers to compare their options in the marketplaces created under the Affordable Care Act. They would define standard deductibles and co-payments, and allow insurers to sell plans with that specific benefit design.

The proposals, released by the Health and Human Services Department, come as the third enrollment season is underway in the federal and state exchanges for people choosing coverage for the coming year. The draft rules, an annual ACA ritual, will begin a debate about what guidelines insurers will have to follow to sell exchange policies for 2017. Most of the changes would move those health plans in the direction of greater regulation and more consumer protections.

They would not reverse the basic elements required of the plans — such as a set of essential covered benefits — but could make a substantial difference to some people.

For instance, one change would allow patients to count all medical expenditures toward the law's ceiling on out-of-pocket costs, even if some care was incurred outside of a plan's network of covered services. Patients could count such spending toward that ceiling if they were not told in advance that a doctor or medical facility was outside their network.

Consumer advocates have pushed for this change. They say patients can get stuck with large bills if, for instance, they seek care at a hospital that is part of their insurer's network and are treated while there by a doctor who is not in the network. Insurers are likely to oppose the idea.

Health insurers and health- policy analysts immediately began to wade through the voluminous regulatory language that spells out the actual details.

Caroline Pearson, senior vice president at the consulting firm Avalere Health, said that the proposals reflect "an aggressive move to strengthen regulation of the market" in the three dozen states that rely on the federal insurance exchange. Some of the rules also would apply in other states that have created their own exchanges under the ACA.

Although several changes would benefit consumers, Pearson said they still “are sort of worrisome,” given signs that the number of insurers taking part in the exchanges may be unstable. The nation’s largest insurer, UnitedHealth Group, made a surprise announcement Thursday that it has been losing so much money on exchange health plans in 23 states that it is halting marketing efforts to enroll people for the coming year — and is debating whether to pull out entirely in 2017.

One aspect of the proposed rules addresses a concern that has roiled parts of the health insurance industry since HHS announced that it was unable to pay more than 13 percent of the money it owes under an ACA provision intended to help offset the expenses of carriers with a large share of customers needing expensive care.

The proposal does not provide a new source of money for those payments, but it would tweak the method used to calculate how much money each insurer needs to pay or is owed under a related program also intended to ease the burden on insurers with big pools of sick patients.

Companies' health costs grow at new low rate, study finds

By Peter Sullivan - 11/12/15 12:59 PM EST

Companies' healthcare costs increased this year by the lowest rate since at least 1996, according to a new study.

The report from the consulting firm Aon finds that average healthcare costs for medium and large companies increased 3.2 percent this year, the lowest increase since the firm started tracking the costs in 1996.

However, the study finds that even as overall costs grow more slowly, employees' share of those costs continues to increase, in part because of the looming ObamaCare "Cadillac Tax" on high-cost health plans.

The tax is aimed at constraining healthcare costs, and one way for companies to avoid being hit with the 40 percent levy is to shift more costs onto employees.

The tax, which begins in 2018, affects health plans with costs above $10,200 for individuals or $27,500 for families.

The report finds that the percent of healthcare costs covered by employers has declined by about 1 percent per year since 2012.

One third of companies increased the share of costs employees had to pay this year, an earlier Aon study found, and about 80 percent are considering taking that step in the future.

Both unions and businesses have strongly objected to the tax, and talk is growing on both sides of the aisle in Congress about repealing it.

While overall cost growth has been lower, the study projects that it will soon increase.

"As prescription drug costs continue to grow at a double digit pace and the economy picks up speed, it's likely these premium rates will start to climb," said Mike Morrow, senior vice president of Aon Health.

It's not just employers' healthcare costs that are set to start increasing more. The Department of Health and Human Services found in July that overall healthcare costs increased 5.5 percent from last year, an increase from several recent years of record low growth below 4 percent.

HHS pointed to the millions of newly insured people under ObamaCare and higher drug prices a

reasons for the increase.

3 Reasons It's Dumb to Take Social Security Benefits at 70

Waiting until you're 70 to take Social Security results in a bigger monthly check, but that doesn't necessarily make it a good idea.

Matthew Frankel Nov 30, 2015

You can choose to start receiving Social Security benefits at any time between your 62nd and 70th birthdays, and many financial experts emphasize the fact that the longer you wait, the larger your monthly benefit checks will be. But there are still some good reasons why many people *shouldn't* put off taking their Social Security benefits until they turn 70. Below, you'll find three of them with an explanation about how *you* can make the best decision for your situation.

Brian Stoffel: While there are lots of good, healthy reasons to wait until 70 to claim your Social Security, a simple boost in cash is hardly enough to justify the decision, in my opinion, especially when you already have enough to live a comfortable lifestyle.

Consider the different possibilities of when you can claim, and how it affects your monthly check from the government.

Age	**% of Full Benefits**
62	*75%*
63	*80%*
64	*86.7%*
65	*93.3%*
66	100%
67	108%
68	116%
69	124%
70	132%

Source: Social Security Administration. Percentages represent payouts if you start receiving money just after your birthday.

Among Social Security gurus, there's something called the "breakeven age." Here's the thinking behind it: while the person who claims at 62 is getting a monthly check that's almost half of the retiree who waited until 70 to claim, the former is collecting money for a full eight years while the latter isn't.

In other words, the early claimers might be getting less, but they're getting it for a lot longer. Depending on taxes, inflation, investment returns, and a host of other variables, it doesn't become financially advantageous to wait until 70 (versus 66) until a retiree reaches his or her mid-80s.

Given that the life expectancy for a U.S. citizen aged 70 is 15 years for males and 17 years for females, it's virtually a wash. In the end, if you have enough money to make ends meet and enjoy retirement when you're younger, it makes a lot of sense to take it.

Matt Frankel: Brian is 100% correct that theoretically, you'll get the same total amount from Social Security no matter when you decide to start collecting benefits. However, this is based on actuarial formulas, while every person is different.

What I'm getting at is that it's worth assessing your own situation before deciding when you should start receiving Social Security. If you have a family history of longevity and you're in excellent health, it may be to your benefit to wait as long as possible to collect Social Security to take advantage of the higher payments.

On the other hand, if your parents and other family members passed away at a relatively young age, or you're in less-than-stellar health, it's probably in your best interest to start collecting Social Security as soon as possible. For example, if you're a pack-a-day smoker and both of your parents didn't make it past 75, it's probably unwise to wait.

Of course, there are no guarantees when it comes to longevity. People in seemingly poor health live into their 90s, and physically fit people die young. The objective is to look at all of the available information and make the best decision possible for you.

Dan Caplinger: Brian and Matt both note that waiting until 70 can unnecessarily lead you to wait for what will theoretically be the same amount over your lifetime. Yet putting theory aside, there's a common situation in which waiting until 70 to claim benefits is *always* the wrong move: when you're looking to collect spousal benefits.

The reason people wait to collect their *own* retirement benefits until age 70 is that they get delayed retirement credits for the years past their full retirement age. That can result in payments that are as much as 32% higher than what they'd receive if they simply took their Social Security benefits at their normal full retirement age.

For spousal benefits, however, no delayed retirement credits are available. If you wait past full retirement age to claim them, you won't get any extra money. You'll just give up benefits that you were otherwise fully entitled to claim, with nothing to show for it.

To be eligible for spousal benefits, your spouse has to claim regular retirement benefits. As soon as you qualify, though, it makes sense to get those spousal benefits started if you're at or beyond your full retirement age.

The $15,978 Social Security bonus most retirees completely overlook

If you're like most Americans, you're a few years (or more) behind on your retirement savings. But a handful of little-known “Social Security secrets” could help ensure a boost in your retirement income. In fact, one MarketWatch reporter argues that if more Americans knew about this, the government would have to shell out an extra $10 billion annually. For example: one easy, 17-minute trick could pay you as much as $15,978 more... each year! Once you learn how to take advantage of all these loopholes, we think you could retire confidently with the peace of mind we're all after

To contact us: go to www.healthcareil.com or Call (800) 739-4700