

Millions of working Americans are facing financial uncertainty.

The absence of emergency savings, rising medical costs, and an overall trend of fewer employers offering benefits to workers has created a uniquely challenging time. But now as much as ever, it's important to understand that without some kind of income protection, more Americans could face severe financial difficulty if they need to miss work due to illness, injury or pregnancy.

Here are the critical numbers.

- **One in four** of today's 20-year-olds can expect to be out of work for at least a year because of a disabling condition before they reach the normal retirement age.¹
- **At least 51 million working adults** in the United States are without disability insurance other than the basic coverage available through Social Security.²
- **Only 49 percent of US households** have enough in liquid savings to cover at least three months of their recurring expenses, and only 39 percent can cover at least six months.³
- **Three out of ten American adults** indicate they can't pay an unexpected \$400 bill without having to carry a balance on their credit card or borrow money from friends, family, or the bank.⁴

Chances of missing work due to illness, injury, or pregnancy are greater than most realize.

- **Prior to the pandemic, around 5% of working Americans** experienced a short-term disability (six months or less) due to illness, injury, or pregnancy.⁵
 - Almost all of these are non-occupational in origin.⁶
- **The most common reasons for short-term disability claims are⁷:**
 - Pregnancies (22.3%)
 - Musculoskeletal disorders affecting the back and spine, knees, hips, shoulders, and other parts of the body (18.5%)
 - Injuries such as fractures, sprains, and strains of muscles and ligaments (11.4%)
 - Digestive disorders, such as hernias and gastritis (7.4%)
 - Mental health issues including depression and anxiety (7.3%)
- **The most common reasons for long-term disability claims are⁸:**
 - Musculoskeletal disorders (27.6%)
 - Cancer (15.0%)
 - Injuries such as fractures, sprains, and strains of muscles and ligaments (12.0%)
 - Mental health issues (9.3%)
 - Circulatory (heart attack, stroke) (8.2%)

The consequences are alarming.

- A 2019 study of consumer bankruptcy filings found that 77.8% of debtors cited income loss as a contributor to their bankruptcy. This included 44.3% specifically citing medically-related work loss as a contributor.⁹

- A large-scale study linking cancer registry data and bankruptcy filings in western Washington state found that cancer patients were 2.65 more likely to go bankrupt than people without cancer, with younger (under age 50) cancer patients having the highest rates of bankruptcy.¹⁰

Workers' Compensation and Social Security do not cover most of these challenges.

- Workers' Compensation only covers time away from work if the disabling illness or injury was directly work-related. In 2019, only 1.3 percent of American workers missed work because of an occupational illness or injury.¹¹
- From 2009 to 2019, only 31 percent of Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) claimants had their applications approved: 21 percent at the initial application stage and the remainder after a reconsideration or appeals process.¹²
- It generally takes three to five months from time of application for SSDI benefits to get an initial decision.¹³

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- The backlog of appeals cases was more than 350,000 in fiscal year 2022, with 37 percent of them being over nine months old.¹⁴
- The average SSDI benefit for a disabled worker as of February 2022 was \$1,359 a month.¹⁵
- That equates to \$16,308 annually – which is below the poverty guideline \$18,310 for a two-person household.¹⁶

To learn more, visit the Council For Disability Awareness' website, DisabilityCanHappen.org

¹ Social Security Administration, Disability and Death Probability Tables for Insured Workers Born in 2001 <https://www.ssa.gov/oact/NOTES/ran6/an2021-6.pdf>, Table A, Column 1 (Probability of Disability Before NRA).

² American Council of Life Insurers, Assessing Americans' Financial Retirement Security, unpublished data from study released in September 2017 as https://www.acli.com/-/media/ACLI/Public/Files/PDFs-PUBLIC-SITE/Public-Industry-Facts/Assessments_Report_082917.ashx?la=en

ACLI found that 54.3% of non-retired households (51.3 million in total) did not report having disability insurance. Assuming there is at least one adult in each household, this means the number of "uncovered" adults is at least equal to the number of "uncovered" households.

³ Bhutta, Neil, Jacqueline Blair, and Lisa Dettling (2021). "The Smart Money is in Cash? Financial Literacy and Liquid Savings Among U.S. Families," Finance and Economics Discussion Series 2021-076. Washington: Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, <https://doi.org/10.17016/FEDS.2021.076>. Figure 2.

⁴ Federal Reserve, Update on the Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households: July 2020 Results. <https://www.federalreserve.gov/publications/2020-update-economic-well-being-of-us-households-overall-financial-security.htm>, Table 4.

⁵ Integrated Benefits Institute, *IBI Benchmarking Analytics Series: Which Diagnoses Drive STD Incidence, Costs and Lost Time?* <https://www.ibiweb.org/which-diagnoses-drive-std/>
Over the past two years (2020-21), there's been a 55% increase in the rate of health-related absences from work compared to the five-year period ending in 2019. (Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/update-health-related-workplace-absence-trends-fred-schott/>)

⁶ AskGMS, a group benefits market research firm, reports that 96% of in-force group short-term disability plans provide coverage for non-occupational disabilities only. <https://www.askgms.com/disability-and-life-insurance.html>.

⁷ Integrated Benefits Institute, Health and Productivity Benchmarking 2019 (released September 2020), Short-Term Disability, All Employers. Condition-specific results. <https://files.ibiweb.org/uploads/general/>

[Sample-Reports.zip](#). Data is pre-pandemic and is the most recent as of March 15, 2022.

⁸ Integrated Benefits Institute, Health and Productivity Benchmarking 2019 (released September 2020), Long-Term Disability, All Employers. Condition-specific results. <https://files.ibiweb.org/uploads/general/Sample-Reports.zip>. Data is pre-pandemic and is the most recent as of March 15, 2022.

⁹ David U. Himmelstein, Robert M. Lawless, Deborah Thorne, Pamela Foohey, Steffie Woolhandler, "Medical Bankruptcy: Still Common Despite the Affordable Care Act," *American Journal of Public Health* 109, no. 3 (March 1, 2019): pp. 431 – 433. See Table 1. Free access available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6366487/>

¹⁰ Ramsey, S. D., Blough, D. K., Kirchhoff, A. C., Fedorenko, C. R., Snell, K. S., Kreizenbeck, K. L., ... Overstreet, K. A. (2013). Washington Cancer Patients Found To Be At Greater Risk For Bankruptcy Than People Without A Cancer Diagnosis. *Health Affairs (Project Hope)*, 32(6), 1143–1152. <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/pdf/10.1377/hlthaff.2012.1263>

¹¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employer-Reported Workplace Injuries and Illnesses (Annual) 2020*, Table 1. Incidence rates of nonfatal occupational injuries and illnesses by industry and case types, cases with days away from work. https://www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/osh/os/summ1_00_2020.htm

¹² Social Security Administration, *Annual Statistical Report on the Social Security Disability Insurance Program*, 2019 https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/di_asr/2020/sect04.html#chart11

¹³ Social Security Administration, Factsheet <https://www.ssa.gov/disability/Documents/Factsheet-AD.pdf>

¹⁴ Social Security Administration, Age Distribution of Pending Hearings, (FY 2018 – FYT 2022 Q1) <https://www.ssa.gov/appeals/charts/Age-Distribution-Pending-Hearings-FY2022-1st-Qtr.pdf>

¹⁵ Social Security Administration, Monthly Statistical Snapshot February 2022 https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/quickfacts/stat_snapshot/ Table 2

¹⁶ HHS Poverty Guidelines 2022, <https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines>