

The purpose of this article is to give a brief overview of Social Security Retirement Benefits, Family Benefits and Survivor Benefits. The complexity of these programs makes it impossible to fully explain all that is involved; however, it is important to at least have a basic understanding of these extremely important entitlements.

In general, workers are eligible for retirement benefits if they are at least 62 years old and fully insured. If the worker waits to retire at full retirement age, he or she will receive full retirement benefits. Full retirement age varies depending on the date of birth of the worker. Full retirement age is 65 for people who were born before 1938. For those born in 1938 and after, the full retirement age has been raised on a gradually increasing scale, to the point where the full retirement age for people born January 2, 1960 and later is 67. More information on the full retirement age requirements can be found on the Social Security's website, www.ssa.gov.

While a person can begin to receive retirement benefits at age 62, those choosing to obtain benefits before their full retirement age will have their benefits permanently reduced. For example, if a person retires at age 62, his or her benefit would be about 25 percent lower than if that person waited until reaching full retirement age.

It is also important to keep in mind that a recipient may find their benefits reduced if that person receives significant income after retiring. The amount of the reduction depends on whether the person's earnings exceed certain limits for the months before he or she reaches full retirement age. If a person was born January 2, 1942 through January 1, 1943 and that person begins receiving benefits before full retirement age, Social Security will deduct \$1 from his or her benefits for every \$2 earned above \$13,560.

The family of a retired worker may also be entitled to receive benefits based on that worker's primary insurance amount. An eligible wife or husband of an insured retired work can

receive a spousal retirement benefit as much as 50 percent of the worker's primary insurance amount. There are a number of requirements that must be met for a person to be qualified as a spouse of the retired worker. For example, a person would be considered a spouse if that person's relationship to the insured as a wife or husband has lasted at least one year. The spouse must be 62 or older or taking care of a child entitled on that person's record who is under age 16 or disabled. A former spouse is eligible if that individual was validly married to the insured worker for a least 10 years immediately before the divorce became final. The amount of benefits a spouse can receive will be permanently reduced if insured worker chooses to receive benefits before that person's full retirement age.

Survivor benefits are similar to family benefits but are payable after the death of an insured worker. A widow or widower of a person who died fully insured is eligible for benefits if they meet certain requirements, such as the person's relationship to the insured as a wife or husband having lasted for at least nine months immediately before the insured died. There are some exceptions to the nine month requirement. The widow/widower can receive full benefits at age 65 or older (if born before January 2, 1940) or reduced benefits as early as age 60. The amount of the widow/widower's monthly benefit will be reduced if the insured person was entitled to old-age benefits that were reduced for age because he or she chose to receive them before reaching full retirement age.

Once again, this information about Social Security Benefits represents the proverbial "tip of the iceberg." For more detailed information contact the Social Security Administration (1-800-772-1213) or a knowledgeable attorney.