The benefit has barely moved in fifty years. The asset test has — downward.

SSI is the third program in the folder and the one almost nobody reads about. It is the cash floor for aged, blind, and disabled Americans with almost nothing. Its rules are written in dollars fixed decades ago, and inflation has been quietly rewriting them ever since.

> **Not Social Security.** SSI is means-tested and paid from **general tax revenue** — no payroll tax, no trust fund, no depletion date. It cannot "run out" the way OASDI or Medicare Part A can. Whether it is adequate is a different question from whether it is solvent, and this page is about the first one.

WHO IT REACHES

7.4M

People received federally administered SSI in January 2026, averaging **$737** a month. That is the entire floor.

AVERAGE MONTHLY RECIPIENTS, 2025	FEDERAL BENEFIT RATE, 2026	COUNTABLE RESOURCE LIMIT
7.3M	**$994**	**$2,000**
1.1M aged; 6.1M blind or disabled, of whom about 62,000 are blind.	Per month for an individual; $1,491 for a couple; $498 for an essential person.	$3,000 for a couple — unchanged in nominal dollars since 1989.

Source: 2026 SSI Annual Report, §II.C "Recent Program Experience" pp. 4–5; §III.C p. 7.

FEDERAL SSI PAYMENTS, 2026 PROJECTED	SHARE OF GDP, 2025	STATE SUPPLEMENTS, 2025	COST TO ADMINISTER, FY2025
$66.3 B	**0.21 %**	**$3.4 B**	**$5.0 B**
up $1.3 B, or 2.0%, on 2025	projected to stay roughly level	1.3 M people, averaging $212	about 7% of what it pays out

Source: 2026 SSI Annual Report, §II.C–D pp. 4–5.

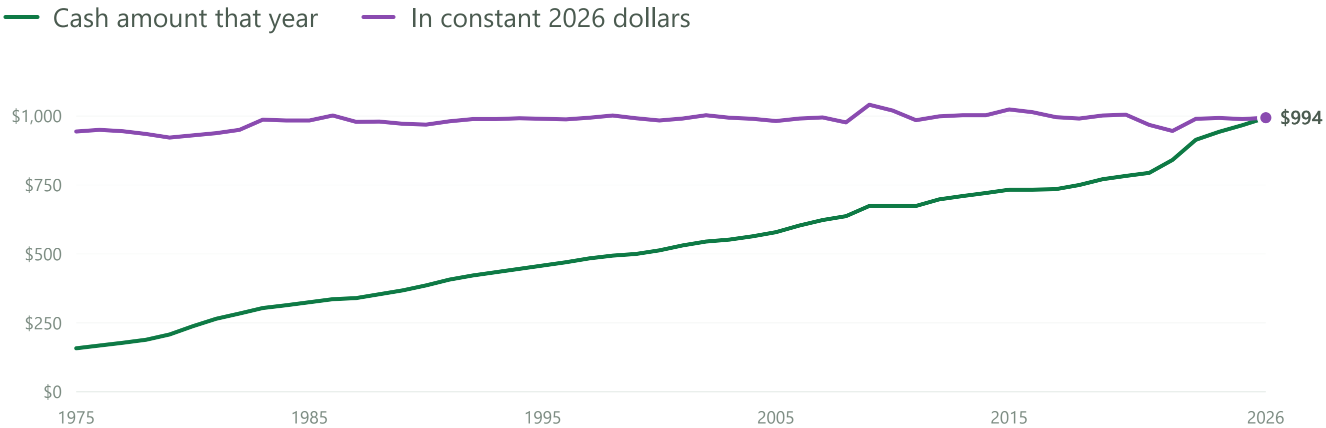
IN TODAY'S MONEY · THE BENEFIT

Half a century of cost-of-living increases has bought five percent.

The federal benefit rate rises with the same CPI adjustment as Social Security, so it holds its purchasing power — and only that. Deflated to 2026 dollars, the 1975 benefit was **$944** a month. Today it is **$994**. Fifty-one years of increases; **five percent** of real gain.

The monthly federal benefit rate, before and after inflation

Individual rate. The rising line is the cash amount; the flat line is that same amount in constant 2026 dollars.



Source: SSA, *SSI payment standards, 1975 & later*. Deflated with the CPI series underlying the 2026 Trustees Report.

● AT THE KITCHEN TABLE

Holding steady is not the same as keeping up. The CPI tracks prices — but **wages have grown faster than prices** across most of this period, so a benefit pegged to prices falls behind the living standard around it every year.

Measured against the average wage, the floor has dropped from **22%** in 1975 to **16%** today.

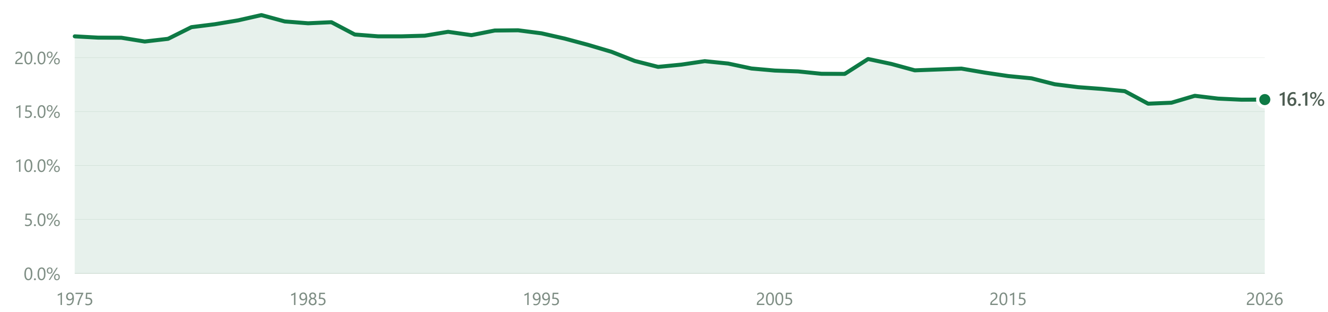
■ IN THE COMMITTEE ROOM

The report names the mechanism itself: the share of the population meeting SSI's tests "will decline over time as average wages and income generally grow faster than the CPI, and therefore the SSI Federal benefit rate."

That is a relative cut delivered by an indexation choice, not by any vote. Moving the index from prices to wages is the one lever that reverses it.

The floor, measured against the average wage

Annualised federal benefit rate as a percent of the national average wage.



Source: benefit rate from SSA; average wage from the 2026 Trustees Report table VI.G1 and SSA's AWI series.

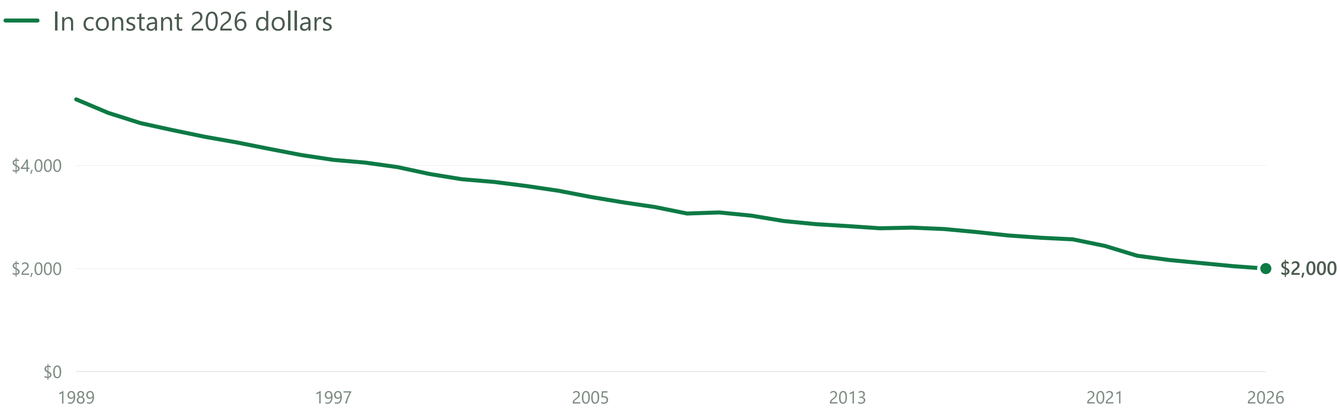
IN TODAY'S MONEY · THE ASSET TEST

Save more than $2,000 and you lose it. That number was set in 1989.

To qualify, countable resources must stay under **$2,000** for an individual and **$3,000** for a couple. Those figures were written into law to take effect in 1989 "and thereafter," and were never indexed. Inflation did the rest.

What the $2,000 limit is actually worth

The statutory limit has not moved. The line is its value in constant 2026 dollars.



Source: limit and effective date from the 2026 SSI Annual Report legislative history, p. 80: "The respective limits would become $2,000 for an individual and $3,000 for a couple in 1989 and thereafter."

$2,000 IN 1989, IN TODAY'S MONEY	REAL VALUE LOST SINCE 1989	COUPLE LIMIT, 1989 VALUE TODAY	YEARS SINCE IT LAST CHANGED
$5,283	**62 %**	**$7,924**	**37**
what the limit was worth when set	no vote required	the statute still says $3,000	1989 to 2026

AT THE KITCHEN TABLE

This is the rule that punishes saving. Put aside more than $2,000 — an emergency fund, a car repair, a small inheritance — and eligibility can end.

The limit was never generous. It is now worth **less than two-fifths** of what Congress set.

IN THE COMMITTEE ROOM

An unindexed dollar threshold tightens automatically every year and never appears in a budget vote. Indexed to the CPI from 1989, it would sit near **$5,300** today.

The report notes most income exclusions are fixed the same way, so the same silent tightening runs across the eligibility rules, not just the asset test.

WHERE IT IS GOING

Flat, by design, for the next quarter century.

This program's actuaries project 25 years rather than 75. Their central finding is stability — which, given everything above, is itself the finding.

Federal SSI recipients Projected to 2050	7.4 M → 7.6 M
Recipients as a share of the population Social Security area population	2.07 % → 2.05 %
Outlays in constant 2026 dollars A real increase of 0.1 % a year across 25 years	$66.3 B → $69.1 B
Applications on disability grounds, 2025 Down 6% on 2024; projected to rise again by 2031	1.30 M

Source: 2026 SSI Annual Report, §II.D "Key Results From The 25-Year Projections," p. 5.

AT THE KITCHEN TABLE

If you are applying: an online SSI application opened in December 2024, but only for some adults meeting certain criteria. Everyone else still needs staff help.

The program reaches about **eight million people** over the course of a year. It is small, and for the people in it, it is everything.

IN THE COMMITTEE ROOM

SSI costs **0.21 % of GDP** and is projected to stay there — roughly a twentieth the size of Medicare. It is not a fiscal problem.

GAO's standing recommendation is not about money at all: SSA still has no plan with steps, goals, metrics, and timelines to let *all* claimants apply online.

SOURCES — EVERY FIGURE ON THIS PAGE

2026 SSI Annual Report — Annual Report of the Supplemental Security Income Program, issued July 2026. Highlights pp. 4–5; program description pp. 7–8; legislative history p. 80.

SSA automatic determinations — SSI federal payment amounts for 2026; SSI payment standards, 1975 & later.

Deflator — the CPI series underlying the 2026 OASDI Trustees Report (table VI.G1), spliced to CPI-U for years before 1970.

GAO-26-108977 — Priority Open Recommendations: Social Security Administration, 23 June 2026.

The SSI report projects 25 years, not 75, and its figures are the actuaries' central estimate. Real-dollar conversions are mine, computed from the published CPI series and labelled wherever they appear; the nominal figure printed in the source always sits beside them. Nothing here is legal or benefits advice — eligibility turns on individual circumstances no summary can capture.