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More Than Half of IRAs Owned by Those Ages 60 or Older Grew From 2012–2015

Washington, D.C. – March 21, 2019 — More than half of the individual retirement accounts (IRAs) owned by those near or in retirement (ages 60 or older) saw balance increases over a three-year period, according to new research by the Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI). Even among the IRAs owned by retirees who are just starting their Required Minimum Distributions (ages 71–74), nearly half (49.2 percent) had increasing balances during this period, according to findings in a new *EBRI Issue Brief*, “**Individual Retirement Accounts: How Balances of Older Account Owners Change Over Time.**”

The latest analysis from the EBRI IRA Database shows that from 2012–2015, 80.8 percent of all Traditional and Roth IRAs in 2012 were still open in 2015 rather than closed or depleted. Of the accounts still open, 68.0 percent had higher balances by the end of 2015. The EBRI IRA Database tracked 6.1 million Traditional IRAs and 1.4 million Roth IRAs owned by those ages 60 or older — ages at which owners are most often in their retirement years.

Of the IRAs owned by those ages 60 or older in 2012, slightly over 80 percent still had positive balances three years later. Only when owners reached ages 85 or older did a significantly higher percentage of accounts fail to have a positive balance after three years, either due to depletion or account closure.

“The increases found in the average balances from 2012–2015 are an encouraging sign that many IRA owners are on the path to not outliving their retirement assets,” said Craig Copeland, senior research associate at EBRI and author of the report. “However, it would be prudent to examine the IRA balance changes over a longer period of time before making definitive conclusions. Also, further studying effective behaviors and strategies for retirees in their implementation of asset drawdown is warranted in order to strike a balance between conserving assets while at the same time maintaining an appropriate standard of living given the size of the nest egg.”

Additional Findings:

- Of all IRAs owned by those ages 60 or older that still had positive balances in 2015, the median balance change from 2012–2015 was an increase of 11.9 percent.
- There were only small differences between IRA types (Traditional vs. Roth) in the likelihood that balances were still positive after the three years, with Traditional IRAs more likely to have a balance decline when they remained open.

- Outside of the smallest accounts, a similar proportion of IRAs had balance increases across balance size categories. For instance, for IRAs with balances of \$1,000 or more, the percentage with an increase ranged from approximately 52 percent to 57 percent.
- Those making annual withdrawals before age 71 had larger balance declines than those who recently reached the required minimum distribution age of 70 ½. This is presumably because the latter group was more likely to be making a withdrawal primarily because they are required to do so, and therefore took the minimum required.

“Individual Retirement Accounts: How Balances of Older Account Owners Change Over Time” is available online at www.ebri.org.

About EBRI:

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