



Fast Facts from EBRI

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Shifts in Older Americans' Total Wealth, 1992–2002

WASHINGTON—Over the 10-year period from 1992–2002, many Americans saw their total wealth grow by a significant amount. Others were not as fortunate.

How do the numbers shake out? A study by the nonpartisan Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI) shows that the mean (average) total wealth of Americans reaching or just past normal retirement age grew by almost 85 percent during the 10-year period—from \$235,514 in 1992 to \$435,072 in 2002.

But the study also reported that, while more than half of Americans in this age group saw their wealth increase by more than 50 percent during the 10-year period, others experienced significant declines and a small percentage lost all of their total wealth. Here is the breakdown of wealth growth for retirement-age Americans over the period:

53.0 percent had more than a 50 percent increase.

61.7 percent had more than a 25 percent increase.

21.1 percent had more than a 25 percent decline.

15.3 percent had more than a 50 percent decline.

2.9 percent had a 100 percent decline.

In the study, “total wealth” was defined as all of a household’s assets minus all of its debts. The study represents EBRI’s analysis of data from the Health and Retirement Study sponsored by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. It covered Americans born from 1931–1941, which includes those who have been affected by major changes in recent years in the way employers provide retirement benefits.

The full study is contained in the January 2005 *EBRI Issue Brief*, “Changes in Wealth for Americans Reaching or Just Past Normal Retirement Age,” and is available on the Internet at www.ebri.org/ibpdfs/0105ib.pdf.

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