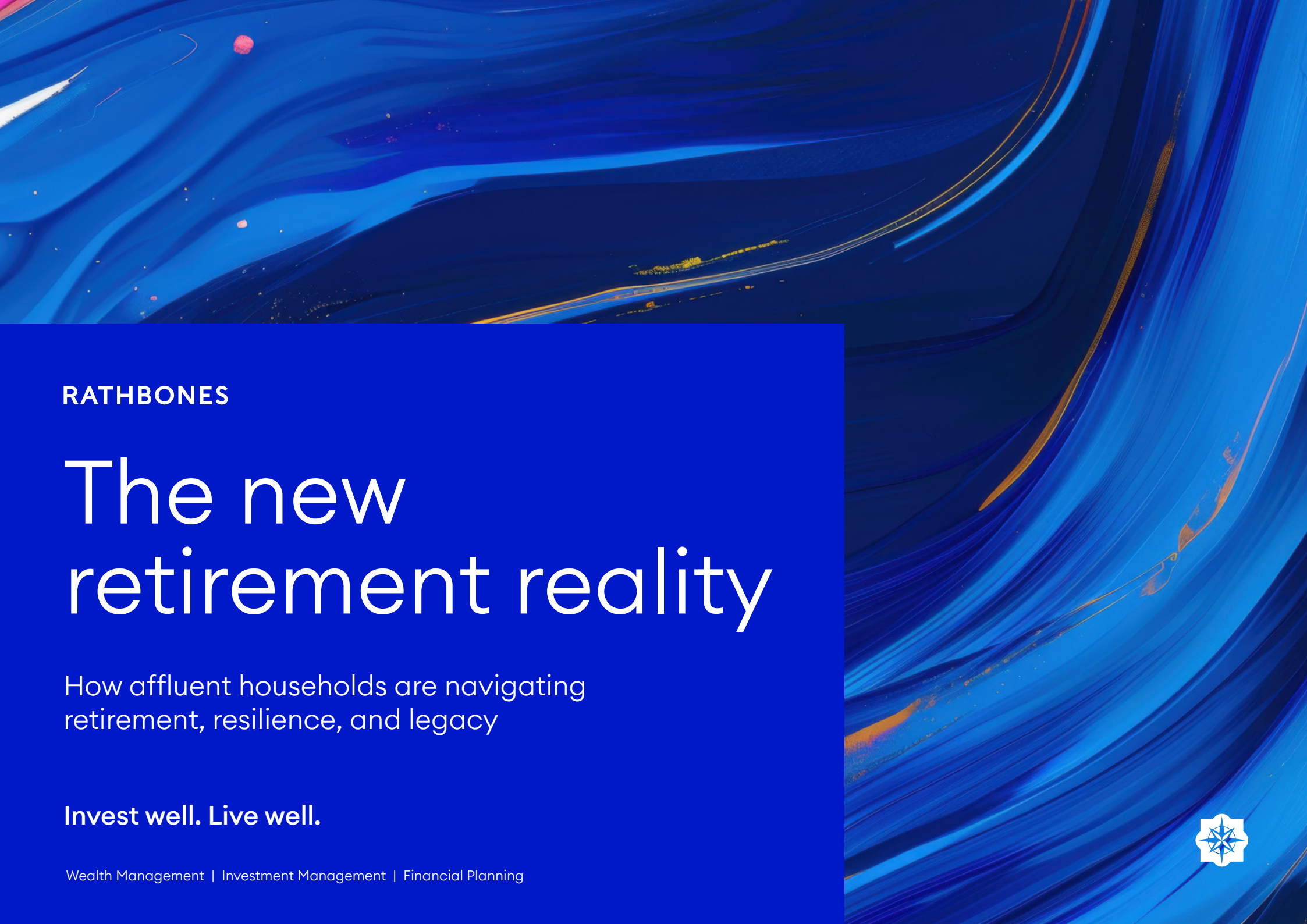


RATHBONES

The new retirement reality

How affluent households are navigating retirement, resilience, and legacy

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The new retirement reality

For much of the past century, retirement planning was organised around accumulation: build pension wealth, stop working and draw an income. That model no longer reflects the reality facing affluent households.

Life expectancy has increased, family structures have evolved, pension freedoms have handed individuals greater responsibility for their retirement decisions, and a growing proportion of wealth is held outside traditional pension arrangements. Retirement itself is changing too. For many, it is no longer a single event marked by a final day at work, but a gradual transition that may span many years.

Against this backdrop, retirement planning has become both more flexible and more complex.

The challenge facing affluent households is increasingly not whether they can retire, but how they can convert accumulated wealth into a secure, sustainable and fulfilling later life. Decisions that were once relatively straightforward now involve balancing multiple income sources, managing investment risk, navigating changing tax rules, planning for the possibility of later-life care and making decisions about how wealth should ultimately be passed to future generations.

This report explores those challenges through the experiences of 2,036 affluent individuals across the UK, each with at least £250,000 in investable assets. That threshold makes the central finding more striking: substantial wealth does not necessarily remove retirement uncertainty.

At the heart of the report is the inaugural Rathbones retire well index, which assesses the practical actions people report taking to prepare for retirement and later life, rather than how confident they feel.

The findings reveal a behavioural decumulation paradox. Large majorities say they have a clear funding plan, understand their pension entitlements and believe they are on track. Yet 45% still worry that they have not saved enough. Financial capacity does not automatically create confidence to spend.

That tension runs throughout the report: between having wealth and feeling able to use it; between recognising risk and planning for it; and between protecting financial security and enjoying the life that wealth is intended to support.

The retirement challenge facing affluent households has therefore entered a new phase. The task is not simply to accumulate wealth, but to turn it into an adaptable plan, with the confidence to use it well.

This report explores what that means for the future of retirement planning.

Executive summary

The central finding of this report is that affluence does not automatically create retirement certainty. The sample is wealthy by construction, yet uncertainty persists around spending, income durability, policy, care costs and family obligations. Retirement confidence increasingly depends not only on accumulated wealth, but also on whether that wealth has been converted into an adaptable plan.

The behavioural decumulation paradox

- 78% say they have a clear funding plan.
- 75% understand their pension entitlements.
- 74% believe they are on track.
- Yet 45% worry that they have not saved enough.

The Four Retirement Gaps

01

Confidence versus preparedness
The affluent often feel prepared, but reported planning activity suggests important gaps remain.

02

Wealth versus income
Accumulating wealth and generating retirement income are increasingly separate challenges.

03

Concern versus action
Care, tax and longevity concerns are widespread, but detailed planning often lags behind.

04

Lifestyle versus legacy
Today's retirees increasingly seek to balance enjoying their wealth with supporting future generations.

The numbers that tell the story

44/100
is the average Rathbones retire well index behavioural engagement and planning score.

48% of blended families find inheritance planning complex, compared with 35% of non-blended families.

43%
of those not fully retired have either not started planning or are finding it difficult to make progress.

42% of those yet to retire expect to phase gradually into retirement; a further 16% expect to step back while continuing paid work.

24% are unaware of pension IHT reform; 65% of those aware have acted, while 35% report taking no action.

40% rank later-life care among their top three concerns, but only 12% have planned for potential costs in detail.

Only **68%** of single respondents look forward to retirement, compared with 74% and 80% of cohabiting and married/civil partnership respondents, respectively.

57% prioritise using wealth for retirement, compared with 18% who prioritise inheritance.

Even respondents who describe themselves as extremely prepared average only 50/100 on the Index.

Part 1: Funding retirement

Can affluent households convert wealth into sustainable retirement income?

For decades, the retirement debate centred on accumulation: how much to save, which assets to use and what size of pension pot might be enough.

Those questions remain important, but they no longer capture the full challenge. As affluent households enter retirement with pensions, investments, ISAs, property and business wealth, the central issue becomes how these resources should be coordinated and used.

Funding retirement requires a different mindset from building wealth. It demands decisions about spending, risk, tax, timing and flexibility. Retirement is therefore not the end of financial planning, but the beginning of a new phase.

45%

worry they have not saved enough

78%

report having a clear funding plan

Chapter one: The Rathbones retire well index

How actively are Britain's affluent preparing for later life?

Chapter at a glance

44/100

average Rathbones retire well index behavioural engagement and planning score.

What we're hearing from clients

Many people arrive at retirement feeling confident they have accumulated enough wealth. The bigger challenge is often understanding how to convert that wealth into sustainable income while preparing for risks that could emerge years or even decades later. Retirement planning increasingly becomes less about building wealth and more about managing complexity.

Confidence is not the same as preparedness

Retirement confidence among affluent households is generally high. Most respondents report having a clear idea of the retirement they want and believe they are broadly on track to achieve it. At first glance, this might suggest that retirement preparedness is similarly strong, but closer examination reveals a more nuanced picture.

While confidence reflects how people feel about retirement, the Index captures the practical actions they report taking to support those aspirations. The distinction matters. A person can feel confident while still neglecting important areas of planning. Equally, someone undertaking multiple positive planning actions may not necessarily feel confident about the outcome.

The Rathbones retire well index was developed to capture this difference. Rather than measuring sentiment, it measures action.

Measuring preparedness

The Rathbones retire well index combines seven equally weighted metrics:

- Frequency of review
- Recency of review
- Pension engagement
- Retirement planning
- Legal readiness
- Later-life costs
- IHT consideration

Rather than asking how people feel about retirement, the Index measures what they report having done to prepare for it. It is a behavioural benchmark, not a measure of financial adequacy. A higher score reflects broader planning activity, not a guarantee of a secure retirement, and should be read alongside, not instead of, an individual's financial position.

The average behavioural engagement

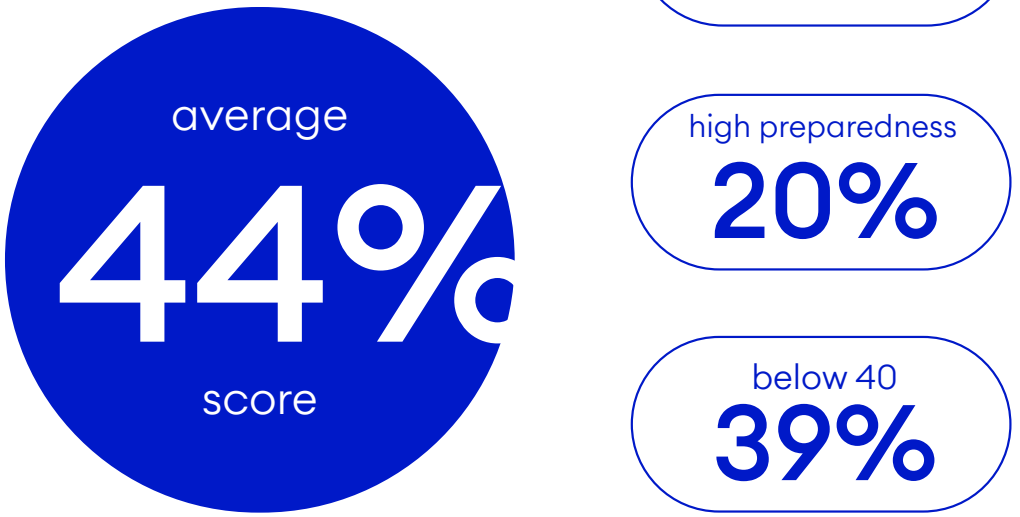
and planning score across the Index sample is 44 out of 100. Around one in five respondents fall within the high reporting band, while around two in five score below 40.

Respondents who describe themselves as “extremely prepared” record an average score of only 50 out of 100. This finding reinforces the gap between confidence and reported planning activity that runs throughout the report.

The gap becomes particularly visible in areas that are difficult to predict or uncomfortable to confront. Retirement income planning often receives significant attention, but preparedness is typically weaker for events that can fundamentally alter financial circumstances, such as ill health, later-life care, the loss of a spouse or partner, divorce, incapacity and estate planning. These risks may feel remote, yet they often have the greatest potential to affect financial security and quality of life in later years.

Confidence in the outcome is not always matched by practical progress. Three-quarters say their current financial plan aligns quite or very well with the retirement lifestyle they want, yet 43% of those not fully retired have either not started planning or are finding it difficult to make progress.

Figure 1: Rathbones retire well index at a glance



Source: Rathbones and Savanta, 2026

Why preparedness matters

- Pension freedoms have increased individual responsibility for retirement decisions.
- Multiple income sources have become commonplace.
- Tax policy continues to change.
- Later-life care remains uncertain.
- Family structures are increasingly complex.
- Together, these factors create a retirement environment that demands greater engagement, planning and flexibility than previous generations experienced.

Key takeaway

Retirement confidence is widespread among affluent households, but reported engagement and planning activity often lag behind. The Rathbones retire well index highlights the practical actions people report taking to prepare for the decades ahead; it does not assess financial adequacy or predict retirement outcomes.





Chapter two: The great decumulation challenge

Why substantial wealth does not automatically create confidence to spend

Chapter at a glance

45%

worry they have not saved enough, despite 78% reporting a clear funding plan.

What we're hearing from clients

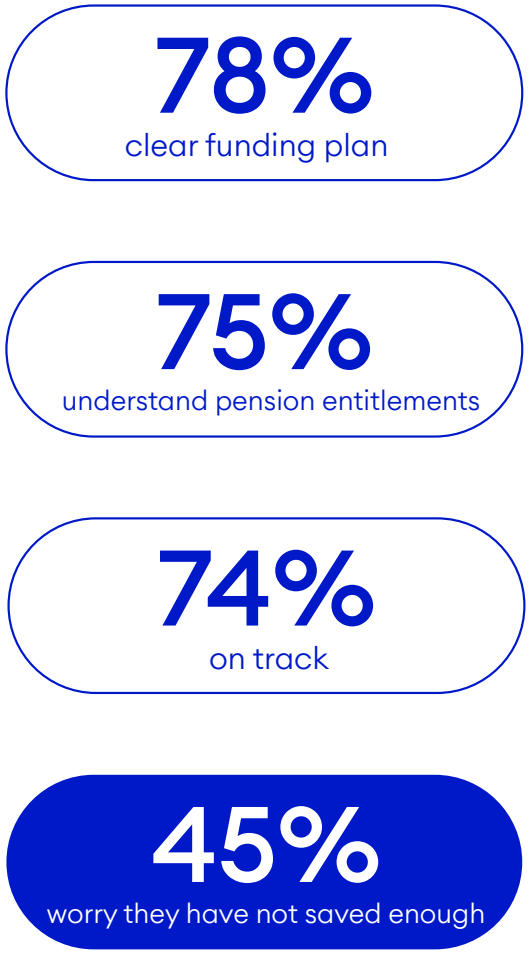
The conversation has changed. Twenty years ago, clients were primarily concerned with building retirement wealth. Today, many are asking different questions: How much can I afford to spend? Will my wealth last? Which assets should I draw on first? How do I balance security with enjoying retirement? The challenge is increasingly not building wealth, but using it well.

Retirement's new challenge

For generations, retirement planning was dominated by a straightforward objective: accumulate enough wealth to stop working. The assumption was simple: working life was for earning and saving and retirement was for spending.

Yet as life expectancy has increased, pension freedoms have expanded choice and households have accumulated wealth across a range of assets, retirement has become significantly more complex. The challenge is no longer simply how much wealth people have accumulated, but how it can be converted into sustainable income that supports their desired lifestyle, adapts to changing circumstances and potentially lasts for decades.

Figure 2: The behavioural decumulation paradox



Source: Rathbones and Savanta, 2026

In many ways, financial planning becomes more complicated once retirement begins. During accumulation, uncertainty can often be addressed by saving more. During retirement, every decision involves trade-offs. Spend too much and wealth may not last as long as expected. Spend too little and people risk unnecessarily constraining the opportunities and experiences retirement should provide. Finding the balance has become one of the defining financial challenges of modern retirement.

Wealth versus income

The most important distinction emerging from the research is between financial capacity and confidence to use it.

Every respondent has at least £250,000 in investable assets, yet 45% worry that they have not saved enough. At the same time, 78% say they have a clear funding plan, 75% understand their pension entitlements and 74% believe they are on track. The survey does not establish whether respondents are objectively underfunded; it reveals that wealth and a broad plan do not necessarily remove uncertainty.

While most respondents report confidence in their overall retirement plans, the research suggests the practical realities of creating retirement income remain less well understood. Almost half of respondents worry they have not saved enough for retirement, despite large majorities reporting that they have a clear funding plan, understand their pension entitlements and believe they are broadly on track to achieve the retirement they want.

This apparent contradiction is the behavioural decumulation paradox: retirement income is harder to visualise than a salary, and drawing on capital can feel fundamentally different from accumulating it.

Unlike a salary, which arrives every month, retirement income may need to be generated from multiple assets with different levels of accessibility, risk and tax treatment. Understanding how those various components fit together is increasingly central to retirement success.

What does a comfortable retirement look like?

The question of how much income people need in retirement has become the subject of growing national debate. The Government's Pensions Commission is currently examining retirement adequacy and long-term retirement outcomes,

while trade bodies continue to warn of a gap between expectations and reality.

Our findings suggest affluent households have diverse expectations about the level of income required to enjoy a comfortable retirement. Just over half of respondents believe they require less than £50,000 annually to live comfortably in retirement.

Others anticipate significantly higher requirements, reflecting differences in lifestyle aspirations, family commitments, housing costs, travel plans and attitudes towards financial security. These expectations sit against the backdrop of wider retirement adequacy discussions.

The latest Retirement Living Standards estimate that a comfortable retirement requires annual expenditure of £45,400 for a single person and £62,700 for a two-person household, although housing costs are excluded from those calculations.

The significance of this debate extends beyond simple numbers. Retirement is no longer solely about covering essential costs. The research shows respondents increasingly prioritise flexibility, independence, family relationships, travel, health and personal fulfilment.

For many people, retirement planning has become less about maintaining a minimum standard of living and more about preserving choice. The challenge is ensuring financial resources remain aligned with those ambitions over what may be a retirement lasting 20, 30 or even 40 years.

The rise of the multi-income retirement

Retirement income already resembles a portfolio. Retired and semi-retired respondents draw income from 2.5 sources on average, most commonly workplace pensions, the State Pension, investment income, personal pensions and ISAs.

Workplace pensions remain an important foundation, but many retirees also draw upon State Pension income, investment portfolios, ISAs, personal pensions, property income and, in some cases, continued employment. This reflects a fundamental change in the structure of retirement.

The traditional model of retiring with a defined benefit pension that provided a predictable income has become less common for many households. Instead, retirees increasingly manage a complex collection of assets that must be coordinated over time.



Each source has different characteristics. Some offer predictability; others offer flexibility. Some provide tax advantages, while others may be preserved for future needs or legacy objectives. Retirement therefore increasingly resembles an ongoing financial management exercise rather than a passive phase of life.

This complexity helps explain why decumulation has become such an important challenge. It is not simply about having enough assets; it is about using those assets effectively.

The drawdown generation

Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) data shows that the number of pension plans entering drawdown rose by more than 25% during 2024/25, while total withdrawals reached £70.9bn. Pension freedoms have increased control, but also responsibility for withdrawal rates, investment risk, tax and longevity. Retirees are increasingly managing their own retirement balance sheets.

Advice, engagement and confidence

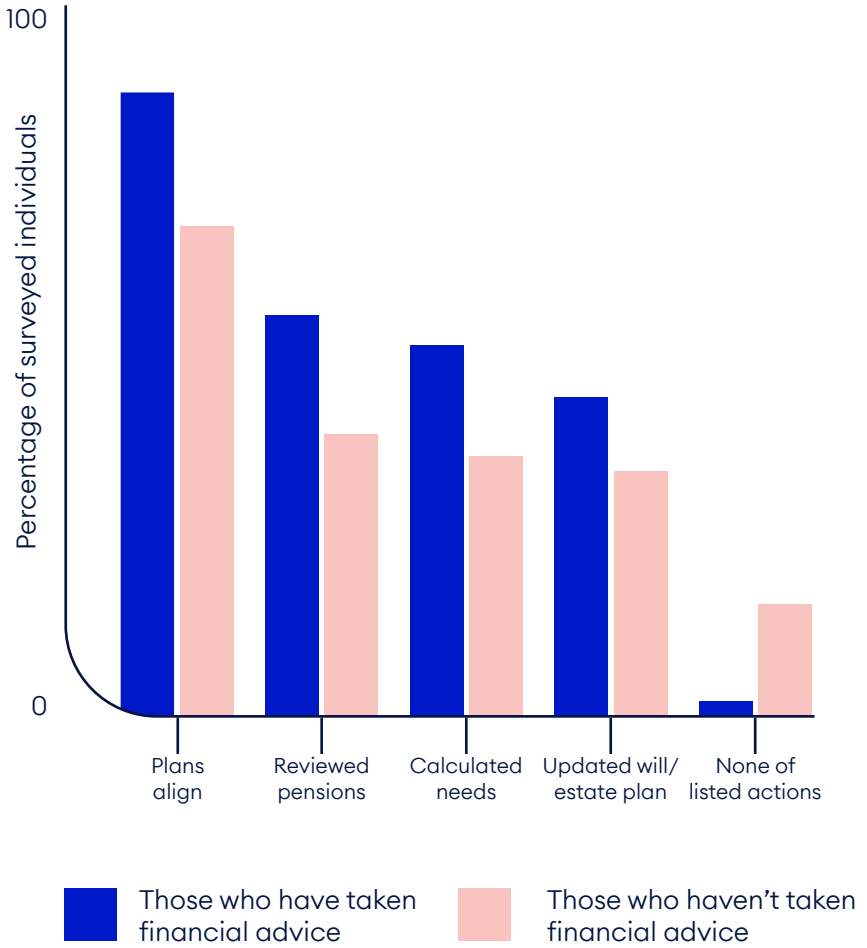
53% have taken or are currently taking formal advice about retirement. Among those using advice, the most commonly reported benefits are peace of mind (53%), understanding what to plan for (49%) and seeing what they might receive (46%). Among those not taking advice, 42% say they prefer to manage their own finances. These are reported associations and preferences, not evidence that advice caused a particular outcome.

The growth of decumulation has increased the importance of informed decision-making. For many respondents, professional advice appears to play a valuable role in that process.

Respondents who have taken advice report greater confidence, stronger alignment between their plans and retirement aspirations, and more planning activity. This is an association within the survey; it does not establish that advice caused those outcomes, as more engaged individuals may also be more likely to seek advice.

The difference is visible in both perceived alignment and reported action. 84% of respondents taking advice say their plans align well with their desired retirement, compared with 66% of those not taking advice. They also score notably higher on the Rathbones retire well index, averaging 54 out of 100 compared with 32 among those who haven't taken financial advice. Those who have taken financial advice are also more likely to report reviewing pensions, calculating income needs and completing legal or

Figure 3: Advice, alignment and reported action



Source: Rathbones and Savanta, 2026



planning actions. These findings remain associations rather than evidence of causation.

However, the research also reveals a significant degree of self-reliance. Many individuals continue to believe retirement planning is something they can manage independently.

This is understandable. The affluent population surveyed is generally financially engaged and experienced. Yet retirement may be one of the few financial transitions that cannot easily be repeated or corrected. While mistakes made during accumulation can often be rectified through additional saving, mistakes made during decumulation can be harder to reverse.

This perhaps helps explain why confidence remains important but may not always be sufficient. Successful retirement planning increasingly depends on combining confidence with preparedness.

Why the transition into retirement matters

The transition from work to retirement is where accumulation becomes decumulation. A regular salary is replaced by income drawn from pensions and other assets, creating new decisions about spending, tax, investment risk and flexibility. It can also bring changes in routine, identity and purpose. The survey does not prove that one period of retirement matters more than another, but it shows why the move from earning to drawing income deserves particular attention.

Those who navigate it successfully may be better positioned to enjoy the opportunities retirement presents.

Key takeaway

The retirement challenge is no longer simply accumulating wealth. It is converting that wealth into sustainable income that can support a changing lifestyle, adapt to uncertainty and potentially last for decades. For many affluent households, managing the transition from accumulation to decumulation may be the most important financial decision they ever make.



Chapter three: Retirement without a finish line

The rise of flexible, phased and purposeful retirement

Chapter at a glance

42%

Yet to retire expect to phase gradually into retirement

What our specialists are hearing from clients

Retirement looks very different from the one many people imagined twenty years ago. Increasingly, clients talk about stepping back rather than stopping altogether. Some want to continue consulting. Others want to pursue passion projects, mentoring, charitable work or part-time ventures. The focus has shifted from leaving work behind to creating a lifestyle that combines financial security, flexibility and purpose.

Retirement is changing

For much of modern history, retirement followed a relatively predictable path. People worked full-time until a specific date, left employment and entered a distinct new phase of life funded by their pension and savings.

That model is becoming less common.

The findings suggest retirement is increasingly viewed not as a destination but as a transition. Rather than drawing a clear line between working life and retirement, many affluent households expect a more gradual and flexible progression. The traditional concept of retirement remains important for some. Almost four in 10 respondents say they would prefer to or did stop working entirely at a set age.

Yet a similar proportion intend to phase gradually into retirement, while others

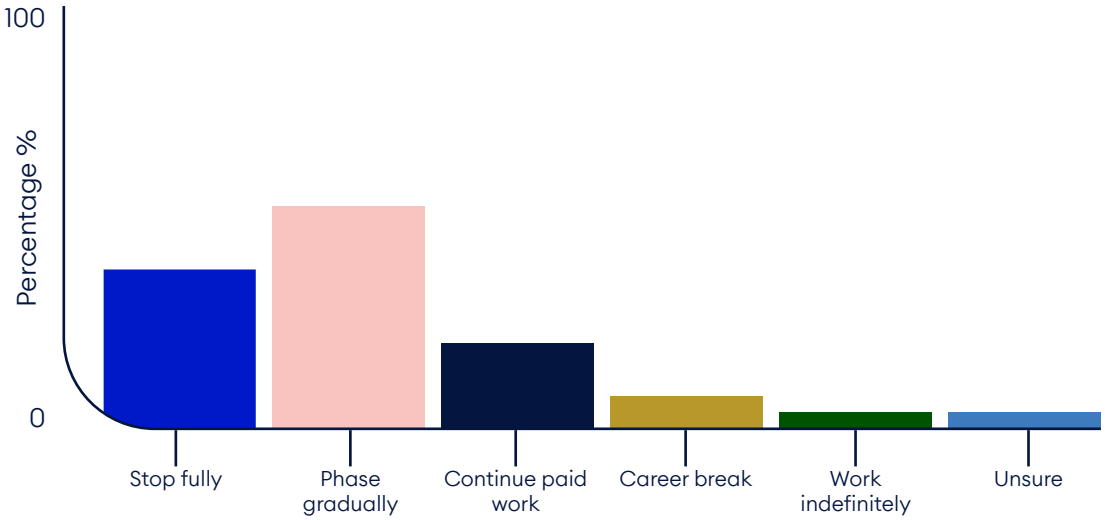
expect to continue earning through consulting, non-executive roles, advisory work or project-based employment. For many affluent households, retirement is no longer defined by the absence of work. Increasingly, it is defined by the freedom to choose how, when and why work continues.

The emergence of phased retirement

Among respondents who have not yet fully retired, phased retirement has become one of the dominant expectations. Many plan to gradually reduce their working commitments rather than stop abruptly. Others envisage stepping back from their primary careers while continuing some form of paid activity.

This reflects broader labour-market trends. The average age at which people leave the workforce continues to rise, and the employment rate among older workers remains historically high.

Figure 4: Retirement is becoming a transition



Source: Rathbones and Savanta, 2026

Government data shows employment among people aged 50 to 64 remains above 70%, and average labour market exit ages have reached record levels.

A number of factors are driving this shift. Some individuals continue working because they enjoy their careers and value the intellectual stimulation work provides. Others are attracted by the additional financial flexibility employment offers.

For some, work provides structure, identity and social interaction that can be difficult to replace. The result is a retirement landscape that increasingly blurs the distinction between work and retirement.

Purpose has become part of retirement planning

Financial security remains fundamental to retirement planning. Yet the research suggests many people increasingly view retirement success through a wider lens.

The most commonly cited motivations for working in retirement are not purely financial. Remaining mentally active, maintaining a sense of purpose and preserving social connections feature prominently among respondents' reasons for continuing to work after traditional retirement age.



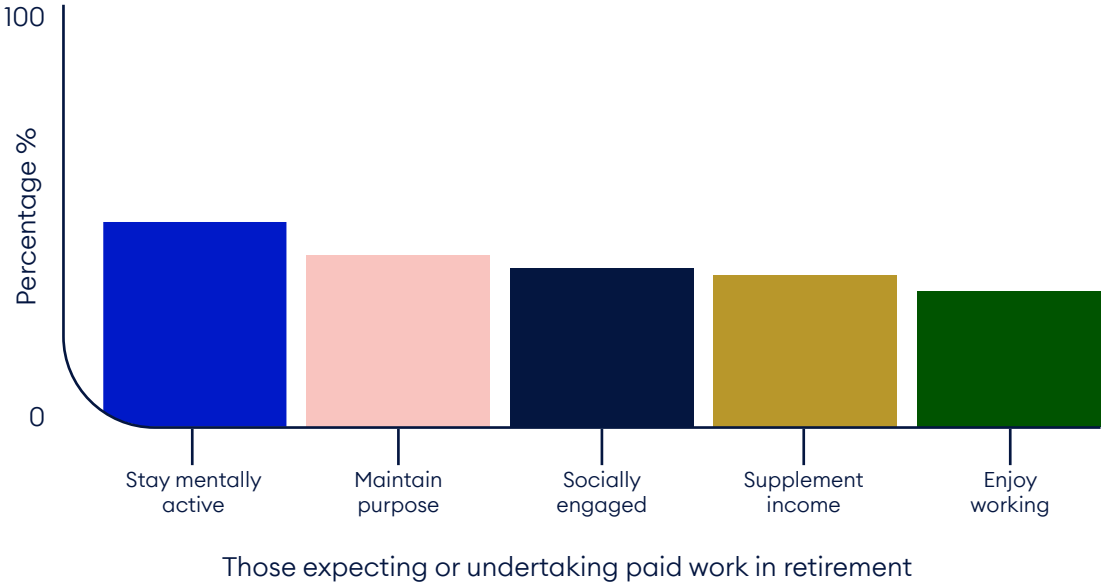
This reflects an important evolution in retirement thinking. Historically, retirement was often portrayed as freedom from work. Today, many affluent households appear to view retirement as freedom to choose the type of work and activities they pursue. Purpose is becoming an increasingly important component of retirement wellbeing.

The challenge is no longer simply funding retirement. It is creating a retirement worth retiring into.

Retirement is increasingly defined by lifestyle rather than leisure

The findings suggest that retirement is no longer viewed primarily as a point at which work ends. Instead, respondents are more focused on what retirement enables. Nearly half identify freedom and flexibility as a top priority, while travel, health and fitness, and existing hobbies all rank ahead of traditional markers of retirement. Family also remains important, with one in five prioritising supporting children and 17% wanting to spend more time helping with grandchildren.

Figure 5: Why people expect to work in retirement



Source: Rathbones and Savanta, 2026



Taken together, these priorities point to a broader definition of retirement success. Rather than simply reaching a stage at which work becomes financially optional, respondents increasingly view retirement as an opportunity to shape how they spend their time, maintain their wellbeing and invest in relationships and experiences that matter most to them.

This may also help explain the growing popularity of phased retirement. For many affluent households, the goal is not necessarily to stop working altogether, but to create greater control over how work fits alongside other priorities in later life.

What retirees say with hindsight

The experience of those already retired adds an important counterpoint. Among fully retired respondents, 85% say retirement has matched their expectations and 81% say they have been able to do everything they planned. Yet 24% still wish they had made a more detailed retirement plan sooner. Successful outcomes do not remove the value of preparation.

Among the retirees who wish they had planned sooner, reported engagement with some of the basics is lower: 35% reviewed pensions in detail, compared with 46% overall; 10% increased pension contributions, compared with 28% overall; and 55% had not factored in later-life care, compared with 45% overall. Clearer advice and personalised projections also feature prominently among the things that might have encouraged earlier action.

Looking ahead

The line between work and retirement is likely to continue blurring. Future retirees may move through more than one phase of retirement, placing greater emphasis on flexibility, purpose and adaptable income.

Key takeaway

Retirement is increasingly becoming a transition rather than an event. Affluent households are moving towards more flexible and purpose-driven retirements in which work, leisure, family and personal fulfilment coexist. The challenge is no longer simply planning for life after work, but planning for a new phase of life in which work itself may continue to play an important role.

Part 2: Protecting retirement

How resilient are retirement plans to risk, uncertainty and disruption?

Much of retirement planning focuses on reaching retirement. Less attention is often given to what might happen after it begins.

Inflation, tax, investment markets, health, care needs and family circumstances can all change. The challenge is not simply generating sufficient income, but ensuring plans remain resilient when circumstances do not unfold as expected.

The chapters in this part explore the protection gap: the distance between preparing for the retirement people want and preparing for the events that may reshape it.

40%

rank later-life care among their top 3 concerns

12%

have planned for potential care costs in detail

Chapter four: The retirement protection gap

Planning for the retirement you want and the risks you do not

Chapter at a glance

81% versus 37%

prepared for retirement versus prepared for the loss of a spouse or partner.

What we're hearing from clients

Most people plan for the retirement they hope to have. Far fewer spend time planning for the events that could derail it. Conversations about inflation, illness, care, redundancy or the death of a partner are often postponed because they are uncomfortable. Yet these are often the issues that have the biggest impact on long-term financial wellbeing.

Prepared for retirement, unprepared for disruption

One of the most striking findings in our research is the difference between preparedness for retirement and preparedness for the events that could disrupt it.

Across the survey, most respondents express confidence about their retirement plans. Many believe they have a clear funding strategy. Most understand the retirement lifestyle they hope to achieve. A significant majority believe they remain broadly on track.

Yet confidence drops sharply when respondents are asked about specific risks.

While retirement itself appears relatively well planned, many of the factors most likely to influence retirement outcomes are far less carefully considered. This creates a protection gap, not necessarily in wealth accumulation, but in resilience: the ability of a financial plan to withstand unexpected events and of a household to adapt when circumstances change.

Inflation remains the dominant concern

The biggest financial risk identified by respondents is one over which they have little direct control: beyond spending less on non-essentials that have risen sharply in value.

After several years in which rising prices became a central economic and political issue, many affluent households remain concerned about the long-term impact higher living costs may have on retirement spending power.

Inflation emerges as the most significant retirement concern in the research, ahead of investment returns, inheritance planning and family support obligations. This concern is understandable. Inflation may appear modest in any single year, but over a retirement spanning several decades, the cumulative effect can be significant.





Unlike those still working, retirees cannot necessarily rely on future salary increases to offset rising costs. Instead, they depend on income generated from pensions, investments and accumulated assets.

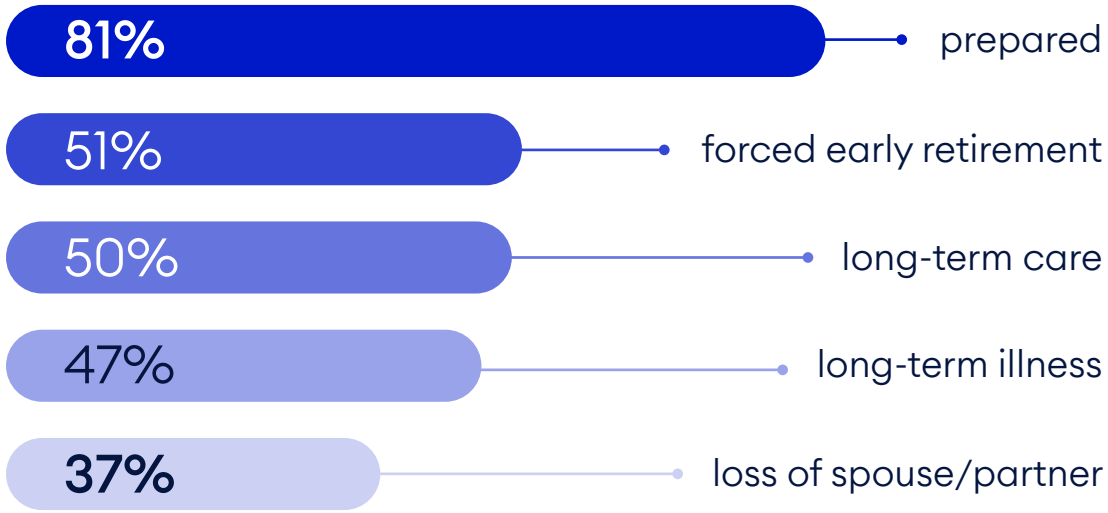
The challenge therefore becomes ensuring retirement income grows sufficiently to preserve purchasing power throughout later life. The findings suggest many households recognise this risk. The question is whether they fully appreciate how long it may persist.

Complexity has become a retirement risk

Tax and pension policy feature prominently among respondents' concerns. The difficulty is not necessarily a lack of information, but deciding what matters, what action is appropriate and how future changes could affect a long-term plan.

The overall 59% who say information volume makes decisions difficult rises to 73% among respondents who feel unprepared and 87% among those

Figure 6: Preparedness falls when life disrupts the plan



Source: Rathbones and Savanta, 2026



whose plans align poorly with their desired lifestyle. Choice can empower households, but complexity can also create hesitation.

The retirement shock many people do not expect

One of the most important protection challenges identified by the research is unexpected retirement.

Many respondents have considered when they would like to retire. Far fewer have spent significant time considering what might force them to retire earlier than planned. Redundancy, business failure, health problems, caring responsibilities and the death of a partner rarely appear in retirement projections. Yet they can fundamentally alter retirement outcomes.

Government data shows health continues to be one of the leading causes of economic inactivity among older workers, while labour market participation remains sensitive to wider economic conditions. Our findings suggest preparedness for these shocks remains materially weaker than preparedness for retirement itself.

This may reflect a natural tendency to focus on positive goals rather than adverse possibilities. However, retirement planning is increasingly becoming a question of resilience as much as aspiration. Successful plans are not necessarily those that predict the future correctly. They are those that can be adapted when circumstances change.

Resilience has become the new retirement asset

Viewed through this lens, retirement planning becomes less about preparing for a single outcome and more about preparing for a range of possibilities. This shift in mindset will become increasingly relevant as retirements continue to lengthen and diversify.

Key takeaway

The greatest risks to retirement are often not the ones people can predict, but the ones they fail to prepare for. Inflation, policy changes, health challenges and unexpected life events can all reshape retirement outcomes. As retirement becomes longer and more complex, resilience may prove just as valuable as wealth itself.

Chapter five: The care and longevity challenge

Living longer does not necessarily mean living more healthily

Chapter at a glance

40% versus 12%

rank care as a top-3 concern versus planned in detail.

What we're hearing from clients

Later-life care is often described as one of the most important retirement risks people don't want to discuss. Clients frequently acknowledge the potential impact of care costs, yet relatively few have incorporated them into detailed financial planning. The challenge is not a lack of awareness. It is turning awareness into action.

The retirement challenge nobody wants to think about

Retirement planning is often centred on aspirations. People imagine where they want to live, how they would like to spend their time and the experiences they hope to enjoy during later life.

Far fewer spend time considering what happens if retirement does not go entirely according to plan. Ill health, reduced mobility, cognitive decline and the need for ongoing care are among the most significant financial risks many households will ever face, yet they are also among the most difficult topics to address.

The findings suggest later-life care represents one of the clearest examples of the gap between concern and preparedness. Many affluent households recognise the risk, but considerably fewer have prepared for it. This creates one of the most important tensions identified in the entire report: people are increasingly living longer, but whether they are planning sufficiently for those additional years remains far less certain.

According to Office for National Statistics data, a typical 50-year-old can expect around two further decades in self-reported good health, with good health lasting to approximately age 70 on average. Life expectancy, however, extends considerably beyond that point, with the average person expected to live a further 14 to 16 years after leaving good health behind.

Importantly, being in less than good health does not necessarily mean severe disability, dependence or the need for residential care. It can, however, involve managing long-term health conditions, reduced mobility or an increasing need for practical support. This highlights the reality that many people may spend a significant proportion of later life living with health-related challenges, even while remaining active and independent.

The implications for retirement planning are significant

A retirement lasting 25 or 30 years may include multiple phases:

- A period of active retirement
- A period of gradual adjustment
- Potentially a period requiring additional support or care

Financial plans that focus solely on the early years of retirement may fail to account for this broader reality.

Concern is high, preparation is low

The research reveals widespread concern about later-life care. Many respondents rank the cost of long-term or residential care among their most significant retirement concerns. Yet detailed preparation remains the exception rather than the rule. Only a relatively small minority say they have planned for care costs in detail. Many have considered the issue only superficially.

Others admit they have not meaningfully factored potential care costs into retirement planning at all. This disparity between concern and action is striking.

Few retirement risks generate such a significant gap. Unlike investment markets or tax changes, care costs can feel distant and uncertain. People may not know whether they will require care, what type of care they may need or how long support may be required. As a result, planning is often deferred. Yet uncertainty itself may be an argument for preparation rather than inaction.

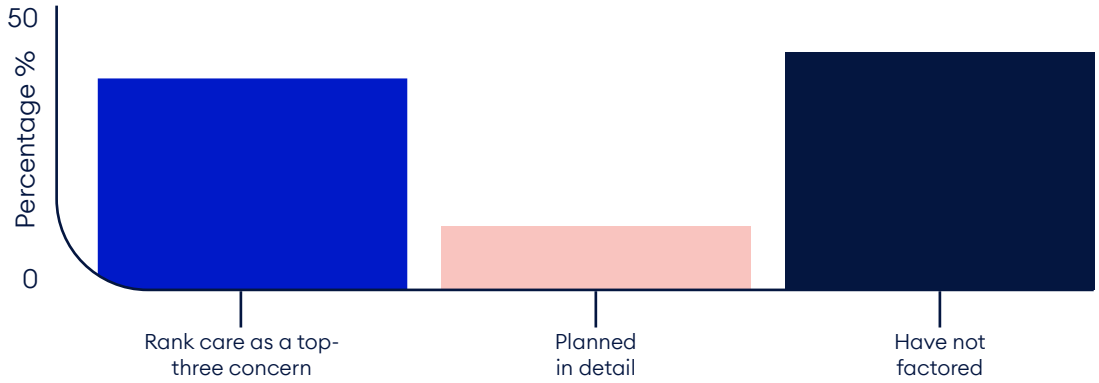
The care funding question

A further challenge emerges when respondents are asked how potential care costs might be funded. Many expect personal savings and investments to play a central role; others anticipate relying on pension assets, property wealth or downsizing; and some expect state support to contribute. This reflects broader uncertainty about care funding.

Unlike retirement income, which benefits from decades of policy discussion and public awareness, later-life care remains less well understood. The debate has become more complicated following the Government's decision not to proceed with previously proposed adult social care charging reforms and the planned cap on lifetime care costs.

For households attempting to plan ahead, uncertainty around future funding arrangements may make decisions even more difficult. The result is a risk that many people continue postponing important conversations until circumstances leave them with fewer options.

Figure 7: The care-planning gap



Source: Rathbones and Savanta, 2026

Care planning is about more than money

One of the misconceptions surrounding care planning is that it is primarily a financial exercise. In reality, financial planning is only one component. Care planning also involves decisions around housing, family support, location, independence and personal preferences.

Questions such as where care should be received, how support should be delivered, what role family members might play and what level of independence should be maintained are often just as important as funding decisions.

The research suggests these conversations frequently happen too late. By contrast, households that address them earlier may be better positioned to make informed decisions when circumstances change. Viewed through this lens, care planning becomes less about preparing for a specific outcome and more about preserving choice.

The cost of avoidance

The findings suggest many people avoid detailed care planning because they perceive the subject as uncomfortable. This is entirely understandable. Few people wish to contemplate declining health or reduced independence. Yet avoidance carries its own risks.

The later a conversation occurs, the fewer options may be available. Families may face difficult decisions during periods of stress. Financial arrangements may become reactive rather than strategic. Retirement planning is often most effective when it addresses difficult questions before they become immediate concerns. Care planning is perhaps the clearest example of this principle.

The absence of certainty does not reduce the value of preparation. If anything, it increases it.

Looking ahead

As life expectancy rises and care policy continues to evolve, later-life care is likely to become a more important part of retirement planning. The challenge is not simply funding care, but preserving choice and independence.

Key takeaway

Later-life care represents one of the biggest gaps in retirement planning. Concern about care costs is widespread, yet detailed preparation remains limited. As people live longer and retirement spans more years, planning for health, care and longevity may become just as important as planning for retirement income itself.



Part 3: Families, relationships, and legacy

How personal circumstances shape retirement, family and the future of wealth

Retirement may be influenced by markets, policy and financial resources, but it is ultimately experienced through personal circumstances.

Gender, relationship status, family structure, health, work history and sources of wealth can all shape the resources people bring to retirement, the risks they face and the decisions they make.

Increasingly, these factors also influence what happens to wealth beyond retirement. Decisions about income, care, family support and inheritance are becoming more interconnected as people live longer, family structures become more complex and retirees seek to balance their own financial wellbeing with supporting future generations.

This part moves beyond a single model of retirement. It explores how different life experiences shape confidence, preparedness, support networks, inheritance planning and the way wealth is ultimately used, shared and passed on.

68%

of single respondents look forward to retirement, versus 80% of married respondents

48%

of blended families find inheritance planning complex, versus 35% of non-blended families



Chapter six: Women and later life

The confidence gap and the preparedness gap

Chapter at a glance

66% versus 80%

women versus men who believe they are on track for the retirement they want.

What we're hearing from clients

Women often arrive at retirement with different experiences of work, wealth accumulation and financial decision-making. Many have spent periods out of the workforce raising families or caring for older relatives. Many have worked part-time. Others have experienced divorce, widowhood or career interruptions that have shaped their financial journeys. As a result, retirement planning conversations often focus as much on confidence and certainty as they do on assets and income.

A different retirement experience

Retirement is often discussed as though it is a universal experience. The reality is more nuanced.

While men and women share many of the same aspirations for later life, the routes they take to retirement are often very different. Differences in earnings, career patterns, caregiving responsibilities and life expectancy can all influence retirement outcomes.

These structural differences are well documented at a national level. Research from the Pensions Policy Institute shows women aged 55 to 64 hold less than half of the private pension wealth held by men of the same age, while women are significantly more likely to undertake unpaid care responsibilities throughout their working lives.

Our findings suggest these differences continue into retirement planning itself. Women are not only more likely to face

structural retirement challenges, they also appear more likely to question whether they are fully prepared for retirement.

The confidence divide

The most consistent gender difference emerging from the research is confidence. Across several retirement measures, women report lower levels of confidence than men.

Women are more likely to say they:

- Do not fully understand how to turn pensions and investments into retirement income
- Are unsure whether their retirement income will allow them to live well
- Lack clarity around the level of income they will need in retirement
- Are uncertain whether they are on track to achieve the retirement they want

These findings are particularly striking given the affluent nature of the audience surveyed. All respondents hold significant levels of investable assets, yet wealth alone does not appear to eliminate uncertainty. The evidence suggests retirement confidence is influenced by more than asset values. Understanding, engagement and preparedness also appear to play important roles.

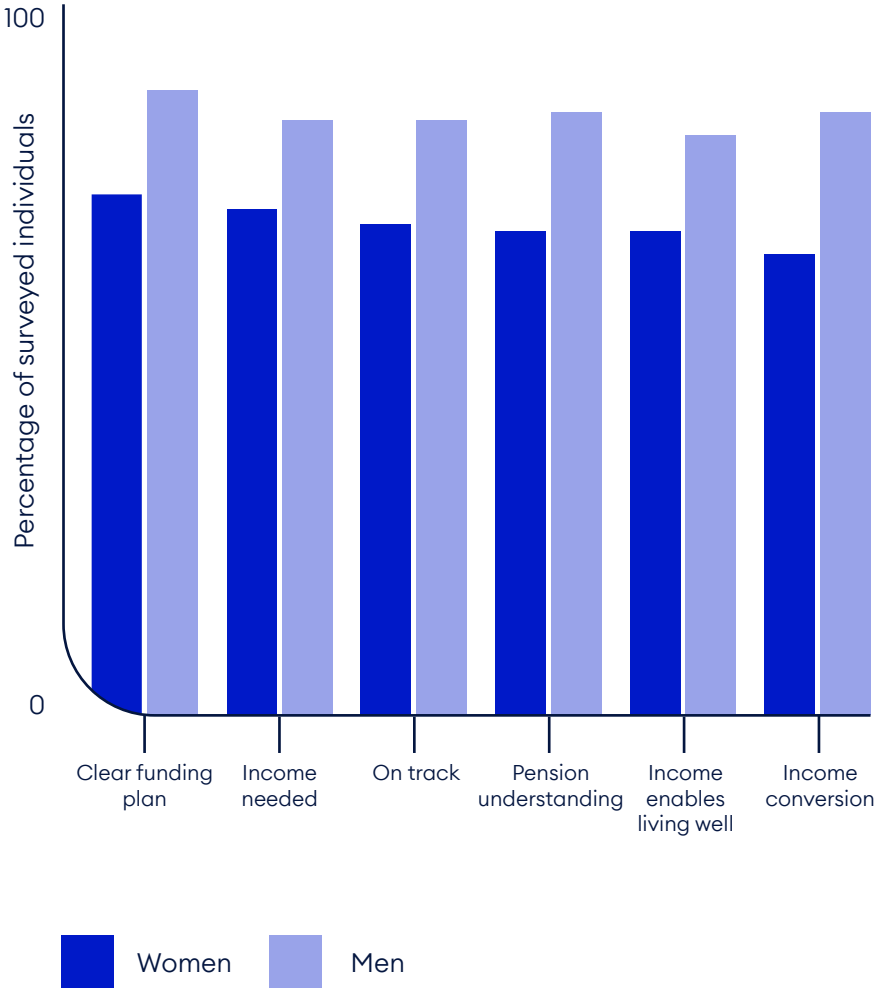
Confidence is accompanied by an action gap

The differences are not limited to perceptions. Women are less likely than men to report reviewing pensions in detail (41% versus 50%), calculating retirement income needs or preferences (37% versus 47%) and consolidating pensions (18% versus 26%). One in 10 women report taking none of the listed retirement-planning actions.

The gender pensions challenge

The retirement confidence gap sits alongside well-established pension wealth disparities. Nationally, women continue to retire with lower levels of private pension wealth than men. According to the Pensions Policy Institute, women aged 55 to 64 hold median private pension wealth of £57,500 compared with £125,000 among men of the same age.

Figure 8: Women report lower retirement confidence



Source: Rathbones and Savanta, 2026

The reasons are complex and rooted in broader labour-market and societal trends. Women remain more likely to work part-time, take career breaks and undertake caring responsibilities. Government data also shows that women aged 50 to 64 are considerably more likely than men to be economically inactive because of family responsibilities. These effects accumulate over time: periods outside the workforce may reduce pension contributions; lower lifetime earnings may constrain savings; and part-time employment can affect automatic-enrolment eligibility and contribution levels.

Over a working lifetime, these differences can result in materially different retirement outcomes.

The hidden effect of relationship change

Another factor influencing women's retirement outcomes is relationship change. Divorce, separation and widowhood can all reshape financial plans, often at or close to retirement age.

Our experience with clients suggests that pensions are not consistently included in divorce settlements, despite often being among a household's most valuable assets. At the same time, women typically live longer than men, creating the prospect of managing retirement finances independently for extended periods later in life.

The combination of longer life expectancy, lower pension wealth and greater likelihood of living alone in later life creates a unique set of planning challenges. As a result, retirement planning for many women may involve a different balance of priorities compared with men.

Security often takes precedence over optimisation, and certainty frequently matters as much as growth.

Financial security versus lifestyle aspirations

The research suggests women are more likely than men to prioritise feeling financially secure as a core retirement objective. This is an important finding.

Retirement planning discussions often focus heavily on investment returns, tax efficiency and wealth preservation, yet many retirees view retirement through a broader lens.

Feeling secure, having the confidence to spend and knowing that financial resources will remain available in later life can all influence retirement decisions. Fear of running out of money can discourage spending even where financial circumstances appear strong, while uncertainty can delay important decisions.

This helps explain why confidence remains such an important theme throughout the research. Retirement success is not simply about having resources; it is also about feeling able to use them.

Confidence, preparedness and advice

The findings suggest professional advice may play an important role in bridging the confidence gap. Respondents who have sought advice report greater clarity around retirement income, stronger alignment between their plans and desired lifestyle outcomes, and higher levels of preparedness.

This is particularly relevant given the complexity of modern retirement planning. The shift towards decumulation means individuals increasingly face decisions about retirement income, drawdown strategies, tax planning, longevity risk, inheritance and care. These decisions affect everyone.

However, they may carry particular significance for those who feel less confident about their retirement plans. The challenge is not necessarily a lack of capability. Rather, it is helping individuals translate financial resources into confidence and action.

Women also report greater difficulty navigating the policy environment. 64% say the volume of pension information makes decisions difficult, while 54% say policy uncertainty makes them anxious. The findings suggest that the confidence gap is accompanied by a complexity gap: the challenge is not simply accessing information, but interpreting it and deciding what action is appropriate.

Key takeaway

The retirement gap is not solely a wealth gap. It is also a confidence and preparedness gap. Women often face different financial journeys, longer retirements and greater later-life uncertainty. As retirement planning becomes increasingly complex, helping people feel confident about their decisions may become just as important as helping them build wealth in the first place.



Chapter seven: Retirement alone or together

How relationship status shapes retirement planning

Chapter at a glance

68% versus 80%

single versus married/civil partnership respondents who look forward to retirement.

What we're hearing from clients

Retirement planning is often approached as a financial exercise, but relationship status plays a significant role in shaping people's experiences. Couples can share decisions, responsibilities and resources, while single retirees often carry those responsibilities alone. Neither path is inherently better, but each creates different challenges and opportunities that can shape retirement outcomes.

Retirement is not a universal experience

Much of the retirement conversation assumes a traditional household structure. The image of retirement often centres on couples travelling, spending time with grandchildren and navigating retirement together.

But around one in five respondents are single, separated, divorced or widowed. Retirement for these individuals can look very different from retirement experienced as part of a couple.

Relationship status influences how retirement is funded, how financial decisions are made, attitudes towards inheritance, preparedness for later-life care and the support networks available throughout retirement.

The findings suggest retirement planning may increasingly need to recognise these differing experiences rather than treating retirement as a single journey.



Interestingly, some retirement concerns appear remarkably consistent regardless of relationship status. When asked whether they worry about having saved enough for retirement:

- 44% of singles agree.
- 44% of cohabiting respondents agree.
- 45% of married respondents agree.

The interaction between gender and household structure

The research suggests that single women may face a particularly distinct planning context. 71% say they feel prepared for retirement, compared with 82% of couples and 81% of single men. 40% feel prepared for long-term care needs, compared with 51% of couples and 50% of single men. Single women are also more likely than couples to value advice on later-life planning (39% versus 30%). Household composition also shapes what people want retirement to make possible. Single women place greater emphasis on freedom and flexibility than single men, while single men are more likely to prioritise hobbies and investment guidance. Couples report better retirement plan alignment and place greater emphasis on inheritance and estate-planning advice. The findings suggest that retirement preferences are shaped not only by wealth, but also by household composition and life circumstances.

Care planning takes on greater importance

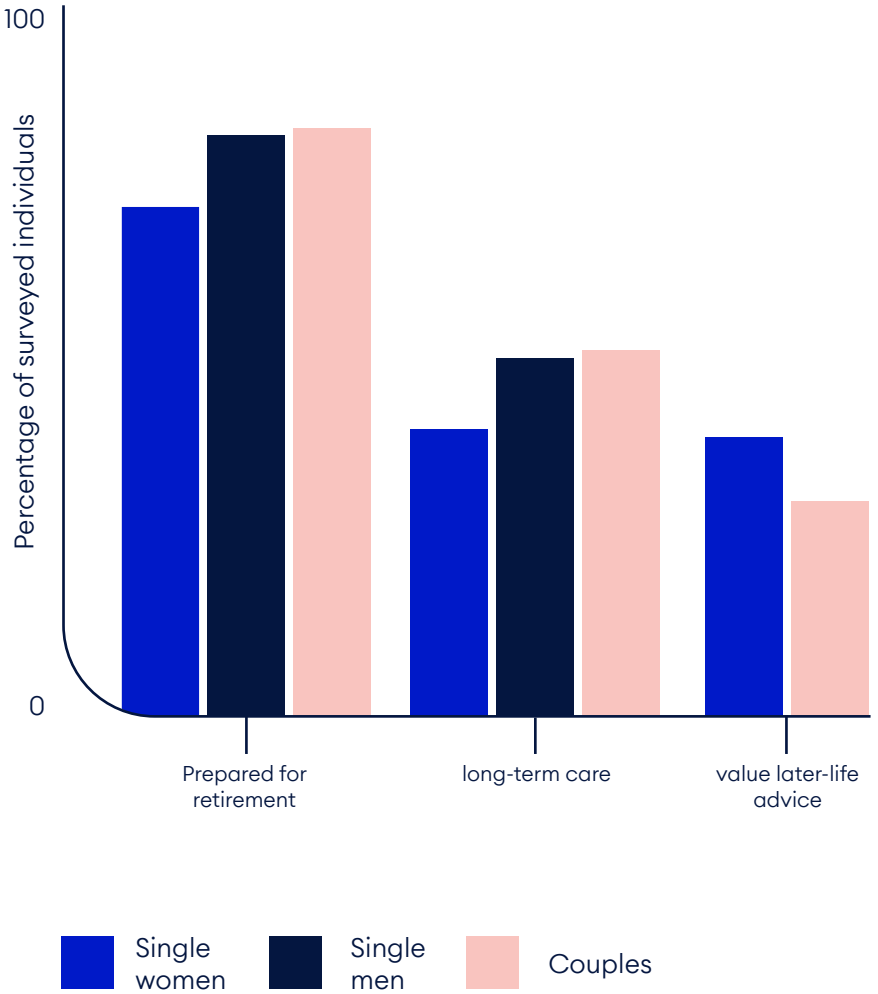
Throughout this report, later-life care emerged as one of the most important areas where concern exceeds preparation. For single individuals, the issue may be particularly significant. Couples often anticipate that a spouse or partner will provide some level of informal support during periods of ill health.

Single retirees cannot necessarily rely on that support. This places greater importance on care planning, housing decisions, powers of attorney, financial resilience and support networks.

When retirement is navigated alone, care planning becomes not simply a financial concern but an important part of preserving independence and choice later in life.

This may become an increasingly important area of focus as Britain continues to age.

Figure 9: Preparedness differs within single and couple households



Source: Rathbones and Savanta, 2026

Retirement as a social experience

Retirement is not solely a financial transition. It is also a personal and social one. Couples often enter retirement with a built-in support structure. They can share activities, make decisions together and provide mutual emotional support through major life changes.

Singles frequently need to build these networks more deliberately. Friends, family, community groups, volunteering and hobbies can all become important sources of connection and purpose.

This may help explain why the report's broader findings around flexibility, community involvement, hobbies and maintaining purpose resonate particularly strongly for some single households.

Retirement planning may therefore need to consider social resilience as well as financial resilience.

Changing household structures mean more people will move between planning as a couple and planning alone. Retirement planning should reflect both current circumstances and the possibility that income, care and support arrangements may change.

Key takeaway

Relationship status plays a significant role in shaping retirement experiences. While couples often benefit from shared resources, decision-making and support, single retirees typically carry greater responsibility for funding, managing and protecting retirement independently. As household structures continue to evolve, retirement planning may increasingly need to recognise that there is no single model of retirement success.





Chapter eight: Modern families, modern legacies

Why inheritance planning has become more complicated

Chapter at a glance

24%

say inheritance concerns have made them less likely to remarry.

What our specialists are hearing from clients

Inheritance planning discussions are increasingly less about tax and more about people. Children from previous relationships, stepchildren, unmarried partners and multiple family branches can create competing expectations. The most difficult question is often not how to pass on wealth efficiently, but how to do so fairly and without undermining family relationships.

The family has changed

Inheritance planning is often built around a traditional model: a married couple, shared assets and children who inherit equally. Many modern families do not fit that pattern. Divorce, remarriage, cohabitation and stepfamilies can create overlapping responsibilities to current partners, former partners, biological children and stepchildren.

The research shows that this complexity is not only technical. It can influence relationship decisions, increase the likelihood of family conflict and change how parents think about fairness and equal distribution.

Inheritance concerns are shaping relationship decisions

Almost a quarter of affluent respondents (24%) say inheritance concerns have made them less likely to remarry. The figure rises to 35% among blended families. Within the research segment described as older female divorcees and inheritors, 72% agree.

These findings suggest that legacy considerations can affect decisions made during life, not only the distribution of wealth after death. For some individuals, remarriage raises questions about protecting children from an earlier relationship, providing for a new partner and avoiding unintended outcomes for different branches of the family.

Complexity rises as family branches multiply

Across the full sample, 33% describe inheritance planning as “really complex”. This rises to 48% among blended families, 49% among respondents with children from multiple partners and 48% among stepfamily households.

The pattern is even sharper for inheritance-related conflict. 14% report conflict overall, compared with 19% among blended families, 27% among those with children from multiple partners.

The impact can extend beyond the inheritance plan itself. 26% of blended families say tax planning around inheritance is affecting family relationships, compared with 17% of non-blended families. The same proportion of blended families say they believe their plans are fair but their partner disagrees, compared with 14% of non-blended families.

The findings point to an escalation in complexity as more family branches and relationships are involved. A current partner may require security; children from previous relationships may expect wealth to remain within their branch of the family; and stepchildren may have different expectations again. These are legitimate but sometimes competing priorities.

Figure 10: More complex family structures report more inheritance difficulty





Fair does not always mean equal

Equal distribution remains the dominant intention. Among parents with more than one child, 83% expect to divide their inheritance equally. However, the proportion falls to 71% among parents with children from multiple relationships and 73% among stepfamily households.

Among respondents planning an unequal distribution, 19% intend to leave more to biological children from a current partner and 11% plan to leave more to biological children from a previous partner. No respondents in this subgroup reported that they would leave more to stepchildren.

The result highlights a difficult distinction between equality and fairness. As family structures become more complex, parents may increasingly distinguish between the two when making inheritance decisions. They may take account of support provided during life, financial need, family businesses or the strength of different relationships. Unequal intentions can also create misunderstanding if expectations are not discussed or documented clearly.

Demand for inheritance advice rises with complexity

39% of respondents say they need inheritance-planning advice. Demand rises to 45% among parents with children from multiple partners and 49% among stepfamily households.

This demand is understandable. Complex families may need to coordinate wills, pension nominations, trusts, lifetime gifts, property ownership and provision for a surviving partner.

Communication is part of the plan

Technical arrangements matter, but they cannot resolve every family tension. Decisions about partners, biological children and stepchildren are also decisions about fairness, responsibility and recognition. Clear documentation can reduce ambiguity, while carefully managed conversations can help families understand the reasoning behind a plan.

Family structures, longevity and intergenerational dependency are making inheritance planning more personal. Clarity, communication and alignment with family priorities may matter as much as technical efficiency.

Chapter nine: Spend it or leave it?

The new legacy dilemma

Chapter at a glance

57% versus 18%

prioritise using wealth for retirement versus inheritance

What we're hearing from clients

Many clients spent decades building wealth with the intention of leaving something meaningful to future generations. Increasingly, however, they are asking a different question: how much is enough? The challenge is no longer simply preserving wealth for heirs. It is finding the right balance between enjoying retirement, retaining flexibility and supporting children and grandchildren at points in life when they need it most, without compromising financial security.

A changing relationship with inheritance

For many years, retirement and inheritance planning were treated as largely separate issues. People accumulated wealth during working life, funded retirement from pensions and savings, and passed remaining assets to the next generation.

Today, those boundaries are becoming less clear. Longer retirements mean wealth often needs to support households for decades after work ends. Families increasingly provide financial support throughout life rather than solely through inheritance. Tax rules continue to evolve. Meanwhile, retirees are placing greater emphasis on experiences, flexibility and personal fulfilment than previous generations.

As a result, many affluent households are reassessing the role inheritance should play within wider financial planning. The findings suggest a significant shift in priorities.

Retirement comes first

Perhaps the clearest message emerging from the research is that most affluent households place their own retirement security ahead of inheritance objectives. A majority of respondents prioritise using their wealth to fund their own retirement. Far fewer identify leaving an inheritance as their primary objective. This finding challenges a longstanding assumption about retirement wealth.

Historically, many households viewed preserving capital as an important goal. Spending was often moderated by a desire to leave assets untouched for future generations.

The findings suggest that attitudes may be changing. Modern retirees increasingly recognise that wealth has multiple purposes: providing financial security, creating opportunities, supporting family, funding experiences, preserving independence and leaving a legacy.





For many households, however, leaving a legacy is no longer the only goal.

The 57% prioritising retirement comprises two distinct positions: 30% expect to draw as much as they need and do not see inheritance as a priority, while 27% expect to draw most of what they need but still try to leave something behind. A further 17% aim for an even balance, 13% would draw only what they need to protect inheritance, 5% would preserve as much as possible and 8% are unsure.

The pension inheritance question

Recent policy developments are likely to accelerate this debate. From April 2027, significant changes to inheritance tax treatment will affect many pension arrangements, bringing most unused pension funds and pension death benefits within the value of an estate for inheritance tax purposes. The change has important implications.

For many years, pensions were often

Figure 11: The lifestyle-versus-legacy balance



Source: Rathbones and Savanta, 2026

viewed as one of the most tax-efficient assets to pass between generations. As these advantages reduce, households may begin re-evaluating how retirement wealth should be used and preserved.

The research suggests many people are already considering these questions. Some have sought professional advice. Others have reviewed wills, adjusted investment strategies or undertaken gifting activity. Yet a substantial proportion have taken no action.

The awareness-action gap

The policy change is not universally understood. 24% of respondents appear unaware of the proposed pension inheritance tax treatment. Among the 76% who are aware, almost two-thirds (65%) report taking at least one of the listed actions, while 35% report taking none. The findings show both engagement and a remaining gap: some households have not yet reached awareness, while others are aware but have not acted.

Lifetime giving and the balancing act

For some families, legacy is becoming an ongoing process rather than a single transfer after death. Support with housing, education or business may have greater impact earlier, but every gift reduces resources available for uncertain future needs. The central trade-off is therefore between supporting family today, preserving later-life flexibility and enjoying retirement. The appropriate balance will differ, but the objective is increasingly to align wealth with personal goals, family priorities and future resilience.

Looking ahead

Longer retirements, pension-tax reform, complex family structures and intergenerational dependency are reshaping inheritance planning. Future retirees may make a sequence of wealth-transfer decisions throughout later life, shifting the emphasis from maximising inheritance to maximising impact.

Key takeaway

Affluent households are increasingly prioritising their own financial security and quality of life in retirement while continuing to support future generations. Inheritance remains important, but the focus is shifting from preserving wealth at all costs towards balancing lifestyle, flexibility and legacy. The question is no longer simply what people leave behind, but how wealth can best be used throughout later life.



Conclusion

What hindsight reveals

Retirement can go well and still reveal opportunities for better preparation. Among retirees who wish they had planned sooner, pension reviews, contribution increases and care planning were less common, while clearer advice and personalised retirement-income projections were the strongest reported prompts for earlier action.

What the findings suggest affluent households should consider

The findings do not prescribe one retirement journey, but they point to seven questions:

1. Is confidence supported by action and regular review?
2. Has planning moved beyond accumulation to a sustainable income strategy?
3. Could the plan adapt to inflation, illness, care, family change or policy reform?
4. Have longevity, care preferences and later-life support been considered?
5. Does the legacy plan reflect modern family realities and expectations?
6. Is the balance between lifestyle, resilience and inheritance explicit?
7. Does the plan reflect personal circumstances, including relationship status, health and work history?

The experience of current retirees reinforces the point: 85% say retirement matched expectations, yet 24% still wish they had made a more detailed plan sooner. Policy changes add another sequence, from awareness to understanding and, where appropriate, action.

A new definition of retirement success

The challenge is no longer simply building financial resources. It is deciding how those resources can support income, resilience, care, family and legacy without allowing the desire for security to prevent wealth from serving its purpose.

That is the Great Decumulation Challenge: moving from wealth accumulated to wealth used well.





Successful retirement increasingly appears to require three interconnected outcomes:

Funding retirement: having the resources to support the lifestyle people want.

Protecting retirement: building resilience against uncertainty, changing circumstances and later-life risks.

Passing on wealth: supporting future generations in ways that reflect personal values and family priorities.

The households best positioned for retirement are unlikely to be those that focus exclusively on one of these objectives. They are likely to be those that successfully balance all three.

Final takeaway

Affluence creates capacity, not certainty. The future of retirement may belong not to those who have accumulated the most, but to those who have converted wealth into a flexible plan and the confidence to use it well.

Start the conversation

Retirement is no longer simply about building wealth. As this report shows, the challenge is turning that wealth into sustainable income, preparing for later-life risks, and balancing lifestyle ambitions with long-term financial security.

Whether you're planning for retirement, navigating pension decisions, considering later-life care, or thinking about the legacy you want to leave, we're here to help.

If you're already a Rathbones client, please speak to your usual contact.

Call us: 0330 390 9191
(weekdays from 9am-5pm)

Submit an enquiry online:
rathbones.com/contact-rathbones



Survey methodology

How the research was conducted

The new retirement reality report is based on original quantitative research commissioned by Rathbones and conducted by Savanta.

2,036 UK affluent adults, £250,000+ Minimum investable assets, 3-27 June 2026 Fieldwork

Research design

- A 15-minute online survey among UK adults with at least £250,000 in investable assets.
- The sample covered three core life-stage groups: mid-career, pre-retirement and retired affluent individuals.
- The research was designed to support robust analysis of retirement preparedness, financial resilience, later-life care, family circumstances and legacy planning.

Sample profile at a glance

Measure	Sample composition
Age	35-54: 21% | 55-64: 57% | 65+: 23%
Gender	Women: 41% | Men: 59%
Investable assets	£250,000-£499,999: 59% | £500,000-£999,999: 25% | £1 million+: 16%.
Main source of wealth	Savings from earnings: 38% | personal investments: 23% | inheritance: 16% | property: 13% | business-related: 8%.





What the index measures

The Rathbones retire well index is a survey-derived behavioural engagement and planning index. It combines 7 equally weighted metrics covering financial review, pension engagement, retirement planning, legal readiness, later-life costs and consideration of pension IHT changes. It is not a measure of financial adequacy and has not been validated as a predictor of future retirement outcomes.

Purpose and interpretation

The Rathbones retire well index provides a consistent benchmark of the practical actions respondents report taking to prepare for retirement and later life. The 0-100 score is a relative summary of the behaviours included, not a percentage of retirement readiness or a diagnostic assessment of an individual plan.

The seven equally weighted metrics

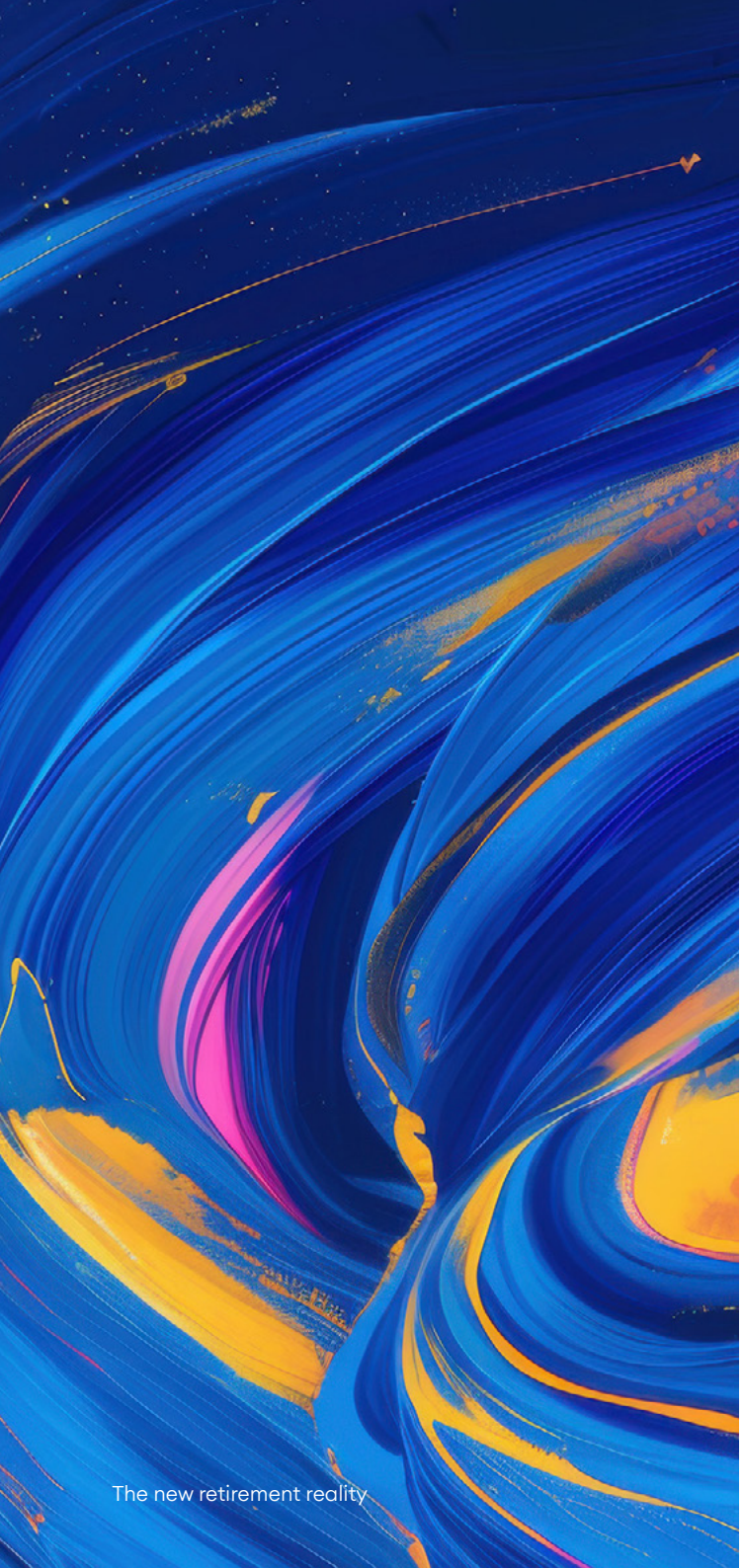
Frequency of review	How often respondents review their pension or retirement savings.
Recency of review	How recently respondents reviewed their plan or took formal financial advice about retirement.
Pension engagement	Whether respondents reviewed pensions in detail, increased pension contributions or consolidated multiple pensions.
Retirement planning	Whether respondents undertook retirement planning or worked out their retirement income needs and preferences.
Legal readiness	Whether respondents updated a will or estate plan, or put a lasting power of attorney in place.
Later-life costs	The extent to which potential later-life care costs have been factored into planning.
Considered IHT	Whether respondents took, or plan to take, action in response to the April 2027 pension IHT changes, including professional advice, investment changes or reviewing a will.

How the score is constructed

Each metric was recoded so that higher values represented greater engagement or planning activity. The seven metrics were standardised, equally weighted and combined on a 0-100 scale. Equal weighting is transparent and prevents any one area from dominating, but it does not imply that each metric has an identical relationship with retirement outcomes.

Responses not asked because of questionnaire routing were retained as missing. “Not sure” responses were treated as missing where they could not reasonably be interpreted, and scores were calculated only where respondents had sufficient valid data.





Headline result and reporting bands

The average continuous score is 44.4, reported as 44/100. The continuous score remains the primary measure for analysis. For communication, scores are also grouped into four pragmatic reporting bands:

Band	Score	Share
Very low	0-24.9	16%
Low	25-39.9	25%
Moderate	40-59.9	39%
High	60-100	20%

Important interpretation points

- The Rathbones retire well index measures reported behaviours, not the quality of decisions or financial adequacy.
- The IHT metric reflects behaviour relating to a specific policy change and may need review in future editions as the policy environment evolves.
- Because recency of advice or review is included, people who deliberately choose not to take advice may score differently from otherwise similar respondents. This does not mean they are necessarily financially less prepared.
- Advice-related comparisons should be described as associations, not causal effects.

Appendix: external context sources

Pensions UK: Retirement Living Standards update, 3 June 2026.
https://www.retirementlivingstandards.org.uk/news/2026-rls-update

Department for Work and Pensions: The Pensions Commission collection, updated 19 May 2026.
https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/the-pensions-commission

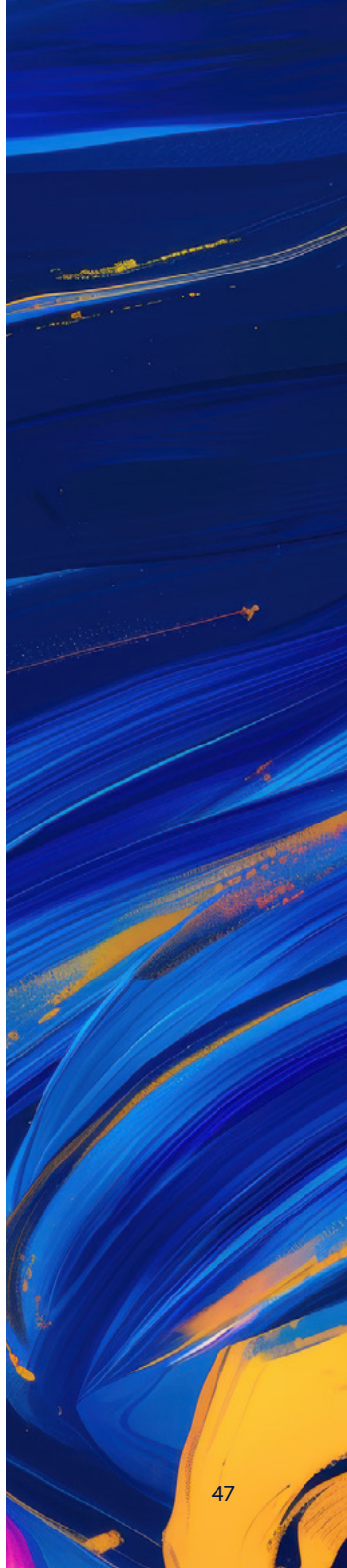
Financial Conduct Authority: Retirement income market data 2024/25, published 16 September 2025.
https://www.fca.org.uk/data/retirement-income-market-data-2024-25

Office for National Statistics: Healthy life expectancy, UK: 2022 to 2024, released 19 February 2026.
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandlifeexpectancies/bulletins/healthstatelifeexpectanciesuk/between2011to2013and2022to2024

HM Revenue & Customs: Inheritance Tax on pensions: technical note, updated 29 May 2026.
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inheritance tax-on-pensions-technical-note/technical-note-inheritance tax-on-pensions

Pensions Dashboards Programme: Progress update report, July 2026
https://www.pensionsdashboardsprogramme.org.uk/progress-update-report

Pensions Policy Institute: International Women's Day and the Gender Pensions Gap, March 2025.
https://www.pensionspolicyinstitute.org.uk/media/2x3h4bax/20250307-ppi-digest-iwd-final.pdf





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