

Seven Ways to Maintain Independence with Technology

DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Joseph A. Fox, Executive Director

Freedom is a word commonly associated with retirement. Most retirees quickly become accustomed to freedom from work, but aging can lead to concerns that one day we will need to rely on others. Over the last working year, many experienced first-hand how technology, such as working remotely and food/grocery delivery apps, made it easier to remain in our homes. In retirement, we have even more technology available to help maintain our independence.

We are in a unique position at OPERS to witness daily the conclusion of varied careers of the many dedicated public employees in Oklahoma as they enter the new world of retirement. In the last 12 months, I have seen public employees retire with 57, 53, and 50 years of service. Another 15 retirees amassed between 45 – 49 years of service. These are no small achievements, but it certainly does not surprise me. Our state and local governments are full of enthusiastic, devoted and loyal public employees who have dedicated their lives to serving those in need, and performing jobs that help make our state better.

As we have recently witnessed, in times of crisis citizens rely on government services even more than in normal times. And we are not in normal times. It has been a difficult and challenging year for workers and businesses throughout the world. Business closures, elimination of jobs, loss of productivity, and service delivery disruptions have become the norm, and public sector employees have not been spared. But one thing remained constant: our government employees continued serving the public without interruption. A tremendous toll was placed on our families, friends, and our mental health. Our health care workers, first responders, public safety

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1 Self-Driving Vehicles

Losing the ability to safely drive is an unpleasant thought. Holding on to transportation independence is easier as autonomous vehicles become common place. Many of the technologies that go into self-driving cars are already available: lane assistance, blind-spot monitoring, front collision assistance, adaptive cruise control, road sign recognition, etc. These features can keep you safely driving years longer.

2 Smart Home Devices

With smart lights, for example, you can turn lights on or off from your device, by voice command, motion sensor or set to a schedule instead of walking across the room. This can be useful if you are at risk of falling in a dark room. Voice assistants do more than look up information, tell jokes and run other devices. You can use the assistant to make calls or send messages, which are especially useful when a phone screen is hard to read or you are stuck and need help. As these technologies improve, instead of requiring you to know what words to use, these machines will proactively learn what you may need before asking.

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Working in Retirement

What You Need to Know

Retirees are returning to work in larger numbers than before. The Department of Labor reports that the labor force growth rate of the 65- to 74-year-old age group is expected to be about 55 percent. Even more surprising, the 75 and older age group is expected to be about 86 percent! This is driven mainly by the fact we are healthier and living longer than previous generations. If working becomes part of your retirement, you should be aware of how your OPERS benefit could be affected.

EARNINGS LIMITS FOR 2021

Limit if not reaching the Social Security full retirement age in 2021	\$18,960
Limit up to the point of reaching the Social Security full retirement age in 2021	\$50,520
After reaching the Social Security full retirement age	No Limit

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Any work performed outside of the OPERS system will not affect your OPERS benefit. You can take a job in the private sector, start your own business, or work for an employer under a different retirement system without concern to your OPERS benefit.

As an OPERS retiree, state law prohibits you from returning to work with the same employer for a period of one year, unless you waive receipt of your OPERS retirement benefits. Same employer means the state agency or local entity that you retired from. For example, if you retire from the Department of Human Services (DHS), you cannot return to work for DHS anywhere within the State of Oklahoma for one year - even if it's in a different office, city or position. It doesn't matter if the position is full-time, part-time, seasonal, temporary, etc.

Similarly, the IRS prohibits pre-retirement employment arrangements with your original employer. This means that you cannot arrange to retire and then be rehired on any basis by that same employer, including third party contracts such as with a temp agency. These arrangements are a violation of IRS Code and do not constitute an actual retirement.

You may return to work as a retiree with a different OPERS participating employer after the first full month of retirement. OPERS needs that full first

month to finish processing your retirement. If you return to the system during that time, we will be unable to complete the process, your retirement will be cancelled, and you will not receive a benefit.

If you return to work with an OPERS participating employer, you will need to decide to either continue receiving benefits that may be subject to earnings limits or waive the receipt of benefits while employed. Each has its own advantages and disadvantages.

Continuing to receive benefits while working for an OPERS employer.

- If you have not reached your full Social Security retirement age, your OPERS benefits will cease when your salary reaches the allowed earnings limit for the year. (See chart.) Your benefits will resume in January and continue until your salary reaches the allowed earnings for that year.
- Once you reach your full Social Security retirement age, your benefit will continue uninterrupted. Earning limits will no longer apply.
- You and your employer will continue contributions into OPERS.
- You will continue to accrue service credit for every hour you work. If you have accumulated an additional year of service by the end of the fiscal year (June 30), your benefit will increase the following January.

Waiving the receipt of benefits while working for an OPERS employer.

- Earnings limits will not apply.
- You may retire for a second time¹ after earning three full years of service credit. Your retirement benefit will be recalculated based on your new service credit and final average salary. You may also re-select a retirement option or name a new joint annuitant.
- If you end employment before you earn three full years of service, you will not receive the waived benefit payments.

More information on returning to work and current earnings limitations can be found at www.opers.ok.gov/returning-to-work.

¹ If you elected the Medicare Gap Benefit Option upon your initial retirement and return to work for an OPERS participating employer, you may not waive benefits and retire a second time.

Technology in Retirement *(continued)*



3 Safety Alert Devices

Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are commonly found in homes today. If hearing becomes a challenge, smart versions can alert you using other methods than just sound. Unattended cooking is the leading cause of cooking fires and casualties. While expensive and difficult to install, a stove monitoring kit can shut off an unattended burner. Water and electrical monitoring devices provide quicker detection of broken or faulty lines. They can also help notify you or a caregiver that something was left on.

4 Security Systems

No longer just intruder alarms, robust security systems include cameras, motion sensors, and smart locks. In addition to providing an increased sense of security, doorbell cameras help seniors with mobility issues see who is at the door. These systems can have another purpose - allow caregivers to monitor a loved one prone to falling or wandering. Notices can be sent by cameras and door locks if movement is not detected or someone left the house.

5 Robotic Devices

Though they don't resemble the images from childhood cartoons, many of these devices have been around many years such as robotic vacuums, mops and lawn mowers, and self-clean ovens and showers. They can be helpful when you no longer have the energy, strength of your youth or for the convenience.

6 Automatic Pill Reminders/ Dispensers

Remembering to take medication can sometimes be a task. When you require several medications with different schedules, having a system in place helps. Pill dispenser technologies currently available tend to carry a big price tag and have limited functionality. It is best to do your research before investing in one, or look to using a combination of apps, labeled containers and voice assistance reminders.

7 Non-Computer Based Assistive Technologies

Sometimes the technology advancement may be in the physical design of an object. The shape or action of everyday hardware like kitchen tools can make it easier to use. Look for brands that specialize in products for those with arthritis and limited motion. When renovating a house, include updates that make the home more accessible to benefit you in retirement years. Wider doorways and grab bars can be designed for safety and to be aesthetically pleasing.

As with most new things, there is a learning curve. Embracing new technologies as they come along will make it easier to maintain your independence.



Time to Move a Loved One to Assisted Living – Now What?

You and your family have made the difficult decision: your loved one now requires more care than you are able to provide, and it is time to consider an assisted living community. With that decision comes a wide array of emotions – sadness, guilt, anxiousness, or a feeling of being overwhelmed. These are all expected and understandable.

Knowing many have taken this path before and there are resources to help you, can put your mind somewhat at ease. Given the degree of planning required and number of details to manage, making the move can be less intimidating if you have an action plan.

The following checklist will provide you with a good roadmap to getting started on this major phase of life should this become a reality.

Deciding on a Location - One of the first steps will be to determine where your loved one will live. Consider the location before deciding on the exact facility. Does the location need to be close to the main caregiver or does it need to be where the loved one will be familiar with faces they may recognize? Involve the family and loved one in visiting locations.

Long-Term Care Insurance - Determine if your loved one has a long-term care insurance policy and understand the terms and conditions. These policies may have requirements on the type of facilities they provide coverage for and limit your options.

Assessing the Care Needs - The level of care the person needs will determine where to place your loved one. Most facilities have assessments available and will conduct those before the move-in date.

Compare Specific Facilities - Narrowing down your choices can be made easier by going to the Medicare Care-Compare website. This website allows you to search for specific facilities and then provides you ratings, quality and details report.

Amenities and Social Engagement - Finding the right facility can mean different things to different family members. Start discussing with everyone involved in the decision as to what their preferences are, including the loved one. Additional items to consider are how robust the activities are for the residents, how are the meals prepared, is the facility a locked or opened facility, is transportation available, what kinds and types of exercise programs are available and what healthcare services are provided.

Connecting with an Ombudsman - A long-term care ombudsman is a person who receives complaints from residents of long-term care facilities, their friends or relative and attempts to resolve those complaints within the facility. The Ombudsman has the authority to explore problems and recommend corrective action to the facility. A list of ombudsman by area can be found on the Oklahoma Human Services website.

It is important during this time that you take care of yourself, too. This transition can add additional stress to the main caregiver. Not only are the demands on the caregiver emotional, but there are many physical demands as well. Here are a few strategies from the Mayo Clinic to help you manage your stress:

- Accept help
- Focus on what you can provide
- Get connected with organizations
- Join a support group
- Set personal health goals
- See your doctor regularly

There is no way to completely remove the worry and stress because it is a big adjustment for everyone. Being prepared can provide you some peace of mind during the process and help ease the transition for both you and your loved one.

RESOURCES

Medicare - Find Healthcare Providers: Compare Care Near You: www.medicare.gov/care-compare

Ombudsman, Oklahoma Human Services: oklahoma.gov/okdhs/services/aging/ombudsmensupervisorkeypersonnel.html

Vintage Guide: LIFE Senior Services: www.lifeseniorservices.org/seniorline/VintageGuide.asp

Caregiver Stress Checklist: Alzheimer's Association: www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/caregiver-health/caregiver-stress-check

Retirement Income Security with Your OPERS Benefit

Your OPERS benefit provides something few employees have access to these days: guaranteed lifetime income. Retirees with a steady stream of income feel more confident facing a long retirement, even with the prospect of living into their 90's or 100's. When your basic needs are covered by regular income, you can have the peace of mind and freedom to chase your retirement dreams.

Pensions have been around since the Roman empire as a way to reward service to country and community by providing income outside of work. In the US, the first pensions were given to those who served in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars. By the nineteenth century, pension plans expanded into both the public and private sectors. As lifespans increased, these plans provided an adequate income to elderly, long-time employees without having to continue to work. While pensions plans have changed over the years, they still accomplish the same goals of providing income security and rewarding service.

Plans like OPERS are known as defined benefit plans. You can know how much your retirement benefit will be because it is defined by a formula. Having a benefit based on your salary and years of service means less stress from the ups and downs of the market. This makes planning your retirement life more straightforward. Based on a three-part formula, your benefit equals your final average salary multiplied by your years of service and then multiplied by a computation factor, which is two percent* for most individuals. You can also think about the formula like this: you will receive two percent of your final average salary for every year of service. Twenty years of service amounts to a 40 percent replacement ratio.



BENEFIT FORMULA:

Final Average Salary	\$30,000
Service Credit	25
X Computation Factor (2%)	.02
<hr/>	
= Lifetime Annual Benefit	\$15,000

Your OPERS benefit is only one part of your retirement income. Social Security benefits, personal retirement savings and possibly a paycheck from a retirement job supplement your benefit to create four legs of retirement income. Having your OPERS pension can help make those other legs stronger. A reliable monthly benefit can make it easier to delay starting Social Security to take advantage of delayed benefit increases. Instead

of focusing on how to stretch a nest egg over your lifetime, you can pay more attention to investing your supplemental savings for growth.

Whether your participation in OPERS has been your entire career, or just enough years to earn a benefit, you have a source of guaranteed lifetime income for retirement. You are part of a group that

reports higher levels of happiness and lives longer. Take comfort that you have a foundation to achieve a secure and lasting retirement.

**The computation factor may be different if you have service as an Elected Office, Hazardous Duty or participate in Step-up.*

The following is a description of the 2021 legislation affecting members of retirement systems administered by the Oklahoma Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS).

House Bill 2458

(Rep. Lepak and Sen. Montgomery)

Effective November 1, 2021

This bill affects OPERS members and has been signed by the Governor. The following points summarize the bill.

- Deletes the requirement for a spouse's signature for an Option B survivor benefit which is 100% of the member's benefit to the survivor upon the member's death.
- Deletes the requirement for OPERS to send reports to LSB. The reports are sent to the Speaker, President Pro Tempore, Governor, and Chief Justice.
- Allows staff to notify the board of special meetings via email.
- Amends the numbers of trustees required for a special meeting to eight.
- Amends a section dealing with the existing language of the calculation of "final average salary" for part-time employees who were hired on or after July 1, 2013. The definition of "final average salary" changed from the high three years to the high five years out of the last 10 years.
- Allows OPERS staff to release 1099s to fiduciaries who are filing taxes on behalf of the deceased member.

Changes to Retirement Benefit Option B

Current law requires married members to retire under Option A with their spouse named as the survivor, unless the spouse consents in writing to choosing a different option or naming a different joint annuitant. Option A provides 50% of the member's benefit to the survivor upon the member's death.

HB 2458 eliminated the requirement for spousal consent if the member chooses Option B and names their spouse as the survivor. This change goes into effect November 1, 2021. Option B provides 100% of the member's reduced benefit to the survivor upon the member's death. Married members can now choose Option A or Option B without requiring spouse consent. Spousal

consent will still be required for the selection of the maximum benefit, Option C or naming someone other than a spouse as joint annuitant.

A summary of all four options are listed below.

Retirement Benefit Options

As an OPERS member, you will receive a monthly life-time benefit. At retirement, you will have a choice between four retirement benefit options. All four options have one thing in common: each will provide you, the member, a benefit for the remainder of your life. The options differ in what happens to the benefit after you pass away.

Maximum Single Life Annuity

Under the Maximum benefit option, you will receive full, unreduced benefits. The Maximum benefit is paid monthly for your lifetime and ceases the last day of the month in which you pass away. Maximum works differently for those who retire as an elected official. See OPERS for more details.

Option A 1/2 Joint and Survivor Annuity

Under this option, you will receive a reduced retirement benefit for life. After your death, one-half of the member's reduced retirement benefit will be paid to the surviving joint annuitant for his or her lifetime. Option A is two payments for two lifetimes.

Option B 100% Joint and Survivor Annuity

Under this option, you will receive a reduced retirement benefit for life. After your death, the same reduced monthly gross benefit will be paid to your surviving joint annuitant for his or her lifetime. Option B is also two payments for two lifetimes

Option C Single Life Annuity with 10-year Certain Period

Under this option, you will receive a reduced retirement benefit for life. If you pass away within the first 10 years of benefit payments, payments will be made to your beneficiary(ies) for the balance of the 10-year period. If you live longer than 10 years after your retirement date, no monthly benefits will be paid to the beneficiary(ies) upon your death.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is my OPERS Member ID?

Your member ID is included with any print communication received from OPERS. It begins with a letter followed by eight digits. You can also call OPERS at 800-733-9008. Once we verify your identity, we will be able to provide your OPERS member ID.

Who is my retirement coordinator?

A listing of retirement coordinators can be found on our website at www.opers.ok.gov/coordinator-listing.

Can annual leave be used toward retirement?

Annual leave does not count toward retirement, but up to six months of unused sick leave can be counted toward your service credit.

When am I eligible to vest my retirement?

To be eligible to vest, you must have at least eight years of credited service with six of those years being full-time equivalent employment with a participating OPERS employer. If you terminate employment and have accrued enough service to vest, you can elect a vested benefit and receive a future retirement benefit once you reach the age requirement for retirement.

What is the best way to learn more about my retirement?

There is great information available on the OPERS website. The Retirement Planning section is a good place to start. For those close to being eligible to retire, we also recommend attending a Pre-Retirement Seminar.

Who do I contact about insurance questions?

The Employees Group Insurance Division can be reached by calling 800-543-6044.

Pre-Retirement Webinars through 2021

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For more than a year, we have been offering the Pre-Retirement Seminar as webinars. This seems to be a popular format for members as we have seen record monthly registration and attendance. In the past, members have travelled to attend our in-person seminars, however, because of the Zoom format we are able to reach members in every corner of the state as well as vested members who live out-of-state at every meeting. To date, we have connected with members in seven states.

We are delighted that we have been able and will continue to connect with members where they are - saving travel time and expense. We will continue to offer our pre-retirement seminars by Zoom with dates and times scheduled through the end of the year. Our in-person presentations are still suspended.

To register, visit www.opers.ok.gov/pre-retirement-seminar-schedule or scan the code with your smart device.



2021 PRE-RETIREMENT WEBINARS

Thursday, July 22	9:30 a.m.
Thursday, August 12	1:00 p.m.
Wednesday, September 1	9:30 a.m.
Friday, September 24	1:00 p.m.
Thursday, October 14	9:30 a.m.
Tuesday, November 9	1:00 p.m.
Thursday, December 9	9:30 a.m.

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Article Idea? Comments?

We want to hear from you!
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DIRECTOR'S CORNER

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employees, and many others risked their health and safety, and that of their families, to do their jobs and keep public services running smoothly and with the dedication we have come to expect.

I consider it an honor to congratulate a new group of retiring public employees each month. At last count, we have more than 36,000 retirees receiving benefits from our legacy defined benefit plans. More than 90% still live in the State they dedicated their careers to, but a few have wandered to all parts of the globe to make their home. I have listened to many stories of why employees retire, about their fascinating careers, and their plans for the future. I enjoy hearing every one and look forward to many more stories about their retirement plans. One of my favorite comments from a long serving employee when dropping off his retirement papers was "I'm going to Disney World!"

The employees of OPERS wish to thank all our state and local active employees and retirees for your service to the citizens of Oklahoma. It is our honor to serve with you. Thank you for a job well done.

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