



80 Facts for the 80th Anniversary

- ★ Abraham Epstein first uses the term “social security” in 1933 in connection with his group, the American Association for Social Security. Originally, the Social Security Act of 1935 is named the Economic Security Act, but the title was changed during Congressional consideration of the bill.
- ★ On August 14, 1935, President Roosevelt signs the Social Security Act into law, which established a national plan to provide economic security for the nation’s workers.
- ★ In 1935, the newly created Social Security Board, has no budget with which to begin operations. The proposed budget for the Social Security Administration for fiscal year 2015 is \$12.5 billion.
- ★ In 1935, the newly created Social Security Board has no staff with which to complete its work. Existing agencies donate initial employees. In 2015, the Social Security Administration has 60,000 dedicated and compassionate employees.
- ★ Fred Happel of Albany, N.Y. designs the original Social Security card in 1936 and is paid \$60 for his work. In 1985, Mr. Happel’s niece donates the original artwork to Social Security’s history room in Baltimore.
- ★ Social Security opened its temporary headquarters in Baltimore in 1936. When construction was completed in Washington, D.C. on what was to be its permanent location in 1941, World War II had broken out and the building was given to the War Department, so Social Security headquarters remained in Baltimore.
- ★ In 1936, Social Security has only 2,000 employees to issue Social Security numbers to an estimated 26 million wage earners.
- ★ The first Social Security field office opens in Austin, Texas on October 14, 1936.
- ★ Grace Dorothy Owen of Concord, N.H. applied for her Social Security number on November 24, 1936. While not the first to receive a Social Security number, she received the lowest Social Security number of 001-01-0001.
- ★ John David Sweeney of New Rochelle, N.Y., receives the first Social Security number, 055-09-0001, on December 1, 1936.
- ★ Payroll tax withholding for Social Security begins January 1, 1937. The original Social Security contribution rates are 1 percent for the employee and 1 percent for the employer on wages up to \$3,000. In 2015, the contribution rates are 6.2 percent for both the employee and the employer on wages up to \$118,500.
- ★ In 1937, Ernest Ackerman becomes Social Security’s first beneficiary. A nickel is withheld from his wages for the one day he worked under the new program. In return, he receives a one-time, lump-sum retirement payment of 17 cents.

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- ★ In 1938, a wallet-manufacturing company included a sample Social Security card in each wallet. The sample card had the actual Social Security number of the company's vice president's secretary. Until the number was voided, more than 40,000 people had attempted to use that Social Security number. Twelve people were still trying to use it as late as 1977.
- ★ The 1939 Social Security amendments establish, among other things, survivors benefits and the trust funds. Social Security taxes and other income are deposited into the trust fund accounts, and Social Security benefits are paid from them.
- ★ Social Security issues the first monthly retirement check in the amount of \$22.54 to Ida May Fuller of Ludlow, Vermont on January 31, 1940. Miss Fuller, a legal secretary, retired in November 1939. She paid a total of \$24.75 in Social Security taxes on her salary during the 3 years she worked under the program.
- ★ During World War II, many Social Security employees volunteer in the U.S. Coast Guard Volunteer Port Security Force and stand guard on the docks and ships in Baltimore's inner harbor where they watched for German U-boats.
- ★ On July 16, 1946, Arthur J. Altmeyer becomes the first commissioner of the newly renamed Social Security Administration.
- ★ On February 27, 1956, Social Security's first electronic computer system, an IBM 705, posts earnings records, computes benefit amounts, and reinstates incorrectly reported earnings.
- ★ On August 1, 1956, the Social Security Act is amended to provide monthly benefits to permanently and totally disabled workers aged 50-64; and to pay benefits to disabled children aged 18 or over of retired or deceased workers, if their disability began before age 18.
- ★ In 1961, for the first time, Social Security field offices connect electronically to headquarters in Baltimore.
- ★ The agency's longest serving Commissioner, Robert M. Ball, is sworn in on April 17, 1962. He resigned in April 1973 after serving for 11 years. Today a commissioner for Social Security can serve a maximum term of only six years.
- ★ On July 30, 1965, President Johnson signs Medicare into law (H.R. 6675) to provide health insurance for the elderly. Happy 50th Anniversary, Medicare!
- ★ The first enrollees in the Medicare system are former President Harry Truman and his wife Bess.
- ★ In 1969, Social Security opens the Metropolitan Answering Service, its first teleservice centers, in Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles. Now there are 29 call centers handling 32 million calls a year.
- ★ In 1969, the Department of Defense begins using the Social Security number instead of a military service, or serial, number to identify personnel in the armed forces.
- ★ In October 1972, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is established. SSI is a Federal income supplement program funded by general tax revenues and not Social Security taxes. It pays monthly benefits to people with limited income and resources who are disabled, blind, or age 65 or older. For people receiving SSI, Social Security regularly reviews a person's income, resources, and living arrangements to make sure he or she still meets the eligibility requirements.
- ★ On June 25, 1986, Dorcas Hardy is sworn in as the Social Security Administration's first confirmed female commissioner.
- ★ Social Security implements its nationwide 800-number customer service number in October 1988. Since then, there have been more than 2.2 billion phone calls. More than 6,000 employees are currently available to answer calls.
- ★ On August 1, 1989, Gwendolyn King is the first African-American to be confirmed as Commissioner of Social Security.

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- ★ Beginning in 1990, parents can request Social Security numbers for their newborns before leaving the hospital as part of the State birth registration process. In fiscal year 2014, Social Security assigns more than 3.8 million Social Security numbers using this process.
- ★ Social Security launches its Internet site on May 17, 1994. In fiscal year 2014, the *socialsecurity.gov* homepage was visited approximately 192 million times.
- ★ On August 15, 1994, President Clinton signs legislation (H.R. 4277) returning the Social Security Administration to an independent agency effective March 31, 1995. Social Security had most recently been under the Department of Health and Human Services.
- ★ On April 19, 1995, the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma is bombed, killing 168 people, including 16 Social Security employees.
- ★ Social Security launches its online Field Office Locator in 1997. The locator allows people to find the most convenient office location and its operating hours easily.
- ★ In 1997, Social Security and the Office of Inspector General's Cooperative Disability Investigations (CDI) Program launches with five units. Today, there are 28 units in 24 states and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. The CDI units stop fraud before it happens by investigating suspicious disability claims early, before a decision is made to award benefits.
- ★ Beginning in 1998, Social Security publishes an annual list of the most popular baby names based on the names from Social Security card applications for newborns. In the 1990s, when the list began, the most popular boy's name is Michael and the most popular girl's name is Jessica. Our archive lists the names by year going back to 1879, when the most popular boy's name was John, and the most popular girl's name was Mary. The **page** is one of our most popular with almost 3 million visits in 2014.
- ★ Social Security was the first major federal agency to achieve Y2K compliancy – ensuring our information technology was prepared for the year 2000. In fact, we were ready a full year early!
- ★ In February 2000, Social Security launches its monthly electronic newsletter, Social Security Update, which provides the latest agency news and information.
- ★ In November 2000, Social Security gives people the option to file their retirement claims online. The agency takes its one-millionth online retirement claim on September 4, 2007.
- ★ In immediate response to the 9/11 terrorist attack, Social Security invokes special emergency procedures to take and expedite related claims for disability and survivor benefits.
- ★ In January 2004, Social Security begins using an electronic disability claims folder, replacing paper records, improving the disability process, and eliminating the incidence of lost folders.
- ★ On July 15, 2004, President Bush signs H.R. 1731, *The Identity Theft Penalty Enhancement Act*. The Act imposes criminal penalties for theft of another person's identity, including for purposes of obtaining Social Security-related benefits.
- ★ The first baby boomer, Kathleen Casey-Kirschling, who was born one second after midnight January 1, 1946, files her claim for Social Security retirement benefits online on October 15, 2007. Today, more than one half of all retirement claims are filed online!
- ★ Social Security's launches its new online *Retirement Estimator* July 21, 2008. In fiscal year 2014, the *Estimator* was used more than 4.6 million times.
- ★ On October 27, 2008, Social Security announces the national rollout of the Compassionate Allowances initiative – a way to expedite the processing of disability claims and payment of benefits for applicants whose medical conditions are so severe that their conditions obviously meet Social Security's standards. Social Security launches this expedited decision process with 50 conditions listed. Today, there are 225 Compassionate Allowance conditions.

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- ★ On March 19, 2010, Social Security “gets hip” and begins using social media. The agency joins Facebook and Twitter to instantly update and interact with the public.
- ★ In July 2000, people can apply for a replacement Medicare card online.
- ★ In October 2007, Social Security starts using a redesigned version of the Social Security card with enhanced features to deter counterfeiting.
- ★ As of May 1, 2011, with only limited exceptions, paper checks are no longer a payment option for those applying for federal benefits.
- ★ On June 25, 2011, Social Security changes how it issues new Social Security numbers. The shift to random assignment means that the area number (the first three digits) no longer has any geographical significance to where someone applied for his or her original SSN.
- ★ On November 15, 2011, Social Security launches Spanish Online Services with TV superstar Don Francisco announcing the ability to file online retirement and Medicare applications in Spanish.
- ★ On April 30, 2012, Social Security and the Department of Defense implement an expedited disability application process for wounded warriors.
- ★ In May 2012, Social Security launches **my Social Security**, an online account allowing workers to access their personalized Social Security Statement to verify their earnings and view estimates of future benefits, and allowing beneficiaries to manage their benefits. As of April 2015, more than 18 million people have registered for **my Social Security**.
- ★ On May 6, 2013, Social Security launches a mobile app, enabling people receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to report their monthly wages using smartphones or tablets.
- ★ On December 16, 2013, Social Security begins processing some widows’ and widowers’ claims filed by surviving members of same-sex marriages and paying benefits where they are due, as well as paying some one-time lump sum death benefit claims to surviving same-sex spouses.
- ★ Social Security has issued more than 453 million different Social Security numbers. There are about one billion possible combinations of the Social Security number – giving us enough new numbers for future generations.
- ★ Social Security numbers aren’t reassigned after a number holder’s death.
- ★ Since it began in 1935, Social Security has collected \$18.0 trillion (largely from Social Security taxes paid by workers and employers) and paid out \$15.2 trillion in benefits and administrative costs.
- ★ In 1937, Social Security operates 175 field offices. Today there are approximately 1,230.
- ★ On March 1, 1940, the Social Security’s Appeals Council is established to oversee the hearings and appeals process. In 2014, it processed more than 160,000 requests for review of less than fully favorable decisions.
- ★ Automated telephone services annually handle five million calls made to the national 800 number.
- ★ In fiscal year 2014, Social Security processed almost 204 million W-2 forms electronically and another 27 million manually.
- ★ In fiscal year 2012, with the help of state and local law enforcement, the Cooperative Disability Investigations Program (CDI) reported nearly \$340 million in projected savings to the disability program. These savings resulted in a return on investment of \$17 for each \$1 spent.
- ★ Special agents in Social Security’s Office of the Inspector General close about 8,000 cases every year, leading to hundreds of millions of dollars in recoveries, restitution, and projected Social Security savings.

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- ★ Social Security is America's most effective poverty prevention program. It keeps 22 million Americans out of poverty, including more than 1 million children, nearly 15 million seniors, and 6 million adults younger than 65.
- ★ Two in three elderly beneficiaries rely on Social Security for half or more of their total income. For 1 in 3, Social Security is all, or almost all (90 percent or more), of his or her income.
- ★ Nearly seven million children receive part of their family income from Social Security. Many receive benefits as children of deceased or disabled parents. Others live with grandparents or other relatives who receive Social Security.
- ★ Nearly one million veterans who served in the U.S. armed forces receive Social Security disability benefits. Veterans account for one of every nine who receive these benefits.
- ★ Of every dollar Social Security pays out, only one penny goes for administering the program – its employees, technology, and field offices. The other 99 cents goes towards the payment of retirement, disability, or survivors benefits to 59 million Americans.
- ★ In 1936, the U.S. Postal Service distributes and assigns the first batch of Social Security numbers through its 45,000 local post offices around the country.
- ★ In customer satisfaction surveys, the public routinely rates our employees very high for their courtesy, job knowledge, helpfulness, and the clarity of the explanations they provide.
- ★ For 2014, the ForeSee E-government Satisfaction Index reported that of the 100 top-ranked federal sites, 5 of the top 6 belong to Social Security.
- ★ At the beginning of 2015, Social Security paid an average monthly disability benefit of \$1,165. That's barely enough to keep a beneficiary above the 2014 poverty level (\$11,670 annually). Even these modest payments make a difference in the lives of people who can no longer work by helping them meet the basic needs for themselves and their families
- ★ In fiscal year 2014, the Social Security online frequently asked questions had more than 28 million visitors.
- ★ Officially, the first Social Security record was assigned to John David Sweeney. When Sweeney died of a heart attack in 1974 at the age of 61, he had never received Social Security benefits. His widow, however, received benefits based on his work record until her death in 1982.
- ★ In fiscal year 2014, Social Security's Office of the General Counsel successfully defended the agency's decisions on 10,090 disability cases in federal district court, saving \$2.16 billion.
- ★ The electronic exchange of data between Social Security and Federal, State, and local agencies resulted in more than \$4 million in government savings for fiscal year 2014. The electronic exchange of data allows for greater efficiency and accuracy and prevents improper payments.
- ★ Social Security has held more than one million appeal hearings since 2004 using videoconferencing. Videoconferencing allows Social Security to avoid hearings postponements and allows us to move pending hearing requests to offices able to schedule hearings more quickly.
- ★ Social Security's Office of Disability, Adjudication and Review processes more than 600,000 cases each year...the most of any administrative judicial system in the world.
- ★ The smallest lump-sum payment ever made for Social Security retirement benefits is 5 cents.