

Prescience 2030:

A watershed moment



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Prescience 2030: A watershed moment

Introduction

As it has been from Day One, the objective for workplace retirement plans is to help everyday Americans achieve a sufficiently funded retirement. The workplace, though, has changed, and there are no signs it will stop any time soon. It's a significant moment for retirement plans. What may come next, and how might employers and the professionals who work with them react? That's the focus of this report.

Prescience 2030: A watershed moment is based on the final survey of the current Prescience series. We asked a panel of experts who represent advisory firms, financial institutions, and consulting groups to answer a series of multiple-choice questions and expand on their answers with open-ended responses. The panel's industry expertise and experience give them a unique, forward-looking perspective about what may come next.

Starting with predictions about features of 2030's ideal retirement program, the poll takes a deep dive into the rising tide of blockchain and artificial intelligence (AI). This continues the discussion that began in **Prescience 2030: The next wave**, allowing panelists to provide deeper insights.

Prescience 2030 panelists foresee a future of seamless automation, personalized engagement, and improved cybersecurity resulting from technology. They expect blockchain to drive streamlined plan administration and enhanced investment portability, while AI delivers better participant engagement, predictive modeling, and tailored financial guidance.

Ultimately, panelists envision that by the end of 2030, employees and employers will have holistic, technology-enabled retirement plans. Despite cost pressures and regulatory complexity, this should support participants' long-term financial security and well-being, and keep retirement plans relevant and successful.



The ideal retirement plan: 2030

Prescience panelists agree that automatic features and employer contributions will be necessary to give employees the best chance of reaching a secure retirement.



How might the ideal retirement plan look?

- Auto-enrollment at 6% or more
- Auto-escalation capped at 15% or higher
- Match at least 50 cents on the dollar up to 6% of pay
- Access to a broad range of financial wellness features



“I think we will see predictive outcomes and frequent reminders about how to be successful as a participant. Investment direction will warn participants when a change is not in their best interest. I hope we will also have plans that can easily hand off balances when an employee terminates service, so as to reduce leakage.”

Gene R. Huxhold, Senior Managing Director, Retirement Investment Consulting

Enrollment and deferrals

The role of automatic enrollment will continue to expand, according to the panelists.

	Use of automatic enrollment	Initial automatic enrollment percentage for majority of plans
By year-end 2030	More than 50% (up from 2025 estimate of about 33%)	6% (compared to 2025 estimate of 4%)

Most believe participants must contribute at least 15% to fully fund their retirement, and that most plans will set a cap on automatic deferral increases at 15% or higher.

Matching contributions

A powerful tool for encouraging participants to save, panelists say matching contributions can also give employers an edge in the competition for talent:

74% said, to remain competitive, employers will need to match at least 50 cents on the dollar, up to 6% of pay

Encouraging appreciation of the employer match requires regular, clear communication:

73% agree or strongly agree that most plan sponsors will communicate the value of the employer match

92% say they will suggest that managers inform employees about the advantages of maximizing matching contributions

88% plan to recommend plan sponsors feature the full match amount as the default choice on the enrollment tool during open enrollment, along with a disclaimer when employees select a lower contribution rate



“Personalized projections, updated quarterly or annually, of how the participant’s match grows over time could be impactful. A short message like ‘Your company match added \$1,800 this year, which could grow to \$14,000 by retirement,’ reframes the match as a living investment, not a forgotten line item.”

Marina Edwards, Marina Retirement, LLC



Financial wellness features

No longer considered add-ons, panelists believe financial wellness programs will be central to well-structured retirement programs. For example:

100% agree that financial counseling and wellness programs will be essential for employee engagement, productivity, and retention

88% think AI will significantly improve the effectiveness of financial wellness programs

84% say personalized financial wellness offerings will be a differentiator in recruiting and retention efforts

An optimal workplace financial wellness program will go beyond the retirement plan to include help with:



Personal debt management
96%



Health savings accounts
96%



Emergency savings accounts
92%



Student debt management
92%



Voluntary benefits
68%

“Employers can better leverage their retirement plans by folding them into a more holistic approach to employee well-being. This doesn’t stop at just financial well-being, but encompasses mental, physical, and social well-being.”

Greg Ward, Financial Finesse

The expanding role of technology: Blockchain and artificial intelligence (AI)

There were areas of significant agreement in the survey around the potential impact of blockchain and AI – on retirement plans and the participant experience.



The survey defined blockchain as:

A type of distributed digital ledger technology (DLT) that records transactions or data across a network of computers in a way that is secure, transparent, and resistant to tampering.

Survey respondents expect blockchain to **improve** certain functions, such as:

61%

agree or strongly agree it will enable participant-level investment customization and reduce administrative overhead for plan sponsors and recordkeepers

55%

believe it will improve portability between plans

61%

expect it to facilitate tokenization of assets, expanding availability of investment options such as real estate and private markets

56%

agree that its encryption capabilities and distributed structure will improve cybersecurity



Respondents also expect complexities related to blockchain and AI use:



Still, panelists expect AI will deliver dynamic, personalized participant experiences with chatbots, predictive modeling, and tailored nudges to facilitate smarter financial decisions.

They foresee plan-level benefits from AI, including:

- Optimized design
- Data clean-up and reconciliation
- Compliance monitoring
- Cybersecurity improvements that reduce vulnerabilities

Panelist opinions were mixed about how AI might change the fiduciary landscape:

Fiduciary risk will **decrease** due to recommendations and personalization driven by AI.



39%

agree or strongly agree



27%

disagree or strongly disagree

“I think by 2030, AI will be part of the retirement plan arena by optimizing plan design and auto-features, cleaning and reconciling plan data, monitoring compliance and fiduciary processes. I believe AI will predict participant behaviors with personalized nudges to refine asset allocations and lifetime income projections in real-time. I also think AI will improve plan benchmarking, vendor evaluations and investment analysis by parsing the data into actionable insights for plan fiduciaries. I would also expect AI to strengthen plan cybersecurity and fraud defenses by detecting transaction anomalies.”

Marina Edwards, Marina Retirement, LLC

The discussion that followed the first Prescience 2030 poll raised questions about responsibility for AI-based decisions related to retirement plans. As a follow-up to the conversation, we asked panelists whether a lack of clear ownership of algorithm-based decisions would change the industry from a rules-based model to one guided by principles. Results were mixed.



39%

agree or strongly agree



27%

disagree or strongly disagree

Participant engagement and barriers to participation

Encouraging employees to enroll in the plan will continue to be challenging, the experts predict, and **61%** of them agreed on three reasons:

- Stress around financial decisions
- Lack of knowledge about saving and investments
- Investment choices

Automation could help reduce or eliminate these barriers by simplifying messaging and taking advantage of targeted behavioral nudges, such as celebrating contribution milestones.



“Among other things, the industry could boost participation by communicating in a simple, straightforward way – no jargon. We can also leverage behavioral finance design beyond auto-enrollment. Many who enroll stay at a low deferral rate or never rebalance. The solutions are auto-escalation and “set-and-forget” default portfolios. We could add dynamic nudges triggered by raises, bonuses, or life events, and reinforce small wins through gamified progress tracking.”

Marina Edwards, Marina Retirement, LLC



“Think of the retirement plan in the context of all the employee benefits and make it easy for employees to interact with their plan and benefits.”

Alicia Hartjen, SS&C Technologies



Outlook for retirement plan success: Is the ‘ideal’ plan enough?

Many panelists are optimistic about the future of retirement plan success, believing that plans will remain effective as long as coverage expands and regulatory complexity is addressed. At the same time, success is closely tied to participant behavior, which can be difficult to change. Some warn that increasing regulatory burdens and litigation risks could discourage employers from offering retirement plans at all.

Significant developments anticipated

Experts anticipate several significant developments by 2030:

- Increased use of AI for personalized guidance, predictive modeling, and automation of savings strategies
- Greater clarity into participants’ overall financial picture, with holistic advice and integration of all benefits
- Expansion of emergency savings programs, student debt match, and broader financial wellness initiatives
- The rise of managed accounts, lifetime income solutions, and seamless integration with payroll and other benefits

The optimal retirement plan will leverage technology and automated services to meet each employee’s needs, including:

- **Automation and defaults** – enrollment and deferral escalation
- **Personalized dynamic design**
- **AI integration and holistic advice**
- **Predictive guidance** – reminders how to be successful as a participant



“I want to see every person have access to a financial coach on demand – whether AI or IRL – so people can plan their financial lives on demand, not just one time per year or less.”

Stephen Popper,
SageView Advisory Group

Conclusion

The two Transamerica Prescience 2030 reports reveal a rising tide of change that is reshaping the retirement landscape. Plan sponsors and their advisors can ride the wave by embracing the technology, automation, and personalization that are now – or soon will be – driving improvements in plan design, participant engagement, and financial wellness. Or they can watch from the shoreline. Either way, the watershed moment has arrived. Successfully expanding coverage, navigating regulatory challenges, and addressing participant behaviors will depend on our commitment to remain agile and embrace innovation.

Methodology

Transamerica Prescience 2030 Poll 2 is designed to establish a vision for retirement plans and financial well-being benefits through the year 2030. The poll uses a modified Delphi method, engaging respondents in iterative brainstorming and polling sessions. The results provide a foundation for strategic planning, and offer insights into consensus and divergent views on the future of retirement plans.

The study invited more than 300 experts, with 46 responses, to the second poll focusing on financial well-being. The panel includes professionals from leading advisory firms, financial institutions, and consulting groups, ensuring a broad representation of industry perspectives.



Transamerica Prescience 2030 is a collection of thoughts and opinions expressed by respondents to Prescience 2030 Poll 2, and not necessarily those of Transamerica. This survey was fielded in August 2025, so relevant legislation and/or regulatory proposals introduced afterward may not have been considered.

All forward-looking statements are based on opinions of survey respondents and are subject to risks and uncertainties.

This material is for informational purposes only and does not constitute investment, legal, or tax advice. Actual results for participants and plan sponsors will vary. Any discussion of technology-enhanced capabilities reflects general industry views and does not represent guaranteed results. Results reflect the opinions of 46 respondents out of over 300 invited industry professionals. Quotes represent the views of individual contributors and are not statements of Transamerica.

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