

How Different States Exempt Social Security Income from Income Tax

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Who receives Social Security benefits?

- ~145,000 people in Vermont received benefits as of Dec. 2016
- Old-Age benefits (73% of OASDI beneficiaries in VT)
 - Age 62+ if 40 quarters of work
- Survivors Insurance benefits (8% of beneficiaries in VT)
 - Widows or widowers age 60 or older (age 50 if disabled) if married > 9 months, or of any age if care for child under age 16 or disabled
 - Unmarried children up to age 19 if full-time in elementary or secondary school
 - Children at any age if disabled before age 22
 - Dependent parents > 62 if provide at least 50% of their support
 - Surviving divorced spouses if > 60 and married at least 10 years
- Disability Insurance benefits (16% of beneficiaries in VT)
 - Ages 16-64 with severe disability

Two simple approaches

1. No broad-based state income tax
 - 9 states, including New Hampshire

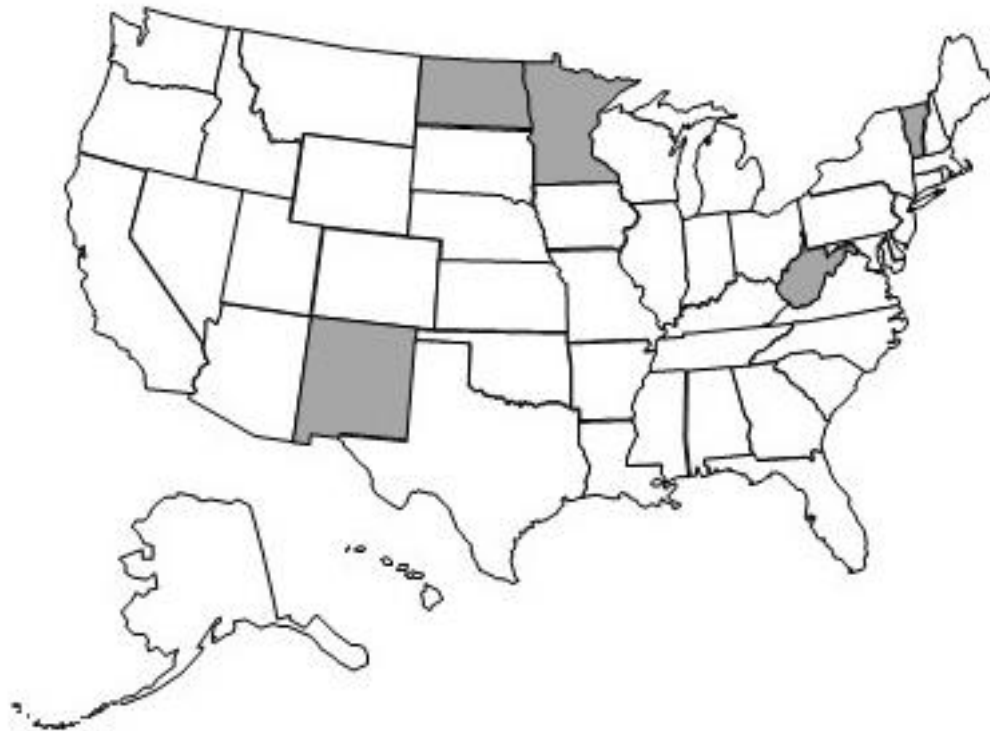
2. Exempt Social Security benefits completely from taxation at the state level
 - 27 states and D.C., including Maine and Massachusetts

3. Apply the state income tax to Social Security benefits that are taxable at the federal level

- Occurs in 4 states, including VT
- Why are some Social Security benefits exempt at the federal level?
 - FICA taxes paid by the employee when working (6.2% of earnings up to \$128,400) are included in taxable wages
 - Back in 1993, single males had the lowest ratio of lifetime benefits to payroll taxes paid; they had already paid federal income tax on about 15% of their benefit value, so that portion was declared to be exempt from further federal income tax

Which 4 states?

Note that Minnesota changed its approach in 2017



The federal approach, cont.

- First, find combined or provisional income
 - = federal AGI excluding Social Security benefits
 - + tax-exempt interest (e.g., from municipal bonds)
 - + ½ of Social Security benefits

Federal Taxation of Social Security Benefits

	Married couple	Single filer
Social Security exempt	Provisional income less than \$32,000	Provisional income less than \$25,000
Social Security included in taxable income at up to 50% rate (first tier)	Provisional income between \$32,000 and \$44,000	Provisional income between \$25,000 and \$34,000
Social Security included in taxable income at up to 85% rate (second tier)	Provisional income over \$44,000	Provisional income over \$34,000

The federal approach, cont.

- Those thresholds have not been updated since 1983
 - This was deliberate, to align with tax treatment of pension income eventually
- Share of beneficiary families who pay federal income tax on benefits nationwide
 - 1984: 8 percent
 - 1993: 20 percent
- Share of beneficiaries who pay federal income tax on benefits
 - 2003: 39 percent
 - 2014: 49 percent
 - Average tax payment in 2014 was 6.7% of benefit income

4. Tax some Social Security benefits but less than under the federal rules

- Partial exemption
 - Based on combined or provisional income
 - Based on AGI
 - Based on age and AGI
- Exemption for pension income, including Social Security income
- Retirement tax credit

Partial exemption, cont.

9 states do this in different ways

1) CO exempts some *pension* income by age

- 55-64: up to \$20,000 pension income is exempt
- 65+: up to \$25,000 pension income is exempt

2) CT exempts most Social Security benefits

- Deduct 100% of benefits if federal AGI < \$60K for MFJ or < \$50K for singles
- If AGI > threshold, exempt 75% of federally taxable benefits

3) KS exempts all Social Security benefits if federal AGI < \$75,000

Partial exemption, cont.

4) Minnesota changed its approach in 2017

- MN followed federal rules through 2016, but then expanded the amount of benefits exempt
- The state subtraction is reduced by 20% of provisional income over a threshold, adjusted by inflation beginning in 2018

	Maximum subtraction	Start of phaseout	End of phaseout
Married joint	\$4,500	\$77,000	\$99,500
Single and head of household	\$3,500	\$60,200	\$77,700
Married separate	\$2,250	\$38,500	\$49,750

Partial exemption, cont.

5) Missouri has the heftiest exemption in this group

- AGI < \$85,000 if single, < \$100,000 if married and age 62+ or disabled
- Partial exemption if income exceeds the limit by less than taxable OASDI benefits and if age 62+ or disabled
- The exemption is decreased by the amount AGI exceeds the limit

6) MT

- Expand federal exemption for singles to include HOH

7) NE

- Exempt if AGI <\$43,000 single or HOH; \$58,000 married filing jointly
- Bill to index thresholds to inflation was under consideration in January 2018

Partial exemption, cont.

8) RI has the 2nd highest exemption in this group

- Exempt if AGI <\$80,000; \$100,000 if married

9) UT

- Follow federal rules, but filer and spouse may each be eligible for a retirement tax credit of up to \$450 if age 65 or over.
- The credit is phased out at the rate of 2.5% when MAGI (including nontaxable interest income) exceeds \$25,000 if single or \$32,000 if married filing jointly or HOH.
- Examples for married filing jointly:

MAGI	\$32,000	\$40,000	\$50,000	\$60,000	\$65,000	\$68,000
Ret tax credit	\$900	\$700	\$450	\$200	\$75	\$0