

COVID-19 effects on retirement planning

Remember that pension savings are for the long term

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) is having a widespread impact across all aspects of financial life, including retirement plans. The current global stock market turbulence, as a consequence of COVID-19, will no doubt be concerning for individuals whose pension savings are invested partly or fully during these volatile market conditions.

But making decisions based on what's happening in the short term can be a risky thing to do. It might be tempting for example to move all your investments into cash or other lower risk investments for a while – but in doing that, you might miss out on the point when the value goes back up – so you could lose out in the long term.

TIME FOR MARKETS TO RECOVER

It's really important to remember that pension savings are for the long term. If you're young and currently paying into a workplace pension, then there is time for your pension pot to achieve growth over the long term and recover from the fluctuations currently being experienced in the stock markets. You shouldn't be too concerned, as you have many years ahead of you, and this will provide time for markets to recover before you take your pension income.

If you're older and closer to retirement, you may have seen your funds lifestyled. This means your pension will have been moved into predominantly less risky funds and invested in 'safer' places such as in cash, gilts or bonds, which are lower risk and usually offer a fixed rate of return. The older you get, the more schemes tend to choose to invest in such assets to limit investment risk. However, not all pension schemes offer automatic lifestyling.

ANNUITIES

If you're about to retire and were planning to buy an annuity, in March, the Bank of England cut the base rate twice in just over a week in a further emergency response to the coronavirus pandemic, reducing it from 0.25% to 0.1%. This has meant annuity rates have also fallen. An annuity is a type of retirement income product

that you buy with some or all of your pension pot. It pays a regular retirement income either for life or for a set period.

If you are thinking of securing an income by purchasing an annuity, the recent volatility shows the importance of gradually reducing the risk in your portfolio as you approach your expected annuity purchase date. Doing this provides greater certainty over the secured income you can expect to generate from your fund.

DRAWDOWN

If we continue to see a protracted period of negative investment returns and you're already using drawdown, or plan to move into drawdown soon, you might also want to avoid taking out any more than you need to while fund values remain depressed. The more you can leave invested, the more you will benefit over time once there is a recovery.

Drawdown is a way of taking money out of your pension to live on during retirement. You have to be aged 55 or over and have a defined contribution pension to access your money in this way. You keep your pension savings invested when you reach retirement and take money out of, or 'drawdown' from, your pension pot. Since your money stays invested, and it's usually in the stock market, there is the risk that your fund may fall in value. The upside is that investment growth can provide higher returns and see your pot continue to increase in value.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Another option to consider, if you are still in the process of saving for your retirement and if appropriate, now might be a good time to consider increasing your pension contributions if you can. Even though your strategy may depend

on the movement of the markets, increases in contributions over the long term can make a difference to your eventual retirement pot value, if it coincides with the market recovery.

Again, there is no need to panic – at this stage, we do not know what the long-term implications of coronavirus will be. We can help you see the bigger picture, weigh all your options and take a balanced assessment of your risks.

STAGGERED

New research^[1] has revealed how many pensioners are opting for a staggered retirement and working part-time before giving up work completely to make sure their pensions last the rest of their lives. With people living longer, and the added prospect of health care costs in later life, retirees increasingly understand the benefits of having a larger pension pot in later life.

Of those who haven't accessed their pension pot, half (51%) say it is because they are still working while more than a quarter (25%) of people in their 60s say it is because they want their pensions to last as long as possible.

Of course, retirees who haven't accessed their pension pot must have alternative sources of income. When asked about their income. Nearly half (47%) said they take an income from cash savings (47%), others rely on their spouse or partner's income (35%) or State Pension (22%) while 12% rely on income from property investments (12%). ■

PROFESSIONAL FINANCIAL ADVICE COUNTS

If you're about to retire the amount of exposure you have will reflect both your attitude to investment risk, and the time you have until retirement. Most importantly, before taking any major decisions relating to your pension take the time to get professional financial advice.

Source data:

[1] LV= survey of more than 1,000 adults aged over 50 with defined contributions
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