



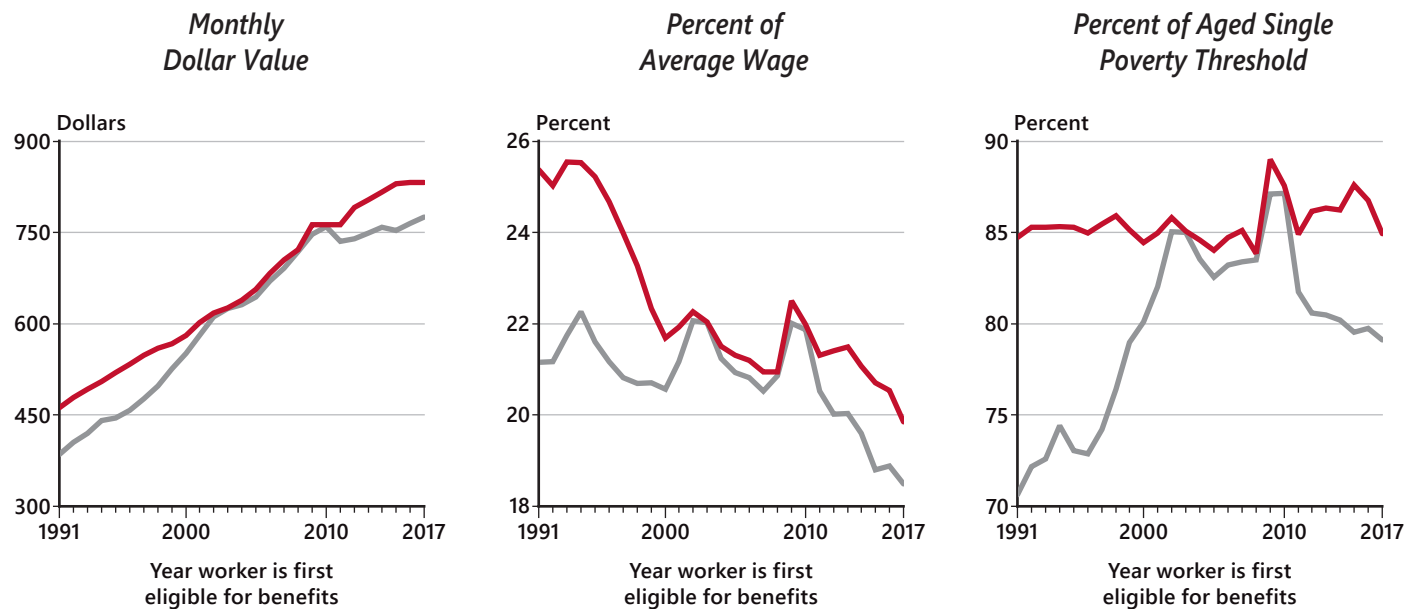
# Special Minimum Benefit

**DEFINITION:** The [special minimum benefit](#) is a special minimum [primary insurance amount](#) (PIA) enacted in 1972 to provide adequate benefits to long-term low earners. The first full special minimum PIA in 1973 was [\\$170](#) per month. Beginning in 1979, its value has increased with [price growth](#) and is \$886 per month in 2020.<sup>a</sup>

- The number of beneficiaries receiving the special minimum PIA has declined from about 200,000 in the early 1990s to about 32,100 in 2019.<sup>b</sup>
- Fewer new beneficiaries are receiving the price-indexed special minimum PIA because wage growth typically exceeds price growth, thus, their wage-indexed regular PIA is usually higher.
- The value of the regular PIA has historically held constant while the value of the special minimum PIA has declined relative to the average wage, but recently the value of the regular PIA has also declined.
- The value of the regular PIA has fallen while the value of the special minimum PIA has held constant relative to the poverty threshold.

## Regular PIA vs. Special Minimum PIA for a Low Earner with 30 Years of Coverage<sup>c</sup>

■ Regular PIA   ■ Special minimum PIA



SOURCE: Author's calculations for workers who earn the exact amount needed each year from age 31 through age 60 to obtain 30 years of coverage, and based on SSA rules for the PIA and special minimum PIA.

a. Social Security Administration, *Annual Statistical Supplement, 2020*, [Table 2.A12b](#).

b. Of the 32,100, approximately 17,500 are retired female workers and 11,000 are retired male workers. For a full breakdown of the remaining beneficiaries, see Social Security Administration, *Annual Statistical Supplement, 2020*, [Table 5.A8](#).

c. To qualify for the full special minimum PIA, a person must have 30 [years of coverage](#) (YOC). A person with 11 to 29 YOCs can qualify for a prorated special minimum.

