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The generational wealth transfer: Strategic estate planning for financial professionals

Turning research into action with an individually centered approach

Over the next two decades, baby boomers are projected to pass down trillions of dollars to their heirs. Yet recent findings from the **2025 Securian Financial-sponsored, Generational Wealth Transfer Consortia Study** suggest that many families, and many financial professionals, are not fully prepared for what that transition will require.

The largest intergenerational wealth transfer in U.S. history is underway.[1] For financial professionals, this moment represents more than a demographic shift. It is a strategic inflection point. One that calls for renewed focus on estate planning as a core discipline.

This opportunity is not simply to facilitate asset movement. It requires leading families through one of the most significant financial and emotional transitions of their lives.

The largest intergenerational wealth transfer in U.S. history is underway.[1]

1. Yin, Shan Lee, **The biggest wealth transfer in history is here: How the next generation will spend the trillions,** CNBC, Jun 23 2026, updated Jun 24 2026

What the research reveals: Gaps that create opportunity

The study surveyed nearly 2,000 benefactors and beneficiaries across generations. Several findings stand out:

- **Expectation gaps:** Benefactors anticipate leaving significantly more wealth than beneficiaries expect to receive.
- **Timing disconnects:** Nearly half of benefactors plan to transfer wealth during their lifetime, yet only a small percentage of beneficiaries expect to receive assets before death.
- **Communication gaps:** While most benefactors believe heirs are aware of inheritance plans, far fewer report having discussed details.
- **Life insurance underutilization:** Only 17% of benefactors with a financial professional report discussing life insurance as a wealth transfer tool.

These findings represent vulnerabilities and real opportunities for financial professionals.

When expectations are misaligned, family conflict risk increases. When communication is delayed, planning becomes reactive. When life insurance is absent from the conversation, liquidity and tax efficiency may suffer.

The financial professionals who address these gaps proactively will not only protect client outcomes. They will also strengthen multi-generational relationships.

> Only **17%** of benefactors report discussing life insurance as a wealth transfer tool.[2]

Estate planning: From technical exercise to strategic discipline

Too often estate planning is treated as a document-driven event rather than an ongoing planning process. Wills, trusts, powers of attorney and beneficiary designations are essential tools. But tools alone do not create alignment.

The research makes clear that inertia is the primary barrier to planning. Many benefactors without estate plans report simply "not getting around to it." Others struggle with the emotional complexity of initiating family discussions.

Operationalizing the opportunity

Securian Financial developed EPIC, Estate Planning, Individually Centered, a structured approach to guiding estate planning conversations. EPIC is a tremendous resource for addressing the concerns the Generational Wealth Transfer study raised.

EPIC operationalizes research insights into a repeatable process:

1. **Gathering Information –** Understanding family dynamics, asset structures and communication patterns.
2. **Determining Goals –** Clarifying legacy intentions, beneficiary expectations and planning priorities.
3. **Analyzing and Aligning –** Identifying gaps between current plans and desired outcomes.
4. **Recommendation and Implementation –** Structuring solutions that support long-term continuity.



For financial professionals, the imperative is to:

- Introduce structured estate conversations earlier
- Normalize family communication
- Clarify goals before recommending solutions
- Align expectations across generations

This requires more than product knowledge. It requires a framework.

2. LIMRA 2025 Generational Wealth Transfer Consortia Study, Sponsored by Securian Financial, 2025.

By shifting the focus from transactions to alignment, EPIC helps financial professionals move beyond reactive planning and toward intentional, multi-generational leadership.

The missed conversation: Life insurance in wealth transfer

One of the most compelling insights from the research is the underutilization of life insurance in estate planning conversations. Despite its unique ability to provide certainty, liquidity and flexibility, only 17% of benefactors report discussing it as a wealth transfer tool.

> **This is not a product pitch. It's a planning gap.**

When omitted from planning discussions, families may rely solely on asset liquidation or market-dependent strategies, introducing avoidable risk.

The financial professionals who reintroduce life insurance thoughtfully within a broader estate planning framework can help clients create greater certainty in uncertain environments.

Life insurance can serve critical roles in estate strategies:

- Providing liquidity to cover taxes or equalize inheritances
- Preserving business or real estate assets
- Supporting philanthropic intentions
- Protecting against longevity and market uncertainty

Beneficiaries: The overlooked strategic audience

The research also challenges professionals to reconsider who the "client" is in estate planning conversations.

While benefactors initiate planning, beneficiaries represent the future of advisory relationships. The study found that 90% of beneficiaries are open to working with their parents' financial professional if engagement occurs meaningfully and early.

Yet many beneficiaries report concerns about taxes, legal complexity and family conflict. At the same time, they are increasingly turning to self-directed content to educate themselves.

This signals a need for financial professionals to:

- Engage beneficiaries before wealth transfers occur
- Provide accessible, relatable education
- Build trust across generations

Estate planning is both a legacy strategy and a retention strategy.

From transfer to continuity

The Generational Wealth Transfer will not be defined solely by asset volume. It will be defined by continuity.

Financial professionals who position estate planning as a central, proactive planning discipline, not an afterthought, can:

- Strengthen client relationships
- Reduce the risk of asset attrition
- Increase multi-generational engagement
- Enhance perceived value

This is not about selling solutions. It is about structuring conversations that create continuity through generations.

The call to lead

The Generational Wealth Transfer is not approaching. It is underway.

The study confirms that families face misaligned expectations, underdeveloped plans and underused strategies. These gaps present risk but also opportunity.

Financial professionals who adopt an individually centered estate planning framework, incorporate liquidity and tax-aware tools thoughtfully, and engage beneficiaries early will be positioned not merely to participate in the transfer — but to lead it.

For financial professionals and distribution partners seeking structured ways to address these challenges, Securian Financial's EPIC approach provides research-backed guidance and conversation frameworks designed to translate insight into action.

The transfer is inevitable.
Leadership is optional.
Now is the time to choose.

Learn more at **securian.com/epic**

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Life insurance products contain charges, such as Cost of Insurance Charge, Cash Extra Charge, and Additional Agreements Charge (which we refer to as mortality charges), and Premium Charge, Monthly Policy Charge, Policy Issue Charge, Transaction Charge, Index Segment Charge, and Surrender Charge (which we refer to as expense charges). These charges may increase over time, and the policies may contain restrictions, such as surrender periods.

Additional agreements may be available. Agreements may be subject to additional costs and restrictions. Agreements may not be available in all states or may exist under a different name in various states and may not be available in combination with other agreements.

Policy loans and withdrawals may create an adverse tax result in the event of lapse or policy surrender, and will reduce both the surrender value and death benefit. Withdrawals may be subject to taxation with the first fifteen years of the contract. Clients should consult their tax advisor when considering taking a policy loan or withdrawal.

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