

Retirement Transition & Readiness Plan

Because you indicated that you are already retired, this Retirement Summary brings together the parts of the report most relevant to sustaining your retirement in this state.

North Carolina offers useful retirement advantages, including no state tax on Social Security and generally lower statewide cost pressure than the U.S. benchmark. The main work now is to make sure the tax treatment, Medicare coverage, healthcare access, housing choice, and future care options hold up for you and your spouse in the specific community you choose. Because you have not selected a home or confirmed a destination locality, keep property- and county-specific commitments open until these checks are complete.

Settle these items first

1. Review both federal-benefit timelines

Do this: Check each spouse's Social Security earnings record, benefit estimates, and current claiming status. Social Security work credits are eligibility credits earned from covered work; retirement eligibility generally requires 40 credits, usually representing at least about 10 years of covered work because no more than four credits can be earned each year. Credits establish eligibility, not the monthly benefit amount.

Where to start: Create or review each person's account with the Social Security Administration at <https://www.ssa.gov/myaccount/>.

Why it matters: You are about nine months from Social Security full retirement age. Your spouse reaches the earliest claiming age of 62 in about four months. These are decision points, but neither age automatically determines the best time to claim. Health, expected longevity, taxes, cash flow, and coordination between spouses all matter.

Done when: You have both earnings records, current benefit estimates at different claiming ages, and a written household claiming plan reviewed with Social Security or a qualified retirement planner. Do not commit to a claiming date until you understand its effect on both monthly income and possible survivor benefits.

2. Clear the Medicare issue now

Do this: Confirm your current Medicare enrollment and whether your coverage will work in the North Carolina county you eventually choose. If you are not enrolled, ask Medicare or Social Security whether you qualify for a Special Enrollment Period and whether late-enrollment consequences apply.

Where to start: Use <https://www.medicare.gov/> or call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227). Compare county-specific Medicare Advantage, Part D, and Medigap choices at <https://www.medicare.gov/plan-compare/>.

Why it matters: You passed the usual Medicare eligibility age more than a year ago. Your spouse's Medicare transition is still about three years and four months away, so your household may need two different coverage arrangements for several years.

Done when: Your enrollment status is documented, your current doctors and prescriptions have been checked against the exact plan and service area, and your spouse has a calendar reminder for the seven-month Initial Enrollment Period surrounding age 65.

Build the retirement-income and tax file

North Carolina does not tax Social Security, but most other retirement income is taxable unless a narrow source-specific or legacy exclusion applies. The state's 2026 individual income-tax rate is 3.99%, but that rate alone does not show your final bill.

Do this: Give a tax professional a source-by-source income list covering Social Security, pensions, annuities, IRA or retirement-plan withdrawals, interest, dividends, capital gains, rental income, and any trust income. Confirm filing status rather than assuming that being married means filing jointly.

Have ready: Prior tax returns, benefit statements, pension records, account statements, and the expected taxable basis of withdrawals.

Done when: You have a written estimate showing North Carolina treatment of each income source, your intended filing status, and what changes after domicile is established. Coordinate this with the Financial Outlook instead of building a second retirement budget.

Domicile checkpoint: Once you choose a home and intend North Carolina to be your permanent legal residence, ask the tax professional or an estate-planning attorney what records should consistently show that intent. Complete address, voter, vehicle, tax, and legal-document changes only after the residential decision is real; do not set a domicile plan around a placeholder city.

Choose housing that still works later

Your stated plan is long-term renting, so prioritize predictable total housing cost, safe access, and the ability to remain there if mobility changes.

Before signing a lease:

Get the full monthly amount in writing, including rent, renter-paid utilities, parking, pet charges, and recurring fees.

Obtain an exact-address renter's insurance quote and check deductibles, exclusions, personal-property limits, temporary-housing coverage, and whether flood or wind protection requires separate coverage.

Test step-free entry, bathroom access, lighting, handrail options, elevator reliability, package and grocery access, and the distance to parking or pickup areas.

Check the route to groceries, a pharmacy, primary care, and the hospital you would actually use. Also identify a workable option if either spouse stops driving.

North Carolina's winter exposure varies by region, but snow and ice affect substantial portions of the state. Some areas also face hurricane winds or concentrated heat. For any finalist address, check road grade, shaded or icy entrances, reliable heating and cooling, outage plans, backup power for essential equipment, storm access, and the landlord's responsibilities after severe weather.

If buying later becomes a serious option, request the parcel's current assessment and tax bill rather than relying on statewide figures. North Carolina's median county effective property-tax rate is 0.62%, and the median county annual bill is about \$1,322, but the actual bill can change sharply with value and location. Ask the county tax office about the Homestead Exclusion for Senior and Disabled Citizens and the Homestead Circuit Breaker Tax Deferral before assuming eligibility.

Protect healthcare access before choosing the community

North Carolina has strong specialist depth around the Research Triangle, Charlotte, Winston-Salem, and Greenville, while rural access is much less consistent.

Do this: For every serious residential area, identify an accepting primary-care practice, the nearest usable hospital, and any specialists you regularly need. Confirm each provider directly with the exact Medicare plan rather than relying on a general directory listing.

Done when: Both spouses have a provider list, realistic travel times, appointment availability, and a plan for prescription refills during the transition. A place fails this check if routine care requires travel you would not want to manage as you age or if the necessary providers are outside your actual network.

Plan the care ladder before it becomes urgent

North Carolina's 2025 median non-medical caregiver rate is about \$30 per hour, 14% below the national median of \$35. The harder issue is availability: the state has about 30 home-health and personal-care workers per 1,000 older adults, roughly 30% below the national median. Lower hourly pricing will not help if an agency cannot staff the needed hours.

Create a simple local care ladder for each finalist area:

Aging in place: home modifications, transportation, meal support, and emergency contacts.

In-home help: private-duty personal care and Medicare-certified home health, which are not the same service.

Assisted living or memory care: current openings, staffing, services, contract terms, and total monthly charges.

Skilled nursing: certified beds, staffing, inspections, penalties, payer participation, and actual availability.

Assisted living has a statewide 2025 median of about \$6,496 per month, 5% above the national median. A semi-private nursing-home room is about \$9,733 per month, 2% above the national median. These are market benchmarks, not quotes or predictions of what insurance or public programs would pay.

Where to start: Find local aging-services guidance through the Eldercare Locator at <https://eldercare.acl.gov/>. Review Medicare-certified home-health agencies at <https://data.cms.gov/provider-data/> and nursing-home staffing, inspections, quality measures, and penalties at <https://data.cms.gov/provider-data/topics/nursing-homes/data-sources>.

Done when: You have at least two plausible local options at each relevant level, with current capacity, service area, staffing, price, payer rules, and travel time confirmed directly.

Review long-term-care insurance deliberately

Meet with an insurance professional who can compare keeping any existing policy, changing coverage, or self-funding future care. Ask specifically whether the policy provides a meaningful in-home-care benefit, what triggers benefits, what waiting period applies, how benefits change over time, and whether assisted living, memory care, and nursing care are covered differently.

The decision is complete when you have the policy language and written comparison—not just a sales illustration—and your retirement planner has shown how premiums and possible uncovered care costs fit within your long-term cash flow.

Update legal and estate arrangements after the move decision

North Carolina currently has neither a state estate tax nor an inheritance tax, but that does not replace estate planning. After deciding where you will live, have a North Carolina estate-planning attorney review wills, powers of attorney, healthcare directives, beneficiary designations, account ownership, and any trust documents. Because you are legally married, include spouse and survivor consequences in the review without assuming every asset is jointly owned or every beneficiary form already matches your wishes.

Done when: The attorney confirms which documents remain effective, replacement documents are signed where needed, and both spouses know where originals and emergency copies are kept.

Healthcare resource contacts: Eldercare Locator: eldercare.acl.gov · 1-800-677-1116 — Find the Area Agency on Aging and local aging-services navigator for a ZIP code.;
Medicare Care Compare: Medicare.gov/care-compare · 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) — Compare Medicare-certified home-health agencies and nursing homes, including available quality information.