The 2026 Savings Cheat Sheet

The federal figures worth claiming this year — and the income test that decides whether each one is yours.

FOURTEEN PAGES, AND NONE OF THEM ARE PADDING

Every figure here traces to the government document it came from, and page 13 shows you how to check any of them in about a minute. If a number has moved since this was printed, the date at the top of this page is how you will know to look.

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READ THIS BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE

What this is, and what it is not.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

This is not written by a financial professional and it is not advice for you personally. It is a research guide to public programs, written for everyone at once. Check every number against the source before you act on it — page 13 shows you how.

THE WHOLE NOTICE, IN ONE PAGE

01 **Who publishes this, and what they are not.** Never Taught That is an independent publisher and educator. The publisher is **not** a certified public accountant, **not** a CFP® professional, **not** an attorney, **not** an enrolled agent, **not** a licensed insurance producer and **not** a registered investment adviser in any state. No financial, tax, legal or insurance credential is held or claimed.

02 **This is education. It is not advice.** Nothing here is investment, tax, legal or insurance advice. It is a researched description of public programs and the published rules that govern them.

03 **It is general, and it is not about you.** It takes no account of any reader's income, household or circumstances, and reading it creates no adviser–client, attorney–client or fiduciary relationship. **Individual questions never get a personal recommendation** — you will be pointed at the program's own page and at someone licensed.

04 **Nothing here promises you will get anything.** Eligibility turns on income, filing status, household size, age, disability and immigration status, and the state you live in. Some programs are funded state by state and run out of money. No refund, rebate or credit is guaranteed.

05 **Every figure expires.** These are 2026 figures, current as of 23 August 2026. Most change each October, some mid-year. Before acting on any number, check it against the agency's own page.

06 **United States only, and no warranty.** Every program described is a US federal, state, tribal or local program. Provided “as is,” without warranty of any kind. To the fullest extent permitted by law the publisher is not liable for any loss arising from use of or reliance on this guide.

TALK TO SOMEBODY LICENSED BEFORE YOU DECIDE

Especially before anything touching your tax return, a retirement account, an insurance enrolment or a debt you owe. This guide is a way to walk into that conversation already knowing the numbers — not a substitute for having it.

TWO SPEEDS, AND WHAT MOVED THIS YEAR

How to read fourteen pages in ten minutes.

THE FASTEST ROUTE THROUGH

1
FIND YOUR INCOME

Nearly every program here is decided by **one comparison**: your income against a threshold. Know roughly what yours is and most pages answer themselves.

2
READ THE GREEN BOXES

Every page opens with one. Read only those and you will still find money — about four minutes for the whole guide.

3
SCAN THE RUST BOXES

Those mark what **changed for 2026** or what most guides still get wrong. They are where an older printout will cost you.

THREE THINGS THAT CHANGED FOR 2026

NEW, AND TEMPORARY	
Tips deduction	**$25,000**
Overtime, joint	**$25,000**
Car loan interest	**$10,000**
Age 65 and over	**$6,000**

MOVED THIS YEAR	
SALT cap	**$40,400**
401(k) limit	**$24,500**
Social Security rise	**2.8%**
Standard deduction, single	**$16,100**

All four deductions in the left panel are **new for 2025 and disappear after the 2028 tax year** unless Congress extends them. They are on page 6.

THE TRAP THAT COSTS PEOPLE THE MOST, AND IT IS NOT A MATH ERROR

People turn down a raise, a second shift or extra hours because they think crossing into the next tax bracket taxes *everything* they earn at the higher rate. **It does not.** A bracket only ever taxes the dollars inside it. Earning one dollar more never leaves you with less after federal income tax.

WHERE ALMOST EVERY BENEFIT PROGRAM STARTS

The one number to know before anything else.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

Benefit programs rarely ask what you earn in dollars. They ask whether you are under a **percentage** of the federal poverty guideline — 138%, 150%, 200%, 250%. So the single most useful number to carry around is the guideline itself.

2026 FEDERAL POVERTY GUIDELINE

$15,960

Household of one, 48 contiguous states and DC

It rises every January, and it is **higher in Alaska and Hawaii**. Add roughly $5,600 for each additional person in the household — the exact step is in the notice below.

The dated Federal Register notice, not an agency landing page — `federalregister.gov/d/2026-00755, published 15 January 2026`

WHAT THE COMMON PERCENTAGES COME OUT AT

HOUSEHOLD SIZE	100%	138%	150%	200%	250%
1 person	$15,960	$22,025	$23,940	$31,920	$39,900
2 people	$21,600	$29,808	$32,400	$43,200	$54,000
3 people	$27,240	$37,591	$40,860	$54,480	$68,100
4 people	$32,880	$45,374	$49,320	$65,760	$82,200

Calculated from the 2026 guideline of **$15,960** for one person plus **$5,640** for each additional person, both published in the Federal Register notice above. Percentages are rounded to the dollar. **Alaska and Hawaii have their own, higher guidelines** — if you live there, use the notice rather than this table.

WHERE THIS NUMBER GETS USED

Marketplace health subsidies, Medicaid and CHIP, Medicare Savings Programs and Extra Help, LIHEAP, Weatherization and most state utility discounts all measure you against a percentage of this figure. **One comparison rules most of them in or out.**

THE RATE TABLES

What each slice of income is taxed at.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

Subtract your deduction from your income. What is left is what these rates act on, one slice at a time. The rate on a row applies to that slice only — never to everything you earned.

2026 TAXABLE INCOME BRACKETS

REV. PROC. 2025-32 § 4.01

RATE	SINGLE	MARRIED FILING JOINTLY	HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD
10%	up to $12,400	up to $24,800	up to $17,700
12%	$12,400 – $50,400	$24,800 – $100,800	$17,700 – $67,450
22%	$50,400 – $105,700	$100,800 – $211,400	$67,450 – $105,700
24%	$105,700 – $201,775	$211,400 – $403,550	$105,700 – $201,750
32%	$201,775 – $256,225	$403,550 – $512,450	$201,750 – $256,200
35%	$256,225 – $640,600	$512,450 – $768,700	$256,200 – $640,600
37%	over $640,600	over $768,700	over $640,600

STANDARD DEDUCTION, AND THE EXTRA AT 65 OR BLIND

§ 4.14

FILING STATUS	2026 DEDUCTION	ADDITIONAL AMOUNT	EACH
Single	**$16,100**	Age 65+ *or* blind	**$1,650**
Married filing jointly	**$32,200**	…if also unmarried	**$2,050**
Head of household	**$24,150**	Married, 65+ *and* blind	**$3,300**
Married filing separately	**$16,100**	Unmarried, 65+ *and* blind	**$4,100**

These stack **per person** and **per condition**. A married couple both over 65 adds $1,650 twice, for **$35,500** total. That is separate from the new $6,000 senior deduction on page 6 — you can have both, and most people over 65 do.

MOST PEOPLE NEVER ITEMISE, AND THAT IS FINE

You take the standard deduction *or* you itemise, whichever is larger. For the large majority the standard deduction wins outright, which is why it is the number to know. If your mortgage interest, state taxes and charitable giving together clear it, that is the year to look harder.

NEW FOR 2025 THROUGH 2028 ONLY

The four deductions with an expiry date.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

Four deductions exist now that did not exist two years ago, and all four disappear after the 2028 tax year unless Congress extends them. You do **not** have to itemise to take any of them. Three of the four require married couples to file jointly.

THE FOUR, AND WHERE EACH ONE FADES

Qualified tips — $25,000

FADES AT	**MAGI over $150,000** single, $300,000 joint
RULES	Only occupations on the IRS list of customarily-tipped jobs as of **31 Dec 2024**
NEEDS	$25,000 is **per return**, not per spouse

Qualified overtime — $12,500

JOINT	**$25,000** for a married couple filing jointly
FADES AT	MAGI over $150,000 single, $300,000 joint
RULES	The **premium half** only — the extra over your normal rate

Car loan interest — $10,000

FADES AT	**MAGI over $100,000** single, $200,000 joint
RULES	Under 14,000 lb, with **final assembly in the US**
NEEDS	The vehicle's **VIN on your return**

Age 65 and over — $6,000

COUPLE	**$12,000** where both spouses are 65+
FADES AT	MAGI over $75,000 single, $150,000 joint
RULES	Must reach 65 **by the last day** of the tax year

THE PART MOST COVERAGE GETS WRONG

These are **deductions, not exemptions**. “No tax on tips” is a headline, not the law. A $25,000 tips deduction is worth $25,000 × your tax rate — roughly $3,000 at 12%, $5,500 at 22% — and it **does not reduce payroll tax**. Social Security and Medicare still come off the whole amount. Anyone promising you a $25,000 refund is selling something.

WHERE MONEY CAN GO BEFORE IT IS TAXED

The 2026 contribution limits.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

Money you put into these accounts is generally not taxed as income this year. The limits below are the most you are allowed to put in. Whether you also get to *deduct* it depends on your income — that part is on the next line down.

2026 CONTRIBUTION LIMITS

NOTICE 2025-67 AND REV. PROC. 2025-19

RETIREMENT ACCOUNTS	
401(k), 403(b), 457	**$24,500**
…catch-up at 50+	**+$8,000**
…catch-up at 60–63	**+$11,250**
IRA, traditional or Roth	**$7,500**
…catch-up at 50+	**+$1,100**
SIMPLE plan	**$17,000**

HEALTH ACCOUNTS	
HSA, self-only	**$4,400**
HSA, family	**$8,750**
…catch-up at 55+	**+$1,000**
Health FSA	**$3,400**

The 60–63 catch-up replaces the $8,000, it does not add to it — $35,750 is the ceiling at 60, not $43,750. That one catches people every year.

WHERE THE TAX BREAK FADES

MODIFIED AGI, 2026

INCOME TEST	STARTS FADING	GONE AT
Traditional IRA deduction — single, covered by a work plan	$81,000	$91,000
Traditional IRA deduction — joint, contributor covered	$129,000	$149,000
Roth IRA contribution — single or head of household	$153,000	$168,000
Roth IRA contribution — married filing jointly	$242,000	$252,000

Above these, the contribution limit does not change — the *tax break* does. There are legitimate routes around the Roth limits; the complete edition works them.

MONEY OFF THE TAX, NOT OFF THE INCOME

The credits most people miss.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

A deduction lowers the income you are taxed on. A credit comes off the tax itself, dollar for dollar — worth roughly four times as much to a middle earner. A **refundable** credit pays you even when you owe nothing at all.

EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT, 2026

§ 4.06

CHILDREN	MAX CREDIT	FADES FROM (S / HOH)	GONE AT	GONE AT, JOINT
None	$664	$10,860	$19,540	$26,820
One	$4,427	$23,890	$51,593	$58,863
Two	$7,316	$23,890	$58,629	$65,899
Three or more	$8,231	$23,890	$62,974	$70,244

Fully **refundable** — you get it as cash even owing zero tax, which is why it is worth filing a return even when you are not required to. One hard stop most people never hear about: **investment income over $12,200 disqualifies you entirely**, whatever your wages.

THE REST OF THE CREDIT TABLE

CREDIT	MAX, EACH	REFUNDABLE	PHASE-OUT
Child Tax Credit, per child	$2,200	$1,700 of it	Complete edition
Adoption credit	$17,670	$5,120 of it	$265,080 – $305,080
Saver's Credit, per person	$1,000	No	$40,250 single
American Opportunity, per student	$2,500	40% of it	$80,000 – $90,000
Lifetime Learning, per return	$2,000	No	Same as above

Education phase-outs shown are for **single and head of household**; married filing jointly is double. Those two come from the 2025 Form 8863 instructions, the most recent the IRS has published — **re-check before you file**.

THE SAVER'S CREDIT IS A CLIFF, NOT A SLOPE

It pays back 50%, 20% or 10% of what you put into a retirement account, and the tiers are hard edges — one dollar of income over a line drops you a whole tier. The complete edition prints all nine thresholds and the form that claims it.

ON A DIFFERENT CLOCK FROM THE IRS

Social Security in 2026.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

Social Security's figures move every October on their own schedule, and they set the ceiling for several other programs. If you are near retirement, the earnings test on this page is the one most often misunderstood.

SOCIAL SECURITY AND SSI, 2026

SSA — 2.8% COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENT

FIGURE	2026	FIGURE	2026
Cost-of-living adjustment	2.8%	Earnings test, under FRA	$24,480/yr
Wages taxed for Social Security	$184,500	Earnings test, FRA year	$65,160/yr
One credit of coverage	$1,890	SSI, individual	$994/mo
Max benefit at full retirement	$4,152/mo	SSI, couple	$1,491/mo

The wage base jumped **$8,400** from $176,100 — about **$521 more** in Social Security tax for an employee on the same salary, **$1,042** if self-employed.

THE EARNINGS TEST IS NOT A PENALTY, AND ALMOST EVERYBODY THINKS IT IS

If you claim Social Security before full retirement age and keep working, benefits are withheld once you earn over **$24,480**. That money is **not lost.** At full retirement age your monthly payment is recalculated upward to give it back over time. People take much worse decisions — turning down work, claiming early out of fear — because they believe it vanishes. It does not.

WHEN YOUR FULL RETIREMENT AGE ACTUALLY IS

SSA

BORN	FULL RETIREMENT AGE	IF YOU CLAIM AT 62 INSTEAD
1943 – 1954	66	25.0% less
1955 – 1959	66 + 2 to 10 months	25.8 – 29.2% less
1960 or later	67	30.0% less

Within 1955–1959 it rises two months per birth year. That reduction is **permanent** — it does not go back up at full retirement age. Waiting past it earns credits that raise the payment further, to age 70. **This guide does not make that choice for you.**

IF YOU ARE OVER 60

The four Medicare Savings Programs and Extra Help can cover your Part B premium and cut prescription costs, both measured against the poverty guideline on page 4. The complete edition carries the asset tests and the application path.

CHANGED FOR 2026, AND PRINTED WRONG

The deduction the IRS misprinted.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

If you itemise, you can deduct what you paid in state and local taxes — income or sales tax, plus property tax — up to a cap. That cap went up sharply for 2026, and the IRS printed the wrong number on one of its own forms.

2026 STATE AND LOCAL TAX CAP

$40,400

$20,200 if married filing separately

It shrinks if your modified AGI is over **$505,000** ($252,500 filing separately), but it **never falls below $10,000** ($5,000 separately). For most people who itemise, the full $40,400 is available.

Confirmed against IRS Publication 505 (2026) — irs.gov/publications/p505

TWO IRS PAGES, ONE OF THEM WRONG — CHECK THE YEAR BEFORE YOU TRUST A FIGURE

The **2026 Form 1040-ES was printed with the wrong SALT figure**, and the IRS has said it *will not be reissued* — the correction sits on a separate page instead. Separately, agency pages routinely sit on last year's table for months after a new one exists. **If a government page does not say 2026 on it, it is not the 2026 number.** That single habit is worth more than any figure in this guide.

WHAT THE CAP ACTUALLY COVERS

COUNTS TOWARD THE $40,400	
State / local income tax	**Yes**
…or general sales tax	**Either**
Property tax on a home	**Yes**
Personal property tax	**Yes**

DOES NOT COUNT	
Federal income tax	**No**
Social Security tax	**No**
Fees for services	**No**
Business property tax	**Elsewhere**

You pick **income tax or sales tax**, not both — sales tax usually wins only in states with no income tax. And none of this matters unless your itemised total beats the standard deduction: **$16,100 single, $32,200 joint**. Under that, take the standard deduction and skip the arithmetic entirely.

ALSO NEW FOR 2026, AT THE VERY TOP

For taxpayers in the 37% bracket, itemised deductions are now shaved slightly. It bites only above $640,600 single and $768,700 joint. The complete edition works the arithmetic.

YOU ARE PROBABLY PAYING TO FILE FOR NO REASON

Filing for nothing.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

Most American households can file a federal return free, through the IRS's own partners or at a staffed site. The tax-prep industry spends a great deal of money making sure you do not know this. There is nothing to buy on this page.

THREE FREE ROUTES, AND WHO EACH IS FOR

1

IRS FREE FILE

Guided software, free, for **$89,000 AGI or less**. Start at **irs.gov/freefile** — not from a search engine, or you will land on a paid product.

2

FILLABLE FORMS

The same forms electronically, **at any income level**, with no guidance. Good if your return is simple and you know what you are doing.

3

A PERSON, IN THE ROOM

VITA for roughly $69,000 or less, **TCE** for anyone **60 and over**. IRS-certified volunteers, free, and they will catch credits you miss.

WORTH FILING EVEN WHEN YOU ARE NOT REQUIRED TO

REASONS TO FILE ANYWAY	
Refundable EITC, up to	**$8,231**
Refundable Child Credit	**$1,700**
Tax withheld from pay	**All of it**

FREE FILING CEILINGS	
IRS Free File software	**$89,000**
Free File Fillable Forms	**No limit**
VITA, in person	**$69,000**
TCE, in person	**Age 60+**

IF YOU ALREADY OWE THE IRS, DO NOT IGNORE IT AND DO NOT PAY A FIRM TO CALL THEM

The IRS has its own ladder — payment plans, an offer in compromise, and a currently-not-collectible status if you genuinely cannot pay. You can ask for these yourself, free. Firms advertising to “settle your tax debt for pennies” charge large advance fees for filing the same forms. **The complete edition walks the ladder and shows the tells.**

EVERY FIGURE IN HERE HAS A SHELF LIFE

The four dates the numbers move.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

Nothing in this guide is permanent. Four times a year a batch of these figures is replaced, and a printout from before that date quietly becomes wrong. These are the dates to watch.

WHAT CHANGES, AND WHEN

15 JAN
HHS poverty guidelines
Resets page 4, and with it most benefit income tests

OCT–NOV
IRS posts next year's figures
Brackets, deductions, credits and account limits, all at once

LATE OCT
Social Security adjustment
Page 9, plus Medicare and Extra Help limits

1 NOV
Marketplace open enrollment
The only window most people get for health coverage

THE FOUR THAT EXPIRE ON A FIXED DATE

DEDUCTION	WORTH UP TO	AVAILABLE FOR TAX YEARS	THEN
Qualified tips	**$25,000**	**2025 – 2028**	**Gone**
Qualified overtime	**$25,000 joint**	**2025 – 2028**	**Gone**
Car loan interest	**$10,000**	**2025 – 2028**	**Gone**
Age 65 and over	**$12,000 couple**	**2025 – 2028**	**Gone**

Unless Congress extends them. **The SALT cap has its own cliff** — it returns to $10,000 in 2030. If any of these apply to you, they are worth claiming while they exist.

HOW TO KNOW WHEN A NUMBER IN HERE MOVES

Get the updated cheat sheet free at **nevertaughtthat.com**. When a figure is revised or a program changes, you will get an email saying which number moved and where — not a newsletter. Page 14 has the square to scan.

WHERE EVERY NUMBER IN HERE CAME FROM

Check any figure yourself.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

You should not have to take anyone's word for a dollar amount that decides whether you file a form. Every figure in this guide came from one of the documents below. Point a phone camera at a square and you land on the government's own page.

CHECK ANY NUMBER IN ABOUT A MINUTE

1

THE SOURCE

Scan the square for the agency that runs it. **Never check a figure against a blog or a tax-prep page.**

2

THE YEAR

Agency pages sit on last year's table for months. **If it does not say 2026, it is not the 2026 number.**

3

YOUR STATE

Benefit programs run state by state. **The federal page gives the ceiling; your state gives what you get.**

THE FIVE DOCUMENTS BEHIND THIS GUIDE

01

Rev. Proc. 2025-32

Brackets, deductions, EITC, credits · 9 Oct 2025

`irs.gov/pub/irs-drop/rp-25-32.pdf`

02

Notice 2025-67

Every retirement and IRA limit on page 7

`irs.gov/pub/irs-drop/n-25-67.pdf`

03

2026 poverty guidelines

The income test on page 4

`federalregister.gov/d/2026-00755`

04

SSA 2026 fact sheet

Everything on page 9

`ssa.gov/news/en/cola/factsheets/2026.html`

05

Publication 505 (2026)

The SALT cap on page 10

`irs.gov/publications/p505`

06

IRS Free File

Start here, not from a search engine

`irs.gov/freefile`

The poverty guidelines link is the **dated Federal Register notice** on purpose — agency landing pages sit on an old year for months and carry no date you can check. All six read **23 August 2026**.

WHERE THIS GUIDE STOPS

What this leaves out, honestly.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

Fourteen pages gets you the figures and the test that decides whether each one is yours. What it cannot do is walk you through claiming them. Below is exactly what is missing, so you can judge for yourself whether you need it.

WHAT THIS GUIDE GIVES YOU, AND WHAT IT DOES NOT

IN THESE 14 PAGES	ONLY IN THE COMPLETE EDITION
Every headline 2026 figure	The phase-out, worked
The income test for each	The form that claims it
What changed this year	Energy and housing rebates
The source document	Medicare and marketplace
How to file for free	Debt relief: real vs. scam

The complete edition is roughly 80 pages across four parts, built to the same rule as this one: **every figure traced to a primary government source**, no advertising and no affiliate links. It is a paid book — this page is the only place it is mentioned.

GET THE UPDATES, FREE

Scan or type

nevertaughtthat.com

The current cheat sheet, and an email when a figure in it changes — which number moved, and where. Not a newsletter. One-click unsubscribe on every email.

`nevertaughtthat.com`

ONE LAST TIME, BECAUSE IT MATTERS

This is general education, not advice, and not about your situation. Nothing here is a promise that you will get anything. **Talk to somebody licensed before you act** — and check every figure against the agency's own page first. Page 13 shows you how.