



## **Life Insurance: What Role Does It Play In Holistic Financial Planning Advice?**

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Life insurance is often viewed narrowly, both by those seeking retirement planning services and those providing personal financial planning advice, primarily as a tool for replacing income after a premature death. While this is a vital function, it is only one of several key roles life insurance can play within a well-rounded financial plan. When integrated strategically, alongside effective investment strategies and portfolio management, life insurance can serve as both protection and a planning asset, supporting families, business owners and philanthropically inclined clients in multiple ways.

Below, we outline the key roles life insurance can serve in a thoughtfully constructed financial plan:

### **Income Replacement & Family Protection**

At its core, life insurance provides financial stability to surviving family members after the death of a primary earner. This is especially important for clients with dependents such as those with a spouse, children or aging parents.

A properly structured policy helps ensure that the loss of income doesn't derail long-term goals such as:

- Maintaining lifestyle related expenses
- Funding children's education
- Paying off a mortgage or other debts

Term life insurance is most often used for this purpose due to its affordability and straightforward coverage during high-need years. But even for high-net-worth clients, income replacement remains a foundation for protecting human capital.

## Estate Liquidity & Wealth Transfer

For clients with large illiquid estates such as closely held business interests, real estate or investment partnerships, life insurance can provide the liquidity needed to settle estate taxes, debts or other transfer costs without forcing the sale of core assets. This function is particularly relevant for:

- High-net-worth individuals with taxable estates that are focused on family wealth preservation
- Families looking to equalize inheritance among heirs (e.g., one child inherits a business, another receives insurance proceeds)
- Those interested in utilizing tax optimization strategies to leave a legacy to heirs or charities

When held outside of the taxable estate—typically through an irrevocable life insurance trust (ILIT) – insurance proceeds can pass to beneficiaries free of estate tax, offering a powerful tool for multigenerational planning.

## Business Continuity & Succession Planning

Life insurance plays a central role in ensuring the stability of privately held businesses in the event of a founder's or key employee's death. It is frequently used to:

- Fund buy-sell agreements among partners
- Replace lost income or expertise tied to key employees
- Provide liquidity for estate taxes tied to ownership shares

Buy-sell agreements funded with insurance help surviving owners have the means to purchase the deceased's interest at a pre-agreed value that helps to minimize disruption and preserve enterprise value.

For business owners, a periodic review of coverage amounts, ownership structure and valuation assumptions is essential to help ensure alignment with the current business and succession plan.

## Tax-Advantaged Wealth Accumulation

Permanent life insurance policies (such as whole life, universal life and indexed universal life) include a cash value component that grows tax-deferred and can be accessed tax-efficiently during the insured's lifetime.

This aspect of life insurance as a tailored investment solution may be appealing for:

- High-income earners who have maximized retirement contributions
- Those seeking tax-deferred asset growth outside of traditional qualified plans

Withdrawals or loans from the cash value can help supplement retirement income, finance education or bridge funding gaps in down markets. While not a replacement for traditional investment accounts, permanent life insurance can offer an additional layer of diversification across both investment vehicles and tax treatments.

## **Philanthropy & Legacy Planning**

For charitably inclined investors, life insurance can amplify giving strategies while preserving wealth for heirs. There are several ways to use life insurance in philanthropic planning, including:

- Naming a charity as a beneficiary of a policy
- Donating an existing policy (with or without continued premium payments)
- Using policy proceeds to replace gifted wealth to heirs (via a wealth replacement trust)

This can be particularly effective when clients have low-cost basis assets they would prefer to donate today to avoid capital gains taxes. Life insurance can then be used to replenish the estate with an equivalent amount for the next generation effectively “leveraging” the charitable impact.

## **Risk Management & Planning Flexibility**

Finally, life insurance serves as a core tool in broader risk management planning, safeguarding family wealth preservation. It protects against the financial impact of low-probability, high-consequence events and provides a level of certainty in the face of life’s unpredictability.

In addition to traditional death benefit coverage, some policies include riders or features such as:

- Long-term care benefits
- Chronic illness protection
- Return of premium options

These added benefits allow insurance to play a multifunctional role, reducing the need for separate standalone products and creating more integrated planning outcomes.

## Key Takeaways

As with any financial planning solution, the effectiveness of life insurance depends on the individual/families goals, needs and overall financial profile. When considering how life insurance fits into a plan, individuals and/or families should:

- **Start with the plan:** Insurance is most powerful when it is used to support clearly articulated goals, not when purchased in isolation.
- **Review regularly:** As circumstances, tax laws and product offerings evolve, insurance strategies must be reassessed for continued alignment.
- **Coordinate across professionals:** Estate attorneys, accountants and insurance specialists should be aligned on ownership structures, funding strategies and tax implications.
- **Become educated on structure and purpose:** Clients often misunderstand life insurance or view it only as a cost. Understanding its use as a flexible planning asset can open up broader conversations about legacy, business succession and wealth preservation.

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