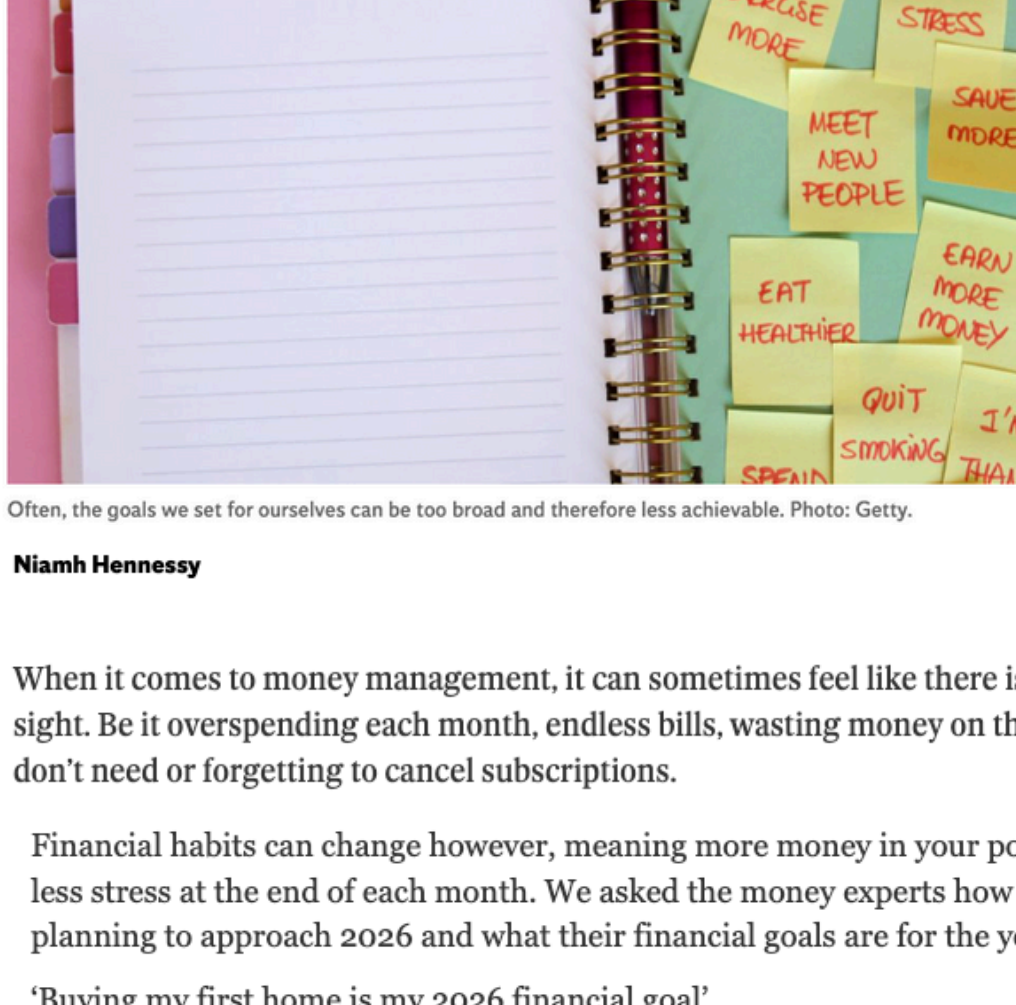


From investing child benefit to avoiding wealth killers, nine money experts share their 2026 financial resolutions

With the new year comes a new opportunity to take stock of your finances



Often, the goals we set for ourselves can be too broad and therefore less achievable. Photo: Getty.

Niamh Hennessy

When it comes to money management, it can sometimes feel like there is no end in sight. Be it overspending each month, endless bills, wasting money on things you don't need or forgetting to cancel subscriptions.

Financial habits can change however, meaning more money in your pocket and less stress at the end of each month. We asked the money experts how they are planning to approach 2026 and what their financial goals are for the year ahead.

'Buying my first home is my 2026 financial goal'

Gavin O'Sullivan, financial planner with BJR Financial

Buying his first home is Gavin O'Sullivan's top goal for 2026 and he has a plan in place to do so.

"To put me in a financial position to do this I just need to continue alongside my partner saving in the correct manner so that when it comes to reviewing our last six months of bank statements, the lender can see our repayment capacity when it comes to getting our mortgage."

Some advice he will be giving his clients heading into 2026 in order to help them achieve their own financial goals includes building an emergency fund, protecting their income, maximising their pensions and to start investing.

He says with regard to building an emergency fund, the key is to start low – even €25 to €50 per week – and to build this up over time.

"I would automate this transfer in the form of a standing order when you get paid from your current account into a savings or deposit account."

He also believes that income protection is the bedrock of any financial plan and he says people should review their cover to ensure they're not overpaying or that they aren't underinsured.

If possible, he advises designating a portion of savings to invest over a minimum five- to seven-year period.

"It's important that you diversify and avoid reactionary decisions based on headlines you see or read. You can begin investing with €100 per month, with a lump sum or both. Invest over the long term, consistently and don't make rash or kneejerk decisions and you will get rewarded."

Money Talks: 'Get uncomfortable with it' - How to conquer your new year money resolutions
Nine money lessons I learned this year: from family finances and debt to freebies and frugality
21 tiny habits that will help you build wealth in 2026

'Real financial progress rarely comes from dramatic resolutions in January'

Cian Carolan, managing director of DNG Financial Services

For Cian Carolan, 2025 was, he says, very deliberately about experiences which included a trip to Lapland.

"Myself and my wife Louise chose to prioritise family experiences over longer-term financial planning for the year. That included a recent trip to Lapland, which was a big expense but worth every penny.

"Importantly, we planned the year out in advance, set clear priorities from the start, and saved monthly so the money was there when we needed it. In amongst the plan, we still had to absorb an unexpected car repair bill of over €3,500 later in the year without causing stress. Hello emergency fund."

He says that experience has shaped how he's approaching 2026 and the year ahead for him is about resetting priorities and rebuilding structure, without, he adds, losing the balance he worked hard to create.

"First, it's about clear priorities. Not everything needs to be tackled at once. In our own household, our priorities for 2026 are to start building towards a large home renovation job over the coming years, to replenish our emergency fund which we dipped into for those car repairs and to review our protection policies which haven't been reviewed in over three years.

"The second thing we will do is map out the key events, occasions and trips coming up in 2026. These are non-monthly outgoings, but still need to be paid in 2026. We will work out what that is going to total up to for the year and will simply divide that figure by 12. We will then save that amount in a separate float account each month so that the necessary money is always there when that event, occasion or trip happens."

Mr Carolan says his advice for people setting financial resolutions for 2026 is simple.

"Be realistic with your goals, ensure they are sustainable and don't try to overhaul everything in January because you will struggle to stick to it for the full year. If you want 2026 to be a step in the right direction, the focus should be on a few fundamentals done well."

He also says to be consistent in 2026.

"Real financial progress rarely comes from dramatic resolutions in January. They generally come from the small, boring actions repeated month after month over a long period of time."

'Avoid the biggest wealth killer – lifestyle creep'

Sheila Madden of Halpin Wealth Management

One of the greatest threats to long-term wealth isn't low income, it's rising spending, says Sheila Madden.

"As earnings grow, it's easy to allow lifestyle upgrades to absorb the extra cash like a new car or more holidays."

However Ms Madden says that if your income rises in 2026, let your savings rate rise too.

"Without this discipline, people often feel richer but make no real financial progress. Focus on building steady, practical habits that will strengthen your financial foundation and safeguard your future."

'Start with manageable goals that are easier to stick to, rather than being overly ambitious'

Teresa Bruen, financial services with Gallagher

Teresa Bruen says her financial goals for 2026 will focus on optimising her long-term savings, building short-term financial flexibility and ensuring she's making the most of her money.

"One of my key goals is to review my pension contributions and increase my AVCs (Additional Voluntary Contributions) for the coming year. To make this more manageable, I plan to increase my contributions on a monthly basis rather than relying on a larger lump sum at the end of the year."

Mr Bruen also plans to review her monthly subscriptions and cancel any that she no longer uses.

"The money saved from these cancellations will be redirected into a savings account. Again, I'll focus on small, regular contributions to this account each month. This will help me build a short-term fund that I can access if needed for unexpected expenses or smaller financial goals."

She says she will also continue to save her child benefit into a unit-linked investment savings plan.

"This has been a manageable and effective way for me to save for my son's future and the plan has performed well over the past few years. It's on track to meet future needs, such as covering college expenses, so I'll maintain this approach to ensure I stay on course."

She says that for those setting their financial resolutions, it's important to make realistic changes, especially in January.

"Start with manageable goals that are easier to stick to, rather than being overly ambitious and saving more than what's sustainable. If you set unrealistic targets, you may find yourself dipping into your savings throughout the year, which can feel counterproductive.

"It's better to save a smaller, more manageable amount consistently than to aim too high and struggle to maintain it."

'Focus on one or two key goals'

Avril McGarry, private client consultant with NFP Ireland

Reviewing her pension strategy as she moves into a new age band for tax relief on pension contributions is top of the list for Avril McGarry in 2026.

"As a result of this, the percentage of my earnings that I can claim tax relief on pension contributions will be higher for me in 2026 than in 2025. So, I plan to make the most of the additional tax relief available and increase my AVCs to the highest level I can comfortably afford.

"This step will not only boost my income in retirement but it will also improve mortgage affordability, as lenders often factor AVC pension contributions into their calculations."

Ms McGarry says that when setting financial resolutions for 2026, she advises people to keep it simple and realistic.

"Focus on one or two key goals. For example, if building an emergency fund is a priority, break this into manageable monthly steps. Automate savings where possible and review your progress regularly. Small, consistent actions will make a big difference over time."

'Broad aspirations like saving more and spending less typically fail because they lack structure'

Paul Cawley, financial planner with Lifestyle Financial Planners

Start your financial planning for 2026 with a realistic assessment of your current position, says Paul Cawley.

He says many households lack clarity on income, expenses, assets and liabilities, making meaningful progress impossible.

"Establishing a robust emergency fund should be the first priority for most people. A cash buffer covering six months of essential expenses protects against unexpected events and creates the foundation for future goals.

He says broad aspirations like saving more and spending less typically fail because they lack structure.

"Transform intentions into SMART Goals. They are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound."

'Remember you need to live too'

Joey Sheahan, head of acquisitions at MyWealthManagement

Joey Sheahan says he follows the same advice that he gives to his clients which is to "keep it structured, keep it simple and stay consistent".

"My central financial goal is to organise my finances across short-term liquidity, long-term investing and protection."

He says it's really important to keep goals realistic and achievable so he tends to focus on a few areas.

Firstly, cash management and keeping a rainy day credit union account for big, planned, irregular expenses and to use the day-to-day current account buffer to handle monthly living expenses.

"I fully fund my pension up to my age-related limit each year with monthly contributions and a similar fund split to match my long-term investment strategy. I pay my income protection from net pay, with tax credits adjusted for 40pc relief."

'Goals only work if you're honest with yourself and committed to following through'

Shane Tobin, CEO of True Wealth

As we head into the new year, it's a good moment to take a breath and look at how we're handling our money, says Shane Tobin.

"A new year feels like a clean slate and it's a chance to make decisions that genuinely make life a little easier. Whether you want to save for a mortgage, clear some debt or start investing, setting real, practical goals for 2026 can make a big difference. Goals only work if you're honest with yourself and committed to following through. A dream without a plan is just a wish."

Mr Tobin says in 2026 you should not just write a list of resolutions but build a plan you can actually stick to.

"Small steps, done consistently, will move the needle in the right direction."

He adds that people normally budget for things like rent, mortgage, groceries, car repayments and loan repayments but forget the small things that creep in every week and cause lifestyle inflation: the coffees, treats, takeaways and last-minute plans; the impulsive online purchases.

"When you budget for everything, even the fun or silly things, you stay in control and avoid that end-of-month panic, that financial anxiety that we really should be aiming to avoid. It's not about restricting yourself, it's about being realistic with how life actually works, unexpected financial hiccups happen, so put a contingency in the budget for those hiccups also."

'Money is limited but the means of spending it is not'

Frank Conway, founder of moneywhizz.ie

A life lesson Frank Conway bestows is that "money is limited but the means of spending it is not".

"So, to ensure you remain financially resilient, and prepare for life events, such as a loss of income, illness, family crisis or even retirement, you need to plan. The most essential aspect of any household financial plan is to know how much you need to run your household.

He says for anyone setting their financial goals for 2026, his advice is not to overstretch yourself from the outset and remember you need to live too.

'Keep it simple and stick to it. It's never too late to start making smarter financial decisions.'

"First, track all your household spending for three months. And then, once a year thereafter. But don't just record the relevant information, question it. With income, ask if you can claim any tax back from Revenue. Remember, you have up to four years to claim back qualifying expenses from Revenue and most tax relief is 20pc so it can really add up.

"On expenses, can you switch for better value. Remember, most financial products are switchable, mortgages, insurances, current accounts and even old pensions."

He says subscription services and recurring payments, including food delivery or premium gym memberships, may have an effect on personal finances over time.

"Distinguishing between necessary and optional expenses and considering alternatives, such as preparing meals at home or utilising less expensive exercise options, can improve financial outcomes.

"While earning capacity is an important factor, applying systematic planning, transparency, and optimisation strategies can contribute to greater financial stability and resilience."

Top Stories

More

Irish News **PREMIUM**
Motorists caught speeding excessively face higher penalty points under planned new law

Life **PREMIUM**
60 rising stars to watch in 2026 – from the arts, activism, food, sustainability, fashion and more

Crime **PREMIUM**
Michaela McAreevey murder 15 years on: 'We have to be realistic – there may never be justice'

Irish News **PREMIUM**
School reopenings on Monday under threat as Arctic blast to bring snow, ice and lows of -4C