

Health Insurance and Health Services

Medicare

Since early in this century, health care issues have continued to escalate in importance for our Nation. Beginning in 1915, various efforts to establish government health insurance programs have been initiated every few years. From the 1930's on, there was a broad agreement on the need for some form of health insurance to alleviate the unpredictable and uneven incidence of medical costs. The main health care issue at that time was whether health insurance should be privately or publicly financed.

Private health insurance coverage expanded rapidly during World War II, when fringe benefits were increased to compensate for the government limits on direct wage increases. This trend continued after the war. Private health insurance (mostly group insurance financed through the employment relationship) was especially needed and wanted by middle income people. Yet not everyone could obtain or afford private health insurance. Government involvement was sought.

Various national health insurance plans, financed by payroll taxes, were proposed in Congress starting in the 1940's, but none was ever brought to a vote. After various considerations and approaches, and following lengthy national debate, Congress passed legislation in 1965 that established the Medicare program as Title XVIII of the Social Security Act.

The 1965 amendments to the Social Security Act established two separate but coordinated health insurance plans for persons aged 65 or older. The compulsory Hospital Insurance (HI) program is Part A of Medicare, and a voluntary program of Supplementary Medical Insurance (SMI) is Part B. Various legislation has extended HI protection to certain disabled persons under age 65 and to persons of any age with end-stage kidney disease.

Since 1977, the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) has had primary program and administrative responsibility for Medicare. Two trust funds (one for HI and one for SMI), which are funded differently, finance the program.

In 1995, more than 37 million persons were enrolled for Part A, and 36 million for Part B. Benefit payments for 1995 totaled \$184.2 billion, of which Part A accounted for \$117.6 billion and Part B accounted for \$66.6 billion.

Of those persons who were entitled to Medicare in 1995,

more than 84% used Part B services, while only 22% used Part A. The combined HI and SMI benefit payments for all Medicare services averaged \$4,978 per enrollee.

Medicare: Enrollment and coverage, September 30, 1996

Type of coverage	Persons enrolled (in thousands)		
	All persons	Aged	Disabled
Hospital Insurance and/or			
Supplementary Medical Insurance	37,980	33,359	4,621
Hospital Insurance	37,567	32,947	4,620
Supplementary Medical Insurance	36,104	31,949	4,155

Eligibility for Benefits

Part A

Persons are eligible for Hospital Insurance protection when they reach age 65 if they are eligible for monthly Social Security benefits. Persons covered by the Railroad Retirement system participate in the HI program on the same basis as those under the Social Security system.

Also eligible are those who would receive a monthly Social Security benefit if their governmental employment were covered work under Social Security. Persons under age 65 who are disabled are eligible for HI if they have been entitled to Social Security disability benefits for more than 24 months or would be entitled to such benefits if their governmental employment were covered work under the Social Security Act. Persons at any age with end stage kidney disease and who meet the special insured status requirements under Social Security are also eligible for HI.

Persons aged 65 or older who are not eligible for benefits may purchase HI coverage for a monthly premium of \$187 if they have 30-39 quarters of Social Security coverage. For those with less than 30 quarters of coverage, the monthly premium is \$311. Enrollment in Part B is required as a condition for "buying into" the HI program. Another requirement is that the person must be a U.S. resident and either a citizen or alien admitted for permanent residence and have resided in the United States for at least 5 years at the time of application for enrollment in Medicare.

Part B

Supplementary Medical Insurance benefits are available to nearly all resident citizens (and certain aliens) aged 65 or older and to disabled beneficiaries who are entitled to Part A. Part B coverage is optional and must be paid for through a monthly premium (\$43.80 in 1997), which is deducted from the enrollees' Social Security benefit, Railroad Retirement annuity, or Federal Civil Service Retirement annuity. Enrollees not yet receiving such benefits—

generally public assistance recipients—are billed quarterly. They individually pay the premium, or a State social service or medical assistance agency pays the premium on their behalf. Coverage will be terminated for failure to pay the premium. Enrollment in Part B also can be terminated by the individual by filing a notice with the Social Security Administration.

Persons who withdraw from the program before coverage starts incur no premium liability. However, the premium rate is increased by 10% for each full year out of the program for persons who do not enroll as soon as they are eligible. (Special waivers of the premium surcharge are available to employees or spouses who continue coverage under an employer-sponsored health insurance plan.)

Covered Services

Part A covers inpatient hospital services, care in skilled nursing facilities, home health services, and hospice care.

Part B is often thought of primarily as coverage for physician services (in both hospital and nonhospital settings). However, it also covers certain other nonphysician services such as clinical laboratory tests, durable medical equipment, flu vaccinations, drugs that cannot be self-administered (except certain anticancer drugs), most supplies, diagnostic tests, ambulance services, certain other health care services, and blood that is not supplied under Part A. All services must be medically necessary to be covered.

Medicare does not pay for the following: long-term nursing care; most outpatient prescription drugs and patent medicines; dental care; eyeglasses, hearing aids, and examinations to prescribe or fit them; routine physical checkups; routine foot care; cosmetic surgery; or for a telephone, television, or radio in a patient's hospital room. Although these services are not covered under Part A or Part B, they may be covered as part of a managed care plan (described below).

Medicare does not pay for services provided outside the United States and its territories (except for services obtained in Canadian or Mexican hospitals when such facilities are closer to or substantially more accessible from the person's residence than the nearest adequately equipped hospital in the United States).

Private Plans

Managed Care Plans

Most managed care plans are HMOs, but are also referred to as competitive medical plans. Medicare pays these plans a prospectively set capitation payment to provide covered services to enrolled beneficiaries. The enrollees generally pay a fixed monthly premium and a small copayment instead of Medicare's coinsurance and deductibles.

Medicare (Part A): Hospital Insurance Covered Services			
Services	Benefit	Medicare pays	Patient pays
Hospitalization			
Semiprivate room and board, general nursing and other hospital services and supplies. (Medicare payments based on benefit periods.)	First 60 days 61st to 90th day 91st to 150th day* Beyond 150 days	All but \$760 All but \$190 a day All but \$380 a day Nothing	\$760 \$190 a day \$380 a day All costs
Skilled nursing facility care			
Semiprivate room and board, skilled nursing and rehabilitation services and other services and supplies.** (Medicare coverage based on benefit periods.)	First 20 days Additional 80 days Beyond 100 days	100% of approved amount All but \$92 a day Nothing	
Home health care			
Part-time or intermittent skilled care, home health aide services, durable medical equipment and supplies and other services.	Unlimited as long as you meet Medicare requirements.	100% of approved amount; 80% of approved amount of approved amount for durable medical equipment.	Nothing for services; 20% of approved amount for durable medical equipment.
Hospice care			
Pain relief, symptom management and support services for the terminally ill.	For as long as doctor certifies need.	All but limited costs for outpatient drugs and inpatient respite care.	Limited cost sharing for outpatient drugs and inpatient respite care.
Blood			
When furnished by a hospital or skilled nursing facility during a covered stay.	Unlimited during a benefit period if medically necessary.	All but first 3 pints per calendar year.	For first 3 pints.***
<p>* 60 reserve days may be used only once.</p> <p>** Neither Medicare nor Medigap insurance will pay for most nursing home care.</p> <p>*** To the extent the 3 pints of blood are paid for or replaced under one part of Medicare during the calendar year, they do not have to be paid for or replaced under the other part.</p> <p>Source: Updated for 1997 rates from <i>1996 Guide To Health Insurance for People with Medicare</i>, National Association of Insurance Commissioners and the Health Care Financing Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.</p>			

Medicare (Part B): Medical Insurance Covered Services

Services	Benefit	Medicare pays	Patient pays
Medical expenses Physician's services, inpatient and outpatient medical and surgical services and supplies, physical and speech therapy, diagnostic tests, durable medical equipment and other services.	Unlimited if medically necessary.	80% of approved amount (after \$100 deductible). 50% of approved amount for most outpatient mental health services.	\$100 deductible,* plus 20% of approved amount and limited charges above approved amount.** 50% for most mental health services.
Clinical laboratory services Blood tests, urinalysis, and more.	Unlimited if medically necessary.	Generally 100% of approved amount.	Nothing for services.
Home health care Part-time or intermittent skilled care, home health aide services, durable medical equipment and supplies and other services.	Unlimited as long as you meet Medicare requirements.	100% of approved amount; 80% of amount Medicare approves for durable medical equipment.	Nothing for services; 20% of amount Medicare approves for durable medical equipment (after \$100 deductible).
Outpatient hospital treatment Services for the diagnosis or treatment of an illness or injury.	Unlimited if medically necessary.	Medicare payment to hospital based on hospital costs.	20% of billed amount (after \$100 deductible).*
Blood	Unlimited if medically necessary.	80% of approved amount (after \$100 deductible and starting with 4th pint).	First 3 pints plus 20% of approved amount for additional pints (after \$100 deductible).***

* Once you have had \$100 of expense for covered services, the Part B deductible does not apply to any covered services you receive for the rest of the year.

** Federal law limits charges for physician services.

*** To the extent any of the 3 pints of blood are paid for or replaced under one part of Medicare during the calendar year, they do not have to be paid for or replaced under the other part.

Source: Updated for 1997 rates from *1996 Guide To Health Insurance for People with Medicare*, National Association of Insurance Commissioners and the Health Care Financing Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Managed care plans provide Medicare services through either a “risk” or a “cost” contract. Plans with risk contracts provide the services on a predetermined per person basis regardless of the frequency or extent of health care utilization by the enrollees. Generally, those who join a risk plan are locked into receiving all covered care through the plan or through referrals by the plan.

Plans with cost contracts provide Medicare services on a reasonable per person amount based on the actual costs, which are adjusted at year’s end. Cost plans do not have lock-in requirements so enrollees can choose a health care provider affiliated with the plan or go outside the plan. However, if the enrollee goes outside the plan, Medicare pays for the services. Medicare pays for its share of approved charges and the enrollee is responsible for Medicare’s coinsurance and deductibles.

Joining a managed care plan and receiving all services through it means the beneficiary’s out-of-pocket costs are usually more predictable. Depending on personal health needs, these costs may be less than the beneficiary would have to pay for the regular Medicare deductible and coinsurance amounts. Managed care plans may also offer supplementary benefits not covered by Medicare, such as preventive care, dental care, and products such as hearing aids and eyeglasses. Also, electing to participate in a managed care plan may serve as an alternative to purchasing “Medigap” insurance (described below), which is often wanted if the beneficiary is in a traditional fee-for-service plan.

Medigap

Medigap insurance is specifically designed to supplement health care expenses that are not covered by Medicare. To make it easier for consumers to comparison shop for Medigap insurance, the law limits the number of different policies that can be sold in each State and jurisdiction. The same format, language, and definitions are used to describe the benefits for each of the 10 standard plans that are available.

Other Insurance

Medicare beneficiaries may also have coverage from another source, such as an employer group health plan, veterans benefits, workers’ compensation, or black lung benefits. In these cases, Medicare is the secondary payer for health care claims.

Medicare beneficiaries with very low income and resources may get help in paying their cost-sharing portions of Medicare from their States’ Medicaid program. (The relationship between Medicaid and Medicare is described in more detail in the Medicaid section.)

Financing and Payments

The financing plan for Part A, Hospital Insurance, is a pay-as-you-go system. It requires workers and their employers as well as

Ten Standard Medicare Supplement Plans

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Basic	Basic	Basic	Basic	Basic	Basic	Basic	Basic	Basic	Basic
		Skilled nursing	Skilled nursing	Skilled nursing	Skilled nursing	Skilled nursing	Skilled nursing	Skilled nursing	Skilled nursing
	Part A	Part A	Part A	Part A	Part A	Part A	Part A	Part A	Part A
		Part B			Part B				Part B
					Part B excess	Part B excess		Part B excess	Part B excess
		Foreign travel	Foreign travel	Foreign travel	Foreign travel	Foreign travel	Foreign travel	Foreign travel	Foreign travel
			At home			At home		At home	At home
				Preventive					Preventive

Note: Basic benefits included in all plans; hospitalization—Part A coinsurance coverage for 365 additional days after Medicare benefits end; medical expenses—Part B coinsurance (generally 20% of Medicare approved expenses), and blood—first 3 pints each year.

Source: [1997] *Guide for Health Insurance for People with Medicare*, National Association of Insurance Commissioners and the Health Care Financing Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

self-employed persons to pay taxes on earnings in jobs covered by Social Security. The current tax rate of 1.45% applies equally to employees and employers, and the rate for the self-employed equals the combined employer and employee rate of 2.9%.

Part B, Supplementary Medical Insurance, is financed by a combination of monthly premiums paid by the beneficiaries (\$43.80 in 1997) and Federal general revenues. The income for these programs is deposited into two separate trust funds: the Federal Hospital Insurance Trust Fund for Part A, and the Federal Supplementary Medical Insurance Trust Fund for Part B. These funds are managed in the same manner as the Social Security trust funds.

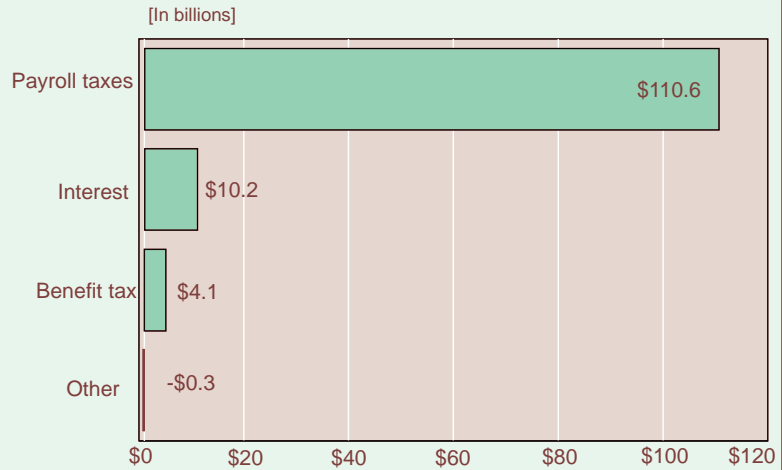
The rising cost of health care is a major consideration for HCFA, for the President, and for Congress. The present schedule for financing the Part A program is sufficient to ensure the payment of benefits only until early in the year 2001, when the funds are expected to be exhausted. And although the Part B program is currently actuarially sound, the past and projected growth in the cost of the program is of grave concern. The long-range intermediate assumptions are: HI program costs are projected to increase

from 1.63% of the GDP in calendar year 1995 to 5.04% of the GDP in calendar year 2070 and the SMI program costs are projected to increase from 0.92% of the Nation's GDP in calendar year 1995 to 3.7% of the GDP in calendar year 2070.

Deductibles and Coinsurance

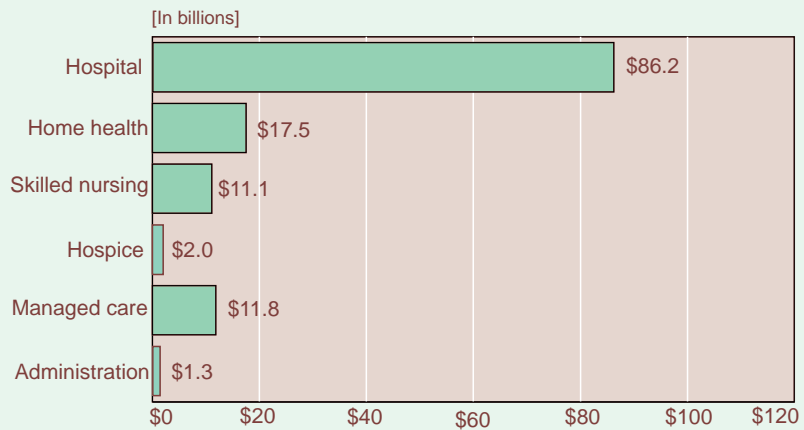
For Part A, a person's use of hospital and skilled nursing services is measured in terms of a benefit period. A benefit period begins the day the beneficiary is hospitalized, with an initial deductible (\$760 in 1997) paid by the beneficiary for the first admission of each benefit period. After 60 days of hospitalization within a benefit period (without a continuous break of 60 days), additional coinsurance is required within the benefit period. A benefit period ends only after 60 days has past since discharge from a hospital or other

HI income in calendar year 1996



Source: HI Trustees' Report.

HI expenditures in calendar year 1996



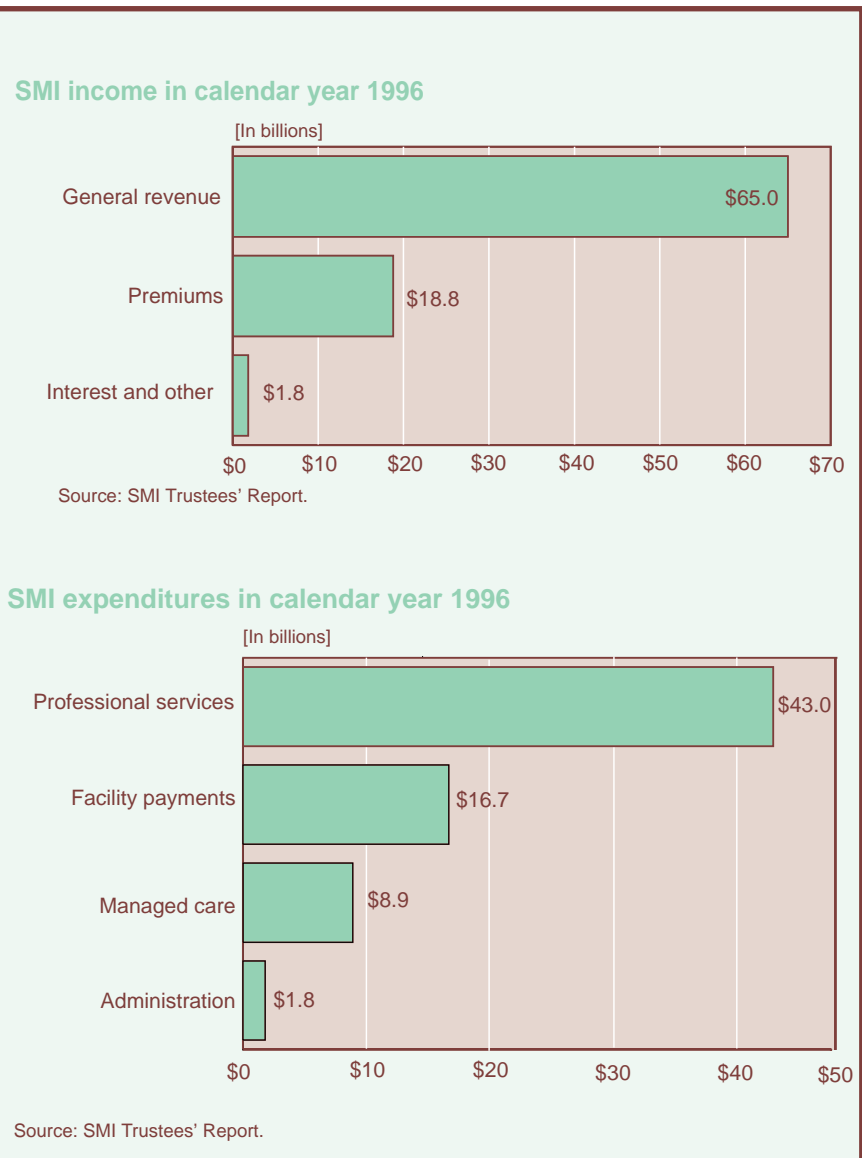
Source: HI Trustees' Report.

facility that primarily provides skilled nursing or rehabilitation. If the beneficiary is hospitalized again, a new benefit period begins. Most HI benefits are then renewed, and the beneficiary must pay a new inpatient hospital deductible. The number of benefit periods is unlimited.

For most SMI covered services, the beneficiary is liable for the monthly premium, an annual deductible (\$100), and 20% of the cost of the services. For outpatient mental health treatment services and a few other specific services, the beneficiary is liable for 50% of the approved charges.

Vendor Payments

Part A payments for most inpatient hospital care are based on the Prospective Payment System. Under the PPS, a hospital is



paid a predetermined rate per discharge. The predetermined rate is based on payment categories called Diagnosis Related Groups, or DRGs. In some cases, the payment will be more than the hospital's costs; in other cases, the payment will be less than the hospital's costs. The hospital absorbs the loss or makes a profit. In cases where the costs for necessary care are unusually high or the length of stay is necessarily unusually long, the hospital receives additional payment. Payments for home health services, hospital care, and for skilled nursing care are made on a "reasonable cost" methodology, with each service or type of care having some restrictions and limitations.

Part B payments to physicians are paid on the basis of "reasonable charge," which is defined as the lesser of the submitted charges, or a fee schedule based on a relative value scale. Durable medical equipment and clinical laboratory services are based on a fee schedule. Outpatient services and home health agencies are reimbursed on a reasonable "cost" basis.

If a physician or medical equipment supplier agrees to "take assignment" (that is, agrees to accept the Medicare-approved amount as full payment for services), then Medicare pays 80% of the approved amount directly to the physician or supplier after the beneficiary meets the \$100 deductible. The beneficiary pays the other 20%. No added payments may be sought from the beneficiary or insurer. If the provider does not take assignment, the beneficiary will be charged for the excess, which may be paid by Medigap insurance. Limits exist on the excess that providers can charge. However, since beneficiaries may select their physicians, they have the option to choose those who take assignment, and thus require no added payments.

Fiscal Intermediaries

HCFA contracts with public or private agencies or organizations to process Part A claims for institutional services and Part B claims for outpatient claims. These "intermediaries" include the Blue Cross/Blue Shield Association (which uses Blue Cross plans in various States) and commercial insurance companies. The fiscal intermediary determines reasonable costs for covered items and services, makes payments, and guards against unnecessary use of covered services.

Medicare "carriers" handle Part B claims for services by physicians and medical suppliers. They determine reasonable charges, make payments, determine whether claims are covered, and deny noncovered claims and unnecessary use of services. Carriers include State Blue Shield plans and commercial insurance carriers.

To improve the quality and effectiveness of Medicare services, each State has a Peer Review Organization (PRO) that the Federal Government pays to determine, for payment purposes, whether the

care is reasonable, necessary, and provided in the most appropriate setting. The PROs are composed of groups of practicing physicians. To receive Medicare payments, a hospital must have an agreement with a Peer Review Organization.

Administration

The Health Care Financing Administration, an agency of the Department of Health and Human Services, is responsible for setting policy and administering the Medicare program. The day-to-day operational work of the program is performed under contract by commercial insurance companies and nonprofit insurers, such as the Blue Cross and Blue Shield plans. These organizations have the responsibility for reviewing and processing benefit claims and making payments to the health care providers. The Social Security Administration does the initial determination of Medicare entitlement. It also provides certain claims-taking and record maintenance services its network of field offices. SSA also provides computer support for the Medicare program.