

Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage: Enroll Now And Start Saving

Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage Helps Everyone With Medicare Pay For Prescription Drugs

Everyone With Medicare Can Get Benefits, No Matter How They Pay For Their Drugs. Joining a Medicare drug plan enables beneficiaries to save an average of 50 percent or more on annual drug costs compared to what they were previously spending with no drug coverage – an average annual savings of \$1,100 in benefits.

Extra Coverage Is Provided For Medicare Recipients With High Prescription Costs. Medicare covers 95 percent of all prescription costs once beneficiaries spend \$3,600 of their own money each year.

Medicare Provides Extra Help For Beneficiaries With Limited Income And Resources. Millions of Medicare recipients are eligible to receive Medicare prescription drug coverage with no premiums, deductibles, or gaps in coverage. On average, Medicare will pay for more than 95 percent of the prescription drug costs for those who qualify.

➤ **Applications For Extra Help Are Available.** Last fall, millions of applications for extra help were mailed to many low-income seniors and Americans with disabilities. Applications are also available at locations around the country, including over 30,000 pharmacies, or through the Social Security Administration by visiting Social Security's website at www.socialsecurity.gov, by calling 1-800-772-1213 (TTY 1-800-325-0778), or by going to any Social Security office. There is no cost or obligation to apply for extra help, and no financial documents or complicated records are required. Everyone who thinks they may qualify should apply.

Medicare Is A Critical Safety Net For Americans With Disabilities. Millions of Americans with developmental and physical disabilities, mental illness, and HIV/AIDS count on Medicare. Medicare's new drug coverage brings them secure coverage and modern medicine.

Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage Offers Better Choices

Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage Offers Choice And Flexibility. Seniors are choosing plans that best meet their individual health needs. Enrollment data shows that around 90 percent of beneficiaries are in plans that are different from the standard plan designed by the government. Many are choosing plans that offer lower deductibles, or no deductibles; fixed co-payments for most drugs; and extra coverage in the coverage gap.

Medicare Provides Support To Employers And Unions Offering High-Quality Drug Coverage. Employers and unions providing drug coverage to their retirees with Medicare can continue doing so, and Medicare will help with the cost.

Medicare Advantage Plans And Other Medicare Health Plans Allow Seniors And Americans With Disabilities To Choose Their Plans And Receive Better Drug Benefits. Seniors and Americans with disabilities who enroll in Medicare Advantage plans and other Medicare health plans can choose the plan best fitting their needs and lifestyle. These plans can enable them to save an average of \$100 each month over traditional Medicare.

Many Medicare Drug Plans Offer Affordable Ways To Avoid Coverage Gaps. Under standard Medicare prescription drug coverage, once a person's cumulative drug expenses reach \$2,250, there is a gap in coverage until out-of-pocket spending reaches \$3,600. However, competition in the prescription drug marketplace has resulted in many affordable drug plans that offer coverage during this period.

Switching To Generic Drugs Can Provide Extra Savings. The FDA ensures all generic drugs are the same as brand-name drugs in terms of dosage, safety, strength and quality. When people switch to generics, they can save hundreds or thousands of dollars. A recent Consumers Union study found that people could save enough to cover the cost of their premiums by switching to equally effective, lower cost medicines.

Medicare Recipients Should Join Now – The Sooner They Join, The Sooner They're Covered

Enrolling By The May 15th Deadline Ensures The Lowest Premiums. For best results, Medicare recipients should sign up for a Medicare drug plan early in the month before they want coverage. This enables them to receive the most out of their coverage from the first day it is effective.

Eligible Beneficiaries Can Sign Up Online, Over The Phone, By Fax, Or Directly With Plans. Medicare beneficiaries and their family members with questions about Medicare drug coverage can call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227; TTY users call 1-877-486-2048) or visit www.medicare.gov. 1-800-MEDICARE wait times average less than two minutes.

- **Assistance Can Also Be Obtained In The Local Community From State Health Insurance Assistance Programs (SHIPs) And Partner Organizations Including Pharmacists, Senior Centers, And Aging Advocacy Groups Like The AARP And The National Council On Aging.**

Joining A Medicare Drug Plan Provides Peace Of Mind By Protecting Beneficiaries From Unexpected Drug Expenses. Even those without significant drug expenses should consider joining a Medicare drug plan to avoid unforeseen prescription drug bills later in life.

Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage By The Numbers

More Than 27 Million Beneficiaries Are Already Enrolled In Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage. An average of 380,000 beneficiaries are enrolling each week. Medicare is on track to meet its goal of enrolling 28 to 30 million people in the Medicare drug plans this year.

Nearly 7 Million Beneficiaries Are Currently Enrolled In Medicare Advantage Plans, Which Often Provide More Choices And Extra Benefits. Enrollment in Medicare Advantage plans has increased by about 1 million since sign up for the Medicare prescription drug coverage began.

Competition Is Reducing The Costs Of Prescription Drugs For Consumers And Taxpayers:

- People who join the Medicare drug plan are saving an average of \$1,100 compared to those without coverage.
- The average Medicare drug plan premium is down from \$37 per month to \$25 per month.
- In 2006, costs to taxpayers are projected to be \$7.6 billion less than previously projected.
- Over the next five years, costs to taxpayers are projected to be \$30 billion less than previously projected.
- Over the next 10 years, States will spend \$37 billion less than previously projected.

Medicare Offers Extra Help For Recipients With Limited Income And Resources

Millions Of Medicare Recipients Are Eligible To Receive Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage For Little Or No Deductibles Or Premiums. Qualified beneficiaries can receive comprehensive coverage with low or no deductibles or premiums. To ensure those who qualify for extra help do not miss out on Medicare drug coverage, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) is facilitating enrollment of these beneficiaries into Medicare drug plans.

CMS Will Enroll The Following Groups Into A Medicare Drug Plan In Their Area, With Coverage Effective May 1, 2006:

- Those who automatically qualify for extra help because they get Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits or get help from their State paying their Medicare premium (belong to a Medicare Savings Program).
- Those who apply with the Social Security Administration (SSA) or their State and qualify for extra help.

CMS Is Letting Beneficiaries In These Groups Know Which Medicare Drug Plan They Will Be Enrolled In If They Take No Action Before April 30. CMS has begun mailing letters to approximately 1.2 million people who qualify for extra help, informing them of their plan assignment. CMS is enrolling these beneficiaries earlier to ensure they receive the benefit of extra help immediately and to ensure they will not be subject to the late-enrollment penalty. They can still decline enrollment before it becomes effective.