Medicare Open Enrollment: A Guide to Making Changes



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A lot can change in a year, particularly your healthcare needs and Medicare coverage. Open Enrollment gives you the opportunity to take a fresh look at your benefits, costs, and coverage. Use this guide to find out about the process, what to review, and make sure your plan continues to fit your needs.

Medicare Open Enrollment runs from October 15 through December 7 each year

Understanding the Open Enrollment Period

Medicare Open Enrollment, also known as the Annual Election Period or Annual Enrollment Period, runs from October 15 through December 7 each year and gives beneficiaries the opportunity to review and make changes to their existing coverage. This yearly review is for those already enrolled in Original Medicare Parts A and B and who have additional insurance, such as Part D plans for medications or the private alternative to Medicare known as a Medicare Advantage/Part C plan. Any changes made during the Open Enrollment timeframe will go into effect January 1 of the following year.

Not All Enrollment Periods Are the Same

The term "open enrollment" can be confusing because it may sound like this is when individuals should first enroll in Medicare. However, those enrolling in Medicare for the first time generally do so either during their Initial Enrollment Period, a 7-month window surrounding their 65th birth month, or a Special Enrollment Period. A Special Enrollment Period may be available after age 65 for individuals who had their own workplace-based insurance or were covered during this timeframe by a working spouse's insurance, if either company had 20 or more employees.

If you're already enrolled in a Part D or Medicare Advantage/Part C plan, reviewing your plan during the Open Enrollment period can be valuable. Even small plan changes could lead to higher out-of-pocket expenses or coverage that no longer meets your needs or expectations.

Take a look at MFS' "Decoding Medicare" resource for more information on Medicare coverage and enrollment periods.

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What to Review Before Making a Decision

Keep an eye out for the Annual Notices of Change, which details any alterations to your current plan coverage. Once you receive that notice, schedule time with your financial advisor and Medicare specialist to discuss changes you may want to make during the Open Enrollment period.

For Part D plans

- Review your current medications and check if any prescription coverage changes have been made over the past year.
- Take a look at the plan's formulary (list of medications). Formularies can change how medications are priced or alter the line-up of medications.
- Check pharmacy networks and see whether your preferred pharmacy is still in-network.
- Review deductibles, copays, and coinsurance

For Medicare Advantage/Part C plans

- Check if there have been any changes to the underlying medication plan and if the plan comes with a medication component.
- Confirm whether the plan provider is changing any additional benefits that come with the plan, such as, but not limited to, dental, vision, or hearing benefits.
- Make sure your preferred hospitals, clinics, and doctors are still in the plan's network.
- Make sure your current plan will continue to be offered.
- Assess if the insurer is still offering plans in your network.
- Review deductibles, copays, and coinsurance

Next Steps

To take advantage of Open Enrollment, consider reviewing your coverage with a licensed insurance agent or broker. These professionals can help you make sure your healthcare coverage is aligned with your financial goals to support a more comprehensive retirement plan. Your state's SHIP (State Health Insurance Assistance Program) or SHINE (Serving the Health Insurance Needs of Everyone (sometimes Elders)) program may be an additional resource.[1] For plan comparisons, you can use the tool found at medicare.gov.

Contact your financial advisor or investment professional for more information or visit mfs.com.

[1] These are state based organizations to help understand enrollment and health insurance options.

For more information and answers to your questions about Medicare visit medicare.gov.

For informational purposes only. Each person's situation is different. For help determining what role Medicare will play in your financial future, work closely with your financial advisor, or investment professional and local Medicare specialist. They will provide the perspective you need to help you build and maintain a retirement strategy that may work best for you. MFS® does not provide tax, legal, accounting, Social Security, or Medicare advice. Clients of MFS should obtain their own independent tax and legal advice based on their particular circumstances.

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