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## 5 Things to Consider When Enrolling in Medicare



As individuals approach the age of 65 or qualify for Medicare due to certain disabilities, navigating the complexities of health care coverage becomes crucial. Medicare—the federal health insurance program—offers various options and plans tailored to different needs. However, enrolling in Medicare can be daunting without a clear understanding of its nuances.

Whether enrolling in Medicare soon or helping someone else with the process, this article explores five considerations to ensure coverage matches personal health care needs.

### 1. Eligibility and Enrollment Periods

Medicare eligibility typically begins at age 65, but certain individuals may qualify earlier due to disabilities or specific health conditions. It's vital to understand the initial enrollment period (IEP), which begins three months before you turn 65 and extends for three months afterward. Missing this window may result in penalties and delays in coverage. Coverage begins the month after signing up during the IEP.

Additionally, there are special enrollment periods (SEPs) when certain events happen in your life, such as moving or losing employer-sponsored coverage. It's crucial to familiarize yourself with Medicare enrollment timelines to avoid gaps in coverage.

### 2. Original Medicare vs. Medicare Advantage

Original Medicare consists of Part A (hospital insurance) and Part B (medical insurance), providing coverage for hospital stays, doctor visits and some medical services. On the other hand, Medicare Advantage (Part C) combines Parts A and B and often includes prescription drug coverage (Part D) along with additional benefits like vision and dental.

Understanding the differences between Medicare options, including costs, coverage limitations and provider networks, is essential in selecting the most suitable plan for your health care needs.

### 3. Prescription Drug Coverage

Prescription drug coverage, offered through Medicare Part D, is crucial for many beneficiaries. Even if you don't currently take prescription medications, enrolling in Part D during your initial enrollment period is often advisable to avoid late enrollment penalties should your needs change in the future. Such penalties generally must be paid for as long as the individual has Medicare drug coverage.

When evaluating Part D plans, consider factors such as formularies, premiums, deductibles and copayments to ensure comprehensive coverage at an affordable cost.

### 4. Supplemental Coverage Options

Original Medicare may leave gaps in coverage, such as deductibles, copayments and services not covered under Parts A and B. To address these gaps, beneficiaries have the option to purchase supplemental insurance, known as Medigap policies. These policies, sold by private insurance companies, help cover out-of-pocket costs, providing greater financial security and peace of mind. Additionally, Medigap policies are standardized and must follow federal and state laws designed to protect beneficiaries.

When comparing Medigap plans, consider factors such as coverage levels, premiums and preexisting condition waiting periods to find the right balance of benefits and affordability.

## 5. Annual Coverage Changes

Medicare plans and coverage options can change annually, impacting costs, benefits, and provider networks. Reviewing your coverage during the annual enrollment period (AEP) to ensure your plan still meets your health care needs is essential. The AEP runs from Oct. 15 to Dec. 7, with new coverage choices going into effect on Jan. 1. During this period, you can switch between Original Medicare and Medicare Advantage, change Part D plans or enroll in or modify supplemental coverage.

Regularly reassessing your health coverage ensures access to the most suitable and cost-effective care options.

## Conclusion

Enrolling in Medicare is a significant milestone that requires careful consideration to ensure you access the right coverage for your health care needs. By understanding eligibility requirements and all available coverage options, you can confidently navigate the complexities of Medicare. Making informed decisions during enrollment sets the foundation for optimal health care coverage, financial security and peace of mind in the years ahead.

Talk to your HR representative if you have any benefits-related questions. If you have specific questions about enrolling in Medicare, visit [Medicare.gov](https://www.Medicare.gov) or call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227).

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