

Medicare offers more health coverage choices and decreased premiums in 2018

Medicare Advantage premiums decrease, choices increase, while enrollment hits an all-time high

Today, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) announced that people with Medicare will have more choices and options for their Medicare coverage in 2018. As CMS releases the benefit and premium information for Medicare health and drug plans for the 2018 calendar year, the average monthly premium for a Medicare Advantage plan will decrease while enrollment in Medicare Advantage is projected to reach a new all-time high. Earlier this year, CMS announced new policies that support increased benefit flexibilities allowing Medicare Advantage plans the ability to offer innovative plans that fit the needs of people with Medicare.

"More affordable choices lead to greater health security for those who need it most," said Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price, M.D. "Both Medicare Advantage and Medicare Part D are providing a higher level of health security for so many of America's seniors precisely because they are built to be more responsive to their needs. Today's news, alongside the long-term trend of more folks choosing Medicare Advantage, is a testament to the power of a more patient-centered approach to healthcare."

"The success of Medicare Advantage and the prescription drug program demonstrates what a strong and transparent health market can do—increase quality while lowering costs," said CMS Administrator Seema Verma. "When Americans are empowered to choose the healthcare plans that fit their needs and the needs of their families, they demand more from their insurance plans and in turn healthcare plans, like any business, provide customers better service at a lower cost."

CMS estimates that the Medicare Advantage average monthly premium will decrease by \$1.91 (about 6 percent) in 2018, from an average of \$31.91 in 2017 to \$30. More than three-fourths (77 percent) of Medicare Advantage enrollees remaining in their current plan will have the same or lower premium for 2018.

Medicare Advantage enrollment is projected to increase to 20.4 million in 2018, a nine percent increase compared to 2017. More than a one-third of all Medicare enrollees (34 percent) are projected to be in a Medicare Advantage plan in 2018.

Access to the Medicare Advantage program remains strong, with 99 percent of people with Medicare having access to a Medicare Advantage plan. The number of Medicare Advantage plans available to individuals to choose from across the country is increasing from about 2,700 to more than 3,100– and more than 85 percent of people with Medicare will have access to 10 or more Medicare Advantage plans. In addition, more Medicare Advantage enrollees are projected to have access to important supplemental benefits such as dental, vision, and hearing benefits.

Medicare Part D prescription drug program access will also remain strong in 2018 with 100 percent of people with Medicare having access to a stand-alone prescription drug plan. Earlier this year, CMS announced that the average basic premium for a Medicare prescription drug plan in 2018 is projected to decline to an estimated \$33.50 per month. This represents a decrease of approximately \$1.20 below the average basic premium of \$34.70 in 2017. The Medicare prescription drug plan average basic premium is projected to decline for the first time since 2012.

This fall, CMS is undertaking several consumer-friendly improvements for Medicare Open Enrollment so that people with Medicare can make an informed choice between Original Medicare and Medicare Advantage. Some of the improvements include:

Changes in the “Medicare & You” handbook to better explain coverage options;

Establishing a help wizard on Medicare.gov that will point to resources to help make informed healthcare decisions; and

Establishing a new email communication opportunity to improve the customer service experience through important messages and reminders.

Medicare Open Enrollment for 2018 Medicare health and drug plans begins on October 15, 2017, and ends December 7, 2017. Plan costs and covered benefits can change from year to year. People with Medicare should look at their coverage choices and decide the options that best fits their health needs. They can visit Medicare.gov (<http://www.medicare.gov>), call 1-800-MEDICARE, or contact their State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP). Those people with Medicare who do not wish to change their current coverage do not need to re-enroll in order to keep their current coverage.

For more information on the premiums and costs of 2018 Medicare health and drug plans, please visit: <https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Prescription-Drug-Coverage/PrescriptionDrugCovGenIn/index.html>.

For a fact sheet on Medicare Advantage and Part D in 2018, please visit:
<https://www.cms.gov/Newsroom/MediaReleaseDatabase/Fact-sheets/2017-Fact-Sheet-items/2017-09-29.html>

For more information on Medicare Open Enrollment, including state-by-state fact sheets, please visit: <https://www.cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/Reach-Out/Find-tools-to-help-you-help-others/Open-Enrollment-Outreach-and-Media-Materials.html>.