

# MEDICARE OPEN ENROLLMENT PODCAST

**Overview:** This podcast is for those of you who currently have coverage through Medicare or Medicare Advantage or simply want to know more about the enrollment guidelines. If you have coverage through either of these programs you have likely received communications regarding the upcoming open enrollment period, which begins from October 15<sup>th</sup> through December 7<sup>th</sup>. Each year Medicare providers & prescription drug plans can make changes regarding your coverage, costs, and which providers and pharmacies are in your network. Your plan will provide you with this information each fall, but it is a good time to review your coverage and see if a better option or a lower cost plan is available. If so, you can elect to switch plans during the open enrollment period and your new coverage will start as of January 1<sup>st</sup>.

We also want to highlight several additional enrollment periods which reside outside of the open enrollment. These include the initial enrollment period when you are first eligible for Medicare, the Medicare Advantage & General open enrollment period, and finally the special enrollment periods which may apply. There is a lot to unpack so let's get started.

Initial Enrollment Period	Open Enrollment Period	Medicare General Enrollment Period	Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment Period	Special Enrollment Periods
• First Eligible for Medicare	• October 15th - December 7th	• January 1st - March 31st	• January 1st - March 31st	• Certain Life Events

## OPEN ENROLLMENT PERIOD (OCT. 15<sup>TH</sup> – DEC. 7<sup>TH</sup>)

### What changes are permitted?

- Change from **Original Medicare** to a **Medicare Advantage Plan**.
- Change from a **Medicare Advantage Plan** back to **Original Medicare**.
- Switch from one **Medicare Advantage Plan** to another **Medicare Advantage Plan**.
- Switch from a Medicare Advantage Plan that **doesn't offer** drug coverage to a Medicare Advantage Plan that **offers** drug coverage.
- Switch from a Medicare Advantage Plan that **offers** drug coverage to a Medicare Advantage Plan that **doesn't offer** drug coverage.
- **Join** a Medicare drug plan.
- **Switch** from one Medicare drug plan to another Medicare drug plan.
- **Drop** your Medicare drug coverage completely.

## When is the change in coverage effective?

January 1<sup>st</sup>

## What you cannot do.

- You cannot switch between Medigap plans.
- If you did not enroll in Medicare when first eligible, you cannot use the fall open enrollment period to enroll. You must wait until the general enrollment period which runs from January 1<sup>st</sup> to March 31<sup>st</sup>. Coverage will then be effective July 1<sup>st</sup>.

## What are the key considerations?

- No medical underwriting when switching plan.
- If you are happy with current coverage do not do anything.
- If you are enrolling in Medicare Part D (prescription drug) for the first time outside of your initial enrollment, a late-enrollment penalty may apply.
- You can change your mind multiple times during the enrollment window.

### ***Going from Original Medicare to Medicare Advantage***

- You can switch to Medicare Advantage if you are enrolled in both Part A & B and there is a Medicare Advantage plan in your service area.

### ***Going from Medicare Advantage to Original Medicare***

- You can purchase a Medigap plan, but an insurer could deny coverage based on health history and/or charge a higher premium (no guaranteed issue).
- Medigap is offered on a guaranteed issue basis for the following situations:
  - 1.) 6-month open enrollment period that begins after turning age 65 and signing up for Medicare Part B.
  - 2.) Eligibility under specific circumstance or guaranteed issue rights.

**Medicare Advantage Trial Rights (guaranteed issue protections):**

- 1.) If you enroll in Medicare Advantage with you first eligible for Part A at age 65, you can switch back to Original Medicare within the first year. This will preserve your guaranteed issue rights to purchase a Medigap policy. Must apply at least 60 days before the date of coverage will end.
- 2.) You dropped Medigap policy to join a Medicare Advantage plan for the first time, and within the **first year of joining** you switch back.
- 3.) Must have had a Medigap policy **previously** prior to switching.
- 4.) If you have been in Medicare Advantage **more than once**, you will **forfeit** your trial right when switching back to Original Medicare.

**MEDICARE ADVANTAGE OPEN ENROLLMENT (JAN. 1<sup>ST</sup> – MAR. 31<sup>ST</sup>)**

**What changes are permitted?**

- If you're in a Medicare Advantage Plan (with or without drug coverage), you can switch to another Medicare Advantage Plan (with or without drug coverage).
- You can drop your Medicare Advantage Plan and return to Original Medicare. You'll also be able to join a Medicare drug plan.

**When does coverage start?**

First day of the month after you ask to join the plan.

**What you cannot do.**

- Cannot switch from Original Medicare to a Medicare Advantage Plan.
- Cannot join a Medicare drug plan if you're in Original Medicare.
- Cannot switch from one Medicare drug plan to another if you're in Original Medicare

### What are the key considerations?

- Only applicable to those already enrolled in Medicare Advantage.
- You are permitted only **one** plan change during this window (multiple changes are allowed in the fall).
- It is a **second chance** to **switch back** to Original Medicare (trial rights still apply if within first 12 months of having Medicare Advantage).

## MEDICARE GENERAL ENROLLMENT PERIOD (JAN. 1<sup>ST</sup> – MAR. 31<sup>ST</sup>)

### What changes are permitted?

- Enroll in Original Medicare Part A or B, if not signed up during initial 7-month enrollment and no special enrollment period applies.

### When does coverage start?

July 1<sup>st</sup>

### What are the key considerations?

- Typically reserved for individuals who did not sign up for Part B during their initial 7-month enrollment period upon reach age 65.
- A late enrollment penalty will apply **unless** individual maintained creditable coverage such as group coverage through an employer.
- No healthcare coverage between sign up date and July 1<sup>st</sup>.

## SPECIAL ENROLLMENT PERIODS (ANYTIME)

Changes are permitted to your Medicare Advantage plan or Medicare prescription drug coverage outside of the open enrollment periods when certain life events occur. These events are called special enrollment periods (SEP). Whether you can make changes and the type of changes that can be made depends on the circumstance.

### **What qualifies as a special circumstance?**

- Change where you live (move to new service area, move back to U.S. from foreign country, move into or out of skilled nursing, released from jail).
- Lose current coverage or chance to get other coverage (left/join employer coverage or COBRA).
- Your plan changes its contract with Medicare (Medicare terminates, sanction's or does not renew plan).
- Other special situations (too numerous for today's Podcast. See Medicare.gov, Special Circumstances)

### **When are changes effective:**

Generally, you have **2 to 3** months to makes changes for most situations, but each circumstance can be different.

## **5-STAR ENROLLMENT PERIOD**

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services uses satisfaction surveys to assign an overall star rating to Medicare Advantage and Medicare Part D plans. These rates range from 1 star to 5 stars and are based on quality and performance measures. There are only 21 Medicare Advantage Plans integrated with Part D coverage nationwide which carry a 5-star rating. Your coverage area will determine availability of 5-star plans and may be limited.

All 5-star plans are identified with this icon to help consumer compare plans



### **What changes are permitted?**

- Dis-enroll from Original Medicare and enroll in a 5-star rated Medicare Advantage plan.
- Move from a lower rated Medicare Part D plan or Medicare Advantage plan to a 5-star rated plan.
- Move from one 5-star plan to another 5-star plan.

### What are the key considerations?

- This special enrollment Period can be used only **once** between December 8<sup>th</sup> through November 30<sup>th</sup> (first week of December is excluded for changes).
- If you move from a Medicare Advantage Plan with prescription drug coverage to a stand-alone Medicare Drug Plan, you will be **disenrolled** from your Medicare Advantage plan.
- If you move from a Medicare Advantage plan with drug coverage to a 5-star plan with **no** drug coverage, you may **lose** your prescription drug coverage. This may result in having to reenroll in during the next enrollment opportunity and paying a Part D late enrollment **penalty**.
- 5-star plans are **limited** and **may not** be available in all service areas.

### INITIAL ENROLLMENT PERIOD (TURNING AGE 65)

The initial enrollment period occurs when you first become eligible for Medicare because you are turning age 65 or you are under age 65 and have a disability which has lasted for 24 months.

### When are you eligible?

- Enrollment begins the 3 months before you turn age 65, the month of your 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, and the 3 months after.
- If your birthday occurs on the **1<sup>st</sup> of any month**, your initial enrollment period begins **4** months before you turn age 65 and ends **2** months after you turn age 65.
- If you maintain employer coverage or employer coverage through a spouse, you have an **8-month special enrollment period** to sign up which commences when you stop working, even if you choose COBRA.

### What are the key considerations?

- If you miss the 7-month initial enrollment period, you may have to wait until the general enrollment period (Jan – Mar.) to sign up for coverage and a late enrollment penalty may apply.

- If you stop working and take COBRA, the 8-month special enrollment period starts upon your ***work stoppage date, not*** the date when COBRA coverage ends.
- You should sign up for Part A when eligible even while working unless you participate in a healthcare savings account (HSA). There is a 6-month lookback penalty if you participate in an HSA and start Part A coverage.
- If you have creditable coverage through a group employer plan you can ***delay*** enrollment in Part A & B if your employer has ***more than*** 20 employees.
- If you continue to work beyond age 65 and your employer has ***less than 20*** employees, you will need to sign up for Medicare Part A & B to avoid a late enrollment penalty. This occurs because when your employer has fewer than 20 employees, Medicare becomes the primary payor, and the group plan is secondary.

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