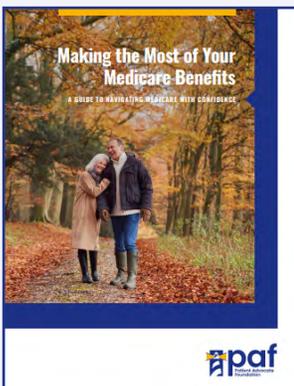


BEST PLAN FINDER TOOL

The tool on Medicare's website lets you search for plans available where you live by typing in your zip code. You can see how much the monthly payment is, other costs, which providers are in the plan's network, what medications are covered, and what other benefits each plan offers. Check it out at www.medicare.gov/plan-compare

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

PAF's interactive guide teaches you the skills to make more informed decisions about your Medicare coverage, the benefits offered by Medicare, and how to use this health insurance confidently and effectively.



MEDICARE AND OPEN ENROLLMENT

Open enrollment is an important time of year for all Medicare enrollees, especially if you already have Medicare coverage. Choosing your health insurance isn't something you only do once. The Medicare Annual Election Period (AEP) is like an open enrollment time that happens every year from **October 15th to December 7th**. During this time, you can change to a different Medicare Advantage plan (Part C), add one, or drop your current one. You can also do the same for your Prescription Drug plan (Part D). This almost two-month period gives people with Medicare time to think about their choices and make sure the coverage they pick makes the most sense for their health needs and their budget for the next year.

Any changes you make during this period will take effect on January 1 of the following year.

LAST YEAR DOESN'T MATTER

Don't just assume that something your plan covered last year will still be covered this year. You have plenty of time (almost two whole months!) to look at your current coverage and see what changes the plan is making for next year. Since plans can change from year to year, it's important to check if your favorite providers are still in your network if you have a Medicare Advantage plan. Also, make sure your usual pharmacy is still part of your Part D or Medicare Advantage plan. If you're not happy with your current providers or pharmacy, you should see if you can get better coverage, save money, or both by switching plans.

CHEAPEST MONTHLY PREMIUM VS. CHEAPEST OVERALL



Just because a health plan offers the lowest monthly payment doesn't mean it be the cheapest in the long run. Remember that if you have a Medicare Advantage plan, or even a Medicare Part D plan, there will likely be other costs you will have to pay besides your monthly payment. You might have to pay a co-pay or co-insurance when you get services, and you'll probably have to meet a deductible before your plan starts helping

with the cost of your medicine or care.



HIGH QUALITY PLANS

You can see the quality of a plan by using the Medicare 5-star rating system. Plans with a 5-star rating are seen as high quality, while plans with less than 3 stars are usually considered lower quality. If your current plan has a rating below 3 stars, you may want to use Open Enrollment to switch to a plan with a better rating.

REMEMBER YOUR PRESCRIPTION BENEFITS

Because coverage changes from year to year, be sure to look closely at the medications you are taking or expect to be prescribed in your current plan, and in others if you expect to change policies. The Plan Finder tool on the Medicare website will allow you to view a plan's formulary (which medications are covered under that plan) as well as any restrictions or limitations placed on them. Not only should you look at whether a medication is covered, but you should also look onto which tier the medication is placed. Drug plans categorize medications into multiple tiers based on the type of medication, format, and other factors, and the tier the medication is on can drastically affect its price.



SEEK HELP IF NEEDED

Talk to a family member or friend who can help you understand your choices. Or, you can get free help from a State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP). They offer free counseling about insurance for people with Medicare. Having someone else look at your options with you can make you feel more confident when you make your final decision. Remember, any changes you make to your plan will start on January 1st of the next year. If you want to change your plan during the year, you usually can't, and you'll have to wait until the next Open Enrollment period in the fall to make changes for the following year. This is just another reason why it's so important to take your time and really look at all your plan options.

Curious about other topics? Our newly redesigned Education Resource Library houses our resources and provides straightforward information in a variety of formats to help you make informed decisions throughout your healthcare journey. Learn about health insurance, disability, medical bill management, and more by visiting our Education Resource Library today. Call us anytime at 800-532-5274 or visit www.patientadvocate.org for help!

