



Understanding Medicare Advantage As a Choice for 2017

November 2016

For more information contact:
SHIIP -- Iowa Insurance Division
515-281-5705

Iowans on Medicare are in the middle of the annual Medicare open enrollment period (October 15- December 7). One of the choices they have is enrolling in a Medicare Advantage plan for 2017. Before making this choice it is important to understand how these plans work.

The first key to understanding Medicare Advantage plans is to know what they are NOT. They are NOT Medicare supplement insurance. They ARE a way to get Medicare Part A and B benefits from private insurance companies, rather than directly from the federal government.

While Medicare Advantage plans must provide almost all of the benefits offered by “Original” Medicare, there are important differences to understand before deciding which option is best for you.

First, Medicare Advantage plans must follow rules set by Medicare, however they can charge different out-of-pocket costs. You cannot buy supplemental insurance to pay these out-of-pocket costs. Unlike Original Medicare they have an annual out-of-pocket maximum which limits your potential costs for a year. You will continue to pay your Part B premium along with any premium the Medicare Advantage plan may charge.

Some plans offer additional benefits such as limited dental and vision coverage, annual physicals or health club memberships. Many include Medicare Part D drug coverage.

Medicare Advantage plans use provider networks to manage your care. It is important to know if your medical providers are in a plan’s network to assure that you get the maximum benefit from your plan. If you go to a doctor, other health care provider, facility or supplier that doesn’t belong to the plan’s network, your services may not be covered, or your costs could be higher. Be sure to check that your providers are “in-network” before enrolling in a plan. Providers can join or leave a plan’s network anytime during the year. Plans can also change the providers in their network anytime during the year.

Medicare Advantage plans are available to anyone who has Medicare Part A and Part B and does not have end stage renal disease. You cannot be turned down for coverage except for

end-stage renal disease. You must live in the plan's service area to enroll. Service areas are county based.

Plans have a one year contract with Medicare. You can change plans or go back to Original Medicare each year during the annual open enrollment period. The plan you choose will be in effect for the next calendar year, with few exceptions. Study your options carefully before making a choice.

For more information about the Medicare Advantage plans available in Iowa call SHIP at 1-800-351-4664 (TTY 1-800-735-2942). The **2017 Medicare Advantage Plans in Iowa** guide is now available online at www.therightcalliowa.gov or by calling SHIP. Local SHIP counselors are also available to explain the plans. Call the SHIP 800# for the site nearest you. SHIP services are free, confidential and objective.