



SHIIP NEWS RELEASE

Five Common Medicare Mistakes

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Are there things you can do to avoid common Medicare mistakes and save money? According to the state of Iowa's Senior Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP) the answer is, "Yes!" "As we help Iowans with Medicare questions, there are some common mistakes people make which could save them money and stress," says Kris Gross from SHIIP.

One of the most common mistakes people on Medicare make is thinking that the Medicare Part D prescription drug plan that worked well for them this year will be fine next year. That thinking can be costly. Plans can change their premiums, co-payments, deductibles and drugs they cover annually. Take the opportunity to compare new plans every year during the annual election period (November 15-December 31). You may find you can save hundreds of dollars by changing plans. Don't forget that Medicare offers extra help with drug costs if your income and resources are limited. Call SHIIP for more information (800-351-4664; TTY 800-735-2942).

Another costly error is enrolling in Medicare Part B at the wrong time. Most people should enroll in Part B at age 65, but some can delay enrolling and save the monthly premium of \$96.40 (2009). Other people don't enroll when they should because they are misinformed and later pay a premium penalty. The key to avoiding these costly errors is to contact Social Security to confirm when you need to enroll in Part B. Call 1-800-772-1213.

Tempting offers for medical equipment, such as scooters and diabetic supplies, are common in media advertising. You might end up paying the entire bill if Medicare guidelines are not followed. All medical equipment requires a prescription by a Medicare provider. You must have the prescription **before** you purchase the equipment. Also, the provider must be Medicare approved. The Medicare website, www.medicare.gov, allows you to find approved providers.

Failing to shop around for Medicare supplement insurance, Part D plans or Medicare Advantage plans can result in paying too much for premiums and benefits. An insurance agent may do a good job of explaining the plans he sells, but there may be many other choices, some of which may meet your needs at a lower cost. Comparison shop. The Medicare web site helps you compare Part D and Medicare Advantage plans and SHIIP has consumer guides to help compare Medicare supplement and Medicare Advantage plans.

The most costly mistake of all is not asking for help. Asking for help—whether it's help understanding Medicare or accessing assistance—shouldn't be your last resort. It should be the first thing you do. Knowing the resources you can draw on can make decisions easier and reduce stress.

For more information about Medicare, call SHIIP at 1-800-351-4664 (TTY 1-800-735-2942). Local SHIIP counselors are available across the state to meet with you in person to answer your questions. Call the SHIIP 800# for the site nearest you. SHIIP services are free, confidential and objective.