

Medicare's New Prescription Drug Benefit

Enrollment in Medicare's new prescription drug benefit has begun.

According to the Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program (HICAP), the choices for Medicare prescription drug coverage depend on the kind of health coverage an individual currently has. Once the type of coverage is established, the research into the most appropriate and beneficial plan begins. Before each of these steps is taken, it is important to list the drugs you take along with their dosage and amount you pay monthly.

Medicare has provided many tools to help beneficiaries with these important decisions. 1-800-Medicare is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Medicare & You handbook lists plans and their costs, and www.medicare.gov allows beneficiaries to compare plans and enroll online.

Before each of these steps is taken, it is important to list the drugs you take along with their dosage and amount you pay monthly. A current drug list allows you to review which plans cover the drugs you take, as well as the total dollars you will save by joining a plan. List the most expensive drugs first, as you will want to make sure these are covered by the plan you select.

Medicare drug plans will cover both brand name and generic drugs although coverage varies. Under the standard drug benefit, the monthly premium averages about \$32 a month with a yearly deductible of \$250. However, this will vary based on your health and income.

It is paramount for seniors to be on the lookout for individuals who will try to take advantage of them. "No one should have to pay for help in choosing a drug plan," says Helen Haaga, a registered HICAP counselor. "If anyone calls you and tries to solicit your financial, credit and social security information, hang up." Help at Eisenhower

Haaga will be at the Indian Wells Center for Healthy Living at Eisenhower every other Monday and Tuesdays January 3, 17, 24 and 31, and February 7, 21 and 28 to answer questions about the drug benefit.

Additionally, insurance counseling with Al Lieberman is available every Wednesday afternoon. Call (760)568-1234 for an appointment and schedule of additional lectures.

Sample of www.medicare.gov webpage entitled "Find Medicare Prescription Drug Plan" Plan Information Sample Plan A Sample Plan B Sample Plan C Your Total Drug Plan Cost \$2,316.80 \$2,235.24 \$2,643.11 Fixed Cost Details Monthly Prescription Drug Premium \$23.22/ month \$27.84/ month \$28.56/ month Deductible \$0.00 \$0.00 \$0.00 Your monthly drug costs after you have met your deductible but before your total drug costs reach the initial coverage limit Detrol LA CAP 4 mg \$28.00 \$23.00 \$30.00 Lipitor TAB 40 mg \$28.00 \$23.00 \$30.00 Protonix TAB 40 mg \$28.00 \$30.00 \$105.98 Toprol XL TAB 50 mg \$25.43 \$23.00 \$25.72 Your monthly drug costs after your total drug costs reach the initial coverage limit but before your total out of pocket expense equals \$3,600 Total Monthly Cost \$109.43 \$99.00 \$191.70