

What is Medicare?

Here's what you need to know...

Medicare is a health insurance program for people who are aged 65 or older, people who are younger than 65 with certain disabilities, or individuals with End-Stage Renal Disease (ESRD).

If you're reading this, chances are it's time for you to start thinking about choosing a Medicare plan for the first time, or making sure your current plan is still the best choice, which can feel overwhelming. "How can I make sense of all this?" you may ask. Let's break it down!

Medicare comes in the following parts:

1. **Part A**, or Hospital Coverage. This is the portion of Medicare that covers all necessary stays in hospitals and skilled nursing facilities, hospice care, and some home health care.
2. **Part B**, or Medical Coverage. This covers necessary medical services and supplies including but not limited to: outpatient care, preventive services such as flu shots and cancer screenings, ambulance services, and durable medical equipment. If ordered by a doctor, Part B also covers some home health care and other rehabilitative services, such as physical therapy.

Parts A and B make up Original Medicare, the traditional health care coverage provided directly from the federal government.

3. **Part C**, also known as Medicare Advantage (MA). This offers the same benefits as Original Medicare (Parts A and B) with the optional addition of vision, hearing, dental, and prescription drug coverage. This "all in one" alternative covers everything that Original Medicare covers, and often can be less expensive. It's important to note that because these plans are designed to be tailored to your needs, not all MA Plans offer the same benefits, so be sure to verify not only that a plan has the benefits you're looking for, but also allows you to keep seeing your current doctors.
4. **Part D**, or Prescription Drug Plans. This covers your prescription drug needs at your local pharmacy, and can be added to Original Medicare (Parts A and B).

The benefits of both Medicare Part C and Part D are provided by private companies contracted with Medicare.

When can I sign up for a Medicare plan?

You can sign up during your Initial Medicare Enrollment period. It starts 3 months before you turn 65 and ends 3 months after you turn 65. Medicare's annual Open Enrollment Period (October 15–December 7) also lets you change or add to your coverage.

How do I sign up for a plan?

Call your pharmacy to learn how to get signed up for the best plan. Depending on your pharmacy, you may be directed to reach out to a Medicare specialist who can answer any in-depth questions you may have.

Need help deciding on a plan? Your local pharmacist can help you compare plans to choose the best fit for you.