

Medicare Minute Script – November 2020 How to Choose a Part D Prescription Drug Plan

Point 1: Understand Medicare's Part D prescription drug benefit

Medicare Part D, the prescription drug benefit, is the part of Medicare that covers most outpatient prescription drugs. Part D is offered through private companies either as a stand-alone prescription drug plan for those enrolled in Original Medicare or a set of benefits included with your Medicare Advantage Plan.

- **Coverage:** Each plan has its own **formulary**, or list of drugs that the plan covers. Some drugs are excluded from Medicare coverage by law and cannot be covered by any Part D plan. An example of an excluded drug is most prescription vitamins and minerals
- **Costs:** Plans have monthly premiums, may have a deductible, and charge coinsurance and/or copays.
- **Restrictions:** Some plans place certain restrictions on covered drugs. **Prior authorization** means that you and your prescribing provider must ask your plan for permission to cover the drug before it will do so. **Step therapy** means that your plan requires you to try a different, less expensive version of your drug before it will cover the more expensive one. **Quantity limits** mean that your plan limits the amount of a prescription you can get within a certain period of time.

Point 2: Choose a Medicare Part D plan that meets your health care needs

There are several factors to consider when choosing prescription drug coverage. You should choose a plan that meets your specific health care needs. That depends on the prescriptions you take, their dosages, their usual costs, and the pharmacies you use.

- You should look at different plans' formularies to see if the drugs you take are covered.
- You should compare the estimated coinsurance amounts or copayments. Look at the costs for both brand-name and generic drugs.
- You should also take into consideration the plan's deductible and monthly premium.
- You should make sure that your pharmacies are preferred pharmacies within the plans' networks and if the plans have a mail-order option.
- You should find out if there are any restrictions on your covered drugs, such as prior authorization, step therapy, or quantity limits. It may be harder for you to access a covered drug if you do not know about the restrictions before you go to fill your prescription.

Point 3: Know when and how to enroll in a Part D plan

Unless you already have creditable drug coverage through employer insurance or another source, you should sign up for a Part D plan for the first time during your Initial Enrollment Period. This period lasts seven months. It includes the three months before your 65th birthday, the month of your birthday, and the three months after your 65th birthday.

Part D plans can change their formularies and costs from year to year. They will send you a notice in September called an Annual Notice of Change that outlines any changes to your plan for the new year. If you want to change your coverage, you can do so each year during the fall Medicare Open Enrollment Period. This period spans October 15 through December 7 each year. You can enroll in a Part D plan by calling 1-800-MEDICARE, calling the plan itself, or using the online Medicare Plan Finder tool at www.medicare.gov/find-a-plan. Your State Health Insurance Assistance Program, called SHIP, can help you navigate your options.

SHIP National Technical Assistance Center: 877-839-2675 | www.shiptacenter.org | info@shiptacenter.org

SMP National Resource Center: 877-808-2468 | www.smpresource.org | info@smpresource.org

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Point 4: Be on the lookout for pharmacy or prescription drug fraud, errors, or abuse.

Medicare prescription drug or pharmacy fraud occurs when Medicare is billed for a prescription that you did not receive, or if you are purposefully given a different medication than the one your doctor prescribed. Examples of suspected pharmacy or prescription drug fraud, errors, or abuse include:

- A provider billing Medicare for drugs you never received
- A pharmacy providing you with expired drugs
- A pharmacy providing you with less medication than you were prescribed
- A company offering you “free” prescription drugs without a prescription and then billing Medicare

Do not give out your Medicare number or other personal information to unknown individuals in exchange for services or benefits. Be suspicious of “free” or “discount” offers for prescription drugs and calls from numbers you do not recognize. Always read the Explanation of Benefits from your Part D drug plan to make sure you recognize the names of the providers and prescriptions listed on the notice. If you suspect potential pharmacy or prescription drug fraud, errors, or abuse, contact your Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP).

Take Action:

1. Use the **Medicare Plan Finder** tool at www.medicare.gov/find-a-plan to compare Part D plans in your area.
2. Call **1-800-MEDICARE** for information about Part D plans and to enroll in one.
3. Contact your **SHIP** for individualized assistance navigating your plan options or enrolling in a plan.
4. Contact your **SMP** for help with questions, concerns, or complaints about potential fraud, errors, and abuse.

Local SHIP Contact Information	Local SMP Contact Information
SHIP toll-free: SHIP email: SHIP website: To find a SHIP in another state: Call 877-839-2675 or visit www.shiptacenter.org .	SMP toll-free: SMP email: SMP website: To find an SMP in another state: Call 877-808-2468 or visit www.smpresource.org .

This document was supported, in part, by grant numbers 90SATC0002 and 90MPRC0002 from the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. 20201. Grantees undertaking projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official ACL policy.