



## Medicare Part D and You

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By now you've probably seen the news or overheard a conversation about the new Medicare prescription drug coverage program, also known as Medicare Part D. You may be wondering whether you're eligible or if it will be useful to enroll in it. Certainly it is a big deal, if nothing else. It's the largest addition to Medicare since the program was founded in 1965. But potential enrollees have been confused by the program, and one poll found that only 20 percent of those eligible plan to sign up.

Knowing the right questions to ask and what to look for in a plan will help simplify the decision making process and so get more potential beneficiaries into the program.

### First things First

Anyone who is eligible for Medicare may enroll in the program (mainly people 65 years or older). Like other Medicare programs, you must enroll to take advantage of the benefit. The deadline for the initial enrollment is May 15, 2006.

If you take two or three drugs the program could save you 40% to 50% of your drug costs. People who take six or more drugs will be ideal candidates for the program and may benefit from the 95% catastrophic coverage that kicks in after total expenses reach \$3,600. However, not everyone will benefit from enrollment in the program. Those who currently have prescription drug coverage of some kind will want to consider whether it will be worth it.

With Part D, Medicare subsidizes the plans offered by private insurance companies. Enrollees will have to select from a number of competing plans. In Wyoming there are 42 different plans available, though not all are available in every county. Some plans pay for more coverage and have a greater list of covered drugs, but they can have a higher monthly premium.

### Selecting a Plan

Each of the Medicare plans covers a different list of drugs. The lists are divided into tiers with several tiers per plan. Medications in the lower tiers are less expensive. To keep your out-of-pocket spending low, you'll want to use the plan comparison tool at [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) to pick the plan that covers the drugs you use at the lowest cost.

When you visit the Medicare website, come armed with your pill bottles and Medicare cards. You'll enter the information into the website, and then a number of plans will be listed. You can also do this over the phone. Don't worry about exploring each and every plan – look at, say, three appealing plans. If you don't like the plan you've chosen, you can change at the next enrollment period.

Here are questions to consider when looking at the alternative plans, compiled by the Medicare Rights Center:

- Does the plan cover all or most of the drugs you take?
- Does it cover the drugstore you use?
- How much are the premiums, co-payments, co-insurance and deductible?
- Will you have to pay the full cost of your prescriptions at any point after the deductible?
- How will the plan work with any current coverage, and could you risk losing that coverage if you don't join the plan?

Some seniors may be interested in enrolling in a plan with a low premium to avoid the late-enrollment penalty. If you don't enroll as soon as you are eligible then you will pay an increased premium. After you enroll you'll receive a drug plan card from Medicare to take to the pharmacy. Coverage will be effective in the month after you enroll.

**Important Dates**

**May 15, 2006:** the last day to enroll for the inaugural period. You may pay a higher premium if you miss it.

**November 15, 2006 – December 31, 2006:** The next chance to enroll or switch plans.

**For more information**

**Medicare** (to evaluate plans and sign up): 1-800-633-4227, [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov).

**Wyoming State Health Insurance Information Program (WSHIIP)** (for one-on-one counseling): 1-800-856-4398, [www.wyomingseniors.com/wshiip.htm](http://www.wyomingseniors.com/wshiip.htm).

