

For Immediate Release

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Medicare Open Enrollment Begins October 15; *Free counseling available from KDADS' SHICK program*

TOPEKA – The open enrollment period for Medicare coverage in 2018 begins October 15, 2017, and runs through December 7, 2017.

“Older adults can sign up for Medicare for the first time during this period, and current Medicare consumers can make changes to several aspects of their coverage as well,” said Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services (KDADS) Secretary Tim Keck. “If you’re already enrolled, this is an opportunity to review your coverage and make adjustments if necessary so it better meets your needs.”

“Earlier this year, CMS announced new policies that support increased flexibility of benefit, allowing Medicare Advantage plans to offer innovative plans that fit the needs of people with Medicare,” Secretary Keck said. “More affordable choices through this patient-centered approach to health care lead to greater health security for those who need it most.”

During open enrollment, those currently enrolled may:

- Switch from original Medicare to Medicare Advantage, or vice versa;
- Switch from one Medicare Advantage plan to another or from one Medicare Part D prescription drug plan to another;
- And if you didn’t enroll in a Medicare Part D plan when you were first eligible, you can do so during open enrollment, although a late enrollment penalty may apply.

If you want to enroll in a Medicare Advantage plan, you must meet some basic criteria:

- You must be enrolled in Medicare Part A and B
- You must live in the plan’s service area
- You cannot have end-stage renal disease (some exceptions apply)

The federal Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) estimates that the Medicare Advantage average monthly premium will decrease by \$1.91 (about 6 percent) in 2018, from an average of \$31.91 in 2017 to \$30. More than three-fourths (77 percent) of Medicare Advantage enrollees remaining in their current plan will have the same or lower premium for 2018.

If you're already enrolled in a Medicare Part D prescription plan or a Medicare Advantage Plan and you ***don't want to make changes*** to your coverage for 2018, you don't need to do anything during open enrollment, assuming your current plan will still be available in 2018. If your plan is being discontinued and isn't eligible for renewal, you will receive a non-renewal notice from your carrier prior to open enrollment. If you don't, it means you can keep your plan without doing anything during open enrollment.

Be aware that benefits and premiums could be changing for 2018. So even if you're confident you want to keep your current coverage for the coming year, it's important to understand any changes that may apply and check to make sure your current plan is still the best available option. The available plans and what they cover changes from one year to the next, so even if the plan you have now was the best option when you shopped last year, it's important to verify that again before you lock yourself in for another year.

Between January 1 and February 14 each year, those enrolled in a Medicare Advantage plan can leave that plan and return to original Medicare. If you leave your plan, you will have until February 14 to enroll in a Part D plan that will begin the first day of the following month that you enroll.

Changes to be aware of for 2018 include:

- 46 Medicare Advantage plans are available
- 100 percent of people with Medicare have access to a Medicare Advantage plan
- 23 Medicare prescription drug plans are available with premiums varying from \$20.40 to \$155.60
- 75 percent of people with a Medicare prescription drug plan have access to a plan with a lower premium than what they paid in 2017

State-by-State Fact Sheets are now available at <https://www.cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/Reach-Out/Find-tools-to-help-you-help-others/2018-MA-Part-D-Landscape-State-by-State.pdf>

For more information on these changes and other Medicare-related issues, please contact KDADS' Senior Health Insurance Counseling for Kansas (SHICK), a free program that offers Kansans an opportunity to talk with trained, community volunteers and get answers to questions about Medicare and other insurance issues. SHICK has counselors throughout the state that can assist people to stay informed on changing conditions in health care insurance. Call **800-860-5260 for this free counseling service.**

SHICK counselors receive training on Medicare, Medicare Supplement Insurance, Long-Term Care and other health insurance subjects that concern older Kansans. The counselors do not work for any insurance company, their goal is to educate and assist the public to make informed decisions on what's best for each individual situation.