

Help For New-to-Medicare Clients

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I have been a SHICK – Senior Health Insurance Counselor for Kansas as part of my Extension programming since 2004. I’ve learned there are many varying needs of those “new to Medicare” clients. In recent years, we’ve seen more and more people “aging” into Medicare who are recently unemployed, without insurance, and living on a very limited income with scarce resources. We’ve also seen those who are over the age of 65 and staying in the workforce. Both groups need help, but both have different needs. When they reach the time when they are eligible for Medicare and they present a need outside the previous norm (“I’m retiring at 65, ready for my Medicare”), there are a few things they will need to know about just when and how to enroll in Medicare, and when the coverage will begin.

Traditional retirees - As they approach their 65th birthday, they need to know that there are certain times when they can sign up for Medicare. And, they should enroll on time. If they wait to sign up, they may have to do just that – wait until an allowable enrollment period – and they may also have to pay penalties in the form of higher monthly premiums when they do join. If they are already getting Social Security benefits, like early retiree or disability benefits, when they turn 65, they will be automatically enrolled in Medicare Part A and Part B. They do not need to do anything. Their Medicare card and "Welcome to Medicare" kit will come in the mail usually the month before their 65th birthday. They can just sign the front of the card and start using it. If they are not yet getting Social Security benefits when they turn 65 they must apply for Medicare. If they do not apply, they will not be enrolled. They should contact Social Security at 1-800-772-1213, or visit them online at least 3 months before their 65th birthday. Once they enroll, their Medicare card and "Welcome to Medicare" kit will come in the mail. Again, they can just sign the front of the card and start using it. Either way, once you enroll in Medicare Parts A and B, you should also review the other options in Medicare, such as the differences between Original Medicare and a private Medicare Advantage health plan and the Part D prescription drug coverage benefit. You will also want to find out how to get coverage to supplement or wrap around Medicare.

Early Retirees or Unemployed before Turning 65 - If they retire or are unemployed before turning 65, they cannot get Medicare until they turn 65 unless they are found disabled. Therefore, they should be sure to arrange for health insurance before taking early retirement. If they are unemployed, they should look into getting health insurance through their previous employer, or through a spouse’s job. If they have limited income and resources, they may be eligible for health insurance through your state (Medicaid) or the Marketplace.

People Working Past Age 65 - Many baby boomers—those born between the years of 1946 and 1964—are faced with the decision of whether or not to work past the age of 65. (For baby boomers, the retirement age to get full Social Security retirement benefits starts at 66. So, while they can retire before turning 66, they may not get their full Social Security retirement benefits.) That said, they still need to consider Medicare when they turn 65 regardless if they continue to work or not. If you are still working after turning 65 (or a spouse is still working) for a company

with at least 20 full-time workers AND gets health insurance from that company (or a spouse's company), you may not need all of Medicare when turning 65. He can delay certain parts of Medicare, and get them later when he retires or loses his job-related insurance. That said, most people should enroll in Medicare Part A when they turn 65, even if they have employer health insurance. If you get insurance from a job (or a spouse's job), you should be sure and talk with the employer's human resources department first before making any decisions about Medicare. **If you have an HSA, you may need to delay Medicare Part A.** That's because an employer and employee **must stop contributing to an HSA account once you enroll in Part A.**

There are so many rules and guidelines for those "new to Medicare" that it is impossible to cover them in this article. You will want to check out www.medicare.gov for further enrollment information or for further information on this topic contact: Diane Burnett at dburnett@ksu.edu or call 913-294-4306.