

TRS Medicare 101

Congratulations! You qualify for Medicare. We're here to give you the basics. Call it Medicare 101. We'll talk about the different Parts of Medicare, what additional coverage you might need, and what you can expect from TRS. So, if you're ready, let's get started.

So, here are some basics to help you know your Medicare A-B-Cs and Ds. Medicare is the federal government's health insurance program that's available to most people age 65 and over, as well as others with disabilities.

Medicare has different parts. Part A is hospital insurance. In general, it covers things like inpatient hospital stays, inpatient rehabilitation facility care, skilled nursing facility care, as well as home health and hospice care.

Medicare Part B is medical insurance. In general, it covers things like doctor services, outpatient care, ambulance services and preventive services. Both Medicare A and B have a deductible.

Parts A and B together are referred to as Original Medicare and are managed by the federal government or more specifically, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, often referred to as CMS.

Now, Medicare Part C and Part D are a little different because both are managed by private insurance companies through contracts with CMS. Since Medicare Parts A and B will only cover a percentage of your costs, some additional coverage might be a good idea.

That's where Medicare Part C comes in. TRS offers a Medicare Advantage Plan. A Medicare Advantage Plan includes coverage from original Medicare Parts A and B, as well as additional benefits all in one plan. Finally, Medicare Part D covers the cost of some or all of your prescription drugs depending on your plan.

TRS-Care offers a Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Plan. It's important to note that Original Medicare does not pay for long-term care expenses, such as nursing home care.

If you are age 65 or older, you are entitled to Medicare Part A if you have contributed to Social Security for the required number of quarters which is usually 40. If you have not contributed to Social Security for the required time period, you may be entitled to Part A if your spouse contributed to Social Security during your marriage.

Medicare Part B may be purchased whether or not you have contributed to Social Security for the required time period. People of any age who have end-stage renal or kidney disease can also receive Medicare benefits. You don't have to be retired to receive Medicare benefits.

You do not need to have a physical to qualify for Medicare Parts A and B. You can get Medicare coverage regardless of your current health or any pre-existing conditions you may have when you apply. Keep in mind that your Medicare coverage only applies to you. It does not cover your family members.

Each Medicare eligible person must enroll in Medicare individually. Typically, people enroll in Medicare when they turn 65, during what's called their initial enrollment period. For initial enrollment, there's a period of seven months when you can apply.

It begins three months before and runs up to three months after the month you turn 65. If you enroll after the initial enrollment period and don't have coverage through your employer, you may have to pay a surcharge and your coverage could be delayed.

Even though Medicare's enrollment period is seven months, you should start the process of applying for your Medicare the three months prior to your 65th birthday to ensure smooth transition when you reach age 65.

Just remember, that if you wait until the last four months after you turn 65, your coverage will be delayed. If you're already receiving Social Security benefits, you will be automatically enrolled in Medicare Part A on the first day of the month you turn 65. If you turn 65 on the first day of the month, your coverage will start on the first day of the month prior to your birthday.

TRS Care pays your claims as if you have already enrolled in Medicare Part B coverage, even if you have not. Remember, if you haven't enrolled in Part B and claims are submitted, you'll be responsible for 80% of the charges, the 80% that Medicare would have paid.

You can see why it's really important to enroll in Medicare Part B. You should apply for Medicare A and B through Social Security. You can apply online at www.ssa.gov or visit your local Social Security office. If you have any questions about applying for Medicare, you can call Social Security at 1-800-772-1213. TTY users should call 1-800-325-0778.

Usually, you don't pay a monthly premium for Part A coverage if you paid Medicare taxes while you were working. This is sometimes called Premium-Free Part A. If you do not qualify for Medicare Part A, TRS-Care will be the primary payer for your Part A expenses.

If you already get Social Security benefits, you still have to sign up for Part B through the Social Security office. Your Part B premium will be automatically deducted from your Social Security check. If you don't get Social Security benefits and you sign up for Part B, you'll get a quarterly bill.

The cost of your premium will depend on your income and how you file your taxes. If you're retired, you should enroll in both A and B. If you have questions about much you may have to pay for your Medicare Part A or Part B benefits, call Social Security at 1-800-772-1213. TTY users should call 1-800-325-0778.

You can also visit www.ssa.gov. Those are the basic elements of Medicare. It can seem confusing at first, but once you learn your A-B-Cs and Ds, you'll understand what the options are.

About six weeks before you 65th birthday, you'll receive a packet from TRS-Care that explains your coverage options, including your opportunity to enroll in the Medicare Advantage Plan and the Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Plan.

You can obtain more information on Medicare plans now by visiting www.trs.texas.gov and clicking on the Medicare Retirees link.

Thanks for watching.