



## Important decisions about your new Medicare coverage

Welcome to Medicare! **You now have Medicare Part A and/or Part B. Your enclosed Medicare card shows what coverage you have and when it starts.**



**Medicare Part A (Hospital Insurance):** Helps cover inpatient care in hospitals, skilled nursing facility care, hospice care, and some home health care. **Most people don't need to pay a premium for Part A.**



**Medicare Part B (Medical Insurance):** Helps cover services from doctors and other health care providers, outpatient care, durable medical equipment, and many preventive services. **Part B is optional, and you pay a monthly premium for it.**

### Make these 2 important decisions now:

#### Decision 1: Do I want to sign up for Part B?

- If you're already signed up for Part B: Medicare will automatically deduct the premium from your monthly Social Security benefits (or Railroad Retirement Board or federal retiree benefits). If you don't get benefits or don't get enough to cover your premium, you'll get a bill for your Part B premium every 3 months. Visit [Medicare.gov/basics/costs/pay-premiums](https://www.medicare.gov/basics/costs/pay-premiums) to learn about ways you can pay your bill.
- You need both Part A (Hospital Insurance) and Part B (Medical Insurance) to join a Medicare Advantage Plan or (in most cases) to buy a Medigap policy.
- If you want to sign up for Part B now: Contact Social Security to find out when you can sign up.
- If you don't want Part B now: You can sign up later. However, if you don't qualify for a Special Enrollment Period, **you may have to wait for your coverage to start and pay a monthly penalty** (that's added to your premium) for as long as you have Part B.

**Important!** Read pages 4-9 in the booklet to find out if you should sign up for Part B (based on your situation).

#### Decision 2: How do I want to get my Medicare health coverage if I sign up for Part B?

You have 2 main ways to get your Medicare coverage:

- **Original Medicare**—includes Part A and Part B. You can use supplemental coverage (like Medigap) to help pay your out-of-pocket costs. You can also add Medicare drug coverage (Part D).
- **Medicare Advantage**—a Medicare-approved plan from a private company that bundles your Part A, Part B, and usually Part D together. Medicare Advantage Plans may offer some extra benefits that Original Medicare doesn't cover.

**Important!** Read pages 10-15 in the booklet for additional information to make your decision. Turn this page over for your coverage options at-a-glance.

Soon, we'll mail your official "Medicare & You" handbook with more information. You can also visit us at [Medicare.gov/basics/get-started-with-medicare](https://www.medicare.gov/basics/get-started-with-medicare).

# Your Medicare options

There are 2 main ways to get your Medicare coverage:

## Original Medicare

- Includes Medicare Part A (Hospital Insurance) and Part B (Medical Insurance).
- You can join a separate Medicare drug plan to get Medicare drug coverage (Part D).
- You can use any doctor or hospital that takes Medicare, anywhere in the U.S.
- You can also use or shop for and buy supplemental coverage that helps pay your out-of-pocket costs (like your 20% coinsurance).

## Medicare Advantage

(also known as Part C)

- A Medicare-approved plan from a private company that offers an alternative to Original Medicare for your health and drug coverage. These plans bundle your Part A, Part B, and usually Part D.
- You may need to use doctors in its network and get approval for certain drugs or services.
- Usually have different out-of-pocket costs than Original Medicare, including a limit on out-of-pocket costs so you don't need to buy supplemental coverage like Medigap.
- Most plans offer extra benefits that Original Medicare doesn't cover—like vision, hearing, dental, and more.



Part A



Part B



You can add:



Part D



You may be able to add:



Supplemental coverage



It can help pay some costs that Original Medicare doesn't. This includes Medicare Supplement Insurance (Medigap). Or you can use coverage from a current or former employer or union, or Medicaid (if you qualify).



Part A



Part B



Most plans include:



Part D



Some extra benefits



You have the right to get Medicare information in an accessible format, like large print, braille or audio. You also have the right to file a complaint if you feel you've been discriminated against.

Visit [Medicare.gov/about-us/accessibility-nondiscrimination-notice](https://www.medicare.gov/about-us/accessibility-nondiscrimination-notice), or call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) for more information. TTY users can call 1-877-486-2048.



Medicare



Medicare



**2026**

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**Medicare**

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your Medicare coverage



# Medicare

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This product was produced at U.S. taxpayer expense.

**Now's the time to make some important decisions about your Medicare coverage.**

**Read this booklet carefully before you make any decisions.**

## Medicare Overview

Medicare is health insurance for people 65 or older, certain people under 65 with disabilities, and people of any age with End-Stage Renal Disease (permanent kidney failure requiring dialysis or a kidney transplant).



### Medicare Part A (Hospital Insurance)

helps cover inpatient care in hospitals, skilled nursing facility care, hospice care, and some home health care.



### Medicare Part B (Medical Insurance)

helps cover services from doctors and other health care providers, outpatient care, durable medical equipment (like wheelchairs, walkers, hospital beds, and other equipment), and many preventive services (like screenings, vaccines, and yearly “Wellness” visits).

**Note:** You must be either a U.S. citizen or national, a lawful permanent resident, a Cuban-Haitian entrant, or a Compact of Free Association migrant to get Part A and Part B benefits or join a Medicare health or drug plan.

## What does Part B cost?

You’ll pay a monthly premium for Part B. In 2026, the standard Part B premium is \$202.90, but the premium amount can change each year. You’ll pay more if you have a higher income.

If you have limited income and resources, you may be able to get help from your state to pay your Part B premium (page 16).

To learn more about what  
Medicare Part A and Part B cover, visit

**Medicare.gov/coverage**

or call

**1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227).**

TTY users can call 1-877-486-2048.



# Decision 1: Do you want to sign up for Part B?

If you already made the decision to sign up for Part B, skip to Decision 2 on page 10.

**If you don't sign up for Part B and don't have other coverage based on current employment, there are some risks:**

- You'll likely have to pay all of the costs for doctors' services, outpatient care, medical supplies, and preventive services.
- If you change your mind and want to get Part B later, you may have to wait until the General Enrollment Period (January 1– March 31 each year) to sign up. This may cause a gap in your health coverage.
- In most cases, if you decide you want Part B later, you may have to pay a **late enrollment penalty** for as long as you have Part B coverage. The penalty amount is added to your monthly Part B premium, and it goes up the longer you go without Part B coverage (page 9).

The best time to sign up for Part B depends on your situation. The next few pages cover common situations that may apply to you.

## Common Situations

I'm still working and have coverage through my employer. Or my spouse (or my family member, if I'm disabled) is still working and I have coverage through his or her employer:

- You may need to sign up for Part B right away if your employer has fewer than 20 employees. Check with your benefits administrator to find out if they require you to sign up for Part B. If you don't sign up for Part B and continue coverage with your employer, **you may be able to sign up for Part B during a Special Enrollment Period without a late enrollment period, if:**
  - You're 65 or older, and you or your spouse is currently working, and you have employer or union group health coverage from that job.
  - You're under 65 and disabled, and you or a spouse (or family member) are currently working, and you have employer or union group health coverage from that job. (If the group health plan coverage is based on the current employment of a family member, the employer must have 100 or more employees.)

If you're eligible for a Special Enrollment Period, you can sign up for Part B:

- Anytime while you have employer or union group health coverage from a job.
- For up to 8 months after the group health coverage or the job ends, whichever happens first.

**I'm retired and have coverage through a former employer, or I have COBRA or VA coverage:**

- You may need both Part A and Part B to get full benefits from this coverage. Your current coverage might not pay (or only pay a small portion of) your medical costs once you're eligible for Medicare, even if you haven't signed up for Medicare yet.
- You aren't automatically eligible for a Special Enrollment Period when this coverage ends. That means:
  - You may have to wait until the General Enrollment Period (January 1–March 31 each year) to sign up for Part B.
  - In most cases, you'll pay a late enrollment penalty that's added to your monthly premium for as long as you have Part B coverage.
- Contact your State Health Assistance Program (SHIP) at [shiphelp.org](https://shiphelp.org), or call 1-877-486-2048 for free, personalized help deciding whether to sign up for Medicare.

## I have coverage through the Health Insurance Marketplace® for individuals or families:

Even if you have Marketplace coverage (or other individual health coverage that isn't based on current employment), you should sign up for Medicare when you're first eligible (usually when you turn 65) to avoid a delay in Medicare coverage and the possibility of a late enrollment penalty. Generally:

- **You won't qualify for help from the Marketplace to pay your Marketplace premiums or other medical costs.** If you continue to get help to pay your Marketplace premiums after your Medicare Part A eligibility starts, you'll have to pay back all or part of the help you got when you file your federal income taxes.
- **Your Marketplace plan may not renew your coverage at the end of the year (in most cases).** This means you and your family could have a gap in your coverage starting January 1 of the next year.
- **You may not be eligible for a Medicare Special Enrollment Period.** This means you'll have to wait for the General Enrollment Period (January 1–March 31 each year) to sign up, and you may have to pay a late enrollment penalty for as long as you have Part B coverage.

For more information about ending Marketplace coverage, call the Marketplace Call Center at 1-800-318-2596. TTY users can call 1-855-889-4325.

### **I have employer coverage through the Marketplace (also called Small Business Health Options Program or “SHOP” coverage) based on current employment:**

You may be eligible for a Special Enrollment Period when you're ready to get Part B. That means you may be able to wait until you stop working or no longer have SHOP coverage to sign up for Part B, without paying a penalty (page 5).

### **I have coverage through a private insurance plan (not through an employer):**

If you get Part B, Medicare will pay its part of the costs for any health care services you get, and then any amount Medicare doesn't cover is submitted to your private plan.

If you choose to sign up for Part B later, you may not be eligible for a Special Enrollment Period. This means you'll have to wait for the General Enrollment Period (January 1–March 31 each year) to sign up, and you may have to pay a late enrollment penalty for as long as you have Part B coverage (page 9).

### **I have TRICARE or CHAMPVA coverage:**

You generally need Part A and Part B to keep TRICARE. However, if you're an active duty service member or the spouse or dependent child of an active duty service member, you don't need to sign up for Part B to keep TRICARE. If you have CHAMPVA, you must sign up for Part A and Part B to keep it.

## **I have Medicaid:**

You should sign up for Part B. Medicare will pay first, and Medicaid will pay second. Your state may also help pay for your Medicare premiums (page 16).

## **I don't have other medical insurance:**

You should consider signing up for Part B, so you have coverage for things like doctors' services and preventive services. Be aware of the risks for not signing up for Part B (page 4).

## **How much is the penalty if I sign up later?**

If you sign up for Part B later and you aren't eligible for a Special Enrollment Period, you'll pay 10% more for each full 12-month period you could've had Part B but didn't sign up. In most cases, you'll have to pay this late enrollment penalty each time you pay your premiums, for as long as you have Part B. The penalty increases the longer you go without Part B coverage.

## Decision 2: How do you want to get Medicare health coverage?

If you signed up for Part B, you have 2 main ways to get your Medicare coverage:

- Original Medicare
- Medicare Advantage

### Original Medicare

Original Medicare includes Part A and Part B. You generally pay a set amount for your health care (deductible) before Medicare begins to pay its share. Once Medicare pays its share, you typically pay 20% of the cost of the Medicare-approved service under Part B.

In 2026, the deductible for Part B is \$283.

Visit [Medicare.gov/basics/costs/medicare-costs](https://www.medicare.gov/basics/costs/medicare-costs) for Part A and other Medicare costs.

### With Original Medicare, you:

- Can go to any doctor or hospital that takes Medicare, anywhere in the U.S.
- Don't need a referral to see a specialist, in most cases.
- Generally pay a portion of the cost for each covered service. There's no yearly limit on what you pay out of pocket, unless you have supplemental coverage (like a Medigap policy, Medicaid, or employer or union coverage).
- May be able to get supplemental coverage (like a Medigap policy) to help pay your remaining out-of-pocket costs (like your 20% coinsurance) (page 14).

- Can join a separate Medicare drug plan (Part D) (page 12).

When you sign up for Part B, you'll have Original Medicare unless you join a Medicare Advantage Plan.

## Medicare Advantage (also known as Part C)

**You must have both Part A and Part B to join a Medicare Advantage Plan.**

Medicare Advantage bundles your Part A, Part B, and usually Part D coverage together. Plans may offer some extra benefits that Original Medicare doesn't.

Medicare Advantage Plans are offered by Medicare-approved private companies that follow rules set by Medicare. Each plan can have different rules for how you get services, like needing referrals to see a specialist. Costs for monthly premiums and services you get vary depending on which plan you join.

Plans must cover all emergency and urgent care, and almost all medically necessary services Original Medicare covers. Some plans offer additional benefits for specific conditions.

### **With Medicare Advantage, you:**

- Generally need to use providers who are in the plan's network (for non-emergency or non-urgent care).
- May pay a premium for the plan in addition to the monthly Part B premium. Plans may have a \$0 premium or may help pay all or part of your Part B premiums.
- Can't buy or use Medicare Supplement Insurance (Medigap) (page 14).

## **Do I need Medicare drug coverage (Part D)?**

If you don't have prescription drug coverage, or the coverage you have isn't at least as good as Medicare drug coverage (called creditable coverage), you should consider joining Medicare drug coverage (Part D). If you have other drug coverage, your plan must tell you each year if it counts as creditable drug coverage.

Creditable prescription drug coverage could include drug coverage from a current or former employer or union, TRICARE, Indian Health Service, the Department of Veterans Affairs, or individual health insurance coverage.

If you don't get drug coverage when you're first eligible for Medicare, and you don't have other creditable drug coverage or get Extra Help (page 16), you may have to pay a Part D late enrollment penalty if you get Medicare drug coverage later. Generally, you'll pay this penalty for as long as you have Medicare drug coverage. The penalty goes up the longer you wait to get coverage.

If you want Medicare drug coverage, you can join a separate Medicare drug plan or a Medicare Advantage Plan with drug coverage.

## Choosing and joining a plan

Learn more about your coverage options at [Medicare.gov/basics/get-started-with-medicare/get-more-coverage](https://www.medicare.gov/basics/get-started-with-medicare/get-more-coverage). You can also find and compare plans by visiting [Medicare.gov/plan-compare](https://www.medicare.gov/plan-compare).

If you didn't join a Medicare Advantage Plan or a Medicare drug plan when you were first eligible, you'll have at least one chance each year to make changes to your Medicare coverage:



**October 15–December 7:** You can join, switch, or drop a Medicare Advantage Plan or a Medicare drug plan during this period each year. Your new coverage will begin on January 1 of the next year.



**January 1–March 31:** If you're in a Medicare Advantage Plan, you can change to a different Medicare Advantage Plan or switch back to Original Medicare (and join a stand-alone Medicare drug plan) once during this time. Any changes you make go into effect the month after the plan gets your request.



**Special Enrollment Periods:** You may be able to join, switch, or drop Medicare Advantage or Medicare drug plans when certain events happen in your life (like if you move, lose other insurance coverage, and other situations).

For more information about when you can join a plan, visit [Medicare.gov/basics/get-started-with-medicare/get-more-coverage/joining-a-plan](https://www.medicare.gov/basics/get-started-with-medicare/get-more-coverage/joining-a-plan).

## Do I need Medicare Supplement Insurance (Medigap)?

Original Medicare pays for much, but not all, of the cost for covered health care services and supplies. If you choose Original Medicare, you might be able to buy a Medicare Supplement Insurance (Medigap) policy from a private company to help pay your out-of-pocket costs in Original Medicare (like your 20% coinsurance).

**In most cases, you need both Part A and Part B to buy a Medigap policy.**

Medigap policies:

- Can cover costs like coinsurance, copayments, and deductibles.
- May offer coverage for services that Original Medicare doesn't cover, like medical care when you travel outside the U.S.
- Generally don't cover long-term care (like care in a nursing home), vision, dental, hearing aids, private-duty nursing, or prescription drugs.

## When can I get Medigap?

The best time to buy a Medigap policy is during your Medigap Open Enrollment Period. This 6-month period begins on the first day of the month in which you're 65 or older **and** have Part B. (Some states have additional Open Enrollment Periods.) During this time, you can buy any Medigap policy sold in your state, and the insurance company can't deny you because of pre-existing health problems. **After the Medigap Open Enrollment Period, you might not be able to buy a Medigap policy, or it may cost more.**

If you're under 65, you might not be able to buy the Medigap policy you want, or any Medigap policy. Federal law generally doesn't require insurance companies to sell Medigap policies to people who are under 65. However, in some states insurance companies do offer Medigap policies to people under 65. If you're able to buy one when you're under 65, it may cost more.

Visit [Medicare.gov/health-drug-plans/medigap](https://www.Medicare.gov/health-drug-plans/medigap) to learn about Medigap.

You can also visit [Medicare.gov/medigap-supplemental-insurance-plans](https://www.Medicare.gov/medigap-supplemental-insurance-plans) to compare the types of Medigap policies in your area, or call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227). TTY users can call 1-877-486-2048.

# Help with Costs

You may be able to get help paying for some of your health care and prescription drug costs.

- **Medicaid and Medicare Savings Programs**—States have programs that help pay Medicare costs for people with limited income and resources. Visit [Medicare.gov/basics/costs/help](https://www.Medicare.gov/basics/costs/help) to learn more. You can also call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) to get the number for your state Medicaid office. TTY users can call 1-877-486-2048.
- **Extra Help with Medicare drug costs**—If you have limited income and resources, you may qualify to get help paying your Medicare Part D drug costs. To apply for this program, visit [SSA.gov/extrahelp](https://www.SSA.gov/extrahelp).
- **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)**—SSI is a monthly benefit paid by Social Security to people with limited income and resources who are disabled, blind, or 65 or older. For more information visit [SSA.gov/ssi](https://www.SSA.gov/ssi).

**Note:** If you live in a U.S. territory, there are different programs to help you pay your Medicare costs. Call your local Medicaid office to learn more. To get the phone number, visit [Medicaid.gov/about-us/where-can-people-get-help-medicaid-chip](https://www.Medicaid.gov/about-us/where-can-people-get-help-medicaid-chip), or call 1-800-MEDICARE.

# Get answers to your Medicare questions

## About signing up for Medicare:

Visit [SSA.gov/medicare/sign-up](https://www.ssa.gov/medicare/sign-up).

## About Medicare:

Visit [Medicare.gov](https://www.Medicare.gov) or call

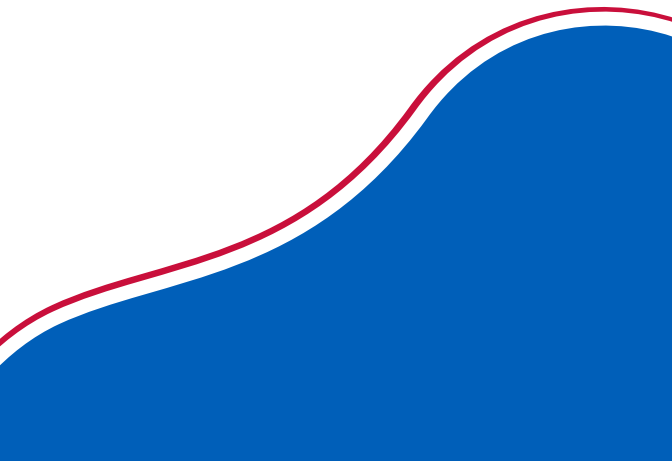
1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227).

TTY users can call 1-877-486-2048.

For free, personalized health insurance counseling, visit [shiphelp.org](https://www.shiphelp.org) to contact your State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP).

## Have a Medicare.gov account?

Log in (or create one) to get your Medicare information anytime. You can add your prescription drugs, find and compare health and drug plans, and more.



Make the most of your  
Medicare by visiting us at  
**Medicare.gov**



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