

## **Enrollment deadlines and allowable windows to change plans**

### **Initial Enrollment Period (IEP)**

There is a seven-month period during which recipients can first enroll in Medicare. That period includes the three months before the recipient's 65th birthday, the recipient's birthday month, and the three months after the month the recipient turns 65.

Coverage begins on the 1st day of the month the recipient turns 65. If, however, the recipient's birthday falls on the 1st day of the month then coverage begins on the 1st day of the prior month.

Failure to enroll during the IEP may result in a late enrollment penalty. This penalty will be assessed for as long as the recipient is enrolled in Medicare. If, however, the individual delays enrollment due to coverage from a group health insurance program, then they must enroll for Medicare within eight months of leaving the job or from the date on which the coverage ends. Failure to do so may also result in assessment of a late enrollment penalty.

Aside from avoiding late enrollment penalties, the benefit of participating in the Initial enrollment is that it allows recipients to enroll into the program without answering health questions.

### **Open Enrollment Period (OEP)**

The Open Enrollment Period (OEP) is often broadly used to reference when a Medicare recipient can enroll or make changes to a plan. More specific references are as follows:

#### **- Annual Enrollment Period (AEP)**

During this period, Medicare Advantage and Part D plan recipients can make changes to their plans for the coming year.

Each September, insurance providers announce changes to their plans for the following year by sending all enrollees an Annual Notice of Change (ANoC) letter. The letter explains the changes that will affect their plan for the following year.

Because insurance companies have the right to change their plans each year, recipients may also elect to change their Medicare Advantage and Part D coverage to ensure they will be sufficiently covered for the next year. The window to make changes is between October 15th and December 7th, with a start date of January 1st.

It is imperative that recipients review their plans and drug coverage during this period. Not doing so may result in greater financial liability for drugs and services.

### **Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment Period (MA OEP)**

This period occurs between January 1st and March 31st of each year. The purpose is to allow Medicare Advantage plan holders to change plans.

During this period, recipients can only make changes to their Medicare Advantage plan if they are already enrolled in a Medicare Advantage plan.

### **Medicare Supplement Open Enrollment Period (Medigap/Supplement OEP)**

During this period, an individual can enroll in a Medigap plan without having to answer any health questions. The period lasts for six months, beginning the same day as the enrollee's Part B effective date. Notably, it only happens once in an individual's life.

Medicare eligible individuals can enroll in a Medigap plan at any time during the year. However, the enrollee will have to answer health questions if enrolling outside of the Medigap/Supplement OEP period. Moreover, enrolling outside of the Medigap/Supplement OEP can result in higher premiums, as well as limited coverage options.

### **Special Enrollment Period (SEP)**

The SEP is for certain unique situations, such as a significant change to an individual's financial circumstances or medical condition. The period is dependent upon several variables, and it is best to consult a Medicare agent to understand if applicable to you.

Lastly, it must be noted that states may vary with some of their rules and, many times, allow more flexibility with enrollment. For this reason, it is best to speak with a reputable Medicare Agent who is registered in your state.