



MISSISSIPPI

INSURANCE DEPARTMENT

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PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

November 5, 2018

OP-ED

Make Smart Choices When Selecting Medicare Plans (Open Enrollment Ends December 7, 2018)

As Insurance Commissioner I take my responsibilities of protecting the consumers of this state very seriously. Never is that more true than when it comes to the ever growing complex issues facing seniors in Mississippi relating to their health coverage. Rising health care costs put a strain on many retirement budgets and seniors need to remain well informed to make the most economical decisions.

The open enrollment period for Medicare runs from October 15 through December 7, 2018 at which time you may change your Medicare health or prescription coverage for 2019, if you decide to. This includes returning to Original Medicare or joining a Medicare Advantage Plan (Advantage Plan).

I urge all Mississippians who qualify to think carefully when enrolling in Medicare and considering a Medicare supplement policy (Medigap) or Advantage Plan. While the Mississippi Insurance Department (MID) does not regulate Advantage Plans, we take our role in protecting consumers seriously. If you have concerns or are confused by the complexity of enrolling in Medicare or purchasing a Medigap or Advantage Plan, remember that the MID is here to assist you.

Just as a refresher - Medicare is a federal insurance program comprised of 4 Parts that is administered by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). Medicare is for people age 65 or older or for people who are under 65 with certain

disabilities or End Stage Renal Disease. There are several things you should consider during each open enrollment period.

Read all notices you get from Medicare about upcoming changes, many of which can be found in the annual Medicare Supplement Shoppers Guide issued by MID. Yearly Medicare revisions can include such changes as out of pocket limits and prescription costs. Carefully consider these changes when considering enrollment and additional coverage through a Medigap Plan.

Know that there are programs out there to assist you in paying for Medicare. You can find out about these programs at [medicare.gov](https://www.medicare.gov) or the Division of Aging and Adult Services of the Mississippi Department of Human Services. At the [medicare.gov](https://www.medicare.gov) website you can also find a helpful tool called the Medicare Plan Finder that can assist you in choosing a plan that fits your budget.

Medicare Part A covers hospital insurance and Medicare Part B covers such medical services and supplies as doctor visits, lab tests, x-rays, mental health services, preventative services and rehabilitative services. You may want to consider a Medigap Plan to help pay for health care costs that traditional Medicare doesn't cover. You must have Parts A and B to qualify for a Medigap Plan. You pay a monthly premium to a private insurance company for this policy that is in addition to the monthly premium you pay to Medicare.

Another option is an Advantage Plan. Understand that if you obtain an Advantage Plan you are still in Medicare with all rights and protections, however the Advantage Plan covers those services of Part A and B instead. It may also cover extras like dental and vision coverage.

With so many plans and options available, choosing just the right coverage can become confusing. That is why I again urge any Mississippian considering these plans to review everything carefully and choose wisely. You need to understand the differences between the choices that are out there.

For example, know that Medigap Plans fall under state oversight while Advantage Plans are under federal jurisdiction. Remember too that an Advantage Plan is restricted to a specific network approved by the company issuing the plan. It tells you that you have to go to a doctor or hospital within their network and if your hospital is not in the network the policy will not be accepted.

If you are a senior in Mississippi and are considering enrolling in Medicare and a Medigap or Advantage Plan, I urge you to take the time to research and choose your health care coverage wisely. If you need assistance in understanding your options please call the Consumer Division of the MID at 1-800-562-3957.

When you are informed and ready, call Social Security to enroll in Medicare or enroll in person at your local Social Security Office.

Mike Chaney
Commissioner of Insurance