

SAVING MONEY PER MEDICARE PART D DRUG PLANS - 2021

Let me introduce myself. My name is Scott Mello and my wife Michal and I have been active members of Ascension for over 20 years. For about 10 years I have been a volunteer Medicare counselor for the State Health Insurance assistance Program (SHIP). Most if not every state has a SHIP office, and our regional supervisor is in Lexington. Our sole purpose is to help Medicare recipients find their best way through the ever-changing Medicare program. This year is particularly challenging because of the Pandemic.

From October 15 through December 7, most Medicare recipients have the opportunity to save on the prescription drugs they will buy in 2022. Because the drugs an individual plan covers and their costs can and often do change every year, consumers are encouraged to compare their present Part D prescription drug plan or their Medicare Advantage plan against all other available plans every year in order to save money. For most people, however, this can be easier said than done.

Fortunately, experienced, volunteer counselors can guide recipients through the annual open enrollment process of comparison shopping using Medicare's online plan finder tool. Working in conjunction with the Capital City Activity Center, Michal, Maggie Friel and I have been helping Medicare recipients select the best plan for the best price for many years.

While COVID-19 has made the usual face-to-face meetings unavailable we can still guide most any current or soon-to-be Medicare enrollee over the phone or via Zoom. Whether you have a stand-alone drug plan or one that is part of a Medicare Advantage plan, comparison shopping can save hundreds and even thousands of dollars for 2022. For example, if your plan (which has an identifying policy number) drops a costly drug from its covered drugs, the full cost of the drug shifts to the policy holder. For some, the cost of the drug lies beyond their financial abilities. In many cases, insurers assign a new plan name and policy number to the coverage you expect from your current plan. Plus 70% of the present Part D drug plans will have a premium increase for 2022. (One of the many issues that arises is that since Social Security rises each year and most people have their premiums taken out of their Social Security deposit the premium increase is hard to detect.) In our experience, Kentucky State retirees are the exception: leaving their group plan is discouraged.

To make an appointment with a counselor to help you, call the Capital City Activity Center at 223-5794 and tell the receptionist that you want to sign up for the Medicare counselling for prescription drug plans. Otherwise, you can contact me directly by email at scottmello36@gmail.com with any questions or concerns.

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WHAT TO EXPECT IF YOU ATTEND A COUNSELLING SESSION

After you make an appointment, Michal or Maggie or I will contact you and you will be asked to be present with your Medicare card or the info on it or your Medicare Advantage card, if you have a Medicare Advantage plan, your prescription drug containers and whatever else we agree you might need when we talk at the appointed time. (Of course, if you want somebody else with you to help, that's fine.) I will then help you to create an account with Medicare, if you don't have one already, and then enter your prescription drugs information into the Medicare account. Next, using Medicare's internet Plan Finder tool, we will determine how much your present Part D plan will cost you in 2022. That is, the sum of the premium, deductible, donut hole and drug costs to you for next year. With that information in hand, we then, using the same drugs and pharmacies, calculate how much you can save, if anything at all, by purchasing a new equivalent plan. If at this point you want to buy the new plan, we can do it on the spot using the same tool.

My experience is that nine out of ten times, at least, a new policy will save you hundreds or thousands of dollars. For example, last year I helped a former Ascension congregant save over \$20,000. \$3000-\$5000 is not unusual in my experience. I've been doing this for around ten years. BTW, Medicare monitors and rates these drug plans, so you have an idea if any of them are substandard, which is rarely the case.