



Office of the Illinois Attorney General

MEDICARE OPEN ENROLLMENT ALERT

Medicare open enrollment starts each year on October 15 and ends December 7. Scammers may use ways to take advantage of seniors by:

- Making false promises of savings
- Offering fake coverage schemes
- Attempting to fraudulently gain access to personal information

Learn how to see through their gimmicks.

Illinois Attorney General's
Senior Citizens
Consumer Fraud Hotline:

1-800-243-5377

Individuals with hearing or speech disabilities can reach us by using the 7-1-1 relay service.



Bogus Medicare Reps



Loss of Coverage Threat



Counterfeit Sales Materials



Fake Rebate Notices



Reps Using Improper Tactics

BE AWARE OF MEDICARE OPEN ENROLLMENT SCAMS



Bogus Medicare Reps

This scam involves an “official Medicare agent” either cold calling a senior by phone or knocking on their door. The phony agent says they’re selling Medicare insurance that can save the senior thousands of dollars in health care costs next year...But the offer is only good during the open enrollment period.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) does not employ any Medicare sales representatives and typically issues all communications in writing.

CMS is only authorized to call beneficiaries in two specific situations:

- A Medicare health or drug plan can call you if you’re already a member of the plan. (The agent who helped you join can also call you.)
- A customer service representative from 1-800-MEDICARE can call you if you’ve called and left a message or a representative said that someone would call you back.



Loss of Coverage Threat

This scam usually begins with a senior receiving a call that says they must have a prescription drug coverage plan (also known as Medicare Part D) or they will lose their other Medicare benefits. They say if the senior doesn’t purchase a plan during enrollment time, then their Medicare benefits will be “terminated.”

Of course, this caller claims to offer just the right Rx plan for the senior to increase their coverage and safeguard their benefits.

If someone says you must join a plan or buy some sort of coverage to avoid losing your other Medicare benefits, it’s a scam. The Medicare prescription drug benefit is an entirely optional addition to your coverage under Original Medicare (Parts A and B). The same goes for Medigap policies.



Counterfeit Sales Materials

Scammers sometimes create and circulate very official-looking brochures and sales materials for new Medicare products. They offer a “discounted price” and count on seniors to contact them to enroll, collecting their personal or payment information.

Don’t be fooled by sales materials that look like they’re from a government agency. Private insurance does sell Medicare Advantage Plans, Medicare Supplement Plans and Medicare Prescription Drug Plans. While CMS approves and standardizes these plans, they do not directly promote or sell any of these options.

If you’re not sure you have received legitimate materials, check a full list of the kinds of notifications and information that CMS and your existing plan(s) may send out via mail on Medicare.gov.

Before acting on an offer, instead of using the contact information on the marketing materials, call Medicare directly at 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) or look up and compare available plans in your area using Medicare’s Plan Compare Tool.



Fake Rebate Notices

A scammer might call a Medicare beneficiary to notify them that they are owed a substantial refund because they’ve reached the prescription drug coverage gap known as the “donut hole.” The catch is that the senior must provide their birth date, Social Security number, bank account and Medicare number in order to automatically deposit a “refund” into their checking account.

Medicare will NEVER call and ask for a beneficiary’s Medicare number or Social Security number. Guard your personal information. Treat Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security numbers like a credit card number, and never give these out to a stranger. If someone claims to be with Medicare and asks for sensitive information like this over the phone, hang up and report it to 1-800-MEDICARE.



Reps Using Improper Tactics

Unfortunately, even legitimate insurance agents may be tempted into using aggressive or deceptive sales practices to lure seniors into buying real Medicare Advantage Plans, Medigap policies, Part D plans or other insurance products.

Seniors do have rights. Do not get pressured into buying insurance coverage that you do not want or need.

Federal regulations make it illegal to market Medicare products at educational events and in places where health care is delivered (e.g., exam rooms, pharmacy counters, hospital patient rooms, dialysis centers). Also, it is illegal to market additional non-health related products, such as a financial annuity, during personal marketing appointments with Medicare beneficiaries.

Visit Medicare.gov for a complete list of rules that people representing Medicare plans must follow. If approached by a salesperson who acts inappropriately or aggressively, or if you’ve been enrolled in an insurance plan against your will, call 1-800-MEDICARE and file a complaint. Also contact the Illinois Department of Insurance to file a grievance at www.insurance.illinois.gov.



STOP THE SCAM BEFORE IT STARTS

- Going through Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) directly is the safest way to explore your options and make changes to your coverage.
- Ignore cold calls and be wary of anyone who shows up unannounced at your home offering products or services of any kind.
- If an “agent” or “representative” tries to sell you something on behalf of Medicare unsolicited, you should report that person to 1-800-MEDICARE or the Illinois Department of Insurance.
- Don’t trust the name displayed on your phone’s CallerID screen. They can use a fake CallerID name to impersonate Medicare or another organization you know.
- If anyone calls and asks for your Medicare, Social Security, or bank or credit card information, hang up.
- There are legitimate insurance agents and brokerage firms that sell Medicare Supplement Insurance (Medigap), Medicare Part D plans and Advantage Plans on behalf of private insurance companies. Some of these entities work with marketing and lead generation companies that advertise heavily online and on television.
- Legitimate firms and licensed brokers are not scammers. While they sell real Medicare policies, be aware that they may only offer a limited number of plans from certain carriers, they may charge fees, and they receive commissions for the sales they make.

If you need help comparing plans and finding the best one for your situation, contact your local Area Agency on Aging (AAA) using eldercare.acl.gov. From there you can make an appointment with the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) to get free health insurance benefits counseling.