

## Getting Started with your Medicare

If you are over the age of 64, you are probably considering your options for health care coverage and have many questions about Social Security, Medicare, prescriptions and everything else as well as how it all coordinates together. First of all, know that Social Security and Medicare are not one in the same. Social Security provides monthly income for retired persons, Medicare provides health insurance. You don't need to elect your Social Security benefit to be eligible for Medicare, but it is Social Security that funds Medicare, so let's start there.

Contact Social Security [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) (800) 772-1213 Verify your Medicare number (called a beneficiary number – usually your social security number followed by the letter A or T). You are probably aware that Medicare is made up of four parts:

- Part A: Hospital Coverage
- Part B: Medical
- Part C: HMO (or Medicare Advantage plans)
- Part D: Prescription

Many people don't need Part C (unless you choose an HMO type of plan – more on that later). When you speak with Social Security you will primarily verify the eligibility date for both parts A (Hospital) and B (Medical).

Once you have established Medicare Part A and B, you have three basic choices. You can just have your red, white and blue Medicare card, referred to as 'original Medicare'. In some rural areas Dr's and hospitals accept it as full payment. However, for most people, original Medicare could leave them at risk of sharing 20% of the cost of major medical expenses. Another choice is to join an HMO (more on that later). For many people, the best answer is to add a Medicare Insurance Supplement plan (sometimes called a Medigap) to pay the portions that Medicare would have you pay if you only had your original Medicare. This is often referred to as 'Primary / Secondary' where Medicare pays 80% and the Supplement pays 20%, leaving you with little or no share of cost.

As mentioned above, if you choose a Medicare Supplement plan, the drug coverage is separate, referred to as Part D (for Drugs). You will need to choose a stand-alone Rx plan or Part D Plan (PDP). Finding an Insurance Agent who specializes in helping with Medicare plans may be helpful to determine which Rx plan is best for you based on your list of medications.

