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A Monthly Reprint of Articles of Importance to Employers Today



Editor's Note

Off the Wire is a reprint of articles for Human Resources professionals and business owners. It is published monthly and is where we are always trying to address the needs and concerns of the business community with a focus on benefits and HR related topics.

We are interested in your feedback and welcome any comments! Also, if there are any topics that interest you, feel free to contact us directly at 206-414-4635. We will gladly do the research for you!

If you would like to view past issues, they can be found on our web site:

www.bene-corp.com

Thank you for your interest and input.

MEDICARE ADVANTAGE OEP

What You Need To Know

By Dave Rich CEO, Ensurem

Medicare beneficiaries and sales agents alike had something in common on their minds the last several months: Medicare Annual Enrollment Period. As Medicare's busiest season of the year, the annual enrollment period between October 15 and December 7 allowed beneficiaries to make changes to their Medicare coverage for 2021. But what happens if they find out the Medicare Advantage plan they selected during AEP didn't quite meet their needs?

Fortunately, they have one more chance to make a change to their own coverage, and its during the Medicare Advantage OEP between January 1 and March 31. We're seeing more people make changes to their coverage selection during this time period each year. In fact, 25% of beneficiaries who enrolled into a MA plan during AEP switched plans during the 2019 MA OEP, and 40% of beneficiaries who shopped during the 2020 MA OEP ended up switching plans. OEP gives MA enrollees the chance to live in their plans for a but to ensure the plan best meets their needs.

If they believe it doesn't, OEP gives MA enrollees the opportunity to find a better alternative. In other words, loyalty to a plan is tested during these times, meaning its important for plan providers and marketers of any kind to take the time to understand the options offered during OEP and how to best offer them to their clients.

In 2019, CMS reintroduced the Medicare Advantage OEP. This enrollment period replaces the Medicare Advantage Dis-enrollment period (MAPD), which previously took place between January 1 and February 4 and only allowed beneficiaries to leave MA and return to Original Medicare. Geared toward Medicare Advantage beneficiaries, the MA OEP is only available to beneficiaries who are enrolled in a MA or MAPD plan, and it allows them to make one or two changes to their coverage:

- Switch to a different MA plan with or without drug coverage
- Go back to Original Medicare and, if needed, join a Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Plan

CHANGES NOT ALLOWED DURING MA OEP

- Switch from Original Medicare to Medicare Advantage
- Switch stand-alone Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Plan

With all the different enrollment periods and acronyms in Medicare, things can get confusing. There are a few things to keep in mind when considering the differences between the two annual enrollment periods. Knowing them will help ensure you provide the right guidance to your clients.

MA OEP VS. MEDICARE AEP

- Eligibility: OEP: Only Medicare Beneficiaries enrolled in MA or MAPD are allowed to make changes vs. AEP: All Medicare beneficiaries are allowed to make changes
- Number of changes allotted: OEP: Only one change allowed vs. AEP: Unlimited changes allowed
- Marketing: OEP: Targeted marketing is not allowed vs. AEP: Marketing is allowed with certain restrictions (read on to learn more)

THE DOS AND DON'TS OF HELPING BENEFICIARIES DURING MA OEP

CMS set regulations for plans and the insurance exchanges in which they're sold. This includes the Medicare Marketing Guidelines³ that provide guidelines for carriers and agents marketing and selling MA health insurance products during and outside of enrollment periods. If you are considering taking advantage of OEP, consider this: Guidelines listed around marketing to and engaging with beneficiaries during MA OEP are a bit stricter than Medicare AEP. During MA OEP, do not:

- Contact former members who made a decision during AEP.
- Promote or engage in activities that intend to use this OEP as an opportunity to make further sales.
- Send unsolicited marketing material advertising the MA OEP.
- Target beneficiaries who made changes during AEP. (This includes purchasing mailing lists of such individuals and marketing to those individuals.)

DURING MA OEP... DO

- Send marketing materials when requested by a beneficiary.
- Conduct sales meetings when requested by a beneficiary.
- Provide information and respond to questions regarding the OEP when asked.
- Market to individuals aging into Medicare, LIS and dual-eligible beneficiaries.



While OEP guidelines can be considered stricter than those for AEP, there is still room to drive engagement with your clients. As always, you can continue to market toward age-ins throughout the year, but you can also take this time to focus on member retention. For example, sending communications that recognize and thank clients for their business as well as brand-awareness communications that simply state “we’re here to help” are two ways you can reach your most valued members while staying within regulations.

With new plans and supplemental benefits being introduced every year and awareness surrounding the OEP expected to increase, it’s likely that the number of beneficiaries interested in exploring better alternatives during OEP will also continue to rise. As such, when preparing for the next AEP it would be beneficial for Medicare plan providers and marketers to invest in their educational efforts to help their clients make the right initial coverage decisions. However, with the annual enrollment period for 2021 plans already concluded and 2021 OEP upon us, it’s even more important now than ever to invest in retention and brand-awareness programs to get ahead of your clients’ needs during this time.

If you or your employees need help understanding Medicare, contact us here at Benecorp. We are experts at helping people navigate the complicated world of Medicare. Call us at 206 414-4635 or visit our website at www.bene-corp.com.