Medicare Enrollment Starter Kit

A simple step-by-step guide to help you prepare for Medicare with confidence

Turning 65 is an important milestone — and it's also when many people become eligible for **Medicare**. The choices you make during your initial enrollment period can impact your **coverage, costs, and flexibility for years to come**, so it's important to understand your options and deadlines.

This checklist will walk you through the key steps to prepare for Medicare and avoid common mistakes.

1. What to Do Before You Turn 65

Planning ahead makes the Medicare transition much easier. Ideally, you should begin preparing **3–6 months before your 65th birthday**.

Review Your Current Coverage

Ask yourself:

☐ Am I currently covered through an **employer health plan**?
☐ Am I on an **individual marketplace plan**?
☐ Am I covered through a **spouse's employer plan**?
☐ Am I currently receiving **Social Security benefits**?

Your current coverage determines **how and when you should enroll in Medicare**.

Understand the Parts of Medicare

Medicare has several components:

Part A – Hospital Insurance
Covers inpatient hospital care, skilled nursing, hospice, and some home health services.

Part B – Medical Insurance
Covers doctor visits, outpatient services, preventive care, and medical equipment.

Part C – Medicare Advantage
Private insurance plans that replace Original Medicare and often include prescription coverage.

Part D – Prescription Drug Coverage
Helps cover the cost of prescription medications.

Estimate Your Healthcare Needs

Think about:

☐ Prescription medications you take regularly
☐ Preferred doctors or hospitals
☐ Travel or lifestyle plans in retirement
☐ Budget for healthcare costs

These factors will help determine the **best coverage option for you**.

2. Key Medicare Deadlines

The most important timeline is your **Initial Enrollment Period (IEP)**.

This window lasts **7 months**:

- **3 months before your 65th birthday month**
- **Your birthday month**
- **3 months after your birthday month**

Example:
If your birthday is **June**, your enrollment window runs from **March 1 through September 30**.

Why Timing Matters

Enrolling at the wrong time can result in:

⚠️ Coverage gaps
⚠️ Lifetime late enrollment penalties
⚠️ Delayed access to benefits

For most people, enrolling **before the month they turn 65** ensures coverage begins on time.

Other Important Enrollment Periods

General Enrollment Period
January 1 – March 31 each year
(Used if you missed your Initial Enrollment Period)

Annual Enrollment Period
October 15 – December 7 each year
(Used to change Medicare Advantage or Part D plans)

Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment Period
January 1 – March 31 each year
(Change to a new Medicare Advantage plan or disenroll from Medicare Advantage and return to Original Medicare. Limitations and restrictions apply)

3. How Medicare Works With Employer Coverage

Many people continue working past age 65, which raises an important question:

Should you enroll in Medicare if you still have employer insurance?

The answer depends largely on the **size of the employer** providing the coverage.

If Your Employer Has 20 or More Employees

Your employer plan is typically **primary coverage**.

You may be able to:

✔ Delay Medicare Part B
✔ Avoid the Part B premium until you retire
✔ Enroll later using a **Special Enrollment Period**

However, many people still enroll in **Medicare Part A** because it is usually premium-free.

If Your Employer Has Fewer Than 20 Employees

Medicare usually becomes **primary coverage**.

In this situation you typically must:

✔ Enroll in **Medicare Part A and Part B at age 65**

Failing to enroll may leave you with **little or no coverage for medical expenses**.

COBRA and Retiree Coverage

Important to know:

• **COBRA does not replace Medicare enrollment**
• Retiree coverage rules vary widely by employer
• You should review how your benefits coordinate with Medicare

4. The Biggest Medicare Mistakes to Avoid

Many Medicare issues occur simply because people didn’t receive clear guidance.

Here are some of the most common mistakes.

Mistake #1

Waiting too long to enroll

Missing your enrollment window can result in **permanent premium penalties** for Part B and Part D.

Mistake #2

Assuming Medicare covers everything

Medicare does **not cover 100% of medical expenses**.

Depending on your coverage choice, you may still have:

• deductibles
• copays
• coinsurance
• prescription costs

Mistake #3

Not reviewing doctor networks

Some Medicare plans have **provider networks**.

Before enrolling, confirm that your:

✔ doctors
✔ hospitals
✔ specialists

are included in the plan.

Mistake #4

Choosing a plan based only on premium

A lower premium does not always mean **lower total costs**.

It’s important to consider:

• out-of-pocket limits
• prescription coverage
• provider access
• long-term flexibility

Mistake #5

Trying to navigate Medicare alone

Medicare rules can be complicated, and small decisions can have long-term consequences.

Working with an experienced advisor can help you:

✔ understand your options
✔ compare plans objectively
✔ avoid costly mistakes

Need Help With Medicare?

At **Colorado Health Insurance Brokers**, we help individuals throughout Colorado understand their Medicare options and select coverage that fits their needs.

Our guidance is **independent, objective, and provided at no cost to you**.

If you would like help reviewing your options, we’re happy to assist.

Schedule a consultation or learn more at:

ColoradoHealthInsuranceBrokers.com