

HEALTH

Drug plans to be renewed soon

Re-enrollment comes up in November

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It will be time to re-enroll in Medicare drug coverage this November, and some Medicare recipients are already getting mail about it.

"The message we're giving to everybody is, don't throw away anything you receive," said Maureen Kane, supervisor of the Senior Information and Assistance program of the Northwest Regional Council.

Nov. 15 to Dec. 31 will be the second annual enrollment period for Medicare Part D, which has Medicare recipients selecting drug coverage plans from a variety of health insurance companies. The plans vary in monthly premiums, coverage levels and drugs covered.

People who have been receiving a low-income subsidy from Social Security to help pay their monthly premiums already may have received paperwork to reapply, Kane said.

And many plans will change their prices and drug formularies next year, Kane said, so people who are enrolled in a plan need to watch for that information when it comes in the mail next month.

"They're going to want to make sure their meds are still covered," she said. "They have a choice, if they're not, of changing medications or changing plans."

And some plans may be ending altogether, she said.

Low-income people who are on both Medicare and Medicaid, whose premiums are paid by the state, should pay particular attention to how much their plan's premiums are going up. Those who were assigned to their plan by the state will be assigned to another plan if the premiums rise above what the state will pay. But those who enrolled in the plan themselves won't be reassigned, Kane said, and might get a bill for the difference.

Senior Information and Assistance staff members will be at county senior centers this fall, talking with people about re-enrolling, or enrolling for the first time.

Help also will be available from the Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisers, volunteers trained to help people sort out health insurance issues.

"Call us, but call us early," said Tobi Johnson, state manager of the program. "Don't wait until Dec. 31, or we probably won't be able to help you."

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