**What Does Medicare Part C Insurance (i.e., Medicare Advantage) Cover?**

*Presented by* ***Eric C. Tolmie, MBA***

Medicare Part C is a Medicare-approved, private health insurance plan. Part C, also known as a Medicare Advantage plan, is an alternative to Original Medicare.

**How—and when—do I enroll?**

* **Initial enrollment:** The initial seven**-**month enrollment period is the three months preceding your 65th birthday, the month of your birthday, and three months following your birthday.
* **Disabled individuals receiving social security or Railroad Retirement Board disability benefits:**
* **Under Age 65:** The initial Part C enrollment period begins 21 months after you start receiving disability benefits and ends 28 months after you start receiving disability benefits. (Remember that eligibility for *Medicare* begins 24 months after you start receiving disability benefits.)
* **At Age 65:** The initial seven-month enrollment period applies.
* **Open enrollment period:** Open enrollment begins October 15 and ends December 7. During the annual enrollment period, you can enroll in a Part C plan or choose a different Part C plan. Coverage under the new Part C plan begins January 1 of the following year.
* **Annual disenrollment period:** The annual disenrollment period begins January 1 and ends February 14.
* If you discontinue a Part C plan, you can return to Part A and Part B coverage. Part A and Part B coverage starts the first day of the month after you cancel the Part C plan.
* If you discontinue a Part C plan, you can enroll in a stand-alone Part D prescription plan. Part D coverage begins the first day of the month after the prescription plan receives your enrollment form.
* **Special enrollment:** The special enrollment period begins when you move from a Part C plan’s service area or you end coverage through an employer’s health insurance.
* Generally, special enrollment periods are for two full months. The two-month period begins the month after you terminate your prior health insurance.
* If you discontinue a Part C plan and don’t enroll in a new Part C plan within two months, you will be reenrolled automatically in traditional Part A and Part B plans.

**What are my out-of-pocket expenses?**

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services approve the plans that are offered by private insurance companies. Medicare pays a fixed amount to the private insurer for the coverage provided.

* Part C includes Part A hospital insurance and Part B physician insurance. Part C plans may also include Part D prescription drug coverage. In addition, Part C plans may offer benefits such as dental, vision, and hearing.
* Your expenses will vary by plan. Variable costs include monthly premiums, deductibles, copayments, and out-of-network charges.
  + Although Part C covers physician insurance, you still must enroll in Part B and pay the Part B premium.

**What else do I need to know about Medicare Part C coverage?**

When you enroll in a Part C plan, you are still enrolled in Medicare.

* There are five types of Part C plans:
* Health maintenance organizations (HMOs)
* Preferred provider organizations (PPOs)
* Special needs plans (SNPs)
* Private fee-for-service (PFFSs)
* Medical savings accounts (MSAs)
* In addition to plan costs and service-area restrictions, there are several factors to consider when selecting a Part C plan.
* Part C plans, particularly HMOs and PPOs, may require you to use in-network providers or to obtain referrals prior to appointments with specialists. You must verify whether your Part C plan will cover the charges from out-of-network providers.
* Part C plans may change providers within their networks at any time. Likewise, health care providers may choose to leave a Part C plan’s network.
* Not all Part C plans offer prescription drug coverage. For example, MSA plans do not. If your plan does not include prescription drug coverage, you must enroll in a separate Part D plan.
* Different Part C plans have different out-of-pocket limits. Once you meet your out-of-pocket limit, you will not incur charges for covered services for the remainder of that plan year.
* With the exception of end-stage renal disease, Part C plans are available to individuals with preexisting conditions.
* You can search for Part C plans in specific locations using the online tool at: <https://www.medicare.gov/find-a-plan/questions/home.aspx> You may further personalize this search by including your Medicare number and date of birth.

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**Eric C. Tolmie**, MBA is a Medicare Insurance Advisor and President of Eric C. Tolmie Financial Services LLC. He is located at Stuyvesant Plaza, 2 Executive Park Drive, Second Floor, Albany NY 12203. He can be reached in his office at 518-438-2008. Or his cell is 518-573-8419. Fax 518-915-1178