

Oct. 14, 2011

Washington, D.C. – With more benefits, better choices and lower costs, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is encouraging people with Medicare and their families to begin reviewing drug and health plan coverage options for 2012. The Medicare Open Enrollment Period, which begins earlier this year on Saturday, October 15, has been expanded to last seven weeks and will end on December 7. This will give seniors and people with disabilities more time to compare and find the best plan that meets their unique needs.

“I encourage people to take advantage of the open enrollment period. You can review your choices and pick the plan that works best for you, and my office is here to help you navigate the process,” said Rep. McNerney.

Beginning today, people with Medicare can begin reviewing the 2012 quality ratings for Medicare Advantage health plans (Part C) and prescription drug plans (Part D) for the upcoming year.

This year CMS is highlighting plans that have achieved an overall quality rating of 5 stars with a high performer or “gold star” icon so people with Medicare can easily find high quality plans. People with Medicare can switch to an available 5-star plan at any time during the year.

Resources for Medicare Beneficiaries

People with Medicare, their families and other trusted representatives can review and compare current plan coverage with new plan offerings, using many proven resources, including:

- Visiting www.medicare.gov , where they can get a personalized comparison of costs and coverage of the plans available in their area. The popular Medicare Plan Finder tool has been enhanced for an efficient review of plan choices. Spanish Open Enrollment information is available.

- Calling 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) for around-the-clock assistance to find out more about coverage options. TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048. Multilingual counseling is available.

- Reviewing the 2012 Medicare & You handbook. It is also accessible online at: <http://www.medicare.gov/publications/pubs/pdf/10050.pdf>.

- Getting one-on-one counseling assistance from the local State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP). Local SHIP contact information can be found:

- <http://www.medicare.gov/contacts/organization-search-criteria.aspx>
- On the back of the 2011 Medicare & You handbook or;
- By calling Medicare (contact information above).
- Through a listing of national stand-alone prescription drug plans and State specific fact sheets can be found at: <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/center/openenrollment.asp>

People with Medicare who have limited incomes and resources may qualify for Extra Help paying for their prescription drug costs. There is no cost to apply for Extra Help, also called the low-income subsidy. Medicare beneficiaries, family members, trusted counselors or caregivers can apply online at www.socialsecurity.gov/prescriptionhelp or call Social Security at 1-800-772-1213 (TTY users should call 1-800-325-0778) to find out more.

