



## Considerations Before Choosing a Medicare Advantage Plan

Nearly 43 million Americans are Medicare beneficiaries. Most receive their health care services through the Medicare program but nearly 8.3 million receive care through Medicare Advantage (MA) plans provided by private insurance companies under contract with Medicare. The government pays the plans 12 to 19 percent more than the cost would be under Medicare; there is much doubt whether this arrangement is advisable, not only for the fiscal health of the program but also for the beneficiaries involved.

Before you choose a MA plan, consider:

**Your costs may be greater than traditional Medicare.** Although MA plans must provide a benefit package that is at least as good as Medicare's, they do not have to cover every benefit in the same way. Some plans may require a higher co-payment, or they may place limits on the frequency of services, leaving the enrollee to pay full price beyond the limit.

**There is no guarantee that the plans offer more than Medicare offers.** Medicare officials admit that they have no accounting of whether any MA plan actually provides additional benefits to enrollees.

**You may not be able to get emergency care coverage when you need it.** If you are traveling and need emergency care outside the plan's network, you may be denied any claims for that care.

**Your doctor may not be in the plan or accept it.** Some MA plans have a network of providers and your doctor may not belong. Or, you may find that your doctor or hospital does not accept the plan you have chosen.

**MA plans can change from year to year.** Once seniors join a plan, insurance plans may revise what benefits they offer and the costs one must pay. You may find that services that were previously available to you are not covered by a new plan. Additionally, although they may promise to coordinate your care, most plans do not.

**MA plans may withdraw altogether.** Although they currently receive substantial subsidies from the government, experience has shown that private insurers will not stay in the business of offering their plans if they are not making a profit. Medicare, however, will always be there for you even if plans pull out.

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The Alliance for Retired Americans is a grassroots organization representing more than 3 million retirees and seniors nationwide. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., the Alliance's mission is to advance public policy that protects the health and economic security of older Americans by teaching seniors to make a difference through activism. Learn more about the Alliance and its work at [www.retiredamericans.org](http://www.retiredamericans.org)