

Tips For Navigating This Year's Health Insurance Open Enrollment Season

(NAPSA)—Open enrollment is the time of year, usually between September and December, when millions of Americans have the opportunity to select or switch their health insurance plan for the following year.

Unfortunately, just 14 percent of Americans understand basic health insurance concepts such as deductible, co-pay, co-insurance and out-of-pocket maximum, according to a recent study published in the *Journal of Health Economics*.

“Choosing health care coverage for yourself and your family is one of the most important decisions you will make this year,” said Tom Paul, chief consumer officer for UnitedHealthcare. “Fortunately, there are a number of useful resources people can use as they review and understand their options for selecting the plan that best meets their personal health and budget needs.”

Beginning this fall, the Congressional Budget Office estimates that an additional 7 million people may participate in open enrollment as a result of the government's newly created state health insurance exchanges, otherwise known as “marketplaces.” The exchanges are a component of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) and are designed to give people, especially lower-income individuals and families that may qualify for federal subsidy assistance, another resource to purchase health insurance.

In general, most people who get health insurance at work will see little or no change in the open-enrollment process, and people on Medicare, Medicaid and other government insurance programs are also not likely affected. The vast majority of Americans—about 157 million with employer-provided coverage, and more than 51 million Medicare beneficiaries—will continue to select a health insurance plan in the same way they have done in the past.

Regardless of how you access health insurance, it's important to pay attention to the following open enrollment dates and tips:

• Employer-Provided Coverage—Fall; specific dates depend on the employer

Most Americans receive employer-provided health benefits, so their open enrollment process will most likely stay the same. Large employers and some small employers typically schedule a two- to three-week period during the fall



There are a number of useful resources to help you choose your health care plan.

when their employees can select health benefits for the following year.

• Tip: Ask about wellness programs. Some health insurers, including UnitedHealthcare, offer incentive-based wellness programs that provide financial rewards for completing health assessments, lowering your cholesterol, losing weight or even signing up for a health coaching program.

• Medicare Open Enrollment Period—Oct. 15 through Dec. 7

For most Medicare beneficiaries, the Open Enrollment Period is their only opportunity all year to make changes to their Medicare coverage.

• Tip: Think about what's changed regarding your health and your options. A lot can change in a year. Consider if your current plan is still meeting your health and budget needs. Medicare plans can change each year, too, so spend time reviewing the options available. Some Medicare Advantage plans offer additional benefits that can help enhance your health and well-being and save you money, such as vision coverage and hearing aids. You can compare your options using the plan finder tool at www.Medicare.gov.

• Health Insurance Exchanges—Oct. 1 through March 31

A public health insurance exchange may be a good option for people who are eligible to receive a government subsidy that lowers monthly premiums.

• Tip: Find out if you qualify for a subsidy. In general, subsidies are available to individuals who meet household income requirements and who are not eligible for certain government insurance programs (such as Medicaid) or do not have access to affordable coverage through their employer.

For helpful information and resources, visit UHC.com and MedicareMadeClear.com. To learn more about health insurance exchanges, visit www.healthcare.gov.