

Social Security Column

THE HUNT IS AFOOT FOR MEDICARE PART D

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Hunting season is open. But rather than hunting for game, may we recommend setting your sights for the Part D Medicare prescription drug plan that's best for you? You'll have more time than usual this year, because open season is lasting longer than usual.

If you currently are enrolled in Medicare and are considering changes to your Medicare Part D plan, act now. The "open season" runs from October 15 to December 7.

The Medicare Part D prescription drug program is available to all Medicare beneficiaries to help with the cost of medications. Joining a Medicare prescription drug plan is voluntary, and participants pay an additional monthly premium for the coverage.

While all Medicare beneficiaries can participate in the prescription drug program, some people with limited income and resources also are eligible for *Extra Help* to pay for monthly premiums, annual deductibles, and prescription co-payments. The *Extra Help* is estimated to be worth about \$4,000 per year. Many people qualify for these big savings and don't even know it.

To figure out whether you are eligible for the *Extra Help*, Social Security needs to know your income and the value of any savings, investments, and real estate (other than the home you live in). To qualify, you must be receiving Medicare and have:

- Income limited to \$16,755 for an individual or \$22,695 for a married couple living together. Even if your annual income is higher, you still may be able to get some help with monthly premiums, annual deductibles, and prescription co-payments. Some examples where your income may be higher include if you or your spouse:
 - Support other family members who live with you;
 - Have earnings from work; or
 - Live in Alaska or Hawaii; and

- Resources limited to \$13,070 for an individual or \$26,120 for a married couple living together. Resources include such things as bank accounts, stocks, and bonds. We do not count your house or car as resources.

You can complete an easy-to-use online application for *Extra Help* at www.socialsecurity.gov. Click on Medicare on the top right side of the page. Then click on “Get Extra Help with Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Costs.” To apply by phone or have an application mailed to you, call Social Security at 1-800-772-1213 (TTY 1-800-325-0778) and ask for the *Application for Extra Help with Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Costs* (SSA-1020). Or go to your nearest Social Security office.

And if you would like more information about the Medicare Part D prescription drug program, visit www.medicare.gov or call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227; TTY 1-877-486-2048).

So this open season, hunt for something that could put an extra \$4,000 in your pocket — bag the best Medicare prescription drug plan for you and see if you qualify for the *Extra Help* through Social Security. That’s a trophy worth displaying in your den.

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