



## **MAKING MEDICARE MAKE SENSE**

*Answers To Some of The Most Commonly Asked Medicare Questions*

**Q: How long will it take before my monthly Social Security check reflects the correct deduction amount of my Medicare prescription drug plan premium for 2008?**

*A:* If you are still seeing premium deductions in the amount of the premium for the plan that you had last year, instead of your new premium amount, it may take up to three months before your withholdings adjust to reflect the new premium amounts. Contact your new plan after 3 months if your premium withholding is not correct.

And, beneficiaries who receive their retirement benefits from other sources like the Railroad Retirement Board or Federal Employees Health Benefits cannot have their Part D premiums automatically withheld from their checks. They will need to either pay the plan directly or have the premiums withheld from their personal checking or savings account.

Also, if this past fall you enrolled in a Medicare prescription drug plan for the first time, and you elected to have the Medicare prescription drug monthly premium deducted from your monthly Social Security check, generally it takes two months before premiums are withheld from Social Security benefit payments. So, some folks will see two months worth of premiums withheld from their Social Security check. Sometimes, however, there are problems with the information sent to Medicare or Social Security to withhold the premiums. This can mean in some cases it will take three months for the premiums to be withheld. If a delay of more than 3 months occurs, or if your monthly Social Security benefit isn't enough to cover multiple premium payments at once, the premiums won't be deducted from the monthly Social Security benefit payment. In those cases, the beneficiary will be contacted by the prescription drug plan to see if they want to be billed directly for the premiums or if they want the premium to be automatically withdrawn from their checking or savings bank account.

**Q: Can you tell me about the Medicare savings programs that help pay for some of the out-of-pocket costs under the Medicare program such as the monthly Part B premium, deductibles, and co-payments?**

*A:* Yes. There are four different types of these programs, called the Medicare Savings Programs. You may qualify to get help paying for your Medicare Part A and/or Part B premiums (the monthly premium you have to pay to get Medicare Part B medical benefits, and Medicare Part A hospital insurance), and other out of pocket costs. These programs that have been around for awhile could save you up to \$1,122 in Medicare

expenses (like premiums, deductibles, and coinsurance), but some Medicare beneficiaries may not know about them.

- There are four Medicare Savings Programs:
  - Qualified Medicare Beneficiary (**QMB**)
  - Specified Low-Income Medicare Beneficiary (**SLMB**)
  - Qualifying Individual (**QI**)
  - Qualified Disabled & Working Individuals (**QDWI**)
- And, if you qualify for one of these programs, you automatically qualify for the extra help paying for out-of-pocket costs of Medicare prescription drugs, which is the low-income subsidy.

First, if a Medicare beneficiary can answer yes to these three important questions then they should apply for help paying medical costs. The three questions are below:

1. Do you have Medicare Part A, also known as hospital insurance? If you aren't sure, look on your red, white, and blue Medicare insurance card. Or, call Social Security at 1-800-772-1213. TTY users should call 1-800-325-0778.
2. Is your income for 2008 at or below these income limits?
  - For the Qualified Medicare Beneficiary (**QMB**) program- if an individual's income is at or below, \$887, and if married at or below \$1,187, then this program will pay for Part A premiums (if one has to pay for this, based on not enough work credits to get premium free Part A or hospital insurance.) and Part B monthly premiums, which is the premium you pay for your medical insurance and for most Medicare beneficiaries comes out of their Social Security check each month, and it also pays for other out of pocket costs such as deductibles, and copayments
  - For the Specified Low-Income Medicare Beneficiary (**SLMB**) program, which pays for Part B premiums only, an individual's income must be at or below \$1,060 and if married then at or below \$1,402.
  - For the Qualifying Individual (**QI**) program, which also pays for Part B premiums only, an individual's income must be at or below \$1,190 and if married then at or below \$1,595.
  - Finally, for the Qualified Disabled & Working Individuals (**QDWI**) program, which pays for Part A premiums only, which means this pays for the working disabled to have hospital insurance, one can find out the 2008 income guidelines by calling their local State Medical Assistance (Medicaid) office.

3. Are your resources for 2008 at or below \$4,000 for an individual or \$6,000 for a married couple? Resources include money in a checking or savings account, stocks, and bonds. When you count your resources, don't include your home, car, burial plot of up to \$1,500 for burial expenses, furniture, or other household items.

Also, if your monthly income changes, this may qualify you to move to a different category of help. Basically, the less income you have the more help you can receive. So, it is best to report your income as it changes.

It's very important to call or fill out an application if you think you qualify for one of these Medicare Savings Programs, even if your income or resources may be slightly higher than the amounts here. The only way to know if you qualify for sure is to apply, as you could be saving quite a bit of money each month. Call your State Medical Assistance (Medicaid) office to find out if you qualify. Call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) to get their telephone number or ask the operator at 1-800-Medicare for the number to call in your state to apply for the Medicare Savings Programs. TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048. Or as always you can visit [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) on the web, and under "Search Tools," select Helpful Phone Numbers and Websites.