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Dec. 7 is 2011 deadline to sign up for Medicare prescription plans

Earlier end this year; Medicare Information Office busy helping Alaskans choose best option

ANCHORAGE — Alaska's Medicare Information Office reminds Alaskans that Dec. 7 is the deadline to enroll in a Medicare prescription drug plan. This is earlier than past years.

Medicare Information Office counselors around the state are busy helping Alaskans compare the plans available. Alaskans can contact them 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday at 269-3680 in Anchorage or 1-800-478-6065 toll-free statewide. Alaskans can also get help from national Medicare counselors, at 1-800-Medicare (1-800-633-4227) or medicare.gov, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Companies' plans and people's medication needs often change, so it's a good idea to check new options each year for the best value.

Medicare charges its beneficiaries permanent late-enrollment fees if they do not sign up for Part D the first time they are eligible. Alaskans do not need to sign up for Part D if they already have prescription coverage through a health care insurance plan such as the military's TriCare or most employer-funded retiree health plans. Also, Alaskans who receive Medicaid as well as Medicare are exempt from enrollment deadlines. Questions? Contact Alaska's Medicare Information Office or Medicare.

Medicare is a federal health insurance program for Americans 65 and older or with certain disabilities.

The Medicare Information Office is part of the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Senior and Disabilities Services. For more information, visit medicare.alaska.gov.

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