

Medicare-Approved Drug Discount Cards

New Medicare-approved prescription drug discount cards will be available in June. **Before you buy a card, explore all your options.**

Existing drug discount cards may offer deeper discounts than a Medicare-approved card. Like existing discount cards, Medicare-

approved cards are offered by private companies. Medicare cards, however, will be stamped with Medicare's seal of approval. They generally offer discounts between 10 and 25 percent off the cost of some drugs.



1. Who can buy a Medicare-approved card?

Anyone who is eligible for Medicare and does not have Medicaid drug coverage can buy a Medicare discount card but first needs to decide if it is worth the cost (up to \$30 a year).

2. Will the card save me more than other discount programs?

Many existing discount programs offer substantial savings on certain drugs. Medicare-approved discount cards will give an estimated 10 to 25 percent discount off the retail price of certain drugs. Different cards will cover different drugs, so if you take two or more medications, you may not be able to find a card that gives discounts on all of them. Each Medicare card will only work at certain pharmacies. **Some Medicare cards will only work in a certain state** (or states) while others will work in all states.

3. Can I compare cards?

It will be hard to compare all discount programs available. Medicare's web site (www.medicare.gov) will have a "card comparison tool" that will show you the estimated price of drugs with each Medicare card, or you can call 800-MEDICARE for assistance. **For a list of other ways to save on your prescription drugs visit:** www.medicarerights.org/rxframeset.html.

4. Will the card help me more if my income is low?

Yes. If your income will be less than \$12,569 a year (\$16,862 for couples) in 2004, **the card is free and offers you up to \$1,200** towards the cost of your drugs (**flip over for more details**). If your income will be higher, **the cards will cost up to \$30 a year.**

5. When can I buy a card?

If you find that a Medicare-approved card gives you better savings than other discount programs, **you can buy any card offered in your state between May 2004 and the end of December 2005.** But if your Medicare private plan (HMO, PPO or PFFS) offers a discount card, you may only be able to join that plan's discount card program. You can switch Medicare drug cards between November 15 and December 31, 2004.

Should I buy a Medicare discount card?

- If you qualify for low-income assistance, **you should** probably get the card (also find out if you qualify for your state's prescription drug assistance program).
- If you already have prescription drug coverage or get discounts of 10-15 percent on your medications, you probably **do not need to** get a card.

You may find that other cost-saving options—such as mail-order pharmacies, Canadian pharmacies, drug manufacturer assistance programs and state drug assistance programs—will save you even more than a Medicare card would.

For a list of other ways to save on your prescription drugs visit:

www.medicarerights.org/rxframeset.html

When deciding whether to buy a Medicare-approved discount card consider:

- Which pharmacies are in the card's network.
- Whether the drugs you take are on the cards list of discounted drugs (if you take several medications, it may be difficult to determine which card offers the most savings and the card's list can change every week).
- What the final cost for each prescription you fill will be in the pharmacies you use regularly.
- If you travel often, whether the card will work nationally.

Low-Income Assistance

1. Who can get low-income assistance?

If your income is less than **\$12,569 a year (\$16,862 for couples)**, the government will pay the card's annual fee and 90 to 95 percent of your drug costs, up to a maximum of \$1,200 (\$600 in 2004 and \$600 in 2005). There is no asset test. You cannot get this assistance if you have prescription drug coverage from a current or former employer (including uniformed services) or from Medicaid.

2. How do I get low-income assistance?

If you are in a state drug assistance program, that program may offer its own card that gives you the \$1,200 worth of drug assistance. Otherwise, apply for the low-income assistance when you apply for a card. **There is a separate low-income assistance card application** that will ask your income, family size and any other prescription drug coverage you might have. You will find out if you will receive low-income assistance within a week after you apply. If you are denied assistance, you can appeal to Medicare.

3. What else should I know about low-income assistance?

- You can get low-income assistance through any Medicare-approved discount card.
- With a few exceptions, **you can apply your \$600 to the cost of almost any drug.**
- You can carry over unused money from 2004 to 2005.

Do you have more questions? Visit www.medicarerights.org.