



*Helping Older Persons With  
Legal & Long-Term Care  
Problems*

# **Medicare's Prescription Drug Discount Card Program**

---

## ***1. What Is A Medicare Discount Drug Card?***

In 2005, Medicare is allowing private companies to market discount drug cards to Medicare beneficiaries. Approximately forty-five Medicare Discount Drug Cards have been approved for Ohio. Each company offering these cards will negotiate the amount of the discount directly with the pharmaceutical companies on behalf of their members.

As a result, the cards are expected to obtain about a 20% discount off the retail price of a particular drug. For individuals with low incomes, Medicare will also pay \$600 a year towards the costs of the medications purchased with their Medicare Discount Drug Card.

## ***2. Who Should Get A Medicare Discount Drug Card?***

Anyone entitled to Medicare Part A or Part B is eligible to buy a Medicare Discount Drug Card unless they also have Medicaid prescription drug coverage. If your monthly income qualifies you for the special \$600 assistance in 2005, you should definitely participate in this program.

If you have retiree prescription drug coverage or you are already getting a 20% discount on your medications and have a monthly income greater than \$1,077(single) or \$1,444 (couple), the Medicare Discount Drug Program may or may not provide you with additional savings. You should definitely check the prices being offered by the Medicare Discount Drug Card companies several times over the next 12 months to see if this program will help you reduce your drug costs. The Medicare Discount Drug Card Program is purely voluntary and, unlike the 2006 Medicare drug benefit, there is no penalty for not participating in it.

## ***3. Who Is Eligible For The \$600 Medicare Prescription Drug Assistance In 2005?***

If your monthly income is about \$1,077 or less (\$1,444 for 2 persons) you will only have a 5% to 10% co-payment on your covered prescription medications until your \$600 credit is all used. There is no asset test to be eligible for this program. If you are

eligible, you will also not have to pay any enrollment fee charged by your discount card provider.

If you think you qualify for this special program, you should sign up for a Medicare Discount Drug Card and the \$600 interim assistance in 2005. If you do not have a lot of expenses for medications in 2005, you can still carry over this credit for use with a Medicare Discount Drug Card until May 15, 2006, as long as you do not terminate your participation in the program.

#### ***4. Will All My Medicines Be Covered By These Cards?***

Some cards will cover your medicines and some will not. Every card is required to provide a discount on at least one drug commonly used for each type of major illness. There are often 5 to 10 different medicines commonly used for treating a specific illness. If you take two or more medicines, you will want to make sure that the card you are choosing offers real discounts on each of your medicines.

#### ***5. Will The Amount Of Discount On A Medication Be The Same Regardless Of Which Card I Choose?***

No. Each card company negotiates the amount of their discount with the drug manufacturers and the pharmacies they use. Each company then decides how much of that discount to pass along to their members and how much to retain as profit.

#### ***6. Can I Use My Medicare Discount Drug Card At Any Pharmacy?***

Not every pharmacy will honor every Medicare Discount Drug Card. One of several important factors in choosing your Medicare Discount Drug Card should be which pharmacies will accept this particular Medicare Discount Drug Card.

#### ***7. Will The Savings From My Other Drug Cards Sometimes Be Better Than My Medicare Drug Discount Card?***

Yes. It is very possible that some other drug cards you already have will provide you with greater savings. These cards might include the non-Medicare Golden Buckeye card or a drug manufacturer's or pharmacy discount card. You might also receive better savings if you use an Internet or mail order pharmacy or get your medications from the Veterans Administration or a public health clinic. You should always double check and periodically go back and check again to ensure you are getting the best deal you can.

### ***8. How Many Medicare Discount Drug Cards May I Have At One Time?***

One. With only a few narrow exceptions, you will not be permitted to get a different Medicare Drug Discount Card after January 1, 2005. The Medicare Discount Drug Card companies have the right to change the medications they cover and the discount on those medications as often as they want.

### ***9. How Much Will These Cards Cost?***

The cards will cost no more than \$30 a year. If you qualify for the low-income assistance program, Medicare will pay this annual fee for you.

### ***10. How Do I Get A Medicare Drug Discount Card?***

If you live in Butler, Clermont, Clinton Hamilton, or Warren County, a list of approved cards and free individualized counseling is available by calling the Council on Aging of Southwestern Ohio at 513-345-8643 or 800-252-0155. If you live in other Ohio counties, you can get this help by contacting Medicare at 1-800-MEDICARE or the [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) website or the OSHIP program at 1-800-686-1578.

### ***11. How Do I Select A Medicare Discount Card Company?***

Staff at the Council on Aging of Southwestern Ohio, as well as the other agencies listed above, now have a computer program to help you compare the many cards. This computer program tracks which company's Medicare Drug Discount Card offers the best price for a particular drug. Staff at these agencies will guide you through this process and help you obtain the \$600 credit.

Once you have narrowed your list of cards that provide the greatest discounts on all of your medications, you should contact those companies directly and obtain their enrollment packets and review this information carefully to select the card that best fits your needs. If you believe you qualify for the special \$600 assistance program, you need to tell the Medicare Discount Drug Card company you need the special application for the \$600 assistance program.

You can also obtain generic application forms for these two programs from the Council on Aging of Southwestern Ohio at 513-345-8643 or 800-252-0155.

## ***12. Can I Get A Medicare Discount Drug Card If I Am In A Medicare HMO?***

Yes. If your HMO is offering a Medicare Discount Drug Card to only its members, you must use the HMO's card. You may also obtain the \$600 transitional assistance through your Medicare HMO's Discount Drug Program.

© Copyright 2005

---

Pro Seniors' Legal Hotline for Older Ohioans provides free legal information and advice by toll-free telephone to all residents of Ohio age 60 or older. If you have a concern that cannot be resolved over the phone, then the hotline will try to match you with an attorney who will handle your problem at a fee you can afford.

In southwest Ohio, Pro Seniors' staff attorneys and long-term care ombudsmen handle matters that private attorneys do not, such as nursing facility, adult care facility, home care, Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, protective services, insurance and landlord/tenant problems.

This pamphlet provides general information and not legal advice. The law is complex and changes frequently. Before you apply this information to a particular situation, call Pro Seniors' free Legal Hotline or consult an attorney in elder law.

Copyright © 2005 by:

Pro Seniors, Inc.  
7162 Reading Rd.  
Suite 1150  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45237

Switchboard: 513.345.4160  
Clients Toll-free: 800.488.6070  
Fax: 513.621.5613  
TDD: 513.345.4160

E-mail: [proseniors@proseniors.org](mailto:proseniors@proseniors.org)  
Web Site: [www.proseniors.org](http://www.proseniors.org)