



California Department of Insurance

Steve Poizner, Insurance Commissioner

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SENIOR ADVISORY

Topic: **MEDICARE ADVANTAGE PLANS & MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG PROGRAM**

This advisory was prepared by the California Department of Insurance to help seniors protect themselves against predatory insurance sales practices during open enrollment for Medicare Advantage plans and the Medicare Prescription Drug Program. Insurance is a difficult and challenging subject for anyone regardless of age, financial status, education, and experience. To help protect yourself from aggressive or deceptive sales practices, please consider these tips:

1. Be sure that the person you are dealing with is a licensed insurance agent. Contact the California Department of Insurance to verify license status. Insurance agents are required to print their license number on all business cards, quotations, and advertisements. Also, verify that the insurance company is licensed to do business in California.
2. Beware of uninvited sales calls or door-to-door visits. Federal regulations prohibit "cold calls" which may take the form of telephone solicitation or any other type of sales contact without your express invitation.
3. Never give out personal information such as your Social Security number, bank account numbers, or credit card information over the phone. Verify that the person you are dealing with is a licensed insurance agent with proper authority to act on behalf of the plan before you provide your Medicare number.
4. Be wary of any salesperson who says that he/she is a Medicare representative. Medicare does not send "representatives" to solicit your business.
5. Beware of an agent who approaches you in a place where health care is delivered (such as a doctor's office, clinic, or hospital) or at an educational event. Federal regulations prohibit the marketing of Medicare products in these settings.
6. Don't be tempted by an offer of a free meal for listening to a sales presentation or for signing up in a particular plan. Federal regulations prohibit this type of incentive in the marketing of Medicare products.
7. Do not fall victim to buying additional insurance products during any sales or marketing presentation for a Medicare Advantage or Prescription Drug Plan. Federal regulations prohibit this type of "cross-selling."
8. Be sure that the plan that you choose matches your needs and that you can continue to see your current health care providers if you wish. Also, understand the plan completely before enrolling. It may be very difficult or even impossible to "undo" your selection later.
9. Know that you have rights! Contact the California Department of Insurance if you have any questions about an insurance offer, scheme or agent.
10. You can get information about Medicare at www.medicare.gov, or by calling 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227). You may also contact the California Department of Aging's Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program (HICAP) at 1-800-434-0222 for assistance.