

Republican Leader Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Oversight & Investigations Hearing
“Protecting America’s Seniors: Oversight of Private Sector Medicare Advantage Plans”
June 28, 2022
As Prepared for Delivery

Popularity of the Medicare Advantage Program

Thank you, Madame Chair.

Medicare Advantage is a very popular and successful program.

For example, according to an eHealth poll, 88 percent of Medicare Advantage enrollees express satisfaction with their Medicare Advantage plan, and 86 percent would recommend it to family and friends.¹

Other surveys suggest that 61 percent of MA enrollees who were previously enrolled in another form of Medicare are more satisfied with MA while 24 percent say they are equally satisfied.

Medicare Advantage is popular because these plans offer supplemental benefits to its enrollees, including hearing, vision, dental, and fitness benefits.

Many of these benefits are only available to Medicare fee-for-service enrollees through additional insurance.

We know that many patients continue to switch over to Medicare Advantage for more savings and better options and benefits.

Moreover, the growth of “zero premium” Medicare Advantage plans and the peace of mind of a cap on their financial liability stands in stark contrast to the outdated structure of fee-for-service Medicare which can be confusing and more expensive.

¹https://news.ehealthinsurance.com/_ir/68/20225/Spotlight_On_Medicare_Advantage_eHealth_Survey_June2022.pdf

On average, MA patients report spending \$1,965 less on their out-of-pocket costs and premiums compared to Medicare fee-for-service.

For seniors on a fixed-income—who are especially pinched by inflation and surging energy costs—these savings make a huge difference in their lives.

Access to Medicare Advantage

Medicare Advantage gives them more choices too.

For 2022, the average Medicare beneficiary has access to 39 Medicare Advantage plans.

That's more than double the number of plans per person in 2017, and the largest number of options available in more than a decade.

OVERSIGHT

Still, there are improvements to be made.

Today's hearing is a welcomed opportunity to conduct oversight of the Medicare Advantage program to ensure it is providing adequate coverage and quality care.

Large areas of the country—including areas of my home state of Washington—have far fewer Medicare Advantage plans for people to choose and enroll in.²

Recently, I have heard at my town halls about counties losing their Medicare Advantage plans.

I have also met Washingtonians who have moved so that they can stay enrolled in Medicare Advantage.

People should not have to move to stay enrolled in a plan they want and that works for them.

Rather than limit seniors' choices ...

² Figure 4, <https://www.kff.org/medicare/issue-brief/medicare-advantage-2021-spotlight-first-look/>.

... we should take this opportunity to think creatively about how to expand greater Medicare Advantage availability, improve care, and lower costs, particularly in rural parts of the country.

OUR SOLUTIONS

I remain extremely concerned by proposals from my colleagues across the aisle that would ban Medicare Advantage plans and move everyone to a one-size-fits all government run plan.

We should be exploring solutions to improve Medicare Advantage, not dismantle it.

These include ideas to harmonize the prior authorization process, like the private sector-led Da Vinci Project...

... and solutions our members are working on to modernize the prior authorization process so it better serves patients and doctors.

We should be leading with solutions that ensure patients and their doctors can access treatments through an improved user-friendly electronic interface.

Proper oversight should inform this policy work.

I hope this hearing signals a genuine effort to make a successful program even stronger.

Again, any savings that are to be realized from this oversight and enhancing program integrity should be used to improve Medicare Advantage today and in the future...

... and not to lurch us toward a government-run health care system that won't meet the needs of seniors and hurt their quality of life.

CMS Should Be Here

I'll close by registering disappointment that the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services declined our invitation to participate in today's subcommittee hearing.

This reflects a pattern from the Biden administration of not participating in necessary oversight over our government's entitlement and mandatory spending programs.

As the federal agency that administers the Medicare program, CMS is best positioned to speak to the details and operations of the Medicare Advantage program.

This is a missed opportunity for CMS to be a partner in conducting oversight of an important program and helping the Committee develop solutions to strengthen Medicare Advantage.

While CMS is not here to provide their expertise and perspective, I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses about how we can strengthen the Medicare Advantage program to better serve its beneficiaries.

Thank you and I yield back.