

CENTERS FOR MEDICARE & MEDICAID SERVICES

Accountable Care Organizations and You: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for People with Medicare

Your doctors try hard to provide you with high quality care, but it can be a challenge to juggle information. Medicare wants to ensure that all doctors have the resources and information they need to coordinate your care.

That's why we're working with many doctors, hospitals, and other health care providers that have decided to work together to provide better, more coordinated health care. They have decided to participate in **Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs)**.

If your doctor, health care provider, or hospital decides to coordinate with other doctors through an ACO, you'll benefit because the doctors will be part of a better team. They will work together to get you the right care at the right time in the right setting.

If my doctor's in an ACO, can I still see whatever doctor I want?

Absolutely—if your doctor participates in an ACO, you can see any healthcare provider who accepts Medicare. Nobody—not your doctor, not your hospital—can tell you who you have to see.

Is an ACO a Health Maintenance Organization (HMO), managed care or an insurance company?

No. An ACO is a group of doctors, hospitals, and other health care providers who work together to provide you with better, more coordinated care. Doctors and hospitals in an ACO communicate with you **and** with each other to make sure that you get the care you need when you are sick, and the support you need to stay healthy and well. 2

An ACO isn't an HMO, managed care or insurance company. Unlike HMOs, managed care, or some insurance plans, an ACO can't tell you which health care providers to see and can't change your Medicare benefits. If your doctor participates in a Medicare ACO, you always have the right to choose any doctor or hospital who accepts Medicare at any time.

How do I know if my doctor is in an ACO? What should I expect if my doctor is in an ACO?

If your doctor chooses to participate in an ACO, you will be notified. This notification might be a letter, written information provided to you when you see your doctor, a sign posted in a hospital, or it might be a conversation with your doctor the next time you go to see him or her.

If you aren't sure if your doctor or healthcare provider is participating in a Medicare ACO, ask him or her. For general information on ACOs, call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) 24 hours a day 7/days a week. TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048.

Over time, if you see a doctor participating in an ACO, you may notice that:

- You don't have to fill out as many medical forms that ask for the same information;
- The health care providers that you see all know what is going on with your health because they communicate with each other;
- You don't have to have the same medical tests done over and over because your results are shared among your health care team;
- The providers participating in the ACO will become partners with you in making care decisions.
- Here are things that **won't** change because your doctor is part of an ACO:
- What you pay, your Medicare benefits, or the cost of your coverage should not increase;
- Your right to choose any hospital or doctor that accepts Medicare, at any time, will not change even if that hospital or doctor is not part of an ACO.³

Some ACOs may hire people to help check on your care. They may call you after an appointment or a procedure to make sure you understand how to take your medicines or schedule follow-up visits. They will also share information with your doctor to make sure you get the right care.

What rights do I have if my doctor is in an ACO?

You will continue to receive the same rights enjoyed by all people with Medicare. To help you to get the best-coordinated care, Medicare will share information about your medical information with your doctor's ACO, including medical conditions, prescriptions, and visits to the doctor. This is important to help the ACO keep up with your medical needs and track how well the ACO is doing to keep you healthy and helping you get the right care.

Your privacy is very important to us, so you may choose to have your name and other personal information removed from the information that Medicare shares with your doctor by doing one of these things:

- calling 1-800-MEDICARE (TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048); or
- signing a form available in your doctor or other healthcare provider's office, which you may also receive in the mail from your doctor.

If you receive a letter from your doctor, unless you take one of these steps, your medical information will be shared automatically starting 30 days from the date you are notified.

Medicare won't share information about anyone who has ever received treatment for alcohol or substance abuse without written permission. If you have received treatment for alcohol or substance abuse and want Medicare to share that information with your doctor's Medicare ACO complete the "Alcohol or Substance Abuse Medical Data Sharing Form" and mail it in.

Starting in 2013, Medicare will also be following up with people with Medicare to ask about your experiences as a patient of a doctor who is participating in a Medicare ACO. As time gets closer, you will get a letter to let you know the survey is genuine. Medicare will use your feedback to help make sure you get high quality care. **4**

Who can read my medical information? And will it be protected?

The group of doctors, hospitals, and other health care providers working together in the ACO will be able to read your medical records, along with other office staff authorized to help coordinate your care.

The privacy and security of your medical information is protected by Federal law. Contact your doctor's office for more information about how they protect your medical information, or call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) 24 hours a day/7 days a week. TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048.

How will an ACO lead to better care for me?

When your health care providers have access to your health information and are able to share that information with one another, they can give you better, more coordinated care. Each of your health care providers will not only know about the health issues that they have treated, they will have a more complete picture of your health through communicating with your other health care providers.

If your health care providers are participating in an ACO, over time, you should see better more coordinated health care where you are the center of care and your satisfaction is a goal of the ACO.

Where can I find more information about ACOs?

For more information about ACOs, you can do the following:

- Visit www.cms.gov/ACO/.
- Visit www.Medicare.gov/ACO.
- Talk to your doctor.
- Call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) 24 hours a day/7 days a week. TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048.