

People unable to enroll in Medicare due to pandemic have extra time

June 3, 2020



Thanks to California Health Advocates' collaborative efforts with advocates state and nationwide, people who were unable to enroll in Medicare during the normal enrollment periods due to the COVID-19 pandemic, now have extra time. This extra time, referred to by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) as "equitable relief," is for enrolling in Medicare Part B, premium-free Part A or refusing automatic Part B enrollment.

"We are thrilled by CMS' announcement of this extra time," said Doug Shaw, Board Chair with California Health Advocates. "It is an essential protection that will save lives. Without it, thousands of Medicare-eligible beneficiaries who have lost their jobs due to COVID-19 would have to wait at least 12 months to get their Medicare benefits, a delay which could have serious health consequences, potentially death."

People may be eligible for this equitable relief if they were unable to enroll in Medicare Part A or Part B because of delays and problems accessing the Social Security Administration (SSA) to file an application or enrollment, as a result of the unexpected, pandemic-induced closure of field offices. This extra time/equitable relief is retroactive to March 17 and extends three months through June 17.

In addition, CMS announced that the Special Enrollment Period (SEP) they have for beneficiaries affected by a FEMA-declared weather-related emergency or other major disaster is now applicable for COVID-19. This means that people who missed an opportunity to change their Medicare Advantage and/or Part D plans due to the COVID pandemic, now have a SEP to make a change.

This SEP is available nationwide to beneficiaries of all states, tribes, territories and the District of Columbia effective March 1 and runs through June 30.

People in Del Norte County who have questions or need assistance with either the SEP for Part D and MA plans or equitable relief/extra time to enroll in Medicare Part A or B, call the HICAP offices at 707- 444-3000 and leave a detailed message. HICAP will return it within 48 hours.