

Frequently Asked Questions

Helpful Tips for ACO Beneficiaries

Medicare wants to make sure that your doctors can provide you with coordinated care. That's why we're working with many doctors, hospitals and health care providers to care for you better. They have decided to participate in Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs).

As part of an ACO, your doctors can form a better team. This is a benefit for you when you navigate the health care system. You get the right care at the right time in the right setting.

Q: If my doctors are in an ACO, can I still see whatever doctor I want?

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

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

A: No. An ACO isn't an HMO, managed care or insurance company. 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. 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.

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

A: If your doctor chooses to participate in an ACO, you will be notified. The type of notification depends on your doctor or hospital. If you aren't sure if your doctor or health care provider is participating in a Medicare ACO, ask them. For general information on ACOs, call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) 24/7. 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
- All of your health care providers know what is going on with your health
- Your medical tests are shared with all of your providers, so you don't need to keep taking tests over and over again

Things that won't change because your doctor is part of an ACO:

- The amount you pay, your Medicare benefits or an increase in the cost of your coverage
- Your right to choose any hospital or doctor that accepts Medicare, even if that hospital or doctor is not part of an ACO.

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.

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

A: 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. This includes 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.

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

A: The group of doctors, hospitals and other health care providers working together in the ACO will be able to read your medical records. In addition, other office staff authorized to help coordinate your care can read your medical information. 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) any time day or night. TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048.

Q: How will an ACO lead to better care for me?

A: When your health care providers have access to your health information and can 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, but they will also 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, you should see better, more coordinated health care over time. You are the center of your care, and your satisfaction is a goal of the ACO.

Q: Where can I find more information about ACOs?

A: 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)
- TTY users, call 1-877-486-2048