Evaluating Your Health Insurance Needs and Options

Facilitator Guide

Nothing external to you has any power over you.
— Ralph Waldo Emerson

Rationale: With the recent introduction of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) and a growing number of individuals becoming Medicare eligible, it is important to ensure that individuals and families understand the health insurance options available to them. In addition, careful planning eliminates the stress associated with evaluating health insurance options. Recognizing which choices exist and developing a strategic plan to assess the plan that most appropriately meets your needs are key to becoming an informed consumer.

Target Audience: The program is appropriate for individuals and families who are in need of a health insurance plan or are interested in evaluating alternative options to their current health insurance plan.

Program Goal: To evaluate your health insurance needs and investigate health insurance options.

Program Objectives:
- To identify health care wants and needs
- To identify strategies for developing a planned buying process for a health insurance plan
- To assist participants in understanding Medicare and Medicare options

Program Duration: The program will take approximately 45 minutes to complete.

Preprogram Preparation:
Copy Evaluating Your Health Insurance Needs publication.
- Copy Planned Buying: Health Care handout.
- Copy Prioritizing Health Care Options handout.
- Ensure that there is seating for interested program participants.
- Writing utensils should be provided.

Introduction: Insurance is designed to protect individuals and families against the unexpected. Home, auto and health insurance protect against disaster, accidents and illness. Many employers offer health insurance to their employees. However, people who are unemployed, self-employed, retired or who have too little coverage now have the opportunity
to purchase health insurance through the Health Benefit Marketplace. Individuals over the age of 65 and some individuals with disabilities are also eligible to enroll in a Medicare plan. Before selecting and purchasing health insurance, it is important to evaluate what you need and want in a health insurance plan.

**Introduction Activity:** As the facilitator, explain that many individuals, families and households are left feeling overwhelmed when it comes to selecting a health insurance plan. We all face the challenges of selecting an affordable health insurance plan that provides us with adequate coverage when needed.

Ask participants to discuss the following questions:
- Do you view the health insurance process as one that is easily navigated?
- What stressors, if any, have you experienced when selecting a health insurance plan?
- Do you believe that you are currently enrolled in the most appropriate health insurance plan?

State to the group that, yes, many individuals feel the same way that you do about evaluating and selecting a health insurance plan. However, it is important to realize that we do not need to experience the stress. Rather, we can develop a plan to become an informed consumer by evaluating and selecting a plan that best meets our needs.

**Objective 1: Identify health care wants and needs.**

As the facilitator, explain — regardless of whether individuals are currently enrolled in a health insurance plan — that the first step is to identify health care wants and needs. Knowing your wants and needs can help ensure that you have adequate coverage when it is needed. For example, do you need a health insurance plan that only covers routine doctor’s visits or do you need a plan with a wider range of services? Second, take some time to think about the medical services that you and your family have used over the last year. Keep in mind that some of these medical expenses occur annually but that other medical expenses are impossible to predict. Examples of medical expenses to consider are routine doctor visits, sick doctor visits, urgent treatment center visits, emergency room visits, etc. It is also important to anticipate upcoming changes in your family. For example, are you planning to become pregnant or do you have an older child who may soon be dropped from your health plan?

**Learning Activity 1: Prioritizing Your Health Care Options**

Ask the group members if they have ever taken the time to think about their health care wants and needs. It is important to realize that individuals and families have a choice in deciding what health care options are important to them. Provide the participants with the *Prioritizing Your Health Care Options* handout. Ask the participants to take three to five minutes to complete the handout. Following the exercise lead a discussion with the participants, using the following questions as prompts:
- Prior to this exercise, were you aware that there were so many options to consider?
- Did your responses surprise you in any way?
- Do you feel like your current health care plan addresses your priorities?
Explain to the group that it is easy to enroll in health care plans without considering these priorities but that taking the time to prioritize your options will allow you to wisely select a health care plan.

**Objective 2: Identify strategies for developing a planned buying process for a health insurance plan.**

Explain to the participants that there are a few basics that need to be discussed and understood when evaluating health care plans and deciding which plan to buy. All health insurance plans will cover the same essential health benefits. There are key health services that these plans must cover such as outpatient hospital care and mental health care. However, health expenses are attached to these services. The expenses associated with health insurance policies are deductibles, copayments, out-of-pocket maximums and premiums. Generally speaking, there are trade-offs between deductibles, copayments, out-of-pocket maximums and premiums. For example, you may select a lower deductible in exchange for paying a higher premium. You also need to consider the network policies associated with various health care plans. For example, some health insurance plans will only cover services performed by or at a specific list of providers. Some of these policies will not cover out-of-network providers.

With the knowledge that there are expenses associated with health care insurance, there are seven steps that you should keep in mind when selecting a health care plan:

1. Prioritizing health care wants (as discussed in Learning Activity 1)
2. Pre-shopping research to see what is available to you
3. Fitting your budget
4. Comparison shopping between multiple health care policies
5. Negotiating to ensure your costs are affordable
6. Making the decision
7. Evaluating your decision

**Learning Activity 2: Health Care Planned Buying Process**

Divide the participants into three groups and pass out the *Health Care Planned Buying Process* handout. If the group is particularly large, you may consider five groups. Five to seven participants per group would be considered ideal. Ask the groups to identify a recorder and a spokesperson. Ask the group to complete the handout by identifying one way to accomplish each step illustrated in the *Health Care Planned Buying Process* handout. Following completion of the handout, ask each group to share its strategy with everyone.

**Objective 3: Assist participants in understanding Medicare and Medicare options.**

As the facilitator, explain that the majority of Americans over the age of 65 are enrolled in a Medicare plan. Medicare is a federal health insurance program for people 65 or older, certain younger people with disabilities, and people with end-stage renal disease. The Medicare program contains four parts that cover different services:

- Medicare Part A (hospital insurance): Coverage is provided by Medicare and covers inpatient hospital stays, care in a skilled nursing facility, hospice care and some home health care services.
- Medicare Part B (medical insurance): Coverage provided by Medicare that covers certain doctors’ services, outpatient care, medical supplies and preventive services.
- Medicare Part C (Medicare Advantage Plus): Coverage provided by a private company that contracts with Medicare to provide Part A and B benefits.
- Medicare Part D (prescription drug coverage): Part D adds prescription drug coverage through plans offered by insurance companies.

Explain to the participants that there are 3 important steps to consider when choosing a Medicare plan:
- Step 1: Decide which plan (Part A, B or C) you would like to enroll in.
- Step 2: Decide if you want prescription drug coverage. If you are enrolled in Part A or B, you must choose and join a Medicare prescription drug plan. Part C enrollees must enroll in prescription drug coverage through their plan.
- Step 3: Decide if you want supplemental coverage which is designed to help pay some health care costs not covered by Medicare (copayments and deductibles). You can choose a Medigap policy from a private company.

**Learning Activity 3:** Understanding Medicare Coverage Choices

Divide the participants into three groups. If the group is particularly large, you may consider five groups. Five to seven participants per group would be considered ideal. Ask the groups to identify a recorder and a spokesperson. Challenge the participants to spend five minutes discussing which Medicare options seem most appropriate to them now or in the future using the following considerations:

1. Coverage
2. Your other coverage
3. Costs
4. Doctor and hospital choice
5. Prescription drugs
6. Quality of care
7. Convenience
8. Travel

Ask the participants to share their reasoning with each other, emphasizing the importance of peer feedback.

**Summary:**
The stress of evaluating your health insurance needs and options can feel overwhelming. However, by developing and implementing strategies that will assist you in selecting an appropriate plan for you and your family, you can avoid additional stress.

**Summary Activity:**
Remind participants of the importance of keeping an end goal in mind. Ask participants to quickly reflect on what they identified as top health care priorities. Examples may include
access to a particular health care provider or yearly wellness visits. Then challenge participants to remember what they have identified as important as they move forward with their health care plan decisions.

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