Fewer Medicare Advantage Plan Members Actively Managed Their Health during Pandemic, J.D. Power Finds

Kaiser Foundation Health Plan Ranks Highest among Medicare Advantage Plans

TROY, Mich.: 17 June 2021 — In a year when it seemed like everyone was focused on healthcare, fewer Medicare Advantage plan members actively managed their care. Medicare Advantage plans are also known as Medicare Part C or Part D. According to the J.D. Power 2021 U.S. Medicare Advantage Study, released today, although overall customer satisfaction with Medicare Advantage plans has significantly increased year over year, plans are still struggling when it comes to member communication and engagement.

“Medicare Advantage plans have begun to position themselves as community health organizations, realizing that the key to better outcomes is more active engagement with members to encourage preventive health and smart utilization of provider resources,” said James Beem, managing director of global healthcare intelligence at J.D. Power. “However, despite recognizing the importance of member engagement, many plans are struggling when it comes to information and communication. When plans do get that engagement formula right, satisfaction, advocacy and retention all improve significantly.”

Following are some of the key findings of the 2021 study:

- **Members’ active management of care declines in 2021**: Slightly more than half (55%) of Medicare Advantage plan members actively managed their care in the past year, a decline of nine percentage points from 2019. The two most common ways in which plan members actively manage healthcare are checking whether a treatment or service is covered and asking their doctor or pharmacist for a generic drug instead of a brand name.

- **Communication still misses mark**: Despite improvements in satisfaction with information and communication this year, it is the lowest-performing factor evaluated in the study. Overall satisfaction scores are 54 points higher (on a 1,000-point scale) when members successfully engage with their plan to ask a question or solve a problem than when they have no engagement at all.

- **New members cite worse health, lower income than established members**: Just 34% of new Medicare Advantage plan members (those ages 65-68 or in their first year with the plan) say they are in “very good” or “better” health and 46% say they have an annual income of $50,000 or more. These compare with 39% of established plan members (ages 69+ and not in the first year of the plan) who say they are in “very good” or “better” health and 56% who earn $50,000 or more.

- **Health plan portals show promise**: More than three-fourths (78%) of Medicare Advantage members are registered for their health plan’s member portal—up four percentage points from last year. Two-thirds of members have logged in to their health plan’s portal. Portal use is associated with higher levels of satisfaction and improved member engagement.

**Study Rankings**

Kaiser Foundation Health Plan ranks highest in Medicare Advantage plan overall satisfaction, with a score of 846. Highmark (834) ranks second and Cigna HealthSpring (822) ranks third.
The study, now in its seventh year, measures member satisfaction with Medicare Advantage plans—also known as Medicare Part C or Part D—based on six factors (in order of importance): coverage and benefits; provider choice; cost; customer service; information and communication; and billing and payment.

The 2021 Medicare Advantage Study is based on the responses of 3,359 members of Medicare Advantage plans across the United States. It was fielded from January through March 2021.


To view the online press release, please visit http://www.jdpower.com/pr-id/2021065.

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NOTE: One chart follows.
J.D. Power
2021 U.S. Medicare Advantage Study℠

Overall Customer Satisfaction Index Ranking
(Based on a 1,000-point scale)

Kaiser Foundation Health Plan 846
Highmark 834
Cigna HealthSpring 822
Humana 822
Industry Average 806
Anthem 797
Aetna 795
UnitedHealthcare 795
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan 788
Centene 769

Source: J.D. Power 2021 U.S. Medicare Advantage Study℠

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