

Medicare Shared Savings Plan ACO FAQs

1. What is an ACO?

An Accountable Care Organization (ACO) is a group of doctors and other healthcare providers who agree to work together with Medicare to give you the best possible care. ACOs may take different approaches to giving you coordinated care. Some ACOs may have special nurses that help you set up appointments or make sure your medications are in order when you enter or leave a hospital. Other ACOs may help your doctors get you equipment for monitoring your medical conditions better at home if you need it. Most ACOs use advanced systems that let them more carefully coordinate your care, and make sure your doctor has the most up-to-date information about your health.

The goal of the ACO is to support your doctor in caring for you by making sure they have the most up-to-date information about your health and your care. For you, this means your doctors communicate better with each other, and you avoid having duplicate tests or answering the same questions over and over. Working together, your doctors can do more to follow your health, make sure you get the best possible care, and may hire additional staff to help meet your unique care needs, depending on what works best for you.

Doctors and other healthcare providers choose to participate in an ACO because they're committed to providing you with a better care experience. They may also be rewarded for offering you better, more coordinated care. If your doctor chooses to participate in an ACO, you will be notified, either in person or by letter.

An ACO isn't the same as a Medicare Advantage Plan or Health Maintenance Organization (HMO). You're still in Original Medicare, and your Medicare benefits, services, rights and protections won't change. And you still have the right to use any doctor or hospital that accepts Medicare at any time, the same way you do now.

2. How do I know if my doctor is in an ACO?

If you received the Medicare beneficiary notification letter, then your doctor is participating in an ACO. You will receive more information the next time you are in the office. Please visit the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services website for more information.

3. If I have not been notified that my doctor is in an ACO, what do I need to do?

You don't need to do anything right now. Your doctor decided to participate in an Accountable Care Organization (ACO). Even though your doctor is participating in an ACO, your Medicare benefits won't change. You'll still be in Original Medicare, and you'll still have the right to use any doctor or hospital that accepts Medicare, at any time.

4. Do I have to participate in an ACO since my doctor is?

Only your doctor participates in an Accountable Care Organization (ACO). You do not participate in the ACO. You still have the right to see any doctor or hospital that accepts Medicare, at any time. You can continue getting care from your doctor, or you can choose to see a doctor who doesn't participate in an ACO.

5. Can I still see all of my regular Medicare doctors and healthcare providers even though my doctor participates in an ACO?

It's important to know that:

- You can still go to any doctor, hospital, or other provider that accepts Medicare. Nobody can restrict which providers you see.
- You are still in Original Medicare.

- You are still entitled to all the same Medicare services, benefits, and protections.

6. Can I still choose to receive services from any new doctor, hospital or healthcare provider that I want to even though my doctor is participating in an ACO?

You can still choose to go to any doctor, hospital, or other healthcare provider that accepts Medicare. Nobody – not even your doctor – can prevent you from seeing the doctors, hospitals or providers you want.

7. What information about me will the ACO have access to?

To help doctors who participate in an ACO give patients like you the best possible care, Medicare wants to share some additional information about your care with them. This information includes things like doctor, hospital, and pharmacy visits in the past and moving forward. This information helps your doctor and the other ACO providers track the services you've already gotten, understand where you may need more care, and find ways to smooth the path for you if you have to transfer in or out of a hospital, or from the care of one doctor to another. If you decide you do not want to have the information about your care shared with the ACO, you can do so.

8. How can I decline to have my personal health information shared?

We value your privacy, so it's important to know that you can prevent Medicare from sharing this information at any time. You can prevent your information from being shared by calling 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227). TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048 and tell the operator you are calling about ACOs.

9. What if I change my mind and decide that I do want my personal health information shared in the future?

If you change your mind in the future, you can call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) and tell them that you have changed your mind and that you do want your data shared. You will receive a letter confirming this change.

10. How long do I have to respond to say that I do not want my personal health information shared with the ACO?

Medicare values your privacy. For that reason, you can prevent Medicare from sharing your personal health information, or otherwise change any of your preferences, at any time. Just call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227), and they can help you set your preferences the way you want them.

11. I recently enrolled in a Medicare Advantage Plan, but I also received a notice that my doctor was part of an ACO, does that change anything?

Because you chose to enroll in a Medicare Advantage Plan, the notice you received about Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs) is no longer accurate. Please disregard it.

12. What if I am already happy with my care the way it is?

We're glad you're having a positive experience already. Your doctor is participating in an ACO, you can continue to see him or her the way you have been. Your doctor's participation in an ACO won't change your benefits in any way, and decisions about your care stay with you and your doctor.

13. How will being in an ACO help my doctor?

Doctors in ACOs may have better access to the expertise, staff, and technology they need to make sure your care is coordinated across all the places you get services. For you, this coordination could mean less paperwork to fill out at the doctor's office, avoiding unnecessary tests, or more help for you in dealing with any health conditions.

14. How can I have the letter I received about my doctor's ACO participation translated into another language?

Medicare recognizes that some beneficiaries may need to get the information in the notification letters in a language other than English. For that reason, 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) staff can have someone read information about ACOs to you over the phone in your preferred language. Is that something that would be helpful to you? If so, please call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227).

15. Can I receive a written translation of the letter I received from my doctor?

1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) cannot provide you with a written version of the letter at this time. Your doctor's office has translated letters available. Please know that you can always call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) to get the information verbally, over the phone.

16. My relative received a letter from the ACO, but they passed away recently, what do I need to do?

We are sorry to hear about your loss. These letters were sent because of your relative's history of receiving care from this doctor who is participating in the ACO. We used official information that we had at the time. You do not need to do anything further—over time, your relative will be removed from the list.