



YOUR MONEY YOUR FUTURE ...

Beware of scammers using Medicare to defraud you

- Criminals want to get their hands on your personal information to defraud Medicare or steal your identity.
- Older Americans tend to lose more per reported fraud than younger consumers.
- If you're called unsolicited and asked for your personal information, it's a red flag.

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As older Americans sort through their options during [Medicare open enrollment](#), they might discover an unwanted complication: fraudsters.

"Scammers are opportunistic, and they take advantage of whatever topics are in the news and on people's minds," said Katherine Hutt, national spokesperson for the Better Business Bureau.

Open enrollment, which lasts through Dec. 7, is when Medicare beneficiaries can make changes to a [Medicare Advantage Plan](#) (Part C) or [prescription drug coverage](#) (Part D).

While criminals prey on people year-round, this annual fall window marks a prime time for scammers to impersonate a government agency, as older Americans are more likely to be dealing with Medicare-related issues.

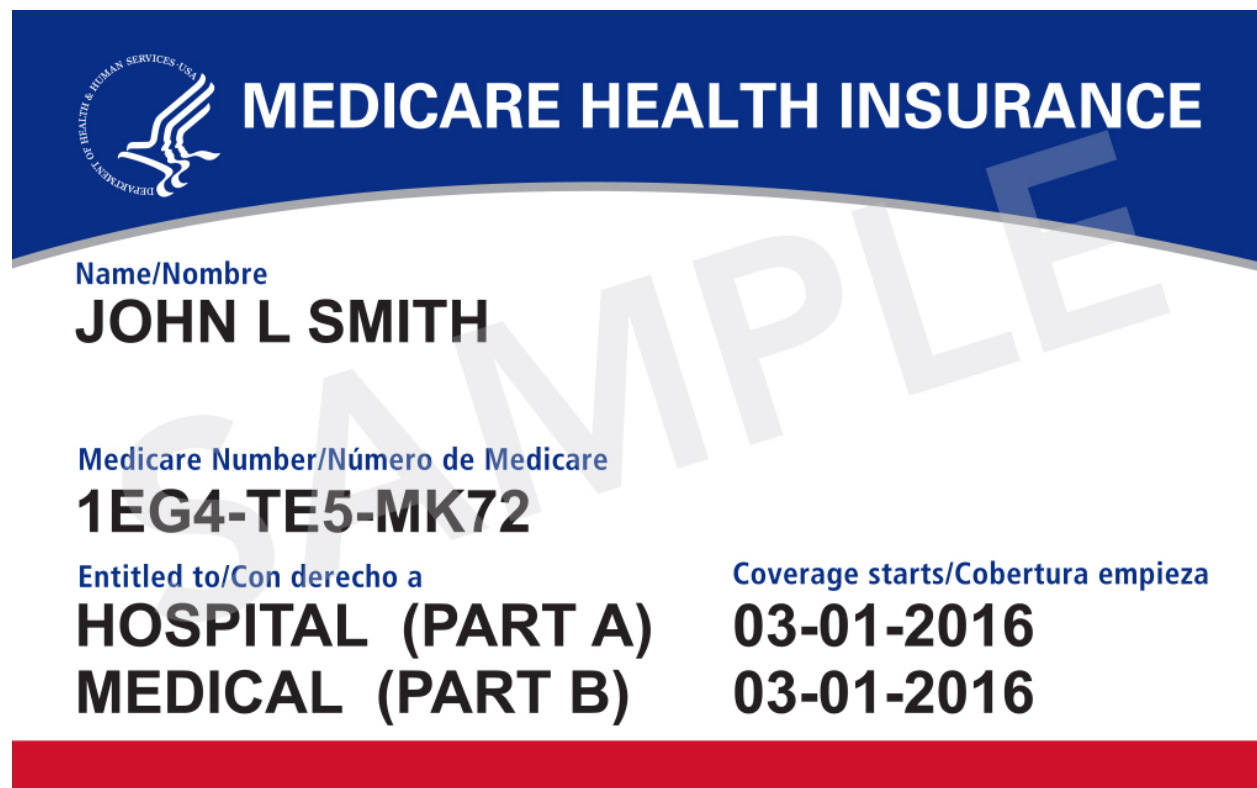
"All their tactics are designed to fool consumers into thinking they are dealing with a legitimate source," Hutt said.

Older Americans are frequent targets of financial scams in general, and about 12 percent are victims, according to the BBB's Scam Tracker Annual Risk Report. While the rate of susceptibility among retirees is lower than in younger age groups, the per-scam loss amount tends to be higher.

For instance, among the 65-and-older crowd in 2016, the median loss was \$390. For consumers age 18 to 24, that amount was \$200, although those younger folks are three times more likely to become a fraud victim.

One scam that tends to intensify every fall involves a caller, claiming to be with Medicare, who says they are updating or confirming your information. The person asks for your Social Security number, which currently serves as your Medicare identification number. They might be trying to defraud Medicare, cheat you, or simply get enough information about you to steal your identity for use at a later time.

"The scariest scams are those that threaten you, tell you that you've done something wrong and face fines or even jail time," Hutt said. "The federal government will never make threatening calls like that so, if you get one, just hang up."



The image shows a sample Medicare Health Insurance card. At the top left is the Department of Health & Human Services USA logo. The title "MEDICARE HEALTH INSURANCE" is prominently displayed in white on a dark blue background. Below this, the cardholder's name "JOHN L SMITH" is listed. The Medicare Number is "1EG4-TE5-MK72". The card details coverage for Hospital (Part A) and Medical (Part B), both starting on 03-01-2016. A large "SAMPLE" watermark is overlaid diagonally across the card. A solid red bar is at the bottom.

Name/Nombre	JOHN L SMITH
Medicare Number/Número de Medicare	1EG4-TE5-MK72
Entitled to/Con derecho a	Coverage starts/Cobertura empieza
HOSPITAL (PART A)	03-01-2016
MEDICAL (PART B)	03-01-2016

The latest scam focuses on the new ID card all Medicare recipients will receive sometime between April 2018 and April 2019. The cards, which will be automatically sent, will include a randomly generated ID number instead of your Social Security number.

Scammers are well aware of the upcoming change. The Federal Trade Commission is warning Medicare recipients that if someone calls to confirm your personal information on the card, or says you must pay a fee to receive the new card, it's a scam.

Yet another scam currently circulating involves a call from someone pretending to be with Medicare who says they have a new back or knee brace to send. The caller asks for the person's Medicare number so they can send the equipment. A variation on this could involve diabetes drugs or other medical supplies.

Other times, scammers say you're owed a refund from your insurance company and the caller needs your bank account number and Social Security number to deposit it.

"What makes it convincing is that these scammers can have accurate information on you, which makes them seem legitimate." -Josh Norris, senior health insurance agent for Comprehensive Financial Consultants

"If you're really owed a refund, the insurance company will send it directly, not by way of someone calling you or coming to your door," said Josh Norris, senior health insurance agent at Comprehensive Financial Consultants in Bloomington, Indiana.

"What makes it convincing is that these scammers can have accurate information on you, which makes them seem legitimate," Norris said.

Scammers also use the internet to do their dirty work. Beware of emails urging you to call or click on a link related to your Medicare plan. Generally speaking, it is illegal for anyone to reach out to you, unsolicited, about your coverage, whether via by phone or email.

"Never give money or information to someone who contacts you unsolicited, and be careful what links you click on when searching online," Hutt said.

To report a suspected scam, visit the BBB [Scam Tracker](#). Alternatively, if you suspect Medicare fraud, you can call 800-MEDICARE or [report it online](#).