

ASK THE MEDICARE SPECIALIST

Question from Bonnie, The Health Insurance Store's managing agent at our Forest Hills office location: I've done around 250 Supplement applications in the just the last two months for current clients who recently got large rate increases. On average, I've saved each about \$50 per month. That's a total combined savings of \$150,000 for just these 250 people in the next 12 months! We didn't have to mail out those 3,000 letters recommending they consider moving companies. We did it as a courtesy, and I think it speaks volumes about the level of care and customer service folks get by becoming a client. Can you write a column about that?

Answer: Bonnie sent me this in a text last week, and it got me wondering how much money we actually save our clients each year. The Medicare insurance field gets more crowded every day because commissions can be very generous and the industry lucrative. What has set The Health Insurance Store apart from others since the day we opened on April 1st, 2008, is our commitment to providing second to none customer service when someone puts their trust in us to help them apply for a Medicare Supplement or Advantage Plan.

In preparation for this column, I sent the following email to the eight hardworking, caring, and dedicated agents who are employed at The Health Insurance Store:

Bonnie had a great idea for a column. She pointed out that just in the last two months she's done 250 Cigna applications for people who already had another Supplement with us. Her average savings for clients is \$50/month which means she's saved these people a total of \$150,000 for the next year.

I'm hoping each of you can find the time to see how many underwritten Supplement applications you've done since we sent out the letters so we can get a total of what we've saved those clients.

I have a couple other questions for you all. How often do you call and correct

bills for people? What is the average size of those bills? What are some of the largest you've fixed?

How often do you help someone apply for PACENET or give out an application for a Patient Assistance Program to get Ozempic, Trulicity, or other meds so people can get them for free?

How often do you apply for people to get their Part B paid by the state?

How often do you discover someone is eligible for Medical Assistance and help them apply?

What else do we do for people that results in them saving money and how often?

Below is one of the responses I got from Jennifer Chaney, who has been with us since 2014 and got her health and Medicare insurance license in 2016, with examples of how she has helped people so far this year and how much money they saved:

- 40 underwritten Supplement applications. **Annual average savings \$600 per person.**
- 2 Part B premium assistance applications that were approved. **Annual savings \$2,220 per person.**
- 5 PACE/PACENET applications that were approved. I was then able to help them switch to other less expensive Advantage Plans with better co-pays and benefits. **Average annual savings approximately \$2,000 per person.**
- 13 Medical Assistance or CHIP applications and renewals that were approved. **It's hard to say exactly what the average savings are for these folks, but it can easily be as much as \$5,000 or more per person considering they now have or get to keep plans with no premiums or out of pocket medical expenses.**

- 8 (at least) calls about billing help of **which the highest I had to fix was over \$11,489** (this was submitted by provider as self-pay and never sent to the client's insurance. It has been resolved).
- 2 with help for private Patient Assistance Programs for medications. **Annual savings \$2,000 per person.**
- 2 with Food stamps and other programs outside of healthcare which were approved. **Average annual savings of \$2,500 per person.**
- 1 with getting medicine out of Canada. **Savings over \$1,200 annually.**
- 3 with charity programs like WVU Cares and UPMC Financial Assistance. **Hard to quantify exactly, but the total savings for the 3 were in the thousands.**

From Jennifer's list, you can see we also assist clients with things that aren't even related to their health or Medicare policies.

I got similar responses from the other agents as well. Chelsea, our newest agent, pointed out that we often help people who get charged IRMAA, extra premiums for Medicare Part B and D that can be over \$500 per month, file an appeal to get that "tax" reduced or eliminated. Most people we help have no idea that's an option. We've saved married couples as much as \$24,000 over a two year period by making sure they're aware of their rights, providing them with the necessary paperwork and instructions. Every year we advise hundreds of clients on how to reduce IRMAA.

So far, in 2025, I and the other agents have helped more than 700 people lower their Supplement premiums by moving them to a different company or letter plan, or even reapplying with their current company. Again, if each had their rates reduced by just \$50 per month, the total first year savings for those clients is \$420,000!

I feel confident that with all the other help and advocacy we provide clients, we will surpass \$1 million dollars in total savings for them in 2025. It's a very rewarding part of our job, especially with the reality of ever-rising costs of daily living that almost outpace any increases in income seniors get.

Lastly, because of the hard work of the agents and loyalty from our clients, almost 10 years ago I was able to start a 501(c)(3) and help it grow into a thriving program for Fayette County children. The organization is One Voice One Community. We have after-school and summer programs that provide support, mentorship, and educational opportunities for kids and their families. You can visit our website at www.ovoc.org. I have and will continue to make significant donations with the hopes of one day serving 1,000 kids annually.

So, when you become a client of The Health Insurance Store, not only are the agents and staff always going to look out for your best interest as well as constantly monitor and inform you of opportunities to save money and/or get better benefits, you're also helping to support kids in need. Thank you to all our current and past clients who have helped make that possible!