

(BPT) - Medicare fraud is a serious problem. Each year, Medicare loses an estimated \$60 billion due to fraud, errors and abuse. Every day, these issues affect individuals and families across the country. The good news? Some simple tips can help you protect yourself and your loved ones.

Common scams

Be aware of common scams, especially during Medicare Open Enrollment in the fall. Examples include:

- Getting bills for services or medical supplies you never received.
- Being prescribed tests and services that are not necessary.
- Receiving medical supplies or equipment you never ordered and do not need.

Warning signs

Watch out for these red flags:

- **Unsolicited calls or visits.** Someone contacts you out of the blue, claiming to be from Medicare, and offers you free services.
- **Requests for personal information.** The person demands your Medicare number, Social Security number or other personal information.
- **High-pressure marketing.** Someone threatens that you will lose your benefits or suffer other consequences if you don't pay them or agree to services.
- **Suspicious websites, mail or email.** Communications that look official but have inconsistencies, errors like obvious spelling mistakes or other odd elements.

Protect yourself

Take steps to reduce your risk of becoming a victim:

- Only share your Medicare and Social Security numbers with those you trust.
- Carry your Medicare card only when you need it.
- Keep a record of all your medical visits and procedures.
- Review your Medicare statements for mistakes and charges you don't recognize.
- Trust your instincts; report any and all suspected fraud.

Need help?

The Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) is a federal program that provides free, unbiased information and assistance to Medicare beneficiaries, their family members and caregivers on how to protect themselves and Medicare from fraud. Local SMPs also provide one-on-one case assistance to those who think they may have been a victim of Medicare fraud, which ensures that suspected fraud is reported quickly and efficiently. Funded by the Administration for Community Living, local SMP programs have offices in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

If you have questions about how to protect yourself, need to report fraud, or need help determining whether you've been a victim of fraud, SMP can help.

Find a local SMP at www.smpresource.org or call 877-808-2468.