



*A Year-Long Plan to Maximize Medicare's
Annual Election Period*



From the Medicare Café

Join us weekly to drink java and talk shop!

Every Tuesday at 10am

Hosted by Mike Gattorna & Senior Marketing Specialists

SMS-University.com

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AEP – Annual Election Period

October 15th through December 7th

Defined: Medicare beneficiaries can change their Medicare Advantage (Part C) or Medicare Prescription Drug Plan (Part D) during this time for a January 1st effective date.

This season, AEP, is one of the main enrollment times for Medicare agents. Anyone who has a MA (Medicare Advantage) or drug plan is recommended to review their coverage for the following year. These plans may, and usually to some degree, change every year.

However, for the insurance agent, AEP is far more than those 54 days.

AEP is an all year event.

THE AEP MARATHON

If you had a friend approach you in January to run a marathon in October, and you have not ran more than half a mile in the past 10 years, when would you start training for the race? I hope the answer would be, “right away.” If you started training in September, do you really think you would be ready to run over 20 miles in a few short weeks? I know I wouldn’t. Heck, I might need two years to train!



The same is true for AEP. You cannot expect to be 100% prepared to have an effective AEP if you start planning in September. You must scramble to certify, order supplies, organize leads, and more while other agents are fully prepared for October to hit and make the most of it.

This guide is designed to give you an overview of annual planning in order to make the most of your year.

The activities are broken into quarterly ideas, but can be mixed up and done anytime during the year (subject to CMS and carrier compliance).

[Need more detailed planning? Senior Marketing Specialists can help you with a personalized AEP 365 plan!](#)

Q1 January / February / March

Assuming you just went through AEP, you need to contact your new clients, for numerous reasons:

Retention & Referrals

Keeping your name and services top-of-mind is vital if you want your clients to call you with concerns or questions (rather than another agent) or to make sure your clients are telling their friends and family about you.

Making this contact should be part of your usual operating procedure. Before you leave your current appointment, your next appointment or point-of-contact should be scheduled. This will make it easier for you to get back in front of your clients with less resistance.

Example: You finish an appointment where you enrolled the beneficiary into a Medicare Supplement policy. A couple months go by with no contact from you. Then you reach out with a call to revisit the client. They may think you are only going to meet with them to sell them more insurance or services. This can get you a “mail me some information” or “I am busy, don’t worry about it” from your client.

However, if those same two months go by and the client receives a post card in the mail reminding them of the upcoming appointment (that you already explained is routine with all your clients) to review their coverage and any additional benefits, they are more likely to keep the appointment and meet with you.

This is also a great time to remind them you can not only be their trusted advisor, but a trusted advisor to their friends and family.

Facebook Agent Connect

Make sure you are connecting with your clients on Facebook! Senior Marketing Specialists has an exclusive group for our agents to join for content, images, videos, and more.

[CLICK HERE](#)

Additional Sales

While you met with your clients in AEP, they may have brought up other concerns which you were not permitted to discuss due to CMS rules and regulations. Now that AEP is over and you are not there to offer them a Medicare Advantage or Prescription Drug plan, you may discuss other lines of coverage such as:



- Life Insurance
- Home Healthcare
- Cancer Policies
- Short / Long Term Care

You can also discuss Hospital Indemnity and Dental/Vision /Hearing plans again if you did so at their AEP appointment.

It is your responsibility to make your clients aware of what coverage options are available to them. So, let them know!

AEP List

With AEP, Medicare beneficiaries with a Medicare Advantage plan or drug plan have the same enrollment window each year. This makes it easier for agents to prospect since we do not have to worry about varying times of enrollment for different people. AEP is the same for everyone.

You should have a running list of prospects you are going to call next AEP. This can consist of prospects who did not purchase from you last AEP and ongoing prospects throughout the year. Once October 1st hits, you can start to call all your prospects and remind them it is time to review their coverage for the following year!

Keep this list active all year!

Compliance Warnings!

- You cannot advertise AEP or the following year's benefits until October 1st.
- Make sure you document permission to contact in AEP with all your prospects.

BUT I AM NEW AND DIDN'T GO THROUGH AEP

If you didn't go through AEP and are just entering in the senior market, guess what; your clients and prospects just went through AEP. You can reach out to prospects and do coverage reviews, offer additional lines of coverage that would pair with their current plans.

Example: Do you have new coverage this year? Make sure your hospital benefit is up to date as well! (For Hospital Indemnity plans)

Q2 April / May / June

With AEP more than a quarter gone, many people are settled in their plans and are not thinking of any other coverage. Plus, hopefully, you have completed all your Post AEP appointments (if not, it's never too late to call a client). Now is the time to broaden your reach for new clients and professional partnerships.

Professional Partnerships

While you are your client's trusted insurance advisor, there are other professionals who work with your same client demographic.

- Estate Planning Attorneys
- Doctors
- CPA / Tax Advisors
- Financial Planners
- P&C Agents
- Group Producers / Agencies

Offering your services can enhance both your agency and their businesses with professional Medicare advice and direction. Many, if not most, of the above professions may have no clue how Medicare works or what is involved when looking at additional coverage options. Likewise, you may not have the knowledge to prepare a will or trust, perform surgery to replace a hip, file their taxes, etc.

When reaching out, invite them for a cup of coffee and have a casual conversation. Remember that relationships take time to build so take it slow and don't try and invade their client list right away as they may be very protective of their clients (just like you are of yours). Offer some cross promotion such as some spots on their newsletter or one in yours and let the relationship evolve over time. Doing this early in the year sets you up to be a familiar face once AEP rolls around!



TIP – Don't involve money. While some people may pay for referrals, keep this on a referral only basis with no monetary involvement. A great way to lose a friend is to involve money. The same holds true with other professionals.

Also, by partnering with other professionals, their clients come to you with less resistance since they were referred by a reputable source. If you do seminars, you may also have them participate and broaden your audience's knowledge with additional topics.

Seminars

If you have a large book of business, you may have already done some client seminars during AEP in order to touch each one of your clients in such a limited amount of time.

Seminars are great way to address a large, well hopefully large, group of people at once. They also put you in an expert light regarding the topic you speak about. Most professionals who speak in front of groups are held in higher regards than those who do not.

You may be thinking, "What am I going to talk about?" That is where Senior Marketing Specialists can help! We have pre-packaged seminars ready for you to use. From Medicare & Diabetes to the Top 10 Things You Need to Know about Your Medicare, we can help you design and implement a successful seminar!

Some Seminar Ideas:

Invite current clients

Yes, they are already your clients, but you want to make sure they stay your clients. Plus, when you send them an invite, make sure you tell them the invitation is for them and a friend (i.e. a referral).

Do them monthly

This may seem overwhelming to some agents, but it's a great way to keep you top of mind and circulate your name in the community. You could have a monthly Medicare Update meeting at a set time each month. This would make it easy for your clients to remember and the more people see something, the more likely they are to take action, or in this case attend a meeting!

Make them interactive

While *you* may find Medicare stimulating and exciting, I am sorry to inform you most people do not. I know. I was shocked too. However, that does not mean your seminar has to be dull and drab. Bring some humor (keep it clean and non-offensive) and ask questions to get the audience involved.

Professional Organizations

Chambers of Commerce, civic organizations, and non-profit groups are operating in your community. While many of them may not directly involve Medicare beneficiaries, they

have people attend who have parents, relatives, or friends who are on or getting ready to enroll into Medicare and could use some expert advice (i.e. you!).

While it's important to get your name out there with beneficiaries, it's ideal that the community knows who are as well. Check out some of these events and organizations to see which ones you fit in with and want to be a part of. Usually, the first few meetings are free to attend. You could also offer to speak to the group about Medicare topics and trends. There is a good chance there are care takers in the group as well and would love to know what resources and who to turn to for Medicare information!

Newsletters

If you are doing quarterly newsletters (hint, you should be at least sending one out per quarter) it is time to roll out your Q2 newsletter. Check out Senior Marketing Specialists talkingMEDICARE weekly publication or our SMS Agent Connect Facebook group for topics to share!

Looking for an easy and free platform to use? Try MailChimp.com. If you have fewer than 2,000 email addresses, you can use them for free.

Q3 July / August / September

Now is the time carriers are starting to roll out their next year benefits and opening certifications.

Before we dive into certification, make sure to continue all the activities you have throughout the year active.

- Client Touches / Referrals
- Facebook
- Professional Partnerships
- Seminars
- T65 Marketing (see Other Ideas later in this guide)
- Newsletters
- AEP List
- Follow-Up / Prospect List
- Etc.

Certifications

While most agents are not too thrilled to perform certifications, they are necessary to write Medicare Advantage and Part D plans. Plus, in many cases, you are certifying prior to seeing the landscape of plans of the areas you serve. We realize this may seem counterintuitive, but it is the same for everyone across the board.

Remember that you are certifying for the entire next year, not just AEP. While you may not plan on working with dual eligible during AEP, that doesn't mean you won't run into a couple over the course of the following year. Same with seminars. While you may not plan on doing any seminars, that does not mean you will not be invited to speak in front of a group.



You want to put yourself in a position to say yes to business because you are certified.

With all this in mind, the best advice I can give you is to certify early and certify for everything available.

Order Supplies

Many carriers will not let agents order supplies for the following year until they are certified, another reason to certify early. You want to make sure you are well stocked for AEP. There have been many times supplies go on back order at the beginning of AEP because carriers are trying to keep up with demand.

Make sure when October 15th arrives, you have the proper supplies to start writing business.

AEP Pre-Launch

Compliance Reminder: You cannot advertise AEP or the following year's benefits until October 1st. However, this does not mean you cannot pre-plan and have your marketing materials ready to launch on October 1st.

Now is the time to take that AEP list you have been working on all year and start to organize your approach. There are basically two types of letters to send out:

1. Stay on the plan you are on
2. Change plans

We have two letters you can use, one for each of these situations. Contact Senior Marketing Specialists for copies!

In the weeks prior to October 1st, you can prepare these letters for mailing. Yes, your clients and prospects will receive numerous solicitations in the mail, this is why I recommend hand writing the envelope. This will make your letter stand out and has a far greater chance of it getting opened. Start to address all your envelopes with the appropriate letters and have them ready to mail on October 1st.

If you want to do any other type of mailer, remember you cannot mention AEP or the following year's benefits until after 10/1.

Prioritize Your List

Ideally, you want to contact every client and prospect with a call and a letter. However, this is subject to the size of your book of business. Start to identify the clients and prospects you need to call, usually the ones who are in plans you are looking to change. More on this in the next section.

Seminars

If you are planning on performing seminars in AEP, now is the time to start to secure locations. Depending on your area, good locations can go fast as some carriers will secure locations for their captive sales forces.

Compliance Reminder: Make sure to register your seminars and only use approved materials.

Professional Partnerships

Remember those professional partnerships you formed? Remind them AEP is coming up as well. This is a great way for your professional partners to touch their clients and keep themselves top of mind while referring their Medicare health coverage to you.

The key is to do as much as you can leading into AEP so when October 15th arrives, you have multiple marketing efforts in full force.

Q4 October / November / December

AEP is starting! From October 1st through October 14th, you can set your appointments, contact clients, talk about next year's benefits and AEP, but you *cannot* accept an application.

Once October 15th arrives, you can take applications!

AEP Action Plan

- Mail out your letters on 10/1 and start calling on them!
- Start setting your appointments and filling in your calendar.
- Your email newsletter should emphasize AEP and clients should be looking out for a letter and, possibly, a call from you.
- Your professional partners should be letting their clients know it is AEP and to reach out to you for assistance.
- Perform your seminars (if applicable).

- Let your clients know you can help their family and friends by leaving extra business cards and send them hand written thank you cards after each appointment.
- Tag your appointments on Facebook (with their permission) thanking them for allowing you to assist them in their Medicare decisions.

There may be additional activities you are performing as well, depending on what marketing, partnerships, and other opportunities you created throughout the year. The more activity you have, the more enrollments you will facilitate.

“But my book of business is so large I am not sure I can contact all my clients!”

If you have a larger book of business, contacting all your clients can seem overwhelming. Here are some options to consider:

Hire an intern / seasonal person

You could hire a part time / intern / seasonal person to do the initial phone calls to your clients. This tends to be most effective when contacting clients who you are looking to keep in the same plan. If the person you have doing this for you is not licensed, they cannot talk about benefits, so telling people to stay where they are is a less intense conversation as they are already familiar with their coverage.

Client Seminars

You could have client seminars to discuss a new plan that is available to your clients. This way you are talking to multiple people at once in a central location rather than trying to have multiple different appointments. Plus, this is a great way to have your clients bring some friends (referrals). This also works for a smaller book of business.

Those two options seem to be the most effective for larger books of business.

Other AEP Considerations

Medicare Supplements

While AEP is designed for Medicare Advantage and Part D plans, many still believe they can change their Medicare Supplement as well. This is true as they can change their Medicare Supplement anytime, however, they may still have to pass through underwriting.

Last Application Wins

In AEP, clients can complete as many applications for coverage they choose. This, of course is not recommended, but there are no rules saying otherwise. The last application they client completes will be the one that goes into effect on January 1st.

Call You

If you have a client that has a question about benefits, coverage, or anything else, make sure you advise your clients you are the first point of contact. Should the client choose to call the carrier or Medicare direct with coverage or network questions, this may count as an infraction against you.

After December 7th

You may receive a call after December 7th from a Medicare beneficiary who would like to change plans. Remember from January 1st through February 14th Medicare beneficiaries can leave their Medicare Advantage plans and return to original Medicare. This does not provide them with a guarantee issue period into a Medicare supplement. They will still have to pass through underwriting.

And then it starts all over again

Once January 1st begins, it is time to start all over again. However, each year, as you grow, you will find you are starting to balance out your prospecting with servicing your clients and receiving more referrals. While you should never stop prospecting, you will find it becomes easier.

In various studies, it has been expressed **retaining your clients is anywhere from 8-10xs more cost effective** than obtaining new ones. Always remember that your clients are another agent's prospect.

In addition, Senior Marketing Specialists has numerous resources to help you grow and retain your book of business.

- Provide additional training and educational opportunities
- Contract you with the most competitive carriers
- Support you and your office staff
- Create marketing plans
- Social media ideas
- Industry leading quote engine
- And more...

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