Annual Medicare Report 2021

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GoHealth's yearly survey shows progress, new challenges for older Americans in 2021

CHICAGO, July 22, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- Many signs point to a COVID-19 recovery, yet the struggle to meet the cost of day-to-day health needs may be the next, though hardly new, crisis for older adults across our nation's healthcare system. Older Americans are eager to leave COVID-19 protocols in their rearview mirrors on the road back to the familiar people, places, and healthcare before the Pandemic. A recent study shows rising confidence in the safety of face-to-face care.

However, 24% of the older adults nearing Medicare eligibility still face financial burdens after the COVID-19 peak. When asked, this group says they have had to choose between paying a medical bill or a household bill. If the economy does not recover quickly, what is the cure for ailing retirement funds and expensive medical bills?

The Annual State of Medicare 2021 report, conducted by GoHealth, Inc. (GoHealth) (NASDAQ: GOCO), accounts for Medicare opinions and knowledge of program trends and benefits. GoHealth conducted 2,000 online surveys in June 2021. The data group was evenly split, including 1,000 people 62+ and not enrolled and 1,000 people 65+ enrolled in Medicare.

22% of people surveyed nearing Medicare eligibility are unable to pay their healthcare expenses each month.

GoHealth's report assesses older Americans' opinions and knowledge of Medicare to depict the program and its current and future members accurately. The survey collected responses on Medicare awareness and knowledge, enrollment, receiving care during the COVID-19 Pandemic, and finances. A few more:

The percentage of Medicare beneficiaries who still have not seen a doctor virtually but would be open to it fell from 49% in 2020 to 36% this year.

More Medicare beneficiaries indicated they did not skip or postpone a doctor's visit in 2021 (61%) compared to 2020 (45%).

This kind of wide-ranging survey can help insurance companies and health care providers see the big-picture issues affecting today's Medicare beneficiaries.

"If 2020 taught us anything, it's that our healthcare system's ability to be agile and responsive when an emergency strikes is incredibly important -- but we can't lose focus now that we are emerging from the crisis and let the everyday issues affecting older Americans fall to the wayside as a result," said Paul Hain, M.D., GoHealth's Chief Medical Officer. "Of course, it's important to keep asking the most basic of questions like, 'Are you happy with your coverage? Can you afford it? What are the things about Medicare that concern you?'"

To cover the issues most essential to today's Medicare beneficiaries, GoHealth asked questions about topics that had the most significant potential impacts in 2020 and 2021: receiving healthcare during the COVID-19 Pandemic, finances, Medicare enrollment and general satisfaction. Here are some highlights:

Confidence in Care Amid COVID-19 Key Findings:

- 25% of Medicare beneficiaries said they'd met with a doctor virtually (compared to 20% in July 2020)
- 39% of Medicare beneficiaries would not be "open to seeing a doctor virtually" in 2021. The top reason why? 84% selected "I prefer to meet with my doctor face-to-face."

In other words, the study suggests virtual health may have hit a peak with older Americans, and data shows they do not have the same barriers to care this year that made virtual care a must for many in 2020.

- 13% of Medicare beneficiaries said the Pandemic made it more difficult to receive medical care this year, compared to 22% in 2020
- 61% of those enrolled were able to avoid postponing or canceling healthcare services due to the Pandemic in 2021, an improvement from 2020 (45%)

Financial Key Findings:

- 15% of Medicare beneficiaries admitted having to choose between paying a medical bill and a household bill in 2021, compared to 24% of those nearing eligibility
- Prescription drugs were the item/service most skipped due to cost
- Nine percent of Medicare beneficiaries have been unable to afford their health care expenses in 2021
- 49% of those on Medicare said they picked their current plan "based on what I could afford"
- Two-thirds of those with Medicare said their coverage was better than (33%) or as good (33%) as their previous coverage

Medicare Knowledge Key Findings:

- When asked if they knew the potential late enrollment penalties for Medicare, a large majority of those nearing eligibility answered, "I don't know," about Part B (80%) and Part A (73%) penalties.

- 43% of current Medicare beneficiaries admitted feeling overwhelmed when enrolling in Medicare for the first time
- 16% of Medicare beneficiaries delayed enrollment in Part A and paid a penalty; 17% paid a Part B penalty
- 46% of Medicare beneficiaries used a Medicare specialist and/or licensed insurance agent for help, over the phone or in-person (up from 37% in 2020)

"Understanding where health coverage is falling short, whether costs or coverage, is essential to helping all Americans, and especially our seniors," Hain said. "Learning from this information is invaluable because it shows us where we can help our members and future Medicare beneficiaries who are going to need guidance in the future."

For more insights, or to check out the full report, "The Annual State of Medicare 2021," visit https://www.gohealth.com/2021-annual-medicare-report/

About GoHealth, Inc.:

As a leading health insurance marketplace and Medicare-focused digital health company, GoHealth's mission is to improve access to healthcare in America. Enrolling in a health insurance plan can be confusing for customers, and the seemingly small differences between plans can lead to significant out-of-pocket costs or lack of access to critical medicines and even providers. GoHealth combines cutting-edge technology, data science and deep industry expertise to match customers with the healthcare policy and carrier that is right for them. Since its inception, GoHealth has enrolled millions of people in Medicare and individual and family plans. For more information, visit https://www.gohealth.com.

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