

Medicare Drug Plans Jump Copays After Enrollment

More than 25 percent of Medicare drug plans increased beneficiaries' copayments and prices for prescription drugs in 2006, often after beneficiaries were committed to plans for the year, according to a study by Consumers Union, USA Today reports.

For the study, researchers examined cost information provided by insurers to CMS and listed on the Medicare Web site. The study tracked price fluctuations of five commonly used drugs among 225 insurers in five states.

According to the study, 62 insurers increased beneficiaries' costs by at least 5 percent last year. Most insurers increased costs by less than 10 percent, but six increased costs by 10 percent or more. One plan increased costs by 32 percent, or by \$795 for the five drugs, during 2006.

In addition, **22 percent of plans between January and February raised drug costs by 5 percent or more.**

Consumers Union said beneficiaries should be able to switch plans if costs in their initial plan increase by more than 5 percent. Consumers Union also has called for more consumer information about cost fluctuations.

The health insurance industry and CMS said the report only examined a limited number of drugs, and most beneficiaries are satisfied with the program and saving money. CMS officials said most drug plan beneficiaries are not affected by price changes unless they are within the so-called "doughnut hole" coverage gap, where they must pay the full price of a drug