

Medicare Advantage may see higher premiums or fewer benefits.

The [Wall Street Journal](#) (4/20, Zhang) reports, "Changes are coming next year to private health plans offered to Medicare enrollees." Medicare Advantage customers "will likely see higher premiums or fewer benefits. And a small number of them will find that their plans no longer exist." The GOP has viewed Medicare Advantage as "a better alternative to traditional Medicare" because, "instead of paying doctors and hospitals directly, the government pays private insurers to manage care." However "President Barack Obama has made clear his intention to rein in Medicare Advantage, saying the program costs the government more but doesn't do enough to manage patient care." CMS "recently laid out stricter terms for insurers bidding to offer Advantage plans next year."

Medicare reform seen as essential part of economic recovery efforts. In a [Washington Times](#) (4/20) op-ed, Judith Stein, executive director of the Center for Medicare Advocacy, writes that in this recession, "top priority must certainly be getting the economy back on track. But improving Medicare is an essential part of that effort. Good Medicare reform could help save taxpayers and Medicare beneficiaries billions of dollars, while also improving access to healthcare." Stein says that first on the list of reforms must be elimination of the "the wasteful subsidies being paid by taxpayers to keep private Medicare Advantage plans afloat," as well as eliminating "the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit." That coverage "should be added to the traditional Medicare program." Stein says reform must add a "coordinated care benefit to traditional Medicare so healthcare providers can be reimbursed for communicating with each other about patient care and primary care providers can coordinate the various aspects of individual patient needs."