

Evidence of Coverage

Option 2

Your Medicare Health Benefits and Services as a
Member of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama/
Blue Advantage

July, 1 2005 - December 31, 2005

Alabama - PPO

EVIDENCE OF COVERAGE:

**Your Medicare Health Benefits and Services
as a Member of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama /
Blue Advantage – Option II**

July 1 – December 31, 2005

This booklet gives the details about your Medicare health coverage and explains how to get the care you need. This booklet is an important legal document. Please keep it in a safe place.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama Member Services:

For help or information, please call Member Services Monday through Friday, 7:30 am – 6:00 pm. Calls to these numbers are free:

1-888-234-8266

TTY: 1-800-257-3384

Welcome to Blue Advantage!

We are pleased that you've chosen Blue Advantage.

Blue Advantage is a PPO for people with Medicare

Now that you are enrolled in Blue Advantage, you are getting your care through Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama. Blue Advantage, a PPO, is offered by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama. (**Blue Advantage is *not* a “Medigap” or supplemental Medicare insurance policy.**)

This booklet explains how to get your Medicare services through Blue Advantage

This booklet, together with your enrollment form and any amendments that we may send to you, is our contract with you. It explains your rights, benefits, and responsibilities as a member of Blue Advantage. It also explains our responsibilities to you. The information in this booklet is in effect for the time period from July 1, 2005, through December 31, 2005.

You are still covered by Original Medicare, but you are getting your Medicare services as a member of Blue Advantage. This booklet gives you the details, including:

- What is covered in Blue Advantage and what is not covered.
- How to get the care you need, including some rules you must follow.
- What you will have to pay for your health plan and when you get care.
- What to do if you are unhappy about something related to getting your covered services.
- How to leave Blue Advantage, including your choices for continuing Medicare if you leave.

If you need to receive this booklet in a different format (such as in Spanish, large print, or audio tapes) please call us so we can send you a copy. Section 1 of this booklet tells how to contact us.

Please tell us how we're doing

We want to hear from you about how well we are doing as your health plan. You can call or write to us at any time (Section 1 of this booklet tells how to contact us). Your comments are always welcome, whether they are positive or negative. From time to time, we do surveys that ask our members to tell about their experiences with Blue Advantage. If you are contacted, we hope you will participate in a member satisfaction survey. Your answers to the survey questions will help us know what we are doing well and where we need to improve.

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Other organizations (including Medicaid, Social Security Administration)	3

How to contact Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama Member Services

If you have any questions or concerns, please call or write to Blue Cross and Blue Shield Member Services. We will be happy to help you. Our business hours are Monday through Friday 7:30 am – 6:00 pm.

CALL	<u>1-888-234-8266</u> This number is also on the cover of this booklet for easy reference. Calls to this number are free
TTY	1-800-257-3384 This number requires special telephone equipment. It is on the cover of this booklet for easy reference. Calls to this number are free.
WRITE	P. O. Box 995, Birmingham, Alabama 35298
VISIT	450 Riverchase Parkway East, Birmingham, Alabama 35244.

How to contact the Medicare program and the 1-800-MEDICARE (TTY 1-877-486-2048) helpline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Medicare is the federal health insurance program for people 65 years of age or older, some people under age 65 with disabilities, and people with End Stage Renal Disease (permanent kidney failure requiring dialysis or a kidney transplant). CMS is the federal agency in charge of the Medicare program. CMS stands for Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. The CMS contracts with and regulates Medicare Health Plans (including Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama) and Medicare Private Fee-for-Service organizations.

Here are ways to get help and information about Medicare from CMS:

- Call **1-800-MEDICARE** (1-800-633-4227) to ask questions or get free information booklets from Medicare. You can call this national Medicare helpline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The TTY number is 1-877-486-2048 (you need special telephone equipment to use this number). Calls to these numbers are free.
- Use a computer to look at www.medicare.gov, the official **government website for Medicare information**. This website gives you a lot of up-to-date information about Medicare and nursing homes. It includes booklets you can print directly from your computer. It has a tool to help you compare Medicare managed care plans in your area. You can also search the “Helpful Contacts”

section for the Medicare contacts in your state. If you do not have a computer, your local library or senior center may be able to help you visit this website using their computer.

Alabama Department of Senior Services / SHIP – *an organization in your state that provides free Medicare help and information*

“SHIP” stands for State Health Insurance Assistance Program. Alabama Department of Senior Services/SHIPs are state organizations paid by the Federal Government to give free health insurance information and help to people with Medicare. Alabama Department of Senior Services/Your SHIP can explain your Medicare rights and protections, help you make complaints about care or treatment, and help straighten out problems with Medicare bills. Alabama Department of Senior Services/Your SHIP has information about Medicare managed care plans and about Medigap (Medicare supplement insurance) policies. This includes information about special Medigap rights for people who have tried a Medicare Advantage plan (like Blue Advantage) for the first time. (Medicare Advantage is the new name for Medicare + Choice). Section 12 has more information about your Medigap guaranteed issue rights.

You can contact Alabama Department of Senior Services at 770 Washington Avenue, Suite 470, P. O. Box 301851, Montgomery, Alabama 36130, local at 1-334-242-5743 or toll free at 1-877-425-2243. You can also find the website for Alabama Department of Senior Services/your local SHIP at www.medicare.gov on the web.

Alabama Quality Assurance Foundation / Quality Improvement Organization – *a group of doctors and health professionals in your state who review medical care and handle certain types of complaints from patients with Medicare*

“QIO” stands for Quality Improvement Organization. The QIO is a group of doctors and other health care experts paid by the Federal Government to check on and help improve the care given to Medicare patients. There is a QIO in each state. QIOs have different names, depending on which state they are in. In Alabama, the QIO is called Alabama Quality Assurance Foundation. The doctors and other health experts in the QIO review certain types of complaints made by Medicare patients. These include complaints about quality of care and complaints from Medicare patients who think the coverage for their hospital, skilled nursing facility, home health agency or comprehensive outpatient rehabilitation stay is ending too soon. See Section 10 for more information about complaints.

You can contact the QIO in Alabama at 2 Perimeter Park South, Suite 200 West, Birmingham, Alabama 35243, local at 1-205-970-3540 or toll free at 1-800-760-3540.

Other organizations (including Medicaid, Social Security Administration)

Medicaid agency – a state government agency that handles health care programs for people with low incomes

Medicaid is a joint federal and state program that helps with medical costs for some people with low incomes and limited resources. Some people with Medicare are also eligible for Medicaid. Most health care costs are covered if you qualify for both Medicare and Medicaid. Medicaid also has programs that can help pay for your Medicare premiums and other costs, if you qualify. To find out more about Medicaid and its programs, contact Medicaid Agency of Alabama, 501 Dexter Avenue, P. O. Box 5624, Montgomery, Alabama 36103, local 1-334-242-5000 or toll free at 1-800-362-1504 or Alabama Department of Public Health, 201 Monroe Street, Montgomery, Alabama 36104, local 1-334-206-5175.

Social Security Administration

The Social Security Administration provides economic protection for Americans of all ages. Social Security programs include retirement benefits; disability; family benefits; survivors' benefits; and benefits for the aged, blind, and disabled. You can call the Social Security Administration at 1-800-772-1213. The TTY number is 1-800-325-0778 (you need special telephone equipment to use this number). Calls to these numbers are free. You can also visit www.ssa.gov on the web.

Railroad Retirement Board

If you get benefits from the Railroad Retirement Board, you can call your local Railroad Retirement Board office or 1-800-808-0772 (calls to this number are free). The TTY number is 312-751-4701 (you need special telephone equipment to use this number). You can also visit www.rrb.gov on the web.

Employer (or “Group”) Coverage

If you get your benefits from your current or former employer, or your spouse's current or former employer, call the employer's benefits administrator if you have any questions about your benefits, plan premiums, or the open enrollment season.

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What is Blue Advantage?

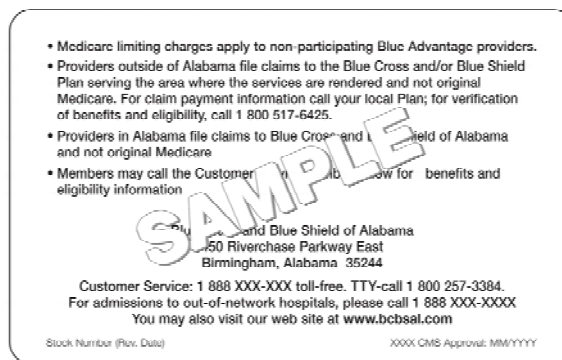
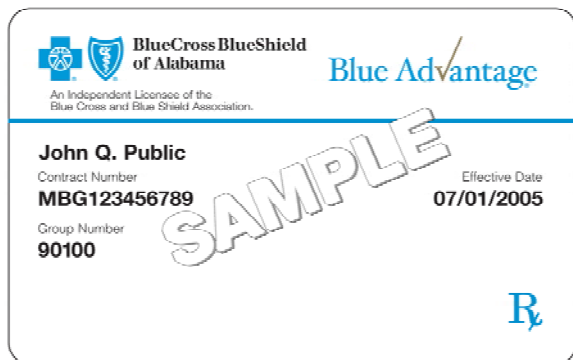
Now that you are enrolled in Blue Advantage, you are getting your Medicare through Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama. Blue Advantage is offered by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, and is a PPO for people with Medicare. The Medicare program pays us to manage health services for people with Medicare who are members of Blue Advantage. (Blue Advantage is **not** a Medicare supplement policy. See Section 14 for a definition of Medicare supplement policy. Medicare supplement policies are sometimes called “Medigap” insurance policies.) Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama provides medical services through Medicare-certified health care facilities. In addition, our health care professionals are in compliance with Medicare credentialing standards.

This booklet explains your benefits and services, what you have to pay, and the rules you must follow to get your care. Blue Advantage gives you all of the usual Medicare services that are covered for everyone with Medicare. We also give you some additional services, such as routine chiropractic care, generic prescription drugs, annual routine physical examination, routine vision and hearing.

Since Blue Advantage is a PPO, this means that you should get most or all of your health services from the doctors, hospitals, and other health providers that are part of Blue Advantage. You may use non-plan providers to get covered services. However, if you use non-plan providers for care that is not emergency care, it may cost you more to use them. See Section 8 for more detail on why it costs less to see plan providers.

Use your plan membership card instead of your red, white, and blue Medicare card

Now that you are a member of Blue Advantage, you have a Blue Advantage membership card. Here is a sample card to show what it looks like:



During the time you are a plan member and using plan services, **you must use your plan membership card instead of your red, white, and blue Medicare card to get covered services.** (See Section 4 for a definition and list of covered services.) Keep your red, white, and blue Medicare card in a safe place in case you are asked to show it, but for the most part you will not use it to get services while you are a member. If you get covered services using your red, white, and blue Medicare card instead of your Blue Advantage membership card while you are a plan member, the Medicare program will not pay for these services and you may have to pay the full cost yourself.

Please carry your Blue Advantage membership card with you at all times. You will need to show this card when you get covered services. You will also need it to get your prescriptions at any plan pharmacy. If your membership card is ever damaged, lost, or stolen, call Member Services right away and we will send you a new card.

Help us keep your membership record up to date

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama has a file of information about you as a plan member. Doctors, hospitals, and other plan providers use this membership record to know what services are covered for you. The membership record has information from your enrollment form, including your address and telephone number. It shows your specific Blue Advantage coverage, and other information. Section 9 tells how we protect the privacy of your personal health information.

Please help us keep your membership record up to date by letting Member Services know right away if there are any changes in your name, address, or phone number, or if you go into a nursing home. Also, tell Member Services about any changes in health insurance coverage you have from other sources, such as from your employer, your spouse's employer, workers' compensation, Medicaid, or liability claims such as claims against another driver in an automobile accident. See Section 1 for how to contact Member Services.

What is the geographic service area for Blue Advantage?

The counties in our service area are listed below.

Autauga

Chilton

Limestone

Morgan

Baldwin

Elmore

Lowndes

Shelby

Bibb	Etowah	Madison	St. Clair
Blount	Jefferson	Mobile	Walker
Calhoun	Lawrence	Montgomery	

Using plan and non-plan providers to get services covered by Blue Advantage

What if you use plan providers to get your covered services?

Now that you are a member of Blue Advantage, you can use plan providers to get your covered services. Your out-of-pocket costs will usually be lower if you use plan providers.

- **What are “plan providers”?** “Providers” is the general term we use for doctors, other health care professionals, hospitals, and other health care facilities that are licensed or certified by Medicare and by the State to provide health care services. We call them “plan providers” when they participate in Blue Advantage. When we say that plan providers “participate in Blue Advantage,” this means that we have arranged with them to coordinate or provide covered services to members of Blue Advantage.
- **What are “covered services”?** “Covered services” is the general term we use in this booklet to mean all of the health care services and supplies that are covered by Blue Advantage. Covered services are listed in the Benefits Chart in Section 4.

What if you use non-plan providers to get your covered services?

“Non-plan providers,” are providers that are not part of Blue Advantage. You may use non-plan providers to get your covered services. However, **your out-of-pocket costs may be higher than if you use our plan providers.** The exception is if you use non-plan providers for emergency care. See Section 8 for more detail on why it costs less to see plan providers.

The Provider Directory gives you a list of plan providers

Every year as long as you are a member of Blue Advantage, we will send you either a Provider Directory or an update to your Provider Directory, which gives you a list of plan providers. If you don’t have the Provider Directory, you can get a copy from Member Services (see Section 1 for how to contact Member Services). A complete list of plan providers is available on our website at www.bcbsal.com. You can ask Member Services for more information about plan providers, including their qualifications and experience. Member Services can give you the most up-to-date information about changes in plan providers.

Access to care and information from plan providers

You have the right to get timely access to plan providers and to all services covered by the plan. (“Timely access” means that you can get appointments and services within a reasonable period of time.) You have the right to get full information from your doctors when you go for medical care. You have the right to participate fully in decisions about your health care, which includes the right to refuse care. Please see Section 9 for more information about these and other rights you have, and what you can do if you think your rights have not been respected.

What if you need medical care when your doctor's office is closed?

What to do if you have a medical emergency or urgent need for care

In an emergency, you should get care immediately. You can dial 911 for immediate help by phone, or go directly to the nearest emergency room, hospital, or urgent care center. Section 3 tells what to do if you have a medical emergency or urgent need for care.

What to do if it is not a medical emergency

If you need to talk with your doctor or get medical care when the doctor's office is closed, and it is *not* a medical emergency, call your doctor's office. Your doctor's answering service will direct you on how to reach your doctor or another doctor to provide advice or direct you to receive treatment. Or, you can call Member Services, at the number listed in Section 1. After business hours and on weekends and holidays your call will be directed to a voice mailbox. You will be asked to leave information and on the next business day, a care coordinator will call you with further instructions.

See Section 3 for more information about what to do if you have an urgent need for care.

Getting care from specialists

A specialist is a doctor who provides health care services for a specific disease or part of the body. Examples include oncologists (who care for patients with cancer), cardiologists (who care for patients with heart conditions), and orthopedists (who care for patients with certain bone, joint, or muscle conditions). If you use our plan specialists, your costs for covered services will be lower than if you used non-plan providers.

Getting care when you travel or are away from the plan's service area

You can get care when you are outside the service area. You will usually pay higher costs for the care because you will get your care from non-plan providers, but you will not pay extra if you are getting care for a medical emergency. See Section 3 for more information about care for a medical emergency. If you have questions about your medical costs when you travel, please call Member Services at the telephone number in Section 1.

What if your doctor leaves Blue Advantage?

Sometimes a doctor, specialist, clinic, or other plan provider you are using might leave the plan. If this happens, you will have to switch to another provider who is part of Blue Advantage. _

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What is a “medical emergency”?

A “medical emergency” is when **you reasonably believe that your health is in serious danger** -- when every second counts. A medical emergency includes severe pain, a bad injury, a serious illness, or a medical condition that is quickly getting much worse.

What should you do if you have a medical emergency?

If you have a medical emergency:

- ***Get medical help as quickly as possible. Call 911 for help or go to the nearest emergency room.***
- Make sure that Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama / Health Management knows about your emergency, because we will need to be involved in following up on your emergency care. You or someone from the medical facility where treatment is being given should call to tell us about your emergency care as soon as your condition has been stabilized, preferably within 48 hours by calling the number on the back of the membership card.

Blue Advantage / Health Management will help manage and follow up on your emergency care

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama / Health Management will talk with the doctors who are giving you emergency care to help manage and follow up on your care. When the doctors who are giving you emergency care say that your condition is stable and the medical emergency is over, what happens next is called “post-stabilization care.” Your follow-up care (post-stabilization care) will be covered according to Medicare guidelines. In general, we will try to arrange for plan providers to take over your care as soon as your medical condition and the circumstances allow. If you choose to remain in a non-plan facility after your condition has been stabilized, the remainder of your care will be paid at the Out-of-Network level (see the Benefits Chart in Section 4 for additional details).

What is covered if you have a medical emergency?

- You can get covered emergency medical care whenever you need it, anywhere in the United States.
- **Ambulance** services are covered in situations where other means of transportation in the United States would endanger your health.

What if it wasn't really a medical emergency?

Sometimes it can be hard to know if you have a real medical emergency. For example, you might go in for emergency care -- thinking that your health is in serious danger -- and the doctor may say that it was not a medical emergency after all. If this happens to you, you are still covered for the care you got to determine what was wrong, (as long as you thought your health was in serious danger, as explained in “What is a ‘medical emergency’” above). However, please note that:

- If you get any additional care after the doctor says it was *not* a medical emergency, the amount of the covered additional care that we pay will depend on whether you get the care from plan providers. If you get the care from plan providers, your costs will usually be lower than if you get the care from non-plan providers.
- If you get any additional care from a *non-plan provider* after the doctor says it was not a medical emergency, it will cost you more to get that care than if you see one of our plan providers. You should try to get your additional care from plan providers.

What is “urgently needed care”? (this is different from a medical emergency)

“Urgently needed care” is **when you need medical attention right away for an unforeseen illness or injury**, and it is not reasonable given the situation for you to get medical care from other plan providers. In these cases, your health is *not* in serious danger. As we explain below, how you get “urgently needed care” depends on whether you need it when you are in the plan’s service area, or outside the plan’s service area. Section 2 tells about the plan’s service area.

What is the difference between a “medical emergency” and “urgently needed care”?

The main difference between an urgent need for care and a medical emergency is in the danger to your health. “Urgently needed care” is if you need medical help immediately, but your health is not in serious danger. A “medical emergency” is if you believe that your health is in serious danger.

Getting urgently needed care when you are in the plan’s service area

If you have a sudden illness or injury that is not a medical emergency, and you are in the plan’s service area, please call your doctor. You can also call Member Services, at the number listed in Section 1. After business hours and on weekends and holidays your call will be directed to a voice mailbox. You will be asked to leave information and on the next business day, a care coordinator

will call you with further instructions. Keep in mind that if you have an urgent need for care while you are in the plan's service area, we encourage you to get this care from plan providers. You can get urgently needed care from a non-plan provider. However, using our plan providers will result in lower costs to you.

Getting urgently needed care when you are outside the plan's service area

Blue Advantage covers urgently needed care that you get from non-plan providers when you are outside the plan's service area (but still in the United States). If you are treated for an urgent care condition while out of the service area, we prefer that you return to the service area to get follow-up care from plan providers. However, we will cover follow-up care that you get from non-plan providers outside the plan's service area as long as the care you are getting still meets the definition of "urgently needed care."

As explained in Section 2, we cover renal (kidney) dialysis services that you get when you are temporarily outside the plan's service area (for up to six months in a row).

SECTION 4 Benefits Chart – a list of the covered services you get as a member of Blue Advantage

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What are “covered services”?

This section describes the medical benefits and coverage you get as a member of Blue Advantage.

“Covered services” means the medical care, services, supplies, and equipment that are covered by Blue Advantage. This section has a Benefits Chart that gives a list of your covered services and tells what you must pay for each covered service. The section that follows (Section 5) tells about **services that are not covered** (these are called “exclusions”). Section 5 also tells about **limitations** on certain services.

You can get covered benefits out-of-network from any provider qualified to provide the benefit in question and who accepts the plan’s terms for payment. We urge you to call Member Services at the phone number in Section 1 to ask if a particular out-of-network provider is qualified to provide any of the other plan benefits in question. Services you get from a provider that is not qualified to provide the plan benefit in question will not be covered.

There are some conditions that apply in order to get covered services

Some general requirements apply to *all* covered services

The covered services listed in the Benefits Chart in this section are covered only when *all* requirements listed below are met:

- Services must be provided according to the Medicare coverage guidelines established by the Medicare program.
- The medical care, services, supplies, and equipment that are listed as covered services must be medically necessary. Certain preventive care and screening tests are also covered. (See Section 14 for a definition of “medically necessary.”)

Benefits Chart – a list of covered services

Benefits chart – your covered services	What you must pay when you get these covered services In-Network	What you must pay when you get these covered services Out-of-Network
INPATIENT SERVICES		

<p>Inpatient hospital care For more information about hospital care, see Section 7.</p>	<p>\$125 per day copay for days 1 through 6 each benefit period</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>
<p>Unlimited inpatient days. Covered services include, but are not limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Semiprivate room (or a private room if medically necessary). ▪ Meals including special diets. ▪ Regular nursing services. ▪ Costs of special care units (such as intensive or coronary care units). ▪ Drugs and medications. ▪ Lab tests. ▪ X-rays and other radiology services. ▪ Necessary surgical and medical supplies. ▪ Use of appliances, such as wheelchairs. ▪ Operating and recovery room costs. ▪ Rehabilitation services, such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy services. ▪ <i>Under certain conditions, the following types of transplants are covered:</i> corneal, kidney, pancreas, heart, liver, lung, heart/lung, bone marrow, stem cell, intestinal/multivisceral. See Section 7 for more information about transplants. ▪ Blood - Coverage begins with the fourth pint of blood that you need – you pay for the first 3 pints of unreplaced blood. Coverage of storage and administration begins with the first pint of blood that you need. ▪ Physician Services. 	<p>A benefit period <i>begins</i> on the first day you go to a Medicare-covered inpatient hospital or a skilled nursing facility. The benefit period <i>ends</i> when you have not been an inpatient at any hospital or SNF for 60 days in a row. If you go to the hospital (or SNF) after one benefit period has ended, a new benefit period begins. There is no limit to the number of benefit periods you can have.</p>	<p>If you get inpatient care at a non-plan hospital after your emergency condition is stabilized, your cost will include the \$1,000 calendar year deductible, 30% coinsurance and any amount above the allowed amount</p> <p>If you are admitted to an out-of-network hospital, please notify Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama by calling 1-888-341-5030, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week</p>

Inpatient mental health care

Includes mental health care services that require a hospital stay. 190-day lifetime limit for inpatient services in a psychiatric hospital. The 190-day limit does not apply to Mental Health services provided in a psychiatric unit of a general hospital.

\$125 per day copay for days 1 through 6 each benefit period

\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance

If you are admitted to an out-of-network hospital, please notify Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama by calling 1-888-341-5030, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

<p>Skilled nursing facility care For more information about skilled nursing facility care, see Section 7.</p>	<p>\$50 per day copay for days 1 through 50 each benefit period</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>
<p>100 days per benefit period. Prior hospital stay is not required to be eligible for Skilled nursing facility care.</p>	<p>A benefit period</p>	<p>If you are</p>
<p>Covered services include, but are not limited to, the following:</p>	<p><i>begins</i> on the first day you go to a Medicare-covered inpatient hospital or a skilled nursing facility.</p>	<p>admitted to an out-of-network hospital, please notify Blue Cross and</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Semiprivate room (or a private room if medically necessary).	<p>The benefit period</p>	<p>Blue Shield of Alabama by calling 1-888-341-5030, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Meals, including special diets.	<p><i>ends</i> when you have not been an inpatient at any hospital or SNF for 60 days in a row.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Regular nursing services.	<p>If you go to the hospital (or SNF) after one benefit period has ended, a new benefit period begins. There is no limit to the number of benefit periods you can have.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Drugs (this includes substances that are naturally present in the body, such as blood clotting factors).		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Blood - including storage and administration. Coverage begins with the fourth pint of blood that you need – you pay for the first 3 pints of unreplaced blood.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Medical and surgical supplies.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Laboratory tests.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ X-rays and other radiology services.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Use of appliances such as wheelchairs.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Physician services.		

<p>Inpatient services (when the SNF days are not or are no longer covered) For more information, see Section 7.</p>	<p>20% coinsurance</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Physician services. ▪ Diagnostic tests (like X-ray or lab tests). ▪ X-ray, radium, and isotope therapy including technician materials and services. ▪ Surgical dressings, splints, casts and other devices used to reduce fractures and dislocations. ▪ Prosthetic devices (other than dental) that replace all or part of an internal body organ (including contiguous tissue), or all or part of the function of a permanently inoperative or malfunctioning internal body organ, including replacement or repairs of such devices. ▪ Leg, arm, back, and neck braces; trusses, and artificial legs, arms, and eyes including adjustments, repairs, and replacements required because of breakage, wear, loss, or a change in the patient's physical condition. ▪ Physical therapy, speech therapy, and occupational therapy. 		
<hr/>		
<p>Home health care For more information about home health care, see Section 7.</p>	<p>No copay</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>
<p>Home Health Agency Care:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Part-time or intermittent skilled nursing and home health aide services. ▪ Physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy. ▪ Medical social services. ▪ Medical equipment and supplies. 		
<p>If you require services from an out-of-network home health agency, please notify Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama by calling 1-888-341-5030, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week</p>		

<p>Hospice care For more information about hospice services, see Section 7.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Drugs for symptom control and pain relief, short-term respite care, and other services not otherwise covered by Medicare. ▪ Home care. ▪ Hospice consultation services (one time only) for a terminally ill individual who has not yet elected the hospice benefit. 	<p>When you enroll in a Medicare-certified Hospice, your hospice services are paid by Medicare (see Section 7 for more information about hospice services).</p>
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OUTPATIENT SERVICES

<p>Physician services, including doctor office visits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Office visits, including medical and surgical care in a physician’s office or certified ambulatory surgical center. ▪ Consultation, diagnosis, and treatment by a specialist. ▪ Second opinion by another plan provider prior to surgery. ▪ Outpatient hospital services. ▪ Non- routine dental care (covered services are limited to surgery of the jaw or related structures, setting fractures of the jaw or facial bones, extraction of teeth to prepare the jaw for radiation treatments of neoplastic disease, or services that would be covered when provided by a doctor). 	<p>\$10 copay per visit</p> <p>\$15 copay per visit for Specialists</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>
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<p>Chiropractic services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Manual manipulation of the spine to correct subluxation. ▪ Routine Chiropractic Services (limited to 12 visits per calendar year). 	<p>\$15 copay per visit</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>
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<p>Podiatry services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Treatment of injuries and diseases of the feet (such as hammer toe or heel spurs). ▪ Routine foot care for members with certain medical conditions affecting the lower limbs. ▪ Routine Podiatry (limited to 6 visits per calendar year). 	<p>\$15 copay per visit</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>
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<p>Outpatient mental health care (including Partial Hospitalization Services)</p>	<p>\$40 copay per visit</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>
<p>Mental health services provided by a doctor, clinical psychologist, clinical social worker, clinical nurse specialist, nurse practitioner, physician assistant, or other mental health care professional as allowed under applicable state laws. “Partial hospitalization” is a structured program of active treatment that is more intense than the care received in your doctor’s or therapist’s office and is an alternative to inpatient hospitalization.</p>		
<p>Outpatient substance abuse services</p>	<p>\$40 copay per visit</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>
<p>Outpatient surgery</p>	<p>\$75 copay per visit</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>
<p>Ambulance services</p>	<p>\$100 copay one way</p>	<p>\$100 copay one way</p>
<p>Includes ambulance services to an institution (like a hospital or SNF), from an institution to another institution, from an institution to your home, and services dispatched through 911, where other means of transportation could endanger your health.</p>		

<p>Emergency care For more information, see Section 3. (Coverage provided within the United States. For definition of United States, see Section 14).</p>	<p>\$50 copay per visit</p>	<p>\$50 copay per visit</p> <p>The \$50 Emergency care copay is waived if the you are admitted into the hospital as an inpatient and your cost sharing is the highest cost sharing you would pay at a plan hospital</p> <p>If you get inpatient care at a non-plan hospital after your emergency condition is stabilized, your cost sharing increases to the out-of-network level</p>
<p>Urgently needed care For more information, see Section 3. (Coverage provided within the United States. For definition of United States, see Section 14).</p>	<p>\$50 copay per visit</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>
<p>Outpatient rehabilitation services</p> <p>Physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech and language therapy</p>	<p>\$15 copay per visit</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>
<p>Cardiac rehabilitation</p> <p>Cardiac rehabilitation therapy covered for patients who have had a heart attack in the last 12 months, have had coronary bypass surgery, and/or have stable angina pectoris.</p>	<p>\$15 copay per visit</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>

<p>Durable medical equipment and related supplies --such as wheelchairs, crutches, hospital bed, IV infusion pump, oxygen equipment, nebulizer, and walker. (See definition of “durable medical equipment” in Section 14).</p>	<p>20% coinsurance</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>
<p>Prosthetic devices and related supplies--(other than dental) which replace a body part or function. These include colostomy bags and supplies directly related to colostomy care, pacemakers, braces, prosthetic shoes, artificial limbs, and breast prostheses (including a surgical brassiere after a mastectomy). Includes certain supplies related to prosthetic devices, and repair and/or replacement of prosthetic devices. Also includes some coverage following cataract removal or cataract surgery – see “Vision Care” below for more detail.</p>	<p>20% coinsurance</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>
<p>Diabetes self-monitoring, training and supplies-- for all people who have diabetes (insulin and non-insulin users).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Blood glucose monitor, blood glucose test strips, lancet devices and lancets, and glucose control solutions for checking the accuracy of test strips and monitors. ▪ One pair per calendar year of therapeutic shoes for people with diabetes who have severe diabetic foot disease, including fitting of shoes or inserts. ▪ Self-management training is covered under certain conditions. ▪ <i>For persons at risk of diabetes:</i> Fasting plasma glucose tests. Contact Member Services for information on how often we will cover these tests. 	<p>20% coinsurance</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>
<p>Medical nutrition therapy—for people with diabetes, renal (kidney) disease (but not on dialysis), and after a transplant when referred by a doctor.</p>	<p>\$15 copay per visit</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>

Outpatient diagnostic tests and therapeutic services and supplies

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ X-rays. ▪ Outpatient radiation therapy ▪ Surgical supplies, such as dressings. ▪ Supplies, such as splints and casts. ▪ Laboratory tests. ▪ Blood - Coverage begins with the fourth pint of blood that you need – you pay for the first 3 pints of unreplaced blood. Coverage of storage and administration begins with the first pint of blood that you need. 	No Copay	\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance
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PREVENTIVE CARE AND SCREENING TESTS

Bone mass measurements

<p>For qualified individuals (generally, this means people at risk of losing bone mass or at risk of osteoporosis), the following services are covered every 2 years or more frequently if medically necessary: procedures to identify bone mass, detect bone loss, or determine bone quality, including a physician's interpretation of the results.</p>	No copay	\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance
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Colorectal screening

<p><i>For people 50 and older, the following are covered:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Flexible sigmoidoscopy (or screening barium enema as an alternative) every 48 months. ▪ Fecal occult blood test, every 12 months. <p><i>For people at high risk of colorectal cancer, the following are covered:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Screening colonoscopy (or screening barium enema as an alternative) every 24 months. <p><i>For people not at high risk of colorectal cancer, the following is covered:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Screening colonoscopy every 10 years, but not within 48 months of a screening sigmoidoscopy. 	No copay	\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance
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Immunizations

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pneumonia vaccine. ▪ Flu shots, once a year in the fall or winter. ▪ <i>If you are at high or intermediate risk of getting Hepatitis B: Hepatitis B vaccine.</i> ▪ Other vaccines if you are at risk 	<p>No copay</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>
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Mammography

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One baseline exam between the ages of 35 and 39. ▪ One screening every 12 months for women age 40 and older. 	<p>No copay</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>
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Pap smears, pelvic exams, and clinical breast exam

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ For all women, Pap tests, pelvic exams, and clinical breast exams are covered once every calendar year. 	<p>No copay</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>
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Prostate cancer screening exams

<p><i>For men over age 50, the following are covered once every 12 months:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Digital rectal exam. ▪ Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) test. 	<p>No copay</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>
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Cardiovascular screening blood tests

<p>Cholesterol and other lipid or triglyceride level blood tests for the early detection of cardiovascular disease (or abnormalities associated with an elevated risk of cardiovascular disease). Contact Member Services for information on how often we will cover these tests.</p>	<p>No copay</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance.</p>
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“Welcome to Medicare” physical exam

Please refer to “Routine Physical Exams” coverage listed below:

OTHER SERVICES

Renal Dialysis (Kidney)

- | | | |
|--|-----------------|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Outpatient dialysis treatments (including dialysis treatments when temporarily out of the service area, as explained in Sections 2 and 3).▪ Self-dialysis training (includes training for you and for the person helping you with your home dialysis treatments).▪ Home dialysis equipment and supplies. | 20% coinsurance | \$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance |
|--|-----------------|--|

Certain home support services (such as, when necessary, visits by trained dialysis workers to check on your home dialysis, to help in emergencies when needed, and check your dialysis equipment and water supply).

<p>Drugs that are covered under Original Medicare (these drugs are covered for everyone with Medicare)</p>	<p>20% coinsurance.</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>
<p>“Drugs” includes substances that are naturally present in the body, such as blood clotting factors.</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Drugs that usually are not self-administered by the patient and are injected while receiving physician services. ▪ Drugs you take using durable medical equipment (such as nebulizers) that was authorized by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama. ▪ Clotting factors you give yourself by injection if you have hemophilia. ▪ Immunosuppressive drugs, if you have had an organ transplant that was covered by Medicare. ▪ Injectable osteoporosis drugs, if you are homebound, ▪ have a bone fracture that a doctor certifies was related to post-menopausal osteoporosis, and cannot self-administer the drug. ▪ Antigens. ▪ Certain oral anti-cancer drugs and anti-nausea drugs. ▪ Certain drugs for home dialysis, including heparin, the antidote for heparin when medically necessary, topical anesthetics, Erythropoietin (Epogen®) or Epoetin alfa, and Darboetin Alfa (Aranesp®). ▪ Intravenous Immune Globulin for the treatment of primary immune deficiency diseases in your home. 		

Coverage for outpatient prescription drugs is very limited. The drugs covered under Original Medicare are generally drugs that must be administered by a health professional. In addition to the drugs listed here that are covered under Original Medicare, Blue Advantage offers an outpatient prescription drug benefit. This additional benefit is described below under the heading that says, “Blue Advantage Prescription Drug Benefit (Outpatient prescription drugs.)”

ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

Blue Advantage Prescription Drug Benefit
(Outpatient prescription drugs)

The Blue Advantage prescription drug benefit covers the following:

- Generic drugs. Section 6 explains about the prescription drug benefit, including rules you must follow to have generic prescriptions covered.

\$10 copay for up to a 30 day supply

You must pay the total cost for prescription drugs purchased from non-plan pharmacies

Dental services

- Limited to surgery of the jaw or related structures, setting fractures of the jaw or facial bones, extraction of teeth to prepare the jaw for radiation treatments of neoplastic disease, or services that would be covered when provided by a doctor.

No copay

\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance

Hearing services

- Diagnostic hearing exams – limited to one exam per calendar year.
- Evaluation and fitting for hearing aid – limited to one every two calendar years.
- Hearing aids – limited to one or a maximum payment of \$400 every two calendar years.

\$10 per visit copay for exam and evaluation

\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance

Vision care

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Outpatient physician services for eye care. ▪ <i>For people who are at high risk of glaucoma, such as people with a family history of glaucoma, people with diabetes, and African-Americans who are age 50 and older: glaucoma screening once per year.</i> ▪ One pair of eyeglasses or contact lenses after each cataract surgery that includes insertion of an intraocular lens. Corrective lenses/frames (and replacements) needed after a cataract removal without a lens implant. ▪ Routine vision exam – limited to one exam per calendar year. ▪ Lens, frames and contacts lens – limited to a \$150 maximum payment per calendar year. 	<p>\$10 copay per visit for exam</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>
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<p>Routine Physical Exams – One routine physical exam each calendar year</p>	<p>\$10 copay per visit</p>	<p>\$1,000 calendar year deductible and 30% coinsurance</p>
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For members whose Medicare Part B coverage begins on or after January 1, 2005 this exam will be considered your “Welcome to Medicare” physical exam. Includes measurement of height, weight and blood pressure; an electrocardiogram; education, counseling and referral with respect to covered screening and preventive services. Does not include lab tests.

What if you have problems getting services you believe are covered for you?

If you have any concerns or problems getting the services that you believe are covered for you as a member, we want to help. Please call us at Member Services at the telephone number in Section 1. You

have the right to make a complaint if you have problems related to getting services or payment for services that you believe are covered for you. See Section 10 for information about making a complaint.

Can your benefits change during the year?

The Medicare program has rules about when and how we can make changes in your benefits. **We can increase your benefits at any time during the calendar year** (the current calendar year is the period from January 1 through December 31, 2005). Here are some examples:

- If we decide to add a new benefit, this would be an increase in your benefits (even though you might have to pay something if you use the new benefit).
- If we decide to provide more of some benefit that you already have, this would be an increase in your benefits.
- If we decide to reduce the amount of a copayment, coinsurance, or plan premium, this would also be an increase in your benefits because you would be getting the same benefits for less money.

If we decide to increase any of your benefits during the calendar year, we will let you know in writing.

The Medicare program does not allow us to decrease your benefits during the calendar year. We are allowed to decrease your benefits only on January 1, at the beginning of the next calendar year. The Medicare program must approve any *decreases* we make in your benefits. We will tell you in advance (in October 2005) if there are going to be any increases or decreases in your benefits for the next calendar year that begins on January 1, 2006.

At any time during the year, the Medicare program can change its national coverage. Since we cover what Original Medicare covers, we would have to make any change that the Medicare program makes. These changes could be to increase or decrease your benefits, depending on what change the Medicare program makes. In some cases, if your benefits increase, Original Medicare will pay for the benefit for the rest of the calendar year. In those cases, you will have to pay Original Medicare out-of-pocket amounts for those services. We will let you know in advance if you will have to pay Original Medicare out-of-pocket amounts for an increased benefit.

Section 5 Medical care and services that are **NOT** covered (list of exclusions and limitations)

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Introduction

The purpose of this section is to tell you about medical care and services that are not covered (“excluded”) or are limited by Blue Advantage. The list below tells about these exclusions and limitations. The list describes services that are not covered under *any* conditions, and some services that are covered only under specific conditions. (The Benefits Chart in Section 4 also explains about some restrictions or limitations that apply to certain services).

If you get services that are not covered, you must pay for them yourself

We will not pay for the exclusions that are listed in this section (or elsewhere in this booklet), and neither will Original Medicare, unless they are found upon appeal to be services that we should have paid or covered (appeals are discussed in Sections 10 and 11).

What services are not covered by Blue Advantage ?

In addition to any exclusions or limitations described in the Benefits Chart in Section 4, or anywhere else in this booklet, **the following items and services are not covered by Blue Advantage:**

1. Services that are not covered under Original Medicare, *unless* such services are specifically listed as covered in Section 4.
2. Services that are not reasonable and necessary under Original Medicare program standards, unless otherwise listed as a covered service. As noted in Section 4, we provide all covered services according to Medicare guidelines.
3. Emergency facility services for non-authorized, routine conditions that do not appear to a reasonable person to be based on a medical emergency. (See Section 3 for more information about getting care for a medical emergency).
4. Experimental or investigational medical and surgical procedures, equipment and medications, unless covered by Original Medicare or under an approved clinical trial. Experimental procedures and items are those items and procedures determined by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama and Original Medicare to not be generally accepted by the medical community. See Section 7 for information about participation in clinical trials while you are a member of Blue Advantage.
5. Surgical treatment of morbid obesity *unless* medically necessary and covered under Original Medicare.

6. Private room in a hospital, *unless* medically necessary.
7. Private duty nurses.
8. Personal convenience items, such as a telephone or television in your room at a hospital or skilled nursing facility.
9. Nursing care on a full-time basis in your home.
10. Custodial care is not covered by **Blue Advantage** *unless* it is provided in conjunction with skilled nursing care and/or skilled rehabilitation services. “Custodial care” includes care that helps people with activities of daily living, like walking, getting in and out of bed, bathing, dressing, eating and using the bathroom, preparation of special diets, and supervision of medication that is usually self-administered.
11. Homemaker services.
12. Charges imposed by immediate relatives or members of your household.
13. Meals delivered to your home.
14. Unless medically necessary, elective or voluntary enhancement procedures, services, supplies and medications including but not limited to: weight loss, hair growth, sexual performance, athletic performance, cosmetic purposes, anti-aging and mental performance.
15. Cosmetic surgery or procedures, *unless* it is needed because of accidental injury or to improve the function of a malformed part of the body. Breast surgery and all stages of reconstruction for the breast on which a mastectomy was performed and, to produce a symmetrical appearance, surgery and reconstruction of the unaffected breast, is covered.
16. Routine dental care (such as cleanings, fillings, or dentures) or other dental services. Certain dental services that you get when you are in the hospital will be covered.
17. Orthopedic shoes, *unless* they are part of a leg brace and are included in the cost of the leg brace. There is an exception: orthopedic or therapeutic shoes are covered for people with diabetic foot disease (as shown in Section 4, in the Benefits Chart under “Outpatient Medical Services”).
18. Supportive devices for the feet. *There is an exception:* orthopedic or therapeutic shoes are covered for people with diabetic foot disease (as shown in Section 4, in the Benefits Chart under “Outpatient Medical Services”).
19. Radial keratotomy, LASIK surgery, vision therapy and other low vision aids and services except vision services listed in Section 4.
20. Self-administered prescription medication for the treatment of sexual dysfunction, including erectile dysfunction, impotence and anorgasmy or hyporgasmy.
21. Reversal of sterilization procedures, sex change operations, and non-prescription contraceptive supplies and devices. (Medically necessary services for infertility are covered according to Original Medicare guidelines.)
22. Acupuncture.

23. Naturopaths' services.

24. Services provided to veterans in Veteran's Affairs (VA) facilities. However, in the case of emergency services received at a VA hospital, if the VA cost sharing is more than the cost sharing required under Blue Advantage, we will reimburse veterans for the difference. Members are still responsible for the Blue Advantage cost-sharing amount.

Section 6 Prescription drugs (this section gives additional information about the outpatient prescription drug benefit that is listed in the Benefits Chart in Section 4)

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Introduction to the Blue Advantage outpatient prescription drug benefit

The purpose of this section is to give details about the Blue Advantage outpatient prescription drug benefit. This benefit is listed in the Benefits Chart in Section 4 under the heading, “Blue Advantage prescription drug benefit (outpatient prescription drugs).” This benefit covers generic drugs that require a prescription and that have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Your prescriptions must be filled at a plan pharmacy

You must fill your prescriptions at plan pharmacies. There is an exception for medical emergencies and urgently needed care.

How much do you pay when you fill a prescription?

The amount you pay when you fill a covered prescription for a generic drug is called your **copayment**. When you fill a prescription, you pay either the copayment or the full cost of the prescription – whichever is *lower*.

Generic drugs are produced and sold under their chemical names, rather than under the names of the companies that manufacture them. A generic drug is a lower cost version of a brand name drug. Some brand-name drugs have a generic equivalent and others do not. Your copayment will be \$10 for generic drugs.

Generic drugs cost less, but **generic and brand-name drugs are the same in terms of quality and how they work**. The law requires that a generic drug must contain the same amount of the same active drug ingredient as the brand-name drug. However, a generic drug may differ in certain other ways, such as its color or its flavor, the shape of the pill or tablet, and the inactive (non-drug) ingredients it contains.

Blue Advantage plan pharmacies fill prescriptions using generic drugs rather than brand-name drugs whenever possible.

There is a limit on how much of the drug you can get for one copayment. For most oral medications, such as pills or other drugs that you swallow, the maximum is a 30 day supply (or less than a 30-day supply for one copayment if your doctor orders less. For medications other than ones you swallow, the maximum depends on the type of medication. The maximum amount per copayment might be a single container, inhaler unit, package, or course of therapy. For example, you would have to pay two copayments if you got two inhalers. If your doctor prescribes an amount of medication that is *smaller* than the maximum allowed for a single copayment, you must still pay the full copayment.

Filling your prescriptions at a plan pharmacy

Filling prescriptions at a plan pharmacy

We call the pharmacies on this list our “plan pharmacies” because we have made arrangements with them to handle prescriptions for members of Blue Advantage.

To use your prescription drug benefit, you must show your Blue Advantage ID card at one of our plan pharmacies. If you do not have your ID card with you when you fill the prescription, you will have to pay the *full cost* of the prescription (rather than paying just your copayment).

Things to know about getting your prescriptions filled

If you fill your prescription at a pharmacy that is not a plan pharmacy, you will have to pay the full cost of the prescription yourself, and we will not pay for any part of the cost.

If you take a prescription drug on a regular basis and you are going on a trip, be sure to check your supply of the drug before you leave. When possible, take along all the medication you will need. To find out if there is a plan pharmacy in the area you will be visiting, call Member Services at the number listed in Section 1 or view a list of plan pharmacies on our website at www.bcbsal.com. There is no out-of-network benefit for prescription drugs.

Prescription drug benefit exclusions (drugs that are not covered)

See Section 5 (“Medical care and services that are not covered – a list of exclusions”)

How to get help with questions or problems related to your prescription drug coverage

To learn more about your prescription drug benefits, call Member Services at 1-888-234-8266 or TTY 1-800-257-3384 Monday through Friday from 7:30 am – 6:00 pm, or visit our website at www.bcbsal.com.

If you have any problems or concerns related to using your prescription drug coverage, please let us know by calling 1-888-234-8266 or TTY 1-800-257-3384.

From time to time, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama may make decisions that affect your prescription drug coverage, such as whether a particular drug is covered for you, or whether we

approve your doctor's request for an exception to the usual rules about prescription drug coverage. If you are unhappy about a decision we make about whether a prescription is covered, or the amount of payment for a prescription, you have the right to make an appeal (an appeal asks us to reconsider and change our decision about coverage or payment). If you want to make any *other* types of complaints related to your prescription drug benefit, you would file a "grievance." Section 10 discusses grievances and appeals. You can also call Member Services to get additional information or help with a grievance or appeal.

SECTION 7 Hospital care, skilled nursing facility care, and other services (this section gives additional information about some of the covered services that are listed in the Benefits Chart in Section 4)

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Hospital care

If you need hospital care, we will arrange covered services for you. Covered services are listed in the Benefits Chart in Section 4 under the heading “Inpatient Hospital Care.” We use “hospital” to mean a facility that is certified by the Medicare program and licensed by the state to provide inpatient, outpatient, diagnostic, and therapeutic services. The term “hospital” does not include facilities that mainly provide custodial care (such as convalescent nursing homes or rest homes). By “custodial care,” we mean help with bathing, dressing, using the bathroom, eating, and other activities of daily living.

If you get inpatient care at a non-plan hospital, your out-of-pocket costs will be higher than if you use a plan hospital. The exception is if you use a non-plan hospital for emergency care. See Section 8 for more detail on why it costs less to see plan providers.

What is a “benefit period” for hospital care?

Blue Advantage uses benefit periods to determine your coverage for inpatient services during a hospital stay (generally, you are an inpatient of a hospital if you are receiving inpatient services in the hospital). A “**benefit period**” begins on the first day you go to a Medicare-covered inpatient hospital or a skilled nursing facility (SNF). The benefit period ends when you have not been an inpatient at any hospital or SNF for 60 days in a row. If you go to the hospital (or SNF) after one benefit period has ended, a new benefit period begins. There is no limit to the number of benefit periods you can have. (Later in this section we explain about SNF services).

As shown in the Benefits Chart in Section 4, you must pay \$125 per day copay for days one through six each benefit period.

Notification of Out-of-Network Hospital Admissions

If you are admitted to an out-of-network hospital, please notify Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama by calling 1-888-341-5030, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (TTY 1-800-257-3384).

What happens if you join or drop out of Blue Advantage during a hospital stay?

If you either join or leave Blue Advantage during an inpatient hospital stay, special rules apply to your coverage for the stay and to what you owe for this stay. If this situation applies to you, please call Member Services at the telephone number listed in Section 1. Member Services can explain how your services are covered for this stay, and what you owe to Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, if any, for the periods of your stay when you were and were not a plan member.

Skilled nursing facility care (SNF care)

If you need skilled nursing facility care, we will arrange these services for you. Covered services are listed in the Benefits Chart in Section 4 under the heading “Skilled nursing facility care.” The purpose of this subsection is to tell you more about some rules that apply to your covered services.

A skilled nursing facility is **a place that provides skilled nursing or skilled rehabilitation services**. It can be a separate facility, or part of a hospital or other health care facility. A skilled nursing facility is called a “SNF” for short. The term “skilled nursing facility” does not include places that mainly provide custodial care, such as convalescent nursing homes or rest homes. (By “custodial care,” we mean help with bathing, dressing, using the bathroom, eating, and other activities of daily living.)

Your cost sharing is higher if you use a non-plan skilled nursing facility.

What is skilled nursing facility care?

“Skilled nursing facility care” means a level of care ordered by a physician that must be given or supervised by licensed health care professionals. It can be skilled nursing care, or skilled rehabilitation services, or both. Skilled nursing care includes services that require the skills of a licensed nurse to perform or supervise. Skilled rehabilitation services include physical therapy, speech therapy, and occupational therapy. Physical therapy includes exercise to improve the movement and strength of an area of the body, and training on how to use special equipment such as how to use a walker or get in and out of a wheel chair. Speech therapy includes exercise to regain and strengthen speech and/or swallowing skills. Occupational therapy helps you learn how to do usual daily activities such as eating and dressing by yourself.

To be covered, the care you get in a SNF must meet certain requirements

To be covered, you must need daily skilled nursing or skilled rehabilitation care, or both. If you do not need daily skilled care, other arrangements for care would need to be made. Note that medical services and other skilled care will still be covered when you start needing less than daily skilled care in the SNF.

Stays that provide custodial care only are not covered

“Custodial care” is care for personal needs rather than medically necessary needs. Custodial care is care that can be provided by people who do not have professional skills or training. This care includes help with walking, dressing, bathing, eating, preparation of special diets, and taking medication. Custodial care is not covered by Blue Advantage unless it is provided as other care you are getting *in addition to*

daily skilled nursing care and/or skilled rehabilitation services.

There are benefit period limitations on coverage of skilled nursing facility care

Inpatient skilled nursing facility coverage is limited to 100 days each benefit period. A “**benefit period**” begins on the first day you go to a Medicare-covered inpatient hospital or a SNF. The benefit period ends when you have not been an inpatient at any hospital or SNF for 60 days in a row. If you go to the hospital (or SNF) after one benefit period has ended, a new benefit period begins. There is no limit to the number of benefit periods you can have.

Please note that after your SNF day limits are used up, physician services and other medical services will still be covered. These services are listed in the Benefits Chart in Section 4 under the heading, “Inpatient services (when the hospital or SNF days are not or are no longer covered).”

In some situations, you may be able to get care in a SNF that is not a plan provider

Generally, you will probably get your skilled nursing facility care from SNFs that are plan providers for Blue Advantage. In general, if you get your SNF care from SNFs that are not plan providers, your cost sharing will be much higher. However, *if certain conditions are met*, you may be able to get your skilled nursing facility care from a SNF that is not a plan provider at the same cost sharing that you would have paid if you used plan providers. One of the conditions is that the SNF that is not a plan provider must be willing to accept Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama’s rates for payment. At your request, we may be able to arrange for you to get your skilled nursing facility care from one of the facilities listed below (in these situations, the facility is called a “Home SNF”):

- A nursing home or continuing care retirement community where you were living right before you went to the hospital (as long as the place gives skilled nursing facility care).
- ▬ A SNF where your spouse is living at the time you leave the hospital.

Notification of Out-of-Network SNF Admissions

If you are admitted to an out-of-network SNF, please notify Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama by calling 1-888-341-5030, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (TTY 1-800-257-3384).

What happens if you join or drop out of Blue Advantage during a SNF stay?

If you either join or leave Blue Advantage during a SNF stay, special rules apply to your coverage for the stay and to what you owe for this stay. If this situation applies to you, please call Member Services at the telephone number listed in Section 1. Member Services can explain how your services are covered for this stay, and what you owe to Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, if any, for the periods of your stay when you were and were not a plan member.

Home health agency care

Home health care is skilled nursing care and certain other health care services that you get in your home for the treatment of an illness or injury. Covered services are listed in the Benefits Chart in Section 4

under the heading “Home health care.” If you need home health care services, we will arrange these services for you if the requirements described below are met.

What are the requirements for getting home health agency services?

To get home health agency care benefits, you must meet all of these conditions:

1. You must be **home-bound**. This means that you are normally unable to leave your home and that leaving home is a major effort. When you leave home, it must be to get medical treatment or be infrequent, for a short time. You may attend religious services. You can also get care in an adult day care program that is licensed or certified by a state or accredited to furnish adult day care services in a state.

Occasional absences from the home for non-medical purposes, such as an occasional trip to the barber or a walk around the block or a drive, would not mean that you are not homebound if the absences are on infrequent or are of relatively short duration. The absences cannot indicate that you have the capacity to obtain the health care provided outside of your home.

Generally speaking, you will be considered to be homebound if you have a condition due to an illness or injury that restricts your ability to leave your home except with the aid of supportive devices or if leaving home is medically contraindicated. “Supportive devices” include crutches, canes, wheelchairs, and walkers, the use of special transportation, or the assistance of another person.

1. Your doctor must decide that you need medical care in your home, and must make a plan for your care at home. Your **plan of care** describes the services you need, how often you need them, and what type of health care worker should give you these services.
3. The home health agency caring for you must be approved by the Medicare program.
4. **You must need at least one of the following types of skilled care:**
 - Skilled nursing care on an “intermittent” (not full time) basis. Generally, this means that you must need at least one skilled nursing visit every 60 days and not require daily skilled nursing care for more than 21 days. Skilled nursing care includes services that can only be performed by or under the supervision of a licensed nurse.
 - Physical therapy, which includes exercise to regain movement and strength to an area of the body, and training on how to use special equipment or do daily activities such as how to use a walker or get in and out of a wheel chair or bathtub.
 - Speech therapy, which includes exercise to regain and strengthen speech skills or to treat a swallowing problem.
 - Continuing occupational therapy, which helps you learn how to do usual daily activities by yourself. For example, you might learn new ways to eat or new ways to get dressed.

Home health care can include services from a home health aide, as long as you are also getting skilled care

As long as some qualifying skilled services are *also* included, the home health care you get can include services from a home health aide. A home health aide does not have a nursing license. The home health

aide provides services that do not need the skills of a licensed nurse or therapist, such as help with personal care such as bathing, using the toilet, dressing, or carrying out the prescribed exercises. The services from a home health aide must be part of the home care of your illness or injury, and they are not covered unless you are *also* getting a covered skilled service. Home health services do not include the costs of housekeepers, food service arrangements, or full-time nursing care at home.

What are “part time” and “intermittent” home health care services?

If you meet the requirements given above for getting covered home health services, you may be eligible for “part time” or “intermittent” skilled nursing services and home health aide services:

- **“Part-time” or “Intermittent”** means your skilled nursing and home health aide services combined total less than 8 hours per day and 35 or fewer hours each week.

Hospice care for people who are terminally ill

“Hospice” is a special way of caring for people who are terminally ill, and for their families. Hospice care is physical care and counseling that is given by a team of people who are part of a Medicare-certified public agency or private company. Depending on the situation, this care may be given in the home, a hospice facility, a hospital, or a nursing home. Care from a hospice is meant to help patients make the most of the last months of life by giving comfort and relief from pain. The focus is on care, not cure.

As a member of Blue Advantage, you may receive care from any Medicare-certified hospice. Your doctor can help you arrange for your care in a hospice. If you are interested in using hospice services, you can call Member Services at the number in **Section 1** to get a list of the Medicare-certified hospice providers in your area, or you can call the Regional Home Health Intermediary at 1-866-801-5301.

If you enroll in a Medicare-certified hospice, Original Medicare (rather than Blue Advantage) pays the hospice for the hospice services you receive. Your hospice doctor can be a plan provider or a non-plan provider. If you choose to enroll in a Medicare-certified hospice, you are still a plan member and continue to get the rest of your care that is unrelated to your terminal condition through Blue Advantage.

The Medicare program has written a booklet about “Medicare Hospice Benefits.” To get a free copy call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227; TTY 1-877-486-2048), which is the national Medicare help line, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, or visit the Medicare website at www.medicare.gov. Section 1 tells more about how to contact the Medicare program and about the website.

Organ transplants

If you need an organ transplant, we will arrange to have your case reviewed by one of the transplant centers that is approved by Medicare (some hospitals that perform transplants are approved by Medicare, and others are not). The Medicare-approved transplant center will decide whether you are a candidate for a transplant. When all requirements are met, the following types of transplants are covered: corneal, kidney, pancreas (when performed with or after a Medicare-covered kidney transplant), liver, heart, lung, heart-lung, bone marrow, intestinal/multivisceral, and stem cell. Please be aware that the following transplants are covered only if they are performed in a Medicare-approved transplant center: heart, liver, lung, heart-lung, and intestinal/multivisceral transplants.

Participating in a clinical trial

A “clinical trial” is a way of testing new types of medical care, like how well a new cancer drug works. Clinical trials are one of the final stages of a research process to find better ways to prevent, diagnose, or treat diseases. The trials help doctors and researchers see if a new approach works and if it is safe.

There are certain requirements for Medicare coverage of clinical trials. If you participate as a patient in a clinical trial that meets Medicare requirements, Original Medicare (and not **Blue Advantage**) pays the clinical trial doctors and other providers for the covered services you receive that are related to the clinical trial. When you are in a clinical trial, you may stay enrolled in **Blue Advantage** and continue to get the rest of your care that is unrelated to the clinical trial through **Blue Advantage**. You will have to pay the Original Medicare coinsurance for the clinical trial services.

The Medicare program has written a booklet about “Medicare and Clinical Trials.” To get a free copy, call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week or visit www.medicare.gov on the web. Section 1 tells more about how to contact the Medicare program and about Medicare’s website.

The clinical trial providers do *not* need to be plan providers. However, please be sure to **tell us before you start a clinical trial** so that we can keep track of your health care services. When you tell us about starting a clinical trial, we can let you know what services you will get from clinical trial providers.

Care in Religious Non-medical Health Care Institutions

Care in a Medicare-certified Religious Non-medical Health Care Institution (RNHCI) is covered by **Blue Advantage** under certain conditions. Covered services in a RNHCI are limited to non-religious aspects of care. To be eligible for covered services in a RNHCI, you must have a medical condition that would allow you to receive inpatient hospital care or extended care services. In addition, you must sign a legal document that says you are conscientiously opposed to the acceptance of “nonexcepted” medical treatment. (“Excepted” medical treatment is medical care or treatment that you receive involuntarily or that is required under Federal, State or local law. “Nonexcepted” medical treatment is any other medical care or treatment.) You must also get authorization (approval) in advance from **Blue Advantage**, or your stay in the RNHCI may not be covered.

SECTION 8 What you must pay for your Medicare health plan coverage and for the care you receive

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Paying the plan premium for your coverage as a member of Blue Advantage

To be a member of Blue Advantage, you must continue to pay your Medicare Part B premium. If you have to pay a Medicare Part A premium (most people do not), you must continue paying that premium to be a member. You also have Blue Advantage premiums that you must pay.

How much is your monthly plan premium and how do you pay it?

In Blue Advantage, you must pay a \$43 premium each month. This monthly plan premium covers the benefits listed in Section 4.

Blue Advantage offers three methods for paying your monthly plan premiums. You can use one of these methods to pay the monthly plan premium that you may owe Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama. These methods for paying your premiums are:

- Automatic Premium Payment through Bank Draft option, where payment can be automatically deducted from your bank account each month.
- Coupon Book option, where you can submit payment by mail, by sending us a check or money order (please do not send cash by mail) with a coupon from a coupon book that we will provide for you.
- Credit card option, where we can collect payment monthly from a major credit card.

If you are interested in one of these methods, please make the appropriate selection when completing your enrollment form.

If you have any questions about your plan premiums or the payment programs, please call Member Services at the number in Section 1.

What happens if you don't pay your plan premiums, or don't pay them on time?

If your plan premiums are past due, we will tell you in writing when a 30-day grace period begins. If you do not pay your past-due plan premiums within the 30-day grace period, we will disenroll you. Disenrolling you ends your membership in Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama. You will then have Original Medicare coverage (Section 12 explains about disenrollment and Original Medicare

coverage). Should you decide later to re-enroll in Blue Advantage, or to enroll in another plan offered by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, you will have to pay any past-due plan premiums that you still owe from your previous enrollment in Blue Advantage.

Can your plan premiums change during the year?

We are allowed to *decrease* your plan premium at any time during the calendar year, but we are not allowed to increase it (the current calendar year is the period from January 1 through December 31, 2005. If we decide to decrease your plan premium during the calendar year, we will let you know in writing. **Increases in your plan premium are only allowed at the beginning of each calendar year, and must be approved by Medicare.** We will tell you in advance if there will be any changes for the next calendar year in your plan premiums or in the amounts you will have to pay when you get covered services. If there are any changes for the next calendar year, they will take effect on January 1, 2006.

Paying your share of the cost when you get covered services

What are “deductibles,” “copayments”, and “coinsurance”?

- The **“deductible”** is the amount you must pay for the out-of-network health care services you receive before Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama begins to pay its share of your covered services. The benefits Chart in Section 4 lists the deductible amount for out-of-network services.
- A **“copayment”** is a payment you make for your share of the cost of certain covered services you receive. A copayment is a **set amount per service** (such as paying \$10 for a doctor visit or \$15 for a visit to a specialist). You pay it when you get the service. The Benefits Chart in Section 4 gives your copayments for covered services. Section 6 gives your copayment for generic prescription drugs purchased from a plan pharmacy.
- **“Coinsurance”** is a payment you make for your share of the cost of certain covered services you receive. Coinsurance is a **percentage of the cost of the service** (such as paying 20% for durable medical equipment.) You pay your coinsurance when you get the service. The Benefits Chart in Section 4 gives your coinsurance for covered services.

You must pay the full cost of services that are not covered

You are personally responsible to pay for care and services that are not covered by Blue Advantage. Other sections of this booklet tell about covered services and the rules that apply to getting your care as a plan member.

For covered services that have a benefit limitation, **you must pay the full cost of any services you get after you have used up your benefit for that type of covered service.** For example, if you get more than one routine hearing examination during the same calendar year, you have to pay the full cost for any examinations that you have after Blue Advantage has paid for the one routine hearing examination during the same calendar year. You can call Members Services when you

want to know how much of your benefit limit you have already used.

You may pay more to see non-plan providers

Your out-of-pocket costs may be higher if you use non-plan providers than if you use plan providers. We will pay for covered care that you get from non-plan providers. However, you may pay more for that care if it was not emergency care because non-plan providers do not have agreements with us to accept a certain amount as payment in full for your care. As a result, you will have to pay any difference between the amount the non-plan provider charges and the amount we pay (up to the Medicare limiting charge), in addition to any applicable coinsurance amounts, copayment amounts, amounts applied to your calendar year deductible, and amounts for noncovered services.

You will pay less to see our plan providers because these providers have agreed to accept a specific negotiated amount as payment in full for services provided to you. There are a lot of doctors, hospitals, and other health care providers who are Blue Advantage providers. If you do not have a list of our plan providers (called the “Provider Directory”) and would like to have one, please call Member Services at the telephone number listed in Section 1.

Please keep us up-to-date on any other health insurance coverage you have

Using all of your insurance coverage

If you have other health insurance coverage besides Blue Advantage, it is important to use this other coverage *in combination with* your coverage as a member to pay for the care you receive. This is called “coordination of benefits” because it involves *coordinating* all of the health *benefits* that are available to you. Using all of the coverage you have helps keep the cost of health care more affordable for everyone.

Let us know if you have additional insurance

You must tell us if you have any other health insurance coverage besides Blue Advantage, and let us know whenever there are any *changes* in your additional insurance coverage. The types of additional insurance you might have include the following:

- Coverage that you have from an employer’s group health insurance for *employees* or *retirees*, either through yourself or your spouse.
- Coverage that you have under workers’ compensation because of a job-related illness or injury, or under the Federal Black Lung Program.
- Coverage you have for an accident where no-fault insurance or liability insurance is involved.
- Coverage you have through Medicaid.
- Coverage you have through the “Tricare for Life” program (veteran’s benefits).

- Coverage you have for dental insurance or prescription drugs.
- “Continuation coverage” that you have through COBRA (COBRA is a law that requires employers with 20 or more employees to let employees and their dependents keep their group health coverage for a time after they leave their group health plan under certain conditions).

Who pays first when you have additional insurance?

When you have additional insurance coverage, how we coordinate your benefits as a member of Blue Advantage with your benefits from other insurance depends on your situation. With coordination of benefits, you will often get your care as usual through Blue Advantage, and the other insurance you have will simply help pay for the care you receive. In other situations, such as for benefits that are not covered by Blue Advantage, you may get your care outside of Blue Advantage.

In general, the insurance company that pays its share of your bills *first* is called the “**primary payer.**” Then the other company or companies that are involved -- called the “**secondary payers**” -- each pay their share of what is left of your bills. Often your other insurance company will settle its share of payment directly with us and you will not have to be involved. However, if payment owed to us is sent directly to you, you are required under Medicare law to give this payment to us. When you have additional health insurance, **whether we pay first or second --or at all-- depends on what type or types of additional insurance you have and the rules that apply to your situation.** Many of these rules are set by Medicare. Some of them take into account whether you have a disability or have End-Stage Renal Disease (permanent kidney failure), or how many employees are covered by an employer’s group insurance.

If you have additional health insurance, please call Member Services at the phone number on the cover of this booklet to find out which rules apply to your situation, and how payment will be handled. Also, the Medicare program has written a booklet with general information about what happens when people with Medicare have additional insurance. It’s called *Medicare and Other Health Benefits: Your Guide to Who Pays First*. You can get a copy by calling 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227; TTY 1-877-486-2048) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, or by visiting the www.medicare.gov website.

What should you do if you have bills from non-plan providers that you think we should pay?

If a non-plan provider asks you to pay for covered services, please contact us at P. O. Box 995, Birmingham, Alabama 35298 or call us at 1-888-234-8266 or TTY 1-800-257-3384. It is best to ask a non-plan provider to bill us first, but if you have already paid for the covered services we will reimburse you for our share of the cost. If you received a bill for the services, you can send the bill to us for payment. We will pay your doctor for our share of the bill and will let you know what, if anything, you must pay. A non-plan provider will not be paid any more than what he or she would have received if you had been covered with Original Medicare.

Section 9 Your rights and responsibilities as a member of Blue Advantage

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Introduction about your rights and protections

Since you have Medicare, you have certain rights to help protect you. In this first part of Section 9, we explain your Medicare rights and protections as a member of Blue Advantage. Then, after we have explained your rights, we tell you what you can do if you think you are being treated unfairly or your rights are not being respected. If you want to receive Medicare publications on your rights, you may call and request them at 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227; TTY 1-877-486-2048) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Your right to be treated with fairness and respect

You have the right to be treated with dignity, respect, and fairness at all times. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama must obey laws against discrimination that protect you from unfair treatment. These laws say that we cannot discriminate against you (treat you unfairly) because of your race or color, age, religion, national origin, or any mental or physical disability you may have. If you need help with communication, such as help from a language interpreter, please call Member Services at the number shown in Section 1. Member Services can also help if you need to file a complaint about access (such as wheel chair access).

Your right to the privacy of your medical records and personal health information

There are federal and state laws that protect the privacy of your medical records and personal health information. We keep your personal health information private as protected under these laws. Any

personal information that you give us when you enroll in this plan is protected. We will make sure that unauthorized people do not see or change your records. Generally, we must get written permission from you (or from someone you have given legal power to make decisions for you) before we can give your health information to anyone who is not providing your care or paying for your care. There are exceptions allowed or required by law, such as release of health information to government agencies that are checking on quality of care.

The laws that protect your privacy give you rights related to getting information and controlling how your health information is used. We are required to provide you with a notice that tells about these rights and explains how we protect the privacy of your health information. For example, you have the right to look at your medical records, and to get a copy of the records (there may be a fee charged for making copies). You also have the right to ask **us** to make additions or corrections to your medical records (if you ask **us** to do this, **we** will review your request and figure out whether the changes are appropriate). You have the right to know how your health information has been given out and used for non-routine purposes. If you have questions or concerns about privacy of your personal information and medical records, please call Member Services at the phone number in Section 1.

Your right to see plan and non-plan providers and get covered services within a reasonable period of time

As explained in this booklet, you can get most or all of your care from plan providers, that is, from doctors and other health providers who are part of Blue Advantage. You can also get most or all of your care from non-plan providers, that is, from doctors and other health providers who are not part of Blue Advantage. You have the right to choose a provider for your care. You have the right to timely access to your providers and to see specialists when care from a specialist is needed. “Timely access” means that you can get appointments and services within a reasonable amount of time. Section 2 explains how to use plan providers to get the care and services you need. Section 3 explains your rights to get care for a medical emergency and urgently needed care.

Your right to know your treatment choices and participate in decisions about your health care

You have the right to get full information from your providers when you go for medical care, and the right to participate fully in decisions about your health care. Your providers must explain things in a way that you can understand. Your rights include knowing about all of the treatment choices that are recommended for your condition, no matter what they cost or whether they are covered by Blue Advantage. You have the right to be told about any risks involved in your care. You must be told in advance if any proposed medical care or treatment is part of a research experiment, and be given the choice of refusing experimental treatments.

You have the right to receive a detailed explanation from us if you believe that a plan provider has denied care that you believe you are entitled to receive or care you believe you should continue to receive. In these cases, you must request an initial decision. “Initial decisions” are discussed in Sections 10 and 11.

You have the right to refuse treatment. This includes the right to leave a hospital or other medical facility, even if your doctor advises you not to leave. If you refuse treatment, you accept responsibility

for what happens as a result of refusing treatment.

Your right to use advance directives (such as a living will or a power of attorney)

You have the right to ask someone such as a family member or friend to help you with decisions about your health care. Sometimes, people become unable to make health care decisions for themselves due to accidents or serious illness. If you want to, you can use a special form to give someone you trust the legal authority to make decisions for you if you ever become unable to make decisions for yourself. You also have the right to give your doctors written instructions about how you want them to handle your medical care if you become unable to make decisions for yourself. The legal documents that you can use to give your directions in advance in these situations are called “**advance directives.**” There are different types of advance directives and different names for them. Documents called “**living will**” and “**power of attorney for health care**” are examples of advance directives.

If you decide that you want to have an advance directive, there are several ways to get this type of legal form. You can get a form from your lawyer, from a social worker, or from some office supply stores. You can sometimes get advance directive forms from organizations that give people information about Medicare, such as Alabama Department of Senior Services / your SHIP (which stands for **State Health Insurance Assistance Program**). Section 1 of this booklet tells how to contact Alabama Department of Senior Services / your SHIP. Regardless of where you get this form, keep in mind that it is a legal document. You should consider having a lawyer help you prepare it. It is important to sign this form and keep a copy at home. You should give a copy of the form to your doctor and to the person you name on the form as the one to make decisions for you if you can't. You may want to give copies to close friends or family members as well.

If you know ahead of time that you are going to be hospitalized, and you have signed an advance directive, take a copy with you to the hospital. If you are admitted to the hospital, they will ask you whether you have signed an advance directive form and whether you have it with you. If you have *not* signed an advance directive form, the hospital has forms available and will ask if you want to sign one.

Remember, it is *your choice* whether you want to fill out an advance directive (including whether you want to sign one if you are in the hospital). According to law, no one can deny you care or discriminate against you based on whether or not you have signed an advance directive. If you *have* signed an advance directive, and you believe that a doctor or hospital has not followed the instructions in it, you may file a complaint with Alabama Department of Public Health at 201 Monroe Street, Montgomery, Alabama 36104, 1-334-206-5175.

Your right to make complaints

You have the right to make a complaint if you have concerns or problems related to your coverage or care. “Appeals” and “grievances” are the two different types of complaints you can make. Which one you make depends on your situation. Appeals are discussed in Sections 10 and 11, and grievances are discussed in Section 10.

If you make a complaint, we must treat you fairly (i.e., not discriminate against you) because you made a complaint. You have the right to get a summary of information about the appeals and grievances that members have filed *against* Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama in the past. To get this

information, call Member Services at the phone number shown in Section 1.

Your right to get information about your health care coverage and costs

This booklet tells you what medical services are covered for you as a plan member and what you have to pay. If you need more information, please call Member Services at the number shown in Section 1. You have the right to an explanation from us about any bills you may get for services not covered by Blue Advantage. We must tell you in writing why we will not pay for or allow you to get a service, and how you can file an appeal to ask us to change this decision. See Sections 10 and 11 for more information about filing an appeal.

Your right to get information about Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, Blue Advantage, and plan providers

You have the right to get information from us about Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama and Blue Advantage. This includes information about our financial condition, about our health care providers and their qualifications, and about how Blue Advantage compares to other health plans. You have the right to find out from us how we pay our doctors. To get any of this information, call Member Services at the phone number shown in Section 1.

How to get more information about your rights

If you have questions or concerns about your rights and protections, please call Member Services at the number shown in Section 1. You can also get free help and information from Alabama Department of Senior Services / your State Health Insurance Assistance Program, or SHIP (Section 1 tells how to contact Alabama Department of Senior Services / the SHIP in your state). In addition, the Medicare program has written a booklet called Your Medicare Rights and Protections. To get a free copy, call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227; TTY 1-877-486-2048) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Or you can visit the Medicare website at www.medicare.gov to order this booklet or print it directly from your computer.

What can you do if you think you have been treated unfairly or your rights are not being respected?

If you think you have been treated unfairly or your rights have not been respected, what you should do depends on your situation.

- If you think you have been treated unfairly due to your race, color, national origin, disability, age, or religion, please let us know. Or, you can call the Office for Civil Rights in your area at 1-

800-368-1019.

- For any other kind of concern or problem related to your Medicare rights and protections described in this section, you can call Member Services at the number shown in Section 1. You can also get help from Alabama Department of Senior Services / your State Health Insurance Assistance Program, or SHIP (Section 1 tells how to contact Alabama Department of Senior Services / the SHIP in your state).

What are your responsibilities as a member of Blue Advantage?

Along with the rights you have as a member of Blue Advantage, you also have some responsibilities. Your responsibilities include the following:

- To get familiar with your coverage and the rules you must follow to get care as a member. You can use this booklet and other information we give you to learn about your coverage, what you have to pay, and the rules you need to follow. Please call Member Services at the phone number shown in Section 1 if you have any questions.
- To give your doctor and other providers the information they need to care for you, and to follow the treatment plans and instructions that you and your doctors agree upon. Be sure to ask your doctors and other providers if you have any questions.
- To act in a way that supports the care given to other patients and helps the smooth running of your doctor's office, hospitals, and other offices.
- To pay your plan premiums and any copayments you may owe for the covered services you get. You must also meet your other financial responsibilities that are described in Section 8 of this booklet.
- To let us know if you have any questions, concerns, problems, or suggestions. If you do, please call Member Services at the phone number shown in Section 1.

SECTION 10 Appeals and grievances: what to do if you have complaints

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Introduction

We encourage you to let us know right away if you have questions, concerns, or problems related to your covered services or the care you receive. Please call Member Services at the number listed in Section 1.

This section gives the rules for making complaints in different types of situations. Federal law guarantees your right to make complaints if you have concerns or problems with any part of your medical care as a plan member. The Medicare program has helped set the rules about what you need to do to make a complaint, and what we are required to do when we receive a complaint. If you make a complaint, we must be fair in how we handle it. You cannot be disenrolled from Blue Advantage or penalized in any way if you make a complaint.

What are appeals and grievances?

You have the right to make a complaint if you have concerns or problems related to your coverage or care. “Appeals” and “grievances” are the two different types of complaints you can make.

- An **“appeal”** is the type of complaint you make **when you want us to reconsider and change a decision we have made about what services are covered for you or what we will pay for a service.** For example, if we refuse to cover or pay for services you think we should cover, you can file an appeal. If Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama or one of our plan providers refuses to give you a service you think should be covered, you can file an appeal. If Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama or one of our plan providers reduces or cuts back on services you have been receiving, you can file an appeal. If you think we are stopping your coverage of a service too soon, you can file an appeal.
- A **“grievance”** is the type of complaint you make **if you have any other type of problem with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama / Blue Advantage or one of our plan**

providers. For example, you would file a grievance if you have a problem with things such as the quality of your care, waiting times for appointments or in the waiting room, the way your doctors or others behave, being able to reach someone by phone or get the information you need, or the cleanliness or condition of the doctor's office.

This section tells how to make complaints in different situations

The rest of this section has separate parts that tell you how to make a complaint in each of the following situations:

- 1. Making complaints (called “appeals”) about what we will cover for you or what we will pay for.** If Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama or your doctor or another plan provider has refused to give you a service you think is covered, you can make an appeal. If we have refused to pay for a service you think is covered for you, you can make an appeal. If you have been receiving a covered service, and you think that service is being reduced or ending too soon, you can make an appeal. When you file an appeal, you are asking us to reconsider and change a decision we have made about what services we will cover for you (which includes whether we will pay for your care or how much we will pay).
- 2. Making complaints (called “appeals”) if you think you are being discharged from the hospital too soon.** There is a special type of appeal that applies only to hospital discharges. If you think our coverage of your hospital stay is ending too soon, you can appeal directly and immediately to Alabama Quality Assurance Foundation, which is the Quality Improvement Organization in the state of Alabama. Alabama Quality Assurance Foundation is a group of health professionals in Alabama that is paid to handle this type of appeal from Medicare patients. If you make this type of appeal, your stay may be covered during the time period the QIO uses to make its determination. You must act very quickly to make this type of appeal, and it will be decided quickly.
- 3. Making complaints (called “appeals”) if you think your coverage for SNF, home health or comprehensive outpatient rehabilitation facility services is ending too soon.** There is another special type of appeal that applies only to when coverage will end for SNF, home health or comprehensive outpatient rehabilitation facility services. If you think your coverage is ending too soon, you can appeal directly and immediately to the QIO. If you make this type of appeal, your stay may be covered during the time period the QIO uses to make its determination. You must act very quickly to make this type of appeal, and it will be decided quickly.
- 4. Making complaints (called “grievances”) about any other type of problem you have with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama / Blue Advantage or one of our plan providers.** If you want to make a complaint about any type of problem other than those that are listed above, a grievance is the type of complaint you would make. For example, you would file a grievance to complain about problems with the quality or timeliness of your care, waiting times for appointments or in the waiting room, the way your doctors or others behave, being able to reach someone by phone or get the information you need, or the cleanliness or condition of the doctor's office. Generally, you would file the grievance with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama. But for many problems related to quality of care you get from plan providers, you can also complain to the QIO in your state.

PART 1. Making complaints (called “appeals”) to Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama to change a decision about what we will cover for you or what we will pay for

This part of Section 10 explains what you can do if you have problems getting the medical care you believe we should provide. We use the word “provide” in a general way to include such things as authorizing care, paying for care, arranging for someone to provide care, or continuing to provide a medical treatment you have been getting. Problems getting the medical care you believe we should provide include the following situations:

- If you are not getting the care you want, and you believe that this care is covered by Blue Advantage.
- If we will not authorize the medical treatment your doctor or other medical provider wants to give you, and you believe that this treatment is covered by Blue Advantage.
- If you are being told that coverage for a treatment or service you have been getting will be reduced or stopped, and you feel that this could harm your health.
- If you have received care that you believe was covered by Blue Advantage while you were a member, but we have refused to pay for this care.

Six possible steps for requesting care or payment from Blue Advantage

If you are having a problem getting care or payment for care, there are six possible steps you can take to ask for the care or payment you want from us. At each step, your request is considered and a decision is made. If you are unhappy with the decision, there may be another step you can take if you want to continue requesting the care or payment.

- In Steps 1 and 2, you make your request directly to us. We review it and give you our decision.
- In Steps 3 through 6, people in organizations that are not connected to us make the decisions about your request. To keep the review independent and impartial, those who review the request and make the decision in Steps 3 through 6 are part of (or in some way connected to) the Medicare program, the Social Security Administration, or the federal court system.

The six possible steps are summarized below (they are covered in more detail in Section 11).

STEP 1: The initial decision by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama

The starting point is when we make an “initial decision” (also called an “organization determination”) about your medical care or about paying for care you have already received. When we make an “initial decision,” we are giving our interpretation of how the benefits and services that are covered for members of Blue Advantage apply to your specific situation. As explained in Section 11, you can ask for a “fast initial decision” if you have a request for medical care that needs to be decided more quickly than the standard time frame.

STEP 2: *Appealing the initial decision by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama*

If you disagree with the decision we make in Step 1, you may ask us to reconsider our decision. This is called an “**appeal**” or a “request for reconsideration.” As explained in Section 11, you can ask for a “fast appeal” if your request is for medical care and it needs to be decided more quickly than the standard time frame. After reviewing your appeal, we will decide whether to stay with our original decision, or change this decision and give you some or all of the care or payment you want.

STEP 3: *Review of your request by an Independent Review Organization*

If we turn down part or all of your request in Step 2, we are **required** to send your request to an independent review organization that has a contract with the federal government and is not part of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama. This organization will review your request and make a decision about whether we must give you the care or payment you want.

STEP 4: *Review by an Administrative Law Judge*

If you are unhappy with the decision made by the organization that reviews your case in Step 3, you may ask for an **Administrative Law Judge** to consider your case and make a decision. The Administrative Law Judge works for the federal government. The dollar value of your medical care must be at least \$100 to be considered in Step 4.

STEP 5: *Review by a Medicare Appeals Council*

If you or we are unhappy with the decision made in Step 4, either of us may be able to ask a **Medicare Appeals Council** to review your case. This Council is part of the federal department that runs the Medicare program.

STEP 6: *Federal Court*

If you or we are unhappy with the decision made by the Medicare Appeals Council in Step 5, either of us may be able to take your case to a Federal Court. The dollar value of your contested medical care must be at least \$1,050 to go to a Federal Court.

For a more detailed explanation of all six steps outlined above, see Section 11.

PART 2. Making complaints if you think you are being discharged from the hospital too soon

When you are hospitalized, you have the right to get all the hospital care covered by Blue Advantage that is necessary to diagnose and treat your illness or injury. The day you leave the hospital (your “discharge date”) is based on when your stay in the hospital is no longer medically necessary. This part of Section 10 explains what to do if you believe that you are being discharged too soon.

Information you should receive during your hospital stay

When you are admitted to the hospital, someone at the hospital should give you a notice called the *Important Message from Medicare*. This notice explains:

- Your right to get all medically necessary hospital services covered.

- Your right to know about any decisions that the hospital, your doctor, or anyone else makes about your hospital stay and who will pay for it.
- That your doctor or the hospital may arrange for services you will need after you leave the hospital.
- Your right to appeal a discharge decision.

Review of your hospital discharge by the Quality Improvement Organization

If you think that you are being discharged too soon, you must ask your health plan to give you a notice called the *Notice of Discharge & Medicare Appeal Rights*. This notice will tell you:

- Why you are being discharged.
- The date that we will stop covering your hospital stay (stop paying our share of your hospital costs).
- What you can do if you think you are being discharged too soon.
- Who to contact for help.

You (or someone you authorize) may be asked to sign and date this document, to show that you received the notice. Signing the notice does not mean that you agree that you are ready to leave the hospital – it only means that you received the notice. If you do not receive the notice when you are being told about your discharge from the hospital, be sure to ask for it immediately.

You have the right by law to ask for a review of your discharge date. As explained in the *Notice of Discharge & Medicare Appeal Rights*, if you act quickly, you can ask an outside agency called the Quality Improvement Organization to review whether your discharge is medically appropriate.

What is the “Quality Improvement Organization”?

“QIO” stands for **Quality Improvement Organization**. The QIO is a group of doctors and other health care experts paid by the federal government to check on and help improve the care given to Medicare patients. They are not part of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama or your hospital. There is one QIO in each state. QIOs have different names, depending on which state they are in. In Alabama, the QIO is called Alabama Quality Assurance Foundation. The doctors and other health experts in Alabama Quality Assurance Foundation / the QIO review certain types of complaints made by Medicare patients. These include complaints about quality of care and complaints from Medicare patients who think the coverage for their hospital stay is ending too soon. Section 1 tells how to contact the QIO.

Getting a QIO review of your hospital discharge

If you want to have your discharge reviewed, you must act quickly to contact the QIO. The *Notice of Discharge & Medicare Appeal Rights* gives the name and telephone number of your QIO and tells you what you must do.

- You must ask the QIO for a “**fast review**” of whether you are ready to leave the hospital. This “fast review” is also called a “fast appeal” because you are appealing the discharge date that has been set for you.

- You must be sure that you have made your request to the QIO **no later than noon** on the first working day after you are given written notice that you are being discharged from the hospital. This deadline is very important. If you meet this deadline, you are allowed to stay in the hospital past your discharge date without paying for it yourself, while you wait to get the decision from the QIO (see below).

If the QIO reviews your discharge, it will first look at your medical information. Then it will give an opinion about whether it is medically appropriate for you to be discharged on the date that has been set for you. The QIO will make this decision within one full working day after it has received your request and all of the medical information it needs to make a decision.

- If the QIO decides that your discharge date was medically appropriate, you will not be responsible for paying the hospital charges until noon of the calendar day after the QIO gives you its decision.
- If the QIO agrees with you, then we will continue to cover your hospital stay for as long as medically necessary.

What if you do not ask the QIO for a review by the deadline?

You still have another option: asking Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama for a “fast appeal” of your discharge

If you do not ask the QIO for a “fast review” (“fast appeal”) of your discharge by the deadline, you can ask us for a “fast appeal” of your discharge. How to ask us for a fast appeal is covered briefly in the first part of this section and in more detail in Section 11.

If you ask us for a fast appeal of your discharge and you stay in the hospital past your discharge date, you run the risk of having to pay for the hospital care you receive past your discharge date. Whether you have to pay or not depends on the decision we make.

- If we decide, based on the fast appeal, that you need to stay in the hospital, we will continue to cover your hospital care for as long as medically necessary.
- If we decide that you should not have stayed in the hospital beyond your discharge date, then we will **not** cover any hospital care you received if you stayed in the hospital after the discharge date.

You may have to pay if you stay past your discharge date

If you stay in the hospital after your discharge date and do not ask for immediate QIO review, you may be financially responsible for the cost of many of the services you receive. However, you can appeal any bills for hospital care you receive, using Step 1 of the appeals process described in Section 11.

PART 3. Making complaints (appeals) if you think your coverage for SNF, home health or comprehensive outpatient rehabilitation facility services is ending too soon.

When you are a patient in a SNF, home health agency (HHA), or comprehensive outpatient

rehabilitation facility (CORF), you have the right to get all the SNF, HHA or CORF care covered by Blue Advantage that is necessary to diagnose and treat your illness or injury. The day we end your SNF, HHA or CORF coverage is based on when your stay is no longer medically necessary. This part of Section 10 explains what to do if you believe that your coverage is ending too soon.

Information you will receive during your SNF, HHA or CORF stay

If we decide to end our coverage for your SNF, HHA, or CORF services, you will get written notice either from us or your provider at least 2 calendar days before your coverage ends. You (or someone you authorize) will be asked to sign and date this document to show that you received the notice. Signing the notice does not mean that you agree that coverage should end – it only means that you received the notice.

How to appeal the termination of your coverage to Alabama Quality Assurance Foundation / the Quality Improvement Organization

You have the right by law to ask for an appeal of our termination of your coverage. As will be explained in the notice you get from us your provider, you can ask the Quality Improvement Organization (the “QIO”) to do an independent review of whether our terminating your coverage is medically appropriate.

How soon do you have to ask the QIO to review your coverage?

If you want to have the termination of your coverage appealed, you must act quickly to contact the QIO. The written notice you got from us or your provider gives the name and telephone number of your QIO and tells you what you must do.

- If you get the notice 2 days before your coverage ends, you must be sure to make your request **no later than noon** of the day after you get the notice.
- If you get the notice and you have more than 2 days before your coverage ends, then you must make your request **no later than noon** the day before the date that your Medicare coverage ends.

What will happen during the review?

If the QIO reviews your case, the QIO will ask for your opinion about why you believe the services should continue. You do not have to prepare anything in writing, but you may do so if you wish. The QIO will also look at your medical information, talk to your doctor, and review other information that we have given to the QIO. You and the QIO will each get a copy of our explanation about why your services should not continue.

After reviewing all the information, the QIO will give an opinion about whether it is medically appropriate for your coverage to be terminated on the date that has been set for you. The QIO will make this decision within one full day after it receives the information it needs to make a decision.

What happens if the QIO decides in your favor?

If the QIO agrees with you, then we will continue to cover your SNF, HHA or CORF services for as long as medically necessary.

What happens if the QIO denies your request? If the QIO decides that our decision to terminate coverage was medically appropriate, you will be responsible for paying the SNF, HHA or CORF charges after the termination date on the advance notice you got from us or your provider. Neither

Original Medicare nor Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama will pay for these services. If you stop receiving services on or before the date given on the notice, you can avoid any financial liability.

What if you do not ask the QIO for a review in time?

You still have another option: asking Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama for a “fast appeal” of your discharge

If you do not ask the QIO for a “fast appeal” of your discharge by the deadline, you can ask us for a “fast appeal” of your discharge. How to ask us for a fast appeal is covered briefly in the first part of this section and in more detail in Section 11.

If you ask us for a fast appeal of your termination and you continue getting services from the SNF, HHA, or CORF, you run the risk of having to pay for the care you receive past your termination date. Whether you have to pay or not depends on the decision we make.

- If we decide, based on the fast appeal, that you need to continue to get your services covered, then we will continue to cover your care for as long as medically necessary.
- If we decide that you should not have continued getting coverage for your care, then we will **not** cover any care you received if you stayed after the termination date.

You may have to pay if you stay past your discharge date

If you do not ask the QIO to review your coverage termination by noon of the day before termination of your SNF, HHA or CORF services, and if you stay in the SNF or continue receiving HHA or CORF services after the termination date, you run the risk of having to pay for the care you receive after this date. However, you can appeal any bills for SNF, HHA or CORF care you receive using Step 1 of the appeals process described in Section 11.

PART 4. Making complaints (called “grievances”) about any other type of problem you have with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama or one of our plan providers

This last part of Section 10 explains how to make complaints about any *other* type of problem that has not already been discussed earlier in this section. (The problems that have already been discussed are problems related to coverage or payment for care, problems about being discharged from the hospital too soon, and problems about coverage for SNF, HHA, or CORF services ending too soon.)

What is included in “all other types of problems”?

Here are some examples of problems that are included in this category of “all other types of problems”:

- Problems with the quality of the medical care you receive, including quality of care during a hospital stay.
- If you feel that you are being encouraged to leave (disenroll from) Blue Advantage.
- Problems with the customer service you receive.
- Problems with how long you have to spend waiting on the phone, in the waiting room, or in the

exam room.

- Problems with getting appointments when you need them, or having to wait a long time for an appointment.
- Disrespectful or rude behavior by doctors, nurses, receptionists, or other staff.
- Cleanliness or condition of doctor's offices, clinics, or hospitals.

If you have one of these types of problems and want to make a complaint, it is called "filing a grievance." In addition, you have the right to ask for a "fast grievance" if you disagree with our decision to not give you a "fast appeal" or if we take an extension on our initial decision or appeal. See below for more detail.

Filing a grievance with Blue Advantage

If you have a complaint, we encourage you to first call Member Services at the number shown in Section 1. We will try to resolve any complaint that you might have over the phone. If we cannot resolve your complaint over the phone, we have a formal procedure to review your complaints. We call this our Blue Advantage grievance procedure. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama will respond to all grievances as soon as possible, with a goal not to exceed 30 days after the grievance is received. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama will respond within 24 hours to an enrollee's grievance that Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama extended the time frame to make an organization determination or reconsideration, or refused to grant a request for an expedited organization determination or reconsideration.

For quality of care problems, you may also complain to the QIO

If you are concerned about the quality of care you received, including care during a hospital stay, you can also complain to an independent organization called the QIO. See Section 1 for more information about the QIO.

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What is the purpose of this section?

The purpose of this section is to give you more information about a topic that is summarized briefly in the previous section of this booklet (Section 10). Section 10 outlines the six possible steps in the appeals process for making complaints about your coverage or payment for your care. This section goes through the same six steps in more detail. Since Section 10 also gives general information about making complaints, and discusses how to deal with other types of problems besides problems with coverage or payment for care, **you should read Section 10 before you read this section.**

A note about terminology. In this Section, we tend to use simpler language instead of certain legal language, including terms that appear in the government regulations for the appeals process. For example, we generally say “initial decision” instead of “initial organization determination,” and we generally use the word “fast” rather than “expedited” when referring to decisions that are made more quickly than the standard time frame. Instead of saying “adverse decision,” we may say “deny your request,” or “turn down your appeal.” We use “independent review organization” rather than “independent review entity.”

What are “complaints about your coverage or payment for your care”?

Complaints about your coverage or payment for your care are complaints you may have if you are not getting medical benefits and services you believe are covered for you as a plan member. This includes payment for care received while a member of the Blue Advantage. Complaints about your coverage or payment for your care include complaints about the following situations:

- If you are not getting the care you want, and you believe that this care is covered by Blue Advantage
- If we will not authorize the medical treatment your doctor or other medical provider wants to

give you, and you believe that this treatment is covered by Blue Advantage

- If you are being told that coverage for a treatment or service you have been getting will be reduced or stopped, and you feel that this could harm your health
- If you have received care that you believe is covered by Blue Advantage, but we have refused to pay for this care because we say it is not covered

How does the appeals process work?

The six possible steps you can take to make complaints related to your coverage or payment for your care are described below. Here are a few things to keep in mind as you read the description of these steps in the appeals process:

- **Moving from one step to the next.** At each step, your request for care or payment is considered and a decision is made. The decision may be partly or completely in your favor (giving you some or all of what you have asked for), or it may be completely denied (turned down). If you are unhappy with the decision, there may be another step you can take to get further review of your request. Whether you are able to take the next step may depend on the dollar value of the medical care involved or on other factors.
- **“Initial decision” vs. “making an appeal.”** Step 1 deals with the starting point for the appeals process. The decision made in Step 1 is called an “initial decision” or “organization determination.” If you continue with your complaint by going on to Step 2, it is called making an “appeal” or a “request for reconsideration” of our initial decision because you are “appealing” for a change in the initial decision that was made in Step 1. Step 2, and all of the remaining possible steps, also involve *appealing* a decision.
- **Who makes the decision at each step.** In Step 1, you make your request for coverage of care or payment for care directly to us. We review this request, then make an initial decision. If our initial decision turns down your request, you can go on to Step 2, where you “appeal” this initial decision (asking us to reconsider). **After Step 2, your appeal goes outside of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, where people who are not connected to us conduct the review and make the decision.** To help ensure a fair, impartial decision, those who make the decision about your appeal in Steps 3-6 are part of (or in some way connected to) the Medicare program, the Social Security Administration, or the federal court system.

STEP 1: Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama makes an “initial decision” about your medical care, or about paying for care you have already received

What is an “initial decision”?

The “initial decision” made by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama is the starting point for dealing with requests you may have about your coverage or payment for your care. With this decision, we inform you whether we will provide the medical care or service you request, or pay for a service you have already received. (This “initial decision” is sometimes called an “organization determination.”) If our initial decision is to deny your request (this is sometimes called an “adverse initial decision”), you

can “appeal” the decision by going on to Step 2 (see below). You may also go on to Step 2 if we fail to make a timely “initial decision” on your request.

- If you ask us to pay for medical care you have already received, this is a request for an “initial decision” about payment for your care. You can call us at 1-888-234-8266 to get help in making this request.
- If you ask for a specific type of medical treatment from your doctor or other medical provider, this is a request for an “initial decision” about whether the treatment you want is covered by Blue Advantage. Depending on the situation, your doctor or other medical provider may make this decision on behalf of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, or may ask us whether we will authorize the treatment. You may want to ask us for an initial decision without involving your doctor. You can call us at 1-888-234-8266 to ask for an initial decision.

When we make an “initial decision,” we are giving our interpretation of how the benefits and services that are covered for members of Blue Advantage apply to your specific situation. This booklet and any amendments you may receive describe the benefits and services covered by Blue Advantage, including any limitations that may apply to these services. This booklet also lists exclusions (services that are “not covered” by Blue Advantage).

Who may ask for an “initial decision” about your medical care or payment?

You can ask us for an initial decision yourself, or you can name someone to do it for you. This person you name would be your *authorized representative*. You can name a relative, friend, advocate, doctor, or someone else to act for you. Some other persons may already be authorized under State law to act for you. If you want someone to act for you, then you and the person you want to act for you must sign and date a statement that gives this person legal permission to act as your authorized representative. This statement must be sent to us at P. O. Box 995, Birmingham, Alabama 35298. You can call us at 1-888-234-8266, TTY 1-800-257-3384 to learn how to name your authorized representative.

You also have the right to have an attorney ask for an initial decision on your behalf. You can contact your own lawyer, or get the name of a lawyer from your local bar association or other referral service. There are also groups that will give you free legal services if you qualify. You may want to contact American Bar Association at 1-202-662-8684.

“Standard decisions” vs. “fast decisions” about medical care

Do you have a request for medical care that needs to be decided more quickly than the standard time frame?

A decision about whether we will cover medical care can be a “standard decision” that is made within the standard time frame (typically within 14 days; see below), or it can be a “fast decision” that is made more quickly (typically within 72 hours; see below). A fast decision is sometimes called a 72-hour decision or an “expedited organization determination.”

You can ask for a fast decision **only** if you or any doctor believe that waiting for a standard decision could seriously harm your health or your ability to function. (Fast decisions apply only to requests for medical care. You cannot get a fast decision on requests for payment for care you have already received.)

Asking for a standard decision

To ask for a standard decision about medical care or payment for care, you or your authorized representative should mail or deliver a request in writing to the following address: Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, 450 Riverchase Parkway, East, Birmingham, Alabama 35244.

Asking for a fast decision

You, any doctor, or your authorized representative can ask us to give a “fast” decision (rather than a “standard” decision) about medical care by calling us at 1-888-234-8266 (for TTY, call 1-800-257-3384). Or, you can deliver a written request to Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, 450 Riverchase Parkway, East, Birmingham, Alabama 35244, or fax it to 1-888-243-0031. Requests submitted after hours or on the weekend can be faxed to the fax number listed above. Be sure to ask for a “fast” or “72-hour” review.

- If **any** doctor asks for a fast decision for you, or supports you in asking for one, and the doctor indicates that waiting for a standard decision could seriously harm your health or your ability to function, we will automatically give you a fast decision.
- If you ask for a fast initial decision without support from a doctor, we will decide if your health requires a fast decision. If we decide that your medical condition does not meet the requirements for a fast initial decision, we will send you a letter informing you that if you get a doctor’s support for a “fast” review, we will automatically give you a fast decision. The letter will also tell you how to file a “grievance” if you disagree with our decision to deny your request for a fast review. It will also tell you about your right to ask for a “fast grievance.” If we deny your request for a fast initial decision, we will instead give you a standard decision (typically within 14 calendar days; see below).

What happens when you request an “initial decision”?

What happens, including how soon we must decide, depends on the type of decision.

1. *For a decision about payment for care you already received.*

We have 30 calendar days to make a decision after we have received your request. However, if we need more information, we can take up to 30 more days. You will be told in writing when we make a decision. If we do not approve your request for payment, we must tell you why, and tell you how you can appeal this decision. If you have not received an answer from us within 60 calendar days of your request for payment, then the failure to receive an answer is the same as being told that your request was not approved. You may then appeal this decision. (An appeal is also called a reconsideration.) Step 2 tells how to file this appeal.

2. *For a standard initial decision about medical care.*

We have up to 14 calendar days to make a decision after we have received your request, but we will make it sooner if your health condition requires. However, we are allowed to take up to an additional 14 calendar days to make a decision if you request the additional time, or if we need more time to gather information that may benefit you. For example, we may need more time to get information that would help us approve your request for medical care (such as medical records). When we take additional days, we will notify you in writing of this extension. If you feel that we should not take additional days, you can make a specific type of complaint called a “grievance.” Section 10 of this booklet tells how to file a grievance.

We will tell you in writing of our initial decision concerning the medical care you have requested. You will receive this notification when we make our decision, under the time frame explained above. If we do not approve your request, we must explain why, and tell you of your right to appeal our decision. Step 2 tells how to file this appeal.

If you have not received an answer from us within 14 calendar days of your request for the initial decision, the failure to receive an answer is the same as being told that your request was not approved, and you have the right to appeal. Step 2 tells how to file this appeal. If we tell you that we extended the number of days needed for a decision and you have not received an answer from us by the end of the extension period, the failure to receive an answer is the same as being told that your request was not approved, and you do have the right to appeal.

3. For a fast initial decision about medical care.

If you receive a “fast” review, we will give you our decision about your medical care within 72 hours after you or your doctor ask for a “fast” review -- sooner if your health requires. However, we are allowed to take up to 14 more calendar days to make this decision if we find that some information is missing which may benefit you, or if you need more time to prepare for this review. If you feel that we should not take any additional days, you can make a specific type of complaint called a “grievance.” Section 10 of this booklet tells how to file a grievance.

We will tell you our decision by phone as soon as we make the decision. Within three calendar days after we tell you of our decision in person or by phone, we will send you a letter that explains the decision. If we do not tell you about our decision within 72 hours (or by the end of any extended time period), this is the same as denying your request. If we deny your request for a fast decision, you may file a grievance. Section 10 of this booklet tells how to file a grievance.

What happens next if we decide completely in your favor?

If we make an “initial decision” that is completely in your favor, what happens next depends on the situation.

1. For a decision about payment for care you already received.

We must pay within 30 calendar days of your request for payment, unless your request has errors or missing information. Then, we must pay within 60 calendar days.

2. For a standard decision about medical care.

We must authorize or provide you with the care you have requested as quickly as your health requires, but no later than 14 calendar days after we received the request you made for the initial decision. If we extended the time needed to make the decision, we will approve or provide your medical care when we make our decision.

3. For a fast decision about medical care.

We must authorize or provide you with the medical care you have requested within 72 hours of receiving your request. If your health would be affected by waiting this long, we must provide it sooner.

What happens next if we deny your request?

If we deny your request, we may decide *completely* or only *partly* against you. For example, if we deny your request for payment for care that you have already received, we may say that we will pay nothing

or only part of the amount you requested. In denying a request for medical care, we might decide not to approve any of the care you want, or only some of the care you want. If any initial decision does not give you *all* that you requested, you have the right to ask us to reconsider the decision. (See Step 2).

STEP 2: If we deny part or all of your request in Step 1, you may ask us to reconsider our decision. This is called an “appeal” or “request for reconsideration.”

Please call us at 1-888-234-8266 if you need help in filing your appeal. You may ask us to reconsider the initial decision we made in Step 1, even if only part of our decision is not what you requested. When we receive your request to reconsider the initial decision, we give the request to different people than those who were involved in making the initial decision. This helps ensure that we will give your request a fresh look.

How you make your appeal depends on whether it is about payment for care you already received, or about authorizing medical care. If your appeal concerns a decision we made about authorizing medical care, then you and/or your doctor will first need to decide whether you need a “fast” appeal. The procedures for deciding on a “standard” or a “fast” *appeal* are the same as those described for a “standard” or “fast” *initial decision* in Step 1. Please see the discussion in Step 1 under “Do you have a request for medical care that needs to be decided more quickly than the standard time frame?” and “Asking for a fast decision.”

Getting information to support your appeal

We must gather all the information we need to make a decision about your appeal. If we need your assistance in gathering this information, we will contact you. You have the right to obtain and include additional information as part of your appeal. For example, you may already have documents related to the issue, or you may want to get the doctor’s records or the doctor’s opinion to help support your request. You may need to give the doctor a written request to get information.

You can give us your additional information in any of the following ways:

- In writing, to Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, P. O. Box 995, Birmingham, Alabama 35298.
- By fax, at 1-888-243-0031.
- By telephone -- if it is a “fast” appeal -- at 1-888-234-8266.
- In person, at 450 Riverchase Parkway East, Birmingham, Alabama 35244.

You also have the right to ask us for a copy of information regarding your appeal. You can call or write us at 1-888-234-8266, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, 450 Riverchase Parkway East, Birmingham, Alabama 35244. We are allowed to charge a fee for copying and sending this information to you.

How do you file your appeal of the initial decision?

The rules about who may file an appeal in Step 2 are the same as the rules about who may ask for an “initial decision” in Step 1. Follow the instructions in Step 1 under “Who may ask for an ‘initial decision’” about medical care or payment?”

Either you, someone you appoint, or your provider may file this appeal.

However, providers who do not have a contract with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama must sign a “waiver of payment” statement that says that they will not ask you to pay for the medical service under review, regardless of the outcome of the appeal.

How soon must you file your appeal?

The appeal should be given to us in writing at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, P. O. Box 995, Birmingham, Alabama 35298, within 60 calendar days after we notify you of the initial decision from Step 1. We can give you more time if you have a good reason for missing the deadline.

You may also send your appeal to your Social Security Administration office. Please note that sending your appeal to this office instead of to us will cause a delay when we begin the appeal, since this office must forward your appeal request to us.

What if you want a “fast” appeal?

The rules about asking for a “fast” appeal in Step 2 are the same as the rules about asking for a “fast” initial decision in Step 1. If you want to ask for a “fast” appeal in Step 2, please follow the instructions in Step 1 under “Asking for a fast decision.”

How soon must we decide on your appeal?

How quickly we decide on your appeal depends on the type of appeal:

1. For a decision about payment for care you already received..

After we receive your appeal, we have 60 calendar days to make a decision. If we do not decide within 60 calendar days, your appeal *automatically* goes to Step 3, where an independent organization will review your case.

2. For a standard decision about medical care.

After we receive your appeal, we have up to 30 calendar days to make a decision, but will make it sooner if your health condition requires. However, if you request it, or if we find that some information is missing which can help you, we can take up to 14 more calendar days to make our decision. If we do not tell you our decision within 30 calendar days (or by the end of the extended time period), your request will *automatically* go to Step 3, where an independent organization will review your case.

3. For a fast decision about medical care.

After we receive your appeal, we have up to 72 hours to make a decision, but will make it sooner if your health requires. However, if you request it, or if we find that some information is missing which can help you, we can take up to 14 more calendar days to make our decision. If we do not tell you our decision within 72 hours (or by the end of the extended time period), your request will *automatically* go to Step 3, where an independent organization will review your case.

What happens next if we decide completely in your favor?***1. For a decision about payment for care you already received.***

We must pay within 60 calendar days of the day we received your request for us to reconsider our initial decision. If we decide only partially in your favor, your appeal *automatically* goes to Step 3,

where an independent organization will review your case.

2. *For a standard decision about medical care.*

We must authorize or provide you with the care you have asked for as quickly as your health requires, but no later than 30 calendar days after we received your appeal. If we extend the time needed to decide your appeal, we will authorize or provide your medical care when we make our decision.

3. *For a fast decision about medical care.*

We must authorize or provide you with the care you have asked for within 72 hours of receiving your appeal -- or sooner, if your health would be affected by waiting this long. If we extended the time needed to decide your appeal, we will authorize or provide your medical care at the time we make our decision.

What happens next if we deny your appeal?

If we deny any part of your appeal in Step 2, then your appeal *automatically* goes on to Step 3 where an independent organization will review your case. This independent review organization contracts with the federal government and is not part of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama. We will tell you in writing that your appeal has been sent to this organization for review. How quickly we must forward your appeal to the independent review organization that performs the review in Step 3 depends on the type of appeal:

1. *For a decision about payment for care you already received.*

We must send all the information about your appeal to the independent review organization within 60 calendar days from the date we received your appeal in Step 2.

2. *For a standard decision about medical care.*

We must send all of the information about your appeal to the independent review organization as quickly as your health requires, but no later than 30 calendar days after we received your appeal in Step 2.

3. *For a fast decision about medical care.*

We must send all of the information about your appeal to the independent review organization within 24 hours of our decision.

STEP 3: If we deny any part of your appeal in Step 2, your appeal automatically goes on for review by a government-contracted independent review organization

What independent review organization does this review?

In Step 3, your appeal is given a new review by an outside, independent review organization that has a contract with CMS (Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services), the government agency that runs the Medicare program. This organization has no connection to us. We will tell you when we have sent your appeal to this organization. You have the right to get a copy from us of your case file that we sent to this organization. We are allowed to charge you a fee for copying and sending this information to

you.

How soon must the independent review organization decide?

After the independent review organization receives your appeal, how long the organization can take to make a decision depends on the type of appeal:

1. *For an appeal about payment for care*, the independent review organization has up to 60 calendar days to make a decision.
2. *For a standard appeal about medical care*, the independent review organization has up to 30 calendar days to make a decision. This time period can be extended by up to 14 calendar days if more information is needed and the extension will benefit you.
3. *For a fast appeal about medical care*, the independent review organization has up to 72 hours to make a decision. This time period can be extended by up to 14 calendar days if more information is needed and the extension will benefit you.

If the independent review organization decides completely in your favor:

The independent review organization will tell you in writing about its decision and the reasons for it. What happens next depends on the type of appeal:

1. *For an appeal about payment for care*,

We must pay within 30 calendar days after receiving the decision.

2. *For a standard appeal about medical care*,

We must *authorize* the care you have asked for within 72 hours after receiving notice of the decision from the independent review organization, or *provide* the care as quickly as your health requires, but no later than 14 calendar days after receiving the decision.

3. *For a fast appeal about medical care*,

We must authorize or provide you with the care you have asked for within 72 hours of receiving the decision.

What happens next if the review organization decides against you (either partly or completely)?

The independent review organization will tell you in writing about its decision and the reasons for it. You may continue your appeal by asking for a review by an Administrative Law Judge (see Step 4), provided that the dollar value of the medical care or the payment in your appeal is \$100 or more.

You must make a request for review by an Administrative Law Judge in writing within 60 calendar days after the date you were notified of the decision made in Step 3. You can extend this deadline for good cause. You have a choice about where you send your written request:

- Directly to the independent review organization that reviewed your appeal in Step 3. They will then send your request along with your appeal information to the Administrative Law Judge who will hear your appeal.
- To Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, or to your local Social Security Administration office. If you do this, starting Step 4 will take longer because your request must first be

forwarded to the independent review organization that reviewed your appeal in Step 3. The independent review organization will then send your request along with your appeal information to the Administrative Law Judge who will hear your appeal.

STEP 4: If the organization that reviews your case in Step 3 does not rule completely in your favor, you may ask for a review by an Administrative Law Judge

As stated in Step 3, if the independent review organization does not rule completely in your favor, you may ask them to forward your appeal for a review by an Administrative Law Judge. During this review, you may present evidence, review the record, and be represented by counsel. The Administrative Law Judge will not review the appeal if the dollar value of the medical care is less than \$100. If the dollar value is less than \$100, you may not appeal any further.

How soon does the Judge make a decision?

The Administrative Law Judge will hear your case, weigh all of the evidence up to this point, and make a decision as soon as possible.

If the Judge decides in your favor

We must pay for, authorize, or provide the service you have asked for within 60 calendar days from the date we receive notice of the decision. We have the right to appeal this decision by asking for a review by the Medicare Appeals Council (Step 5).

If the Judge rules against you

You have the right to appeal this decision by asking for a review by the Medicare Appeals Council (Step 5). The letter you get from the Administrative Law Judge will tell you how to request this review.

STEP 5: Your case may be reviewed by a Medicare Appeals Council

This Council will first decide whether to review your case

The Medicare Appeals Council does not review every case it receives. When it gets your case, it will first decide whether to review your case. If they decide not to review your case, then either you or Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama may request a review by a Federal Court Judge. However, the Federal Court Judge will only review cases when the amount involved is \$1,050 or more. If the dollar value is less than \$1,050, you may not appeal any further.

How soon will the Council make a decision?

If the Medicare Appeals Council reviews your case, they will make their decision as soon as possible.

If the Council decides in your favor

We must pay for, authorize, or provide the medical service you have asked for within 60 calendar days from the date we receive notice of the decision. However, we have the right to appeal this decision by asking a Federal Court Judge to review the case (Step 6), provided the amount involved is at least \$1,050. If the dollar value is less than \$1,050, the Council's decision is final.

If the Council decides against you

If the amount involved is \$1,050 or more, you or we have the right to continue your appeal by asking a Federal Court Judge to review the case (Step 6). If the value is less than \$1,050, the Council's decision is final and you may not take the appeal any further.

STEP 6: Your case may go to a Federal Court

If the contested amount is \$1,050 or more, you or we may ask a Federal Court Judge to review the case.

SECTION 12 Leaving *Blue Advantage* and your choices for continuing Medicare after you leave

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What is “disenrollment”?

“Disenrollment” from Blue Advantage means ending your membership in Blue Advantage. Disenrollment can be voluntary (your own choice) or involuntary (not your own choice):

- ***You might leave Blue Advantage because you have decided that you want to leave. You can do this for any reason.***
- ***There are also a few situations where you would be required to leave. For example, you would have to leave Blue Advantage if you move out of our geographic service area or if Blue Advantage leaves the Medicare program. We are not allowed to ask you to leave the plan because of your health.***

Whether leaving the plan is your choice or not, this section explains your Medicare coverage choices after you leave and the rules that apply.

Until your membership officially ends, you should keep getting your Medicare services through Blue Advantage or you will have to pay more for your services

If you leave Blue Advantage, it takes some time for your membership to end and your new way of getting Medicare to take effect (we discuss when the change takes effect later in this section). While you are waiting for your membership to end, you are still a member and should continue to get your care as usual through Blue Advantage.

What are your choices for continuing Medicare if you leave Blue Advantage?

If you leave Blue Advantage, one choice for continuing with Medicare is to go to Original Medicare. You may also have the choice of joining another Medicare managed care plan or a Medicare Private Fee-for-Service plan if any of these types of plans are available in your area and they are accepting new members.

- **Original Medicare** is available throughout the country. It is a pay-per-visit or “fee-for-service” health plan that lets you go to any doctor, hospital, or other health care provider *who accepts Medicare*. You must pay a deductible. Medicare pays its share of the Medicare-approved amount, and you pay your share. Original Medicare has two parts: Part A (Hospital Insurance) and Part B (Medical Insurance).
- **Medicare Managed Care Plans** (such as HMOs or PPOs) are available in some parts of the country. In HMOs you go to the doctors, hospitals, and other providers *that are part of the plan*. In PPOs, you can usually see any doctor but you may pay more to see doctors, hospitals, and other providers that are *not* part of the plan. These plans must cover all Medicare Part A and Part B health care. Some plans cover extras, like prescriptions drugs.
- **Medicare Private Fee-for-Service Plans** are available in some parts of the country. In Private Fee-for-Service plans, you may go to *any* Medicare-approved doctor or hospital that accepts the plan’s payment. The Private Fee-for-Service plan, rather than the Medicare program, decides how much it will pay and what you pay for the services you get. You may pay more for Medicare-covered benefits. You may get extra benefits that Original Medicare does not cover. Private Fee-for-Service plans are *not* the same as Medigap (Medicare supplement insurance) policies.

When can you change your Medicare choices?

All through the year, everyone with Medicare (including members of Blue Advantage) is allowed to change from their current way of getting Medicare to one of their other choices. As we have explained above, you have one or more of the following choices about how you get your Medicare coverage. They are:

- **Original Medicare.** This choice is available to you throughout the year.
- **A Medicare Managed Care Plan.** This choice is available to you **if** there are Medicare managed care plans in your area, and **if** they are accepting new members when you want to join. There is a yearly period from November 15 through December 31 when all Medicare Advantage

plans must accept new members (unless unusual circumstances apply). (Medicare Advantage is the new name for Medicare + Choice).

- A **Medicare Private Fee-for-Service plan**. This choice is available to you **if** there are Medicare Private Fee-for-Service plans in your area, and **if** they are accepting new members when you want to join. There is a yearly period from November 15 through December 31 when all Medicare Private Fee-for-Service plans must accept new members (unless unusual circumstances apply).

In most cases, your disenrollment date will be the first day of the month that comes *after* the month we receive your request to leave. For example, if we receive your request to leave during the month of February, your disenrollment date will be March 1. There is an exception: if we receive your request between November 15 and 30, the change will take effect on January 1, unless you specifically ask for a disenrollment date of December 1.

What should you do if you decide to leave Blue Advantage?

If you want to leave Blue Advantage, what you must do to leave depends on whether you want to change to Original Medicare or to one of your other choices.

How to change from Blue Advantage to Original Medicare

Do you need to buy a Medigap (Medicare supplement insurance) policy?

If you want to change from Blue Advantage to Original Medicare, you should think about whether you need to buy a Medigap policy to supplement your Original Medicare coverage. For Medigap advice, you should contact Alabama Department of Senior Services/the SHIP in Alabama (the phone number is in Section 1). You can ask Alabama Department of Senior Services/the SHIP about how and when to buy a Medigap policy if you need one. Alabama Department of Senior Services/The SHIP can tell you if you have a guaranteed issue right to buy a Medigap policy.

If you have a “**guaranteed issue right**,” this means that the Medigap insurer must sell you a Medigap policy, even if you have health problems. This is a special, temporary right, which means that if you decide to change to Original Medicare you have a limited time to buy a Medigap policy on a guaranteed issue basis. For example, you have a guaranteed issue right to buy a Medigap policy if you are in a Medicare managed care plan “trial period” and you change to Original Medicare. Generally, a Medicare managed care plan trial period begins on the date of “first time” enrollment in a Medicare health plan (other than Original Medicare) and ends 12 months later. You may be in a Medicare managed care plan trial period if in the past 12 months you: (1) dropped a Medigap policy to join a Medicare health plan for the first time; or (2) joined a Medicare health plan upon first becoming entitled to Medicare at age 65. Under certain circumstances, if you lose your health plan coverage while you are still in a trial period, the trial period can last for an extra 12 months. Alabama Department of Senior Services/The SHIP can tell you about other situations where you may have guaranteed issue rights.

If you do buy a Medigap policy, you still have to follow the instructions below for changing from Blue Advantage to Original Medicare. (Buying a Medigap policy does not switch you from Blue Advantage to Original Medicare. A Medigap sales person or insurance agent cannot cancel your Blue Advantage membership and put you in Original Medicare.)

How to change from Blue Advantage to Original Medicare

If you decide to change from Blue Advantage to Original Medicare, you must tell us (or one of the offices listed below) that you want to leave Blue Advantage. You do *not* have to notify Original Medicare, because you will automatically be in Original Medicare when you leave Blue Advantage. Here is how it works:

1. First, use any of the following ways to tell us that you want to leave Blue Advantage:
 - You can write or fax a letter to Member Services at P. O. Box 995, Birmingham, Alabama 35298 or to our fax number at 1-888-246-0230, or you can fill out a disenrollment form. Be sure to sign and date your letter. To get a disenrollment form, call Member Services at the telephone number shown in Section 1.
 - You can call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227), which is the national Medicare help line, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. TTY Users should call 1-877-486-2048.
 - You can contact your nearest Social Security office or, if you have Railroad Retirement benefits, you can contact the Railroad Retirement Board office. Section 1 tells you how to contact these offices.
2. We will then send you a letter that tells you when your membership will end. This is your **disenrollment date** – the day you officially leave Blue Advantage. In most cases, your disenrollment date will be the first day of the month after the month we receive your request to leave. For example, if we receive your request to leave during the month of February, your disenrollment date will be March 1. There is an exception: **One exception occurs in November – if we receive your request between November 15 and 30, you will be allowed to choose either December 1 or January 1 as your effective date of disenrollment. If you do not choose an effective date, you disenrollment will be effective on December 1.**
3. On your disenrollment date, your membership in Blue Advantage ends, and you can start using your red, white, and blue Medicare card to get services under Original Medicare. You will not get anything in writing that tells you that you have Original Medicare, because you will *automatically* be in Original Medicare when you leave Blue Advantage. (Call Social Security at 1-800-772-1213 if you need a new red, white, and blue Medicare card.)

How to change from Blue Advantage to another Medicare managed care plan or to a Private Fee-for-Service Plan

If you want to change from Blue Advantage to a different Medicare managed care plan or to a Private Fee-for-Service plan, here is what to do:

1. Contact the plan you want to join to be sure it is accepting new members.
2. If the plan is accepting new members, apply for membership in the plan. **Once you are enrolled in your new plan, your membership in Blue Advantage will automatically end.** This means that you do not need to tell us that you are leaving. However, we do encourage you to tell us why you left.
3. Your new plan will tell you in writing the date when your membership in that plan begins, and your membership in Blue Advantage will end on that same day (this will be your “disenrollment date”). Remember, you are still a member until your disenrollment date, and should continue to get your

medical care as usual through Blue Advantage until the date your membership ends.

What happens to you if Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama leaves the Medicare program or Blue Advantage leaves the area where you live?

If we leave the Medicare program or change our service area so that it no longer includes the area where you live, we will tell you in writing. If this happens, your membership in Blue Advantage will end, and you will have to change to another way of getting your Medicare benefits. All of the benefits and rules described in this booklet will continue until your membership ends. This means that you must continue to get your medical care in the usual way through Blue Advantage until your membership ends.

Your choices will always include Original Medicare. Your choices may also include joining another Medicare managed care plan, or a Private Fee-for-Service plan, if these plans are available in your area and are accepting new members. Once we have told you in writing that we are leaving the Medicare program or the area where you live, you may change to another way of getting your Medicare benefits at any time. If you decide to change from Blue Advantage to Original Medicare, you will have the right to buy a Medigap policy regardless of your health. This is called a “guaranteed issue right” and it is explained earlier in this section under the heading, “Do you need to buy a Medigap (Medicare supplement insurance) policy?”

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama has a contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), the government agency that runs Medicare. This contract renews each year. At the end of each year, the contract is reviewed, and either Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama or CMS can decide to end it. You will get 90 days advance notice in this situation. It is also possible for our contract to end at some other time, too. If the contract is going to end, we will generally tell you 90 days in advance. Your advance notice may be as little as 30 days or even fewer days if CMS must end our contract in the middle of the year.

You must leave Blue Advantage if you move out of the service area or are away from the service area for more than six months in a row

If you plan to move or take a long trip, please call Member Services at the number on the cover of this booklet to find out if the place you are moving to or traveling to is in plan’s service area. If you move permanently out of our service area, or if you are away from our service area for more than six months in a row. You will need to leave (“disenroll” from) Blue Advantage. In these situations, if you do not leave on your own, we must end your membership (“disenroll” you). An earlier part of this section tells about the choices you have if you leave Blue Advantage and explains how to leave.

Under certain conditions Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama can end your membership and make you leave the plan

We *cannot* ask you to leave the plan because of your health

No member of any Medicare health plan can be asked to leave the plan for any health-related reasons. If you ever feel that you are being encouraged or asked to leave Blue Advantage because of your health, you should call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227; TTY 1-877-486-2048), which is the national Medicare help line, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

We can ask you to leave the plan under certain special conditions

If any of the following situations occur, we will need to end your membership in Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama.

- If you move out of our geographic service area or live outside the plan's service area for more than six months at a time.
- If you do *not* stay continuously enrolled in both Medicare Part A and Medicare Part B (see Section 8 for information about staying enrolled in Part A and Part B).
- If you give us information on your enrollment form that you know is false or deliberately misleading, and it affects whether or not you can enroll in **Blue Advantage**.
- If you behave in a way that is unruly, uncooperative, disruptive, or abusive, and this behavior seriously affects our ability to arrange or provide medical care for you or for others who are members of **Blue Advantage**. We cannot make you leave **Blue Advantage** for this reason unless we get permission first from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, the government agency that runs Medicare.
- If you let someone else use your plan membership card to get medical care. Before we ask you to leave **Blue Advantage** for this reason, we must refer your case to the Inspector General, and this may result in criminal prosecution.
- If you do not pay the plan premiums, we will tell you that you have a 30-day grace period during which you can pay the plan premiums before you are required to leave **Blue Advantage**.

You have the right to make a complaint if we ask you to leave Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama

If we ask you to leave **Blue Advantage**, we will tell you our reasons in writing and explain how you can file a complaint against us if you want to.

SECTION 13 Legal Notices

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Notice about governing law

Many different laws apply to this Evidence of Coverage. Some additional provisions may apply to your situation because they are required by law. This can affect your rights and responsibilities even if the laws are not included or explained in this document. The principal law that applies to this document is Title XVIII of the Social Security Act and the regulations created under the Social Security Act by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, or CMS. In addition, other federal laws may apply and, under certain circumstances, the laws of the State of Alabama may apply.

Notice about non-discrimination

When we make decisions about the provision of health care services, we do not discriminate based on a person's race, disability, religion, sex, sexual orientation, health, ethnicity, creed, age, or national origin. All organizations that provide Medicare managed care plans, like Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, must obey federal laws against discrimination, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, the Americans with Disabilities Act, all other laws that apply to organizations that receive federal funding, and any other laws and rules that apply for any other reason.

Section 14 Definitions of some words used in this booklet

For the terms listed below, this section either gives a definition or directs you to a place in this booklet that explains the term

Appeal – Sections 10 and 11 explain about appeals, including the process involved in making an appeal.

Benefit period – For both Blue Advantage and Original Medicare, a benefit period is used to determine coverage for inpatient stays in hospitals and skilled nursing facilities. A benefit period *begins* on the first day you go to a Medicare-covered inpatient hospital or a skilled nursing facility. The benefit period *ends* when you have not been an inpatient at any hospital or SNF for 60 days in a row. If you go to the hospital (or SNF) after one benefit period has ended, a new benefit period begins. There is no limit to the number of benefit periods you can have. The type of care you actually receive during the stay determines whether you are considered to be an inpatient for SNF stays, but not for hospital stays.

You are an inpatient in a SNF only if your care in the SNF meets certain skilled level of care standards. Specifically, in order to have been an inpatient while in a SNF, you must need daily skilled nursing or skilled rehabilitation care, or both. (Section 7 tells what is meant by skilled care.)

Generally, you are an inpatient of a hospital if you are receiving inpatient services in the hospital (the type of care you actually receive in the hospital does not determine whether you are considered to be an inpatient in the hospital).

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) -- The Federal Agency that runs the Medicare program (CMS was formerly known as the Health Care Financing Administration). Section 1 tells how you can contact CMS.

Covered services – The general term we use in this booklet to mean all of the health care services and supplies that are covered by **Blue Advantage**. Covered services are listed in the Benefits Chart in Section 4.

Disenroll or disenrollment -- The process of ending your membership in **Blue Advantage**. Disenrollment can be voluntary (your own choice) or involuntary (not your own choice). Section 12 tells about disenrollment.

Durable medical equipment is equipment needed for medical reasons, which is sturdy enough to be used many times without wearing out. A person normally needs this kind of equipment only when ill or injured. It can be used in the home. Examples of durable medical equipment include wheelchairs, hospital beds, or equipment that supplies a person with oxygen.

Emergency care -- Covered services that are 1) furnished by a provider qualified to furnish emergency services; and 2) needed to evaluate or stabilize an emergency medical condition. Section 3 tells about emergency services.

Evidence of coverage and disclosure information -- This document, along with your enrollment form explains the covered services, defines our obligations, and explains your rights and

responsibilities as a member of the Blue Advantage.

Grievance – Section 10 explains about grievances.

Medically necessary – Services or supplies that: are proper and needed for the diagnosis or treatment of your medical condition; are used for the diagnosis, direct care, and treatment of your medical condition; meet the standards of good medical practice in the local community; and are not mainly for the convenience of you or your doctor.

Medicare --The federal health insurance program for people 65 years of age or older, some people under age 65 with disabilities, and people with End-Stage Renal Disease (generally those with permanent kidney failure who need dialysis or a kidney transplant).

Medicare Advantage Organization -- A public or private organization licensed by the State as a risk-bearing entity that is under contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to provide covered services. Medicare Advantage Organizations can offer one or more Medicare Advantage Plans. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama is a Medicare Advantage Organization. (Medicare Advantage is the new name for Medicare + Choice).

Medicare Advantage Plan -- A benefit package offered by a Medicare Advantage Organization that offers a specific set of health benefits at a uniform premium and uniform level of cost-sharing to all people with Medicare who live in the service area covered by the Plan. A Medicare Advantage Organization may offer more than one plan in the same service area. Blue Advantage is a Medicare Advantage Plan. (Medicare Advantage is the new name for Medicare + Choice).

Medicare Cost Plan – A specific set of health benefits offered at a uniform premium and uniform level of cost-sharing to all people with Medicare living in the service area covered by the Plan. A company offering a Cost Plan may offer more than one plan in the same service area. Members under this plan may use Original Medicare benefits from any Medicare provider.

“Medigap” (Medicare supplement insurance) policy –Many people who get their Medicare through Original Medicare buy “Medigap” or Medicare supplement insurance policies to fill “gaps” in Original Medicare coverage.

Member (member of Blue Advantage, or “plan member”)– A person with Medicare who is eligible to get covered services, who has enrolled in Blue Advantage, and whose enrollment has been confirmed by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

Member services -- A department within Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama responsible for answering your questions about your membership, benefits, grievances, and appeals. See Section 1 for information about how to contact Member Services.

Non-plan provider or non-plan facility or out-of-network provider -- A provider or facility that we have **not** arranged with to coordinate or provide covered services to members of Blue Advantage. Non-plan providers are providers that are not employed, owned, or operated by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama and are not under contract to deliver covered services to you. As explained in this booklet, you may pay more if you see non-plan providers unless it is for emergency. Services provided by non-plan providers are subject to a \$1,000 calendar year deductible. Payment will be based on the lesser of the actual charges or the Medicare Allowed Amount. In addition to the

deductible, you will be responsible for 30% coinsurance.

Original Medicare -- A plan that is available everywhere in the United States. Some people call it “traditional Medicare” or “fee-for-service” Medicare. Original Medicare is the way most people get their Medicare Part A and Part B health care. It is the national pay-per-visit program that lets you go to any doctor, hospital, or other health care provider *who accepts Medicare*. You must pay the deductible. Medicare pays its share of the Medicare-approved amount, and you pay your share. Original Medicare has two parts: Part A (Hospital Insurance) and Part B (Medical Insurance).

Plan provider – “**Provider**” is the general term we use for doctors, other health care professionals, hospitals, and other health care facilities that are licensed or certified by Medicare and by the State to provide health care services. We call them “**plan providers**” when they are part of Blue Advantage. When we say that plan providers are “part of Blue Advantage,” this means that we have arranged with them to coordinate or provide covered services to members of Blue Advantage. Blue Advantage pays plan providers based on the contracts it has with the providers.

Quality Improvement Organization (QIO)-- Groups of practicing doctors and other health care experts who are paid by the Federal Government to check and improve the care given to Medicare patients. They must review your complaints about the quality of care given by doctors in inpatient hospitals, hospital outpatient departments, hospital emergency rooms, skilled nursing facilities, home health agencies, Private fee-for-service plans and ambulatory surgical centers. See Section 1 for information about how to contact Alabama Quality Assurance Foundation / the QIO in Alabama and Section 10 for information about making complaints to the QIO.

Rehabilitation services – These services include physical therapy, cardiac rehabilitation, speech and language therapy, and occupational therapy that are provided under the direction of a plan provider. See Section 7 for more information.

Routine Chiropractic – Services provided by a Chiropractor other than manipulation of the spine to correct a subluxation.

Service area -- Section 2 tells about Blue Advantage’s service area. “Service area” is the geographic area approved by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) within which an eligible individual may enroll in a particular plan offered by a Medicare Health Plan.

United States – the term “United States” means the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa and, for purposes of services rendered on a ship, includes the territorial waters adjoining the land areas of the United States.

Urgently needed care – Section 3 explains about urgently needed services. These are different from emergency services.



**BlueCross BlueShield
of Alabama**

An Independent Licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association