



Why You Should Enroll in Medicare at 65, Even When Delaying Social Security

Financial advisors often recommend delaying Social Security benefits past age 65 to maximize lifetime income through delayed retirement credits. However, it's critical to separate that strategy from Medicare enrollment.

Clients frequently assume Medicare and Social Security are linked, but failing to enroll in Medicare on time can lead to lifelong penalties and coverage gaps, even for those making smart decisions about Social Security.

There are several key reasons to enroll in Medicare at age 65:

1. Avoid permanent late enrollment penalties

Unless you have credible employer coverage (from active employment, not retiree benefits, COBRA, or a Health Savings Account plan), you must enroll in Medicare during your Initial Enrollment Period. If you miss this window, Part B carries a 10% penalty for each full 12-month period you were eligible but didn't enroll. This penalty lasts for life.

2. Medicare enrollment is independent of Social Security

If you delay Social Security, you must take the extra step to sign up for Medicare proactively—no automatic enrollment occurs. Many are unaware of this and risk missing their window. Going to [SSA.gov](https://www.ssa.gov) to enroll in Medicare at 65 is crucial to retirement planning.

3. Better value than COBRA or Marketplace plans

Combined with a Medigap or Advantage plan, Medicare Part B is often more cost-effective and comprehensive than COBRA or ACA marketplace coverage. Even high-income individuals subject to IRMAA usually see better value and predictability with Medicare.

4. Delaying can create coverage gaps

If you don't qualify for a Special Enrollment Period (SEP), you may have to wait until the next General Enrollment Period (Jan–Mar) to sign up, with coverage beginning July 1. That gap could result in both financial and health risk exposure.

5. Medigap enrollment rights are strongest at 65

Individuals who enroll in Medicare Part B at 65 have guaranteed issue rights for Medigap coverage. Delaying Medicare can forfeit those protections, leading to underwriting later. This is especially problematic for clients with pre-existing conditions.

Bottom Line

While delaying Social Security often makes financial sense, Medicare should typically begin at 65 unless you have active, credible employer coverage. Understanding this distinction protects both your health and long-term retirement strategy.

