



March 31, 2020

Andrew M. Saul, Commissioner
Social Security Administration Headquarters
6401 Security Blvd.
Woodlawn, MD 21207

Dear Commissioner Saul,

I am writing on behalf of current and future eligible Medicare beneficiaries who have been impacted by the communications restrictions implemented as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. These potential beneficiaries have lost their ability to enroll in Medicare during the General Election Period (GEP) which ended March 31, 2020 because they were either unable to reach their local Social Security office due to closures, long telephone wait times, or cannot use the on-line application process.

I ask that an extension of the General Enrollment Period or a Special Enrollment Period (SEP) be granted, similar to a previous “equitable relief” measure given to those who kept their Marketplace plan, instead of enrolling in Medicare Part B. This extension should remain in place until SSA is able to reopen their local offices.

California Health Advocates (CHA) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to providing quality Medicare, Medicare Supplement, long-term care insurance information, and supports the work of local State Health Insurance Assistance Programs (SHIPS, known in California as Health Insurance Counseling & Advocacy Programs (HICAP), providing benefits counseling and community education on Medicare and long-term care with training, education, technical assistance.

I have made multiple efforts to communicate with both the Social Security Administration (SSA) and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) the need for an extension of the GEP, and to date we have had no response. This effort has also been made by various advocacy organizations around the country. The extension will allow enrollment by those who were unable to do so prior to the deadline due to succumbing to COVID-19 virus, or because of problems reaching SSA offices by telephone or other constraints placed upon by this national emergency.

If a GEP extension or SEP is not granted, thousands of Medicare eligible beneficiaries will have to wait at least 12 months to get their Medicare benefits, a delay which could potentially cost their health, or worse - their lives.

I respectfully ask that you promptly act on this request or provide me with options that will help eligible Medicare beneficiaries obtain coverage that they desperately need.

If there are any questions, I can be reached at 530-521-7502.

Sincerely,

Tatiana Fassieux
Education & Training Specialist

Cc: Seema Verma, Administrator, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services