The Healthcare Sharing Ministry Trap Nobody Warns About

Here's something I've seen too many times. A faithful member of a congregation turns 65.

They've been in a healthcare sharing ministry for years — Samaritan Ministries, Liberty HealthShare, Medi-Share — and it's worked well. It fits their values. It feels like community. So they figure, why change anything?

Then the medical bills start arriving. Full price. No Medicare.

And the penalties? Those are permanent. This is the conversation most church leaders never knew they needed to have.

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What Everyone Gets Wrong About Healthcare Sharing Ministries and Medicare

People assume that if they have some form of healthcare coverage, they're protected from Medicare penalties.

They're not.

Here's what's actually true: According to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), healthcare sharing ministries — no matter how long you've been a member — **do not meet the legal definition of "creditable coverage" for Medicare Parts B or D.** They are not insurance. They do not create a Special Enrollment Period. And they do not protect your members from late enrollment penalties.

That's not an opinion. That's federal policy.

So when a senior sits in your pew, happy in their faith-based sharing program, they may be quietly walking toward a financial trap that follows them for the rest of their life.

Not Creditable Coverage

Healthcare sharing ministries do not meet the legal definition of creditable coverage for Medicare Parts B or D.

No Special Enrollment Period

Membership in a sharing ministry does not create a Special Enrollment Period — no exceptions.

No Penalty Protection

Sharing ministry participation does not protect members from late enrollment penalties — no matter how long they've been a member.

The Penalty Math Is Brutal — and It Never Goes Away

Let me give you the real numbers, because vague warnings don't move people. Specific ones do.

Medicare Part B Penalty

For every full 12-month period a person delays enrolling after they become eligible, their monthly Part B premium goes up **10%**. In 2026, the standard Part B premium is **$202.90 per month**.

Wait three years? That's a **30% permanent surcharge** — every single month — for as long as they have Medicare.

Sarah's brother waited three years. He now pays significantly more than he should, every month, for life. That money is gone. There's no appeal, no do-over.

Medicare Part D Penalty

The prescription drug penalty is **1% of the national base beneficiary premium ($38.99 in 2026)** for every month without creditable drug coverage. That penalty is also **permanent** — even if you switch plans.

Go 14 months without creditable coverage? You owe a **14% penalty** added to your premium for as long as you have Medicare drug coverage.

Healthcare sharing ministries do not qualify as creditable prescription drug coverage. **Not one of them.**

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Real People. Real Consequences.

Now I'll tell you about Kelly and Kendall — a couple who loved the concept of Samaritan Ministries. They eventually discovered the shortcomings of their approach. That said, none of that matters when CMS calculates your penalty.

In contrast, I've also walked alongside Tom and Linda, who enrolled in Medicare right on time, added a Supplement plan and a drug plan, and watched their monthly healthcare costs drop dramatically because Medicare was actually a good deal for them. That freed up money to pay off debt and build some financial breathing room.

Kelly & Kendall

Loved the concept of Samaritan Ministries. But none of that matters when CMS calculates your penalty. The consequences were real and lasting.

Tom & Linda

Enrolled in Medicare right on time, added a Supplement plan and a drug plan, and watched their monthly healthcare costs drop dramatically. That freed up money to pay off debt and build some financial breathing room.

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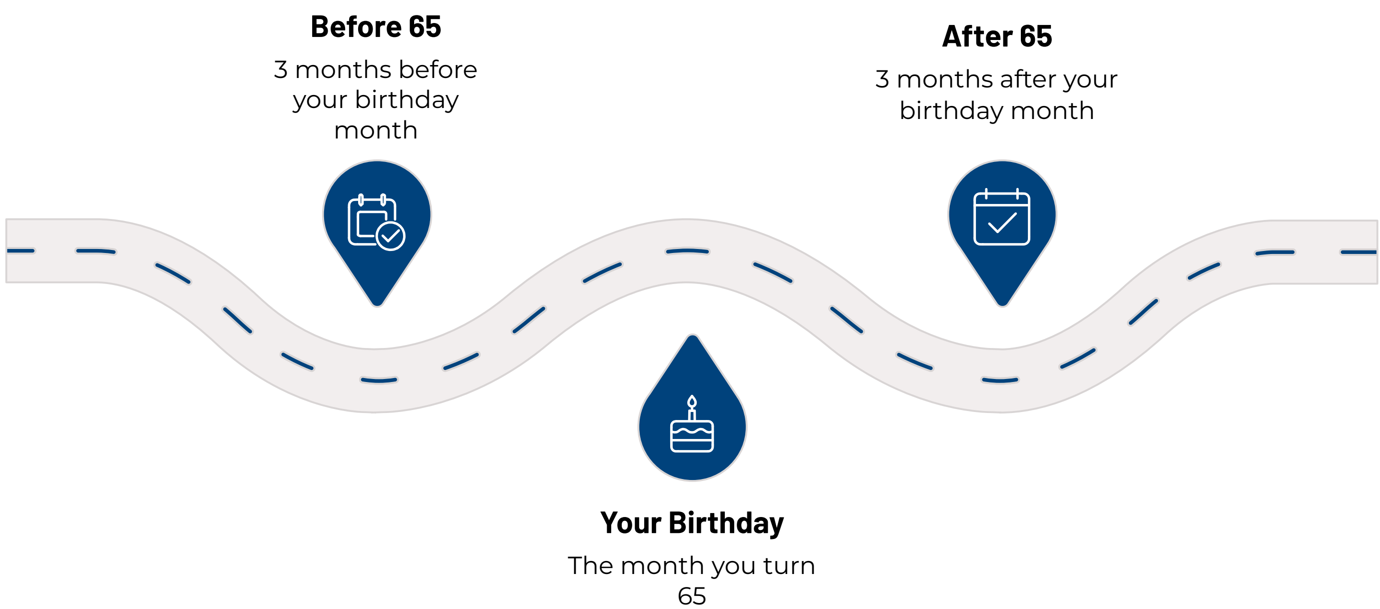
Initial Enrollment Period — The Window That Doesn't Stay Open



Your Medicare Initial Enrollment Period starts **three months before the month you turn 65** and ends **three months after**. That's a seven-month window.

Miss it — unless you qualify for a Special Enrollment Period (which healthcare sharing ministry participation does not trigger) — and you're looking at:

→ **Penalties That Compound Over Time**

Every year you delay adds more to your permanent monthly premium surcharge.

→ **Coverage Gaps During the Switch**

You may face periods with no coverage at all while waiting for your next enrollment window.

→ **Full Out-of-Pocket Exposure**

Potential exposure to full out-of-pocket costs for hospitalizations and procedures Medicare would otherwise cover.

> Think of the Initial Enrollment Period like a door that locks behind you. You can still get in later, but the price of entry goes up every year you wait — and that higher price never comes back down.

What About Medi-Share 65+ and Similar Programs?

This is where it gets nuanced, and church leaders need to understand the distinction.

Medi-Share 65+, for example, is designed to **work alongside Medicare** — not instead of it. Members still need to enroll in Medicare Parts A and B first. Medi-Share 65+ then helps cover things Medicare doesn't, like deductibles and copays.

That's a very different model than using a sharing ministry *in place of* Medicare before or after age 65.

✅ Programs That Supplement Medicare

Programs built to **supplement Medicare** can serve your members well. They work alongside Medicare Parts A and B to cover gaps like deductibles and copays.

⚠️ Programs That Replace Medicare

Programs used to **replace or delay Medicare enrollment** can cause lasting financial damage — permanent penalties, coverage gaps, and full out-of-pocket exposure.

📝 **One more thing worth knowing:** When your members turn 65, they get a one-time, six-month open enrollment period for Medicare Supplement (Medigap) plans. During that window, no insurer can deny them coverage or charge more based on health history. After that window closes, underwriting applies — and someone with health conditions may find their options limited or impossible. **That window doesn't repeat.**

Why You Can Be Just the Person to Deliver This Message

Roughly **11,400 Americans turn 65 every single day in 2025**, according to Bankers Life's demographic analysis. Some of them sit in your church. Most of them rightly trust you more than they trust a government website or an insurance commercial.

That's not a burden. That's an opportunity.

Seniors already look to church leaders for guidance on the hard decisions — finances, family, health. The problem is that most church staff don't know enough about Medicare to feel confident addressing it. And so the topic gets skipped. And the senior church members fall into gaps that cost them for decades.

> You don't have to become a Medicare expert. You just need to know enough to give people a heads-up — and to point them to someone who can walk them through the details.

What Church Leaders Can Do Right Now

Here's a practical checklist you can implement this month:

Partner with a Licensed Medicare Advisor

Partner with a licensed, trustworthy Medicare advisor who can field individual questions from members — at no cost to your church or to your members.

Host a Free Educational Session

Host a free educational session before your members' enrollment windows open. No sales pitch. Just clear information about what healthcare sharing ministries do and don't cover for Medicare purposes.

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One More Story Worth Telling

Then there's Adam, who has a happy story to share. He enrolled in Medicare on time. After that, he could see his doctors. Manage his conditions. He didn't have to choose between a checkup and paying his electric bill.

> That's what timely Medicare enrollment actually looks like in a person's life. Not paperwork. Not policy. A real person, staying healthier, staying active, staying present in their community.

That's the outcome worth protecting.

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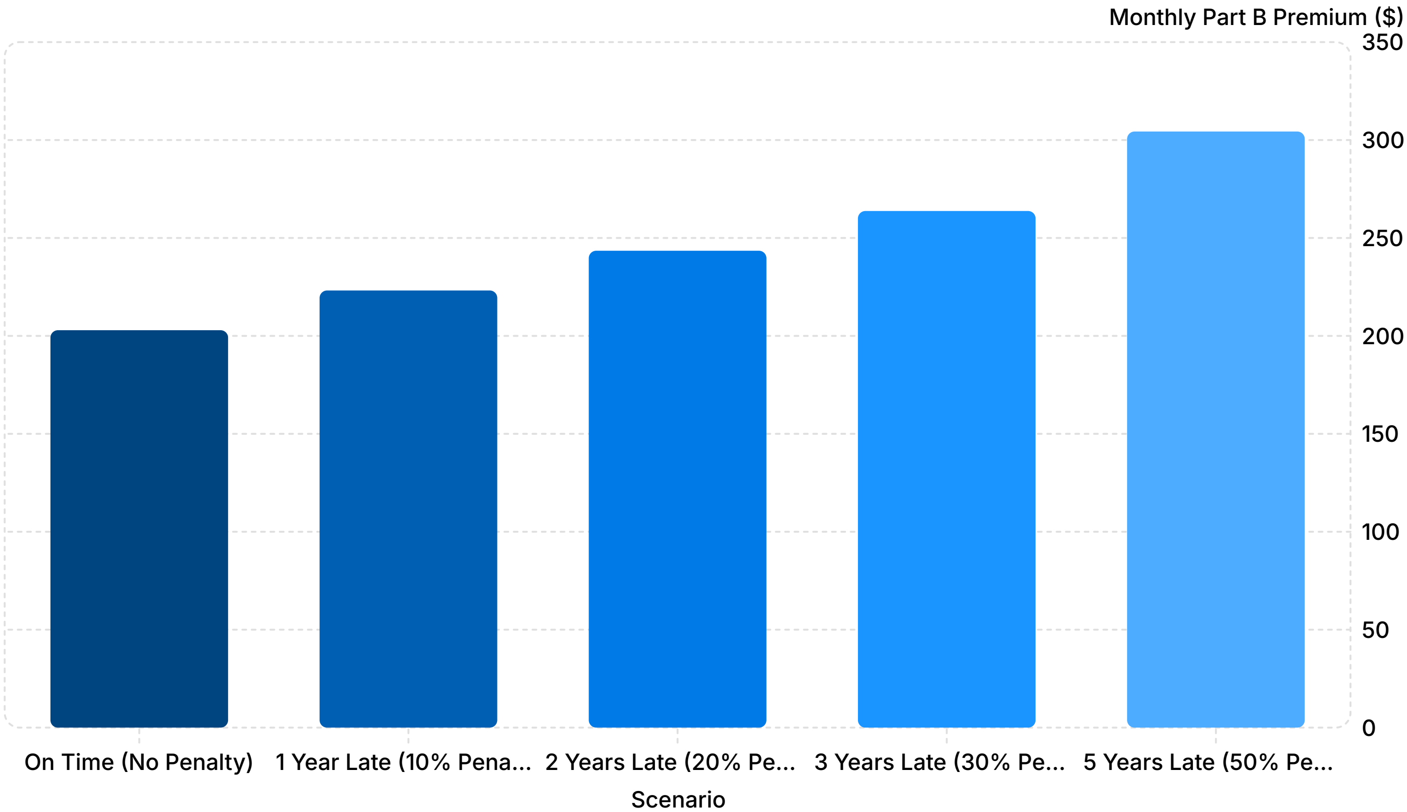
The Stakes: By the Numbers

The financial impact of delayed Medicare enrollment is not abstract. Here's what the numbers actually look like over time.



These penalties are **permanent**. Every extra dollar paid each month, for the rest of a member's life, is money that could have stayed in their pocket — or gone to their church, their family, or their community.

Ready to Help the People You Care About Get This Right?

You don't have to navigate this alone.

Rodney Powell — known as the *"Medicare Video Guy"* and affiliated with Senior Health Services — works alongside pastors, church administrators, and senior ministry leaders.

Free Educational Presentations

Free educational presentations for senior groups — no sales pitch, just clear and trustworthy information.

Individual Medicare Transitions

Individual Medicare transitions at zero cost to your members or your church.

Expert Guidance

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Contact Rodney Today

Rodney Powell has built his practice largely around serving church communities. Your members already trust you. Offer them guidance that frees them from personal issues so they can focus on serving.

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