

The Complete Medicare Hospice Benefit Guide

Everything families need to know about Medicare coverage for hospice care in California

◆ Westlake Village Hospice, INC

◆ Medicare-Certified Provider

◆ Serving LA, Ventura & Orange Counties

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What Is the Medicare Hospice Benefit?

The Medicare Hospice Benefit is a Medicare Part A benefit that covers all hospice care services for patients with a life-limiting illness who have a prognosis of six months or less if the illness runs its normal course.

Key fact: Medicare covers nearly 100% of hospice costs for eligible patients — including nursing visits, medications, medical equipment, aide support, chaplain services, and bereavement counseling for the family.

Hospice is a philosophy of care focused on comfort, dignity, and quality of life rather than curative treatment. It is NOT giving up — it is choosing the best quality of life for the time that matters most.

Am I Eligible for Medicare Hospice?

To qualify for the Medicare Hospice Benefit, a patient must meet **all three** of the following criteria:

1. **Enrolled in Medicare Part A** — This includes Medicare Advantage (Part C) patients, who may elect to receive hospice under Original Medicare.
2. **Physician certification** — Two physicians must certify that the patient has a terminal prognosis of 6 months or less if the illness follows its natural course.
3. **Electing hospice care** — The patient (or their legal representative) must sign the Medicare Hospice Election form, formally choosing comfort-focused care over curative treatment for the terminal diagnosis.

Important: Electing hospice does NOT mean forfeiting Medicare coverage for unrelated conditions. Patients can still receive Medicare treatment for other health issues.

What Does Medicare Hospice Cover?

Service	Covered?	Notes
Skilled nursing visits	✓ Fully covered	As often as medically necessary
Physician services	✓ Fully covered	Hospice medical director + attending
Medications for terminal diagnosis	✓ Covered	Small copay may apply for outpatient drugs
Medical equipment (DME)	✓ Fully covered	Hospital beds, wheelchairs, oxygen
Home health aide services	✓ Fully covered	Personal care, bathing, grooming
Social work services	✓ Fully covered	Counseling, resource planning
Chaplain / Spiritual care	✓ Fully covered	All faiths and non-religious options
Volunteer support services	✓ Fully covered	Companionship, light assistance
Bereavement counseling	✓ Fully covered	For family members, up to 13 months after passing
Respite care (inpatient)	✓ Up to 5 days	Small daily copay for room/board may apply
Continuous home care	✓ Covered	During medical crises at home
General inpatient care	✓ Covered	When home symptoms can't be managed

The Four Levels of Medicare Hospice Care

1. Routine Home Care (Most Common)

Regular nursing, aide, and therapy visits in the patient's home (or assisted living/SNF). This is the foundation of hospice care for most patients.

2. Continuous Home Care

Short-term, 24/7 nursing care provided in the home during acute medical crises — such as severe pain, breathing difficulty, or seizures. Minimum 8 hours in a 24-hour period.

3. Inpatient Respite Care

Short-term (up to 5 consecutive days) inpatient care to give the primary family caregiver a break. The patient receives full professional care in a Medicare-approved facility.

4. General Inpatient Care (GIP)

Inpatient care in a facility for acute symptom management when home-based care is insufficient. There is no limit on the number of days, but it must be medically necessary.

How Long Does Hospice Last?

Medicare hospice is organized into benefit periods:

- **Two initial periods of 90 days each**
- **Followed by unlimited 60-day periods**

At the start of each period, a physician must re-certify that the patient still qualifies (prognosis remains 6 months or less). There is **no hard cap** on how long a patient can receive hospice — patients can be on service for years if they continue to meet eligibility criteria.

Can I leave hospice? Yes. Patients may revoke their hospice election at any time and return to curative Medicare benefits. They can also re-enroll in hospice at a later time.

How to Enroll — Step by Step

1. **Contact us** — Call (818) 791-0611. We'll answer your questions and begin the admission process.
2. **Physician referral** — We work directly with your doctor to obtain the required certifications. You don't have to manage this alone.
3. **Benefit election** — Our team guides you through signing the Medicare Hospice Election form. Same-day admission is available.
4. **Care begins** — A nurse visits within 24 hours. Equipment is delivered the same day. Our interdisciplinary team begins coordinating your loved one's care.

Ready to Learn More? We're Here 24/7.

Our care coordinators can answer every question — at no obligation.

(818) 791-0611

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