

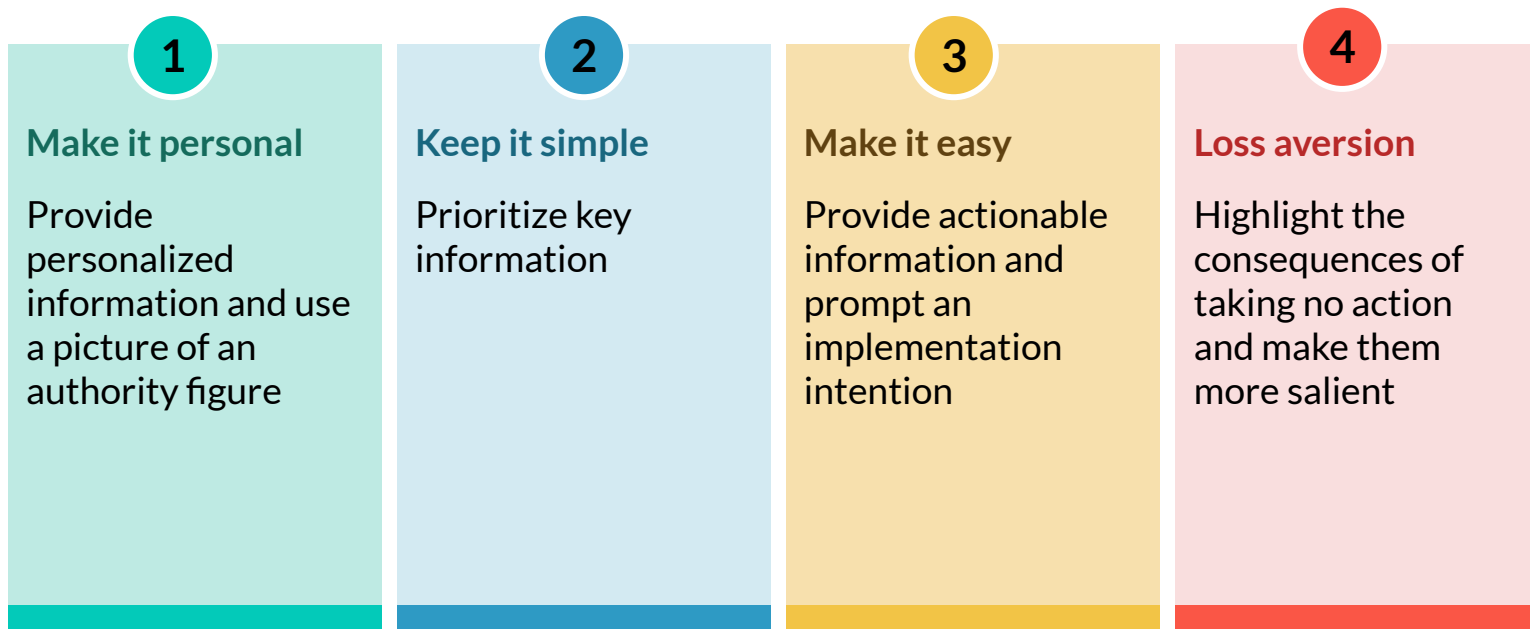
# Letters designed with behavioural science increase influenza vaccination in Medicare beneficiaries



**Project Summary:** The flu results in more than 200,000 hospitalizations and up to 48,000 deaths annually. The flu vaccine reduces the likelihood of infection by more than 60% and is fully covered by Medicare, yet only 6 in 10 Americans 65 and over actually receive the vaccination. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and the National Vaccine Program Office (NVPO) in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), along with OES, co-designed behaviorally-informed letters to encourage flu vaccination uptake.

**Intervention Description:** We randomly sampled 228,000 Medicare fee-for-service beneficiaries 66 and older in the fall of 2014. One half of the sample served as the control group and received no letter. The remaining participants were randomly assigned to receive one of four letters. All letters emphasized the risks of flu, encouraged the recipient to get vaccinated, and included the sender’s signature and picture. The letters were based on promising evidence of using communication elements like implementation prompts and enhanced choice prompts to encourage immunization.

The letters were designed with four principles in mind: ***make it personal, keep it simple, make it easy, and loss aversion***. More information on designing effective communications can be found [here](#). The way these principles were applied to the letters is described below:



For more information on this intervention or to start a conversation, please contact [oes@gsa.gov](mailto:oes@gsa.gov).

The OES project page for this project can be accessed [here](#) and publication is [here](#).

# Letter #1 signed by the Surgeon General



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Public Health Service

Office of the Surgeon General  
Rockville, MD 20852

Dear [SBENEFICIARY\_FIRST\_NAME],

## Protect yourself and those you love – get your free flu shot!

Almost 36,000 Americans die every year because of the influenza virus. The “flu” – as it’s commonly called – also results in more than 200,000 hospitalizations annually. Adults 65 and over, children 5 and younger, and pregnant women have the highest risk.

You can help! Getting the flu shot is the best way to protect yourself, your neighbors, and the ones you love. Because flu viruses change from year to year, it’s important to get a flu shot each year.

People with Medicare can get a **free** flu shot from doctors or other health care providers, and it’s widely available – just visit your local pharmacy, senior center, hospital, or doctor’s office.



So please don’t forget – get your free flu shot today!

Sincerely,

*RADM Boris D. Lushniak*

Boris D. Lushniak, M.D., M.P.H.  
RADM, U.S. Public Health Service  
Acting U.S. Surgeon General

Make it personal by using the recipient’s name

Prioritize key information and make it simple to digest

Use a picture of an authority figure to increase compliance and trust

# Letter #2 signed by the Director of the NVPO



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

7500 Security Boulevard  
Baltimore, MD 21244-1850

Dear **[\$BENEFICIARY\_FIRST\_NAME]**,

## Protect yourself and those you love – get your free flu shot!

Almost 36,000 Americans die every year because of the influenza virus. The “flu” – as it’s commonly called – also results in more than 200,000 hospitalizations annually. Adults 65 and over, children 5 and younger, and pregnant women have the highest risk.

You can help! Getting the flu shot is the best way to protect yourself, your neighbors, and the ones you love. Because flu viruses change from year to year, it’s important to get a flu shot each year.

People with Medicare can get a **free** flu shot from doctors or other health care providers, and it’s widely available – just visit your local pharmacy, senior center, hospital, or doctor’s office.



So please don’t forget – get your free flu shot today!

Sincerely,

Dr. Bruce Gellin  
Director, National Vaccine Program Office

Make it personal by using the recipient’s name

Prioritize key information and make it simple to digest

Use a picture of an authority figure to increase compliance and trust

# Letter #3 with implementation prompt



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Public Health Service

Office of the Surgeon General  
Rockville, MD 20852

Dear [SBENEFICIARY\_FIRST\_NAME],

## Protect yourself and those you love – get your free flu shot!

Almost 36,000 Americans die every year because of the influenza virus. The “flu” – as it’s commonly called – also results in more than 200,000 hospitalizations annually. Adults 65 and over, children 5 and younger, and pregnant women have the highest risk.

You can help! Getting the flu shot is the best way to protect yourself, your neighbors, and the ones you love. Because flu viruses change from year to year, it’s important to get a flu shot each year.

People with Medicare can get a **free** flu shot from doctors or other health care providers, and it’s widely available – just visit your local pharmacy, senior center, hospital, or doctor’s office.



So please don’t forget – get your free flu shot today!

Sincerely,

*RADM Boris D. Lushniak*

Boris D. Lushniak, M.D., M.P.H.  
RADM, U.S. Public Health Service  
Acting U.S. Surgeon General

P.S. Many people find it helpful to **make a plan** for getting their flu shot. Write yours below, and stick it on your refrigerator so you don’t forget!



I will get the flu shot to reduce my risk of getting and spreading the flu on:

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_  
(day of week) (month) (day) (time)

Make it personal by using the recipient’s name

Prioritize key information and make it simple to digest

Use a picture of an authority figure to increase compliance and trust

Include essential information for implementation that individual can fill out

# Letter #4 with implementation prompt and enhanced choice



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Public Health Service

Office of the Surgeon General  
Rockville, MD 20852

Dear [BENEFICIARY\_FIRST\_NAME],

## Protect yourself and those you love – get your free flu shot!

Almost 36,000 Americans die every year because of the influenza virus. The “flu” – as it’s commonly called – also results in more than 200,000 hospitalizations annually. Adults 65 and over, children 5 and younger, and pregnant women have the highest risk.

You can help! Getting the flu shot is the best way to protect yourself, your neighbors, and the ones you love. Because flu viruses change from year to year, it’s important to get a flu shot each year.

People with Medicare can get a **free** flu shot from doctors or other health care providers, and it’s widely available – just visit your local pharmacy, senior center, hospital, or doctor’s office.



So please don’t forget – get your free flu shot today!

Sincerely,

*RAOM Boris D. Lushniak*

Boris D. Lushniak, MD., MPH.  
RADM, U.S. Public Health Service  
Acting U.S. Surgeon General

P.S. Many people find it helpful to **decide now on a plan** for getting their flu shot. Mark your decided plan below, and stick it on your refrigerator so you don’t forget!



I will get the flu shot to reduce my risk of getting and spreading the flu on:

, at  
(day of week) (month) (day) (time)

I will not get the flu shot, even if it means I am more likely to get sick and spread the flu.

Tailor to specific needs by personalizing request (for recipient)

Prioritize key information and make it simple to digest

Use a picture of an authority figure to increase compliance and trust

Include essential information for implementation that individual can fill out

Highlight the consequences of taking no action and make them more salient