



Medicare to Offer Prescription Drug Coverage

In January 2006, for the first time, Medicare will offer prescription drug coverage for the more than 42 million people with Medicare. For too long now America's seniors have struggled to pay for their medicines. Now, Medicare will offer prescription drug coverage to help people with Medicare pay for the prescription drugs that their doctor tells them they need. Enrollment in the new drug plans will begin November 15, 2005. Education about this benefit begins now.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is working with other federal agencies to educate community organizations and associations, senior advocacy groups, employers, the healthcare industry, and a variety of other groups who will help to inform and enroll people with Medicare in one of the prescription drug coverage plans. These organizations will help Medicare beneficiaries learn that the new drug coverage will:

- Be available to all people with Medicare regardless of their income or how they receive their medical coverage
- Offer comprehensive help for those with limited income and resources which means no premiums or deductibles for more than nine million Medicare beneficiaries
- Give beneficiaries a choice between at least two plans available in their area that will cover a comprehensive set of both brand name and generic drugs
- Provide convenient access to pharmacies, generally within just a few miles of one's home
- Be available to all people with Medicare who live in nursing homes because all prescription drug plans will have to contract with the pharmacies that serve long-term care facilities
- Ensure that Medicare Advantage plans such as health maintenance organizations will continue to offer prescription drug coverage to enrollees and enhance their existing coverage
- Ensure that people who receive both Medicare and Medicaid and who currently receive their drug benefit through Medicaid, will be automatically enrolled in a plan if they do not choose one by the middle of December so that they will experience no gap in their prescription drug coverage.

In addition to the Medicare prescription drug coverage, the new Medicare law ensures that retirees who currently have health and drug coverage from their past employer or union continue to receive that coverage.

For more information about the upcoming Medicare prescription drug coverage or other Medicare questions visit www.medicare.gov or call 1-800-Medicare, (1-800-633-4227), 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

