



BETTER BENEFITS – MORE CHOICES

Good News about the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement and Modernization Act of 2003!

Enhanced Medicare Website and 1-800 Number Make it Faster to Start Saving with Medicare-Approved Drug Discount Cards

Almost 4 Million Beneficiaries Now Enrolled in Cards

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) today announced improvements in the Medicare-Approved Drug Discount Card Program web site and the 1-800 MEDICARE number to make it more efficient for Medicare beneficiaries to start using a Medicare drug card to lower their drug costs. Nearly 4 million Medicare beneficiaries have already signed up for the Medicare-approved cards, including almost 1 million who will get a \$600 credit this year to further help them pay for their prescription drugs.

“Seniors and people with a disability who are using the Medicare discount cards are seeing real savings over what they would be paying retail for their prescription drugs,” said Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy G. Thompson. “We are making it easier for seniors – especially those eligible for the \$600 credit – to sign up for a card so they won’t have any excuse not to take advantage of the benefits these cards provide.”

CMS has improved the “Price Compare” tool making it even easier to find out about drug prices and to choose a discount card on www.medicare.gov. For example, the process of entering beneficiary information has been simplified, with an integrated “drug dictionary” making it easier and faster to enter drug information.

In addition, the Price Compare tool helps target a beneficiary’s choice by providing the five lowest priced Medicare-approved drug discount cards that fit that beneficiary’s individual drug needs. These changes are also reflected in the customer service assistance that beneficiaries get when they call 1-800-MEDICARE, so getting information and enrolling by phone is easier and faster as well. Finally, CMS is providing enhanced information on state and manufacturer programs.

“About 3.9 million Medicare beneficiaries have enrolled in drug cards after just the first month, and around 25 thousand more beneficiaries are signing up every business day,” said CMS Administrator Mark B. McClellan, M.D., Ph.D. “We’ve heard a lot of good ideas from beneficiaries and our own staff about how we can make it more efficient for still more beneficiaries to get savings now, and we’re taking action.”

Any Medicare beneficiary who does not have drug coverage through Medicaid is eligible to enroll in a Medicare-approved drug discount cards, but those who do not have good drug coverage now will find the greatest benefits. The discount card program is an urgent interim step until the Medicare drug benefit is implemented on Jan. 1, 2006. Many Medicare beneficiaries currently have some drug coverage and the new Medicare law will strengthen that coverage. As of July 12, approximately 3.9 million Medicare beneficiaries had signed up for a drug card, which is more than halfway to the projected 7.4 million that were projected to enroll.

The new enhancements include:

- A “Top 5 – Best Choice” list of the five cards that offer the lowest aggregate prices for an individual’s drugs (beneficiaries who want more information on more cards can get it);
- “Enrollment information” buttons to provide easy-to-access, easy-to-use information on how to enroll. This includes online enrollment for all cards that offer it - 36 different cards at this time;
- Significant improvements to the drug entry tool making it quicker for users to enter their drug information, including entering all drug information at one time;
- An improved display of drug pricing information making it easier for users to compare the price differences between brand and generic drugs;
- More information about state pharmacy assistance programs;
- Additional details about manufacturer “wrap-around” programs that offer additional discounts for beneficiaries who qualify for the \$600 credit;
- A new “special features” link that provides updated card sponsor information such as online enrollment availability and manufacturer “wrap-around” programs; and
- A new tool under “resources” allowing users to select their state and immediately see a listing of all drug card sponsors in their area.

Many of the new enhancements were generated from suggestions and comments received from beneficiaries and their family members, individuals who work with older Americans, such as the State Health Insurance Assistance Programs, and health care providers. CMS will continue to make improvements based on constructive comments on the website. In fact, there is a feedback button on each page of the web site so CMS can hear directly from users.

Each of these enhancements will also make it more efficient for callers to the toll-free hotline, 1-800-MEDICARE, to get information. **There are now 3,000 operators answering an average of 50,000 calls a day at the 24-hour hotline. Wait time for a customer service representative is less than two minutes.** The Medicare customer service representatives answer questions about the drug card, walk callers through the information available at www.medicare.gov. Beneficiaries who call can also get the information they need in a personalized brochure mailed to them the next day. Then, signing up for a card requires only filling out a two-page form or calling the card sponsor’s 800 number.

Choosing a card is more straightforward than ever and the Medicare-approved cards offer substantial savings over retail prices. A compilation of these studies can be found at www.cms.hhs.gov/discountdrugs.