



THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20201

As the result of a new law, Medicare is making some of the most significant improvements to the program since its inception in 1965. Now, for example, Medicare will provide benefits that can save you money on the life-enhancing and life-saving prescription drugs that you need.

It is important to know that Medicare will remain the health care program you have always counted on - only now with more benefits. The new benefits being offered are voluntary.

I am enclosing a fact sheet that outlines some of the new benefits that you will be able to choose under Medicare. These benefits will be phased in over the next two years. In brief, here's what the new benefits can do for you:

Save You Money on Prescription Drugs

The opportunity for savings will begin by this June when Medicare-approved drug discount cards become available. Look for more information about these cards in the next few months. Then in 2006, Medicare will offer prescription drug coverage. This voluntary benefit is expected to provide you with prescription drug savings. And people with Medicare who have lower incomes can save even more through both the Medicare-approved cards and the prescription drug coverage.

Provide Better Preventive Health Care

Starting in 2005, Medicare will offer new preventive benefits, which will include a "Welcome to Medicare" physical exam for people when they join Medicare. The benefits also include screening tests to find heart diseases and diabetes early.

Improve Your Access to Doctors and Medical Care You Choose

The new law makes substantial investments in the health care system to promote the highest quality health care for people with Medicare. And it provides even more help for those of you in rural America, by improving your access to doctors, hospitals, ambulance service, home health care, and other medical services in your communities.

In summary, the Department of Health and Human Services and our Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services look forward to helping you better understand Medicare's new benefits. And you can always get answers to your questions by calling 1-800-MEDICARE or visiting www.medicare.gov on the web.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tommy G. Thompson".

Tommy G. Thompson
Secretary