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Compromise for PAAD in works

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By DON BENNETT
Staff Writer

TOMS RIVER -- A hundred thousand low-income senior citizens now enrolled in New Jersey's Prescription Assistance to the Aged and Disabled (PAAD) program might be enrolled automatically as well in the new Medicare drug discount card program, Sen. Jon S. Corzine, D-N.J., said.

No decision has been made, but that is the inclination of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services as of Thursday, Corzine said.

There are 19,000 Ocean County residents enrolled in the PAAD program, said Rep. Jim Saxton, R-3rd.

While they would be eligible for the new Medicare discount cards, their New Jersey PAAD benefits are superior and many might not have enrolled in the federal program, Corzine said. That could have cost New Jersey \$100 million in Medicare transition funds.

Mark McClellan, the CMS administrator, told Corzine that his agency is moving toward automatic enrollment of New Jersey PAAD recipients in the new federal program.

Corzine urged him to make a decision soon. The federal discount card program is supposed to start May 1.

That enrollment would bring \$100 million to New Jersey that could be used to expand its existing prescription drug program for seniors and the disabled, he said.

The PAAD program provides low-cost prescription medicines to those who meet income eligibility limits.

Corzine, Sen. Frank Lautenberg, D-N.J., and Gov. James E. McGreevey expressed concerns earlier this year that the proposed Medicare discount card program seemed to exclude states that already had prescription drug programs like New Jersey's.

They asked to be able to automatically enroll PAAD recipients in the Medicare program.

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