



BETTER BENEFITS – MORE CHOICES

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

Medicare Sponsored Drug Cards Provide Significant Savings Now For Beneficiaries with Chronic Conditions

According to a new report issued by HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson, Medicare **enrollees with chronic diseases can now reap substantial savings on their medicines by enrolling in the new Medicare-approved discount drug card program.** Discount cards can yield savings anywhere from 10 percent to 75 percent off the prices a typical American would pay.

“The overwhelming majority of Medicare beneficiaries suffer from chronic conditions like high blood pressure, heart disease and arthritis,” Secretary Thompson said. “The new Medicare discount **drug card is helping seniors get greater access to life-saving medicines at a much lower cost.** I urge beneficiaries with chronic conditions who don’t have good drug coverage to get in touch with Medicare about the new drug card, so they can start taking advantage of these substantial savings right away.”

Eighty-seven percent of Medicare’s 41 million enrollees reported having at least one chronic health condition in 2002. Most beneficiaries—59 percent—report having high blood pressure; 56 percent have some form of arthritis; 30 percent say they have heart disease; and, 17 percent report having depression or some other psychiatric illness. Diabetes is also quite common with one in five beneficiaries reporting they have the disease.

“Many older Americans have to take medicines every day to control their chronic conditions, and to prevent complications that can be life-threatening,” said CMS Administrator Mark B. McClellan, M.D., Ph.D. “Beneficiaries who have been struggling with the high costs of chronic illnesses can get double-digit savings right now – amounting to hundreds of dollars in help over the rest of this year. And beneficiaries with low-incomes who have chronic diseases no longer have to make tough choices between paying for their medicines and the other necessities of life like food and heat.”

In conducting the study, CMS examined the prices of 23 drugs used to treat these and other common conditions like acid reflux, congestive heart failure, diabetes, depression, hypertension and high cholesterol. **For 22 out of the 23 drugs reviewed, percentage savings were in the double digits off national average retail pharmacy prices paid by typical Americans.**

For example, a beneficiary in Portland, Oregon who suffers from hypertension could enroll in a Medicare-approved discount card, can purchase a generic drug like Lisinopril to treat her condition and save 45 percent over the price an average American would pay.

A beneficiary with an acid reflux condition in Boston, Massachusetts, could save 19 percent off the national average retail price for Aciphex by enrolling in the Medicare-approved drug discount card with the best price for this drug—a savings of almost \$26 per month.

In Pittsburgh, a beneficiary could save about \$30 per month over national average retail prices by enrolling the Medicare-approved drug discount card with the best price for Pravachol, a drug used to treat high cholesterol.

These beneficiaries can even save more than they would purchasing medicine through the Internet. **Mail-order savings through the Medicare discount card for drugs used to treat chronic illnesses are generally seven to 24 percent lower than the prices at popular U. S. Internet pharmacies.**

Prescription drugs play a critical role in curing and controlling diseases. The new **discount card benefit offered by Medicare is providing access to cutting-edge drugs for almost four million seniors, allowing them to improve their quality of life at a lower cost.**

Medicare beneficiaries who do not have Medicaid are eligible for a Medicare-approved drug discount card. Beneficiaries whose income in 2004 is not more than \$12,569 if single, or no more than \$16,862 if married (including their spouse's income), may qualify for the \$600 credit this year and again in 2005.

It is simple for Medicare beneficiaries to learn more and have their questions answered about this new benefit. Counselors are available 24 hours a day through Medicare's toll-free hotline, 1-800-MEDICARE. To expedite service, beneficiaries should have the following information ready when they call:

1. Their zip code;
2. Their drugs and dosages (having the bottles in hand can help);
3. Their monthly income.

CMS operators will send a personalized report that includes a list of the lowest cost cards and the pharmacies where they are accepted with an application so they can make a decision about which card is best and apply directly to the card sponsor.

The full study can be viewed at http://www.cms.hhs.gov/media/press/files/disease_specific_savings.pdf