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MMA - New Medicare-Approved Drug Discount Cards and Transitional Assistance Program: A Summary for Physicians and Other Health Care Professionals

Note: This article was revised on October 27, 2004 to correct the web address for State Health Insurance Counseling and Assistance Programs (SHIPs).

Provider Types Affected

Physicians and other health care professionals

Provider Action Needed

Understand the Medicare-Approved Drug Discount Cards and Transitional Assistance Program that begins in 2004 to help Medicare beneficiaries save on prescription drugs.

Background

As part of the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003 (MMA), the Medicare-Approved Drug Discount Cards and Transitional Assistance Program begins in 2004 to help Medicare beneficiaries save on prescription drugs. Medicare will contract with private companies to offer new drug discount cards until a Medicare prescription drug benefit starts in 2006. A discount card with Medicare's seal of approval can help Medicare beneficiaries save on prescription drug costs. This article is designed to give an overview of the new Medicare-Approved Drug Discount Cards and Transitional Assistance Program. It will also explain where you may refer Medicare patients for information on selecting and enrolling in the drug discount card that best suits their needs.

Medicare-Approved Drug Discount Cards

- Open enrollment started in May 2004
- Available to qualified beneficiaries regardless of income
- Represent a variety of discount and drug options from private companies
- Available to beneficiaries eligible for or enrolled in Medicare Part A or enrolled in Medicare Part B, **unless** receiving outpatient prescription drug coverage through State Medicaid programs
- May charge an annual enrollment fee of no more than \$30, which may be paid by Medicare for some low-income beneficiaries
- Do **not** require that beneficiaries purchase discount drugs through mail-order pharmacies

Disclaimer

The information contained in this article was current at the time of its development. We encourage users of this article to review statutes, regulations and other interpretive materials for the most current information.

- Provide beneficiaries the ability to use their discount cards in pharmacies near their homes.

Transitional Assistance Program

Beneficiaries with the greatest need will have the greatest help available to them. Individuals with an annual income in 2004 of no more than \$12,569 if single or \$16,862 if married, and individuals receiving help from their state in paying their Medicare premiums or cost sharing, may qualify for a \$600 credit on their discount card to help pay for prescription drugs. These income limits change every year. Residents of Puerto Rico or a U.S. territory are not eligible for the \$600 credit from Medicare. However, they may be eligible for similar assistance provided by the territory in which they reside. Beneficiaries cannot qualify for the \$600 if they already have outpatient prescription drug coverage from certain other sources.

Where Do I Refer Medicare Beneficiaries for Information on Prescription Drug Discount Programs?

In addition to the Medicare-approved drug discount cards, there are other programs available that provide assistance in paying for prescription drugs. Alternatives such as individual state pharmacy assistance programs and manufacturers' discount programs may be a better fit for certain individuals.

Medicare recognizes that physicians and other health care professionals have limited time available to counsel patients. The following resources are available to help individuals with questions about the Medicare-approved drug discount cards:

The 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) Toll-Free Call Center

This Call Center is available 24 hours per day and 7 days per week. It connects beneficiaries with customer service representatives who can answer questions and perform price comparisons for discount cards and other assistance programs. Beneficiaries should prepare a list of current prescription drugs and dosages prior to contacting the Call Center. Beneficiaries may request a copy of their individualized price comparison results. TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048.

The Prescription Drug and Other Assistance Programs Web Site at Medicare.gov

<http://www.medicare.gov/AssistancePrograms/home.asp>

For beneficiaries who use the Internet, this site features eligibility, enrollment, and price comparison information for each available discount card in a particular area, as well as their state pharmacy assistance programs. It also has a tool that helps beneficiaries determine the best savings program based on their prescription drug needs.

Medicare's Guide to Choosing a Medicare-Approved Drug Discount Card

<http://www.medicare.gov>

This resource provides beneficiaries with information on choosing a card, enrolling, and submitting complaints. This guide also features sample enrollment forms and worksheets to assist beneficiaries in selecting the discount card that is right for them.

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State Health Insurance Counseling and Assistance Programs

Beneficiaries may also contact their SHIP counselor for information on prescription drug cost assistance programs. To find the telephone number for the nearest SHIP, call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) or visit <http://www.medicare.gov/Contacts/Related/Ships.asp> on the Web.

Information Resources for Physicians and Other Health Care Professionals

- Download a free patient-education brochure at <http://www.medicare.gov> (or call 1-800-MEDICARE to order a limited number of free copies).
- Read The Medicare-Approved Drug Discount Cards and Transitional Assistance Program - A Brochure for Physicians and Other Health Care Professionals at <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/medlearn>.
- Attend CMS Open Door Forums in person or by telephone (toll-free). These forums address concerns and issues of physicians, nurses, and allied health professionals. Visit <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/opendoor> for further details.
- Visit <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/medicarerereform> for the latest information on MMA.
- Contact your carrier for information by using the toll-free provider lines. Visit <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/medlearn/tollnums.asp> for your carrier's toll-free number.

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