



Medicare: Today's Issue

February 11, 2004

BETTER BENEFITS – MORE CHOICES

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

Beneficiary Education:

The Department of Health and Human Services is launching a nationwide education campaign to inform seniors about the new benefits being offered to them as a result of the recently passed Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement and Modernization Act of 2003. The National Medicare & You Education Program (NMEP) provides information to beneficiaries through several media:

- National Advertising Campaign: The national campaign utilizes television, radio, print and Internet advertising to inform and motivate beneficiaries and their caregivers to call 1-800-MEDICARE, visit www.medicare.gov, and refer to the *Medicare & You* Handbook for answers to their Medicare questions. The first major segment of the education campaign is a television ad that began last week.

❖ Informing Beneficiaries

- It is crucial that seniors and disabled Medicare beneficiaries have access to clear, concise information. The Department is committed to providing seniors with straight answers about the new benefits being offered to them.
- As part of our fact-based education campaign, we have developed the first television ad to inform seniors broadly of some of the new benefits coming their way, particularly the prescription drug benefits.
- Most importantly, the ad encourages seniors to call our toll-free helpline – 1-800-Medicare -- to learn more about the new benefits being offered them.
- This ad is an extension of our existing 1-800-Medicare campaign to provide seniors with the information they need to make informed choices about their health care. The 1-800-Medicare campaign started three years ago.
- The 1-800-Medicare campaign gives seniors a reliable place to turn for straight answers.

- Toll-Free Number: Beneficiaries can contact 1-800-MEDICARE for information about health plan options, benefits, enrollment and other issues. Beneficiaries have access to customer service representatives 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

- ❖ The toll-free line is projected to receive an estimated 12.8 million calls in FY 2004, up from 5.6 million actual calls in FY 2003.

- ❖ The 12.8 million calls include an estimated increase of 5.5 million calls as a result of the new Medicare law and 7.3 million for routine call topics.
- ❖ In FY 2003, CMS had approximately 386 Call Service Representatives (CSRs) available during steady-state call periods. During the fall of 2003, CMS increased the CSR level to 819 to coincide with the mass media and mailing activities.

■ **Print Materials:** HHS will soon send useful information to every beneficiary explaining how the new Medicare law provides improved coverage, including a prescription drug benefit. The first in a series of fact sheets – “The Facts About Upcoming New Benefits in Medicare” – is currently available at <http://www.medicare.gov/Publications/Pubs/pdf/11054.pdf>. Additionally, CMS plans to mail 39 million *Medicare & You* 2004 handbooks to beneficiaries and stakeholders. This began in October 2003. Handbooks are offered in English and Spanish, and also they are available in Braille and large print.

■ **Internet:** CMS expects 78.8 million hits in FY 2005 on the www.medicare.gov website. On this site, beneficiaries can obtain general information about Medicare, information on the new Medicare Modernization Act, as well as information on topics such as long-term care, nursing homes, dialysis facilities, and contact links. Also on the site is the web-based decision tool, the Medicare Personal Plan Finder, which allows beneficiaries to narrow down the current health options available in their zip codes by preferences and price.

■ **Community-Based Outreach:** CMS partners with State Health Insurance Assistance Programs (SHIPs) to provide counseling and various other outreach activities to beneficiaries. SHIPs are located in all 50 States, DC, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. CMS plans to allow the territory of Guam the opportunity of participating in the SHIP program in FY 2005.