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NADSA's Cause Important as 'ABC'



ACCESS
TO BENEFITS
COALITION

HERNDON, Va. – The National Adult Day Services Association (NADSA) has joined forces with more than 70 other national, not-for-profit organizations as part of the Access to Benefits Coalition (ABC) -- a unique public-private partnership formed to reach out to educate and enroll lower-income Medicare beneficiaries in Medicare's new prescription-drug savings program.

Recent national surveys suggest that Medicare beneficiaries are confused or even unaware about the new Medicare program. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), a Federal agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, estimates about 2.5 million of the 7 million low-income Americans are eligible, even though a majority will not enroll, thus forfeiting benefits that include an annual \$600 credit as well as other public and private programs to help them better afford their prescription drugs.

“We know from experience and research that lower-income beneficiaries are more likely to have chronic and/or cognitive illnesses and can be more difficult to reach about benefits such as these,” says James Firman, chair of the Coalition and president and CEO of The National Council on the Aging (NCOA). Firman, who is calling this effort “the single-most important opportunity in 40 years” to help low-income Medicare beneficiaries with prescription drug costs, says the goal of ABC is to “mobilize the resources” of non-profits, foundations, and businesses so that, by year-end 2005, at least 5.5 million low-income Medicare beneficiaries will receive the \$600 annual credit, as well as other public and private benefits to which they are entitled.

NADSA and the other coalition members together have unique reach and trust built over many years among Medicare beneficiaries, including those aged 65 and over, as well as younger persons with disabilities. “Our work will complement and coordinate with the work of CMS in encouraging enrollment,” explained NADSA Executive Director, Lisa Gables. “ABC is initiating grassroots action and collaboration through member organizations like NADSA. Volunteers from adult day services state associations will work to provide assistance to beneficiaries to help them determine the best mix of public and private prescription drug savings programs,” Gables added. **MORE**

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ABC already has developed a rich set of online tools and information resources designed for caregivers and government and non-profit agencies that serve low-income seniors. These tools and resources are available online at www.accesstobenefits.org, and include unique, state-specific decision guides that provide an overview of federal, state, and some private prescription drug benefits available to residents of each state. A "Promising Practices" section offers case studies on outreach programs targeted to lower-income audiences.

In addition, the website features a one-of-a-kind enrollment center, with forms and instructions to enroll in Medicare's prescription savings program and many others. In order to make the most of savings available to them, most low-income beneficiaries will need to enroll in a combination of programs – a Medicare-approved discount card, the annual \$600 credit Medicare offers for those with incomes below 135 percent of poverty (in 2004, that is below \$12,569 for an individual and no more than \$16,862 if married), and additional public and private savings programs – to afford the prescription drugs they need to maintain their health and improve the quality of their lives.

Gables says she sees NADSA's involvement in this important initiative as "a demonstration of NADSA's commitment to ensuring that as many lower-income Medicare beneficiaries as possible know about and take advantage of the safety net provisions of the new – and existing – public and private prescription-drug savings programs available to them.

"NADSA and its membership will work to help ABC reach its goals," she added. "In June NADSA members from around the nation visited their legislators on Capitol Hill. This initiative was just one of the items on the agenda when we met with our representatives," Gables says.

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Adult day services programs are appropriate providers of community-based care for frail elders as well as persons of all ages with multiple and special needs associated with conditions such as Alzheimer's disease, developmental disabilities, traumatic brain injury, mental illness, HIV/AIDS, vision and hearing impairments, and more. The NADSA Officers and Board Members are representative of the range of persons served in the adult day setting. For more information on NADSA or its role in the Access to Benefits Coalition, please contact Lisa Gables, NADSA executive director, at 703-435-8630, or visit NADSA online at www.nadsa.org.