

Senior Alert—October 15, 2008

Medicare Part D Open Enrollment Fast Approaching *Prescription Drug Plan Enrollment Runs Nov. 15 to Dec. 31*



Once again, it's time for North Carolina's Medicare beneficiaries to make a decision about their prescription drug coverage. The Medicare Part D — the federal program's prescription drug benefit — open enrollment begins on Nov. 15 and runs through Dec. 31. During this enrollment period, people with Medicare can sign up for a prescription drug plan (PDP) or switch their current Medicare Part D plan.

SHIIP, the Department of Insurance's Seniors' Health Insurance Information Program, is available to help seniors and other Medicare beneficiaries with the enrollment process or answer any questions about the program.

The Shepherd's Center of Charlotte has trained SHIIP counselors available to meet with you face-to-face at Trinity Presbyterian Church. In addition, the toll-free SHIIP hotline has trained communication specialists that can answer your questions Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

SHIIP has created the following frequently asked questions to guide you through the Part D enrollment process. If you have additional questions, you can call SHIIP at 1-800-443-9354 or visit www.ncshiip.com. You can also call The Shepherd's Center of Charlotte, 704.365.1995.

What is a Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Plan (PDP)?

Medicare PDPs are insurance plans approved by Medicare and sold by private insurance companies that offer prescription drug coverage to people with Medicare. All people on Medicare are eligible to enroll into a Medicare PDP regardless of their income or assets. Medicare PDPs work like any other insurance products — they have premiums, co-payments, deductibles and a list of approved drugs that the plan will cover.

What if I cannot afford a Medicare PDP?

There is federal assistance available for people with Medicare who have limited income and resources. If you qualify, you can receive assistance with premiums, deductibles and prescription co-payments. To apply for the Low Income Subsidy (LIS) program call the Social Security Administration at 1-800-772-1213, visit www.socialsecurity.gov or contact SHIIP for help, 1-800-443-9354.

North Carolina residents may also apply for assistance through the Governor's NCRx program by calling 1-888-488-6279 or visiting www.ncrx.gov.

Should I change my current PDP?

Many Medicare PDPs change their approved drugs and prices every year, so it is possible that the PDP you chose for 2008 won't work as well for you in 2009. Just like with any insurance product, it's important to make sure that your coverage continues to meet your needs year after year. By comparing plans, you can see if another Medicare PDP would save you money and/or cover more of your prescriptions. Start your comparisons now so that there is plenty of time to shop around before making your decision. If you do sign up for Part D or change your current plan during the open enrollment, Nov. 15 – Dec. 31, your new plan will take effect on Jan. 1, 2009.

What other options are available for Medicare prescription drug coverage?

Some Medicare Advantage plans contain prescription drug coverage. If you have questions about Medicare Advantage plans, contact SHIIP for assistance.

