



## Medicare: Today's Issue

April 29, 2004

### *BETTER BENEFITS – MORE CHOICES*

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

#### **1-800-MEDICARE Call Center Representatives Tripled to Provide Personal Assistance to Callers**

- ❖ The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has more than tripled the number of customer service representatives available through its toll-free information line, 1-800-MEDICARE, which received a record number of calls this past Monday.
- ❖ The 24-hour a day, seven-day-a-week hotline has hired an additional 1,000 trained customer service representatives, for a total of nearly 1,400, in order to handle the rapidly increasing call volume generated by the new Medicare Modernization Act (MMA).
- ❖ The expansion of the six call centers, located in Arizona, Kansas, and Iowa, is also being done to handle the anticipated influx of calls generated by the availability of drug discount cards beginning May 3, as well as the ongoing addition of new prescription drug and preventive care benefits being added to Medicare in the next two years.
- ❖ The Department of Health and Human Services is encouraging Medicare beneficiaries to call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) or go to [www.Medicare.gov](http://www.Medicare.gov) for personalized assistance in comparing drug discount cards or to learn about other benefits being offered under the new law.
- ❖ Additionally, HHS will be providing a price comparison tool on the Web site so that beneficiaries can receive personalized assistance in choosing a drug discount card that will best work for them. HHS wants to provide seniors with the tools necessary to make an informed decision when choosing a card that will provide real savings on their prescription medicines.
- ❖ Since April of 2003, call volume has increased 150 percent, with over 3 million calls in the first four months of 2004 alone. On Monday the call center received an all-time record high of 111,904 calls. CMS officials estimate that 1-800-MEDICARE will receive nearly 13 million phone calls in 2004, up from fewer than 6 million in 2003.
- ❖ In addition to an increased call volume, the topics of the questions have changed with the top five questions now focusing on the discount card program. The number one question is about the \$600 credit on the discount card for low-income beneficiaries, with questions about card sponsors a close second. Rounding out the top five are questions about how to enroll in the drug card program, the cost of the drug card, and general inquiries about the program.

- ❖ The call centers provide information about Medicare in English, Spanish and TDD for the hearing impaired. Callers will choose the language they prefer through a voice-prompt system, then callers will be connected directly to a person who will help them find the Medicare-approved discount card to fit their individual needs and location. Callers also have the option to use the voice-prompt system to get the answers they need from recorded information.
- ❖ Among many services, counselors at the toll-free line will be able to help Medicare beneficiaries and their family members compare the prices of drugs being offered through the new Medicare-endorsed discount cards that will be available in May, as well as provide names of participating drug stores in their areas. Questions that cannot be answered by the customer service representative right away will be referred to the call center's research staff for resolution.
- ❖ Call center operators will also be able to refer callers to discount drug card sponsors and local state health insurance assistance programs for additional information and local assistance. In addition to being trained to answer questions on the new Medicare law, customer service representatives can also mail printed materials to callers who request it.
- ❖ 1-800-MEDICARE is just one of many information resources available to help Medicare beneficiaries and their families choose a discount drug card or obtain information about other aspects of the Medicare. The award winning [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) has the same information available and the Web site was recently upgraded to increase the capacity to handle additional information and usage.