



## ***BETTER BENEFITS – MORE CHOICES***

### **CMS Adds Resources to Respond to Record Numbers of Callers New Steps Make It Easier for Seniors Interested in Medicare Discount Drug Card**

- ❖ The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) recently announced **additional steps to improve service for Medicare beneficiaries deciding whether a discount card is right for them.** This includes **adding about 400 more customer service representatives to answer calls** on the 1-800-MEDICARE hotline and enhancing the “Price Compare” database at [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov).
- ❖ Customer service representatives on the 1-800-MEDICARE hotline are eager to work with seniors and people with disabilities to help them learn more about the Medicare-approved drug cards. Representatives can explain the simple steps beneficiaries can take to make it easier to decide how they can get the most out of a drug discount card. **CMS is working hard to make it easy for seniors to learn more about the discount cards and easy to enroll in a card program if it's right for them.**
- ❖ **In the first week of enrollment, CMS received more than 10 times the regular call volume, with 1.6 million calls to 1-800-MEDICARE and more than 7 million internet visits. Then last week, CMS was still reporting very heavy call volume – close to one million calls.** CMS is now increasing the number of customer service representatives at the Medicare call centers, bringing the total to more than 1,800. CMS had previously tripled the number of operators from nearly 400 in August to 1,400 in the first week of enrollment. CMS is getting the additional help from trained customer service operators from some Medicare contractors; the private companies that process and pay Medicare Part B claims.
- ❖ **Enhancements are also being implemented in Medicare's Price Compare services based on feedback from beneficiaries, customer service operators, and advocates.** For example, [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) now has a new, easily visible link making the Price Compare database easier to find, and the “drug dictionary” of drugs included on Price Compare is being expanded.
- ❖ Website users and callers to 1-800-MEDICARE can now get **an easy-to-use list of information to have available to help them find the best cards for their needs as quickly as possible.** The list includes pill bottles or a list of drugs and dosages, favorite pharmacies, whether the beneficiary has a preference for low- or no-fee cards, and income information, if the beneficiary is interested in the \$600 credit and other low-income assistance programs.
- ❖ When calling Medicare, beneficiaries should be prepared to answer a few important questions about their prescription drug needs. CMS call centers use this information to sort

through all of the medicines, drug discount cards, and pharmacies to give beneficiaries the specific, individual facts they need to decide about the drug card program. This includes:

- Their zip code.
  - Their medicines and doses. It's best to have pill bottles in front of them.
  - Their total monthly income, if they have limited means and are interested in the \$600 credit for drug costs and other programs to help them get much larger savings.
- ❖ The best times to call 1-800-MEDICARE is later in the week – Thursday through Sunday and between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. Eastern time.
- ❖ **All Medicare beneficiaries are eligible to enroll in a Medicare-Approved Discount Drug Card, unless they receive prescription drugs through Medicaid.** Other Medicare beneficiaries may find that the discount cards may not be as beneficial as their existing employer benefits, Medigap coverage or health plan benefits.
- ❖ Approximately 7 million beneficiaries with incomes below \$12,569 per year for individuals and less than \$16,862 per year for couples who do not have good drug coverage now can qualify for the \$600 drug credit this year and again next year, as well as substantial additional manufacturer discounts.