



# Medicare: Issue of the Day

September 7, 2004

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

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

### ***NEW BENEFICIARY ASSISTANCE IN FINDING THE MOST APPROPRIATE HEALTH COVERAGE***

CMS has taken many steps to **increase beneficiary assistance** and seeks comments on ways to give beneficiaries **personalized education about Medicare's expanded benefits.**

- ❖ These steps would build on recent **enhancements at 1-800-MEDICARE** so that beneficiaries can get additional support in identifying the best prescription drug plans and health plan options for their needs.
  - CMS has **increased the number of customer service operators** from several hundred to **3,000** as of the beginning of June 2004, and expects to maintain this number of trained representatives to handle the unprecedented number of callers in a timely and effective manner.
  - CMS has **added voice messages to help callers be better prepared when they reach a customer service representative**, further reducing call waiting and call handling time.
- ⇒ CMS also intends to **continue and enhance the use of informational mailings** to help beneficiaries understand the new Medicare benefits and how to get the most out of these benefits. These **publications will also be available online at [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov)**. Numerous mailings have already been sent to beneficiaries to help them learn about, and enroll in, the Medicare-approved drug discount cards.
- ⇒ CMS will **mail the Medicare & You 2005 handbooks to beneficiaries** and stakeholders in the fall. Handbooks are offered in English and Spanish, and also are available in Braille and large print.
- ⇒ The **National advertising 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](http://www.medicare.gov), and refer to the *Medicare & You Handbook* for answers to their Medicare questions.
  - The last week of April 2004, a new TV and print ad campaign was initiated for the Medicare-approved drug discount card, and **new advertising will be launched in the fall.**
- ⇒ For beneficiaries who require or prefer **face-to-face personalized assistance**, CMS has also enhanced its partnership with the State Health Insurance Assistance Programs (SHIPs).
  - HHS will award \$21.1 million this year, and another \$31.7 million next year, to the SHIPs, thereby reflecting the increased emphasis on one-on-one advice and counseling for Medicare beneficiaries.

- The SHIPs are among the most effective resources in helping beneficiaries learn about the changes to Medicare and will be able to use the additional funds to equip local organizations with the tools needed to answer beneficiaries' questions.
- ⇒ CMS is also supporting **non-profit organizations to help educate and assist low-income beneficiaries who may otherwise be hard to reach**. CMS will give **\$4.6 million in grants** to the Access To Benefits Coalition to help beneficiaries learn about the \$600 in transitional assistance money available through the Medicare-approved drug discount card. CMS is seeking comments on how to use SHIPs, as well as private organizations, to help further improve our personalized outreach and support.

*Comments on the proposed regulations will be accepted until October 4, 2004. Comments should be submitted to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services at [www.cms.hhs.gov/regulations/ecomments](http://www.cms.hhs.gov/regulations/ecomments)*