

## Overview of the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP)

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### What is SHIP?

The State Health Insurance Assistance Program, or SHIP, is a national program that offers one-on-one counseling and assistance to people with Medicare and their families. Through grants directed to states, SHIPs provide free counseling and assistance via telephone and face-to-face interactive sessions, public education presentations and programs, and media activities.

#### How did SHIPs start?

SHIP (formerly the Information, Counseling and Assistance (ICA) Grants Program) was created under Section 4360 of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA) of 1990 (Public Law 101-508). This Act authorizes the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the Federal Medicare agency, to make grants to states for health advisory services programs for people with Medicare. Currently, there are SHIPs in all 50 states plus Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

#### How are the SHIPs funded?

SHIPs are funded through grants from CMS. Currently, Federal funding is approximately \$12 million annualized spread across the 53 programs. Many states and local communities contribute additional funding and in-kind services in support of the programs.

Grant funding is available for SHIPs to plan and operate a variety of information, counseling, and assistance activities. States have wide latitude in providing SHIP services. However, programs must offer services to all eligible persons requesting assistance, develop an intra-state agency referral system, and communicate timely and accurate health care information.

#### What kinds of help do SHIPs provide?

The SHIPs were originally established to address the confusion caused by the increase in choices of Medicare supplemental insurance, or Medigap. Since the program's inception, however, the role of the SHIPs in serving people with Medicare has greatly expanded. Today, trained counselors offer information, counseling and assistance to Medicare beneficiaries on a wide range of Medicare and Medicaid, and Medigap matters, including, Medicare+Choice health plan options, long-term care insurance, claims and billing problem resolution, information and referral on public benefit programs for those with limited income and assets, and other health insurance benefit information. In addition, SHIPs also support efforts to inform Medicare beneficiaries about fraud and abuse.

Who are the SHIP counselors?

SHIPs are principally made up of a network of volunteers supported by local sponsoring organizations. Paid staff manage these local programs and serve as SHIP counselors. Under the direction and support of state program directors and trainers, SHIP counselors receive extensive training and continuous ongoing information updates about Medicare and other health insurance topics.

Currently the SHIP network nationwide includes close to 1,000 sponsoring organizations supporting over 12,000 counselors (mostly volunteers) and staff. Last year alone, the SHIPs served in excess of 2 million Medicare beneficiaries, with about 1.2 million of those served through one-on-one, in-person and over the telephone counseling sessions and approximately 800,000 served through SHIP presentations and public education programs. In addition, SHIPs help beneficiaries through approximately 20,000 outreach events and media activities conducted annually.

How can a SHIP counselor be contacted?

You can be referred to your state's SHIP by contacting 1-800-Medicare and asking for health insurance counseling.