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MEDICARE NEWS

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MEDICARE ANNOUNCES THE START OF 2007 OPEN ENROLLMENT FOR MEDICARE HEALTH AND DRUG COVERAGE

Expanded Options Provide More Comprehensive Coverage for Millions

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has announced that Medicare beneficiaries have six weeks to change or add coverage to their current Medicare health and prescription drug plans. The Medicare annual Open Enrollment Period, which starts today, runs from November 15 through December 31, 2006.

“Now is the time for Medicare beneficiaries to carefully review their current plan to see how changes may affect their costs and coverage in 2007, and then compare their plan to other options available to them,” said Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt. “If they are satisfied their plan will meet their needs next year, they do not need to take any action to keep their coverage.”

“Again this year, Medicare and its network of dedicated and trained national, state and local partners are providing highly personalized information and assistance to beneficiaries in their communities, online and on the phone,” said Leslie V. Norwalk, Acting Administrator for CMS. “Building on last year’s successes and experiences, beneficiaries and those who are assisting them have access to a variety of consumer tested tools and resources which have been enhanced to help them make confident, well-informed decisions about their health and prescription coverage in 2007.” Online alone, 16,000 beneficiaries enrolled in drug plans in the first 24 hours of open enrollment.

CMS is adding a new consumer tool today focusing on plan performance. Medicare Part D Plan Performance metrics for 2006 are now posted on the Plan Finder Website. Consumers are able to see how plans are rated along with specific data on how they performed on the following areas of customer service, including: telephone customer service, complaints, appeals, and sharing information with pharmacists.

In addition to the website enhancements, tools and resources such as the 2007 Medicare & You handbook, www.medicare.gov, and 1-800-Medicare, there are community-based information and enrollment events scheduled, and the Medicare “Mobile Office Tour” has a full schedule of stops planned to help local partners and community organizations with enrollment events.

Competition and choice have resulted in the average monthly premium of \$24 for 2007, the same as in 2006, and 83 percent of beneficiaries with stand-alone prescription drug plans will have access to plans that cost less than their current coverage. Nationwide, the average number of drugs included on plan formularies have increased by 13 percent, and there are more plans with coverage for preferred brands and/or generics in the coverage gap, with at least one available in every state. On average, beneficiaries are saving more than \$1,200 annually on their drug costs, and five separate opinion surveys show that beneficiaries are overwhelmingly satisfied with their Part D coverage. While beneficiaries have until December 31 to change or choose, CMS officials encourage those who plan to make changes or join to do so early—optimally by December 8—to avoid any delay or inconvenience in accessing their coverage in January.

“With the great success of the initial year for Medicare prescription drug coverage, this year’s open enrollment period is focused on improving beneficiary satisfaction by providing options for more comprehensive coverage and competitive costs while assuring a smooth transition for those who select a new plan,” stated Norwalk. She says CMS continues to work with plans and inter-governmental partners on complaint resolution and systems integration for data exchanges to process enrollments smoothly, accurately and efficiently.

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