

SHIC

talk

A program of the North Dakota Insurance Department • Adam Hamm, Insurance Commissioner

February 2009



Dear friends,

Medicare Part D annual enrollment in 2008 was a phenomenal success. With your help, we served nearly 1,600 North Dakota consumers in 10 locations.

In 2007, the Insurance Department held seven events around the state and helped about 1,000 consumers with their Medicare Part D plans. In 2008, our three additional events increased the number of people we were able to assist. Following this incredible increase, we are already making plans to help an even larger number of consumers in 2009.

One plan we have for 2009 annual enrollment is to train a group of volunteers to help solely with Medicare Part D annual enrollment. These folks will be trained to compare Part D plans and enroll consumers in new or different plans for 2010. Our hope is that these Part D-focused volunteers will allow us to handle the increase in consumers we expect this November. If you or anyone you know is interested in this volunteer opportunity, please call us at 1-888-575-6611. An advertisement is on page 5 of this newsletter; please pass it along to your friends and families.

In addition to the increased attendance at the annual enrollment events, the number of people helped from Nov. 15–Dec. 31 is 7,100 and counting! In 2007, a total of 4,105 consumers were helped during the annual enrollment period.

Thank you to all the volunteers that helped make the 2008 annual enrollment period a success. Your expertise and willingness to help made a big difference to North Dakota's Medicare beneficiaries.

Happy New Year!

Sincerely;

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Adam Hamm', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Adam Hamm
Insurance Commissioner

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S H I C
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Finding funds short for food?

Federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) can help.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the U.S. Department of Agriculture-funded program formally called the Food Stamp Program. The new name reflects the changes made to meet the needs of clients, including the focus on nutrition and improving access to this important assistance.

Making the program easily available to older adults is a priority, and North Dakota has taken several steps to achieve this.

- Individuals can request applications by mail or in person at all county social services offices.

- Once complete, the application form can be mailed to or dropped off at the county social service office.
- County workers can interview program applicants by telephone instead of an in-person office interview.
- If seniors or other individuals need help applying for nutrition assistance, a friend or relative may help them apply. This person can assist in directing questions to the county worker, attend the interview, and help the individual purchase food with the individual's special debit card, called an EBT card.

If you have questions about the SNAP program or eligibility, contact your local county social service office, or the North Dakota Department of Human Services toll-free at 1-800-755-2716.

Medicare SHIPLine under utilized, has proven track record

Director's note: Last fall, CMS heard our concerns about 1.800.MEDICARE and established a phone line with highly trained representatives, only for SHIPs. We have used this hundreds of times in the state office with extremely reliable results. Some counselors have stated that they have not used this process. Please use this number below any time you would originally call 1.800.MEDICARE. You will get a much better response time and more adequately trained CSRs.



As announced at the SHIP conference, CMS has implemented a system designed to enhance the interaction of SHIP counselors with customer service representatives at 1-800-MEDICARE.

- A SHIP-only number is established that will allow you to reach customer service representatives at 1-800-MEDICARE. That SHIP number is 1-888-647-6701. Counselors should call 1-888-647-6701 for any issue for which they would have

called 1-800-MEDICARE previously. **This number is not to be given to beneficiaries.**

1-888-647-6701

- SHIP counselors with unique IDs issued through the SHIPTalk.org web site will be eligible to use the SHIP number.
- When a counselor calls 1-888-647-6701, an automated voice will prompt the counselor to enter his or her unique ID.
- Counselors must enter the full unique ID, complete with a numeric prefix that corresponds to your state. The numeric prefix for North Dakota is 34. For example, if a counselor's unique ID is ND00001, the counselor should enter 3400001 when prompted to enter his/her unique ID.
- If the counselor enters his/her unique ID correctly, s/he will receive a very brief list of options from a recorded menu (described in the next bullet point). If the counselor does not enter the Unique ID correctly or enters an invalid Unique ID, s/he will hear the regular menu of options presented to all callers who call 1-800-MEDICARE. So, if counselors report to you that they see no difference in the

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menus, they are likely entering invalid unique IDs.

Assuming that the correct ID is entered, the counselor will hear a very brief menu of options as follows:

- Press 1 for general Medicare issues (these include Part D questions or calls to enroll in a plan)
- Press 2 for hospital issues to reach a Part A agent
- Press 3 for physician issues to reach a Part B agent
- Press 4 for medical equipment issues to reach a DME agent
- Press 5 to disenroll from a Part D plan



The efficiency in this system comes from the counselor selecting the appropriate option from this menu. The menu is designed to be very short and to the point to encourage counselors to listen and select the appropriate option.

Contact Cindy Sheldon at the SHIC office if you are not successful with this system.

Email: csheldon@nd.gov
Phone: 1.888.575.6611

Save the date!

New SHIC counselor training will be held May 5, 6 and 7, 2009 at the Comfort Inn Suites in Bismarck.

For more information, call 1.888.575.6611.

Oxygen payment changes from CMS

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has announced new oxygen payment rules and supplier responsibilities required by the Medicare improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008 (MIPPA).

The new rules permit the supplier to retain ownership of oxygen equipment after receiving payment for furnishing oxygen and oxygen equipment for 36 continuous months. The rental payment covers the equipment, contents, maintenance, and supplies and accessories such as tubing or a mouthpiece. After the 36 month payment period, the supplier is required to continue furnishing the equipment, supplies, accessories, and contents and for ensuring the equipment is in good working order for any period of medical need for the remainder of the five year reasonable useful lifetime of the equipment. There will be no additional Medicare payment for the equipment, supplies, accessories, or repairs for the remainder of the reasonable useful lifetime as Medicare's payments during the 36-month rental period cover all of these costs. However, after 36 months, Medicare will pay for oxygen contents for gaseous liquid oxygen equipment.

Also, Medicare will pay for one, in-home, routine maintenance and servicing visit for oxygen concentrators and transfilling equipment every 6 months during 2009 only, beginning six months after the end of the 36-month rental



period. This payment will be made for beneficiaries who do not receive liquid or gaseous oxygen of the supplier visits the beneficiary's home, performs any necessary maintenance and servicing, and inspects the equipment to ensure that it will function safely for the next 6 months.

For further administrative questions, call 1.800.Medicare.

Update training via Interactive Video Network (IVN) in May. More details to follow in future SHIC Talk issues.

Q&A with the Medicare Prescription Drug Plan finder

What is the Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Finder?

The Medicare based plan finder is located at this website: www.medicare.gov.

This tool allows you to find and compare Medicare plans that cover drugs and to learn more about Medicare options.

What does it mean when a pharmacy is marked “no” for preferred status? Why are there so many “no’s” this year compared to last?

For the 2009 contract year, plans may designate network pharmacies as “preferred” if cost sharing is lower at these pharmacies. If the same cost-sharing is available at all network pharmacies, then no network pharmacies will be designated as “preferred.” Only a small percentage of the plans actually have different cost sharing among their network pharmacies, therefore, this small percentage of plans have preferred pharmacies designated in the plan finder.

Drug pricing may vary by pharmacy and the plan finder does have pharmacy-specific drug pricing information.

In 2009, drug pricing is not being used to designate a preferred pharmacy status. If the beneficiary uses a specific pharmacy, he/she should use the “preferred pharmacy selection” button to designate the pharmacy of choice. The estimated annual cost would then be computed specific to that pharmacy.

How many drugs can I enter into the Plan Finder?

The Plan Finder can provide pricing up to 25 drug in the system. If you have more than 25 drugs, you may call

1.800.Medicare for an accurate comparison. SHIC counselors can use the SHIP line at 1.888.647.6701.

Can the Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Finder get specific information about my Medicare drug coverage and current enrollment?

Yes. Medicare beneficiaries or their authorized representative have the option of choosing a personalized plan search that provides specific information about the beneficiary’s current plan. To access this information, certain beneficiary information, such as the information from the beneficiary’s red, white and blue Medicare card is needed for a personalized search.

When using the Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Finder, in step two it asks for my ZIP code. I live in different locations in the summer and winter. Which ZIP code should I use?

CMS records reflect the beneficiaries address recorded at the Social Security Administration and this zip code should be used for the Medicare Prescription Drug Finder. By using the alternate zip code, you could enroll in a Part D plan that would not be applicable to you.

Why can I not find the generic albuterol inhaler in the Plan Finder?

Generic albuterol inhalers have been taken off the market due to environmental issues. As a result, generic albuterol inhalers have been taken off the Plan Finder tool. In the meantime, you can search and obtain pricing for the brand name equivalents, Proventil HFA or Ventolin HFA.

Report finds increasing costs in cancer drugs

In December, Avalere Health and the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) released a report, Cost Sharing for Patients in Medicare, that looks at the costs and coverage of oral cancer drugs in Medicare drug plans. Costs and restrictions on these critical drugs are rising under Medicare, which raises serious implications for Medicare beneficiaries with cancer. The report findings include:

- In 2009, the majority of plans now place brand-name

oral anti-cancer drugs on Tier 4. Plans charge as much as a 33 percent co-insurance amount for drugs on Tier 4—meaning these oral anti-cancer drugs can cost thousands of dollars per month. Since Tier 4 is often considered a “specialty tier,” enrollees in such plans may not request an exception to the cost-sharing assigned to these drugs. Since 2006, many plans have begun shifting these expensive drugs to higher and higher tiers.

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•In 2009, plans have more prior authorization requirements for these drugs than in any other prior year of Medicare Part D.

More information about this report is available at the Avalere News Room.

Source: Health Assistance Partnership

WANTED

Medicare Part D volunteers

The North Dakota Insurance Department is looking for volunteers to do Medicare Part D work October to December 2009. Compare Part D plans online and help beneficiaries enroll in plans for 2010. Training is provided and the hours are flexible to fit your schedule.

For more information, call 1-888-575-6611.

NORTH DAKOTA
Insurance Department

SHIC

State Health Insurance Counseling Program
Adam W. Hamm, Commissioner

Part D enrollees to pay lower drug prices starting 2010

Starting Jan. 1, 2010, people enrolled in Medicare Part D will pay less at the pharmacy for prescription drugs as a result of a new Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) regulation that revises the definition of “negotiated prices” under the Part D program. The revised definition, released by CMS on Jan. 6, 2009, requires that Part D plans use the sale price negotiated with pharmacies in determining the cost of drugs for Part D enrollees.

Currently, some Part D plans charge enrollees the drug prices negotiated with an intermediary contracting

organization, such as a pharmacy benefit manager (PBM), who then negotiates a lower drug price with pharmacies.

The difference between the pharmacy price and the price paid to the PBM can be large, particularly for generic drugs, and can push enrollees in these plans into the Part D coverage gap, or doughnut hole. The higher prices also raise costs for Medicare, which covers cost-sharing for low-income people under the Extra Help program.

Source: Medicare

ND SHIC writing 2009 continuation grant

ND SHIC is in the process of writing the continuation grant for 2009. The grant goals for 2009 include:

- Displaying SHIC brochure holders at the statewide Social Security offices and medical facilities
- Revitalizing Medicare Part D annual enrollment events including: shortening the events from 9 a.m.–4 p.m. instead of 9 a.m.–5 p.m.
- Providing Medicare drug retrieval cards for the

Medicare Plan Finder to beneficiaries for easy access in 2009 to plan comparisons

- Starting 2-1-1 intake calls earlier during the annual enrollment period in 2009 (Oct. 1)
- Advertise and train Part D-focused volunteers to assist with the inundation of beneficiaries during the annual enrollment period

Medicare drug retrieval code

Your name

Retrieval code or ID

Date or password date

Pharmacy ZIP code

Bring this card with you to Medicare Part D open enrollment events.

NORTH DAKOTA
Insurance Department

Prescription Connection
and
SHIC

State Health Insurance Counseling Program
Adam W. Hamm, Commissioner

1-888-575-6611

Director's corner

Greetings!

I hope you have all survived the Part D annual enrollment. I cannot express the relief you have brought to many North Dakota beneficiaries. We appreciate you helping us at the enrollment events and with beneficiaries directly in your community. As I have said before, many hands make light work!

We are making some changes to the annual enrollment period. We are starting 2-1-1 on Oct. 1, adding some temporary staff in the state office to help with comparisons and using the Medicare drug retrieval cards, highlighted on page 5 in this newsletter. These six weeks will be busy every year, but we can fine tune the process to make it as user-friendly as can be.

In our upcoming Recertification Training, we will be having a question and answer session. If you have any burning questions, or basic questions that you don't know how to answer, would you please email them to me for discussion at the upcoming training? I can be reached at csheldon@nd.gov. It will be a nice opportunity to discuss some common problems and solutions that we all encounter.

Additionally, if you feel as a counselor you need additional training on a specific topic (i.e. Part D, Medicare Advantage Plans, etc.), please know that I am always open to this. I realize that this is a volunteer position for you, so you may feel rusty. I am ALWAYS willing to sit down with you for a brush up!

Again, the North Dakota Insurance Department, SHIC program and staff appreciate all you do. Have a great winter!

Sincerely,



Cindy Sheldon



2009 Selecting a Medigap Policy: A Guide to Health Insurance for People with Medicare books are available at the ND SHIC office. Call 1-888-575-6611.

SHIC **talk**

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If you have questions about any content or have suggestions for content for our next publication, please contact Cindy Sheldon, director, at 701.328.9604 or csheldon@nd.gov.

For Medicare-related resources, please visit www.medicarerights.org.