



A Call to Action from CMS Administrator Mark B. McClellan, MD, PhD

MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG COVERAGE

THE CENTERS FOR MEDICARE & MEDICAID SERVICES (CMS) is in the process of implementing the Medicare prescription drug coverage. All Medicare beneficiaries—no matter how they get their health care today or whether they have existing drug coverage—will be eligible for drug coverage under a Medicare prescription drug plan. These plans will cover both brand name and generic drugs. And, very importantly, there will be extra help for those in need, which is why I am writing this message to you today.



We are committed to making sure that everyone who qualifies for extra help gets it. Almost eight million people will automatically qualify for extra help. Beginning in late May through June, people with Medicare and Medicaid, people in a Medicare Savings Program, and those who receive Supplemental Security Income will receive a letter from Medicare telling them they will receive the extra help automatically so they do not have to apply. The notices may be viewed at <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/medicarereform/lir.asp>. If you or a loved one receives this letter please be assured that this means you or they will have continuous prescription drug coverage with small out of pocket costs.

Additionally, there is extra help for people who do not automatically qualify but who do have limited income and resources. The Social Security Administration (SSA) is working with CMS to help these people apply for this extra help and get pre-qualified for this assistance before the enrollment period for the prescription drug coverage plans begins in the Fall. Social Security will be mailing a letter and an application to almost 19 million people beginning in late May and the mailings will continue through August. We encourage everyone who receives this letter and application to fill out this application so they can get the extra help from Medicare to pay for their prescription drug coverage. This letter can be viewed at <http://www.ssa.gov/organizations/medicareoutreach2/> on the web. Select "Application for Help with Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Costs."

We're committed to making sure that everyone who qualifies for extra help gets it. Medicare and Social Security will be conducting thousands of community outreach events in the next six months to let people know about this important and significant extra assistance for drug coverage. We are working closely with hundreds of organizations, community groups and thousands of volunteers to help those who qualify for extra assistance both to know about it and apply. This is a nationwide grassroots effort, which will be successful because of the commitment of both national and local organizations. This effort must be successful—we must insure that those who qualify for the extra help complete the application so in November they can enroll in a prescription drug plan that meets their needs.

Please join us in this grassroots effort—we need your assistance in spreading the word about the extra help which will be available to help those in need pay for the new and comprehensive Medicare prescription drug coverage. Please pass this information on to other organizations which would share our commitment to making this program successful and helping millions of Americans cover the costs of their prescription drugs.

Our goal is to make sure that all who might be eligible for extra assistance fill out an application—getting extra help to pay for comprehensive prescription drug coverage will help improve the quality of life and health for millions of Americans and I hope you can join us in this effort.

I ask for your help to make this important part of the implementation of the new drug coverage a success.