



PAT QUINN
Governor
MICHAEL T. McRAITH
Director

NEWS

Illinois Department of Insurance

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CONTACTS:
Anjali Julka (312) 814-0093
Louis G. Pukelis (312) 814-0778

State Reminds Medicare-Eligible Individuals of December 31st Open-Enrollment Deadline

Illinois Department of Insurance provides free counseling; 24-hour assistance available toll-free at 1-800-MEDICARE

CHICAGO—December 28, 2010. As the December 31st deadline nears for Medicare enrollees to choose a new Medicare benefit plan, and to select or change a Medicare drug plan for 2011, the Quinn administration is encouraging seniors and other Medicare recipients to review and compare coverage and benefit options in order to find a plan that best meets the individual's needs. Medicare beneficiaries who have not enrolled in a Medicare drug plan before, or who want to make changes to an existing plan, should do so as soon as possible in order to ensure uninterrupted access to medications at chosen pharmacies in January 2011.

The Illinois Department of Insurance's Senior Health Insurance Program (SHIP) can help Medicare-eligible individuals determine how they would like to receive Medicare health benefits next year and provide information on new benefits provided under the federal Affordable Care Act. SHIP staff can be reached toll-free at 1-800-548-9034, or you can visit the SHIP website at <http://insurance.illinois.gov/SHIP> to find a SHIP volunteer in your area. **Medicare representatives are also available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227).**

"With just days remaining in Medicare's open-enrollment season, our tireless staff has been helping eligible individuals, families, friends and caregivers learn about available prescription drug and health plan options," said Michael T. McRaith, Director, Illinois Department of Insurance. "Through our toll-free hotline and free counseling sessions, we can help eligible individuals compare costs and coverage, and provide information on new protections under the Affordable Care Act – including how to reduce the prescription drug coverage 'donut hole' through available discounts on covered brand-name prescription drugs."

Through its staff and a network of hundreds of trained volunteers in more than 180 sites throughout the State, SHIP assists Illinoisans who have questions about or problems with:

- Medicare
- Medicare supplemental insurance
- Medicare Advantage Plans (HMO, PPO, and PFFS)
- Medicare claims and appeals
- Prescription drug coverage through Medicare and other sources

- Long term care insurance

Every SHIP office is volunteer-based and supported by local sponsoring organizations. In 2009 alone, SHIP volunteers provided over 54,000 hours of counseling, responded to more than 37,000 telephone calls, and saved Medicare beneficiaries an estimated \$16.2 million. Governor Pat Quinn proclaimed the week of November 15 through November 19 this year as “SHIP week” to recognize the nearly 300,000 hours of free counseling provided to Illinois’ Medicare beneficiaries.

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