



PAT QUINN

Governor

JACK MESSMORE

Acting Director

# NEWS

## Illinois Department of Insurance

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**CONTACTS:**

Anjali Julka: (312) 814-0093

Milly Santiago:(312) 814-0908

## **State Launches Free, One-on-One Medicare Counseling Sessions Statewide During Early Medicare Open Enrollment Season**

*Gov. Quinn Proclaims Oct 10<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> as Senior Health Insurance Program (SHIP) Week; Highlights State's Volunteer Effort to Help Elderly, Persons with Disabilities*

CHICAGO – October 11, 2011. The Illinois Department of Insurance today announced free counseling sessions at more than 25 locations statewide to help thousands of seniors and people with disabilities learn more about Medicare insurance coverage and how to apply for benefits. The Department's Senior Health Insurance Program (SHIP) volunteers will be on site to provide one-on-one assistance during the Medicare open-enrollment season, which this year falls on October 15<sup>th</sup> through December 7<sup>th</sup>. Governor Pat Quinn proclaimed this week, October 10 – 15, 2011, as "SHIP Week" in Illinois to applaud the volunteer effort and to help remind Medicare-eligible residents that open-enrollment begins sooner this year.

"Especially during the open enrollment season, many Illinois residents have questions about Medicare and how to apply for a plan that best meet their healthcare needs," said Acting Director Jack Messmore. "I am proud of the dedicated SHIP volunteers who help seniors and people with disabilities navigate through the Medicare application process and towards obtaining necessary healthcare coverage."

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, and long term care insurance. Throughout the year, hundreds of trained SHIP volunteers staff 204 sites in every county to help elderly residents learn more about available Medicare insurance options. Since SHIP's inception, volunteers have provided nearly 700,000 hours of counseling, assisted more than 900,000 clients, and saved Medicare beneficiaries an estimated \$75 million in customer service costs.

In addition to the year-round services provided by SHIP volunteers, the Illinois Department of Insurance is conducting a series of free, one-on-one counseling sessions throughout the state to assist Medicare-eligible individuals with the Medicare open-enrollment season, which runs this year from October 15th – December 7th.

A list of upcoming SHIP events during open-enrollment season is available on the Department's website at [Insurance.Illinois.gov/SHIP](http://Insurance.Illinois.gov/SHIP) or by calling the SHIP toll-free hotline at (800) 548-9034.

Gov. Quinn's proclamation reads:

WHEREAS, there are over 1.84 million Illinoisans 65 years of age or older on Medicare and more than 275,595 Illinoisans who are under 65 and have a disability who are on Medicare; and,

WHEREAS, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of Illinoisans 65 years of age or older is estimated to increase to more than 2.4 million by the year 2030; and,

WHEREAS, elderly and disabled people who lack a social support network can be unaware of or overwhelmed by their Medicare benefits or may be unable to access and complete Medicare application procedures; and,

WHEREAS, the Senior Health Insurance Program (SHIP) was originated in 1988 by the Illinois Department of Insurance in order to educate the citizens of Illinois about Medicare benefits and programs through community organizations, senior citizen centers, and the media; and,

WHEREAS, since its inception, more than 2,500 SHIP volunteers have contributed nearly 700,000 hours to assist over 900,000 clients, saving Illinois' citizens more than \$75 million in customer service costs, \$40 million of which have been recorded in the past two years; and,

WHEREAS, hundreds of active SHIP volunteers are truly admirable citizens, contributing their time and talents through more than 204 local SHIP sites throughout Illinois in order to improve the lives of Illinois' Medicare beneficiaries; and,

WHEREAS, consistent with the Department of Insurance's consumer education and protection priorities, SHIP volunteers counsel eligible Illinois residents in every county, helping our seniors and disabled citizens work through the often confusing array of Medicare insurance options:

THEREFORE, I, Pat Quinn, Governor of the State of Illinois, do hereby proclaim October 10-14, 2011 as **SENIOR HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM WEEK** in Illinois, and encourage all residents to recognize the important contributions of the SHIP volunteers who assist our elderly and disabled citizens.

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