



News Release

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

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	http://www.dhs.ca.gov		

ENROLLMENT OPENS FOR NEW FEDERAL PRESCRIPTION DRUG BENEFITS

Free Advice Available to Help Beneficiaries Meet their Prescription Drug Needs

Sacramento – Seniors and persons with disabilities today can begin to enroll in prescription drug plans for the upcoming Medicare drug benefits. Under changes ordered by Congress called the “Medicare Modernization Act,” the federal government will for the first time offer prescription drug benefits through Medicare.

Beginning Jan. 1, 2006, more than one million Californians who are eligible for both Medicare and Medi-Cal will have prescription drug coverage from the federal government, not Medi-Cal.

“This is the largest and most complex change in the 40-year history of Medicare,” said California Department of Health Services Director Sandra Shewry. “We know that any change in prescription coverage can have significant impact on a person’s health. The Governor is helping to ensure the vulnerable and medically fragile population impacted by this change have the information and support what they need during this transition.”

The Governor’s budget includes more than \$100 million for outreach, training and support to assist clients’ and consumers’ transition from Medi-Cal drug coverage to Medicare’s prescription drug benefits.

Medicare has notified dual eligible beneficiaries about the upcoming changes and which Medicare drug plan they will be automatically enrolled in if they take no action. People who are eligible for Medicare and Medi-Cal should double check the plan they were automatically enrolled in to be sure it meets their medical needs. Dual eligible beneficiaries may switch plans at any time.

Proactive measures to ease this transition have been taken, such as:

- Medi-Cal is issuing notices to dual eligible beneficiaries about the upcoming changes.
- Medi-Cal will continue to provide dual eligible beneficiaries with coverage for certain types of medications not offered by Medicare, including over-the-counter drugs like antihistamines, cold medicines and some prescription drugs.
- To prevent a lapse in coverage, Medi-Cal offers up to a 100-day prescription refill for many drugs during the months of November and December 2005.

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Medicare beneficiaries who are not covered by Medi-Cal have until May 15, 2006, to make a decision on enrollment. If Medicare beneficiaries do not select a plan by May 15, 2006, enrollment will not open again until Nov. 15, 2006, and coverage will cost more and will not take effect until Jan. 1, 2007.

The new Medicare Part D drug plans will offer both generic and brand name drugs. A co-payment of \$1 to \$5 for each prescription will be required for people enrolled in both Medicare and Medi-Cal and for people eligible for federal assistance. Low-income Californians may be eligible for federal assistance to pay for premiums and deductibles. Co-payments for other Medicare enrollees may be greater.

Before selecting a plan, beneficiaries should first make a list of the medications they are currently taking. Second, they should carefully read the *2006 Medicare & You Handbook* that was mailed in October.

“Medicare beneficiaries shouldn’t feel like they have to wade through this information alone,” said Shewry. “Several resources are available to guide seniors and persons with disabilities through this new benefit. Doctors, pharmacists and other community partners are available to find a plan that will best serve their medical needs.”

Several free resources are available for beneficiaries to learn more about the new Medicare Part D prescription drug benefits, such as:

- *Medicare & You 2006* booklet, sent to each Medicare consumer in October 2005.
- Toll-free 24-hour assistance is available at 1-800-Medicare.
- (TTY users call 1-877-486-2048).
- The Social Security Administration at 1-800-772-1213, can help beneficiaries determine eligibility for financial assistance for premiums and deductibles.
- On-line prescription drug plan comparisons are available at www.Medicare.gov or www.calmedicare.org/changes/partd.html.
- Useful fact sheets for consumers covered by both Medi-Cal and Medicare are available at the Health Consumer Alliance Web site www.healthconsumer.org.
- Call the local county human services department to apply for Medi-Cal or the Medicare Savings Program or to discuss current Medi-Cal or Medicare Savings Program needs.
- Call the California Department of Aging’s Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program (HICAP) at 1-800-434-0222 for free in-person or over the phone counseling sessions and local educational presentations.
- Additional information, specific to California beneficiaries, is available at www.chhs.ca.gov.

Key Dates:

Nov. 15, 2005

Enrollment for Medicare prescription drug plans begins. People who are eligible for Medicare and Medi-Cal should double check the plan they were automatically enrolled in to be sure it meets their medical needs.

Dec. 31, 2005

Last date for beneficiaries eligible for Medicare and Medi-Cal to obtain most drug coverage from Medi-Cal.

Jan. 1, 2006

New Medicare prescription drug benefits take effect.

May 15, 2006

Last day for Medicare beneficiaries who are not covered by Medi-Cal to enroll in a prescription drug plan.

Nov. 15, 2006

Enrollment opens for Medicare beneficiaries who did not select a plan by May 2006.

Jan. 1, 2007

Coverage takes effect for Medicare beneficiaries who enroll in November 2006.

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