



MLN Matters



Information for Medicare Fee-for-Service Health Care Professionals

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MMA-New Medicare-Approved Drug Discount Cards and Transitional Assistance Program: A Summary for Pharmacists and Other Pharmacy Professionals

Note: This article was revised to contain Web addresses that conform to the new CMS website and to show they are now MLN Matters articles. All other information remains the same.

Provider Types Affected

Pharmacists and other Pharmacy Professionals

Provider Action Needed

Understand the Medicare-Approved Drug Discount Cards and Transitional Assistance Program that begins in 2004 to help Medicare beneficiaries save on prescription drugs.

Background

As part of the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003 (MMA), the Medicare-Approved Drug Discount Cards and Transitional Assistance Program begins in 2004 to help Medicare beneficiaries save on prescription drugs. Medicare will contract with private companies to offer new drug discount cards until a Medicare prescription drug benefit starts in 2006. A discount card with Medicare's seal of approval can help Medicare beneficiaries save on prescription drug costs. This article is designed to give an overview of the new Medicare-Approved Drug Discount Cards and Transitional Assistance Program. It will also explain where you may refer Medicare beneficiaries for information on selecting and enrolling in the drug discount card that best suits their needs.

Medicare-Approved Drug Discount Cards

- Open enrollment started in May 2004
- Available to qualified beneficiaries regardless of income
- Represent a variety of discount and drug options from private companies
- Available to beneficiaries eligible for or enrolled in Medicare Part A or enrolled in Medicare Part B, **unless** receiving outpatient prescription drug coverage through State Medicaid programs
- May charge an annual enrollment fee of no more than \$30, which may be paid by Medicare for some low-income beneficiaries

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- Do **not** require that beneficiaries purchase discount drugs through mail-order pharmacies
- Provide beneficiaries the ability to use their discount cards in pharmacies near their homes.

Transitional Assistance Program

Beneficiaries with the greatest need will have the greatest help available to them. Individuals with an annual income in 2004 of no more than \$12,569 if single or \$16,862 if married, and individuals receiving help from their state in paying their Medicare premiums or cost sharing, may qualify for a \$600 credit on their discount card to help pay for prescription drugs. These income limits change every year. Residents of Puerto Rico or a U.S. territory are not eligible for the \$600 credit from Medicare. However, they may be eligible for similar assistance provided by the territory in which they reside. Beneficiaries cannot qualify for the \$600 if they already have outpatient prescription drug coverage from certain other sources.

Special Concerns of Pharmacists and Other Pharmacy Professionals About the Drug Discount Cards

Some pharmacy associations have expressed concerns about how the Medicare-approved drug discount cards will affect the role of pharmacists and other pharmacy professionals in patient interaction. Because beneficiaries are more apt to seek out their local pharmacists or pharmacy professionals for advice, Medicare believes that the discount cards may allow the further development of relationships with Medicare beneficiaries. In fact, educational materials will remind beneficiaries to consider the importance of the relationship with their pharmacist or other pharmacy professional when selecting a discount card. Private companies are required to offer discount cards that give consumers in urban, suburban, and rural areas the option to use their cards in pharmacies near their homes.

Where Do I Refer Medicare Beneficiaries for Information on Prescription Drug Discount Programs?

In addition to the Medicare-approved drug discount cards, there are other programs available that provide assistance in paying for prescription drugs. Alternatives such as individual state pharmacy assistance programs and manufacturers' discount programs may be a better fit for certain individuals.

Medicare recognizes that pharmacists and other pharmacy professionals have limited time available to counsel beneficiaries. The following resources are available to help individuals with questions about the Medicare-approved drug discount cards:

The 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) Toll-Free Call Center

This Call Center is available 24 hours per day and 7 days per week. It connects beneficiaries with customer service representatives who can answer questions and perform price comparisons for discount cards and other assistance programs. Beneficiaries should prepare a list of current prescription drugs and dosages prior to contacting the Call Center. Beneficiaries may request a copy of their individualized price comparison results. TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048.

The Prescription Drug and Other Assistance Programs Website at Medicare.gov ***(<http://www.medicare.gov>)***

For beneficiaries who use the Internet, this site features eligibility, enrollment, and price comparison information for each available discount card in a particular area, as well as their state pharmacy assistance

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programs. It also has a tool that helps beneficiaries determine the best savings program based on their prescription drug needs.

Medicare's Guide to Choosing a Medicare-Approved Drug Discount Card
(<http://www.medicare.gov>)

This resource provides beneficiaries with information on choosing a card, enrolling, and submitting complaints. This guide also includes sample enrollment forms and worksheets to assist beneficiaries in selecting the discount card that is right for them.

State Health Insurance Counseling and Assistance Programs (SHIP)

Beneficiaries may also contact their SHIP counselor for information on prescription drug cost assistance programs. To find the telephone number for the nearest SHIP, call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) or visit http://www.cms.hhs.gov/Partnerships/10_SHIPS.asp#TopOfPage on the CMS website.

Information Resources for Pharmacists and Other Pharmacy Professionals

Download a free patient-education brochure at <http://www.medicare.gov> (or call 1-800-MEDICARE to order a limited number of free copies).

Read the press release fact sheet, *Medicare Prescription Drug Discount card and Transitional Assistance Program*, at <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/apps/media/press/release.asp?Counter=990> on the CMS website.

Attend CMS Open Door Forums in person or by telephone (toll-free). These forums address concerns and issues of the pharmaceutical industry. Visit <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/OpenDoorForums/> for further details.

Visit <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/MMAUpdate/> for the latest information on MMA.

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