

Medicare News and Notes

Deciding If Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage Is For You Ⓢ

(NAPSA)—Policymakers and the media are measuring the success of Medicare's new prescription drug benefit on the number of people who sign up. Consumers may see polls that indicate more than a third of seniors don't plan to join—leading them to reconsider whether or not they should sign up. Experts caution seniors not to be misled by these reports or think that others must know something that they don't. Although the new benefit may not be for everyone, for many, it may offer much-needed assistance with the costs of prescription medications.

Those who are eligible for Medicare should weigh their prescription drug coverage options in order to choose coverage that best meets their needs. Here are some guidelines to consider in deciding whether or not to sign up:

- 32 percent of seniors already have adequate prescription drug coverage and will not need the new benefit, especially if they receive more help with premiums and co-pays than Medicare will provide. These people should keep their coverage if possible. Some have retiree or union coverage and others may be covered through programs such as TRICARE. If their current plan provides drug benefits that are at least as good as Medicare, they

won't risk a penalty if they join a Medicare plan later.

- 15 percent of seniors are eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid. These "dual eligibles" will not need to sign up because they will be automatically enrolled by the government.

- 12 percent of seniors are already signed up with a Medicare HMO, also called a Medicare Advantage Plan. Many of these plans provide drug benefits. Starting January 1, 2006, these plans will include new Medicare drug benefits along with other services, including medical care.

- 11 percent of seniors have low incomes but do not qualify for Medicaid. This means that they will not automatically be enrolled in Medicare prescription drug coverage. For these seniors and disabled individuals, applying for "extra help" through the Social Security Administration can assist with premiums and deductibles associated with the new benefit.

Seniors must carefully weigh all of their options in choosing whether or not to enroll in a new Medicare drug plan. Helpful information can be found at 1-800-MEDICARE, www.medicare.gov, www.YourPharmacyBenefit.org, and www.MedicareRxEducationNetwork.org.