

WORD FROM WASHINGTON

Medicare Offers Insurance Coverage For Prescription Medicines

(NAPSA)—Most of us know the value of good insurance, whether it's life, home, auto or health. Medicare is now offering insurance coverage for prescription medicines to help seniors and disabled persons with the cost of their medicines.

Those who join a drug plan will pay a monthly premium (just as they do now for their Medicare doctor visits), pay a part of the cost of their prescription medicines and may have a deductible, depending on the plan they join. But unlike some types of insurance, people with Medicare cannot be turned down for prescription drug coverage.

On average, people with Medicare spend over \$2,800 per year on prescription medicines, more than \$1,500 of which they currently pay out of their own pockets. With the new Medicare coverage, the money that an individual will spend out of pocket is expected to drop to about \$850.

Even those seniors who currently take few medicines and spend little money will have the security of knowing they're protected for future prescription drug needs. This coverage is important because health care needs generally increase with age—the chance of having more than one chronic health problem doubles by the time beneficiaries reach 80 years—as does the need for prescription medicines. About 85 per-

The Cost Of Waiting To Enroll

If a person with Medicare takes few medicines now and doesn't think there is a need to join a plan this year, waiting will cost more. For example, waiting four years to sign up would add an additional 43% of the average premium in 2010 or 1% for each of the 43 months not enrolled after May 2005. The average premium at that time is estimated to be \$42 per month or \$504 per year. The beneficiary would have to pay an extra \$217 a year, making his annual premium about \$721. 

cent of Medicare beneficiaries who are ages 65 to 74 use at least one prescription medication.

Health care needs are unpredictable and people with Medicare who don't initially sign up will have to wait until the next calendar year even if their health care needs change. When they do sign up later they will pay more for the coverage because there is a penalty—a higher premium—for those who do not already have equivalent coverage. Paying higher premiums the longer you wait is the same way life insurance works.

The new Medicare prescription drug coverage provides access, protection and peace of mind, just like every other type of insurance. For more information on how to sign up for Medicare prescription drug coverage, call (800) MEDICARE or visit www.Medicare.gov.