

Seniors Can Benefit From Medicare's Preventive Services

by Tommy Thompson
Former Health &

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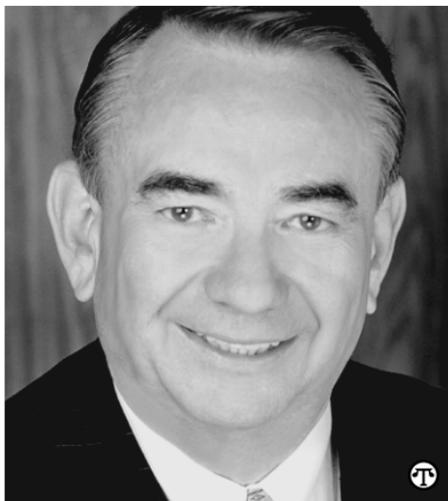
(NAPSA)—As a former Secretary of Health & Human Services (HHS), I am particularly interested in the recent changes to Medicare. I've been reading a lot about the new prescription drug coverage, also known as Part D. It's great to see the impact of the new program—now more than 38.2 million, or 90 percent, of those eligible for Medicare have help paying for their drugs.

What many people do not realize is that the law that brought about Part D included more than just prescription drugs. The law, known as the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003 (MMA), contained other measures to improve Medicare. One very important change was the coverage of additional, preventive health services.

Preventive services are often health care screenings or tests that are performed by a doctor to understand your current health status. They can also be used to predict potential health care risks. The medical community now understands that identifying and treating a condition early on can result in better health outcome results. Preventing something before it starts can be even better.

Medicare first began covering preventive services in 1981. Throughout the years, new services have been added. The services listed below are some of the ones offered by Medicare.

- A one-time Welcome to Medicare physical exam;
- Health screenings for cardiovascular disease, breast cancer, cervical and vaginal cancers, colorectal cancer, prostate cancer, diabetes, glaucoma and bone density;
- Flu and hepatitis shots; and



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- The most recently added preventive service, smoking and tobacco use cessation.

More information about Medicare's preventive services can be found at www.medicare.gov or by calling (800) MEDICARE. You should also consult with your doctor and Medicare to understand which services would be helpful to you and your level of coverage.

These preventive services are important, but we still have a ways to go. Today's health care systems focus the vast majority of resources on treating problems that already exist. We need to learn better ways to keep people as healthy as possible as long as possible. Not only is this better for patients and their families, it saves the overall system a lot of money.

I encourage all seniors to talk to Medicare and their doctors about the preventive services available through Medicare. As more seniors use these services, the more public support there will be for making services such as these available to seniors. It's just one step toward changing the system to provide real health care, not just sick care.