



Press Release

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For Immediate Release

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Medicare Part D Open Enrollment Nov. 15-Dec. 31

The Whatcom Medicare D Coalition will present, "Time to Consider Changes: Medicare Part D in 2007," 2 p.m.-4 p.m., Thurs., Nov. 16, at the St. Luke's Health Education Center, 3333 Squalicum Parkway, Bellingham. The session is free and open to all Medicare beneficiaries, their families and advocates.

The Annual Coordinated Enrollment Period for Medicare Part D prescription drug coverage is Nov. 15-Dec. 31 of every year. "This is the time that beneficiaries can sign up for a Part D plan for the first time, or switch to a different plan than the one they had in 2006," said Maureen Kane, of Senior Information & Assistance.

"People are beginning to receive letters from their current plans that can seem confusing," said Elizabeth Jennings, coordinator of the SHIBA HelpLine (Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors), a program of the Office of the Insurance Commissioner sponsored locally by the nonprofit Whatcom Alliance for Healthcare Access. "Plus, this year there are more prescription drug plans to choose from with different premiums, deductibles and some with coverage in the 'donut hole' or coverage gap."

The Nov. 16 workshop will outline changes and additions to the Medicare Part D program, and beneficiaries may choose to get one-on-one advising about their letters and questions. In addition, attendees will find out if they qualify for "extra help" from Social Security to help pay their Medicare Part D premiums, deductibles and co-pays.

Whatcom County Medicare beneficiaries have three ways to compare the lowest-cost Medicare Part D plans that cover the drugs they take. "All three options will get the same job done," said Jennings, who suggests family members help elders with the often-confusing process.

1. Visit <http://www.medicare.gov/> and use the Prescription Drug Plan Finder.
2. Call 1-800-MEDICARE (1.800.633.4227).
3. Request local assistance. Folks over age 60 and over may contact Senior Information & Assistance, (360) 715-6533. People of any age may contact the SHIBA HelpLine, 1-800-562-6900. Enrolled members of federally-recognized Native American tribes may contact the tribal health clinic nearest them: Lummi Tribal Health Center, (360) 384-0464, or Nooksack Indian Tribe Health Center, (360) 592-5176.

Jennings and Kane encourage Medicare beneficiaries to investigate their options early. According to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, beneficiaries who want their 2007 coverage to begin Jan. 1 should consider making changes by Dec. 8.

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