



Connecting Older Adults with Community-based Resources and Options

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**Local Advocates Produce Video for Medicare Website
With Information in American Sign Language, Other Formats**

People who need or prefer to get information about Medicare in formats other than written text are now able to do so thanks to an idea that started with a local group of professionals who are deaf or work with the deaf community.

Members of the Deaf Workgroup of the Make Medicare Work Coalition had observed that people they serve were often unaware of important Medicare information because it was not provided in a format they could use. They worked with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to produce a video that presents information on the basics of Medicare in American Sign Language (ASL), and with large-type captions and voiceover narration.

Anyone going to the Medicare website, www.medicare.gov, can now click on Information in Other Languages to reach the video. It can also be reached directly at www.medicare.gov/multilanguage.aspx. The 27-minute video includes information about who can get Medicare, how to enroll, Medicare benefits, and programs to help with costs for people with limited incomes.

The Make Medicare Work Coalition (MMW) is a partnership of AgeOptions, the Progress Center for Independent Living and Health & Disability Advocates. It provides older adults, people with disabilities and those who care for them with education, counseling, advocacy and decision-making support on Medicare and other health programs.

“The video is also designed to reach people with difficulty seeing or reading, as well as those who just prefer to get information through a video,” said Terri Gendel, AgeOptions director of benefits and advocacy. “It came about through a public-private partnership. A group of local advocates thought it was important, went to the government and, with the support of Rep. Jan Schakowsky, made it happen.”

Gendel explained that Schakowsky lent her support when she heard about the video project. “Access to information should not be discriminatory,” Schakowsky said. “All Medicare beneficiaries, including the deaf and hard of hearing, need to receive up to date information regarding their benefits. I am glad to lend support to this effort to ensure that key government information is accessible to people with disabilities.”

“Videos are a great way to get this information out because ASL is a visual language that includes expression in hands, face and body to get the message across,” Gendel said. “Like translating any other language, it isn’t just word-for-word English.”

She also pointed out that some people whose first language is ASL don't read English well, so traditional written materials aren't useful for them.

Members of the group making the video determined it could be valuable to a variety of audiences beyond those who use ASL. "We have received very positive feedback from people who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, have low vision and some whose first language is not English who find the slow pace, captions and narration really helpful," said JulieAnn Chavez, a Senior Health Insurance Program counselor with Arkansas-based JulieAnn and Associates, who appears in the video.

Chavez pointed out that the video will be a valuable tool for professionals who present Medicare information to groups. "Medicare can be complicated and we want to be sure everyone is included and gets the information they need," she said. "We also hope this serves as a model for other government websites to include more information in accessible formats, including ASL."

The video was produced by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services in collaboration with the Make Medicare Work Coalition. Funding was provided by the Michael Reese Health Trust, the Retirement Research Foundation and the Illinois Senior Health Insurance Program (SHIP), with additional support from Arkansas SHIP.

AgeOptions and its network of community agencies are the principal source of information regarding senior services in suburban Cook County, Ill. A nonprofit organization located in Oak Park, AgeOptions has served the older adults of suburban Cook County and their caregivers as an Area Agency on Aging since 1974. For more information, please visit the Agency website at www.ageoptions.org.

AgeOptions connects adults age 60 and over with resources and service options so they can live their lives to the fullest and remain in their homes as long as possible. In 2010 we met the needs of more than 198,500 individuals in 130 communities within 30 townships that have a diverse population of 460,000 older adults. AgeOptions advocates, plans, develops and funds programs and coordinates a network of community-based senior service agencies to ensure an effective and efficient system of service delivery. Support is provided through the Older Americans Act, Illinois General Revenue Funds, local funds and individual contributions.