



Connecting Older Adults with Community-based Resources and Options

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AgeOptions Joins National Effort to Increase Use of Medicare's New Free Preventive Screenings

People with Medicare can now receive services and screenings that help prevent illness and emergency room visits – in most cases without any out-of-pocket cost. These benefits include a Welcome to Medicare exam, annual doctor visits and screenings such as mammograms, bone density, prostate and colorectal cancer screenings.

Starting January 1, 2011, Medicare has been providing many covered Part B preventive services at no cost to the consumer, based on a provision in the Affordable Care Act. In addition to cutting the co-pays and deductible for many services, Medicare added a new benefit – coverage for an Annual Wellness Visit.

The preventive benefits will help older adults stay healthier longer and prevent chronic illnesses, along with helping save an estimated two-thirds of the \$2 trillion the U.S. spends each year treating preventable long-term illness.

That's the message of a campaign to educate older adults and people with disabilities about new, free preventive care that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) announced in June. With only one in six people with Medicare taking advantage of one or more of the recommended preventive benefits now available without co-pay or deductible, CMS wants to be sure Medicare beneficiaries are aware of and use their preventive benefits.

AgeOptions is joining the initiative by reminding Medicare recipients to take advantage of the preventive services. "We plan to encourage those on Medicare to obtain the free screenings, and those new to Medicare, to not miss their Welcome to Medicare physical," said Jonathan Lavin, president and CEO of AgeOptions, the Area Agency on Aging of suburban Cook County. "We are asking community agencies throughout suburban Cook County and throughout the metropolitan region to share this important message."

Just days before Medicare launched the nationwide public outreach campaign, Rear Adm. James M. Galloway, MD, informed the 145 people at AgeOptions' annual Volunteer Recognition Luncheon about the benefits.

Galloway, who is acting U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) regional director in Chicago and a board-certified physician in both internal medicine and cardiology, said he became discouraged with practicing cardiology when he realized he was fixing conditions that could have been prevented. He emphasized that preventive measures help older people reduce their risk of disability and chronic illness.

How Do the New Benefits Work?

People who are new to Medicare may get a Welcome to Medicare Exam within their first year in the program. After that, they may have an Annual Wellness Visit once every 12 months, without paying a co-pay or deductible. In addition, many preventive benefits are now offered at no out-of-pocket cost, including mammograms and screenings for bone density and prostate and colon cancer, as well as smoking cessation counseling. Some preventive services were already offered without cost and continue to be important, such as flu and pneumonia shots.

Usually, the Medicare Part B preventive services will be available without a co-pay if the doctor or health care provider accepts Medicare payment in full. People with Medicare should ask if the doctor “accepts assignment” to be sure.

The Annual Wellness Visits allow individuals with Medicare Part B and their doctors to create a personalized prevention plan to reduce the risks of chronic disease and to follow up every year. Based on the patient’s health, age, gender and family history, the doctor and patient will determine which preventive tests are appropriate and set up a schedule to have them done. Individuals who had a Welcome to Medicare exam when they were new to the program must wait 12 months from the date of that exam before they can get their first Annual Wellness Visit.

To see a full list of available services, and for additional information, go to <http://Medicare.gov/sharethehealth>, <http://es.Medicare.gov/sharethehealth> (Spanish) and www.healthcare.gov.

AgeOptions also provides information on Medicare and other services and programs for older adults and those who care for them. Call (708)383-0258 or (708)524-1653 for TTY users, or go to www.ageoptions.org.

AgeOptions co-leads the Make Medicare Work coalition made up of 260 organizations statewide that assist older adults and people with disabilities with health care and prescription drug programs.

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.