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Oregon receives more money to counsel people with Medicare

(Salem) — An estimated 22,000 Oregonians with Medicare qualify for assistance paying for prescription drug insurance but aren't taking advantage of this benefit. A state program that counsels Medicare recipients recently received additional federal funds to help educate Oregonians about this and other Medicare benefits.

The Senior Health Insurance Benefits Assistance (SHIBA) program this month received a \$202,210 grant from Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to increase its ability to explain health care choices to those with Medicare. CMS had already awarded the program \$417,631 in May. This brings SHIBA's total 2008 federal funding to \$692,737, a 60 percent increase over 2007.

"Many of Oregon's over 570,000 Medicare beneficiaries still don't know that they can get free, one-on-one Medicare counseling through their local SHIBA organization," said SHIBA Manager Lisa Emerson. "The federal government is counting on programs like SHIBA to reach and help folks apply for the Low Income Subsidy (LIS) that helps pay for Part D drug coverage."

SHIBA is a statewide network of trained volunteers that provides unbiased, personalized information to Medicare recipients. Part of the Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services, SHIBA is funded by CMS and state general funds.

People who are eligible for Medicare may call the SHIBA program for help:

- Applying to the Social Security Administration (SSA) for assistance with prescription drug insurance costs. Eligibility is looked at every year. Some people may need to reapply if they failed to provide Social Security with updated information.
- Selecting a prescription drug plan that fits their needs.
- Understanding other Medicare choices such as how to select a supplement.

SHIBA will award most of the additional CMS funds to existing county SHIBA program sponsors to boost their outreach efforts to Medicare recipients who have limited income.

How to reach SHIBA

SHIBA's toll-free phone is 1-800-722-4134. Callers are asked to use the telephone keypad to type in their ZIP code. In most areas, they will be transferred to a volunteer in their community. In a few rural areas, they will be connected with state staff in Salem.

Further information about SHIBA, how to become a SHIBA volunteer, and a list of local county SHIBA sponsors is also available at: www.oregonshiba.org.

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