

People with Medicare save \$4.8 billion on drugs

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

As a result of the Affordable Care Act, 5.6 million seniors and people with disabilities have saved \$4.8 billion on prescription drugs since the law was enacted, Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced Thursday, Oct. 25.

This year alone, 2.3 million people in the Medicare prescription drug coverage gap known as the “donut hole” have saved an average of \$657. During the first nine months of 2012, over 20.7 million people with original Medicare got at least one preventive service at no cost to them.

This news comes after last month’s estimates that the health care law will save the typical person with original Medicare \$5,000 from 2010 to 2022.

“I am pleased that the health care law is helping so many seniors save money on their prescription drug costs,” Sebelius said. “Medicare is stronger thanks to the health care law, offering new benefits at no cost to seniors.”

The health care law includes benefits to make Medicare prescription drug coverage more affordable. In 2010, anyone with Medicare who hit the prescription drug donut hole received a \$250 rebate. In 2011, people with Medicare who hit the donut hole began receiving discounts on covered brand-name drugs and savings for generic drugs.

For 2013, people with Medicare in the donut hole will receive about 53 percent on the cost of brand name drugs and a 21 percent savings for the cost of generic drugs. These savings and Medicare coverage will gradually increase until 2020, when the donut hole will be closed.

The health care law also makes it easier for people with Medicare to stay healthy. Prior to 2011, people with Medicare had to pay part of the cost for many preventive health services. These costs made it difficult for people to get the health care they needed. For example, before the health care law passed, a person with Medicare could pay as much as \$160 in cost-sharing for a colorectal cancer screening. Because of the health care law, many preventive services are now offered free to beneficiaries (with no deductible or co-pay) so the cost is no longer a barrier for seniors who want to stay healthy and treat problems early.

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In 2012 alone, over 20.7 million people with original Medicare have received at least one preventive service at no cost to them. This includes 2.13 million who have taken advantage of the annual wellness visit provided by the health care law—almost 650,000 more than had used this service by this point in the year in 2011. In 2011, an estimated 32.5 million people with original Medicare or Medicare Advantage received one or more preventive benefits free of charge.

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