

See information below for Medicare Beneficiaries. Open Enrollment for Medicare Prescription Drug Plans begins soon. In the Siouxland area, Siouxland Aging Services' SHIIP counselors are available to assist residents of Cherokee, Ida, Monona, Plymouth and Woodbury Counties. Additional SHIIP sponsor sites in Sioux City include Sunrise Retirement Community, Mercy Hospital, and Siouxland Center for Active Generations. Many of the hospitals in counties outside of Woodbury County also sponsor SHIIP programs. Beneficiaries can make an appointment at Siouxland Aging Services by calling 712-279-6900 or 800-798-6916.

For more information contact:
SHIIP -- Iowa Insurance Division
515-281-5705

Several important changes for people on Medicare will start taking place this October. Each of the changes relate to Medicare Part D prescription drug coverage.

Most important are the new dates for the Part D "Open Enrollment Period." The new dates are **October 15-December 7**. This is the time when individuals can change Part D plans for 2012, enroll in a Part D plan or drop coverage. Choices made during the open enrollment will go into effect January 1, 2012.

"This is a change from past years when the open enrollment was November 15-December 31," says Kris Gross from the state of Iowa's Senior Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP). Gross adds, "We're asking everyone to remind family, friends and neighbors that the dates for changing have moved up a month. We don't want anyone to miss the opportunity to make their choice of plans for 2012." Plans can change their coverage and costs from year to year so comparing plans during the open enrollment is critical.

The "Annual Notice of Change", sent out by plans to explain formulary (drugs covered), benefits and cost changes for 2012 is due in mailboxes September 30. "Notice of Creditable Coverage" are also due September 30. This is a notice from employer/union and other group health plans which tell Medicare eligible enrollees if their drug coverage will be "as good as or better than Medicare's coverage" in 2012.

The 2012 Medicare drug plans will be available on the Medicare website, www.medicare.gov, on October 1. Plans not renewing their contract with Medicare for 2012 must notify their members by October 2.

Two other important changes are coming to Part D next year. The "donut hole" or "coverage gap" will continue to close. Once again you will pay 50% for brand name drugs covered by the plan, but your cost for generic drugs will be reduced from 93% to 86%. Each year these costs will drop until the donut hole is closed.

Currently, anyone in a nursing home on Medicaid and Medicare does not pay anything for drugs covered by their Part D plan. In 2012, the same will be true for individuals who qualify for the Medicaid Elderly Waiver Program.

If you have questions about Medicare Part D contact SHIIP, a free, confidential service of the state of Iowa. You can call 1-800-351-4664 (TTY1-800-735-2942), go to www.therightcalliowa.gov or e-mail shiip@iid.iowa.gov.