

## MEDICARE NEWS

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### More people with Medicare receiving free preventive care

*New CMS campaign to educate seniors about new free preventive care provided by Affordable Care Act*

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) today released a new report showing that more than 5 million Americans with traditional Medicare – or nearly one in six people with Medicare – took advantage of one or more of the recommended preventive benefits now available for free thanks to the Affordable Care Act. Also today, Medicare launched a nationwide public outreach campaign, including a letter to doctors and a new Public Service Announcement that will raise awareness about all of the important preventive benefits now covered at no charge to patients, including the new Annual Wellness Visit benefit created by the Affordable Care Act.

“The Obama Administration is committed to helping increase the number of Americans who are healthy at every stage of life, said CMS Administrator Donald Berwick, M.D. “Even in your 70s, 80s, or beyond you can reduce your risk of disability and chronic illness if you take care of yourself. With the new free Annual Wellness Visits and free preventive care, people with Medicare have the tools to take common-sense steps to take control of their health.”

“Further, it’s important to get the tests which can spot a serious illness early when it can be best treated,” said Dr. Berwick. “These preventive screenings are critical, and we want physicians to take this opportunity to help their older patients understand how necessary they are.”

“The Administration on Aging network of service providers are the ‘boots on the ground’ in reaching people on Medicare,” said Assistant Secretary for Aging Kathy Greenlee. “These providers see Medicare beneficiaries every single day at a variety of settings across the country, and serve a diverse group population. I am committed to ensuring that the Medicare beneficiaries we serve are aware of and take advantage of their Medicare preventive benefits.”

According to the report, over 5.5 million beneficiaries in traditional Medicare used one or more of the preventive benefits now covered without cost-sharing including, most prominently, mammograms, bone density screenings, and screenings for prostate cancer. In 2011, Medicare began covering an Annual Wellness Visit at no cost to Medicare beneficiaries. As part of that visit, beneficiaries and their physicians can review the patient’s health and develop a personalized wellness plan. Over 780,000 beneficiaries received an Annual Wellness Visit between January 1 and June 10. Additionally, more seniors have used the Welcome to Medicare Exam this year. 66,302 beneficiaries had taken advantage of the benefit by the end of May 2011, compared to 52,654 beneficiaries at the same point in 2010 – a 26 percent increase.

A renewed push toward prevention is the latest step toward CMS’s fulfillment of its “Three-Part Aim”: Better care and better health at lower cost through improvement in health care. Roughly 70 percent of Medicare beneficiaries had at least one chronic condition in 2008, while as many as 38 percent had between two and four chronic conditions, and 7 percent had five or more. They see an

average of 14 different doctors and fill an average of 50 prescriptions or prescription refills a year. Preventing chronic disease among the Medicare population would not only improve their health and quality of life, it could help save an estimated two-thirds of the \$2 trillion the U.S. spends treating preventable long-term illness today.

The new annual wellness visit can help spark the beginning of an ongoing conversation between patients and their doctors on how to prevent disease and disability. At this visit, beneficiaries can review their histories and make sure their primary care doctor knows about their other providers and prescriptions. They can also talk about the pros and cons of getting an influenza, pneumococcal or hepatitis B vaccination, or find out whether a diabetes test, a bone mass measurement, or any of several cancer screenings would be right for them. Thanks to the Affordable Care Act, Medicare now covers many of these services without cost to patients.

Medicare's *Share the News, Share the Health* campaign will run throughout the summer, with online ads and community events all over the country starting in July. HHS is releasing a nationwide public service announcement that is available on [www.youtube.com/CMSHHSgov](http://www.youtube.com/CMSHHSgov). As part of these outreach efforts, CMS has issued a "Dear Doctor" letter to providers today, calling on them to discuss preventive care with their patients.

The agency also launched the full Spanish version of the [www.Medicare.gov](http://www.Medicare.gov) website, <http://es.Medicare.gov>. In addition, Medicare's dedicated caregivers' website "Ask Medicare" ([www.Medicare.gov/caregivers](http://www.Medicare.gov/caregivers)) now has a prevention section especially for caregivers. You can find additional information on prevention benefits on line at [www.Medicare.gov](http://www.Medicare.gov), and at [www.healthcare.gov](http://www.healthcare.gov) (click on "Learn about Prevention" at the top).

This announcement comes during Prevention & Wellness Month, as the Obama Administration is highlighting announcements, activities, and tips that will help Americans get healthy and stay healthy. Last week, the National Prevention Council released the National Prevention Strategy, America's plan to help increase the number of Americans who are healthy at every stage of life. The Community Transformation Grants are one piece of a broader effort to address the health and well-being of our communities through initiatives such as the President's Childhood Obesity Task Force, the First Lady's *Let's Move!* campaign, the National Quality Strategy, and HHS' Communities Putting Prevention to Work program. The Prevention and Public Health Fund, as part of the Affordable Care Act, is supporting this and other initiatives designed to expand and sustain the necessary capacity to prevent disease, detect it early, manage conditions before they become severe, and provide States and communities the resources they need to promote healthy living.

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