

Center ready to help as Medicare Part D deadline nears

Seniors residing in Outagamie, Calumet and Waupaca counties have a new resource to help them through the maze of forms that must be completed by Dec. 31 to meet the 2007 deadline for participation in Medicare Part D insurance plans. That resource is the new tri-county Aging & Disability Resource Center, which provides immediate assistance to residents in each of the three counties by simply calling toll-free 1-866-739-2372.

Through this new centralized service concept, seniors and individuals with disabilities are now able to work with an experienced Information &

Assistance Specialist to arrange for help and guidance instead of trying to contact several agencies or insurance providers, making the ADRC a one-stop source for help. With 54 Medicare plans to choose from, that's good news for seniors who may have last minute questions. "We're here to help and to take away the confusion of so many choices," noted Lori Metoxen, Outagamie County elderly benefit specialist. "We answer questions, compare plans, and assist with applications to make the process easy for area seniors," she said.

Disability Benefit Specialists who work with people age 59 and younger

are also available to help those with special needs who are eligible for Medicare coverage. All Medicare plans must be approved by Centers for Medicare and Medicaid to be a Medicare insurer. The federal government governs the CMS.

Seniors and individuals with special needs are encouraged to review their mail, paying special attention to mail with the following letterhead: The Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), Social Security Administration, Medicare, and any current insurance provider.

Most people who have Medicare prescription drug coverage will only receive one important notice in the mail, referred to as the "Annual Notice of Change," Metoxen said. In some cases, notices are color-coded, to denote the organization that sent the notice. Seniors who miss the Dec. 31 deadline should also be aware that premium penalties will be added for late enrollment into a Medicare Part D Plan.

A simple toll-free call to the ADRC is a way to find answers while there is still time to apply. While each county will maintain its own location and phone number, ADRC services under the new tri-county partnership are designed to cross all three counties, allowing those seeking assistance to receive on-site counseling at any location, including in consumers' homes, as well as by phone.

For easy access and convenience, the three counties share a common toll-free number, 1-866-739-2372, that automatically routes callers to their own county center. Persons with hearing or speech disabilities can call the Wisconsin Relay Text Telephone (TTY) 7-1-1 to receive ADRC services, which are provided

FREE of charge, regardless of income level.

In addition to providing help with Medicare Part D paperwork, other ADRC service categories include: information and assistance, long-term care options counseling, benefits counseling, disease prevention and early intervention services, short-term care management, eligibility determination for state-funded long-term support benefits and information about community programs.

ADRC professionals can also assist individuals in navigating state-funded long-term support services, learning how to avoid or lessen illness or disability, and researching care options that preserve personal resources and assets.

Site locations for the Tri-County ADRC are as follows:

- Calumet County
206 Court Street
Chilton, WI 53014
920-849-1451
www.co.calumet.wi.us
- Outagamie County
401 S. Elm Street
Appleton, WI 54911
920-832-5178
www.co.outagamie.wi.us