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NEW MEDICARE DRUG POLICY OFFERS HELP, AND SOME CONFUSION, TO MILLIONS OF SENIORS

National Non-Profit Group Offers Help to Navigate New Policy

CHICAGO (August 23, 2005) – Medicare is embarking on a new journey to help seniors better afford their medical prescriptions. This unprecedented program, entitled Medicare Part D, will be offered to the approximately 40 million Medicare recipients. Enrollees will be asked to choose a prescription drug policy from a variety of private companies.

But because Part D has so many elements and requirements, some seniors and their caretakers are finding the new program to be very confusing. Coverage varies between policies, meaning some drugs are covered while others are not, depending on what company is chosen. And, not all of the information on what policies will be offered is available yet.

Unfortunately, Medicare recipients don't have a lot of time to decide what policy is right for them. Seniors must enroll between the dates of November 15, 2005 and May 15, 2006 and premiums will be an average of \$37 a month. Those who sign up after the close date will pay higher premiums (a one percent increase to their premium for every month they delay enrollment). However, those that meet the Medicare low-income guidelines will pay less.

"Although this new program will be a relief to many seniors, it has so many rules and regulations, it's difficult to know where to start," said Daniel D. Garrett, senior vice president of Prevent Blindness America (PBA). "We have already received calls from Medicare recipients who are trying to determine how Part D will affect access to their vision medications. We want to help make the enrollment process as easy as possible so patients can receive the prescriptions and the information they need."

To help seniors navigate their way through the challenging enrollment process PBA is offering a new Web resource and fact sheet entitled "Medicare Benefits and Your Eyes." Since details are still emerging about the program, PBA will continue to research and compile information on Part D elements as it becomes available. Soon, PBA hopes to offer a listing of which insurance providers will cover specific vision medications and provide information on what to do if the needed drug is not covered.

PBA urges older Americans now to do the following:

- Check your mail boxes and read all mail from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Management (CMS).

PBA Offers Assistance to Seniors Enrolling in Medicare Part D Coverage

Page 2

- Apply for assistance if you have limited resources.
- Be aware of deadlines, and avoid late penalties.
- Take your time and review the information carefully, and enroll in a plan that best meets your needs.

To receive the new Medicare Part D fact sheet from PBA, call 1-800-331-2020 or log on to www.preventblindness.org.

About Prevent Blindness America

Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness America is the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent Blindness America touches the lives of millions of people each year through public and professional education, advocacy, community and patient service programs and research. These services are made possible through the generous support of the American public. Together with a network of affiliates, divisions and chapters, it's committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information, or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call 1-800-331-2020 or visit us on the Web at www.preventblindness.org.

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