



ULSTER COUNTY NEWS

ULSTER COUNTY NEWS INFORMATION
OFFICE OF ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATURE
244 FAIR STREET
KINGSTON, NEW YORK, 12401

PHONE: 845.340-3900
FAX: 845.340.3651
www.co.ulster.ny.us
www.ulstercountyny.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Contact: Anne Cardinale, Director
Ulster County Office for the Aging
(845) 340-3456**

Elderly Face Complex Choices as Medicare Enrollment Begins in November

Michael J. Burgess, Director of the New York State Office for the Aging announced his office, and the 59 county offices for the aging across the State will conduct a two month outreach campaign to older and disabled New Yorkers to help them make informed decisions about their Medicare coverage. Beginning on November 15, Medicare beneficiaries can change the plans that provide them with prescription and health coverage under the program.

The State Office for the Aging and local offices for the aging will have a heavy case load over the next few months as older New Yorkers call or go to county offices to speak with trained counselors that provide information and assistance through the Health Insurance Information, Counseling and Assistance Program, known as HIICAP. Calls to the state wide **HIICAP Hotline 1-800-701-0501** have increased four-fold since last week when the federal government mailed information about this year's plan selections to Medicare beneficiaries. "By calling the HIICAP Hotline, beneficiaries will be able to speak to a counselor who would assist them with unbiased health insurance information," Director Burgess said.

This year there are over 55 Medicare prescription plans along with thousands of Medicare Advantage, Cost and Demonstration Plans available in New York State. For example, in Albany County there are 68 Advantage Plan choices for 2008; in Erie County there are 65; and, in Fulton County there are 56. Couple this with the need to coordinate drug coverage, and many Medicare beneficiaries are faced with a complex maze of choices. If the wrong choice is made, they may be left with inadequate health coverage or huge out of pocket expenses.

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The State Office for the Aging will be commencing a multi-media campaign, including Public Service Announcements in English and Spanish which will begin to air on radio stations Statewide in mid-November, to help people with selecting a plan and to provide information about how to avoid purchasing a plan based on incomplete or misleading information. Director Burgess said, “Unfortunately there have been documented cases in the past of sales people who take advantage of uninformed beneficiaries to get them to sign on to their plan. While this is not a prevalent practice, Medicare beneficiaries need to be cautious, reach out for assistance when necessary and always remember that “buyer beware and buyer be well-informed” is key in making a good choice.”

For more information about where to get help, contact the **HIICAP Hotline** at **1-800-701-0501** or check the website Medicare.gov. Director Burgess promised that the outreach campaign will reach as many older New Yorkers as possible to let them know where they can get assistance during this important enrollment period.

Ulster County seniors should call 845-340-3456 for help in this area and to make an appointment with a HIICAP counselor.