

Medicare Wellness Event
May 25, 2011

Introduction

Good morning and thank you for joining us today to learn more about free & reduced cost preventive health services.

And a special thank you to Community Services Inc. of Ocean County for hosting us today & for being our partner in raising awareness of services that are available to keep our residents healthy. They really have done tremendous job getting the word out about these important services.

As a new commissioner, improving healthy people & healthy communities is one of my priority areas. Encouraging residents to take advantage of ways to improve their overall health is critical to building a healthy New Jersey.

Today is National Senior Health and Fitness Day, making it the perfect time to highlight the important role preventive services play in maintaining one's health and quality of life.

Today we are here to talk about some of those important preventive services that are now available free or at reduced cost for Medicare Part B enrollees.

Annual Wellness Exam

One of those new benefits is an annual wellness visit with their doctors.

At the free annual wellness visit, Medicare beneficiaries and their health care providers develop or update a personalized prevention plan based on current health and risk factors.

This visit will include

- Review of medical & family history
- A list of current providers & prescriptions
- Height, weight, blood pressure & other routine measurements
- Create a screening schedule for appropriate preventive services
- And a list of risk factors & treatment options

This visit is free once every 12 months. It is important to visit your doctor when you are healthy to avoid getting sick.

Because we think it is so important that enrollees take advantage of this new benefit, we are asking you as Medicare beneficiaries to fill out a wellness pledge card on which you vow to call your doctor within 30 days to make an appointment for your first-ever free annual wellness visit.

Pledge states “Now that I know about the new, free, and reduced cost preventive benefits offered to individuals enrolled in Medicare Part B, I pledge to call my doctor within the next 30 days to make an appointment for my first free annual wellness visit. At that appointment, I will ask my doctor which preventive benefits are right for me.

Once you fill out the pledge, we will mail them back to you as a friendly reminder to make an appointment if you haven’t already. We have pledge cards here today so please fill them out and hand them in before your leave today.

Other preventive care options

In addition to the wellness visit, the 19 preventive services covered by Medicare that are now offered free or at a reduced-cost include:

- “Welcome to Medicare”— a physical exam within your first 12 months of Medicare enrollment
- Diabetes screening & monitoring for those at risk
- Cancer screenings, including mammography, colorectal, prostate and cervical screenings
- Vaccinations
- Bone Mass measurement to examine if you are at risk for broken bones
- Glaucoma screening & many others

These are a just a few of the options you can now take advantage of as Medicare beneficiaries.

Chronic Disease

I urge you all to talk to your doctors about these benefits because disease prevention and early detection services can keep you from getting sick or and can help you find & address health problems early— when treatment works best.

Chronic disease from sources such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and arthritis result in decreased quality of life and premature death among New Jersey residents.

- In NJ and nationally, 70% of deaths are attributable to chronic disease
- In NJ leading causes of death are heart disease, cancer, stroke, chronic respiratory disease, and diabetes
- 80% of seniors have at least one chronic condition & the majority suffers from multiple conditions.

Although chronic diseases are among the most common and costly health problems, they are also among the most preventable.

By taking control of your health through screening & participating in health and wellness programs, you can reduce the risk of developing disease and decrease the odds that you will have to go on medication to treat an illness. Adopting healthy behaviors such as eating nutritious foods, being physically active and avoiding tobacco use can prevent or control the devastating effects of these diseases.

We know preventing a condition is much easier than treating it.

A focus on prevention will offer New Jersey residents an improved quality of life and also control health care spending.

A recent report (from Trust for America's Health entitled *Prevention for a Healthier America*) concluded that investing \$10 per person per year in proven community-based programs that increase physical activity, improve nutrition, and prevent smoking and other tobacco use could save the country more than \$16 billion annually within 5 years.

This demonstrates the impact preventive health can have on controlling health costs.

Please talk with your doctor or health care provider to find out what screenings or other services you may need and how often you need them to stay healthy.

Chronic Disease Self Management

Living with chronic conditions can be debilitating, costly and can significantly impact quality of life.

But our Department has programs to ease the burden of chronic disease and help residents manage their conditions. One extremely successful initiative has been our Chronic Disease Self Management Program -- known in New Jersey and here in Ocean County as "Take Control of Your Health" -- that uses peer-led education to help individuals cope with symptoms, manage medication and make lifestyle changes.

Aimed mainly at New Jersey's seniors, the program has grown from 2006 when just one person was certified as a master trainer to now where workshops are offered in all 21 counties and more than 3,000 people have completed the six-week course.

Currently more than 60 agencies are partnering with us to make this initiative available in many areas and many languages.

Participants have cited great benefits from the program, including a reduction of health distress, increased self-sufficiency and less fatigue. And national studies of the program have shown a savings per participant in health care costs that range from \$350 to \$750.

Take Control of Your Health is offered in Ocean County so I encourage you to learn more about it if you are affected by chronic disease. You can also look into becoming a peer leader to help your friends & neighbors manage their chronic condition.

Closing

Thank you all again for taking time out of your day to learn more about the programs and services that can help you live a long, healthy life. Please help us spread the word by telling your friends and family members about these programs.

And please take the pledge to get your Annual Wellness Exam! Thank you.