

Seniors sign up for Medicare plans in droves

More than 425,000 Hoosiers have picked a program since November

By PAIGE E. WASSEL
DAILY JOURNAL STAFF WRITER
pwassel@thejournalnet.com

Enrollments for Medicare-approved prescription drug insurance have been steadily climbing since late November, with almost 24 million people signing up nationwide.

In Indiana, 425,075 people had signed up as of Jan. 13, using friends, consumer advocacy groups and insurance agents to help them sort through plans.

At a Tuesday news conference, Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt said the enrollment numbers exceeded expectations and put the program on track for a first-year goal of bringing 28 million to 30 million people into the program.

The prescription drug benefit is expected to cut yearly drug costs in half for millions of Americans, using Medicare-approved private insurance companies to provide the plans to eligible residents.

A massive information campaign was launched last year to educate seniors and the disabled about the program and the benefits of signing up.

Hospitals hosted workshops to go over the details of the program, and seniors received multiple mailings from insurance companies and the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Yet, many seniors felt frustrated by too many choices with the plans and often had to rely on family members or other trusted people to help them find plans that met their needs.

Some family members complained that perhaps the best research tool for comparing the plans was through online search engines, which were often less friendly to a population who weren't tech savvy.

Experts and area residents said that people were key to understanding an alphabet soup of options.

Senior Promise, a St. Francis senior advocacy group, helped about 700 seniors on the south side of Indianapolis and in Johnson County sign up for the insurance plans.

AT A GLANCE

Medicare prescription drug insurance plans have seen steady signups through online, phone and paper enrollments.

Here's a look at enrollment numbers between Nov. 15 and Jan. 13 and census data from 2000 for the senior population in Indiana and nearby states.

Indiana
Population age 65 and older in 2000: 752,831
Total number enrolled: 425,075

Illinois
Population age 65 and older in 2000: 1,500,025
Total number enrolled: 951,888

Kentucky
Population age 65 and older in 2000: 504,793
Total number enrolled: 350,979

Ohio
Population age 65 and older in 2000: 1,507,757
Total number enrolled: 1,067,476

SOURCES: Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, U.S. Census data from 2000

Program manager Jim Poole estimated that they will work with almost 200 people to sort through plans this month.

"I don't see it slowing down," Poole said.

In early January, CMMS administrators reported processing an average of 20,000 enrollments per day.

Regional Medicare spokesman Bob Herskovitz said that the enrollment numbers were exciting, but the department's first concern is making sure enrollees are leaving pharmacies with the right medications and co-payments.

Early in the month, people using the plans complained that they still had to pay the full price for medications, due to computer errors and paperwork snafus.

Local and regional experts said the number of complaints is going down, as Medicare is trying to add safeguards to make sure seniors can get the discounts.

A nationwide helpline was set up just for pharmacies, where pharmacists could call anytime to get questions answered, Herskovitz said.

Democrats, Republicans spar over Medicare fixes

By KEVIN FREKING
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

It is unacceptable that some of the poorest and sickest older people are having the most trouble getting prescription drugs through the new Medicare benefit, a leading Republican senator said Thursday.

But Sen. Charles Grassley of Iowa, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, does not see the need for legislative fixes yet.

"Let's focus on the administrative remedies now because they will deliver help a lot faster than any legislation," he said.

Several Democratic senators said too many people have had trouble getting their medicine since the benefit went into effect on Jan. 1.

Sen. Jay Rockefeller, D-W.V., took issue with Grassley's opinion that it was too early for Congress to intervene.

"It's always premature," Rockefeller said.

"It was premature that the Titanic went down. But it did indeed disappear."

The Democrats are sponsoring legislation that would:

- Require all prescription drug plans to provide new enrollees with at least 30 days of prescription drugs. This is what the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services already have told plans they must do.
- Provide federal reimbursement for states, pharmacies and beneficiaries for out-of-pocket costs because the new benefit has failed to cover those costs.
- Reduce wait times on calls to 1-800-Medicare.

FINAL DAYS

LONG'S FURNITURE

Quality Home Furnishings
on 31 just south of Walmart in Marsh Plaza, next to McDonald's
1162 N. Main St. (US 31) Franklin, IN 46131

Phone **317-346-7311**

Long's Furniture

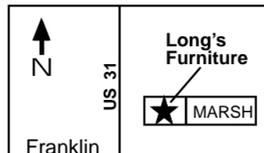
WILL SOON CLOSE THEIR DOORS FOREVER!

You now can shop one of JOHNSON COUNTY'S PREMIER FURNITURE GALLERIES. The entire inventory of quality furniture and bedding will be **SOLD AT DRASTICALLY REDUCED PRICES!**

Over 1 MILLION DOLLARS in overstock inventory will be sold. Buy the quality furniture you've always wanted for **PENNIES ON THE DOLLAR.** The entire inventory of quality furniture will be **SOLD AT DRASTICALLY REDUCED PRICES!**

Name brands you have trusted for years...

Lane • Broyhill • Ashley • Corinthian • Simmons and Many More



STORE HOURS:
Monday-Friday 10am-6:00pm
Saturday 10am-5:00pm
Sunday 1:00pm-5:00pm

Get 0% Financing!



(to qualified buyers) Sale does not apply to previous sales.

No phone ordering - No layaways

EVERYTHING PRICED TO SELL-ON-SIGHT

Bring your trucks and trailers and save even more...

All items offered on first-come, first-served basis.

We have valued your patronage and invite you to save one last time.

Everything goes...Wall to Wall. Be here early for the best selection.

Thank You! Your Friends at Long's Furniture

FINAL DAYS

The Saturn Promise:
There's still a place where "affordable" and "well-equipped" co-exist



Buy for only
\$13,530[†]



Buy for only
\$18,220[†]

2006 Saturn ION™ • 2

Estimated 35 miles per gallon highway*

2006 ION•2 features include: Air Conditioning • CD Player • Power door locks • 2.2-liter, DOHC, 140-horsepower engine • 14.7 cubic feet of trunk space • Dent-resistant polymer panels • A friendly no-hassle, no-haggle buying experience

SmartLease example for qualified buyers.

\$199/month for 39 months \$0 down

Tax, title, license and retailer fees extra.

2006 Saturn VUE® FWD 4

Estimated 27 miles per gallon highway*

2006 VUE FWD 4 features include: 2.2-liter, DOHC, 4-cylinder engine, 63.4 cubic feet of cargo space, Air Conditioning • CD Player • Power Windows • Power Locks • Keyless Entry • Power Mirrors • Cruise Control • OnStar • Manual Transmission • A friendly no-hassle, no-haggle buying experience

SmartLease example for qualified buyers.

\$279/month for 39 months \$0 down

Tax, title, license and retailer fees extra.

FEATURES	'06 Saturn ION•2	'06 Honda Civic DX	'06 Toyota Corolla CE	'06 Mazda Mazda3 i	'06 Nissan Sentra 1.8S
OnStar® System with one-year Safe & Sound Service††	Standard	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
Five-star frontal impact crash test safety ratings**	Standard	Not Tested	Standard	Not Available	Not Available
140-horsepower engine	Standard	Standard	Not Available	150-hp	Not Available
Quiet Steel® construction	Standard	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
Dent-resistant doors	Standard	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
The Saturn Difference	Standard	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
MSRP (manual)	\$13,530	\$15,110	\$14,545	\$14,270	\$15,680

FEATURES	'06 Saturn VUE FWD 4	'06 Ford Escape XLS	'06 Honda CR-V LX	'06 Jeep Liberty Sport
OnStar® System with one-year Safe & Sound Service††	Standard	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
Five-star frontal impact crash test safety ratings**	Standard	Not Available	Standard	Not Available
Power windows, door locks and remote keyless entry	Standard	Standard	Standard	Standard
Dent-resistant doors	Standard	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
Fold-flat front passenger seat	Standard	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
The Saturn Difference	Standard	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
MSRP***	\$18,220	\$20,685	\$20,395	\$21,885

Saturn of Greenwood

1287 U.S. 31 South • 2 Mi. South of the Greenwood Park Mall • Toll Free: 1-800-463-6217



†Tax, title, license, retailer fees and optional equipment extra. See retailer for details. *Based on EPA estimates. ††Cargo and load capacity limited by weight and distribution. †††Five-star rating is for both the driver and front passenger in the frontal crash test. Government star ratings are part of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA's) New Car Assessment Program (www.safercar.gov). ††††Comparison of base models. Level of equipment varies. Based upon approved credit. Lease examples are 39 months allowing 39,000 miles. Other lease terms available. Must take delivery by 01/31/2006. Picture are for representational purposes only. ©2005 Saturn Corporation. Saturn and its logo are registered trademarks of Saturn Corporation.

Center Grove Youth Sports
Registration for 2006 Season

Will be Held:
Saturday, January 21st 9:00AM- 3:30 PM
Monday, January 23rd 6:00PM- 8:30 PM
Tuesday, January 24th 6:00PM- 8:30 PM
at the Center Grove High School Hall of Excellence. If this is your first season to enroll in a sport, you will need to bring a copy of your Birth Certificate.

The Following sports will be represented:
Center Grove Bantam Football 422-4774
www.centergrovefootball.com
Center Grove Lassie League (girls softball) 882-5504
www.cglassieleague.org
Center Grove Little League (Baseball) 881-6704 www.cgll.com
Center Grove Soccer Club 422-9555 www.centergrovesoccer.org
Center Grove Wrestling Club 887-1424

For more information please contact the sport organization directly. Please do not call the schools. Each organization is independently operated and collects fees individually. Organizations are not for profit and self-supporting.

Send us your story ideas: Call 736-2712 or e-mail newstips@thejournalnet.com