



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 18, 2011

Contact: Michael Freeman
202-452-8700
Mfreeman@hlc.org

Survey: Nearly 90 Percent of Medicare Beneficiaries Satisfied with Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Coverage

Seniors Still Need More Information about Open Enrollment Period, Changes to Coverage Gap

WASHINGTON – Medicare’s Part D prescription drug coverage program is maintaining its exceptionally high popularity among the nation’s older Americans, with a new survey showing that 88 percent of beneficiaries are satisfied with the program and 95 percent saying they have greater peace of mind as a result of Part D coverage.

The same survey shows, however, that many Medicare beneficiaries were not hearing about the Part D open enrollment period that just opened on October 15 or of changes to the program, such as the reduced out-of-pocket amount beneficiaries will spend if their medication purchases place them in the Part D coverage gap, or so-called ‘donut hole.’”

The survey of 992 Medicare beneficiaries, of which 403 have Medicare Part D coverage, was conducted by KRC Research. It was commissioned by the Medicare Today coalition, an alliance of more than 400 national and local organizations committed to providing seniors and near-retirees with reliable information on Medicare benefits and program changes.

“Medicare Part D has reached popularity levels that you seldom, if ever, see from a government program,” said Mary R. Grealy, president of the Healthcare Leadership Council and co-chair of Medicare Today. “Over the last five years of satisfaction surveys, Part D has stayed consistently above an 80 percent approval rating. And given the fact that competition is keeping the program affordable – and that average premiums won’t increase in 2012 – satisfaction should stay very high.”

Among the key findings from beneficiaries with Medicare Part D plans:

- 95 percent say their current Part D plan works well, with 94% saying it is easy to use.
- 82 percent say their Part D plan offers good value. Beyond that, 67 percent saying they have lowered their prescription drug spending. That’s an eight percentage point increase since 2006. Also, 34 percent say they used to skip or reduce their prescription medicine doses to save money, but now no longer have to do so.
- Part D popularity transcends partisan political lines. Among self-identified Democrats, 91 percent are satisfied with their Part D coverage, compared to 89 percent of Republicans and 80 percent of independents.

- The high satisfaction rate is reflected in the number of beneficiaries who say they will likely shop and compare competing Medicare Part D plans during the open enrollment period. Two of every three seniors said they are unlikely to shop around.

One area of concern, Ms. Grealy said, is that seniors aren't as aware as they should be of changes to the Part D program or of the opportunity to change plans during the open enrollment period.

According to the KRC survey, only one of every three seniors said they had read, seen or heard any recent news about Medicare prescription drug plans. Among those who had heard some sort of news, only 12 percent said they had seen information about the open enrollment period and only five percent said they had heard about new changes in the Part D coverage gap. (Part D enrollees in the coverage gap now have 50 percent of the cost of name-brand prescription drugs covered, and their out-of-pocket costs for generic drugs will decline.)

"This is a clear signal that both the public and private sectors need to be more vigilant about keeping seniors informed of new and important developments in their Part D prescription drug coverage, including this year's open enrollment period." said Ms. Grealy.

The Medicare Part D open enrollment season, which began October 15, continues through December 7. This is an earlier-than-usual beginning to the enrollment period. Beneficiaries can get more information on Medicare Part D coverage by going to www.medicare.gov or by calling 1-800-MEDICARE.

More information on the Medicare Part D satisfaction survey can be found at www.medicaretoday.org.

About the Survey: KRC Research conducted a random-digit-dial landline telephone survey of 992 seniors 65 years and older who are enrolled in Medicare. Of those, KRC interviewed a total of 403 seniors with Medicare Rx plans, half with stand-alone plans and half with Medicare Advantage plans. The margin of error for a sample size of 403 beneficiaries with Medicare Part D is plus or minus 4.9 percentage points. For information about KRC Research, see www.krcresearch.com.