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New Survey: Nearly 85 Percent of Seniors Satisfied with Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Coverage

Poll Shows Beneficiaries Largely Unaware of New Measures to Close "Donut Hole"

WASHINGTON – Medicare's Part D prescription drug coverage continues to enjoy strong support among the nation's seniors, with a new survey showing that 84 percent of beneficiaries are satisfied with their coverage and more than 80 percent saying their Part D premiums and co-payments are affordable.

The survey of 1,243 Medicare beneficiaries conducted by KRC Research 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.

"The Medicare Part D program continues to defy its doubters," said Mary R. Grealy, president of the Healthcare Leadership Council and co-chair of Medicare Today. "At its outset, critics said health plans wouldn't participate in Part D, but today seniors have ample choices of affordable plans. They said the program would cost too much, but the last Medicare trustees report reported costs are 41 percent below initial expectations. And they said seniors would find the program too confusing, but it remains enormously popular."

In fact, the KRC Research survey found that 94 percent of Medicare beneficiaries say they understand how their plan works and they know how to use it. And, among the beneficiaries who do not have Part D coverage, only six percent said it's because the program is too complicated.

With the Medicare Part D open season – during which beneficiaries have the ability to move from one coverage plan to another – beginning on November 15 and continuing until the end of the year, the KRC Research survey found that 65 percent of beneficiaries feel no need to shop around for another plan while 31 percent said it is very likely they will compare their current plan's costs and benefits with available alternatives. This, Ms. Grealy said, indicates that the majority of consumers are finding value in their current prescription drug plans.

Ms. Grealy said the survey research underscores the need for both public and private sectors to continue outreach to the Medicare beneficiary community with information about the Part D program. She noted that only one in five seniors are aware that eligible beneficiaries who have drug spending that places them in the so-called "donut hole" will receive a 50 percent discount on brand-name prescription drugs beginning next year.

"Seniors on limited incomes need to plan their spending and budget their resources and it's important they know about these changes. Congress and the nation's pharmaceutical companies have taken significant steps to reduce out-of-pocket spending for these 'donut hole' seniors and we need to raise awareness of these changes," she said. She also stressed that work must continue to reach out to low-income beneficiaries who can receive Medicare prescription drug coverage at little or no cost.

More information on the KRC Research survey can be found at www.medicaretoday.org.

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