

**Report to the Governor,
Speaker of the House of Representatives and President Pro Tempore of the
Senate
Director, Department of Human Services**

**From the Oklahoma Pharmacy Connection Council
February 1, 2005**

Following is the 2004 report of the Oklahoma Pharmacy Connection Council, as set out in Title 56 O.S. Section 1010.21. The Council filed a previous report dated February 9, 2004.

The purpose of the Council is to improve access to prescription drugs for citizens who have no or inadequate health insurance or other resources for the purchase of medically necessary prescription drugs.

In 2003, the Council approved implementation of a pilot project to facilitate access to patient assistance plans (PAPs) available for many years from pharmaceutical manufacturers to low-income persons. The pilot was made possible through grants from several entities, including the Pharmaceutical Research Manufacturers of America, Norman Regional Hospital Foundation and pending CDBG funding. Implementation required a partnership with the Central Oklahoma Community Action Agency (COCAA), which provided staffing, office space, software, telephone lines and Internet access. Additional volunteer staffing was through the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). The pilot program expanded in late 2004 to include assistance with Medicare approved drug discount card sign-up, primarily to low income Medicare beneficiaries who qualify for the \$600 per year credit toward the cost of their prescription drugs in 2004 and 2005.

Pilot Progress-Manufacturer Prescription Assistance

Persons Served: 810 (Feb-Dec)

Number of Prescriptions Provided: 77,784

Annualized Retail Cost (Savings) Prescriptions Provided: \$6,086,598

Assistance was provided in person and through the mail. Approximately 50% of clients served were from outside the Cleveland-McClain County area. No one was denied service. Client surveys and unsolicited comments alike indicate a high level of satisfaction with the services provided by the Prescription Assistance Program and the manufacturers.

Pilot Progress-Medicare Drug Discount Card Enrollment Assistance

The PA Program and RSVP volunteers provided enrollment assistance to approximately 140 Medicare recipients (including many who did not qualify for the special \$600 subsidy). This assistance first required training volunteers on the use of the www.medicare.gov <<http://www.medicare.gov/>> web site to find the most suitable card for the client and to access an enrollment application to complete and send to the card sponsor. When feasible, volunteers also submitted enrollment applications on-line. Enrollment assistance was provided in many settings, including the Prescription Assistance office, the Norman Public Library computer room, Purcell Public Library, senior housing facilities, and via advocates such as elder care nursing staff. Enrollment interest increased in December, when news story appeared headlined: *New Medicare Credit Unused by Thousands*. This article stated that of the 98,000 Oklahomans on Medicare who qualify for the \$600 subsidy, only 8000 had enrolled in a Medicare discount card.

Next Steps and Future Direction for the Council

Declare the pilot a success and consider petitioning the legislature for funds for statewide expansion. The Central Oklahoma Community Action Agency in cooperation with RSVP volunteers will continue to refine their Rx Assistance services and be a resource for the Council.

Target appropriate Oklahoma Community Action Agency jurisdictions and assist with implementation the Cleveland-McClain County model. Cultivate and consult with local officials, including legislators, during implementation steps including funding.

Serve as a resource for pharmaceutical benefit issues. One example: Share Prescription Assistance Program research findings that Medicare discount cardholders who qualify for the \$600 subsidy can save much more on prescriptions at their own drug store than they can from a Canadian pharmacy. By communicating such information to government officials, advocacy groups, etc., the Council would be fulfilling its statutory mandate.

Proactively review and consider taking a position on pending legislation relating to prescription access and affordability.

As required by statute, this report will be posted on the DHS website, www.okdhs.org. Council members will also be asked to post it on their organizations' sites.

Respectfully submitted by:

Richard Ingham, DHS Co-Chair
Mary Buckner, OPhA Co- Chair