

**Report to the Governor,
Speaker of the House of Representatives,
and President Pro Tempore of the Senate
Oklahoma Pharmacy Connection Program
February 9, 2004**

Following is the report of the Oklahoma Pharmacy Connection Program ("Program") on its progress toward implementation of its program, as set out in Title 56 O.S. Section 1010.21

The purpose of the program is to improve access to prescription drugs for Oklahoma citizens of all ages who have no or inadequate health insurance or other resources for the purchase of prescription drugs. To meet this goal, the Program is charged with establishing a program through which health care providers and members of the public can obtain information about manufacturer-sponsored prescription drug assistance programs. Through such medication assistance programs (MAPs), citizens can obtain needed prescription drugs either free or at discounts ranging up to 80%, depending on each manufacturer's qualifying criteria. The Program is also directed to serve as a clearinghouse for information about MAPs and a disseminator of such information. The Program may, in addition, implement additional strategies to assist citizens in accessing prescription drugs.

In 2002, over 100,000 Oklahomans benefited from MAPs, according to the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America ("PhRMA"). According to the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (ODMHSAS), PhRMA MAPs in 2002 provided over 6,000 mentally ill consumers with prescriptions valued at \$18 million. This translates to \$18 million in cost avoidance (general revenue) for ODMHSAS.

The Department of Human Services ("DHS") is also separately directed, subject to available resources and recommendations of the Oklahoma Pharmacy Connection Council ("Council"), to implement strategies to improve access to prescription drugs. DHS is also to provide staff support to the Council.

The Council consists of twenty members representing public and private prescription drug providers and consumers. The Council is co-chaired by representatives of DHS and the Oklahoma Pharmacists Association (OPhA). A roster of members is attached.

Implementation progress:

- The Council was formed in 2002 and has met quarterly since.
- Using grant money from PhRMA, the Council created a notebook filled with information on how to access MAP information by product, for all existing MAPs. This notebook was then distributed as part of a special training program to Information and Assistance personnel at all eleven Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs). This allows Oklahomans 60 and over to use the toll-free Senior Info-Line (1-800-211-2116), which automatically connects the caller with the nearest AAA, to obtain help over the phone in filling out and sending in the forms needed for free or discount prescription drugs.
- Recognizing that the Senior Info-Line and AAAs serve only older Oklahomans, the Council sought a partner with computers and volunteers to provide a similar service to all Oklahomans, statewide. The Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) is filling this role at a pilot site in Norman in cooperation with the Central Oklahoma Community Action Agency. The new access program was named Patient Assistance Program (PAP). RSVP has office space, software, telephone lines and Internet access and has begun training volunteers and publicizing the PAP. Costs to date have been paid from the PhRMA grant to the Council. Rollout for the pilot will take place in February 2004 and is expected to generate media interest and coverage at a ribbon-cutting event.
- The Program has also printed posters, flyers, and other material about accessing MAP programs by phone or via the Internet. Speakers have presented at several meetings and conferences, including the State Conference on Aging, The Oklahoma Aging and Advocacy Leadership Academy and to a special training session for 80 executives and administrative assistants for the State Senate, House of Representatives, Governor's Office and the State Insurance Commissioner.

Next steps and future direction:

1. Monitor RSVP PAP, and expand as appropriate and in accordance with funds available.
2. Study the details of the recently enacted Medicare Prescription Drug legislation and monitor any MAPs changes that may result from this legislation.

3. Seek additional funds from the Governor and Legislature to provide the Aging Services Division of DHS with funding necessary to hire additional Information and Assistance personnel to handle increased calls from seniors asking for help in obtaining prescription drugs.
4. Encourage companies to simplify and standardize applications and processing time for new and refill prescriptions.

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:

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