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Contacts: Stephanie Marquis, Department of Health and Family Services, 608-266-1683
Anne Lupardus, Office of the Governor, 608-261-2162

Governor Doyle Announces Emergency Action to Get Wisconsin's Seniors Needed Medications

Failure of Medicare Part D Leaves Thousands of Seniors Without Prescriptions

With reports of widespread failure by the federal government to properly enroll seniors in the Medicare Part D program, Governor Doyle announced today emergency measures to ensure seniors and people with disabilities in Wisconsin get the life-saving drugs they need.

"It is outrageous how the federal government has mishandled this program and put thousands of lives at risk," said Governor Doyle. "As an emergency measure, the state will step in to ensure that no seniors go without lifesaving medicines – but we will expect and demand that the federal government and its contractors will not only fix the problem, but reimburse the state."

The Governor announced that Wisconsin will cover the cost of prescriptions for seniors and people with disabilities that would have otherwise been turned away because of problems with the new Medicare Part D program.

Under Medicare Part D, the federal government has created complex Prescription Drug Plans to pay pharmacies that fill Medicare Part D prescriptions. However, many seniors and people with disabilities have faced serious barriers getting the drugs they need because of start-up problems with the new Medicare Part D program and its Prescription Drug Plan contractors.

More than 110,000 Wisconsin seniors and people with disabilities eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid were forced into a Medicare Part D prescription drug plan if they hadn't voluntarily enrolled by December 31, 2005. Many of these individuals were not aware what plan had been chosen for them until they went to a pharmacy to get their prescription filled. Medicare and drug plan hotlines have been overwhelmed with calls from both recipients and pharmacies who are trying to sort out their coverage.

"Our seniors shouldn't have to pay the price because of the federal government's mess," said Governor Doyle. "The glitches in this program are simply unacceptable, and underscore the point that this was a bad deal for taxpayers and seniors alike."

If a pharmacy has not been able to bill the Medicare Prescription Drug Plan through normal processes and procedures, it can submit a claim form to Wisconsin's Medicaid program, including the steps it has exhausted in trying to successfully bill Medicare Part D.

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Pharmacies that fill a 30-day prescription and have tried to obtain payment under Medicare Part D can submit a one-time claim to Wisconsin's Medicaid program for payment. The state will pay the claims that are due, and then seek reimbursement from the federal Prescription Drug Plan providers. If necessary, the state will demand that the federal government provide any assistance necessary to recoup or cover these costs.

"This is a temporary solution to a much bigger problem, one that we didn't create," said Governor Doyle. "But we are not going to stand by and watch our seniors fall through the cracks and not get the drugs they need because the federal government didn't get the job done right."

Hotlines are still available to assist recipients and pharmacies with Part D problems. Below are list of numbers available throughout the state.

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| WI Medicaid Recipient Services | Medicaid Recipients | 1-800-362-3002 |
| WI Medicaid Provider Services | Pharmacies | 1-800-947-9627 |
| Medicare – federal hotline | Medicare Recipients | 1-800-MEDICARE (800-633-4227) or www.medicare.gov/ |
| WI Prescription Drug Helpline <i>(Sponsored by Coalition of WI Aging Groups' Elder Law Center)</i> | Medicare recipients age 60 and older | 1-866-456-8211 |
| WI Disability Drug Benefit Helpline <i>(Sponsored by WI Coalition for Advocacy)</i> | Persons under age 60 who receive Medicare because of a disability | 1-800-926-4862 |
| County Department on Aging – Elderly Benefit Specialist | Age 60 and older | Local number |