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HHS and CMS to Provide Additional Support to North Carolina Health Insurance Assistance Program to Help People Formerly in Fox Prescription Drug Plan

Officials from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Administration on Aging announced today that they were providing \$120,000 in additional funds to the Senior's Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP) in North Carolina, to support beneficiaries affected by Medicare's termination of the Fox Insurance Company's prescription drug plan. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) ended its contract with the plan on Tuesday, March 9, after determining the plan's significant deficiencies jeopardized the health and safety of Fox enrollees.

"Protecting the health and safety of our Medicare beneficiaries is our primary mission at CMS and we felt that the risk to our beneficiaries' health was too high if they stayed in the Fox Prescription Drug plan. We set up an alternate system to ensure that the former Fox Insurance plan members will be able to continue to get the medications they need," said Marilyn Tavenner, CMS principal deputy administrator. "To make sure that we can quickly and clearly communicate this change to those beneficiaries who were in the Fox Plan, Secretary Sebelius authorized and allocated extra funds to help us support the staff and volunteers at the state health insurance assistance programs who will be on the front line addressing any concerns and reassuring beneficiaries that they will continue to get their drug coverage.

"Secretary Sebelius also directed CMS to work closely with the Administration on Aging, the other HHS operating divisions and our counterparts in North Carolina to help get out the word about this change quickly while ensuring there are people on the ground to help beneficiaries understand how they will get medicines now," said Tavenner.

"The SHIPs and the Administration on Aging's national network of community based organizations will work together and tirelessly to meet the needs of these Medicare beneficiaries. These resources will help them target the needs of those affected by Fox in North Carolina and seamlessly transition them into the best plan that meets their needs," said Assistant Secretary for Aging Kathy Greenlee.

Former Fox enrollees will be able to choose a new Medicare prescription drug plan through May 1, 2010. Those enrollees who do not choose a plan will be enrolled into a new plan by Medicare effective May, 1, 2010. With the additional funding, the North Carolina SHIP offices will be available to help former Fox enrollees choose a new plan that best fits their individual needs. Medicare beneficiaries affected by the termination of the plan can contact the SHIP by calling its toll-free line at (800) 443-9354.

“We know that many Medicare beneficiaries across North Carolina rely on the information and support provided by the SHIP during Medicare’s annual enrollment periods,” said Tavenner. “By providing these additional funds, we expect that the SHIP will be available to help ensure a smooth transition for the former Fox enrollees.”

North Carolina residents who were part of the Fox Plan are encouraged to work with the SHIP to get more information about what to do next. The SHIP toll-free number is (800) 443-9354 and contact information is available at the SHIP’s website, www.ncship.com. Medicare beneficiaries can also get additional information at 1-800-MEDICARE (800-633-4227) or www.medicare.gov.

Information is also available in Spanish and other languages.

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Note: All HHS press releases, fact sheets and other press materials are available at <http://www.hhs.gov/news>.