

Access to Benefits Coalition (ABC)

The Access to Benefits Coalition (ABC) is dedicated to ensuring that Medicare beneficiaries with lower incomes know about and can make the best use of all available resources for reducing the costs of prescription drugs, including the new Medicare approved drug discount program and Medicare Part D (starting in 2006). Coalition members share an interest in helping close to 7 million Medicare beneficiaries (including both those aged 65 and over as well as younger persons with disabilities who qualify) find the public and private prescription savings programs they need to maintain their health and improve the quality of their lives.

Because the history of efforts to enroll lower-income Americans in government benefits programs has been uneven, getting large numbers of lower-income beneficiaries to take advantage of these programs is difficult. The Coalition believes that only through massive public education as well as localized outreach and enrollment will those with incomes below 200% of poverty find the best combination of programs to reduce the costs of their prescriptions.

Chaired by The National Council on the Aging, the Coalition now has over 80 national voluntary organization members. These include aging and health care organizations such as AARP and the Catholic Health Association of the U.S., national charities such as Easter Seals and groups representing those with health problems such as the Alzheimer's Association and the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill. In addition, faith-based and multi-cultural groups such as The National Council of Churches and the National Alliance for Hispanic Health are active members. For a complete list of members, [visit](#) the Coalition's Web site

To meet its goals, the national coalition is involving and supporting hundreds of state and local organizations in communities nationwide. The 50 local coalitions will be educating and enrolling thousands of beneficiaries in 2004-05. A list of the local Coalition members is also at www.accesstobenefits.org.

ABC has developed a powerful Web-based decision support tool to help beneficiaries, as well as family caregivers and organizations who wish to help them in not only understanding, applying and enrolling in the best Medicare-approved drug discount card, but also in finding what other public and private prescription savings programs will lower their prescription costs even more. ABC's BenefitsCheckUpRx 2.0™ is fast, free and confidential and is available by accessing the Coalition's Web site.

To reach lower income beneficiaries, ABC is also partnering with both nonprofit, government and private organizations to produce educational materials, fund & train local Coalitions as well as reach out to the media and both federal and state policymakers.

The goal of the Coalition is to quickly and measurably educate lower-income Medicare beneficiaries; help them make informed choices about prescription savings programs; and facilitate their actual enrollment in new and existing prescription savings programs through:

- Developing and using the best-available knowledge from the public and private sectors about best practices and cost-effective strategies for reaching and enrolling lower-income Medicare beneficiaries.
- Activating and supporting nationwide community education and outreach, focused on reducing confusion and providing beneficiary support in decision-making and enrollment.
- Developing and implementing a public information and outreach campaign
- Developing a robust decision-support tool to help consumers make optimal choices, and
- Mobilizing widespread support and participation in national, state and local Access to Benefits coalitions.

The Coalition is committed to helping the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and others achieve aggressive enrollment goals including:

- By the end of 2005, at least 5.5 million lower-income beneficiaries will have received transitional assistance for 2004-05 (including the \$600 credit if applicable), and also maximizing enrollment in other public and private prescription savings programs available to help them save money.
- By the end of 2008, at least 8 million lower-income beneficiaries will have enrolled in Medicare Part D.
- By 2012, at least 12 million lower-income beneficiaries will have enrolled in Part D.

For more information, visit www.accesstobenefits.org, call 202-479-6670, or send an e-mail to info@accesstobenefits.org.

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