



## **Charter, National Access to Benefits Coalition**

### **Background**

In recent years, government agencies, non-profit organizations and foundations have been involved in efforts to identify and enroll low-income Medicare beneficiaries and others who are eligible for but not receiving medical benefits from government and private programs. To date, success in doing this has been at best inconsistent and uneven. There also have been few opportunities to evaluate or identify and systematically implement proven, best-practice enrollment and outreach programs with this underserved audience. The importance to be attached to accelerating new and better answers to effective outreach and enrollment is underscored by the opportunities and challenges inherent in enrolling low-income beneficiaries in new prescription drug benefits available in June 2004.

### **Purposes/Mission**

Leading national not-for-profit organizations have formed the Access to Benefits Coalition (ABC). The Coalition is a public-private partnership solely dedicated to ensuring that low-income beneficiaries know about and are assisted to make optimal use of new Medicare prescription drug benefits and all other available resources for saving money on prescription drugs.

Coalition members share an interest in helping all Medicare beneficiaries (including those aged 65 and over as well as younger persons with disabilities) to access the public and private prescription savings programs they need to maintain their health and improve the quality of their lives.

The National Access to Benefits Coalition will prompt and support the development of state and local ABC coalitions. The terms of this charter will apply to all state and local coalition activities.

### **Goal**

The goal of the Coalition is to quickly and measurably inform low-income Medicare beneficiaries, help them make informed choices about prescription savings programs, and facilitate their actual enrollment in new Medicare benefits and other public and private benefit programs for which they qualify.

## **Objectives**

The Coalition is committed to working with CMS and other public and private prescription drug benefit programs to achieve aggressive enrollment goals (numbers are tentative, based on preliminary analysis), namely:

- By the end of 2005, at least 5.5 million low-income beneficiaries will have received \$600 annually credit under a Medicare-endorsed discount card, and also will have had an opportunity to enroll in other public and private Rx programs available to help them save money.
- By the end of 2008, at least 8 million low-income beneficiaries will have enrolled in Medicare low-income savings programs and been assisted to enroll in other Rx benefit programs, public and private.
- By 2012, at least 12 million low-income beneficiaries will have enrolled in Medicare low-income savings programs and been assisted to enroll in other Rx benefit programs.
- Low-income beneficiaries identified through these efforts will also be informed about and encouraged to enroll in other public and private assistance programs that can help them to meet important needs.

## **Governance, Members and Supporters**

The Coalition is a diverse, broad-based coalition of more than 50 non-profit organizations that share a commitment to helping low-income Medicare beneficiaries access prescription drug benefits for which they qualify.

- Steering Committee – Chaired by NCOA, the Steering Committee is the decision-making body for ABC and is comprised of NCOA, AARP, Alzheimer’s Association, Easter Seals and the National Alliance for Hispanic Health. The Coalition seeks to achieve consensus on issues and encourages involvement of all members, individually and through a framework of subject-specific working groups. However, when a vote by the Steering Committee is necessary, a simple majority rules.
- Coalition members have input into formulating the policies, programs, and initiatives of the Coalition through Working Groups that will advise the Steering Committee. At the outset, three Working Groups are established, namely:
  - Mobilization, Outreach and Enrollment
  - Media and Communications
  - Policy and Research
- Members include national voluntary organizations and other national not-for-profit organizations that support the ABC mission and charter. Potential members include health, social service, aging, disability, faith based, and minority organizations, as well as trade and professional groups and associations.

- Corporate Advisory Council – Organizations that choose to provide financial support for ABC activities will be invited to sit on the Corporate Advisory Council and encouraged to participate as members of relevant ABC Work Groups. The Corporate Advisory Council will have input into the deliberations and work of ABC, and will advise the Steering Committee. The Corporate Advisory Council will meet regularly; and the Chair of this Council will meet on a regular basis with Steering Committee.
- Cooperating Organizations – Cooperating organizations are public and private organizations, including discount card companies, media companies, and government agencies that support the mission, purposes and charter of ABC. Cooperating Organizations may be invited to participate in ad hoc projects or Work Groups of the Coalition, but are not otherwise members.
- NCOA serves as the lead administrative agent responsible for organizing, implementing and managing the Coalition activities.

### **Operating Principles**

In order to effectively organize and carry out its mission, to promote and support common purpose and to avoid real or perceived conflicts of interest, the Coalition will operate under the following organizing principles.

- **Neutrality.** In all communications, services, materials and support, the Coalition will operate in the role of honest broker, maintaining neutrality in any and all information offered and consideration given to any and all card and benefit options.
- **Apolitical.** The Coalition will solely focus on its mission and enrollment support objectives. It will operate in a manner that is strictly non-partisan and apolitical.
- **Consensus.** The Coalition will operate on a consultative and consensus-building model. Decisions are made by the Steering Committee, after gathering input from members. Where significant differences of opinion exist, resolution will be achieved through a consultative process. Coalition members have a regular opportunity to provide input on strategy and operational issues through individual actions and through the activities of the Coalition staff and Working Groups.
- **Transparency.** The Coalition will engage in full public acknowledgement of all (1) participants/members, (2) sources and expenditure of funds, including quarterly financial statements, and (3) activities.
- **Autonomy.** Policy, message, and programmatic decisions (e.g., content of materials and website) rest with the Steering Committee.
- **Message Control.** Any and all uses of ABC logo, letterhead, materials, and services are subject to review and approval by the ABC Steering Committee.
- **No Implied or Real Endorsement.** ABC participation or support cannot be attributed as a direct or indirect endorsement of any position, product, or company.

- **Non-Attribution.** Actions or positions taken that are incongruent with ABC mission/position cannot be attributed to ABC
- **Message Conflict.** Members agree to keep any relevant advocacy and public policy positions/stances/or messages separate and distinct from their public identification with ABC and its mission.

### **Core Policies and Procedures**

- The Coalition will focus solely on outreach, education and enrollment support targeted to low-income Medicare beneficiaries who qualify for new Medicare benefits as well as other public and private prescription drug benefit programs.
- The Steering Committee will set all Coalition policies and procedures, with input and consultation with members. The Steering Committee seeks to gain consensus; in those instances when a vote is necessary, simple majority rules.
- The Coalition and its Working Groups will employ a participatory, consultative model, involving all members and top tier funders.
- All Coalition programs and activities will be defined and carried out in partnership with members and funders.
- All Coalition members are encouraged to play active roles in informing the development of Coalition plans and activities. When operating in support of the Coalition, all are expected to use the core messages, outreach materials, decision-support and enrollment tools developed by the Coalition, but each will define its own strategies and specific objectives for reaching and assisting low-income beneficiaries through their network and distribution channels. All Coalition members also are expected to invest resources – time, funds, staff – in ways appropriate to each.
- The Coalition will steadfastly adhere to all contractual, legal and financial requirements of funders, including assuring that all relevant terms, provisions and requirements are applied to sub-grantees and vendors. All appropriate records will be maintained. As fiscal agent for the Coalition, NCOA obtains an annual financial audit by an independent public accounting firm
- The Coalition will maintain and publish up-to-date roster of all members and funders.
- The Coalition will not consider and advance legislative recommendations except on those matters related solely to low-income enrollment policies and procedures. Other types of legislative matters are outside the purview of the Coalition, and organizations may pursue these on their own initiative. The Coalition's sole focus will be on how to connect low-income beneficiaries to benefits and programs for which they qualify.
- Members will advise and the Coalition will comply with each organization's rules and procedures about contacting members. Those organizations that restrict access to their local affiliates are urged to inform the ABC staff about appropriate procedures.
- All fundraising in the name of the national Coalition will be managed by or conducted in coordination with NCOA and the Steering Committee. The

Steering Committee will set policies and provide guidance to fundraising undertaken by state and local Access to Benefits coalitions.

- Members and funders must maintain a clear, consistent and public division between their support and participation in the Coalition and any related products, services or policies with which they are associated as an independent organization.
- The Charter may be changed by a simple majority vote of the Steering Committee members.
- The Coalition may be disbanded by a simple majority of the Steering Committee members.

### **Conflict of Interest Mitigation**

In order to avoid and manage any real or perceived conflicts of interests on the part of organizations that are both participating in the national ABC coalition and may have a financial interest or other organizational stake in decisions affected by ABC's mission and activities, the following guidelines, policies and procedures will be applied:

- **Disclosure.** All Coalition members will be required to complete a disclosure statement/form providing for self-identification of any potential or apparent conflict of interest between their participation in the work of ABC and other business and professional interests. All such disclosure forms will become part of the public record of ABC and will be updated annually.
- **Conflict Mitigation Plans.** All Coalition members who have a potential or apparent conflict of interest will be required to complete and file a conflict mitigation plan that establishes how they will maintain a complete separation between their ABC-related work and other relevant and competing activities in which they are, or may become, engaged while they are involved in ABC activities. These plans are subject to review and approval by the Steering Committee. If the Conflict Mitigation Plan fails to gain Steering Committee approval, then the organization that submitted the Plan cannot be a member of the Coalition. Members of the Corporate Advisory Council and Cooperating Organizations must submit a Disclosure statement, but there is no requirement for a conflict mitigation plan.
- **Recusal.** In decision-making actions of the Steering Committee, organizations with a financial interest in the outcome will (1) publicly acknowledge their potential conflict of interest and (2) recuse themselves from voting in final decision-making.
- **Transparency and Accountability.** The Steering Committee will provide complete public disclosure on all sources of funds, conditions, if any, set by funders, and the expenditure of all such funds. ABC will abide by all relevant contract or grant requirements. The Coalition may reject funds if undue conditions are set by funders. Funders, both public and private, may serve in an advisory role to the Coalition and its Steering Committee.

### **State and Local Access to Benefit Coalitions**

As State and Local Access to Benefit Coalitions are formed, members will adopt the Access to Benefits Charter. Upon adoption of the Charter by members, and establishment of an operational structure, these State and Local Coalitions will be sanctioned by the National Coalition and given authority to use the ABC logo and other identifying information and materials.