



OFFICE OF GOVERNOR PAT QUINN

NEWS

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Governor Quinn Highlights Illinois' Free Medicare Counseling Service

Proclaims SHIP Week to Honor State Program which Offers One-on-One Medicare Counseling Prior to Open-Enrollment Period

CHICAGO – November 2, 2009. Governor Pat Quinn today proclaimed the week of November 2 - 6 as Senior Health Insurance Program (SHIP) Week in Illinois, highlighting the nearly 300,000 hours of free counseling provided by SHIP volunteers to Illinois' Medicare beneficiaries.

"Millions of eligible people across Illinois are often unaware of, or overwhelmed by, their Medicare options and application procedures," said Governor Quinn. "I salute the Department of Insurance and its committed volunteers for their education and outreach efforts to help our seniors and persons with disabilities work through the array of Medicare insurance options."

SHIP began in 1998 to educate Medicare beneficiaries and their caregivers about Medicare insurance options through a network of community organizations, senior citizen centers, and the media. Today, more than 900 trained SHIP volunteers staff more than 150 sites across Illinois to educate our most vulnerable residents about available Medicare insurance options throughout the year.

"By dedicating their time, knowledge and energy, SHIP volunteers play a tremendous role in improving the lives of millions of Illinoisans by helping them navigate the process of Medicare enrollment," said Michael T. McRaith, Director, Illinois Department of Insurance. "I am heartened by Governor Quinn's recognition of the important, yet often unnoticed, work our SHIP volunteers do."

The Illinois Department on Aging works closely in partnership with DOI's SHIP program to ensure that older adults understand and receive benefits.

"I join in celebrating the hundreds of SHIP volunteers who work in senior centers across Illinois to help older adults get the best health care, drug coverage, and other important benefits that help them live in the community," said Charles Johnson, Director, Illinois Department on Aging.

In addition to the year-round services provided by SHIP volunteers, the Department of Insurance is conducting a series of free, one-on-one counseling sessions throughout the state to assist Medicare-eligible individuals with the Medicare open-enrollment season, which runs this year from November 15 - December 31. A list of these events, along with more information about the SHIP program and a list of local SHIP volunteers, can be found on the Department of Insurance's website at Insurance.Illinois.gov or by calling the SHIP toll-free hotline at 1(800) 548-9034.

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Governor Quinn's proclamation for SHIP Week reads:

WHEREAS, there are over 1.45 million Illinoisans 65 years of age or older on Medicare and more than 240,000 Illinoisans who are under 65 and have a disability who are on Medicare; and

WHEREAS, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of Illinoisans 65 years of age or older is estimated to increase to more than 2.4 million by the year 2030; and

WHEREAS, elderly and disabled people who lack a social support network can be unaware of or overwhelmed by their Medicare benefits or may be unable to access and complete Medicare application procedures; and

WHEREAS, the Senior Health Insurance Program (SHIP) was originated in 1988 by the Illinois Department of Insurance in order to educate the citizens of Illinois about Medicare benefits and programs through community organizations, senior citizen centers, and the media; and

WHEREAS, since its inception, more than 1,500 SHIP volunteers have contributed nearly 300,000 hours to assist over 307,000 clients, saving Illinois' citizens more than \$56.4 million in customer service costs, \$35 million of which have been recorded in the past three years; and

WHEREAS, more than 900 active SHIP volunteers are truly admirable citizens, contributing their time and talents in order to improve the lives of Illinois' Medicare beneficiaries; and

WHEREAS, consistent with the Department of Insurance's consumer education and protection priorities, SHIP volunteers visit eligible Illinois residents in every county, helping our seniors and disabled citizens work through the often confusing array of Medicare insurance options:

*THEREFORE, I, Pat Quinn, Governor of the State of Illinois, do hereby proclaim November 2-6, 2009, as **SHIP WEEK** in Illinois, and encourage the people of Illinois to recognize the important contributions of the SHIP volunteers who assist our elderly and disabled citizens.*

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