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Medicare Rx Education Network Launches Effort to Educate about New Medicare Drug Coverage

(WASHINGTON, July 19, 2005) – The Medicare Rx Education Network was launched today at a press conference in Washington, D.C. The network of 40 national organizations is chaired by former U.S. Senator John Breaux, senior counsel at Patton Boggs. The network will share resources, coordinate activities and disseminate information to Medicare beneficiaries and their caregivers about the new Medicare Part D drug coverage.

Member organizations represent seniors, patients, people with disabilities and chronic diseases, pharmacists, insurers, healthcare providers, and businesses.

“Reaching 42 million people is no small challenge. These organizations are pulling together to make certain that the challenge is met successfully,” said Senator Breaux. “The goal of the Medicare Rx Education Network is to work with a broad range of healthcare and senior organizations to help Medicare beneficiaries make the most informed choices they can about enrolling in the new prescription drug benefit.”

The Medicare Rx Education Network hopes to eliminate duplication of efforts and maximize the effectiveness of outreach efforts. The network also hopes to pre-empt any confusion about the new Medicare prescription drug coverage by making sure information disseminated about the benefit is factual and accurately conveyed. The network will, whenever possible, direct beneficiaries to local resources in neighborhoods and communities where questions can be answered face-to-face or in a phone call with a local counselor. The network does not engage in legislative activities or take positions on pending legislative or administrative policies related to the Medicare Part D benefit and its implementation.

“It is critical that we reach out to people in Medicare and those who care for them so beneficiaries can make confident, informed decisions about their prescription drug coverage,” said Mark B. McClellan, M.D., Ph.D., Administrator for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. “This new network and its efforts will be a big help toward our goal of reaching seniors and people with a disability where they live, work, pray and play.”

Beginning next January 1, Medicare will include a prescription drug benefit that could provide Medicare beneficiaries with savings on their prescription medicines. Medicare covers hospitalization and visits to the doctor, but until now Medicare has not covered prescription drugs. The new prescription drug benefit will offer 42 million people coverage for a wide array of medicines.

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Beneficiaries with limited incomes — an estimated one third of the Medicare population — will get extra help and pay little or nothing at all to participate. Like other forms of insurance coverage, Medicare's prescription drug insurance protects against high costs in the present and unexpected costs in the future.

Enrollment begins Nov. 15, 2005. Coverage begins January 1, 2006. Detailed information about prescription drug plans will become available this October.

"Millions of people are deciding whether or not to sign up for this coverage. The Medicare Rx Education Network is working hard to make sure that they get information, that the information is accurate, and that they know where to go in their local communities to get help in order to receive the benefit," said Senator Breaux.

In its first coordinated effort, the Medicare Rx Education Network will begin airing nationally a television ad beginning July 20, 2005. The network also has created a Web site (www.MedicareRxEducation.org) that combines the resources of its over 30 member organizations to link to dozens of sources of information about the Medicare prescription drug benefit, including those of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Social Security Administration, which is spearheading efforts to enroll limited-income beneficiaries in the benefit's subsidy program.

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The Medicare Rx Education Network provides information and assistance with outreach and enrollment for the new Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit. The network is chaired by former U.S. Senator John Breaux. Members share an interest in educating Medicare beneficiaries about the new Medicare prescription drug benefit and will work closely with the appropriate federal agencies to obtain up-to-date information to ensure that information disseminated by the network about Medicare Part D is factual and accurately conveyed, thereby pre-empting confusion about the benefit and equipping beneficiaries and their caregivers to make informed choices.

By sharing information with each other about member organizations' independent efforts, collaborating on activities, and identifying ways to work together, the network aims to eliminate duplication of efforts and maximize the effectiveness of outreach efforts. The network does not engage in legislative activities or take positions on pending legislative or administrative policies related to the Part D benefit and its implementation.