



# Fall 2008 eNews

## **Annual Enrollment is Fast Approaching and MMW is Here to Help!**

Here we are again! For some of us, this is the 4<sup>th</sup> time we have worked through the big enrollment period. For others of us, this is the first or second time. For everybody, the MMW Coalition is here to help make things easier for you to serve your clients by providing up to date information and education/outreach and enrollment assistance. As usual, there were changes to plans, including the number of plans below the Low Income Subsidy benchmark, changes in premiums, and changes in drugs that are covered. Medicare beneficiaries may need to switch plans, apply for the Low Income Subsidy and do whatever else is necessary to access the best possible coverage to meet their needs.

Please let the Coalition partners know what we can do to support you in serving your clients and consumers.

## **The MMW Coalition Continues its Education Push on Medicare Supplement Enrollment for Medicare Beneficiaries Under 65**

Due to a change in Illinois law, Medicare Supplement Plans must be offered to individuals under 65 and cannot charge those under 65 more than the highest rate currently on file with the Illinois Division of Insurance. That highest rate is usually the rate charged to those 80-85 years of age. The initial enrollment for this benefit for those already enrolled in Medicare ends November 30, 2008. The MMW Coalition partners are doing outreach activities to assure that Medicare beneficiaries under 65 are aware of their new affordable access to these plans. AgeOptions has issued a press release to several local newspapers. The MMW Coalition is also working with AIDS Legal Council and AIDS Foundation of Chicago on assuring that Medicare beneficiaries with HIV are aware of this important opportunity to access Medicare Supplemental Plans.

With only a couple of weeks left, it is important that we all get the word out about this. If you would like to collaborate with the MMW partners on press releases, letters or other fact sheets, please contact us immediately!

## **Thank You for Responding to the MMW Survey!**

Recently, the MMW Coalition sent out a survey to the over 450 individuals on our e-mail listserve. The purpose of the survey was to hear from you about how the MMW Coalition serves you, what you would like, and what areas you think we could improve. We had an almost 25% response rate to the survey, which is significant. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive and we were thrilled to know that the support we provide to you is helpful. Below is a summary of some of the findings:

*92% of respondents receive the MMW e-mail information.*

*73% of respondents attend our MMW meetings.*

*71% of respondents use our written materials.*

*62% of respondents pass on our e-mails to others, with 54% forwarding e-mails to co-workers and 33% forwarding to other professionals and volunteers.*

*80% of respondents believe MMW helps provide better quality information to clients.*

*52% of respondents are interested in partnering with MMW to do focused outreach to the Deaf and hard of hearing and mental health communities.*

## What Ever Happened to Improving Illinois Cares Rx? Could We See It This Year?

With strong help from all of our partners, including Citizen Action Illinois and others, **improvements to Illinois Cares Rx and access to healthcare for individuals with disabilities moved close becoming law.**

**HB 4449** (Franks/Halverson) would provide one level (instead of the current two) of Illinois Cares Rx benefits, with cost sharing assistance on all drugs covered by the Medicare Part D plan for all Medicare beneficiaries with income of up to 250% of the Federal Poverty Level. This bill passed the House unanimously and the Senate by an overwhelming margin.

**HB 5251** (Nekritz/Delgado) provides a health care safety net for people with disabilities who are working, including many Medicare beneficiaries. This bill would allow individuals to continue to qualify for Health Benefits for Workers with Disabilities even if they were found to be “medically improved.” By creating this net, we assure that individuals keep the health care benefits that may have allowed them to work in the first place. This bill also passed the House and Senate unanimously.

Unfortunately, both of these bills became part of a larger disagreement between the House, Senate and Governor over how rules implementing laws should be promulgated. Many bills, including these two, were amended in the House to require that the Governor receive approval from the General Assembly of any rules associated with the bill. When these bills reached the Senate, this amendment was removed. No agreement was ever reached between the two chambers on this language.

**We hope that these bills will be brought back, passed and signed by the Governor in November during the General Assembly’s Veto Session. Stay tuned!**

For more information about MMW Education and Outreach activities, you can contact Terri Gendel (*AgeOptions*) at [terri.gendel@ageoptions.org](mailto:terri.gendel@ageoptions.org) or Jennifer Scheffler (*Progress Center for Independent Living*) at [jscheffler@progresscil.org](mailto:jscheffler@progresscil.org)

For more information about MMW Policy activities, you can contact: John Coburn (*Health & Disability Advocates*) at [jacoburn@hdadvocates.org](mailto:jcoburn@hdadvocates.org)