



Press Release

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CMS, IHS ANNOUNCE SPECIAL MEDICARE DRUG CARD FOR AMERICAN INDIANS, ALASKA NATIVES

American Indians and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Medicare beneficiaries who utilize Indian health program pharmacies can now begin taking advantage of two specially endorsed Medicare-approved drug discount cards and the \$600 credit tailored for their needs according to an announcement today by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Indian Health Service (IHS).

The two special drug cards for Indian health program pharmacies are Criterion Advantage and Pharmacy Care Alliance. The AI/AN Medicare beneficiaries who enroll in these drug cards can use their card at other pharmacies. Both cards have large national networks of pharmacies in addition to the Indian health program pharmacies. The AI/ANs can also choose from any of the other drug cards already participating in the program. More information about the drug discount cards as well as other drug cards can be obtained by calling 1-800-MEDICARE (633-4227) or by going to the Medicare Website at www.medicare.gov.

“These two specially endorsed drug cards are tailored to meet the needs of those accustomed to using special pharmacies,” said Mark B. McClellan, M.D., Ph.D., administrator of CMS. “These pharmacies may be the only drug stores serving remote areas where they are needed the most.” Providing drug cards through AI/AN pharmacies used by many American Indians and Alaska Natives furthers the Bush Administration goal of providing more affordable, up to date drug coverage for all Medicare beneficiaries. “We want to keep people healthy, prevent illnesses and reduce health disparities, and these special Medicare drug cards are another step in achieving that goal.” said Dr. McClellan.

Low-income AI/AN Medicare beneficiaries may also qualify for the \$600 credit for this year and another \$600 for next year. The \$600 credit is available to AI/AN Medicare beneficiaries who do not have other prescription drug coverage, and whose annual income is below 135 percent of the federal poverty limit, which in 2004 is no more than \$12,569 for individuals and \$16,862 for married couples (in Alaska, no more than \$15,701 for individuals and \$21,074 for married couples). Individuals who qualify for the credit will not have to pay the annual enrollment fee for the discount card. The \$600 credit can be used with any Medicare-approved drug discount card and with any pharmacy in that card’s network, including the Indian health program pharmacies.

“These special drug discount cards will not only reduce the cost of drugs for many American Indians and Alaska Natives,” stated IHS Director Dr. Charles W. Grim, “but will also enable Indian health program pharmacies to bill against the \$600 credit for drugs dispensed to beneficiaries, providing a valuable source of third-party collections to the Indian health system. These funds can then be used to provide more health care services to American Indian and Alaska Native people.”

Further information on the drug cards can be found at www.criterionadvantage.com and www.pcacard.com. General information on the Medicare program can be found at www.medicare.gov.