

Medicare drug plan changes affect seniors

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U.S. officials say changes in the Medicare prescription drug plan for next year will include more choices and better coverage especially in the "doughnut hole."

More choices will allow beneficiaries in most states to choose from more than 50 plans and that the "doughnut hole" gap coverage will apply only to generic drugs, USA Today reported.

The newspaper said that currently the gap affects 94 percent of beneficiaries after they have paid about \$750 until they reach \$3,600 in costs. But health advocates say seniors should revisit the plan and re-examine the choices because of the changes.

"The right plan for someone in 2006 might not be the right plan in 2007," a spokesman for the Kaiser Family Foundation health research organization told USA Today. "The concern is that products are changing, but seniors won't."

Medicare officials say the average monthly premiums will stay below \$24, or far less than the \$37 originally projected. They said companies also are adding new forms of coverage.

"Competition is working," Mark McClellan, administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, told the newspaper. "They are adding plans that people want."

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