

CCoA  
California Commission on Aging

## AGEWATCH

## CMS Requests Feedback on Possible Change to Hospital “Observation Status” Rule

The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) is asking for input on possible changes to hospital “observation status” policy.

According to the National Consumer Voice for Long-Term Care, “Medicare beneficiaries who stay at the hospital for one or more days are placed on observation (outpatient) status. This may feel like a hospital stay and look like a hospital stay, but it is not because, under observation status, the individual is not officially admitted as an inpatient.”

The Consumer Voice explains that the difference between observation and inpatient status matters because “Medicare will only pay for care in a skilled nursing facility after a hospital stay if a beneficiary spends at least three consecutive days in the hospital as an inpatient (not counting the day of discharge) – the so-called three midnights rule. So while a beneficiary may spend three days or more in the hospital, none of that time counts if he or she is on observation status. The result – these patients do not qualify for Medicare coverage in a skilled nursing facility and must pay thousands of dollars out of their own pockets or return home without receiving the therapy and nursing services they need to recover.”

CMS is considering changes to the observation status policy and is seeking public comment. The Consumer Voice is asking anyone interested to submit comments urging CMS to count all days hospitalized on observation status toward the three-day hospital stay requirement and to share accounts of friends or loved ones who have been negatively impacted by the rule. Accounts of observation status experiences should include the state where the person was hospitalized, the length of hospitalization, and if appropriate, the length of admission and cost of a skilled nursing facility stay. To read about the proposed changes, visit the CMS website at [www.medicareadvocacy.org/2012/08/09/3805/](http://www.medicareadvocacy.org/2012/08/09/3805/).

Comments are due September 4, 2012 at 11:59 pm ET. To submit a comment: Please to refer to file code CMS-1589-P in your comments. You can submit them electronically at <http://www.regulations.gov/#/documentDetail;D=CMS-2012-0084-0002> and follow the instructions under the "Comment Now!" tab.

*Reprinted in part from the National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care August 22, 2012 Action Alert: Make Observation Status Count.*

AGE WATCH is an occasional publication of the California Commission on Aging (CCoA) intended to inform, educate, and advocate. The CCoA is an independent state agency established in 1973 to serve as the principal state advocate on behalf of older Californians. The CCoA office is located at 1300 National Drive, Suite 173, Sacramento, CA 95834.

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## Gov. Brown Calls for Special Session on Federal Health Law

A special session of the Legislature has been called to address California's compliance with federal health care reform. Announced by Governor Jerry Brown in mid-August, the post-election special session will be used to finalize action on remaining compliance provisions that would complete California's plans to implement the law here in California.

In a letter to lawmakers, the Governor said "We will work with you to complete what we can in the current session, but many important issues and questions" about reform law provisions "cannot be addressed or answered without further guidance from the federal government and additional analysis to understand the inter-relationship of the decisions we must make."

Announcement of the late winter session means that any failed legislation that would have implemented provisions of the healthcare law could be re-visited in the special session. Any bills approved during the special session will become law 90 days from signing.

*Excerpted from California Health Care Foundation's 8/20/12 edition of California Healthline.*

## Flu + You Campaign Raises Awareness about the Seriousness of Influenza, Need for Prevention, and Vaccine Options for Adults 65 and Older

The National Council on Aging has launched the "*Flu + You Campaign*," designed to promote the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's influenza recommendations that urge older adults to get their annual influenza vaccine.

NCOA's nationwide *Flu + You* campaign is working to improve vaccination rates among this adults 65 and older, a group that is particularly vulnerable to the flu and its complications. The objective of *Flu + You* is to inform older adults about the serious threat influenza poses, the importance of annual immunization, and the available vaccine options covered by Medicare for people over 65. NCOA's *Flu + You* campaign is made possible through a collaboration with Sanofi Pasteur.

NCOA, with the support of Sanofi Pasteur, has developed educational Materials designed to reach older adults, caregivers, and health care providers with critical Information regarding influenza and immunization options. NCOA will conduct extended Regional programming for the *Flu + You* campaign in the states of Arizona, Florida, and Pennsylvania to reach older adults and their caregivers.

For more information regarding regional training and on *Flu + You*, visit [www.ncoa.org/Flu](http://www.ncoa.org/Flu).

*Excerpted from NCOA Week, August 21, 2012*



## Redesign of Medicare.Gov to Improve Online Experience for Beneficiaries

A redesign of the [medicare.gov](http://www.Medicare.gov) website is now complete, making content more accessible and easier for beneficiaries, their families and caregivers to understand. Today's redesign, announced by Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Acting Administrator Marilyn Tavenner, supports CMS's commitment to provide better customer service.

The new design responds to mobile devices, like tablets and smartphones. Users can get information such as coverage and cost details, anytime, anywhere, and in the most convenient format. Medicare beneficiaries, counselors, and caregivers can check if a letter they received in the mail is an official communication from Medicare by viewing descriptions of Medicare mailings. The popular "Medicare & You" handbook now has its own landing page for an easy access complement to the annual print mailing.

The new site will allow most users to find the content they're looking for directly from the home page. These features include:

- A search for whether a specific test, item, or service is covered under original Medicare;
- The ability to get customized information based on a beneficiary's specific situation;
- Quick links to replace a lost Medicare card, find a Medicare Advantage or prescription drug plan, and get help with health care costs. To view and start using the new tools and additional information, users are invited to visit [www.Medicare.gov](http://www.Medicare.gov)

Reprinted from From ACL News and Info, August 21, 2012

### People with Medicare Save More Than \$4.1 Billion on Prescription Drugs

*18 million with Medicare also receive free preventive services in the first seven months of 2012*

Nearly 5.4 million seniors and people with disabilities have saved more than \$4.1 billion on prescription drugs as a result of the Affordable Care Act, Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced yesterday. Seniors in the Medicare prescription drug coverage gap known as the "donut hole" have saved an average of \$768. During the first seven months of 2012, the new health care law has helped nearly 18 million people with original Medicare get at least one preventive service at no cost to them.

The health care law includes benefits to make Medicare prescription drug coverage more affordable. In 2010, anyone with Medicare who hit the prescription drug donut hole received a \$250 rebate. In 2011, people with Medicare who hit the donut hole began receiving a 50 percent discount on covered brand-name drugs and a discount on generic drugs. These discounts and Medicare coverage gradually increase until 2020 when the donut hole is fully closed.

For state-by-state information on savings in the donut hole, please visit: <http://www.cms.gov/apps/files/donut-hole-data-chart.pdf> (PDF - 206 KB) For state-by-state information on utilization of free preventive services, please visit: <http://www.cms.gov/apps/files/preventive-data-chart-first-seven-months-2012.pdf>

Reprinted from From ACL News and Info, August 21, 2012

## New Video on Social Security: The Facts May Surprise You

Just in time for Social Security's 77th anniversary, the National Academy of Social Insurance (NASI) recently released an animated, 4-minute video that explains the basics about Social Security, including its purpose, who pays for it, who gets it, and what it means to seniors, working families, and children now and in the future.

### Social Security: Just the Facts Video



The “[Just the Facts](#)” video is a tool for schools, colleges, community and religious organizations, and journalists to educate their students, communities, viewers and readers about Social Security and how it has performed over the years through good times and bad. NASI has also prepared a companion resources page at [www.nasi.org/learn](http://www.nasi.org/learn) for viewers to further explore each topic discussed in the video.

To learn more about the National Academy of Social Insurance or to watch the video, visit [www.nasi.org](http://www.nasi.org).

*Reprinted from ACL News & Info, August 21, 2012*

## United States of Aging

A new report from United Healthcare, USA TODAY, and the National Council on Aging (NCOA) reviews whether today's older adults are ready for the realities of aging in America and if American communities ready to meet the needs of the rapidly growing senior population. The research surveyed 2,250 U.S. adults aged 60 or older for the inaugural *United States of Aging Survey* to examine seniors' outlook and preparedness for aging, and their community's ability to meet their needs as they age.

### Key Findings

- Seniors and baby boomers expect their lives to improve as they grow older.
  - A significant minority of respondents feel less secure: about one in four report trouble with current monthly living expenses; one-third say they will not be able to afford future long-term care services; and 72% of those who make less than \$30,000 per year live with a chronic health condition.
- Perceptions of community services for older Americans vary; boomers are less confident than older respondents that their community will provide the services they need to maintain health and independence.

### Survey Fact Sheets

Get detailed survey findings for the nation and for the following subsets of respondents at <http://www.ncoa.org/improve-health/community-education/united-states-of-aging/united-states-of-aging.html>



## Federal Report Details Health, Economic Status of Older Americans

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A new report from the Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics outlines the physical and economic health of U.S. adults over age 65. The report, *Older Americans 2012: Key Indicators of Well-Being*, tracks trends at regular intervals to see how older people are faring as the U.S. population grows older.

*Older Americans 2012*, the sixth report prepared by the Forum since 2000, provides an updated and accessible compendium of indicators, drawn from official statistics about the well-being of Americans primarily age 65 and older. The 176-page report provides a broad description of areas of well-being that are improving for older Americans and those that are not. Thirty-seven key indicators are categorized into five broad areas—population, economics, health status, health risks and behaviors, and health care. This year's report also includes a special feature on the end of life.

Among the report's findings are an increasing percentage of women over 65 in the labor force; falling rates of poverty and rising income since the 1970s; and increasing difficulty with housing affordability and access. The report details the rapid growth of the population age 65 and over, which represented 13% of the U.S. population in 2010 and is expected to grow to nearly 20% by the year 2030.

The Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics was established in 1986 to improve the quality and utility of federal data on aging. The Forum membership includes the Administration on Aging, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, U.S. Census Bureau, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Veterans Affairs, among others. To learn more about the Federal Interagency Forum or to read the report, please visit [www.nia.nih.gov](http://www.nia.nih.gov).

AGEWATCH

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### Upcoming Events

- September 11-13, 2012 International Conference on Aging in the Americas National, International, and Comparative Studies of Hispanic Aging and Related Methodological Challenges, University of Southern California, Los Angeles. (213) 740-1887 or [uscroybal@usc.edu](mailto:uscroybal@usc.edu) for information.
- September 18, 2012, The SCAN Foundation's 2012 Summit on Long-Term Services and Supports, Sacramento. [www.thescanfoundation.org](http://www.thescanfoundation.org).
- September 18-19, 2012, California Commission on Aging, Sacramento. [www.ccoa.ca.gov](http://www.ccoa.ca.gov) for information.
- County Welfare Directors Association 2012 Conference, October 3 – 5, 2012, The Westin Hotel, Long Beach. [www.cwda.org](http://www.cwda.org) for information.

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