

Special Report

from Congressman **Eliot Engel**



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**International Relations
Committee**

Middle East and
Central Asia Subcommittee
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Subcommittee

The New Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit

December 2005

Dear Friend:

Starting January 1, 2006, Medicare will offer prescription drug coverage through new private drug plans and through Medicare managed care plans (now called "Medicare Advantage" plans).

I opposed the law that created the Medicare Part D drug program because it failed to provide seniors with relief from the high cost of prescription drugs, is overly complex, and was set up to maximize profits for the pharmaceutical and HMO companies rather than maximizing assistance to seniors. The law even bans Medicare from negotiating with drug companies for lower prices.

However, the law takes effect January 1st, and you need to have all the information necessary to make your decision about whether to join and - if so - which plan may be best for you.

The current deadline to enroll without penalties is May 15, 2006. I am working to pass legislation to extend the deadline to the end of 2006 to give people more time to determine what is best for them among all the confusing Medicare drug plans.

Whether you are a senior, a person with a disability, or someone trying to help a parent or friend, you should carefully research all available options.

Consumer Alert: Companies are not allowed to enroll people in Medicare Part D plans over the phone. Do not give out Medicare ID and Social Security numbers and other personal information on the phone. Callers from legitimate companies will not ask.



Eliot L. Engel, Member of Congress

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Official Business



M.C.

Presorted Standard

This mailing was prepared, published and mailed at taxpayer expense

Congressman Eliot Engel Works to Extend Prescription Drug Enrollment Deadline

“Seniors who are trying to sort through countless prescription drug plans to determine which ones cover their necessary drugs for the best price at the right pharmacy are frustrated and confused by the new drug plans. People need more time and more assistance,” Congressman Eliot Engel stated.

Eliot Engel is supporting legislation to extend the deadline for enrolling from May 15, 2006 to the end of 2006.

Research shows that more than 60% of seniors do not understand the complicated new Part D drug program. The government sent many seniors incorrect information about the program. And the government now tells seniors to use the internet to get the correct information. But 75% of seniors do not use the internet.

To give people more time, Congressman Engel is working to pass the “Medicare Informed Choice Act.” This would not only allow seniors more time, but also protect people who make an initial mistake by allowing them to make a change in 2006. It would also protect retiree benefits for those who accidentally enroll in a new private drug plan.

Congressman Engel is also supporting the “Medicare Prescription Drug Savings and Choices Act” which, among other provisions, would require Medicare to negotiate with drug companies for lower drug prices.

Engel Warns Seniors About Medicare Part D Prescription Fraud Phone Calls

In December, Congressman Eliot Engel issued a warning to seniors about scammers pretending to be from a Medicare drug plan to get financial information from seniors.

“Be very careful,” Congressman Engel warned, “about phone calls asking for personal information from people claiming to be from a company trying to enroll you in a drug plan.” Companies with approved plans can market their prescription drug plans by mail and phone but **cannot** ask anyone to enroll on the phone.

Never give your Medicare ID number, Social Security number, bank account, credit card numbers or other financial information to anyone over the phone. This information is not needed to assess which Medicare Part D plan will work best for you. Legitimate companies with approved plans will not ask for this information.

You can call Medicare at 800-633-4227 to verify the name and number of plan if you are not sure.

Do not believe anyone who says that signing up is required by law or that you will lose your Medicare benefits if you do not sign up, or that there is a fee for enrolling. There is no fee.

“I must reiterate: **do not give your personal information out over the phone,**” said Congressman Engel.

Congressman Engel explaining how Medicare Part D will work at two of his recent community meetings on the new drug program.

At the meetings experts from the Social Security Administration and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services answered questions and distributed information.

