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For immediate release:
May 25, 2007

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Oregon SHIBA receives federal grant

Money will help expand services to those needing Medicare advice

(Salem) – A state program that uses volunteers to offer free, unbiased help to people making Medicare decisions this month received a \$417,631 federal grant to continue outreach to Oregonians in 2007.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) grant goes to the Senior Health Insurance Benefits Assistance (SHIBA) network and will allow the program to expand its volunteer network into several underserved rural areas of Oregon. This year's amount is 6 percent larger than the grant SHIBA received in 2006.

The grant money pays for a state SHIBA office, 22 local program sponsors, and approximately 250 volunteers who counsel Medicare beneficiaries and their family members.

Here's how the program works:

1. People with Medicare questions call Oregon's toll-free number (1-800-722-4134) and enter their ZIP code using the telephone dial pad.
2. The caller is routed to a SHIBA sponsor volunteer coordinator in their county service area or to the state SHIBA staff if no local program is available.
3. The volunteer answers the caller's questions and then offers to set up a one-on-one meeting. It may be at a local program office, such as an Area Agency on Aging (AAA) or Seniors and People w/Disabilities field office, other community centers, or the home of the client.

Certified volunteers are trained to answer questions about all aspects of Medicare, from supplemental policies to help fill "gaps" in coverage to how to obtain and enroll in prescription drug plans.

This year, SHIBA will provide one-on-one counseling to a minimum of 15,000 Medicare beneficiaries. It also will increase the number of volunteer counselors; provide training and outreach assistance to volunteers and other program partners; and establish SHIBA sponsors in counties that do not have a local SHIBA sponsor organization, including Umatilla, Morrow, Grant, and Malheur counties and some areas on the Oregon coast.

In 2006, SHIBA provided free counseling services to more than 20,000 Medicare beneficiaries and others. The large amount of contacts was due mainly to Medicare's open enrollment for Part D prescription drug coverage.

For more information on how to get help with Medicare or become a SHIBA volunteer and help others:

- Visit www.oregonshiba.org
- Call toll-free in Oregon: 1-800-722-4134

The Oregon SHIBA program is one of 54 advisory programs nationwide and in Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Virgin Islands to receive a share of \$30 million in CMS grants. Beneficiaries may also get help by calling 1-800-MEDICARE (634-2273) or visiting www.medicare.gov.

In Oregon, SHIBA is part of the Department of Consumer and Business Services. The department is Oregon's largest business regulatory and consumer protection agency. For more information, visit www.dcbcs.oregon.gov.