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Contact: Lisa Emerson, SHIBA program manager: (503) 378-5614
Cynthia Hylton, SHIBA field officer: (503) 378-2034

State commission recognizes SHIBA program volunteers

Salem – A state volunteer network that helped more than 30,000 Oregonians with Medicare’s new prescription drug coverage received the 2007 “Governor’s Outstanding Statewide Volunteer Program” award.

The Senior Health Insurance Benefits Assistance (SHIBA) program garnered one of seven volunteer awards announced Aug. 28 by Oregon Volunteers, a state commission that promotes volunteerism.

The commission recognized SHIBA for volunteers’ work in enrolling seniors and other Medicare beneficiaries in drug plans using Medicare’s online plan evaluator. Without volunteers, many seniors would not have been able to comprehend their plan choices or apply for the extra help that made coverage affordable, the announcement said.

SHIBA operates with four state staff members, 22 local sponsors, and hundreds of volunteers. About 300 volunteers were recruited and trained in the months before enrollment in Medicare’s prescription drug coverage began. Together, staff and volunteers logged nearly 23,500 hours through March 31, 2007, helping people understand and enroll in medical and prescription coverage.

SHIBA volunteers still are needed, now more than ever, as the program looks for new ways to reach people approaching Medicare eligibility, such as baby boomers.

Volunteers complete online training modules, attend a two-day training offered by state SHIBA staff members, and typically spend time shadowing a SHIBA counselor in their area.

“There’s no better way to learn about the intricacies of your Medicare choices than to be a volunteer and share your knowledge with others,” said Cynthia Hylton, SHIBA field officer.

SHIBA is part of the Department of Consumer and Business Services, Oregon’s largest business regulatory and consumer protection agency.

For assistance with Medicare questions or to volunteer, contact SHIBA at 1-800-722-4134.

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