

Medicare Part D Premiums to Decrease in 2012

BY FRANCES CORREA

FROM A PRESS BRIEFING HELD BY THE HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Medicare beneficiaries with prescription drug coverage under Part D will pay about \$1 less in monthly premiums next year for a basic plan, the Health and Human Services department announced. The projected pre-

mium drop is based on bids submitted by Part D plans for 2012.

"No seniors should ever have to choose between medication they need to be healthy and putting food on their table, and the health care law is helping to make sure they don't have that terrible choice," HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said at the briefing.

Further, about 900,000 beneficiaries have hit the Part D coverage gap or

"doughnut hole" this year and have become eligible for a 50% discount on covered brand-name drugs. As of June, that discount – a provision of the Affordable Care Act – has saved Medicare beneficiaries about \$462 million, Ms. Sebelius said.

"There [are] still critical gaps in coverage, especially for prescription drugs," she said. She added that 25% of seniors have reported that high costs have led them to skip dosages of medicine, cut pills in

half, or simply not fill their prescriptions.

Although lawmakers have finally passed an agreement to raise the nation's debt limit, Medicare remains vulnerable to cuts. Under the Budget Control Act of 2011, the bipartisan 12-member Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction, also known as the Super Committee, will have until Nov. 23 to decide where to trim out an additional more than \$1 trillion. ■

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