

Proposed Elimination of SHIPs Threatens Health and Independence of People with Medicare

Millions of people turn to State Health Insurance

Assistance Programs annually to navigate the complexities of Medicare

Arlington, VA (June 16, 2016) – The U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee has approved a Fiscal Year 2017 budget [appropriations bill](#) that completely eliminates the \$52.1 million in funding for the Medicare State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP). The [Center for Medicare Advocacy](#), [Medicare Rights Center](#), [National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare](#), and [National Council on Aging \(NCOA\)](#) strongly oppose this move because it would leave 55 million people with Medicare without the only program that provides free, personalized, unbiased counseling on the growing complexities of Medicare coverage.

Today’s Medicare beneficiary must choose among more than 20 prescription drug plans, an average of 19 Medicare Advantage plans, as well as various Medigap supplemental insurance policies—all with different premiums, cost sharing, provider networks, and coverage rules. For more than 24 years, SHIPs have advised, educated, and empowered individuals to navigate their state-specific Medicare choices. In addition, SHIPs help beneficiaries resolve fraud and abuse issues, billing problems, appeals, and enrollment in low-income health assistance programs. In 2015, SHIPs provided assistance to more than seven million individuals with Medicare.

“The SHIP network provides critical information upon which people with Medicare rely to make informed decisions about their coverage options and enrollment decisions,” Judith A. Stein, Executive Director, Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc. “The SHIPs are critical to providing assistance with these increasingly complicated choices. People with Medicare and their families from all over the country depend on SHIPs as the key source of unbiased guidance.”

“Eliminating SHIPs would leave millions of older Americans, people with disabilities, and families who need help comparing coverage options, appealing denials, applying for financial assistance, and navigating an evolving and increasingly complex program stranded—with nowhere to turn,” said Joe Baker, President of the Medicare Rights Center. “With 10,000 baby boomers aging into Medicare each day, it is imperative that the U.S. House of Representatives reject this unprecedented, nonsensical cut.”

“Senate appropriators have turned their backs on a growing number of people who will need SHIP services to navigate the complexities of Medicare coverage by proposing to eliminate program funding,” says Max Richtman, President and CEO of the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare. “This kind of penny-wise, pound-foolish lawmaking will threaten the economic security of millions of Medicare beneficiaries and their families.”

“Understanding the complexities and decisions required for Medicare is an overwhelming, isolating experience for seniors, people with disabilities, and caregivers who don’t know where to get help,” said James Firman, President and CEO of the NCOA. “SHIPs provide a valuable service that is especially needed for low-income Americans and if they disappear, there are no replacements for the critical program they provide. The loss of SHIPs threatens the economic security and the health of all current Medicare beneficiaries and the thousands who become eligible every day.”

Fifty-four SHIP grantees receive funding under the U.S. Administration for Community Living (every state, Puerto Rico, Guam, DC, and the U.S. Virgin Islands), and they oversee a network of more than 3,300 local SHIPs and over 15,000 counselors. In the past 10 years, the number of beneficiaries receiving personalized counseling from SHIPs has tripled.

For more information about SHIPs and the services they provide, visit <http://www.ncoa.org/IssueBriefs>.

About the Center for Medicare Advocacy

The Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc., established in 1986, is a national nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that provides education, advocacy and legal assistance to help older people and people with disabilities obtain fair access to Medicare and necessary health care. We focus on the needs of Medicare beneficiaries, people with chronic conditions, and those in need of long-term care. The organization is involved in writing, education, and advocacy activities of importance to Medicare beneficiaries nationwide. The Center is headquartered in Connecticut with offices in Washington, DC and offices throughout the country.

About the Medicare Rights Center

The Medicare Rights Center is a national, nonprofit consumer service organization that works to ensure access to affordable health care for older adults and people with disabilities through counseling and advocacy, educational programs and public policy initiatives.

About the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare

The mission of the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare, a membership organization, is to protect, preserve, promote and ensure the financial security, health and the well-being of current and future generations of maturing Americans. (<http://www.ncpssm.org/>)

About the National Council on Aging

The National Council on Aging (NCOA) is a respected national leader and trusted partner to help people aged 60+ meet the challenges of aging. Our mission is to improve the lives of millions of older adults, especially those who are struggling. Through innovative community programs and services, online help, and advocacy, NCOA is partnering with nonprofit organizations, government, and business to improve the health and economic security of 10 million older adults by 2020. Learn more at <http://www.ncoa.org> and @NCOAging.