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## Partnership for Prescription Assistance of Virginia (PPARx)

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# age in action

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## Case Study

### Partnership for Prescription Assistance of Virginia (PPARx)

Sarah Huddle, APR

#### Educational Objectives

1. To inform Virginia's older adult population and those who serve them about the Partnership for Prescription Assistance, a new program to help qualifying patients who lack prescription drug coverage get the medicines they need through the public or private program that best suits them, including the new Medicare prescription drug benefit.

2. To demonstrate, to older adults and those who assist them, the accessibility and ease of use of the Partnership for Prescription Assistance of Virginia.

#### Background

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, as cited by the Kaiser Foundation's 2004 report *Kaiser Commission on the Uninsured*, there were more than 1,061,000 uninsured Virginia residents in 2004, an increase of 10% over 2003 figures. With the expense of multiple medications, many uninsured older Virginians have to make the choice between basic living essentials and prescription medicines far too often. There are literally hundreds of public and private prescription assistance programs to help the qualifying uninsured; yet there is a knowledge gap between these programs offering help and those that need access to them.

The Partnership for Prescription Assistance (PPARx), a national initiative, bridges that gap by bringing together doctors and other health care providers, patient advocates and com-

munity leaders, and America's pharmaceutical companies, to help patients find the public or private patient assistance program that's right for them. PPARx provides a single point of access to more than 475 public and private patient assistance programs, including more than 180 programs offered by pharmaceutical companies. These programs provide assistance for nearly 2,500 prescription drugs to people in need. Patients may qualify to get prescription medicines for free or nearly free. Qualifying patients will also be given information on how to contact government programs.

The PPARx launched its services in April, and Virginia's chapter launched in August. More than 20 local organizations, including the Virginia Center on Aging, Virginia Lung Association, Rx Partnership, VCU Health Systems, the Virginia Association of Free Clinics, and the

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Virginia Pharmacists Association, as well as a fast-growing list of state organizations, are working with PPARx of Virginia to spread the word about the program.

### **How PPARx Works**

Enrollment is easy. To start the process of finding out if they might qualify for private or public assistance programs, including the new Medicare prescription drug benefit, patients or their medical caregivers can call the toll-free number, 1-888-4PPA -NOW (1-888-477-2669), or visit [www.pparx.org](http://www.pparx.org). For those who call, a trained specialist will ask a short series of questions, provide initial feedback, and help patients identify the specific programs for which they may qualify.

### **Information Required**

Patients should be ready to provide the following: age, state of residence and ZIP code, estimated gross annual household income, number of people living in their household, brand name of the prescription medicines they are currently taking or have been prescribed, and, if applicable, any type of health insurance and/or prescription coverage for which they are eligible. All responses to these questions are completely confidential.

### **Completing Applications**

The specialists also make the application process easy by helping patients fill out the application forms. Similar information and assistance are available on the web site. In addition to handling inquiries from English and Spanish speaking callers, the call center can accommodate approximately 150 other languages.

A patient who qualifies will receive information by mail about application processes and appropriate applications. The applications will show the information the patient provided on the phone. Web site visitors can print out their applications after providing information online. The patient must provide any remaining required information and may be required to obtain his or her doctor's signature. Depending on the program, either the patient or the doctor should mail the forms to the company sponsoring the specific program.

As enrollment begins for the new Medicare prescription drug benefit, the Partnership for Prescription Assistance of Virginia plans to provide Medicare-eligible patients who call or visit the web site with information on how they can apply for this new benefit, which is available to all 40 million Medicare beneficiaries.

### **Timeline to Receive Medications**

Although each patient assistance program has its own timeline, the companies involved in the Partnership for Prescription Assistance are committed to getting medicines to eligible patients as quickly as possible. Patients may contact the organization sponsoring a specific patient assistance program to ask when they will receive their medicines. Trained specialists at the Partnership for Prescription Assistance call center may provide patients with program-specific contact information and, in some cases, may transfer patients directly to the company sponsoring a particular program.

### **Case Study**

A 65-year-old woman suffering from high blood pressure and diabetes recently told a representative of the local free clinic she visited that she was alternating paying her rent and buying her prescription medications. She is currently taking eight prescription medications daily. She was skipping doses to make the medicines last longer. A clinic representative sat down with the patient and called 1-888-4PPA-NOW and reviewed her situation and relevant information.

The PPARx specialist took the information and found that the

woman was eligible for two different prescription assistance programs and mailed the appropriate enrollment forms to her, as she had no internet access at home. The patient completed the forms with the help of PPARx. Her free clinic representative mailed the forms to the prescription assistance programs along with her prescriptions for the medications. The patient's medications were sent to the free clinic and dispensed to the patient.

### **Study Questions**

1. How can a patient or medical caregiver have one single point of access to more than 475 public and private prescription assistance programs?
2. What information is needed to determine if a patient is eligible for prescription assistance?

### **About the Author**



Sarah Huddle works with Alliance Group, a Richmond-based public affairs and public relations firm, to heighten

awareness and usage of the Partnership for Prescription Assistance so Virginia's uninsured can obtain access to the prescription medicines they need.