

SPRING 2010



# Inside Medicare Rights

## FROM THE DESK OF JOE BAKER

15,000. The number of cases handled last year, like Mrs. M who was denied coverage for her heart medication but got it after we helped her appeal. 2,000. The number of people with low incomes enrolled in programs that saved them a total of \$5.1 million and allowed them to access care they could not have otherwise afforded. 8,500. The number of professionals provided with technical information so that they could help their clients. 400,000. The number of visits logged on our website, [www.MedicareInteractive.org](http://www.MedicareInteractive.org), which provides clear answers to Medicare questions.



The Medicare Rights Center turned 20 last fall, and after two decades of tireless work on behalf of older adults and people with disabilities, we've learned a thing or two. Through our national hotlines, we've learned that people often need help understanding their health coverage and accessing quality, affordable care. Through our efforts to enroll people with Medicare with low incomes in programs that help them pay for their care, we've learned that too many eligible Americans are not receiving the help they need. Through our Medicare policy work in Washington, D.C., we've learned that effecting change can take years, but that persistence does pay off.

It's been a busy, challenging and exciting year. We took our volunteer program in Westchester County (NY), Seniors Out Speaking on Medicare (SOS Medicare), on the road to Kansas. Through a partnership with the North Central-Flint Hills Area Agency on Aging and other Kansas agencies, SOS Medicare launched in Kansas in fall 2009. Throughout the coming year and beyond, the program will help ensure that people with Medicare and their caregivers across the state receive clear, accurate guidance about Medicare, and understand their rights. We are also working with partners in Maryland and Florida to set up SOS Medicare in those states.

In Washington D.C., we continue to monitor Medicare policy and advocate for changes that strengthen the Medicare program for consumers. The health care reform debate in particular has kept us busy; we have offered clear, accurate information to the public about how health reform will affect Medicare. And we worked to ensure that reform included provisions that provide real help to people with Medicare, such as the elimination of the "doughnut hole," the gap in Medicare's drug coverage.

We have always known that Medicare provides a vital lifeline to the most vulnerable among us, and as we move into our third decade we know that more work is necessary to

Everyone  
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health care.

ensure that Medicare keeps its promise. There is perhaps no better illustration of the Medicare Rights Center's mission than our consumer hotline, which is staffed by volunteers who receive thousands of calls each year. Some people call us with simple questions and others with more complex problems, but everyone who calls receives

counseling rooted in twenty years of experience and the belief that everyone deserves access to affordable health care.

By serving one person, we seek to serve all people with Medicare. The individuals we serve help us identify systemic problems, which we work to change through education and policy initiatives so that we improve and preserve Medicare for generations to come.

I encourage you to read more about our accomplishments and to meet some of our staff and volunteers by reading our Annual Report online.

Read our 2009  
Annual Report  
online at:



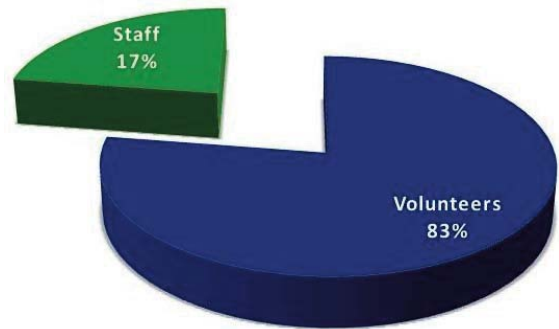
[www.medicarerights.org/pdf/2009annualreport.pdf](http://www.medicarerights.org/pdf/2009annualreport.pdf)

## Staff Profile: Lizaura German

*Lizaura (Lizzie) German recently joined the Medicare Rights Center as Volunteer Coordinator. Before coming to Medicare Rights, Lizzie coordinated a volunteer program at Catholic Medical Mission Board, where she recruited, placed and deployed hundreds of volunteers to sites around the world.*



**Volunteers make up more than three quarters of the Medicare Rights Center's workforce.**



**Q.** *You've been at Medicare Rights just a few short months. How are you settling in?*

**A.** Really well, actually. I'm very excited. Having the opportunity to work with some really great people who are passionate about health care is unbelievable. It's only been six weeks or so, but I'm diving in.

**Q.** *Have you always had a passion for health care?*

**A.** Always. My mom is a social worker, so I grew up with a passion for service to others. She's super-giving and I have that in me. I'm actually finishing up my master's in health care policy, which is really exciting. I've been working in international health care, but more and more I'm seeing that you have to start at home. It's really important for us to make changes here in the States before we can effect change overseas.

**Q.** *What is your vision for the volunteer program at Medicare Rights?*

**A.** One of my first goals is to streamline our operation by creating the right structure to support our volunteers and building a sustainable model for our program. It is extremely important for volunteers and staff alike to have these in place to do their job to the best of their ability.

I am working with volunteers and Medicare Rights staff to create a handbook and a new database that will enable volunteers to more effectively counsel clients on the hotline. We also plan to recruit and train volunteers for new roles at the organization, in departments where we traditionally have not had volunteer help. My ultimate goal is to increase the quality and productivity of volunteers' work.

**Q.** *What's your favorite thing about Medicare Rights?*

**A.** My favorite thing is the passion that everyone here has to help people with Medicare and their caregivers. That's the best part of being here.

## Medicare Rights Center in the News

Medicare Rights is a nationally recognized source of Medicare information and policy analysis. In recent months, our experts have been featured in such national publications as the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post* and the *Associated Press*. Our president, Joe Baker, has appeared on television outlets such as *NBC* and *CBS News*, and twice appeared on the *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*.

## Program Update: **Client Services, Enrollment Department**

*By Heather Bates*

One year ago, the Medicare Rights Center's Enrollment Department started collaborating with the Food Bank for New York City to increase the number of people with limited incomes who receive benefits for which they are eligible. Together we developed counseling messages that are designed to encourage people to apply for four benefits: Medicare Savings Programs (MSP), Extra Help, the New York State Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage (EPIC) Program and Food Stamps (or Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program). As a result of our joint efforts we have counseled over 4,000 clients citywide, and have enrolled more than 1,600 clients in New York City in multiple benefits programs. We see the need for our work every day in the stories of the people we help:

*In September of 2009, Mr. S reached the Part D coverage gap—the period in which consumers are responsible for paying 100 percent of their prescription drug costs—and could no longer afford*

the medication he takes to manage his multiple sclerosis. Mr. S needed his medication immediately, and called Medicare Rights Center's consumer hotline for help. After hearing Mr. S's story, a hotline counselor referred him to the Enrollment Department, where an enrollment staff member helped him complete an expedited EPIC application and an MSP application. Mr. S was able to go to the pharmacy later that week to get his medication, and was also approved for an MSP that will save him over \$1,100 in out-of-pocket costs per year.

We are also working with a number of other groups in New York State and beyond to find ways to reach and enroll

more people in programs that can help them. At the national level, we assist hundreds of people across the country in applying for Extra Help, the federal program that helps people with Medicare pay for their prescription drugs, and have partnered with organizations in Kansas and Florida to increase enrollment in those states. Finally, we are in the process of expanding our Deputization Project, which trains community advocates and social workers to apply for MSPs on behalf of their clients. We currently have 700 deputized agents across the city, and our goal is to increase this number to more than 1,000. If you are a New York City-based professional working with older adults who need assistance paying for their Medicare costs, you can learn more about our Deputization Project on our website at <http://bit.ly/8YG1bI>.

## The Spirit of Giving Is Alive and Well at Medicare Rights

For the past three years, the Medicare Rights Center has served as a volunteer site for AmeriCorps VISTA members. Not only do VISTAs dedicate a year of service to Medicare Rights, they also find time to volunteer outside of the organization. On the morning of February 24, six of the Medicare Rights Center's VISTAs traveled to SoHo to volunteer at God's Love We Deliver, a New York City-based nonprofit. God's Love provides meals and nutritional counseling to people in New York City, Hudson County and Newark, New Jersey, who are living with serious illnesses such as HIV/AIDS and cancer. The VISTAs helped out by preparing meatballs and chopping vegetables in the state-of-the-art God's Love kitchen.



VISTAs Laura Frischer and James Wong



VISTAs Kristin Brown and Courtney Cohen



Perri Peltz, Joe Baker and Dana Kurzweil



Stuart Appelbaum

## Medicare Rights Celebrates 20th Anniversary

Last fall, Medicare Rights celebrated twenty years of helping people with Medicare at an anniversary celebration dinner at the Ritz-Carlton Battery Park in New York City. The event's honorees were Drew Altman, President and CEO of the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, and Stuart Appelbaum, President of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union. Guests receiving special recognition were longtime hotline counselor Walter Bach and past president of Medicare Rights, Robert M. Hayes. Former WNBC News Coanchor Perri Peltz emceed the event.



Joe Baker and Denise Grant



Drew Altman, Bruce C. Vladeck and Joe Baker



Board of Directors, from left to right: Alicia Glekas Everett, Donna Regenstreif, Herman Rosen, Larry Madison, Edith Everett, Simon Stevens, Joe Baker, Marilyn Moon, Alex Gleser, Bruce C. Vladeck and Alan B. Lubin

# Medicare Rights Center's Policy Department Celebrates Increased Drug Coverage Under Medicare

By Ilene Stein

The Medicare Rights Center Policy Department, located in Washington, D.C., has worked with health reform policymakers to advocate for Medicare-centered reforms that help older Americans and people with disabilities access affordable, high-quality health care. Through meetings, testimonies, letters to congressional



President Obama signs the reconciliation bill

leaders, public statements and media coverage, Medicare Rights has been at the center of the health reform debate. Since our first priority is Medicare consumers, the Policy Department developed educational materials to help people with Medicare understand how health care reform will affect them, including a series of fact sheets

that have been featured in publications such as the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Washington Post*.

The greatest success of Medicare Rights Center's health care reform efforts is the closure of the Part D doughnut hole—when consumers are responsible for the complete cost of their drugs. In 2010, all people with Medicare who enter the coverage gap will receive a \$250 rebate. Beginning in 2011, people with Medicare will receive a 50 percent discount on brand-name drugs and a 7 percent discount on generic drugs while they are in the doughnut hole. The consumers' share of costs in the coverage gap will continue to decrease through 2020, at which time the doughnut hole will disappear and people will be responsible for 25 percent of costs for both brand-name and generic drugs. For a full explanation, see Medicare Rights Center's fact sheet "Health Care Reform: Closing the Doughnut Hole" at <http://bit.ly/9QzqRD>.



President Obama and Dr. Jill Biden

Medicare Rights Center President Joe Baker was invited to attend the signing of the reconciliation bill that officially closed the doughnut hole. Now the Policy Department is focusing on protecting consumers and assuring that implementation of reforms and all parts of the Medicare program are consumer-centered.

## Social Security Administration Presents Public Service Award to Medicare Rights

The Social Security Administration honored Medicare Rights on January 8 with a Public Service Award for outreach efforts to inform people with Medicare about Extra Help, the federal program that helps people with low incomes pay for prescription drugs under Medicare Part D. The award was presented at a press event designed to raise awareness about changes to Extra Help's eligibility guidelines. Chubby Checker was on hand to publicize the changes, or "twists," in the guidelines, and Medicare Rights staff danced the Twist with the man who started it all!



Social Security Commissioner Michael Astrue and Medicare Rights President Joe Baker



Chubby Checker leading the audience in the Twist

## SUPPORT US

Our work is made possible by the support of people like you. To donate, visit [www.medicarerights.org/support-us](http://www.medicarerights.org/support-us).

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Hotline: 800-333-4114

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.

**MEDICARE RIGHTS CENTER**  
Getting Medicare right