

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Department on Aging Offers Free Counseling for Medicare Annual Open Enrollment Period Starting October 15** *SHIP Provides Help to Seniors & People with Disabilities for Insurance Options; Call (800) 252-8966 or visit the website at <http://www.illinois.gov/aging/>*

**SPRINGFIELD - October 14, 2014.** To assist Medicare-eligible individuals regarding their Medicare insurance options, Illinois Department on Aging (IDoA) Director John K. Holton, Ph.D., today announced free counseling assistance is available. Medicare Open Enrollment starts tomorrow, October 15, and runs until December 7. The department's Senior Health Insurance Program, (SHIP), provides free counseling for Medicare beneficiaries and their caregivers.

"Medicare coverage and deciding which of the different options to select can be overwhelming, but a SHIP Counselor can help you choose the best option for you," said IDoA Director Holton. "Whether enrolling for the first time or reviewing current coverage, open enrollment is the time to determine how Medicare Part D and Medicare Advantage plan benefits work for you. SHIP counseling offers peace-of-mind, knowing you are getting the most from your health insurance benefits."

SHIP counselors can explain the drug, health, and supplemental plans that are available to help seniors and people with disabilities make the best choices. To contact SHIP call (800) 252-8966 weekdays from 8:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. For more information about SHIP including a list of SHIP sites, view the website at <http://www.illinois.gov/aging/ship/Pages/default.aspx>.

SHIP is a year round program, not affiliated with any insurance company, and counselors do not sell or solicit any type of insurance. Counselors educate and answer questions about Medicare A, B, D and Medicare Advantage plans, Medicare Supplement policies, Extra Help for Part D, long term care insurance, and employer/retiree health plans. Counselors are skilled at filing Medicare appeals and will help make sense of the paperwork associated with Medicare such as explanation of benefits notices and bills from medical providers.

It is important to clarify Medicare Open Enrollment (October 15 to December 7) is not the same as the open enrollment for uninsured people to sign up for coverage on the Illinois marketplace called *Get Covered Illinois* (which starts November 15, 2014). If you have health coverage through Medicare, the marketplace will not have any effect on your Medicare coverage. To compare 2015 drug and health plans and find out more about Medicare, including preventive services now covered, log on the federal website at [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov).

#### **About the Illinois Department on Aging**

The Department's mission is to serve and advocate for older Illinoisans and their caregivers by administering quality and culturally appropriate programs that promote partnerships and encourage independence, dignity, and quality of life. For information about programs to assist older adults in Illinois, their families and their caregivers, call the Department on Aging at 1-800-252-8966 or (TTY, hearing impaired use) call 1-888-206-1327, or log on to the department website at: <http://www.illinois.gov/aging/>.