



ADVOCACY ALERT!

Protect SHIP Funding



Update - August 24, 2017

Your help is needed!

The President's 2018 federal budget and the House Appropriations Committee Labor – Health and Human Services (HHS) bill for FY 2018 eliminate all funding for the Medicare State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP). This funding, which was already cut by nearly 10% in FY 2017, provides people on Medicare or soon-to-be-eligible for Medicare with free, unbiased counseling on the ever-increasing complexities of Medicare coverage.

The State of Wisconsin receives approximately \$1 million annually through the federal SHIP grant. This funding is used to support the:

- SHIP counselors staffing the toll-free statewide Medigap Helpline and Medigap Part D and Prescription Drug Helpline operated by the State of Wisconsin Board on Aging and Long Term Care (BOALTC).
- SHIP counselors staffing the toll-free statewide Medicare Part D Disability Drug Benefit Helpline operated by Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW) for people with disabilities and their families or guardians.
- Elder and Disability Benefit Specialists who are SHIP counselors providing service to all 72 counties and 11 tribes in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin's SHIP counselors and volunteers are helping Medicare beneficiaries navigate through their *state-specific* Medicare choices and make informed decisions about Medicare prescription drug plans (24 available), Medicare Advantage plans (71 plan choices, plus 18 Special Needs Plans and 2 Medicare Savings Account plans), and Medigap supplemental insurance policies. They also help resolve fraud and abuse issues and billing problems, assist with appeals, and help with enrollment in low-income health assistance programs. With special access points within the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), SHIP counselors are often able to help resolve consumer problems quickly.

Wisconsin is home to nearly 1.1 million Medicare beneficiaries and the population is growing rapidly with over 32,000 Wisconsin residents becoming newly-Medicare-eligible last year alone. In 2016 Wisconsin SHIP counselors handled over 86,000 client contacts and almost 18% were referred by Medicare, Social Security, or another agency. The one-on-one assistance provided by SHIP counselors cannot be replaced by access to online tools such as Plan Finder or a national helpline. Many of the vulnerable residents needing assistance would not be able to independently access online tools or receive the assistance needed without the personal support provided by the SHIP counselors. Additionally, SHIP counselors continue to conduct outreach events (over 2,500 in 2016) to help newly-eligible individuals learn the basics

ACTION NEEDED:

- 1.) Ask U.S. Senators Tammy Baldwin & Ron Johnson to reject/speak out against including the SHIP funding cuts in the Senate Labor – HHS bill.***
- 2.) Ask your U.S. Representative to support any efforts to increase SHIP funding in the final House bill.***

of Medicare, provide beneficiaries with seminars on Medicare's preventive and wellness benefits, and help people learn to use the Medicare Website to research and enroll in a plan.

Defunding SHIP would mean over 1 million beneficiaries in Wisconsin would no longer have access to free, unbiased, personalized Medicare counseling services. House and Senate Appropriators are expected to consider funding bills when they return to Washington, D.C., after the Labor Day recess. Members of Congress are in-district for approximately two more weeks! **If you do not want these valuable services to go away...**

- 1.) Contact [U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin](#) who is a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee and ask her to ensure cuts to SHIP are not included in the Senate Labor – HHS bill.
- 2.) Contact [U.S. Senator Ron Johnson](#) and encourage him to reach out to his colleagues on the Senate Appropriations Committee to ask them to reject any cuts in SHIP funding.

Ultimately, both the House and Senate will need to pass identical funding bills, so also...

- 3.) Reach out to your U.S. Representative and ask him/her to support any efforts to increase SHIP funding in a *final* House Labor – HHS bill.

To find your U.S. Representative, go to: www.house.gov (enter your zip code in the white box in the upper right-hand corner under FIND YOUR REPRESENTATIVE).

For more information:

The National SHIP Technical Assistance (TA) Center recently posted a series of video testimonials from Medicare beneficiaries who benefited from meeting with a SHIP counselor. To view the videos, go to: www.shiptacenter.org and click on the menu item "How SHIP Helped Me."

For a complete list of Wisconsin SHIP resources, check out: [Medicare Counseling for Wisconsin Residents](#) on the Wisconsin Department of Health Services website.

For the latest Fact Sheet for Wisconsin, go to: [Wisconsin SHIP Fact Sheet](#) (P-00166).

The National Council on Aging (NCOA) released this [Medicare SHIP Funding Issue Brief](#) in July 2017.

Check out [Wisconsin Members of Congress](#) for contact information for your federal legislators.