

SENIORCARE, A MODEL FOR BIPARTISANSHIP

By Tom Frazier, April 16, 2019

Recently it was announced by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) that SeniorCare, Wisconsin's popular Rx Drug Assistance Program for lower-income older people, had its federal waiver extended for 10 years until December 2028. This is great news for the nearly 100,000 SeniorCare enrollees who will not need to worry whether or not the program is going to continue every three years or so, and is another validation of the success of the program in lowering drug prices for older adults. SeniorCare is targeted to older persons with incomes below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (in 2019 that is \$24,980 for an individual and \$33,820 for a couple).

One of the most interesting aspects of SeniorCare has been its bipartisan political support from initiation until now. It was bipartisan in the planning that included all stakeholders, bipartisan when it was passed into law by the legislature by unanimous vote, bipartisan in its implementation by the Department of Health Services, and bipartisan in its continued operation since it began on September 1, 2002. And, SeniorCare has been highly successful in both reducing drug prices for lower-income seniors and saving millions of dollars in drug costs for the Medicaid program.

While SeniorCare ought to be a model for the federal government in how to reduce the price of Rx drugs, it is certainly a model of how to plan and implement government programs on a bipartisan basis. I believe that it is so popular because one, it works so well and two, because it became law through a bipartisan process that was not all that unique back in 2002. In Wisconsin we are now in the process of passing a state budget for the next two years. I urge state legislators to look to SeniorCare and find as many things as they can in that budget that would benefit the people of Wisconsin, as SeniorCare has benefitted elders, by bipartisan compromise and support. Maybe the next SeniorCare program is in there somewhere.