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PRESS RELEASE

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IDoA announces start of Medicare open enrollment period *Senior Health Insurance Program offers free one-on-one assistance*

Springfield – Saturday, October 15th marks the beginning of the annual Medicare open enrollment period. The Illinois Department on Aging (IDoA) is reminding eligible older adults to use this time to review their plan options. The Department offers free counseling assistance to help educate Medicare-eligible individuals and their caregivers about their Medicare insurance options through the Senior Health Insurance Program (SHIP). Medicare Open Enrollment begins October 15 and runs through December 7.

Navigating different plan options can sometimes be overwhelming; SHIP counselors are on hand to help seniors understand their Medicare benefits, sort through their options to find the best one for them and complete the enrollment process. Assistance is available year-round to Medicare-eligible beneficiaries, their families and their caregivers.

"There are over 300 SHIP offices throughout Illinois that are ready to schedule an appointment to assist with open enrollment," said SHIP Director Sandy Leith. "I encourage folks to take advantage of this service as our caring counselors will work with you to make sense of a complicated system and guide people to the best choice for healthcare for 2017. We anticipate this year to be a very busy enrollment season."

During open enrollment, eligible adults can adjust Medicare Advantage or Medicare prescription drug coverage; change from original Medicare to a Medicare Advantage plan (or vice versa); switch between Medicare Advantage plans; join a Medicare Prescription Drug Plan; or switch existing drug plans or drop Medicare prescription drug coverage.

SHIP counselors work through the Medicare.gov plan finder to help seniors and people with disabilities make the best choices for their individual situation. To contact SHIP, call 1-800-252-8966 on weekdays from 8:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. For more information about SHIP, including a list of SHIP locations, visit our website at <http://www.illinois.gov/aging/ship/Pages/default.aspx>.

To compare 2017 drug and health plans on your own and to find out more about Medicare, including preventive services now covered, visit the federal website at www.medicare.gov or review your 2017 Medicare & You handbook. You can also call 1-800-Medicare (1-800-633-4227); Medicare phone lines are open 24/7.

SHIP is not affiliated with any insurance company, and counselors do not sell or solicit any type of insurance. SHIP counselors in the field make sure seniors and people with disabilities on Medicare are aware of options that can save them money. Counselors educate and answer questions about Medicare, Part A, B, and D, Medicare Supplement insurance, and Medicare Advantage plans.

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