



Prevention and The Affordable Care Act: Benefits to Seniors

Prevention is important for Americans of all ages – and seniors are no exception. By 2030, 20 percent of the U.S. population (roughly 71 million Americans) will be 65 or older.¹ Eighty percent of America's seniors live with at least one chronic disease, yet we know that many of these conditions are preventable. That's why the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) contains important provisions that will improve the ability of our senior citizens to access and afford clinical and community preventive services to help avert acute illness and injury and prevent chronic disease.

- **Annual Wellness Visit.** As of January 1, 2011, Medicare now covers an annual wellness visit to make it easier for seniors to visit their physician for a check-up before an acute or chronic illness develops. This visit includes allowing physicians to work with Medicare patients to develop a personalized prevention plan so seniors can take proactive steps on their own to make healthier decisions and prevent illness or injury (for more information, see ACA §4103).
- **More Affordable Clinical Services.** As of 2011, Medicare patients make no copayment or deductible payments on evidence-based recommended preventive services that are covered under Medicare. Where clinical prevention is appropriate and recommended, seniors can now focus on doing what it takes to stay healthy instead of what a service or screening is going to cost (for more information, see ACA §4104).
- **Immunizations.** Despite government recommendations, a recent study found that one-third of Americans aged 65 and over did not receive a flu shot.² Seniors who get the flu are at a higher risk of developing life-threatening complications. For flu and other infectious diseases, immunizations are a critical component of our strategy to reduce preventable illness among seniors. The ACA authorizes states to obtain additional vaccines for adults and has made investments from the Prevention and Public Health Fund to ensure that influenza and other vaccines are available for our senior population (for more information, see ACA §4204).
- **Community Transformation and Health.** The ACA's Prevention and Public Health Fund is making targeted investments in local communities across the country to empower local leaders and businesses to take cross-cutting steps to combat chronic disease.

As with any age group, prevention has real health and financial benefits for seniors and all Americans. Early detection of disease saves lives and money. Yet it also enables independent living and a sustained quality of life in retirement. New investments in prevention made possible through the ACA, both those specific to seniors and those that affect all Americans, will help us begin to transform our health care system in to one that improves health by preventing disease in the first place and improves quality of life for seniors and their grandchildren.

¹ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and The Merck Company Foundation. *The State of Aging and Health in America 2007*. Whitehouse Station, NJ: The Merck Company Foundation; 2007.

² U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Prevalence Data, Nationwide (States and D.C.) – 2005 vs 2004, Immunization*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006.