

Stop. Question. Call. Q&A: Kevin Robertson, North Carolina Outreach Strategies – Education Campaign Partnerships

Kevin Robertson, M.P.A., C.A.V.N.C., is the Statewide Volunteer Manager for the Seniors' Health Insurance Information Program ([SHIIP](#)) of the North Carolina Department of Insurance. Kevin has worked with the SHIIP for more than four years, and he brings more than 13 years of volunteer management experience to the SHIP network.

Kevin spoke with HAP about North Carolina's new Partnership for Medicare Education, which recently embarked on a statewide outreach campaign to help Medicare beneficiaries understand their health plan choices. The key message of the campaign is "Stop. Question. Call." Using the media and six Medicare forums to disseminate the message, the campaign is reaching a vast audience and has been successful to date. Call volume to the customer service representatives at the SHIIP hotline has increased, and callers report hearing about the hotline from the campaign.

In the following Q&A, Kevin describes more about this campaign and other ongoing volunteer initiatives at the North Carolina SHIIP. If you have additional questions about "Stop. Question. Call." or want to discuss specific volunteer program development ideas, please contact Kevin at kroberts@ncdoi.net.

How did the Partnership for Medicare Education come about?

Hospitals, senior support organizations, and the North Carolina SHIIP continue to hear heart-breaking stories about seniors who, for a variety of reasons, have been enrolled in private plans that do not meet their needs. Anyone who works in Medicare knows how complicated the selection process has become. In North Carolina alone, there are 79 Medicare Advantage (MA) products. Since various organizations serve seniors, we wanted to create a coalition aimed to tell seniors, their families, and providers that there is a resource available to help them navigate the decision process.

North Carolina's SHIIP Director, Carla Obiol, and hospital administrators from around the state talked about these challenges and it became clear that joining together would help to connect with more beneficiaries. Their leadership didn't end there. The N.C. SHIIP joined forces with the AARP, the N.C. Hospital Association, the N.C. Medical Society, the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, and the N.C. Health Care Facilities Association to form the first-ever collaboration of these organizations called the Partnership for Medicare Education.

Why the Stop. Question. Call. campaign?

Our goal is to work through a variety of means to urge seniors and their families to check with SHIIP before making changes in their Medicare plans. The Partnership

created the message "Stop...before you make any changes to your Medicare plan. Question...whether the changes are right for you. Call...the Seniors' Health Insurance Information Program for free advice."

In early November, N.C. Insurance Commissioner Jim Long helped us kick off the initiative through a media campaign in 26 counties surrounding Wake County (around Raleigh) and the distribution of posters. The same message was relayed in six Medicare forums around the state.

What results have you seen so far?

While we can't say that the campaign has been solely responsible, we have seen an increase in calls to the SHIIP hotline. Because we've asked each customer service representative to ask callers how they heard about the SHIIP program, we are confident that much of the increase is the result of the campaign.

What advice do you have for other SHIP programs?

We have really benefited from working with other organizations. It takes time to know who is doing what around the state, but the impact of an educational campaign can be increased when key partners collaborate, and the organizations use their unique channels and contacts to further the group's goal.

An important part of this strategy is to pay attention to the timing of your campaign. The Partnership decided to launch this campaign around the holidays when families are getting together and talking about the issues. Due to the enrollment period and this campaign, we've seen an increase in calls to the SHIP hotline around the holidays.

The Stop. Question. Call. message is working for us, and we welcome other states to adopt this model or something similar.

With such an extensive background in volunteer management, can you share a little about your volunteer program?

In November 2006, we implemented an online training program, which has, in part, led to the doubling in the number of newly trained volunteers for 2007. In the past, our five regional managers were responsible for periodic in-person trainings, but with challenges like their busy workloads and the coordinating of volunteer schedules, we've seen that we can train far more people at their convenience using this web-based system.

We are also working with the community college system in the state to provide an opportunity for volunteers to take a computer course since much of the SHIIP's work is done online.

HAP's [Medicare Advantage Resource Center](#) has a variety of new information to help beneficiaries during the Open Enrollment Period.