

Maine SHIP Training and Certification Program

Initial Training

New SHIP volunteers and staff attend a 3 day, 13-hour initial training to learn about Medicare and related topics. Additional training is available, depending upon the interests and training requirements for volunteers and staff. Volunteers and staff can also learn more about Medicare and SHIP by visiting Maine's interactive online training website. Maine's online certification materials include modules on all aspects of Medicare as well as other state-specific modules such as Error, Fraud and Abuse; Skills and Responsibilities; MaineCare; and Long-Term Care Insurance.

Update Training

Each spring and fall, a statewide conference is held to provide SHIP volunteers and staff with updated information and training on Medicare changes, counseling issues, and a variety of Medicare related topics. This year Maine is replacing one of these conferences with a half-day multi-session webinar. The decision to utilize this online resource was in response to reduced training budgets at all levels, increased travel restrictions, and the desire to minimize the additional expenses associated with centralized conferencing.

Competency Testing

The Maine SHIP has created several quizzes and exams to check volunteer and staff knowledge on various Medicare topics. These quizzes and exams correspond with the Medicare CD Suite Training Modules and additional Maine specific modules available on the Maine DHHS - Office of Elder Services (OES) Website. Volunteers and staff can currently take these quizzes and exams online. Once completed, these exams and quizzes are scored automatically through Maine's OES website. To prevent potential misuse of the site or the information it contains, Maine has opted to restrict access to this site. Maine requires a user name and password to access the Training Modules and testing materials. Restricting access to this information also helps limit any potential liability issues associated with misuse of the site.

Maine SHIP's quizzes and exams prepare volunteers and staff for the formal testing available through Maine's pilot participation in the online certification tool offered by the SHIP Resource Center.

The Maine SHIP still uses face-to-face training as much as possible. Online training and testing opportunities supplement this traditional training method. For example, after participants complete the initial training, the online piece is used as a post-training review for volunteers and staff.

Training Exercises

The Maine SHIP uses an interactive exercise with its volunteers and staff to reinforce the training and information learned about Medicare. Participants are instructed to assume they are about to turn 65. They are then asked to identify the best Medicare choices for themselves, based upon the prescriptions they take, the providers they use, type of supplemental insurance they should consider, etc. Each participant then shares their plan with the group and discusses the reasoning behind their decision. The Maine SHIP has found that this type of self-reflective exercise is even more meaningful and tangible than a case study. It helps participants synthesize and apply the information they've learned during the training sessions.

Advice from the Maine SHIP

In most cases, well designed and well delivered face-to-face training is going to be the most effective way to share information. Unfortunately, because of budget constraints, the rural nature of many of our states, potential logistical challenges, and existing time commitments, this isn't always the most practical alternative.

There is value in trying new strategies, evaluating their effectiveness and then utilizing and incorporating them into your program. For instance, it can be helpful to use online training to reach rural volunteers as a cost effective way to standardize training across the state. When considering online training, it's also important to consider ways that online training can supplement the face-to-face training and interaction already in place. Online training can serve as an excellent refresher that provides SHIP volunteers and staff with ongoing training that fits their individual schedules. The Maine SHIP encourages other states to consider how they might personalize an online training and certification program to meet specific needs of each state's unique program.

An online certification and training tool serves not only as a study tool for certification, but as an easily accessible reference tool. This is one of the strengths of Maine's Online Certification Tool. It is more than a testing instrument; it is a learning tool that benefits counselors regardless of their current skill level.