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## **Getting Started: What SHIPs Need to Know**

### **Things to Consider about the New AEP Schedule**

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The final health insurance reform legislation passed by Congress helps ensure that Americans will have access to quality, affordable health care. A key provision in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (H.R. 3590) simplified the Annual Enrollment Period (AEP) for Medicare Parts C and D by moving and extending the enrollment period to start on October 15 and end on December 7, and providing an annual 45-day period for beneficiaries to disenroll from a MA plan and return to Original Medicare. The new law means that the change to the Part D plan enrollment schedule will go into effect for plan year 2012, with the first revised enrollment period occurring in the fall of 2011.

This long-sought after improvement is the result of direct advocacy efforts by HAP, based on feedback from SHIPs, to inform and educate Congress about the need to provide Medicare consumers with more time to make informed decisions about their health care choices and apply for low-income programs.

Whether your program is well-versed in planning for and meeting the needs of beneficiaries during the AEP, or is interested in making some changes, this tool is designed to help SHIPs consider how the new AEP schedule will affect their [program operations](#), including volunteer recruitment, training, community outreach, and partnerships. This tool offers suggestions, or “things to consider,” to help ensure a successful transition to the new AEP schedule from the perspective of both SHIP staff and counselors and Medicare beneficiaries.

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#### **Volunteer Recruitment**

It should be easier for SHIPs to recruit volunteers now, since the new AEP schedule won't include as many major holidays. However, SHIPs should still begin their recruitment efforts sooner to ensure volunteers can be fully trained and on board prior to October 15.

#### **Training**

SHIPs will need to hold update training to teach current volunteers about AEP and other Medicare-related health care reform changes. Ideally, this training should take place as soon as possible, so volunteers can begin alerting Medicare consumers about important changes.

SHIPs must also re-think the timing of any training they would typically hold in the fall, prior to the AEP. They'll need to move up any Part D update training or initial

training for new volunteers to ensure all training is complete by the summer or early fall. Additionally, SHIPs will need to begin preparing for those trainings sooner than usual, by developing and printing their training materials earlier.

### **Community Outreach to Medicare Consumers**

SHIPs should start highlighting AEP and other Medicare updates in their community outreach and public education activities. By communicating important changes early and often, SHIPs can proactively educate Medicare beneficiaries and minimize questions and confusion during the AEP.

### **Partnerships with Other Organizations**

As always, SHIPs will need to utilize valuable partnerships to help with important AEP activities such as recruiting volunteers, hosting events, and speaking at trainings. SHIPs should notify their current partners of the revised AEP schedule and make sure they're still willing and able to help. SHIPs may also want to establish new partnerships with other organizations that can help them achieve their AEP goals. By partnering early and often, SHIPs and their partners can make the AEP schedule change easier for Medicare beneficiaries.

### **Agency Support**

Many local SHIPs receive extra in-kind support from their agencies during the AEP. This support can include things such as additional clerical help, more office space for volunteers, or increased counseling assistance from other agency staff. As such, SHIPs will need to alert their agencies to the new AEP schedule and work with their agencies to plan for continued in-kind support during an earlier time period.

HAP will keep SHIPs updated with more AEP tools as CMS releases additional information about the change to the enrollment period. In the meantime, don't forget to check out our other [resources](#) to help you prepare for the AEP.