

Kulongoski Announces Expansion of Oregon Prescription Drug Program

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Pledges to Push for Further Expansion to Private Employers! Governor Kulongoski announced that Thursday was the first day that any Oregonian without prescription drug coverage was eligible to enroll in the Oregon Prescription Drug Program (OPDP), which is the state's bulk-purchasing pool for prescription medications and offers savings up to 60% for uninsured citizens. Measure 44 was enacted by the voters last month, removing previous age and income eligibility restrictions for OPDP. Enrollment assistance information is available online at www.opdp.org or the toll-free number 1-888-441-OPDP. "The increasing costs of health care and prescription medications are placing a real hardship on Oregonians who do not have health insurance with drug coverage," Governor Ted Kulongoski said. "An overwhelming majority of Oregonians agreed with the passage of Measure 44 that it is time to do our part to make sure our citizens have access to affordable prescription drugs" and today marks an important new step in that direction. Changes under Measure 44 officially take effect Friday, December 8, and will offer relief on prescription drug costs for the more than 600,000 uninsured adults and children who are currently without prescription drug coverage. Also because of a waiver that the Governor secured from the Federal Government, older Oregonians enrolled in the Federal Medicare Part D prescription drug program may be eligible to participate in OPDP. The Governor also applauded the work of the AARP, Oregonians for Health Security and other critical partners, including State Senator Bill Morrisette, for championing this program and leading the charge to victory for Measure 44 and uninsured Oregonians. "The Oregon Prescription Drug Program is a proven approach that will now be even better at allowing our state to tackle the skyrocketing costs of prescription drugs and bringing more affordable, accessible medicines to Oregonians of all ages," said Jerry Cohen, state director of AARP Oregon, who along with Sen. Bill Morrisette served as one of Measure 44's co-petitioners. "This is a solid and critical first step in lowering health care costs for everyone and creating a healthy Oregon." "This is a great day for Oregonians through the state," said Senator Bill Morrisette, co-petitioner for Measure 44. "Oregon is once again a trailblazer and sets an example for the federal government to follow." "This not only helps Oregonians without prescription drug coverage, but it helps all Oregonians by lowering drug costs," said Mary-Beth Healy, Executive Director of Oregonians for Health Security. The Governor also announced that the Northwest Prescription Drug Consortium, a partnership between OPDP and a similar purchasing pool in the state of Washington, signed a contract with The ODS Companies for Pharmacy Benefit Administration services. The contract, which takes effect February 1, 2007, promises to increase savings for OPDP members, to improve the administrative efficiency of the program, and to make drug purchasing through the program even more transparent. "ODS strives to make healthcare easier for individuals in our community. Being a part of the Northwest Prescription Drug Consortium is just one more way for us to make healthcare more accessible for Oregonians," said Robin Richardson, Vice President of Government Programs for ODS. "As an Oregon-based pharmacy focused on helping people get access to low-cost medications, Wellpartner is proud to participate in this Oregon and Washington prescription drug program," said Mike Wright, President and CEO of Wellpartner, Inc, the mail order pharmacy for OPDP and Northwest Consortium members. In keeping with his commitment to expand affordable health care options to all Oregonians, the Governor also pledged his support to further expand OPDP to include private employers. "The rising cost of health care is impacting all of us" individuals and employers alike," the Governor said. "We know this program saves money, and I believe that private as well as public employers deserve the opportunity to save money on health insurance for their employees." Finally, the Governor also recognized Oregon pharmacies that have joined the Network and provided discounts to Consortium members. "The discounts provided by pharmacies make the savings to Oregonians a true reality. This program represents the best of Oregon coming together for a common purpose" healthy individuals and healthy communities," Governor Kulongoski said. For more information about the program contact Missy Dolan, Administrator of the Oregon Prescription Drug Program at: 503-373-1595.

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