



The Carousel Network

**Chronic Neuroimmune Disease
Information and Support for Sonoma County**
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Medicare Beneficiaries Eligible for Medi-Cal Drug Pricing on Prescription Medications

Effective February 2000 until at least 2003, Californians who are disabled or retired and receiving Medicare benefits are eligible to obtain prescription drugs at Medi-Cal prices, that is, the amount Medi-cal pays the Medi-cal participating pharmacies.

The prescriptions have to be purchased at pharmacies participating in the Medi-cal program. Information on how to find the pharmacies, get drug pricing, and more is included in this article.

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The Carousel Network (TCN) offers information on the various diseases and disorders associated with chronic neuroimmune diseases, such as chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, multiple chemical sensitivity, autoimmune thyroid disease, etc. The information is intended to help patients and caregivers make informed decisions about the patient's health, diagnostic testing, and treatment in conjunction with their health care practitioners. TCN does not diagnose patients nor recommend specific medical or palliative treatments.

***The Carousel Network is a 501(c)3 nonprofit supported by memberships and donations.
Membership is \$20/year; make checks payable to The Carousel Network, POB 366, Fulton CA 95439-0366.***

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On October 10, 1999, Governor Gray Davis signed into law Senate Bill 393, which was authored by state Senator Jackie Speier. This new law enables Medicare recipients to obtain their prescription drugs at a cost no higher than the Medi-Cal reimbursement rates from Medi-Cal pharmacies. The program went into effect February 1, 2000.

What does this mean?

For documented Medicare recipients, the Medi-Cal pharmacy can only charge a price that does not exceed what Medi-Cal would reimburse the pharmacy for the same prescription, plus a small processing fee (\$0.15 per prescription). "Prescription" means the for the same drug, manufacturer, dose and quantity.

There are 5,000 participating pharmacies in California, so it should not be difficult to find one in your area. To find out if your regular pharmacy a Medi-Cal program participating pharmacy, look for be a decal on the door. If there isn't one, just ask the pharmacist or pharmacy clerks.

Another way to locate local Medi-Cal participating pharmacies is to contact the Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program (HICAP) office and ask for the names of pharmacies in your area; call them toll-free at 1-800-434-0222

How does the program work?

At the time you present your prescription to be filled, present your Medicare card and ask them to please notate your file that you are a Medicare recipient and that you want to get Medi-Cal pricing for your prescriptions.

If the pharmacist or pharmacy clerk does not know what you are talking about, refer them to the California State Department of Health Services who administers the Medi-Cal program or to Sen. Speier's office, or print out a copy the DHS bulletin for them.

So, who pays for my prescriptions?

YOU are still responsible for paying for your prescriptions. You are just going to be paying the Medi-Cal pricing rather than the price you would have paid before this program went into affect.

Is it for all drugs?

It is for all prescription drugs that are covered under Medi-cal and for which you would have to pay out-of-pocket.

The most common 50 drugs filled by Medi-Cal pharmacies - and the per pill/tablet price - can be viewed online at http://www.dhs.ca.gov/mcs/mcpd/MBB/contracting/sb393/Top_50_drugs.htm. If the drug you are trying to price isn't on that regularly updated list, then you may call the California Department of Health Services's Medi-Cal Policy office at (916) 657-4302 (note: this is not a toll-free number) message line, or email them at SB393RX@dhs.ca.gov, and give them the following information:

- name of the drug
- the strength
- the quantity
- retail price

If you don't know the retail price, you can ask your regular pharmacist, or look the drug up on one of the online pharmacies, such as drugstore.com

What if I'm on Medicare but also have drug coverage under an insurance plan?

If your insurance plan coverage means that you are paying only a low co-payment for your prescriptions, then there is nothing to be gained from using this Medi-Cal pricing program. However, if you exceed your drug plan's annual benefit limit and have to pay for your prescriptions out-of-pocket until your new benefit period starts, then using this Medi-cal pricing program will help reduce your drug expenses until the new benefit period starts.

What about all the supplements and other over-the-counter things I have to use - are they covered?

No, only prescription drugs. Just because your doctor has told you to take something, if does not require a prescription to purchase it, it is not covered under this Medi-Cal pricing program.

Is this a permanent program?

As enacted, this program will be in existence until January 1, 2003. If changes to the Medicare reimbursement program result in Medicare covering prescription drugs before then, or any other legislation is enacted to provide such a benefit to Medicare recipients, then the continuation of this Medi-Cal pricing program will be re-evaluated.

The full text of the law can be read online at www.dhs.ca.gov/mcs/mcpd/MBB/contracting/sb393/