

New Prescription Drug Program Offers Relief For Uninsured Americans

(NAPSA)—One of the greatest anxieties Americans face today is worry over loss of health and prescription drug insurance.

Often, it's the most vulnerable populations who suffer from gaps in health care coverage, such as the aged, immigrants and minorities. Low-wage workers are also at especially great risk, as are people employed in small businesses, service industries and blue-collar jobs.

“As a physician, I see uninsured patients struggling to meet their health care bills including the cost of medication,” said Dr. Margo Denke, a private-practice endocrinologist and professor at the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio. “Whenever I write a prescription for my patients, cost has to be a consideration. For patients who are paying for medications out-of-pocket, any cost savings can make a difference.”

Prescription discount drug programs, such as the one launched by Merck earlier this year are responding to the problem.

“With the number of uninsured soaring by five million in the past five years to a high of 45 million, it's not surprising that Americans are more worried about the loss of health and prescription drug insurance than the loss of a job or home,” said Margaret McGlynn, President, U.S. Human Health, Merck & Co., Inc., referring to a recent public opinion poll by Zogby International.


For the first month of the Merck program, more than 15,000 people enrolled.

“Initial interest in the program shows that there is a real need for help,” said McGlynn. “While this program doesn't solve the problem of uninsured Americans, we believe it is a step in the right direction.” It is important to note

Merck Prescription Discount Program

- No age or income constraints
- Instant Savings Certificate provides immediate savings at local pharmacies
- Enrollment is easy and free
- No annual membership fees for life of the program
- Available at almost all U.S. pharmacies.

To enroll:

- Call 1-800-50 MERCK (1-800-506-3725) between 8 am and 8 pm Eastern Time Monday through Friday. Spanish-speaking operators are available
- Visit www.merckuninsured.com
- Mail in an enrollment form available at local pharmacies and doctor's offices 

that discounts offered through the Merck program are not insurance and are not intended to be a substitute for insurance.

Anyone without prescription drug insurance regardless of age or income is eligible for the program, which offers discounts of 15 to 40 percent off many Merck medicines.

Merck advertises the program in dozens of English- and Spanish-language consumer magazines and on national radio networks. The company also works with grassroots organizations to distribute enrollment information in local communities.

Public officials and leaders from national organizations such as the AARP and the Alliance for Children and Families, have applauded the program as a step in the right direction. Senator Edward Kennedy, D-MA, has called on all pharmaceutical manufacturers to follow Merck's example, while John Rother, Director of

Policy and Strategy for the AARP, says the program is in line with his organization's own advocacy efforts on behalf of millions of Americans who lack health coverage. The program has been designed to be as easy as possible to enroll in and use.

Patients can enroll over the phone or the Web, and, when accepted, will receive a membership ID that they can use at their local pharmacies right away.

Prior to enrollment, patients can present an innovative Instant Savings Certificate to their pharmacist along with a valid prescription and immediately save at least 10 percent on many Merck prescriptions. The certificates are available free in pharmacies and doctors' offices. Patients also can print out certificates at www.merckuninsured.com.

To enroll in the program to obtain greater savings of 15 to 40 percent, patients can:

- Call 1-800-50 MERCK (1-800-506-3725) between 8 am and 8 pm Eastern Time Monday through Friday. Spanish-speaking operators are available.
- Visit www.merckuninsured.com.
- Mail in an enrollment form that they can obtain at their local pharmacy and doctor's office.

Enrollment is free and easy, and there is no annual membership or hidden fees.

“We believe our medicines should be available to everyone, regardless of whether they have drug coverage,” McGlynn said.

The company has a legacy of putting patients first, according to McGlynn, by helping Medicare beneficiaries afford the medicines they need and through its Patient Assistance Program, which has provided free Merck medicines to patients for 50 years.