

**ALL THREE Medication Assistance Programs Supported by
The Health and Wellness Trust Fund
Slated to End in June**

Last week, given the very bleak news from the NC General Assembly, the Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) Commission met and decided to make a 29% program cut and narrow its focus to fighting obesity and smoking. We had already known that funding for ChecKmeds and MAP grantees was likely not to be continued past June 30th. However, **the decision to terminate the NCRx benefit**, which provides up to \$29/month in Part D premium assistance for those 65 and older with incomes at or below 175% FPL, **in the middle of the contract year – is very worrisome.**

This qualified SPAP (state pharmacy assistance program) is the reason many older North Carolinians are able to obtain Medicare Part D plans that cover their medications well. Terminating the program in the middle of the year will leave low-income seniors to pay the full premiums in drug plans they may not have chosen had they not been enrolled in NCRx. Many will not be able to keep paying their monthly premiums, and thus, will lose Part D coverage. *It would cost less than \$450,000 to continue NCRx to the end of 2011.* Older adults in our State enrolled in NCRx for 2011, and North Carolina should honor its pledge to these seniors who are often very vulnerable given their financial situations and health status.

Background:

As you may recall, ChecKmeds NC (medication therapy management program for seniors) and the Medication Assistance Program or MAP (grants to community based-organizations to help North Carolinians of any age access drug manufacturers' patient assistance programs) had both been slated to end in June without an extension of funding. However, this NCRx news is in response to further threats to cut more funding from the NC HWTF.

The Health and Wellness Trust Fund receives one-quarter of the money that comes to North Carolina from the national tobacco settlement to spend on programs that promote health. In recent years, monies from the Trust Fund have been raided to help cover state budget deficits and to pay for construction debts. As members of the General Assembly are attempting to plug the budget shortfall this year, budget leaders have their eyes on the Trust Fund monies again. In recent days, Dr. Laura Gerald, the Fund's executive director, and Dr. Chuck Wilson, the Trust Fund Commission's chairman, have actively advocated for continuation of the Fund.

On March 8, the HWTF Commission announced findings from a first ever benefit-cost analysis of programs funded by the Trust Fund. Annual net cost savings reported by the three prescription drug programs were found to exceed \$67 million. The report found that for every dollar spent on these programs, there was a benefit of from \$13.55 to \$19.36 received. Dr. Wilson noted "we are gratified to have confirmation that the Health and Wellness Trust Fund's investments in preventive health are not only beneficial for the health of our state's residents, but they are also generating quantifiable financial benefits over and above the original amount invested. The results of the analysis clearly show the positive economic value of many Trust Fund programs on the health and quality of life for many North Carolinians, and this is especially timely given the current threats to Trust Fund funding due to state budget shortfalls."

We encourage you to contact your members of the North Carolina House and Senate NOW in support of these medication assistance programs & the Health and Wellness Trust Fund.

July 2009 - June 2010

- **CheckMeds** - 8,314 unduplicated seniors received medication therapy management services to help minimize medication risks and maximize benefits to improve health
- **NCRx** - 5,896 seniors received assistance to help cover up to \$29/month on the cost of their Part D premium (with contracted plans) to improve access to necessary medications

Began in Jan 2003 and these community-based grants

- **MAP grants** – distributed over 6 phases; just over \$20M has been spent since 2003 to bring in over \$350M in medications (at average wholesale price) to North Carolinians of all ages but mainly to those less than 65 years old

Extrapolated from the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund’s benefit-cost analysis conducted by *Chenoweth and Associates*, an independent evaluator specializing in health econometrics (March 8, 2011).

Program	Cost to HWTF	North Carolinians Served	<u>Annual</u> Net Cost Savings	Benefit per \$1 of HWTF spending
CheckMeds NC (Jan 08 – July 10)	\$2,631,945 \$1,052,778 avg. <i>annually</i>	39,344 patients 15,737 patients avg. <i>annually</i>	\$13,211,470	\$13.55
NCRx (July 09 – June 10)	\$830,598	5,896	\$15,250,700	\$19.36
Medication Assistance program (MAP)	\$20,017,720 over 8.5 yrs or \$2,355,026 avg. <i>annually</i>	Unknown	\$38,956,975	\$15.15
Medication programs supported by HWTF	\$4,238,402		\$67,419,154	\$16.02 average value for \$1 investment in Rx programs