Mississippi's State Health Insurance Assistance Program has gone virtual

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MDHS creates Medicare University to help aging adults

(Jackson, Miss.) – The Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) Division of Aging and Adult Services has created a unique, virtual resource to help Mississippi's aging population better understand the Mississippi State Health Insurance Program (SHIP).

Since the first Shelter in Place order came into effect as the spread of COVID-19 pandemic grew, the staff members in the Division of Aging and Adult Services understood they needed to find a way to serve a vulnerable aging population who could not go without the essential services provided by the agency. To do this, John Robinson, SHIP Volunteer Coordinator for MDHS, created Medicare University.

Medicare University is a two-hour community class designed to educate Medicare beneficiaries, their family members, caretakers and community stakeholders on how to navigate Medicare plans. Using a virtual platform, SHIP counselors and volunteers help elderly citizens and caregivers understand Medicare benefits; organize doctor and hospital bills; file Medicare appeals; review Medicare Supplemental Insurance; evaluate Medicare+ Choice or Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) options; understand Medicaid eligibility, and explore long-term care options.

"Seventy-nine percent of my job is to create understandable, educational resources to aid our aging population when doing community engagement," Robinson said. "Medicare is such a critical part of the Medicare beneficiaries' budget, often leaving them to decide between buying groceries or medication. We could not view this pandemic as a stop sign to providing services. Instead, we had to find a way to build a virtual bridge to continue serving Mississippi Medicare beneficiaries." SHIP's virtual plan is to launch links to the information on social media and post information on interoffice electronic messaging devices, much like message boards in waiting rooms. The program includes a Medicare University community workbook for people to use after the class. They also created "Let's Talk Medicare" by providing clients with 3-5-minute-long videos that cover specific subjects, including "What's the difference between Medicare and Medicaid?" and "How to get extra help to pay for medication."

For more information on the State Health Insurance Assistance Program and Medicare University, visit https://www.mdhs.ms.gov/adults-seniors/services-for-seniors/state-health-insurance-assistance-program/

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