

## (July 12, 2006) Lipinski Calls On Congress to Fix Medicare Prescription Drug Program

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### GAO Report Finds that Even Medicare Providers Cannot Explain Plans

[WASHINGTON, DC] Today, Congressman Dan Lipinski, speaking on the floor of the House of Representatives, called on Congress and the Administration to help seniors by fixing the Medicare prescription drug program. Lipinski cited a new General Accounting Office (GAO) report that found that call centers run by private Medicare drug providers give inaccurate and incomplete information much of the time.

"It is absolutely inexcusable that providers seem to be incapable or unwilling to provide beneficiaries with good information," said Rep. Lipinski. "Our seniors should not be treated like this. Medicare must guarantee that these providers give accurate and complete information.

The GAO found that in most instances, drug plan providers were unable to give accurate information in response to simple questions about plan costs, low-income coverage, plan formulary procedures, and plan utilization management techniques. Specifically, the GAO found:

- The phone centers operated by private Medicare providers gave inaccurate or incomplete answers to two-thirds of the beneficiaries who called. Two Medicare plan providers gave bad information at least 75% of the time.
- Medicare drug plan providers were unable to provide critical cost information for seniors to choose among plans. Two GAO questions focused on which of the drug plans would provide seniors with the lowest out-of-pocket costs, and what these costs would be. Medicare providers failed to give accurate or complete answers to these questions over 70% of the time. In one case, the costs were underestimated by \$6,000.
- Medicare providers often furnished conflicting answers, giving one answer on one call and a different answer on a second call. For example, some plans said that one of their plans was the least expensive on one call and then said that a completely different plan was the least expensive on a separate call.

This is the second GAO report analyzing the drug plan information available to Medicare beneficiaries. In May 2006, the GAO analyzed the information provided to seniors by the federal Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, concluding that this information was frequently confusing, inaccurate, or incomplete. The new GAO findings show that the private plans are also failing to answer seniors' questions, leaving millions of seniors unable to get accurate answers to their questions about the Medicare drug plans.

"These findings also demonstrate another problem," continued Lipinski. "If Medicare providers do not yet understand these plans, how can we expect seniors to understand them? Congress must act to give seniors more time to sign up for a drug plan without suffering the life-long penalty that is now being imposed. Seniors should also be given the option of changing plans immediately if their current plan is not working for them."

