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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 15, 2005

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MANY MEDICARE RECIPIENTS NOW ELIGIBLE FOR DISCOUNTED PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

SACRAMENTO - Hundreds of thousands of low-income California Medicare beneficiaries are now eligible for a $600.00 credit and discounts on prescription drugs of up to 25 percent, but only if they apply by March 31. The voluntary prescription drug discount card program extends until January 2006 when the new prescription drug benefit under Medicare Part D takes effect. The benefit is part of the U.S. Medicare Modernization Act that began last year.

"The Medicare Modernization Act includes many benefits and requires eligible seniors to make several key decisions for prescription drug coverage," said Lora Connolly, acting director of the California Department of Aging. "We encourage Medicare beneficiaries to carefully consider their options."

The $600.00 credit is available for individuals with an annual income of less than $12,569 or couples with an income of less than $16,862. The credit is just one component of the initial benefits offered when low-income seniors apply for Medicare's new drug discount card. The card is free for low-income applicants, $30 a year for seniors with higher incomes.

For immediate assistance on selecting the right drug discount card, please call the Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program (HICAP) at 1-800-434-0222. Trained HICAP counselors can review your choices, compare available drug discount cards and help you select the card that best meets your needs. You may also make an appointment to meet with a counselor in person.

Additional information may be obtained by calling the federal government at 1-800-633-4227 (1-800-Medicare) or logging on to www.medicare.gov.

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