

People who need or prefer to get information about Medicare in different formats other than written text now have a new resource thanks to an idea that started with a local group of professionals who are deaf or work with the deaf community.

The group worked with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to produce a video that presents information on the basics of Medicare in American Sign Language (ASL), with large type captions and voiceover narration. The video can be seen on the Medicare website at www.medicare.gov/multilanguage.aspx and on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=eskZVAg7v0o

“The video came about through an exciting public-private partnership,” said Terri Gendel, AgeOptions director of benefits and advocacy. “A group of local advocates thought it was important, went to the government, and with the support from a concerned Congressperson, helped make it happen.”

The concept started with members of the Deaf Work Group of the Make Medicare Work Coalition, who observed that people they serve were often unaware of important Medicare information because it was not provided in a format they could use. The Make Medicare Work Coalition (MMW) is a statewide group led by three nonprofits - [AgeOptions](#) , [Progress Center for Independent Living](#) and [Health & Disability Advocates](#)

. It provides older adults, people with disabilities and professionals who serve them with education, counseling, and advocacy on state and federal healthcare and prescription drug programs.

“Access to information should not be discriminatory. It is incredibly important for Medicare beneficiaries to be able to receive up to date information regarding their benefits regardless of their condition,” said **Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky**. “Regular services for deaf seniors do not always meet their needs and I am glad to lend support to this effort to make sure government information is accessible.”

“Videos are a great way to get this information out because ASL is a visual language that includes expression in hands, face and body to get the message across. Like translating any other language, it isn’t just word for word English.,” Gendel said. Some people whose first language is ASL don’t read English well, she pointed out, so the traditional written materials don’t help them and many public presentations do not include interpreters.

The group determined the video could be valuable to a variety of audiences beyond those who know ASL. JulieAnn Chavez, a certified SHIP counselor who is Deaf appears in the video. “Since the video was released”, Chavez reports, “we have received very positive feedback from people who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, have low vision and some whose first language is not English and find the slow pace, captions and narration really helpful.”

Chavez pointed out that the video will be a valuable tool for professionals who present Medicare information to groups. “Medicare can be complicated, and we want to be sure everyone is included and gets the information they need.” she said. “We also hope this serves as a model

for other government websites to include information in accessible formats, including ASL.”

The 27-minute video includes information about who can get Medicare, how to enroll, the benefits, and programs to help with the costs for people with limited incomes. It was produced by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services in collaboration with the Make Medicare Work Coalition that worked on the scripts and provided the actors. The coalition members involved were supported with funding from the Michael Reese Health Trust and the Retirement Research Foundation, with additional support from the Arkansas Senior Health Insurance Program (SHIP) and the Illinois SHIP.

AgeOptions and its network of community agencies are the principal source of information regarding senior services in suburban Cook County, Ill. A nonprofit organization located in Oak Park, AgeOptions has served the older adults of suburban Cook County and their caregivers as an Area Agency on Aging since 1974. For more information, please visit the Agency website at www.ageoptions.org.

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