

Advocates for Seniors Warn About Eliminating EPIC

Dave Lucas (2011-02-17)
ALBANY, NY (WAMC) -

Advocates for Senior citizens are calling on the New York State Legislature to reject cuts to prescription drug coverage by preserving the existing "EPIC" program - Capital District Bureau Chief Dave Lucas reports.<BR

AARP, Selfhelp Community Services and Statewide Senior Action are concerned that Governor Andrew Cuomo's budget proposal eliminates all assistance to the state's 300-thousand EPIC "Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage" enrollees, while drastically reducing benefits to cover only medications when an enrollee falls into the Medicare coverage prescription drug coverage gap. The average EPIC enrollee is 78 years old and is on four prescription medications.

"This will hurt lower income seniors whose income is just high enough to be disqualified from the federal Part D subsidy called Extra Help' but still too low to be able to afford the full cost of Part D," stated Valerie J. Bogart, Director of the Evelyn Frank Legal Resources Program at Selfhelp Community Services, Inc. "Widows with incomes over \$16,500 per year will no longer get help from EPIC in paying these hefty co-payments, premiums, and deductibles charged by the Part D plans. Coinsurance for brand name drugs under a typical plan may charge, for example, a range from \$40 - \$77 per drug, on top of a monthly premium of \$92.70/month. This is simply unaffordable at lower income levels."

"This budget is supposed to not have taxes and fees yet older persons on EPIC will pay hundreds of dollars more in premiums, deductibles and co-payments with this proposal," stated Michael Burgess, Public Policy Advocate for New York StateWide Senior Action Council. "If this passes, we won't be able to celebrate the 25th anniversary of EPIC's passage later this year, but rather its demise."

AARP says that as of March 2010, the manufacturer prices of the brand name prescription drugs most widely used by Medicare beneficiaries increased by an average of 9.7 percent. Governor Mario Cuomo signed the EPIC bill into law in 1986.