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Prescription drug help now available statewide

AG Cooper, NC Free Clinics and NC MedAssist partner to create central pharmacy

Winston-Salem: North Carolinians who are unable to afford their prescription medicines can now get them for free, Attorney General Roy Cooper, the North Carolina Association of Free Clinics, and NC MedAssist announced today.

Starting today, a pilot program begun in March of last year to give low-income North Carolinians free access to needed prescription drugs has been expanded to serve residents statewide.

"Times are hard and people are sacrificing to make ends meet, but they shouldn't have to sacrifice their health," Cooper said. "Qualified low-income North Carolinians can now get access to the medications they need to stay healthy."

The program, administered by NC MedAssist, has created a mail-order central pharmacy to provide free brand name and generic drugs. The drugs are donated by participating pharmaceutical companies.

"The NC MedAssist program is designed to help the thousands of people in our state ease that dangerous burden of choosing between everyday necessities in life—buying groceries, paying the utility bill or filling a prescription," said Jason Baisden, Executive Director of the NC Association of Free Clinics. "Having prescriptions medications to help maintain a healthy lifestyle is a necessity."

"The growing number of uninsured in North Carolina—which currently is nearly one in five among us—face challenges every day in accessing medications that can improve their health status. The NC MedAssist program will greatly enhance the ability of low-income and uninsured people to access the medications they desperately need," said Pam Silberman, JD, DrPH, President and CEO of the North Carolina Institute of Medicine.

Who is eligible to enroll in the program?

North Carolina residents who are:

- Adults and children living at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.
- Adults and children who do not qualify for: Medicaid, Veterans Administration or private health insurance.
- Medicare Part D participants who fall in the "donut hole" may be eligible after consultation with NC MedAssist.

How can North Carolinians enroll in the program?

Eligible North Carolina residents can enroll in the program by downloading an enrollment packet from the NC MedAssist website at www.medassist.org, or by calling at 1-866-331-1348.

Eligible North Carolina residents living in Forsyth, Stokes, Davie or Yadkin counties should enroll in the program by calling MedAid at 336-714-2359.

How does the program work?

Eligible North Carolinians can now enroll with NC MedAssist using one application form rather than applying with each drug company. The program has partnered with pharmaceutical companies such as Novartis, Eli Lilly and AstraZeneca to bulk ship drugs to one central location. The central pharmacy run by NC MedAssist keeps both brand name and generic drugs in stock, and can ship medications directly to participants' homes, making it quick and easy for people to get the medicines they need.

Prescription assistance programs offered through drug companies can require applicants to fill out separate applications for each company. Depending on the number of medications needed, the process can be time-consuming and complicated.

How is the program funded?

The program is funded for the first year by a grant of \$873,000 from Cooper's Consumer Protection and Education Fund.

About the North Carolina Association of Free Clinics

The North Carolina Association of Free Clinics, founded in 1998, is a private, nonprofit, 501(c) (3) tax-exempt organization that conducts advocacy, research, public relations, resource development, training and technical assistance on behalf of its member free clinics. The North Carolina Association of Free Clinics is the largest state association with 75+ member free clinics, serving 79 counties throughout North Carolina. For more information, please visit www.ncfreeclinics.org or call 336-251-1111.

About NC MedAssist

NC MedAssist is a community pharmacy founded in 1997 through the efforts of the Mecklenburg Medical Society Alliance Endowment with the assistance of a \$55,000 grant from the employees of Presbyterian Hospital. NC MedAssist has dispensed over \$30 million in free prescription medicines for our clients. Most of the drugs are secured from the Patient Assistance Programs available through participating pharmaceutical companies. As a result of NC MedAssist's positive impact on the community, it has been named as one of the top 25 non-profit organizations in Charlotte by the Charlotte Business Journal. For more information, please visit www.medassist.org or call 704-536-1790.

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