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## Medicare Annual Wellness Exams Increase Access to Preventative Care

### **Introduction**

As of January 1, 2011, Medicare is covering annual wellness visits for all beneficiaries. The annual enrollment period is October 15 –December 7 to change, drop, or enroll in a plan. During your “Welcome to Medicare” visit, or first wellness visit if you missed the welcome visit, your doctor will review your past and current physical and mental health history, as well as review the medications you are taking. Your height, weight, and blood pressure will be recorded. Your eyesight will be checked. Your doctor will recommend preventative screenings based on your individual health risks. Every year, Medicare will cover follow-up wellness visits, during which the information collected at your initial assessment will be updated.

### **Free Screenings**

The following preventative screenings are *free* if you have Original Medicare, if your doctor accepts assignment:

- Breast cancer screening
- Cervical cancer screening
- Colon cancer screening- fecal occult blood test, colonoscopy, flexible sigmoidoscopy
- Diabetes screening
- Heart disease screening
- Medical nutritional therapy
- Osteoporosis screening
- Prostate cancer screenings
- Vaccinations- hepatitis B, flu & pneumonia

“Accept assignment” is a term that means your doctor will agree to accept Medicare reimbursement to cover the entire cost of the service. To find out if your doctor accepts assignment, you can call 1-800-633-4227.

### **Screenings with a Cost**

In addition to your physician’s order, the following screenings require you to pay coinsurance or deductible amounts:

Glaucoma screening  
Colon cancer screening- barium enema  
Prostate cancer screening

### **Role in Prevention**

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) heart disease, diabetes, and Alzheimer’s were listed as part of the top seven causes of death in 2007. Chronic diseases, like cancer and heart disease, are often *preventable or treatable* with early intervention. Early detection of Alzheimer’s may not necessarily prevent the disease from eventually taking its course. However, early detection of Alzheimer’s may make it possible for client’s to play an integral role in decisions about their care early on. A yearly wellness visit covered by Medicare may be important for early detection and intervention to maintain optimal health.

Seniors have the highest rate of pneumococcal infection related deaths. Pneumococcal vaccination is covered under Medicare. Obesity related deaths are the second leading preventable cause of death in the United States. Medical nutritional counseling is covered under Medicare for clients who receive a referral from their physician. There are not always symptoms that would indicate an individual is developing glaucoma. Medicare covers annual glaucoma

screenings.

For more information about annual wellness visits contact Carol Abrahamsen at Central Midlands Council of Governments (CMCOG) Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC), (803) 376-5390 ext. \*312.