

How to Get Help from Public Programs

by Alicia Betancourt
Family & Community Development Agent
University of Florida/IFAS/Monroe County Extension Services

Many people in our community need help paying for prescription drugs, health care, utilities and other basic needs. Based on national estimates, over 18% of our residents are eligible for but not receiving some services. According to the 2006 Monroe County health profile at www.healthcouncil.org, 20% of our residents aged 65 and younger are uninsured, 15% of the population are seniors, and 37% of students receive free or reduced lunch.

While Medicare and Social Security benefits are well known, many residents - especially seniors with limited income and resources - are not taking advantage of many government programs that can improve the quality of their lives.

The National Council on Aging's (NCOA) BenefitsCheckUp®, a free and confidential online service, helps residents, seniors, or people who care about them determine what benefits they qualify for and how to apply.

Using this service, residents can find out if they qualify for help with their prescription drug costs, Medicare premiums, health care, utilities, in-home services or many more programs.

Developed and maintained by The National Council on Aging, BenefitsCheckUp is the nation's most comprehensive Web-based service to screen for benefits programs for seniors with limited income and resources. It includes more than 1,450 public and private benefits programs. Since 2001, more than two million people have used the service.

Developed for seniors, this program works well for any limited income residents. The program takes about 20-30 minutes and can be accessed from any computer. The Extension Service has been offering this program as part of their Medicare Part “D” education at the senior centers and other locations. So far, Extension Service has assisted 234 residents use the web based “Benefits Check Up” program. According to the Access to Benefits Coalition, The average benefits savings per resident is \$110 per month for a total year savings of \$308,880. Having residents enrolled in a benefit program reduces the cost for emergency and social services, improving their quality of life.

For more information on BenefitsCheckUp, call Alicia Betancourt at 305-451-4234 or visit <http://www.BenefitsCheckUp.org>.

Additional information on family and community development is available from the UF/IFAS/Monroe County Extension Services, 1100 Simonton Street #2-260, Key West, FL 33040, phone 305-292-4401 or Monroe@ifas.ufl.edu or visit our Web site at <http://monroe.ifas.ufl.edu>. Our services are free and available to all without regard to race, color, sex, or national origin.