To get information about medical insurance options more generally, there are several places for Seniors to call. First, the Council on Aging itself through its Information and Referral Specialist is one source and can be reached at 617 349- 6220. In addition, Seniors can obtain information through the Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services at 617-628-2601. Finally, the Senior Health Connections, part of the Cambridge Health Alliance, is a source of information and referral for seniors at 617- 665-1665.

Additionally, I have attached a response from Chief Public Health Officer Harold Cox concerning this matter.

Very truly yours,

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RWH/mec
Attachment

Cambridge Public Health Department 119 Windsor Street · Ground Level · Cambridge, MA 02139
Cambridge Health Alliance 617.665.3800 · Fax 617.665.3888

TO: Robert W. Healy, City Manager

FROM: Harold Cox, Chief Public Health Officer

DATE: September 24, 2003

SUBJECT: **Council Order #6, dated 1/8/03:**
Plan to advertise pharmaceutical manufacturer-sponsored patient assistance programs to Cambridge seniors an uninsured/underinsured

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Insuring the availability of free or discounted prescription medications to uninsured/underinsured individuals is one of the greatest challenges facing public health care systems, including the Cambridge Health Alliance.

The Alliance is leading the city's public health initiative to improve access to health care services. The Alliance believes the best approach for providing free or inexpensive prescription medications to low-income individuals is through health insurance programs like MassHealth (Medicaid) and other state-funded insurance programs. Individuals not eligible for these programs may qualify for "Free Care" from the Uncompensated Care Pool.

The public and private sector also offer programs that help uninsured or underinsured individuals receive free or discounted prescription medications. These include drug manufacturers' "patient assistance programs," Citizen's Health (see Appendix), and drug discount cards (see Appendix).

Pharmaceutical-Sponsored Patient Assistance Programs

Through their patient assistance programs (PAPs), pharmaceutical companies provide prescription medicines free of charge to low-income U.S. residents who typically do not have private insurance and are not eligible for, or covered by, any government-funded reimbursement or insurance program for medication. Some manufacturers, however, will offer discounted drugs to persons with limited coverage.

In the past decade, the number of drug manufacturers offering patient assistance programs has risen dramatically, from fewer than 10 companies to more than 70.[1] According to the pharmaceutical industry, PAPs provided prescription medicines to an estimated 5.4 million patients in 2002 at an estimated cost of $2.3 billion.[2]

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[1] "Questions about Patient Assistance Programs," Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), 2002.
[2] "PhRMA Member Patient Assistance Programs," (PhRMA), November 2002.

Nonetheless, PAPs are not widely promoted by the pharmaceutical industry. In fact, patient assistance programs are drug manufacturers "best-kept secret," according to the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), the industry's trade association.[3]

Neither the drug manufacturers or the medical community view these programs as a solution to the larger national problem of access to affordable prescription drugs.[4] Many pharmacists, physicians, and health care advocates have criticized the pharmaceutical industry for its refusal to streamline the application process for PAPs. At present, the more than 70 companies offering PAPs each have their own application process, eligibility criteria, and access information. Writes the Massachusetts Health Policy Forum in a 1999 report:

> These programs are almost universally administratively cumbersome, time consuming and labor intensive on the part of those helping an uninsured or underinsured patient access medications. The medications available through these programs change frequently, as do phone numbers to access them, the application forms to apply for assistance, and the criteria for eligibility.[5]

Since the 1990s, advocacy groups have been largely unsuccessful in their efforts to persuade pharmaceutical companies to streamline their indigent patient assistance programs by developing a single entry point, uniform criteria for eligibility, and a standard application. Past efforts to get the companies to work together to devise a uniform system have stalled as the companies raised concerns about being accused of anti-trust violations if they acted collaboratively.[6]

In the past few years, however, there has been notable progress in "warehousing" information on PAPs. Recently PhRMA launched *helpingpatient.org*, a website that allows patients to complete an online form and receive a listing of programs for which they may be qualified. The website features information about 1,400 medicines, more than 140 industry-sponsored programs, and more than 185 government and private programs.[7] Patients can also locate patient assistance programs through the PhRMA directory, available free by calling 800-762-4636.

In addition, several national, state, and local organizations offer services that help expedite the application process. These include MassMedline (see Appendix) and the National Council on Aging's Benefits CheckupRx website (see Appendix).

At present, the Alliance considers PAPs for its patients on a case-by-case basis.

Alliance Efforts to Promote Prescription Coverage Programs

The Alliance promotes a variety of programs and activities that help uninsured or underinsured residents gain access to health care, including prescription drug coverage programs. Alliance efforts include:

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[3] "Questions about Patient Assistance Programs," (PhRMA), 2002.
[4] Ibid.
[5] "Issue Brief: The cost and availability of prescription drugs—What can we do in Massachusetts." Massachusetts Health Policy Forum. Institute for Health Policy at the Heller School, Brandeis University. May 1999, p. 14.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Questions about Patient Assistance Programs," PhRMA, 2002.

- *The Community Access Program* – Through this program, a team multicultural team of outreach workers assist uninsured Cambridge residents in applying for Medicaid, other state-funded insurance programs, and "Free Care" from the Uncompensated Care Pool. Once a resident is enrolled in an insurance plan, Alliance staff ensure that the individual is connected to a primary care provider.

- *Senior Health Connections/617-665-1665* – The Alliance developed this free telephone information service to help seniors better understand their medical issues and health care options. Senior Health Connections staff frequently talk with seniors, families, and providers about their pharmacy needs and how to reduce pharmacy expenses. Staff help seniors locate and apply to prescription medication program(s) that best fit their insurance, income, and medication profile. Staff work closely with SHINE counselors at the Cambridge Council on Aging.

In addition, the Alliance organizes and participates in community health fairs and other health events, including the Cambridge Council on Aging's upcoming Insurance Seminar at the Citywide Senior Center on Oct. 28.

Appendix

Prescription Medications – Council Order O-6

Insurance Plans

The following programs provide free or inexpensive prescription medications to their clientele:

- **MassHealth–** MassHealth (Medicaid) pays for health care for certain low- and medium-income people living in Massachusetts who are under age 65 and who are not living in nursing homes or other long-term-care facilities. At least three health plans offered through MassHealth (including the Alliance's Network Health) cover 100% of patients' prescription drug costs.

- **Prescription Advantage –** This state-funded insurance plan offers comprehensive prescription drug coverage to Massachusetts residents age 65 and older, and younger low-income individuals with disabilities. Individuals receiving Medicaid are not eligible to join Prescription Advantage. Unlike other insurance plans, Prescription Advantage provides financial security with an annual out-of-pocket spending limit. Once the limit has been met, the program covers all patient drug costs for the remainder of the plan year.

  As a result of the FY04 budget cuts, enrollment for seniors 66 years or older is presently uncertain. An open enrollment was held in August 2003 in which 14,000 applications were received.[1] There may be a new enrollment period in January 2004, but it has not been confirmed.[2] Seniors who are 65 years are currently eligible for open enrollment.

- **Free Care Pool** – The Uncompensated Care Pool is not insurance, and only pays for medically necessary inpatient and outpatient services provided by hospitals and community health centers. It can, however, provide some assistance to patients who are either uninsured or underinsured, and who meet the Pool's income and residency criteria.[*] Currently, the Cambridge Health Alliance provides prescription medications at no cost to qualified Free Care patients through its outpatient pharmacy at The Cambridge Hospital.

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[1] Prescription Advantage, personal communication, September 17, 2003.

[2] Alliance Senior Health Connections, personal communication, September 23, 2003.

[*] Note: Patients with family incomes under 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines are eligible for full free care, and those with family incomes between 200% and 400% are eligible for partial free care. Patients at any income level may also be eligible for the Pool if medical costs deplete the family's income and resources so that the patient is unable to pay for necessary medical care.

Telephone and Internet Information Resources

Here are two examples of services available to Massachusetts residents that can help expedite the application process for PAPs and other prescription coverage programs:

- **Mass Medline/866-633-1617 –** This free telephone information service is offered to all Massachusetts residents through the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy, in collaboration with the Executive Office of Elder Affairs. Qualified pharmacists and trained support personnel provide information (including applications) on pharmaceutical manufacturers and other organizations that offer free or discounted prescription drugs.

- **Benefits Checkup/www.benefitscheckuprx.com** – Sponsored by the National Council on Aging, this website provides patients with confidential, personalized reports of public and private programs that can help individuals save money on some or all prescription drugs. The database includes over 260 programs, including more than 1,450 prescription drugs.

Prescription Medication Discount Programs

Here are two examples of prescription medication discount programs available to Massachusetts residents:

- **Citizen's Health** – Founded by Senator Joe Kennedy II, Citizens Health is a health care savings and benefits plan open to all Massachusetts residents that provides members with discounts of up to 40% on health care expenditures such as physician visits, dental care, hospital stays, prescriptions, chiropractic services, vision care, and other health care services. If a member is uninsured, Citizens Health offers an inexpensive way to obtain health care when it is needed. Members have access to a large network of nearly 500,000 health care professionals and over 3,500 hospitals.[3] According to Senior Health Connections staff, this is a worthwhile program for many seniors.

- **Prescription Drug Discount Cards** – The majority of these cards are offered by pharmaceutical companies and marketed to seniors. According to Senior Health Connections staff, the value of these programs vary according to the medications, and offer somewhat limited application to most seniors they work with in their program.

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[3] www.citizenshealth.com

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CITY OF CAMBRIDGE • EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

Robert W. Healy, City Manager *Richard C. Rossi, Deputy City Manager*

795 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139
Voice: 617.349.4300 Fax: 617.349.4307 TTY: 617.349.4242 Web: www.cambridgema.gov

September 29, 2003

To the Honorable, the City Council:

In response to Awaiting Report Item Number 03-93, regarding a report on the plan to advertise assistance for prescription drug programs to Cambridge seniors and uninsured/underinsured, Assistant City Manager for Human Services Jill Herold reports the following:

The Cambridge Council on Aging has two employees who, in addition to their primary responsibilities, are certified S.H.I.N.E. (Serving the Health Insurance Needs of the Elderly) counselors. On Tuesday, October 28th, at 12 Noon the COA S.H.I.N.E. program will present an Insurance Seminar at the Citywide Senior Center, 806 Massachusetts Avenue. All are invited to attend this Insurance Seminar. No registration is necessary, and there is no fee.

The seminar will provide up-to-date information on such topics as the revised Prescription Advantage program offered by the Commonwealth, changes in various insurance programs, including the traditional Medicare program, Medicare HMO's, Medex, etc. A similar seminar was offered last year and was very well attended.After the group presentation, staff will be available to anyone wishing to talk individually and wishing assistance in mapping out a plan to meet their specific needs, and provide the least costly, most comprehensive coverage available.

The Council on Aging has been providing publicity about the upcoming event through its monthly newslines, which is distributed to over 4000 seniors through the senior housing developments as well as through local community groups. Both the September Newslines and the upcoming October Newslines have information about the event.

Information on the October 28th seminar was announced at the September meeting of the Somerville/Cambridge Interagency Task Force which consists of approximately 30+ members, who work in the Somerville and Cambridge Cities, directly with individuals 60 years of age and older. Most of these providers will be attending the seminar, as well as, advertising to their clientele.

The Council on Aging's Director of Client Services will be collaborating with the City's Public Information Officer, in the advertising of this forum.

In the past, advertising has been in the *Boston Globe's* City Weekly section; City's web page; *The TAB*; *Cambridge Chronicle*; and through postings at various senior locations.

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Consent Agenda #13

Transmitting communication from Robert W. Healy, City Manager, relative to **Awaiting Report Item Number 03-93,** regarding a plan to advertise assistance for prescription drug programs to Cambridge seniors and uninsured/underinsured.

In City Council September 29, 2003

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