



Connecting Older Adults with Community-based Resources and Options

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 20, 2011

For more information contact:

Carol Mattar, Public Relations Specialist

Phone: (708)383-0258

Cell: (708)601-3730

Email: carol.mattar@ageoptions.org

Program to Prevent Health Care Fraud Receives National Awards

A statewide program that trains older adults in how to prevent, detect and report health care fraud recently received awards from the U.S. Administration on Aging (AoA) and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

The Illinois Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) was recognized as one of the top five SMP programs in the country for both number of beneficiaries served and the number of complex fraud-related issues referred to investigators. The program also received an award for Innovation in Collaboration and Partnership Activities.

The SMP program was established by federal law in 1997 and is administered by the AoA. It recruits and trains older adults to educate their communities to detect and report health care fraud and abuse, and helps Medicare and Medicaid recipients correct billing errors. AgeOptions coordinates SMP in Illinois.

“AgeOptions is very proud of the accomplishments of our staff and volunteers who work with the Illinois SMP program,” said Jonathan Lavin, AgeOptions president and CEO. “We accepted these awards on behalf of all of our SMP program partners, including the Illinois Area Agencies on Aging, Catholic Charities, Senior Services Associates, the Coalition of Limited English Speaking Elderly, the Illinois Network of Centers for Independent Living and the Illinois Attorney General’s Office.

“These performance awards recognize the dedication of SMP volunteers, staff and partners in Illinois to ensuring that Illinois consumers hear the SMP message and learn how to protect themselves from health care fraud,” he added.

“CMS believes that the consumer education efforts of the SMP program at the grassroots level are an essential part of our national strategy to decrease waste, fraud and abuse in the Medicare system,” said Angela Brice-Smith, director of the Medicaid Integrity Group/Center for Program Integrity at CMS. She presented the SMP awards along with Barbara Dieker of AoA at the 2011 SMP National Conference in Washington, DC.

“These SMPs went above and beyond this year to serve the beneficiaries in their states. Their efforts to fight fraud at the grassroots level is of the highest caliber,” said Dieker, director of the Office of Elder Rights at the AoA.

AgeOptions staff members Erin Weir, Jason Echols, and Peg Tully represented AgeOptions at the SMP National Conference. Volunteer specialists Gwen Gaukler of the Western Illinois Area Agency on Aging and Tamara Stancil of the Area Agency on Aging of Southwestern Illinois also attended. During the conference, SMP staff members and volunteers were briefed on health care fraud schemes, law enforcement actions and SMP outreach initiatives.

AgeOptions and its network of community agencies are the principal source of information regarding senior services in suburban Cook County, Ill. A nonprofit organization located in Oak Park, AgeOptions has served the older adults of suburban Cook County and their caregivers as an Area Agency on Aging since 1974. For more information, please visit the Agency website at www.ageoptions.org.

AgeOptions connects adults age 60 and over with resources and service options so they can live their lives to the fullest and remain in their homes as long as possible. In 2010 we met the needs of more than 198,500 individuals in 130 communities within 30 townships that have a diverse population of 460,000 older adults. AgeOptions advocates, plans, develops and funds programs and coordinates a network of community-based senior service agencies to ensure an effective and efficient system of service delivery. Support is provided through the Older Americans Act, Illinois General Revenue Funds, local funds and individual contributions.