

# Sixty Seconds

*A monthly update from Senior Resources of West Michigan  
560 Seminole Road Muskegon, Michigan 49444*

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## The Senior Medicare Patrol 'Fraud Detectors'

It is considered one of the government's least sophisticated measures against Medicare fraud, but it is boasting some big successes.

The Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) is sponsored by the Administration on Aging, and is made up of volunteers who work with Medicare and Medicaid recipients to help protect against fraud.

Shirley Merner works with the Senior Medicare Patrol in Iowa and said their mission is pretty straightforward.

"The basic message is to protect, detect and report. It's a simple, three-pronged message. We want [people] to learn how to protect their identity because Medicare medical identity theft is currently the fastest growing crime in the United States. We need them to know how to detect errors, fraud, waste and abuse within the system by reading their Medicare summary notices. Then, they need to know [how] to report any discrepancies they find in the system." Thus, the program is very proactive and educational.

Merner said it is difficult to estimate how many people make up the Patrol mainly because the workforce is volunteer-based.

"We have a program in every state, so every state has at least one paid staff person. They may have more. They may not. They're charged to recruit

and train volunteers. Currently we have about 4,700 active volunteers. Here at our Iowa SMP program we have lots of snowbirds who are at times inactive. When you're dealing with seniors and the older population as your volunteer base, they're somewhat transient. So, the number varies." Though the number of volunteers might swell and wane, Merner said waste, fraud and abuse in dollar amounts is on the up and up.

To date, the SMP has caught over \$100 million in fraud since 1997, a figure that she credited mostly to an increasingly educated populace.

According to the most recent report from Medicare's Inspector General, \$60 billion was somehow wasted last year. To reduce that number, Merner said her group is pushing not only for recipient education, but for provider education, as well. "Providers need to know how to protect their identities. We're finding many, many providers that are having their provider numbers stolen or their name being misused and forged on prescriptions." The Senior Medical Patrol works with law enforcement officials, as well.

Overall, Merner said her hope is to get everyone involved with Medicare to become more active in the hopes of

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### ...a simple three pronged-message to protect, detect and report

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"It's basically because people have read their Medicare summary notices and report things that have happened, either overbilling, underbilling, getting billed for products they did not receive. Of course, these are just the ones we can document."

The purpose of the SMP is not to play 'gotcha' with the medical billing or drug companies, either. The group simply wants to better educate seniors to eliminate errors. "We know that, truly, the providers of medical services across the United States -- 99 percent of them are honest and they truly care about their patients and their health and their healthcare. It's that one percent that we're really concerned about, and that one percent is getting \$1 out of every \$10 that's budgeted for Medicare per year."

reducing the dollar amount associated with waste, fraud and abuse.

"\$60 billion would pay the salaries of 1.7 million American workers for one year. It would pay the healthcare of two out of three people over the age of 65 for one year. It would pay for one third of the prescription drugs now bought in the United States for one year. It's huge -- and its impact is huge."

If you're interested in learning more about SMP -- or getting involved yourself -- Merner suggests checking the website—[www.smpresource.org](http://www.smpresource.org)

By Dorothy Ramienski, Internet Editor  
Federal News Radio

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**The Mission of Senior Resources  
An Area Agency on Aging:**

To provide a comprehensive and coordinated system of services designed to promote the independence and dignity of older persons and their families in Muskegon, Oceana, and Ottawa counties — a mission compelling us to focus on older persons in greatest need and to advocate for all.

**Re-Cap of MMAP: The Michigan Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program**

**MMAP** is a free health-benefits counseling service funded through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the Administration on Aging and the Michigan Office of Services to the Aging.

Locally, the MMAP program is based out of Senior Resources and has responded to the increasing demand for more information and clarification concerning Medicare's prescription benefit (Part D). Last year 37 MMAP volunteers provided one-on-one counseling and education to 6,495 beneficiaries and helped save over \$1.29 million in prescription costs. One fully trained Senior Medical Patrol (SMP) volunteer conducts outreach activities and educates consumers about Medicare fraud and abuse. MMAP continually seeks volunteers who have computer skills, are internet savvy, and who have a sincere desire to help people. Training is provided in Medicare and Medicaid rules and regulations.

**MMAP counselors can help you:**

- Understand Medicare and Medicaid
- Compare or enroll in Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage (Medicare Part D)
- Review your Medicare supplemental insurance needs
- Understand Medicare health plans
- Apply for Medicaid or a Medicare Savings Program
- Report identity theft, Medicare and Medicaid fraud/abuse, or scams
- Explore long terms care insurance options

To learn more about becoming a MMAP volunteer call 1-800-803-7174. Please note: Insurance agents, insurance brokers and financial planners are not eligible to serve as MMAP volunteers.

- Vickie DeCheney, MMAP Regional Coordinator

**Appointments can be scheduled with MMAP counselors at (231) 733-3572 or toll free at 1-800-442-0054**