



San Joaquin County Employees' Retirement Association

September 28, 2005

**To: All Retirees NOT Enrolled in a Health Plan
Offered by San Joaquin County to Retirees**

RE: NEW MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG COVERAGE (Part D)

Beginning January 1, 2006, Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage, also called "Medicare Part D," will be available to all people with Medicare. In the near future, there will be a lot of publicity about this new program from a variety of sources.

Because you are **not** enrolled in a health plan offered by San Joaquin County, the San Joaquin County Employees' Retirement Association (SJCERA) cannot provide specific information about how the new Medicare prescription drug coverage will affect you and your dependents. We do recognize, however, that all of our retired members need reliable sources of information and answers to their questions regarding this new program.

As a service to our retired members who are not enrolled in a health plan offered by San Joaquin County, SJCERA is providing the enclosed brochure that answers frequently asked questions about the new Medicare prescription drug coverage. This brochure is published by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the federal agency responsible for administering Medicare programs.

If you or your dependents have Medicare, we hope you will find this information about the Medicare prescription drug coverage helpful. Although the brochure assumes you are enrolled in an employer- or union-sponsored health plan, the questions and answers are enlightening for all retirees who want to understand their choices and requirements regarding Medicare prescription drug coverage.

The brochure includes the following important information and advice:

- **The law requires your current health plan sponsor or insurer to provide you information by November 15, 2005**, about your current prescription drug coverage and how it will work when the new Medicare prescription drug coverage begins in 2006.
- **Read carefully the information you receive from your current health plan sponsor or insurer** to understand how your current prescription drug coverage compares to the new Medicare drug plan, and how they will work together.
- **Don't rush to make a decision before you know the facts about your choices.**
- **If you have questions**, contact your current health plan sponsor or insurer. A wealth of information, including frequently asked questions, numerous publications, and decision tools regarding Medicare prescription drug coverage is available online at www.medicare.gov or by calling **1-800-MEDICARE** (1-800-633-4227), available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048.

If Medicare is the only health insurance you currently have, you will need to choose a Medicare prescription drug plan during the initial open enrollment period (November 15, 2005 through May 15, 2006) or incur a lifetime financial penalty for late enrollment. You will receive information directly from Medicare about your choices and requirements for enrolling in a Medicare prescription drug plan. Additional information is available online at www.medicare.gov or by calling **1-800-MEDICARE** (1-800-633-4227).

People with limited income and resources may qualify for extra help in paying for Medicare prescription drug plans. The amount of extra help you get depends on your income and resources. You can only get this extra help if you join a plan that provides Medicare prescription drug coverage.

In the weeks ahead, you will likely receive numerous commercial mailings from companies that will be offering you a "Medicare drug plan." Some of these mailings may even look like "official" mail from the federal government. There will be many television, newspaper, magazine, and radio advertisements regarding Medicare prescription drug plans. We suggest you carefully review all the information you receive on this topic to verify its source and determine its usefulness to you.

You also will receive official government mail directly from the federal agency responsible for administering Medicare programs (known as "CMS," the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services). **Please look for the publication from CMS entitled "Medicare & You 2006," which will be mailed to you this October.** This will be an accurate, reliable source of important information for you regarding the new Medicare prescription drug coverage.

Above all, we encourage you to obtain all the information you need to understand the new Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage and how it will impact you and your family before making any enrollment decisions.

Enclosure