

**State Offers Prescription-Drug Discount Program**  
by Cara Matthews Gannett News Service March 24, 2009

The state is offering prescription-drug discount cards for New Yorkers who are disabled, too young to receive Medicare or who make too much money to get Medicaid, the governor and legislative leaders announced yesterday.

"The idea that you are sick and can't get medication, there aren't too many things that are more frightening than that," Gov. David Paterson said.

The New York Prescription Saver Cards, which take effect April 1, target lower-income New Yorkers ages 50 to 64 and people of any age who have been classified as disabled by the Social Security Administration. Yearly income must be at or below \$35,000 for single people and at or below \$50,000 for married couples.

Paterson said he believes 35,000 people would be eligible to join the program. The state Health Department is accepting applications for the cards.

"One of the great obstacles that New Yorkers face is the skyrocketing cost of prescription drugs. In fact, in the last two years, the cost of these drugs has elevated over twice that of the inflation rate," he said.

Savings will depend on the quantity, type and brand of the drug purchased. More than 2,500 pharmacies across the state are participating in the program.

Paterson said the state hopes the program will reduce the cost of generic drugs by an average of 30 percent to 40 percent and at least 25 percent for name brands. Estimated savings on common generic and brand-name drugs include 76 percent on Metformin (treats diabetes); 40 percent on Actonel (osteoporosis); 31 percent on Lipitor (high cholesterol); and 19 percent on Nexium (acid reflux disease).

The state is using its bargaining power with drug companies to get the discounts, officials said. Participants may see higher discounts as more pharmaceutical manufacturers join the program.

"New Yorkers should not sacrifice good health just because they can't afford it," said Senate Health Committee Chairman Thomas Duane, D-Manhattan.

The prescription program was passed as part of the 2008-09 state budget, which expires March 31, and is being implemented now.

Assembly Health Committee Chairman Richard Gottfried, D-Manhattan, said the Assembly wanted low-income New Yorkers of any age to be eligible for the program but couldn't come to an agreement last year with the Senate, which was controlled by Republicans. Democrats now have a 32-30 seat edge.

Lawmakers said they would look into expanding the program during this year's session.

"This is a good beginning towards the goal of covering all New Yorkers with pharmaceutical discounts," said Lois Aronstein, state director of AARP New York.

People who are enrolled in Medicaid or the state's Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage program are not eligible for the cards.

One senator is taking a different look at the issue of prescription drugs.

Sen. Ruben Diaz, D-Bronx, is holding a public hearing tomorrow on legislation that would allow senior citizens to purchase pharmaceutical drugs from Canada, where they are cheaper.

When asked about the bill, Paterson said purchasing drugs in Canada wouldn't work for the United States as a whole but could be feasible in border states such as New York.

#### **How To Apply**

**Applications are being** accepted online at the Prescription Saver Web site, <http://nyprescriptionsaver.fhsc.com>, or by phone at 800-788-6917. TTY users can call 800-290-9138. Forms will be available at pharmacies and community organizations.

**Approved participants should** receive their cards in the mail about two weeks after filing an application.

**Information on the** drug discounts, participating manufacturers and pharmacies, and a pharmacy locator is available at the Prescription Saver Web site, <http://nyprescriptionsaver.fhsc.com>.

<http://www.lohud.com/article/20090324/NEWS02/903240338/1018>