

Information Memorandum

January 2008

Rhode Island Department of Elderly Affairs

John O. Pastore Center

Benjamin Rush Building 55

35 Howard Ave, Cranston, RI 02920

www.dea.state.ri.us

Customer Information Referral & Assistance Center: 462-4000

The Point: 462-4444

www.ThePointRI

DIGITAL TV IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER

CRANSTON---Remember this date-February 17, 2009. By law, all television channels must switch from analog to digital television broadcasting on that date. The National Association of Broadcasters estimates that this switch will have an immediate effect on 49,570 households in Rhode Island. Elder residents are a large segment of these households. Simply stated, those television sets that rely on an outside antennae, rabbit ears or that are not connected to a cable or satellite broadcasting service, or are without a digital converter box will not be able to receive any television signal.

Why the switch? Under a law passed by Congress in 2005, all free local broadcasters are required to turn off their analog channels and broadcast exclusively in the digital format. February 17, 2009 is D-Day.

What is Digital Television (DTV) anyway? DTV is a new type of broadcasting that produces a dramatically clearer picture and sound. DTV can also offer multiple program choices and better service such as significantly enhanced closed captioning. DTV will also enable broadcasters to provide several channels of programs at once (multicasting) and will free up the traditional analog channels to be used for public safety uses by police and fire services.

Who will be affected by the switch? Any household that receives its free television signal with analog tuners and who do not subscribe to cable, satellite or a telephone company service provider will lose their signal on February 17, 2009.

How can you get ready for the switch to DTV? Follow one of three simple steps. You can purchase a DTV converter box that plugs into your existing analog set. This will enable you to receive free television broadcasts the same as you are doing currently. Converter boxes will be available early in 2008. At that time, the federal government will provide \$40 coupons that can be used to purchase the converter. There will be a limit of two coupons per household. The coupons must be redeemed within three months of receipt.

You can buy a new television set with a built-in digital tuner. All sets sold after May 25 of this year were required to be compatible with the digital signal.

Subscribe to a cable, satellite or telephone company service so that you can continue to use your analog television set.

You can check whether your television is equipped to handle over-the-air digital broadcast signals by looking in your television's owner's manual.

For more information, go to www.dtvanswers.com

IDENTIFICATION CARDS: DEA processes identification cards for persons 60 and older, and adults with disabilities from age 18 to 59 at Benjamin Rush, Building 55, located at 35 Howard Avenue in Cranston. Identification cards are processed Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Two forms of proof verifying a person's identity are required to obtain a DEA card. Types of qualifying identification include a birth certificate, driver's license, or Medicare supplement insurance card. Adults with disabilities must present their Social Security disability award letter or Veterans Administration disability card and one additional form of identification. The DEA identification card contains the owner's photograph, date of birth, address, and signature. DEA identification cards **CANNOT** be used for transportation on RIPTA buses. There is a \$2 fee for a DEA identification card. State law requires financial institutions to honor the DEA card as sufficient identification for the cashing of checks and other banking transactions involving federal, state, or municipal funds in amounts of \$750 or less. For additional information, call 462-4000. The Rhode Island Registry of Motor Vehicles also offers free identification cards to persons 59 and older. For information, call 462-4407.

CABLE TELEVISION PROGRAMMING: SENIOR JOURNAL: The *Senior Journal* explores the issues of growing older through the perspectives of older adults. The *Senior Journal* is produced by volunteers, and is sponsored by DEA in cooperation with Cox Communications. *Senior Journal* programs are aired on Sundays at 5:00 p.m.; Mondays at 7:00 p.m.; and Tuesdays and 11:30 a.m. over interconnect Channel A.

From January 6-15, 2008, *Reverse Mortgages* will be broadcast. Libby Arron of Cranston interviews Rhonda Schwartz, legal services developer for the RI Department of Elderly Affairs; Robert Silva, home buyer educational counselor for RI Housing and Cathleen Panniccia, RI Housing director of home ownership.

From January 20-29 *Predatory Lending* will be aired. Arron interviews Rhonda Schwartz, DEA legal services developer and Neema Simha Savage, chief of legal services for the RI Department of Business Regulation.

From February 3-12, *Digital TV is Coming* will air. Arron talks with Roger Goldblatt from the Consumer and Government Affairs Bureau of Federal Communication Commission.

For additional information, call 462-0509.

RIPTA IDENTIFICATION CARDS: RIPTA will process bus passes for senior and disabled persons at these sites during January:

Friday, January 11: William Donovan Manor, 19 Chapel Street, Newport
(11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.).

Friday, January 18: Leon Mathieu Senior Center, 420 Main Street, Pawtucket
(11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.).

Friday, January 25, RI Mall, Warwick (11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.).

For more information, call RIPTA at 784-9500.

OIL HEAT PROGRAM: Under the Joe Kennedy Oil Program, Rhode Islanders with limited incomes may be eligible for up to 100 gallons of heating oil free of charge. For information, go to www.citizensenergy.com/english/pages/OilHeatProgram.

POSITION AVAILABLE: Hospice of Nursing Placement, 334 East Avenue, Pawtucket is seeking a bilingual Spanish/English speaking registered nurse to join their hospice team. Experience is required in the medical, surgical and oncology fields. Hospice training will be provided. For information, call Maria Fatima Barros, RN at 728-6509.

RI LAW CENTER ADVOCACY PROGRAM: The Rhode Island Law Center, Ltd. has created the Care and Advocacy Program for Rhode Island seniors and their families. The Program offers help to families who are about to place a loved one into a nursing home or who need help in making other care arrangements. For information, contact Laura Pickering at 333-3311 or go to laurap@rielderlawcenter.com.

MEDICARE BENEFICIARIES SHOULD ACT NOW TO MEET THEIR 2008 PRESCRIPTION DRUG NEEDS: The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) encourages all Medicare beneficiaries to act BEFORE December 31 of 2007 to meet their 2008 health care needs. Review of current health care coverage should be performed each year to ensure the best coverage for the coming year, New beneficiaries are urged to sign up for medical plans and prescription drug coverage as soon as possible to ensure a smooth transition to health care coverage in 2008. The annual open enrollment runs until December 31.

ADOPT A SENIOR: Now is the time for you to *Adopt a Senior* to help them review their Medicare health plans and their supplemental or Medicare Advantage health plans. Take these simple steps:

1. Contact a loved one who needs help.
2. Have them put together a list of their current medications.
3. Go to www.medicare.gov or call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) and log onto the Prescription Drug Plan Finder.
4. Select the options that best suit the senior's needs and allow them to make a choice.
5. If your loved one is living on a limited income, help them to apply for Extra Help by calling 1-800-772-1213 (Voice) or 1-800-325-0778 (TTY) and ask for form SSA-1020 or apply on line at www.socialsecurity.gov.

2008 RESOURCE LIMITS: The 2008 resource limits for Extra Help are \$7,790 for a single person and \$12,440 for a married couple for the full low-income subsidy and \$11,990 for a single person and \$23,970 for a married couple for the partial subsidy. A \$1,500 exclusion is included in these resource limits if the beneficiary indicates that they will use part of these resources for burial expenses.

EXTRA HELP RECIPIENTS MAY NEED TO TAKE ACTION: If you have Medicare and are already receiving Extra Help in paying for prescriptions, you need to know what's going on IF you received a blue or tan letter.

BLUE LETTER:

1. Your current plan is leaving Medicare.
2. The Extra Help you get from Medicare will no longer cover the full premium of your current plan in 2008.

ACTION: Keep the letter as you will need it to make sure that your new 2008 plan will meet your needs.

What if I don't want Medicare to automatically enroll me in a new plan?

You can join a new plan on your own in your area at any time. Included in the blue letter is a list of Medicare plans in your area that have no monthly premiums for people who qualify for full Extra Help. Be sure to compare plan premiums when shopping for a drug plan because some premiums may be more than the amount of Extra Help you receive.

TAN LETTER:

If you get a tan letter from Medicare, this means that the Extra Help you get will not cover the full cost of your plan's premium in 2008. Medicare will not automatically re-assign you to a new plan because you have selected a new plan on your own. However, if you stay in this plan you will have to pay higher out-of-pocket costs.

ACTION: If you do nothing, you will remain in the plan you have selected for 2008. You will pay more each month so you should make sure the plan meets your needs.

HOUSING OPTIONS GUIDE: The Eldercare Locator has just published and released their *Housing Option for Older Adults* consumer guide for making housing decisions. The booklet provides an overview of the many housing options available for older adults and discusses the benefits and challenges to consider for each option. For a free copy of the booklet, call 202-898-2478 or go to www.n4a.org/resources.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS: The federal Homeland Security agency publishes a wide variety of brochures to help older Americans be prepared for emergency situations. Among these brochures are *Preparing Makes Sense for Older Americans-Get Ready Now*, *Preparing Your Pets for Emergencies Makes Sense-Get Ready Now* and *Preparing Makes Sense for People with Disabilities and Special Needs-Get Ready Now*. For copies of these brochures and other emergency preparedness materials, go to www.ready.gov.

Department of Elderly Affairs (DEA), John O. Pastore Center, Benjamin Rush Building 55, 35 Howard Avenue, Cranston, RI 02920 publishes the Information Memorandum in January, February, April, June, July, August, October, and November of each year. In March, May, September, and December, DEA publishes The Older Rhode Islander newspaper. Reader's comments, suggestions, or items of interest are welcome. The deadline for submission of material is the first of the month for the next monthly publication. The DEA also encourages aging network agencies to reprint any articles that appear in the Information Memorandum or The Older Rhode Islander. Permission to reprint this material is not required by DEA. For additional information on DEA publications, call Larry Grimaldi at 462-0509. To send a FAX, dial 462-0503; or e-mail larry@dea.state.ri.us.

