



## NEWS RELEASE

### ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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## Local partners join national effort to promote healthier living, wellness when Medicare Prevention tour bus visits Montgomery

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Steps to a Healthier Alabama and a Steps-cosponsored program for seniors are being highlighted when a Medicare Prevention tour bus visits the East YMCA in Montgomery July 26.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services are joining community members to educate area residents about the importance of preventing chronic disease and illness. An initiative called A Healthier US Starts Here encourages the public to take advantage of important screenings and preventive benefits offered through Medicare.

Dr. Thomas Miller, Assistant State Health Officer for Personal and Community Health, Alabama Department of Public Health, said, "In this time of increases in obesity, decreases in physical activity, and continued tobacco use, we applaud the efforts of A Healthier US Starts Here to encourage Alabamians to live healthier lives. Not only do unhealthy lifestyles take their toll on our people, they also strain our health care system. We want Alabamians enrolling in Medicare to be aware of the many screening tools available to them at no charge so that health problems can be detected and treated earlier."

Captain Clara Cobb, Regional Health Administrator, Department of Health and Human Services, is joining community partners including representatives from the Alabama Quality Assurance Foundation at the Montgomery stop, one of four planned for the state this week and early next week. The Medicare Prevention tour bus is visiting each of the 48 continental United States to promote conversations among people with Medicare, families, caregivers, health professionals and community organizations.

A Healthier US Starts Here encourages Alabamians to adopt the following lifestyle habits:

- Make physical activity a part of your day
- Eat more healthy foods
- Protect yourself and your family from illness
- Avoid risks to your health and to your loved ones

In Montgomery, visitors will first participate in a partner roundtable to explore collaborative projects. Then they will observe a class at the East YMCA called Living Well Alabama which is cosponsored by the Steps Program and conducted by the Alabama Arthritis Branch of the Alabama Department of Public Health.

The mission of Steps to a Healthier Alabama is to reduce the prevalence and burden of obesity, diabetes and asthma. Its services include programs and initiatives focused on individuals, families, community organizations, environmental enhancements, and government and policy changes to enhance improved nutrition, physical activity, tobacco avoidance and health care access. Steps funds community-based activities in two regions of the state: the Steps River Region (Autauga, Elmore, Lowndes, Macon and Montgomery counties) and the Steps Southeast Alabama Region (Pike and Barbour counties).

National data show that the increased use of Medicare preventive benefits can help prevent and detect chronic diseases early in their course, when they are most treatable, and can save lives. For example:

- More than 34 million Americans have low bone mass, placing them at increased risk for osteoporosis. Osteoporosis can be prevented and early diagnosis and treatment can reduce or prevent fractures from occurring.
- Decreasing total cholesterol levels by 10 percent in the U.S. population could result in a 30 percent reduction in the incidence of coronary heart disease.
- One pneumonia vaccine, which is free to Medicare beneficiaries, can be life saving—yet only about two-thirds of those with Medicare report receiving the service and 46,700 U.S. adults die annually from vaccine-preventable diseases.

Many beneficiaries are unaware that Medicare covers preventive screenings and other benefits, sometimes at no cost. New demands will be placed on the Medicare system as vast numbers of baby boomers begin reaching Medicare eligibility. The health of beneficiaries and the health of the Medicare Trust Fund depend upon on effective prevention programs.

Medicare currently covers:

- One time “Welcome to Medicare” physical (including an abdominal aortic aneurysm screening)
- Cardiovascular screenings
- Smoking cessation counseling
- Cancer tests – mammogram screening for breast cancer, pap test and pelvic exam screenings for cervical and vaginal cancer, colorectal cancer screenings, and prostate cancer screening
- Shots and vaccines – flu, Pneumococcal pneumonia, Hepatitis B
- Bone mass measurement
- Diabetes screening, glucose monitoring supplies and self-management training
- Medical nutrition therapy for people with diabetes or kidney disease
- Glaucoma test

People with Medicare are being asked to take action, to talk to their healthcare providers and to visit [www.mymedicare.gov](http://www.mymedicare.gov) to learn more about preventive services they are eligible to receive and to access tools to help manage their healthcare. Information is also available at 1-800-MEDICARE.

Other Alabama stops will be made in Birmingham, Mobile and Poarch Creek Indian Health Services.