



**NEWS COLUMN – Area Agency on Aging District 7, Inc.**

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**Impact of the Senior Medicare Patrol**

**by Debbie Gulley, AAA7 Interim Executive Director**

**August 2024 Monthly Column**

The Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) has a mission to empower and assist Medicare beneficiaries, their families and caregivers to prevent, detect and report suspected healthcare fraud, errors and abuse through outreach, counseling and education. SMPs work to process, refer, and/or resolve beneficiary complaints of potential healthcare fraud in collaboration with state and federal partners. In Ohio, we work closely with the Ohio SMP, partnering to drive awareness of medical identity theft and educating the community on Medicare scams.



Medical identity theft occurs when someone uses personal information – such as your name and Medicare number – to bill for services or supplies you did not approve. Fraudsters may send you unwanted COVID test kits, call you to claim you qualify for free genetic testing, tell you Medicare is issuing new cards, or they may bill Medicare for a knee brace in your name, unbeknownst to you.

Earlier this month, the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Inspector General (OIG) published its report on the performance of the Senior Medicare Patrol program, including SMPs in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam and the US Virgin Islands. The report shared that in 2023, the SMP program:

- Provided information to help older adults protect themselves from health care fraud, errors and abuse at more than 22,000 events, reaching a total of 1.2 million people.
- Worked one-on-one with (or on behalf of) more than 270,000 Medicare beneficiaries — a 10% increase over 2022 — to provide information, advocate to resolve billing issues, and more.
- Reported 26 emerging fraud schemes, providing OIG with the information needed to alert consumers about risk and how to protect themselves.

The report also describes how the SMP program helped Medicare recoup more than \$111 million in fraudulent billings and helped Medicare and beneficiaries avoid thousands of dollars in unnecessary costs.

The Ohio Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) is part of the non-profit group Pro Seniors, Inc. and is funded through a grant from the Administration for Community Living. The SMP are fraud fighters helping to protect Medicare beneficiaries from medical identity fraud and stay safe from scammers. You can contact the SMP in Ohio at 800-293-4767 or visit them online at [www.proseniors.org/ohio-smp](http://www.proseniors.org/ohio-smp). The AAA7 partners with the SMP to provide local presentations in the AAA7 service area focusing on ways to best protect your Medicare number and detect and report Medicare fraud. For more information, contact Jenni Lewis at the AAA7 at 1-800-582-7277, extension 22224, or email [jlewis@aaa7.org](mailto:jlewis@aaa7.org).

For more information about the Area Agency on Aging District 7, call 1-800-582-7277 or email [info@aaa7.org](mailto:info@aaa7.org).