

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
Department of Health and Human Services
Attention: CMS-4203-NC
P.O. Box 8013, Baltimore, MD 21244-8013

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of Meals on Wheels of Pasco County and the many Florida seniors we serve, I am writing to urge the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to protect and strengthen Medicare Advantage, a vital program that improves the quality of life for the more than 2.5 million beneficiaries in the state. Medicare Advantage positively contributes to our state's growing elder community and organizations like ours by providing supplemental services, like meal delivery, to help our beloved, and often vulnerable, seniors and retirees live to their full potential.

Medicare Advantage's partnerships with local, community organizations like Meals on Wheels are instrumental in delivering and expanding the program's wide range of supplemental benefits for beneficiaries. For Meals on Wheels, these include home visits from our volunteers to deliver nutritious meals to seniors that serve the dual purpose of increasing their social interaction and preventing chronic illnesses like heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes.

Meals on Wheels of Pasco County also partners with hospitals and insurance providers, including Aetna and Humana, to offer supplemental services not related to meal delivery. By doing this, we are stepping outside of the box to help close the health care gaps many seniors fall victim to, and are proud to step up and be a service provider for so many.

Serving as the Executive Director of Meals on Wheels of Pasco County, I've witnessed the value the program provides to Pasco County seniors. Most recently, the services that Medicare Advantage provided through community-based organizations like mine helped lift burdens off vulnerable seniors during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Community-based organizations also provide valuable insights about the health and wellbeing of beneficiaries by collecting information in their homes during visits which would otherwise be unavailable to health care professionals. Collecting this vital information is critical to addressing and closing the gap in the inequities in social determinants of health (SDOH). To strengthen Medicare Advantage, CMS should create uniform standards and processes for the collection of information related to race, ethnicity, gender, and other social determinants of health like food or housing insecurity. This will ensure that Medicare Advantage stakeholders are collecting and have access to consistent and reliable data which will allow health care providers to better serve their patients.

Florida has a unique elder population with unique health and social needs. Now is the time for CMS to protect and strengthen the program to ensure that Sunshine State seniors have access to the care, and nutrition services, they need to live healthy lives.

Sincerely,

Beth Aker

Meals on Wheels of Pasco County
Pasco County, Florida

###