

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 30, 2008

**NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund's *CheckMeds NC*
Program Served Over 15,000 Seniors in First Year**

Services helped NC Seniors avoid an estimated \$10 million in health care costs

Raleigh, NC – Just more than a year ago on Oct. 25, 2007, the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) Commission launched a unique and innovative statewide program to provide Medication Therapy Management services for North Carolina seniors: *CheckMeds NC*. During the first year of the program, more than 15,000 NC seniors received Medication Therapy Management through *CheckMeds NC*, saving an estimated \$10 million in health care costs and avoiding countless health problems for those receiving services.

CheckMeds NC offers eligible seniors one-on-one consultations with pharmacists throughout the state to ensure that they are receiving the best information and advice about their medicines. North Carolina is the first state in the nation to launch such a service for its seniors.

“Checkmeds NC is a groundbreaking program for North Carolina seniors that not only saves them money, but also improves their health and can even save their lives,” said Lt. Governor Bev Perdue, chair of the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund Commission. “The fact that so many seniors have taken advantage of this free service in its first year of operation is a testament to the fact that our seniors need this kind of counseling.”

Medication Therapy Management is offered to a limited number of NC seniors under the federal Medicare Part D legislation; however, prescription drug plans are neither required to provide it in a face-to-face setting, nor to use a pharmacist to conduct this in-depth counseling session. Prior to *CheckMeds NC*, most plans were attempting to provide this type of service via direct mail or over the phone using primarily non-pharmacists, which can greatly diminish its effectiveness. *CheckMeds NC* offers every NC senior the opportunity for an in-depth medication review with a specially trained pharmacist in their area.

Building upon its community-based Medication Assistance Program (MAP) launched in 2002, HWTF placed both retail and community pharmacists under contract to counsel eligible seniors on the most appropriate and cost-effective use of their federal drug benefit. All North Carolina seniors ages 65 and older and enrolled in a Medicare prescription drug plan are eligible to receive this free service at participating pharmacies. The HWTF Commission has allocated \$2 million to fund the program.

Services include a comprehensive “brown bag review” session between the senior and the specially-trained *CheckMeds NC* pharmacist. This initial review consists of a one-on-one meeting where the senior is asked to bring all his/her prescription, over-the-counter, and herbal medicines, vitamins and supplements. The review may result in advice, patient education, and/or follow up with the prescribing physician to discuss medication changes that may be helpful to the senior.

Pharmacists in both chain and independent pharmacies across the state were invited to take the free online training to become *CheckMeds NC* participating pharmacists, enabling them to be reimbursed for services they provide to eligible seniors. In response, 285 NC pharmacists completed the training and have been providing *CheckMeds NC* services to seniors across the state for the past year.

Medication Therapy Management is a proven method of saving lives and reducing overall health care costs by reducing potentially harmful drug-to-drug interactions. Nationally, as many as 200,000 deaths and an estimated 16% of all hospital admissions are linked to medication-related problems.

For more information about *CheckMeds NC*, go to the website: www.checkmedsnc.com.

About the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund

The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund makes North Carolina stronger, both physically and economically, by funding programs that promote preventive health. Created by the General Assembly in 2000 to allocate a portion of North Carolina's share of the national tobacco settlement, HWTF has invested \$199 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$102 million to fund prescription drug assistance programs. For more information, please visit www.HealthWellNC.com.

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