

**For Immediate Release**

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**LT. GOVERNOR PERDUE ANNOUNCES A UNIQUE SENIOR DRUG PROGRAM  
TO SAVE MONEY AND LIVES**

*Pharmacists engaged statewide to help NC seniors stretch Medicare drug benefits*

At a time when 170,000 North Carolina seniors are projected to fall victim to the so-called “doughnut hole” in the federal Medicare prescription drug program, the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) is announcing the creation of **NCRx Care**, a unique and innovative medication therapy management program to address this problem in future years.

Building upon its Medication Assistance Program (MAP) established in 2002, the Trust Fund will place both retail and community pharmacists under contract to counsel Medicare enrollees on the most appropriate and cost-effective use of their federal drug benefit. HWTF is investing \$2 million over 3 years to compensate pharmacists who counsel seniors.

*“I’m proud that the Health and Wellness Trust Fund is stepping up to help fix a gap in coverage that the federal plan created,”* said HWTF Chair Lt. Governor Bev Perdue. *“By expanding the availability of counseling services through retail pharmacists, North Carolina will be the first state in America using this proven strategy to help seniors maximize their Medicare benefit. This interaction with pharmacists can save both money and lives.”*

The “doughnut hole” is a gap in prescription coverage. Medicare covers 75% of the first \$2,250 worth of prescriptions, but after that, coverage drops to zero and doesn’t resume until a senior hits \$5,100 in drug costs. Thereafter, Medicare covers 95% of the costs. The gap in coverage amounts to \$2,850. HWTF’s new **NCRx Care** counseling can help seniors spend their Medicare benefit efficiently and thereby avoid or delay falling into the coverage gap.

Medication therapy management is a proven method of saving lives and reducing overall health care costs by identifying 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.

**NCRx Care** will provide pharmacist counseling for 50,000 eligible North Carolina seniors. These seniors can also receive assistance paying for their prescription drug premiums through NCRx, a companion program recently announced by Governor Mike Easley and Lt. Governor Perdue. NCRx, funded by HWTF, provides up to \$18 a month towards premiums for seniors who are age 65 and above and who meet income and asset requirements.

**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 \$127 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$78 million to fund a prescription drug assistance program. For more information, please visit [www.HealthWellNC.com](http://www.HealthWellNC.com).*