

1941 SOUTH 42ND STREET
SUITE #312
OMAHA, NEBRASKA 68105

STAFF

Sue Fredricks.....Executive Director
Kae Turco.....Volunteer
Coordinator
Brenda Canedy.....Client Resource
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Anissa Wilson....Intake Coordinator
Diana Palmer.....Office Assistant

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HOURS

MONDAY-FRIDAY
8:30AM—4:30PM

OUR MISSION

TO SIMPLIFY THE LIVES OF
SENIORS BY ENABLING THEM TO
MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS
REGARDING THEIR BENEFITS

www.vas-nebraska.org
402-444-6617

vas

— VOLUNTEERS —
ASSISTING SENIORS

SPRING 2021

VAS is Assisting Homestead Exemption Filers

The Nebraska Homestead Exemption program offers eligible property owners reduced property taxes. To determine eligibility, a property owner must complete and submit the Nebraska Homestead Exemption application to your county's Assessor Office before June 30.

Do I qualify?

You may qualify for reduced property taxes if you own and occupy your home on or before January 1 of 2021 and qualify in one the following categories:

- Persons 65 or older before January
- Qualified disabled individuals
- Qualified disabled veterans and their widow(er)s). ([Click for details](#)).

Some categories have limits on income and home value.

If you haven't completed your Homestead application yet this year, you can contact Volunteers Assisting Seniors (VAS) for information on the program and help

reviewing or completing the Nebraska Homestead Exemption application.

VAS has a long history of offering homeowners assistance with completing their Homestead application. On March 23 of last year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, VAS had to change how we provided Homestead Exemption application assistance from in person help to helping over the phone to ensure the health and safety of the homeowners and our volunteers. Last year, during the pandemic, VAS helped 436 homeowner's with their applications for an estimated savings of \$1 million in property tax relief, an average savings of \$2,294 per homeowner.

Don't miss the opportunity to save money in property taxes. Be sure to file your Homestead application by June 30th. If you would like VAS to help you with your application, call us at 402-444-6617 to schedule a phone appointment with one of our trained and experienced Homestead volunteers.



Homestead Exemption Filing February 1 – June 30

COVID-19 Vaccine Scams

As the number of people and communities affected by the COVID-19 pandemic grows, so do the scams associated with it. Scammers use public health emergencies as opportunities for new fraud schemes, and because older adults are at greater risk for serious illness from COVID-19, they may target older populations.

It's important to remember that although the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other public health officials may contact you if they believe you may have been exposed to the virus, they will not need to ask you for insurance or financial information.

Scammers rapidly alter their tactics and adapt their schemes to the changing landscape, and we anticipate that they will leverage the COVID-19 vaccine to prey on unsuspecting beneficiaries. Be vigilant and protect yourself from potential fraud concerning COVID-19 vaccines and treatments.

Here are things you need to know about the COVID-19 vaccine:

- You will not need to pay anything out-of-pocket to get the vaccine during this public health emergency.
- You cannot pay to put your name on a list to get the vaccine.
- You cannot pay to get early access to the vaccine.
- Be cautious of door-to-door visitors – especially those that are unsolicited or come without notice.
- No one from Medicare or the Health Department will contact you.
- No one from a vaccine distribution site or health care payer, like a private insurance company, will call you asking for your Medicare number, Social Security number, credit card or bank account information to sign you up to get the vaccine.

- Photos of COVID-19 vaccination cards should not be shared on social media. Posting content that includes your date of birth, health care details or other personally identifiable information can be used to steal your identity.

Medicare beneficiaries should:

- Contact your own doctor if you are experiencing potential symptoms of COVID-19.
- Do not give out your Medicare number, Social Security number, or personal information in response to unsolicited calls, texts, emails, home visits, or booths at health fairs and other public venues.
- Be suspicious of anyone going door-to-door to offer free coronavirus or COVID-19 testing, supplies, treatments, or vaccines.
- Beware of providers offering products, treatments, or medicines to prevent the virus. Check with your health care provider before paying for or receiving any COVID-19-related treatment.
- If you get a call, text, email — or even someone knocking on your door — claiming they can get you early access to the vaccine, STOP. That's a scam.

“People who think they know everything are a great annoyance to those of us who do.”

– Isaac Asimov

How to Avoid COVID-19 Vaccine Scams

Here are two sure ways to spot COVID-19 vaccine scams:

- 1 You can't buy real vaccines online. **Those are scams.**
- 2 You don't have to pay out of pocket for a vaccine – not before, during, or after your appointment. **That's either a scam or a mistake.**

Learn more at

ftc.gov/coronavirus/scams

consumerresources.org/beware-coronavirus-scams

Stopping Medicare Fraud

2020 National Health Care Fraud TAKEDOWN



The Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General, along with our state and federal law enforcement partners, participated in a nationwide health care fraud takedown in September 2020.

Scope: The takedown focused on several schemes to include alleged telefraud, or scams that leverage aggressive marketing and so called telehealth services to commit fraud. This fraudulent activity resulted in charges for 345 defendants in 51 judicial districts, including telemedicine executives, the owners of durable medical equipment (DME) companies, genetic testing laboratories, pharmacies, and more than 100 medical practitioners, for their alleged participation in health care fraud schemes involving more than \$6 billion in alleged loss. In addition, federal health care billing privileges were revoked for 256 medical professionals for their involvement in the schemes. Federal and state law enforcement personnel took part in this operation, including 175 OIG special agents.

The largest amount of alleged fraud loss charged in connection with the cases announced – \$4.5 billion in allegedly false and fraudulent claims submitted by more than 86 criminal defendants in 19 judicial districts – relates to schemes involving telemedicine: the use of telecommunications technology to provide health care services remotely.

Telefraud Scheme: Since 2016, HHS OIG has seen a significant increase in telefraud. The alleged scheme involves a marketing network that lured hundreds of thousands of unsuspecting individuals into a criminal scheme through telemarketing calls, direct mail, television advertisements, and internet pop-up advertisements. The defendant telemedicine executives allegedly paid medical practitioners to order unnecessary durable medical equipment, genetic and other diagnostic testing, and medications, either without any patient interaction or with only a brief telephonic conversation with patients they had never met or seen. Often, the durable medical equipment, test results, or medications were not provided to the beneficiaries or were worthless to the patients and their actual primary care doctors, and the misdirection, fake diagnoses, and unneeded tests misled patients and delayed their chance to seek appropriate treatment for medical complaints. The proceeds of the fraudulent scheme were allegedly laundered through international shell corporations and foreign banks for the benefit of the defendants.

The Medicare Fraud Strike Force, a joint initiative between the Department of Justice and Health and Human Services, works to prevent and deter fraud and enforce current anti-fraud laws around the country. In addition, the U.S. Department of Health

and Human Services Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, working in conjunction with the Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General are taking steps to increase accountability and decrease the presence of fraudulent providers.

NATIONAL TELEFRAUD TAKEDOWN



Scammers are targeting Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries in schemes which involve the use of illegal kickbacks and bribes by durable medical equipment companies, laboratories, and pharmacies to telemedicine corporate executives in exchange for orthotic braces, diagnostic testing, and prescription drugs that are medically unnecessary.

The ALLEGED SCHEME and KEY PLAYERS



Telemedicine Executives

They own telemedicine companies and call centers. They use international marketing networks to lure unsuspecting individuals into a criminal scheme through telemarketing calls, direct mail, television ads, and internet pop-up ads. A call center confirms that an individual is on Medicare or Medicaid and transfers the individual to a telemedicine company for a medical practitioner's consultation.

Telemedicine executives are the masterminds of this scheme. They pay practitioners for prescriptions.



Medical Practitioner & Telemedicine Company

The telemedicine company obtains prescriptions from medical practitioners and sells them to pharmacies, laboratories, or medical equipment companies.

Medical practitioners are being paid by telemedicine executives to order unnecessary prescriptions, either without any patient interaction or with only a brief telephonic conversation with patients they have never met or seen.



Pharmacy, Lab, Medical Equipment Company

After the pharmacy, lab, or medical equipment company purchases the prescription, it sends the prescription to the beneficiary. Medicare or Medicaid is then billed and the telemedicine executives receive a kickback from the scam.

* This alleged scheme is current as of September 2020.

Learn More: oig.hhs.gov/2020takedown

Report Fraud: 1-800-HHS-TIPS or

oig.hhs.gov/fraud/hotline

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Office of Inspector General



Protect, Detect, Report

How can you help fight Medicare billing fraud? One way to help is to keep a record of any healthcare services you receive. By keeping a detailed record of the dates, and services received, you can compare them to your Medicare Summary Notices (MSN) or Explanation of Benefits (EOB).

The MSN details any original Medicare Part A or B services you were billed for during the past 3 months. If you have a Medicare Advantage plan, you will receive an EOB from your plan. These notices will include the date of service, services provided, and who provided the service. If this information does not match your records, you should contact the provider to determine if there was a error in billing.

If you don't recognize the provider, or suspect fraudulent billing, you can contact VAS for information on where to report your concerns. You can also request a copy of a "My Health Care Tracker". The tracker is a fraud-fighting tool available for free to beneficiaries through the SMP program. The trackers help beneficiaries prevent, detect, and report possible Medicare fraud.

Call VAS at (402) 444-6617 to receive a free 'My Health Care Tracker' (while supplies last) to help fight Medicare fraud.

My Health Care Tracker



Protect yourself from fraud
by tracking your health care!



PROTECT
DETECT
REPORT

VAS Continues to Help Seniors throughout COVID-19

Thanks to our network of incredible volunteers, VAS has been able to continue providing senior benefits counseling throughout the past year. We have been offering our services remotely, through phone assistance, to ensure the health and safety of our clients and volunteers.

Our organization is closely monitoring the COVID-19 situation. We will return to in-person assistance through a phased implementation, when it is safe to do so, based on guidance from the CDC. The current VAS status is:

VAS Office

Our VAS office is currently closed to the public. However, we can be reached during office hours at our main number, 402-444-6617.

Homestead Exemption Filing Assistance

VAS continues to provide Homestead filing assistance by phone. Please call the main number at 402-444-6617 to schedule an appointment.

The deadline for filing the Homestead Assistance Application is June 30.



VOLUNTEERS
ASSISTING SENIORS



Medicare Counseling

VAS continues to provide ongoing, daily Medicare counseling by phone, including access to important Medicare resources by email or online.

Please call VAS at 402-444-6617 to schedule an appointment to talk with one of our trained and certified Medicare counselors.

Medicare Open Enrollment

It is important to review your Medicare plan every year to insure that you will have the best coverage at the lowest cost for next year. Last year, during the pandemic, VAS helped over 1,200 people review their Medicare plans over the phone.

We are committed to helping beneficiaries review their drug coverage again this fall, keeping our client's health and safety as our primary concern. VAS will begin scheduling Open Enrollment appointments for Drug and Advantage plan reviews in late September. Please call VAS at 402-444-6617 at that time to schedule an appointment for a plan review.



VOLUNTEERS
ASSISTING SENIORS

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Upcoming Events

VAS will continue to serve you with phone assistance for Medicare and Homestead Exemption. We will keep you updated as we develop other ways to help. Please stay healthy and safe.

- VAS staff and volunteers