

Lower Columbia CAP recruits volunteers to help explain changes in health care

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In anticipation of the questions and confusion around health care reform, Lower Columbia Community Action Program (CAP) is recruiting volunteers to help.

The volunteers can train to become Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors (SHIBA). CAP trains these volunteers through the Washington State Office of the Insurance Commissioner.

"The training provides an excellent overview to Medicare, Medicaid, and health insurance in general," Anita Hopkins, who oversees the SHIBA program, said in a press release. "And the role of the SHIBA volunteers is going to become even more important with health care reform."

Hopkins expects people will be seeking informed and objective advice as the changes in health care insurance which begin to take effect in 2011, similar to when Medicare Prescription D started several years ago.

"We had dozens of people calling each week, asking questions and wanting advice," said Hopkins. "We expect that will be happening again. Many changes are coming, and we want to be ready."

The 32-hour training will be from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on June 4, 8, 23, and 30 in the CAP building, 1526 Commerce Ave., Longview, next to the Columbia Theatre for the Performing Arts.

The training is free and lunch will be provided.

Martin Estrada from Office of the Insurance Commissioner will conduct the four-day training which includes health care benefits in Washington State, health care insurance options for persons under 65, as well as an understanding of Medicare and Medicaid.

Once volunteers complete the basic training, they are paired with a senior volunteer who acts a mentor until they are comfortable advising people on their own. They also participate in monthly training updates from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. on the second Wednesday also in the CAP building.

"Most SHIBA volunteers work one afternoon a week, but we can be flexible to suit people's schedules," said Hopkins.

She hopes to have a team of trained volunteers ready when the calls start coming in. For more information, contact Anita Hopkins at CAP at 425-3430 or 1-800-383-2101, extension 288.