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TennCare Opening Enrollment For 2,500 Applications

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by Tim Wetzel NASHVILLE, Tenn. - TennCare is opening limited enrollment Monday night for the Standard Spend Down program. The program helps low income Tennesseans pay for medical bills.

TennCare has set up a special call in line for applicants that will be open from 6:00 to 8:30 P.M. Applicants must call 1-866-358-3230.

WhenTennCare last opened enrollment, callers flooded the state's phone system with calls. The number of spots were filled within an hour.

"We are pleased to again work in this collaborative effort with several entities including TennCare, the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS), the Tennessee Hospital Association, advocacy groups and the federal government in offering Standard Spend Down," says DHS Commissioner Raquel Hatter. "This program offers additional assistance to qualified low-income individuals or those with very high medical bills who are not already on TennCare."

Standard Spend Down Program Information



Prospective applicants are encouraged to check eligibility qualifications before calling in. More information on the Standard Spend Down program and more detailed eligibility criteria are available on TennCare's website: www.tn.gov/TennCare.

In order to qualify, applicants have to be low income, disabled, elderly or take care of a Medicaid-eligible child.

The toll-free number system is used to ensure equal access to Tennessee citizens interested in this program. After the first 2,500 calls are taken, the phone lines will be closed. A maximum of 7,000 people can be on the program.

Tony Garr with the Tennessee Health Care Campaign says the program doesn't cover near that many people.

He believes people are suffering and needlessly being shut out of the program. TennCare opened enrollment last October. In one hour, they reached their 2,500 call limit, but only 504 people actually got into the program.

In February of this year, close to 3,000 applications were mailed out. Only 1,850 were returned, and 431 people made it into the program.

There are currently 935 people on the program, but TennCare can only process a

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certain number at a time.

"We have to do it in sections because it takes time to process applications," says Kelly Gunderson with TennCare.

Gunderson points out they have to meet federal guidelines when processing applications in a certain amount of time, so they cannot take them all at once.

"We are going to continue to open up enrollment on this on a rolling basis, until we reach the 7,000 limit," says Gunderson.

The Standard Spend Down category first opened to applicants on Oct. 4, 2010. It was opened a second time on Feb. 22, 2011. The 2,500 call limit was reached in approximately one hour during both enrollment periods.

Officials recommend doing some research before calling. Information can be found on the [program website](#). Also, a record of medical bills over the past 90 days would be helpful because the state will ask for them. The hotline number to call is 1-866-358-3230.

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