



Successful Partnerships

How the City of Cleveland Uses **BenefitsCheckUp** to Screen Seniors for Eligible Benefits



CITY OF CLEVELAND
Mayor Frank G. Jackson

Many older people need help paying for prescription drugs, health care, utilities, and other basic needs. Ironically, millions of older Americans – especially those with limited incomes – are eligible for, but not receiving, benefits from existing federal, state and local programs. Ranging from heating and energy assistance to prescription savings programs to income supplements, there are many public programs available to seniors in need if they only know about them and how to apply for them.

Thanks to BenefitsCheckUp®, help is available for seniors and those who care about them. Launched by the National Council on Aging (NCOA) in 2001, BenefitsCheckUp® is the nation's most comprehensive Web-based service to screen for some 1,550 benefits programs available to those 55 and over.

Cleveland: Committed to Seniors' Quality of Life

Cleveland's Department of Aging is committed to ensuring that Cleveland is an elder-friendly community by enhancing the quality of life for its seniors through advocacy, planning, service coordination, and the delivery of needed services. The Department uses BenefitsCheckUp to help seniors locate federal, state and local programs that assist residents with a wide array of benefits.

The Cleveland BenefitsCheckUp program started in August 2003 with grant funding and is now financed through the City's general fund, supplemented with foundation funds. Many seniors were not getting the full range of benefits they needed, and the Department of Aging was eager to partner with NCOA to assist Cleveland's seniors.

Creative Screening Strategies

To reach as many people as possible, Cleveland has come up with an innovative approach to go directly to their target population. Armed with bus passes and BenefitsCheckUp questionnaires, AARP senior workers go out to senior apartments, recreation centers, health centers, senior companion programs, and homeless shelters. In this way they are able to reach traditionally "unreachable" clients

and those who either don't have access to a computer or don't feel comfortable navigating the BenefitsCheckUp website on their own. In addition, seniors can receive screenings at various sites of the Public Housing Authority, which works in partnership with the Department.

Other strategies for informing Cleveland seniors about BenefitsCheckUp include: inserts in utility bills, flyers, letters to churches, posters at local libraries, inclusion of BenefitsCheckUp on the City's cable station, and articles in newsletters and resource guides.

Benefits Services Expanding

The Department of Aging will soon reach even more of its older population through a recent grant from the Sisters of Charity Foundation in Cleveland which provides them with a dedicated site that seniors can come to for screenings. The site is located at Fairhill Center (a multi-tenant campus of 25 organizations engaged in service to older adults and families). Staff will zero in on the assistance programs that will be of greatest benefit to seniors.

The sometimes difficult work of follow-up will continue as well. Two phone surveys revealed that 35% of people screened actually did obtain benefits.

BenefitsCheckUp Serves Cleveland's Seniors

Volunteers visited 235 community sites last year and completed about 1200 screenings, which is their yearly goal. As of August 2007, 4,643 older citizens have been screened, and over \$125 million in benefits have been identified for seniors in the city. The Department of Aging and BenefitsCheckUp continue to improve the lives of seniors and the local economy as well, as seniors receive the benefits they are eligible for.

Partnering with BenefitsCheckUp

To discuss partnership opportunities with BenefitsCheckUp,

contact: S. Stuart Spector, Senior Vice President
Benefits Access Group
National Council on Aging
Email: Stuart.Spector@ncoa.org
Phone: (202) 479-6675

BenefitsCheckUp

BenefitsCheckUp is an online decision-support and enrollment tool that helps organizations screen seniors with limited income and resources for over 1,550 public and private benefits including:

- Prescription drugs
- Heating bills
- Housing / Rent
- Meal programs
- Legal services
- Medical costs
- In-home services
- Tax relief
- Veteran's benefits
- Employment
- Volunteer work

And gives agencies:

- Single-page screenings format for fast data entry
- Printable screening questionnaires for enrollment events, mailing and pre-screening
- Over 250 Rx program application forms, searchable by drug or program name
- Reports that document the number of clients screened, their demographics and the programs for which they are eligible