



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## Senator Kennedy Announces Expansion of Prescription Drug Coverage Program for WNY Seniors

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY April 11, 2014

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*With first expansion of the EPIC program since 2001, as many as 3,000 seniors in Cheektowaga may now be eligible.*

*Seniors with incomes under \$75,000 if single and \$100,000 for married couples now meet EPIC's income eligibility requirements.*

CHEEKTOWAGA, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy visited the Cheektowaga Senior Center today to announce the expansion of an important prescription drug coverage program that many

local seniors rely on to reduce the costs of needed medications. Senator Kennedy said this year's state budget expands eligibility for the Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage (EPIC) program for the first time since 2001. Under the changes approved as part of the state budget, many more Western New York seniors are now eligible for the cost-saving program.

Previously, only seniors with incomes under \$35,000 if single or \$50,000 if married were eligible for EPIC. In this year's budget, Kennedy and colleagues in the Legislature successfully expanded eligibility for EPIC by raising the income threshold to \$75,000 if single and \$100,000 for married couples.

"Many local seniors are struggling under the rising costs of necessities like food, transportation, housing and medications. With the expansion of the EPIC program, more Western New Yorkers will now have access to an extremely helpful program that makes prescriptions more affordable," said Senator Kennedy. "This will provide necessary relief and protect seniors from those devastating dilemmas over whether or not they can afford their needed medications each month. It was urgent for New York State to finally expand this program to help more seniors, and I'm thrilled that thousands more are now eligible in Western New York."

EPIC is a state-run prescription assistance program that helps make medications more affordable for seniors, and the changes in the budget dramatically expand access to the program. Under the changes made, it's estimated as many as 3,000 additional seniors in Cheektowaga now meet income eligibility requirements for the program. And throughout Senator Kennedy's district covering Buffalo, Lackawanna and Cheektowaga more than 6,000 seniors are now estimated to meet EPIC's income requirements.

The state budget increases funding for EPIC by \$4.1 million, which will be used to expand the number of seniors enrolled in EPIC by at least 10 percent. Currently, more than 270,000 New

Yorkers take advantage of the program. Now, thousands of additional seniors in Western New York and across the state meet income eligibility, but to receive EPIC benefits, seniors must be enrolled in or eligible for the Medicare Part D drug plan.

**Eligibility requirements for EPIC** are as follows: a senior must be a New York State resident who is age 65 or older, and they must be enrolled or eligible to be enrolled in a Medicare Part D prescription coverage plan, in addition to meeting the income requirements.

EPIC supplements Medicare Part D plans by covering out-of-pocket drug costs for eligible seniors. EPIC serves as secondary coverage to pay a portion of remaining costs for prescription drugs. After any Medicare Part D deductible is met, **co-payments under EPIC** range from \$3 (for prescriptions costing \$15 or less) to \$20 (for prescriptions over \$55).

Seniors who now meet income eligibility requirements for EPIC should contact the state's EPIC helpline at 1-800-332-3742 for more information. Information is also available online at [https://www.health.ny.gov/health\\_care/epic/](https://www.health.ny.gov/health_care/epic/). Seniors can also call Senator Kennedy's office at 716-826-2683 with any questions.

Senator Kennedy also highlighted the \$5 million increase in funding for Community Services for the Elderly. This \$5 million increase brings total program funding to \$25,296,000, which represents an increase of about 25 percent over last year. This program provides help for seniors who want to remain in their homes by offering some necessary support services to stay safe and independent at home and in their communities. The most recent data for the program indicates there are approximately 66,000 older New Yorkers who benefit from services funded through this program. These services range from personal care, home-delivered meals, transportation, health promotion and wellness activities, senior centers and other congregate programs, personal emergency-response systems and other important services. A portion of this funding goes to Erie County to funnel to various programs and

services.

In addition, the budget increases funds for Elder Abuse Education and Outreach by about \$200,000 for a total funding allocation of \$945,000 – that represents an increase of about 27 percent. This urgently-needed funding will help protect seniors by increasing access to opportunities to remain safe and independent in their homes. This funding goes toward investigation and assessment of seniors' needs and risk of harm, counseling for victims and families, advocacy, financial-management services, crisis interventions and case management.

While meeting with local seniors Friday, Kennedy also outlined new property tax relief programs that the state established in the budget. Approximately \$1.5 billion in property tax relief will be provided to homeowners statewide over the next two years, and in Western New York, the Governor's office estimates homeowners will receive property tax savings totaling about \$106 million. Senator Kennedy brought attention to increased funding for local schools as well, which will allow districts to protect and strengthen educational programs for children while relying a little less on local property taxpayers.

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*Senator Timothy M. Kennedy represents the New York State Senate's 63rd District, which is comprised of the town of Cheektowaga, the city of Lackawanna and nearly all of the city of Buffalo. More information is available at <http://kennedy.nysenate.gov>.*