

Still Here, Still Growing and Weathering the Storm

There is no denying that times are tough. Everyone is finding it more difficult to make ends meet in this economic situation. Every day it seems another business is closing its doors.

Commonwealth Care Alliance, on the other hand, is very much still open, weathering the storm just like everyone else, and continuing to grow our membership. In fact, we have just signed a contract with the state that allows us to keep growing our Senior Care Options program.

We are also applying to expand our service area to provide care to folks in more communities across Massachusetts.

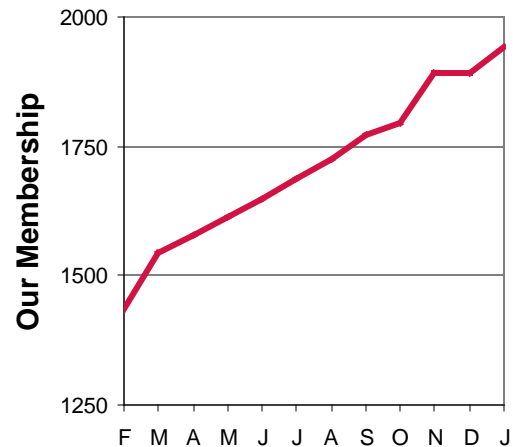
No matter how tough it gets, remember — help is available to you. Utility assistance programs in Massachusetts help low-income people pay for heat. You may also be eligible for fuel discounts and shutoff protection. Call the MA Heat Line at 1-800-632-8175 to check whether you are eligible for these programs and to learn how to apply for them.

Food stamps are also available for low-income households.

Call the Department of Transitional Assistance at 1-800-249-2007 to find your local office, or call Project Bread's toll-free

FoodSource Hotline at 1-800-645-8333 for other food stamp locations in your area.

If you still need help call Member Services at 1-866-610-2273, Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–6 p.m. ♦



Past 12 months





Green Pea Soup with Dill
Yoghurt

Ingredients

3½ cups reduced-sodium chicken broth
2 cups Gold potatoes, peeled, cut into small chunks
2 cups medium leeks, chopped, white and light green part
2 medium garlic cloves, peeled
2 cups frozen green peas, thawed
½ cup plain fat-free yogurt
3 Tbsp fresh dill, chopped
¼ cup tomatoes, diced

Instructions

Combine broth, potatoes, leeks and garlic; bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce heat and simmer, covered, until vegetables are almost tender, about 12 minutes. Add peas to saucepan, cook until vegetables are tender, about 3 minutes; remove saucepan from heat and let cool about 5 minutes. Whisk together yogurt and 2 Tbsp of dill; set aside. Puree soup (be careful not to splatter hot liquid); stir in remaining dill. Season to taste. Top each serving with 4 tps of yogurt mixture, swirl into soup, then top with tomato.

What's the Deal with Generic Medications?

Does your nurse or doctor talk about 'generic' drugs as an alternative to your current medications? Here are answers to some frequently asked questions that may help you understand generic drugs:

Q: What are generic drugs?

A generic drug is the same as a brand-name drug in dosage, safety, strength, how it is taken, quality, performance and intended use. The main difference is its name and its manufacturer.

Q: Are generic drugs as safe as brand-name drugs?

Yes. The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires that all drugs be safe and effective. Since generics use the same active ingredients and are shown to work the same way in the body, they have the same risks and benefits as their brand-name counterparts.

Q: Why are generic drugs less expensive?

Generic drugs are less expensive because generic manufacturers don't have the investment costs of the developer of a new drug. New drugs are developed under patent protection. The patent protects the investment—including research, development, marketing, and promotion—by giving the company the sole right to sell the drug while it is in effect. As patents near expiration, manufacturers can apply to the FDA to sell generic versions. Because those manufacturers don't have the same development costs, they can sell their product at substantial discounts. Also, once generic drugs are approved, there is greater competition, which keeps the price down. Today, almost half of all prescriptions are filled with generic drugs.

Q: If brand-name drugs and generic drugs have the same active ingredients, why do they look different?

In the United States, trademark laws do not allow a generic drug to look exactly like the brand-name drug. However, a generic drug must duplicate the active ingredient. Colors, flavors, and certain other inactive ingredients may be different.

Q: Does every brand-name drug have a generic counterpart?

No. Brand-name drugs are generally given patent protection for 20 years from the date of submission of the patent. This provides protection for the innovator who invested the initial costs (including research, development, and marketing expenses) to develop the new drug. However, when the patent expires, other drug companies can introduce competitive generic versions, but only after they have been thoroughly tested by the manufacturer and approved by the FDA.

Questions? Call Member Services at 1-866-610-2273, Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–6 p.m. ♦

Source: U.S. Food and Drug Administration, 11 Dec. 2008 <http://www.fda.gov/buyonlineguide/generics_q&a.htm>

My Life, My Health

My Life, My Health is the Stanford Chronic Disease Self-Management Program, where participants learn how to live better with long-term health conditions.

Commonwealth Care Alliance has held a number of My Life, My Health workshops in and around Boston, and will have more early this year. We are also planning a leader training, where our members will be trained to teach the program to their peers.

The participant workshops for My Life, My Health run for two and a half hours, once a week for six weeks. The program will be held in the Springfield, Boston and Lynn areas beginning Spring 2009.

The leader trainings run for four days, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. and will be held in Boston beginning March, 2009.

Questions? Call Rosa Palacios, Consumer Involvement Coordinator & CDSMP Specialist at 1-866-610-2273 ext. 226, Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–6 p.m. ♦

“I am very happy that I joined this program, as I learned many new ways to help myself feel good – it really makes a big difference.”

“I learned to think positively.”

“I would recommend the program – 10 out of 10.”

“I am so happy I was in the group. It was informative, educational, and interesting. Our leaders were wonderful and I hope they continue to inspire. I feel so sensitive to anybody who could come forward and teach us to fix our lives.”

“Talking about your health problems as a group is most beneficial. One realizes that they are not alone in their situation.”



Local Consumer Meetings are held in your communities.

(Stay tuned for your invitation in the near future.)



The Evidence of Coverage 2009

Every year Commonwealth Care Alliance updates and mails a member handbook to all members. The handbook is called the Evidence of Coverage. We recently mailed the 2009 version of it to you.

The Evidence of Coverage contains

important information including:

- Services covered by our plan
- Your ability to make complaints or appeal decisions made by your primary care team
- Your rights and responsibilities as a member of our plan

- How to get care and prescription drugs when you are out of the service area
- Prescription Drug benefit information

We are currently translating this member handbook into Spanish, Russian, and Portuguese and we will mail a copy to you if you speak one

of these languages. Please call 1-866-610-2273 if you would like another copy of this handbook in English.

Questions? Call Member Services at 1-866-610-2273, Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–6 p.m. ♦

Visit the Commonwealth Care Alliance web site for the latest in member information

www.commonwealthcare.org

or call our Member Services Department, Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–6 p.m.

1-866-610-2273

To share your own recipes or stories, or if you have an idea for the newsletter, contact Nerissa J. Fry at 1-866-610-2273 ext. 244 or e-mail nfry@commonwealthcare.org



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