

## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

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### Public Affairs Office

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## MEDICARE NEWS

For Immediate release  
February 22, 2006

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### **MEDICARE DEMONSTRATION TO STUDY REHABILITATION FOR PEOPLE WITH VISION IMPAIRMENT**

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) today announced a demonstration project to study the impact of standardized Medicare coverage for rehabilitation services that can be provided in the homes of beneficiaries with a diagnosis of moderate to severe visual impairment that cannot be corrected through conventional means or surgery.

Under the Low Vision Rehabilitation Demonstration project, to be conducted in 6 selected areas of the country, Medicare beneficiaries with moderate to severe vision impairment will be eligible to receive up to 9 hours of rehabilitation benefits when prescribed by their ophthalmologist or optometrist.

“This demonstration has the potential to expand access to quality vision rehabilitation services to more individuals in this vulnerable population and help them to achieve a greater degree of independence and minimize barriers to care,” said CMS Administrator Mark B. McClellan, MD, PhD. “It will put additional resources for rehabilitation in the hands of eye care physicians and consequently improve the quality of life of beneficiaries who are visually impaired.”

To be eligible, beneficiaries must live in one of 6 demonstration locales and their eye care physician must practice in one of the locales. The demonstration will be conducted in New Hampshire, New York City (all 5 boroughs), North Carolina, Atlanta, GA., Kansas, and Washington State. The demonstration is slated to begin on April 1, 2006 and run for 5 years until March 31, 2011.

Medicare beneficiaries are currently able to receive low vision rehabilitation services under local coverage decisions when they are provided by Medicare qualified therapy providers (generally occupational or physical therapists) under the supervision of a qualified physician. The Low Vision Rehabilitation Demonstration, however, will permit vision rehabilitation to be provided by certified low vision therapists, orientation and mobility specialists and rehabilitation teachers, as well as occupational therapists, in appropriate settings including the beneficiary’s home, without need for the supervising physician to be on the premises.

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