

Background

Lifestyle choices with respect to diet, physical activity, alcohol and tobacco use are associated with the leading causes of morbidity and mortality—cardiovascular and lung diseases, cancer, and diabetes. The New England Journal of Medicine recently reported that poor physical fitness is a better predictor of death than smoking, hypertension, and heart disease (March 2002). The challenge is assisting people in changing behavior and maintaining healthy lifestyles.

Much of the physical decline that occurs with aging has been attributed to the absence of comprehensive health promotion strategies. A growing literature indicates that chronic disease and functional disability can be measurably reduced or postponed through lifestyle changes, and that healthy behaviors are particularly beneficial for the elderly.

RAND reviewed the evidence on health risk appraisal programs and their implications for Medicare in a report titled *Health Risk Appraisals and Medicare* (see “**downloads**” area **below for more information**). RAND's review of the evidence indicates that health risk appraisal (HRA) programs have been effective in achieving behavior change, often in the areas of diet and physical activity. HRA programs have also been shown to have an impact on blood pressure. Experts agree that the approach used in HRA programs is promising for Medicare beneficiaries and should be tested in a demonstration.

CMS is developing the Senior Risk Reduction Program to test a comprehensive and systematic approach to identifying health risks and empowering Medicare beneficiaries to improve their health. The Senior Risk Reduction Program will use a beneficiary-focused questionnaire to assess health risks, such as lifestyle behaviors and use of clinical preventive and screening services. Questionnaire responses will be fed through a series of computer algorithms, and tailored information, behavior change recommendations, and tools for risk factor reduction will be provided on an on-going basis. CMS is particularly interested in incorporating state-of-the-art approaches to tailoring. The Senior Risk Reduction Program will study the impact of tailored interventions delivered through the mail or Internet, with and without telephone health coaching. This demonstration is also expected to address physical, mental and social well-being by connecting people to available programs, services, and volunteer opportunities in their communities.

Current Status

The Senior Risk Reduction Demonstration has been designed and the draft solicitation is under review.