

# Know Your Benefits

The Senate Special Committee on Aging is committed to exploring ways to strengthen major federal income and health care benefit programs such as Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. In the Committee's work, I have noticed that many people are unaware of additional opportunities and federal benefits that can help older Americans. Below is a select list of some of the many programs for which you may be eligible. For more information on these and other programs, or to check your eligibility, call 1-800-FED-INFO (1-800-333-4636) or visit [www.govbenefits.gov](http://www.govbenefits.gov).



## ***Reverse Mortgage for Seniors: Home Equity Conversion Mortgage Insurance Program***

A reverse mortgage is a special type of home loan that lets a homeowner convert their home equity into cash. But unlike a traditional home equity loan or second mortgage, no repayment is required until the borrower no longer uses the home as a principal residence.

**Eligibility:** Homeowners aged 62 and older who have low outstanding mortgage balances or own their homes free and clear.



## ***Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)***

SCSEP provides opportunities for part-time employment in community service activities for unemployed, low-income older persons who have poor employment prospects.

**Eligibility:** Persons aged 55 and older with incomes below 125 percent of the poverty level (approximately \$16,500)\*. Priority is given to persons aged 60 and older.



## ***Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP)***

RSVP matches volunteers with opportunities to make use of their skills and life experiences in various community service activities. Volunteers may serve up to 40 hours per week.

**Eligibility:** Persons aged 55 and older.



## ***Foster Grandparent Program (FGP)***

FGP provides volunteer opportunities for older persons to assist children with special or exceptional needs in various settings, such as schools and child care centers.

**Eligibility:** Persons aged 60 years and older who have incomes not in excess of 125 percent of the poverty level (approximately \$16,500)\*, or in higher cost of living areas, not more than 135 percent of the poverty level (approximately \$17,820)\*.



## ***Senior Companion Program (SCP)***

SCP creates opportunities for senior volunteers to provide supportive services, including companionship, chores and transportation, to vulnerable, frail adults aged 21 and older.

**Eligibility:** Persons aged 60 years and older who have incomes not in excess of 125 percent of the poverty level (approximately \$16,500)\*, or in higher cost of living areas, not more than 135 percent of the poverty level (approximately \$17,820)\*.

\*Annual income thresholds are based on the United States Department of Health and Human Services 2006 Federal Poverty Guidelines. Numbers provided here are for dual households.

# Healthy Aging

An important responsibility of the Special Committee on Aging is to study ways to help keep America's aging population healthy. In reviewing programs such as Medicare and Medicaid, I have worked with the Committee to ensure these programs contain provisions for preventative care and disease management to help participants stay healthy and control health care costs.



Chairman Smith discusses issues facing older Americans with Oregon seniors

At home, there is much you can do to improve your health and quality of life. Among the most prevalent behaviors that contribute to chronic diseases are physical inactivity and poor eating habits. No matter what your age, studies show that it is never too late to enjoy the benefits associated with adding moderate exercise and a balanced diet to your life. The late comedian George Burns once said, "You can't help getting older, but you don't have to get old." By adopting healthy habits, you can significantly improve your chances of living longer and staying young at heart.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has compiled some recommendations to help older Americans remain healthy and independent throughout their lives, some of these are included below.



**Regular physical activity** can greatly reduce your risk of suffering from heart disease, colon cancer, diabetes and high blood pressure. Physical activity also helps to control weight; contributes to healthy bones, muscles and joints; helps to relieve the pain of arthritis; reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression; and can decrease the need for hospitalizations, physician visits and medications.

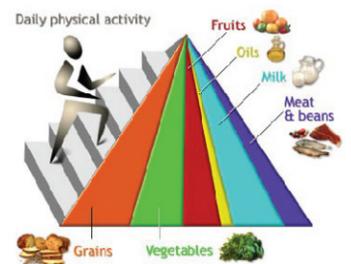
## **The following types of exercises can help older adults gain significant health benefits:**

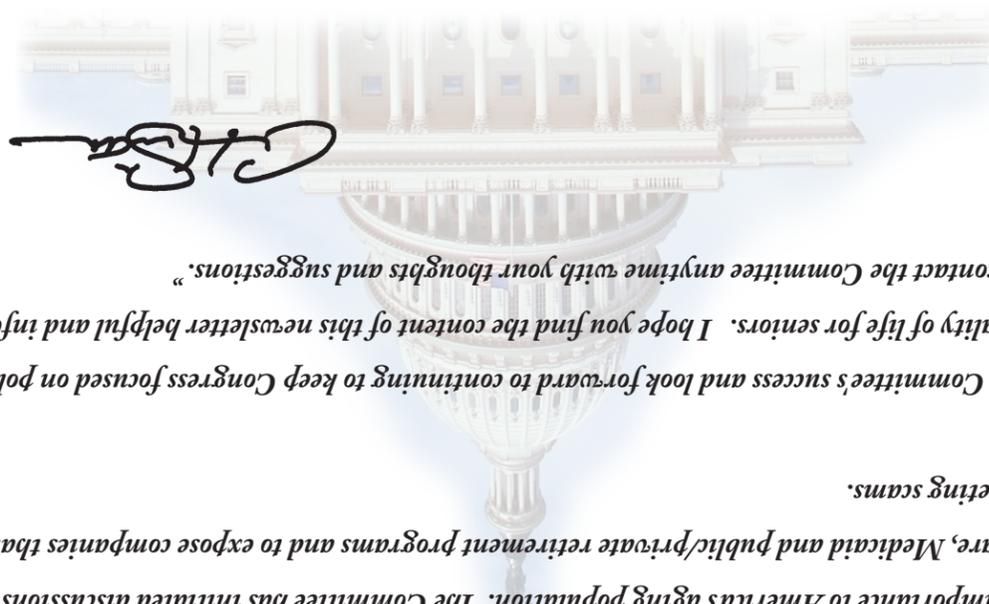
- **Endurance exercises** are activities that increase your breathing and heart rate to improve the health of your heart, lungs and circulatory system. Examples include walking, biking and swimming. The NIH recommends a goal to build up to a minimum of 30 minutes of endurance exercise on most or all days of the week. Remember to stretch immediately after your endurance activities to help protect against injury.
- **Strength exercises** work to build your muscles and make you stronger. The NIH recommends that you work all major muscle groups at least twice a week without working the same muscle group on any two consecutive days. Strength exercises should never hurt.
- **Balance and flexibility exercises** help keep your body limber and can help prevent falls. Stretch after you do your regularly scheduled strength and endurance exercises. Slowly stretch into the desired position, as far as possible without pain, and hold the stretch for 10 to 30 seconds. Relax, then repeat, trying to stretch farther. Always warm up before stretching exercises.



**Good nutrition**, including a diet that is low in saturated fats and contains five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day, is recommended for maintaining good health.

For more information on healthy living for seniors, call 1-800-222-2225 or go on-line at <http://nihseniorhealth.gov>.





*Chris*

*"I am proud of the Committee's success and look forward to continuing to keep Congress focused on policies that work to improve the quality of life for seniors. I hope you find the content of this newsletter helpful and informative. Please feel free to contact the Committee anytime with your thoughts and suggestions."*

*"As Chairman of the Senate Special Committee on Aging, it is my pleasure to lead the Senate in investigating and debating issues of importance to America's aging population. The Committee has initiated discussions on ways to strengthen Medicare, Medicaid and public/private retirement programs and to expose companies that prey on seniors with marketing scams."*



## Senate Special Committee on Aging Chairman Gordon H. Smith, Oregon News Update

United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

*Chris*  
U.S.S.

POSTAL CUSTOMER  
OREGON

**Sign-up for updates on the topics  
that matter to you.**



Visit [www.aging.senate.gov](http://www.aging.senate.gov) to subscribe to the Committee's e-newsletter or call 202-224-5364.

PREPARED, PUBLISHED AND MAILED AT TAXPAYER EXPENSE

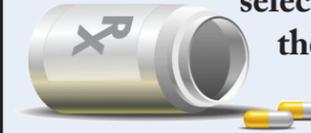
## Higher Savings Through Generic Drugs

One of the most significant challenges facing our nation's health care system is the rising costs of care. High prescription drug prices contribute greatly to this problem.

Generic drug alternatives hold the promise of providing you with more affordable options. Unfortunately, there have been a number of troubling reports lately that indicate the generic drug approval process is not working as effectively as it could – delaying over 800 low-cost drugs from coming to market. Recently, I convened the Senate Special Committee on Aging to examine the problems contributing to this delay. Based on the information gathered at the hearing, the Committee is working with the Food and Drug Administration to provide greater and swifter access to more affordable prescription drug options.

**Are you currently taking prescription medication for allergies, insomnia or depression?**

**The FDA has announced that generic alternatives for select brand name drugs used to treat these conditions are expected to become available in the coming months. Ask your doctor for more information.**



## Retirement Security for Life

Americans are living longer than ever before, which means we must stretch our retirement dollars over a greater period of time. Unfortunately, the personal savings rate in the United States has declined dramatically over the last two decades, falling to -1.6 percent in April of this year. The Special Committee on Aging is a focal point in the Senate for discussion and debate on retirement security. The Committee has held hearings to find ways to encourage persons near retirement age to save so they can have a financially secure future. While much of the work we do deals with individuals about to retire, it is important for those who are already retired to ensure that their financial futures are secure for the duration of their lives. The Social Security Administration provides a public resource for long-term planning and can be reached at 1-800-772-1213 or online at [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov).

Here are some tips based on the Committee's findings that may help you manage your retirement assets and enjoy financial security:

- **Diversify Your Assets.** Financial advisors recommend that you limit your risk and put your money into a number of different investments.
- **Remember to Rebalance.** To manage risk, it is important that you reexamine your asset allocations from time to time and rebalance them if necessary.
- **Watch Out for High Fees.** Before making any investment, ask lots of questions and closely examine all documents to ensure that the fees are not too high.



*Chairman Smith discusses retirement security with financial speaker and writer Ben Stein.*