

Local

# New benefits website links low-income residents with assistance

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It is estimated up to 4,500 residents in the Green River Area Development District may be eligible for federal benefits they are not receiving.

To make it easier to determine if residents are missing out on programs and services, GRADD and the National Council on Aging teamed up on a consumer-friendly website titled Benefits CheckUp.

The website, which can be accessed at [www.benefitscheckup.org/gradd](http://www.benefitscheckup.org/gradd), provides details about programs that pay for prescription drugs, heating bills, housing, meals, legal services, medical costs and in-home services, to name a few.

Anyone older than 18 with an annual income less than \$54,000 a year may be missing out on property tax relief, veteran's benefits and more.

Of course, as a person's income increases, they qualify for fewer programs, said Ken Lawson, NCOA outreach specialist who works at GRADD.

"The average person I deal with has an income per month of about \$750," Lawson said.

Many elderly live off Social Security payments alone. In the GRADD area, Lawson said, residents who used Benefits CheckUp last year saw an average increase in benefits of \$7,654 per person.

"That almost doubles their income," Lawson said of residents living on \$750 per month.

Anyone who qualifies for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Medicaid and several other programs may receive free cellphones, a choice of cellphone plans and minutes to use. There are no hidden fees, contracts or monthly fees, according to a Benefits CheckUp report.

By using a resident's ZIP code and information from a personal questionnaire, the Benefits CheckUp website produces a report about programs available to that individual. It also provides phone numbers and addresses of local and regional agencies where a person can apply for assistance.

"Nationally, half of all people with Medicare live on incomes less than \$24,280 (per year), and often lack the resources needed to meet basic living expenses," according to a GRADD press release. "Several programs exist to help these individuals, but many people do not know how to apply for assistance."

The report ends with a reminder to check unclaimed-property sites, where residents may find long-forgotten uncashed dividend checks, insurance payments, refunds and a variety of other payments. That's a potential benefit for all residents, regardless of income.

"(Benefit CheckUp) is a comprehensive way to find out the benefits that many residents probably qualify for," Lawson said

Benefits CheckUp is free and private. The website provides facts sheets and online application forms for more than 250 programs.

Lawson makes presentations to groups interested in Benefits CheckUp. To schedule a presentation or get more information, contact him at GRADD at 800-928-9094.

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