

MAKING ENDS MEET Sharon Harvey Rosenberg
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Some options to whittle cost of RX drugs; MAKING ENDS MEET

405 words

4 March 2006

The Miami Herald

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English

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The cost of prescription drugs can add headaches and heartaches during illness, especially if you lack health insurance or prescription drug coverage.

There are, however, a variety of low-cost prescription drug options ranging from free discount access cards to special generic drug programs.

One of the newest is the Together RX Access Card (www.togetherrxaccess.com), a discount program organized by 10 major drug companies. Executive director Roba Whiteley said that Florida is one of eight states targeted this year for outreach.

Enrollment is free and qualifying consumers receive discounts of 25 percent to 40 percent on more than 275 name-brand prescription drugs. After enrolling either online or by phone (800-444-4106), qualifying consumers receive a card. Eligibility is based on income, ranging for \$30,000 or less for a single person to \$60,000 for a family of four.

An income-based program for discount prescription drugs is available through Rx Outreach, a program run by Express Scripts Specialty Distribution Services, a mail order pharmacy that manages patient assistance programs for major drug companies.

Rx Outreach enables qualified consumers to purchase via mail 90-day supplies of medicine for \$20 to \$30. You are eligible if you earn less than \$24,500 a year or \$50,000 for a family of four. Call 800-769-3880 or visit www.rxoutreach.com .

If you don't qualify for these programs, there are other options.

For one thing, shop around. If a pharmacy is not willing to reveal prices over the phone, Whiteley suggested going elsewhere.

Meanwhile, many major drug companies offer Patient Assistance Programs (PAPs) that provide some name-brand or generic drugs at a discount. Some programs are open to all and others are for those without insurance.

For the uninsured, Merck operates a Prescription Discount Program, which enables consumers to get discounts of up to 40 percent on Merck products. Income doesn't matter. For information call 800-506-3725 or go to www.merckhelps.com/uninsured.

Additionally, patient advocacy groups provide information about discount drug programs.

For more information contact groups such as American Diabetes Association, CancerCare, National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship, National Mental Health Association, American Heart Association National Alliance for Mental Health, and the National Medical Association.

Send your tips to sharonhr@bellsouth.net.