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Doyle expands state drug program

BadgerRx goes Gold, offers low prices for residents

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APPLETON — Wisconsin residents without prescription drug coverage can now join a state program to help them save on their drug costs.

Gov. Jim Doyle announced Thursday the creation of the BadgerRx Gold program at the Shopko here on Northland Avenue. The program expands one already in place where Madison-based Navitus Health Solutions manages the prescription drug program for state employees, retired state workers and small businesses.

"This is the next step to provide all Wisconsin residents with low-cost prescription drug coverage," Doyle said. "Some people out there have to make some really painful decisions about whether or not to get a prescription filled."

Under BadgerRx Gold, consumers without prescription drug coverage can join the program for \$25 a person or \$75 for a family of four or more. Once enrolled, members will pay the same discounted prices that state employees do for their prescriptions.

"We are leveraging the buying power of the state to help more people," said Doyle, adding that Navitus helped the state save \$25 million last year on drug costs for their employees.

More than 1 million people across Wisconsin don't have drug coverage, said Navitus chief executive officer Allan Zimmerman. "BadgerRx Gold is Wisconsin's answer to the high cost of prescription drugs," he said. "This program is not only affordable, it's also convenient. So far, more than 700 pharmacies across the state have signed up to participate."

Navitus is owned by northeast Wisconsin physicians, Appleton-based ThedaCare, Bellin Health of Green Bay and Dean Health of Madison.

The expansion of the BadgerRx program won't cost taxpayers a thing, Doyle said. "That's the beauty of this program. We are able to just expand the current program we have. It's a great public-private partnership," he said.

Dr. Greg Long, medical director of ThedaCare Physicians, said he has seen firsthand the challenge some patients without drug coverage face.

"I'm so happy there's not an income or age limit. What I have seen a lot is that some children aren't having their prescriptions filled for ear infections or chronic diseases like asthma because there's no coverage there," he said. "This will eliminate that and will help us to create a healthier community."

Doyle said he hopes consumers will look at the BadgerRx program before deciding to order prescription drugs off the Internet or through a Canadian mail order program. "If people look at our prices and what we have to offer, I think they will see we are very competitive and more convenient since you can just go to your corner store to get what you need," he said.

BadgerRx has an extensive drug formulary — the list of prescriptions covered by the program — are constantly be reviewed and updated by doctors and pharmacists, Zimmerman said. "There's really an expertise here. We are looking at what's out there and want to provide the best, low-cost option for customers," he said.

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