

Recent Developments

Housing and House Furnishings

The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) plays an increasingly important role in home purchases -- particularly for first time and minority home buyers. According to the most recent Housing/FHA Report, FHA currently insures 6.8 million homes. Sixty-eight percent of FHA purchase loans are made to first-time home buyers. About half of the families securing FHA-insured financing had annual incomes below \$37,000. The median income of FHA buyers is \$15,000 less than that of conventional buyers. FHA plays a vital role in serving minority home buyers, insuring minorities twice as often as other private mortgage insurance companies.

Source: 1995 Housing/Federal Housing Administration Report

Submitted by: Sarah D. Kirby

Housing Growth is Regional. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce/U.S. Bureau of the Census Statistical Brief, between 1973 and 1993, housing growth has been concentrated in the Southern and Western portions of the United States. Nearly 7 of every 10 homes built since 1975 have been located in these two regions of the country. Twenty years ago, 32 and 18 percent, respectively, of the nation's homes were located in the South and West. These percentages grew to 36 and 21 by 1993.

Amenities in Homes. This same report discusses home convenience features that are present in many of the nation's homes in 1993. These features include amenities that many homeowners desire, but are not absolutely necessary. Amenities included: dishwashers (61%), usable fireplaces (42%), separate dining rooms (55%), multiple living/recreation rooms (45%) and garages/carports (74%). These kinds of amenities were even more prevalent in new homes (homes built during the 4 years prior to 1993). Eighty-two percent had dishwashers, 55 percent had useable fireplaces, 59 percent had separate dining rooms in their homes, and 50 percent had multiple living/recreation rooms.

Home Owner Satisfaction. Another interesting note from this report relates to how Americans feel about their housing. When asked to rate their homes on a scale of 1 to 10 (ten being the highest), 82 percent of owners and 60 percent of renters rated their home at least an 8. When

asked to rate their neighborhood using the same scale, 77 percent of owners and 59 percent of renters gave their neighborhood a comparable rating.

Source: Home Sweet Home -- America's Housing, 1973-1993, July 1995, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census Statistical Brief

Submitted by: Sarah D. Kirby

Family Resource Management

MANAGED CARE, MEDICARE AND YOU was the name of a video conference on October 16 attended by 231 persons at 11 sites around the state. It was hosted by the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service at North Carolina State University and co-sponsors included the Seniors' Health Insurance Information Program, AARP, Medical Review of N.C., Inc., the Division of Aging, and the N.C. Retired School Personnel. Nationally recognized speakers included: Mike Thibodeau from the Health Care Financing Administration, who gave an overview of how Medicare-Managed Care Plans work together; Angela Ledford from the Consumer Coalition for Quality Health Care, who discussed health care quality issues in managed care settings; and Kathy Claunch from the Illinois Department of Insurance, who discussed the advantages and limitations of joining a Medicare HMO based on the experience in Illinois with nine different Medicare HMOs.

Copies of the 2-hour video tape are available from Cooperative Extension at NCSU, from each of the host counties, from SHIIP, and from AARP. Outreach activities are planned around the state to help consumers compare this new option for insurance to supplement Medicare.

Only three Medicare HMOs are currently available in North Carolina, with full or limited service in one or more counties. A total of 28 counties currently have full or limited service from one or more of these three Medicare HMOs. Multiple applications for additional Medicare HMOs have been made, and as new plans are approved by HCFA, consumers will be provided new materials from SHIIP and Cooperative Extension to help them make informed decisions on whether to select one of the Medicare Supplement policies, an Employer Group Health Plan (which might include an HMO format which is NOT the same as a Medicare HMO), or one of the newer Medicare HMOs.

Submitted by: Janice Holm Lloyd

STOP HEALTH INSURANCE FRAUD was the focus of an interactive video conference on May 23 that was co-sponsored by North Carolina Cooperative Extension, The Senior's Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP), AARP, and Medical Review of N.C., Inc. Panelists

from seven different insurance claims and law enforcement organizations discussed how to recognize health insurance fraud and how to report suspected fraud. This observance of Older Americans Month originated at N.C. State University and brought together interested persons at six additional MCNC sites: East Carolina University, Fayetteville State University, UNC-Asheville, UNC-Charlotte, UNC-Greensboro, and UNC-Wilmington. Site Coordinators from Cooperative Extension and SHIP facilitated the local wraparound sessions and are giving joint leadership to ongoing outreach efforts to share the video conference information with other older adults in their communities.

Submitted by: Janice Holm Lloyd