

Health

Boost for seniors

ABOUT 36,000 retired West Virginia state and local government employees, including school retirees and surviving spouses, have received a beneficial gift: free memberships in fitness clubs such as the Charleston YMCA.

On Jan. 1, Humana began managing the Medicare Advantage portion of the Public Employees Insurance Agency. Immediately, the multitude of oldsters got invitations to join the Healthways SilverSneakers Fitness Program — at no cost.

The PEIA seniors can choose among 22 West Virginia health clubs where they're enrolled for exercise classes, swim sessions, machine workouts, yoga classes and other fitness help. Each retiree's bar-coded membership card is swiped at each visit, and a small fee is paid by Humana. The cards also work at many other clubs in many states.

Apparently, paying around \$3 per senior workout is a bargain, because the resulting health im-

provement averts some of the costly doctor treatments and hospitalizations incurred by older folks. And the plan certainly is a boon for aging participants who gain spunk and a better quality of life. They enjoy the camaraderie of exercise with their peers.

"Be healthy and stay independent" is the motto of the system. Amen. We hope all 36,000 PEIA retirees take advantage of this charming offer. And we hope other medical insurance systems in the Mountain State provide similar fitness aid to senior clients.

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West Virginia has a higher ratio of oldsters than almost any state. The potential to improve their lives is great.

Ultimately, it's up to each individual to do whatever possible to boost health. "You're the only person who can make the changes that contribute to your wellbeing," the plan says. PEIA's aging group has been handed a golden opportunity.

