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MEDIA ADVISORY

"Utah Consumer Alert: Beware of 'Free' Genetic Testing offers from Medicare"

"Division of Consumer Protection received report about door to door person offering 'free' genetic cancer testing in exchange for Medicare personal account information"

(For immediate release...)

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah - Francine A. Giani, Executive Director of the Department of Commerce, announced today that the Utah Division of Consumer Protection has received a report that scammers are trying to steal a person's Medicare account information and other personal information in a new imposter scam by offering "free" genetic testing to look for hereditary cancer. The Utah victim stated that a person came to their door and offered "free" genetic testing in exchange for providing their government benefit information. The Division of Consumer Protection reminds consumers that government agencies will never go door to door or call you on the phone with "free" offers of genetic cancer testing or any other service. Citizens should not respond or provide information, including a Medicare card, to fraudsters if they are contacted and are encouraged to contact local police.

"With so many Utahns wanting to research family ancestry, this scam using a cancer test as bait is especially concerning for our senior citizens. Remember no one from the government will ever offer you any 'free' service and then ask you to divulge personal account information of any kind," stated Francine A. Giani, "Don't be afraid to shut your door or hang up the phone on anyone pitching these imposter offers."

Both Oregon's Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission have received reports of this "free" genetic testing imposter scam. The Oregon Department of Justice reports consumers have been approached by fraudsters targeting Medicare beneficiaries through telemarketing calls, booths at public events, health fairs, and door-to-door visits. These scammers offered cheek swabs for genetic testing in order to obtain their victims' Medicare information to steal their identity or for fraudulent billing purposes. The scammers falsely promised that Medicare would pay for the test; some asked for the consumer's doctor information, implying they would send the results to their medical office. Unfortunately, when consumers turned over this information, they gave the bad guys access to their health plan or Medicare number. This could allow the scammers to bill Medicare thousands of dollars for medically unnecessary tests or even services that consumers never received. The fraudsters also ended up with personal genetic information about consumers regarding their health history.

“Imposter scams continue to be our top consumer complaint in Utah. Stay vigilant against fraud and please remind your relatives to be skeptical of anyone offering something for ‘free’”, advised Daniel O’Bannon, Division Director.

What Consumers Need to Know about Imposter Scams

- 1) Imposters will pose as people, companies or government entities that you are familiar with to set the trap. In this case, the fraud is pitched face to face with a “free” offer of genetic testing and may also come via text, email or phone calls.
- 2) Government agencies will rarely, if ever, call you. If they do, it will be after they send you a letter – or to return a call you made to them. But anytime the “government” caller demands information (or payment by wire transfer or gift card), that’s a scam.
- 3) Don’t trust caller ID. Scammers use technology to hide their real number, but show one that seems legit. So if the caller ID shows a 202 area code, or says “government” or “Washington, DC,” don’t take that at face value. It could be anyone calling from anywhere.
- 4) Never give anyone who calls or approaches you out of the blue information like your Medicare, bank account, credit card or Social Security number. Scammers can use your information, steal your identity, get credit in your name and take your money.
- 5) Report imposter scams to the Federal Trade Commission; <https://www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov/#crmt&panel1-1>

For more information on how to protect yourself from scams or to file a complaint, log on to the Utah Division of Consumer Protection website at: www.consumerprotection.utah.gov

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