



Washington Health Care Issues Survey Results

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

CodeBlueNow! commissioned The Gilmore Research Group to conduct a telephone survey of 600 registered voters in Washington State to obtain their opinions regarding health care in the United States. The poll was conducted among randomly selected voters with household telephones between November 11th and December 26, 2007. The average survey lasted just under 14 minutes. The maximum margin of error for a survey of this size is ± 4.0 percentage points at the 95% level of confidence. Key findings from the survey are summarized below.

KEY FINDINGS

- Survey respondents represent a cross-section of Washington State voters. Poll respondents are similar to all Washington residents in terms of age, ethnicity, income, gender and political leanings. The poll slightly over-represents Washingtonians age 55 and older while under-representing those age 18 to 24. Poll respondents also tend to be somewhat better educated and have higher incomes than the general population. Nearly one of five respondents (19%) are employed by (or related to someone employed by) a health care organization or health insurance company.
- Nearly all respondents (95%) have health insurance, and 89% have a personal doctor or primary care provider. Three of four Washingtonians (75%) are satisfied with their access to health care and the quality of care their family receives. However, just 42% say they are satisfied with the cost of their health care.
- Washington voters are less satisfied with the state of health care nationally than they are with their personal health care situation. Only about one of five (21%) are satisfied with Americans' access to health care, 40% are satisfied with the quality of care available to Americans and just 10% are satisfied with the cost of health care in the country.
- Satisfaction with the health care system tends to split along party and economic lines, with Democrats being generally less satisfied than Republicans. Those dissatisfied with cost are more likely to be females and also more likely to have annual incomes below \$75,000. Satisfaction with their personal health care situation also colors their perceptions of national health care. Those who are dissatisfied with access and cost on a personal level are more likely than others to also be dissatisfied with health care nationally.
- One in five Washington voters (20%) think today's health care system is better than it was ten years ago, but nearly half (47%) think the system is getting worse.
- When asked to name the **best thing** about today's health care system, one in four respondents (24%) said it is access to care and 21% said the quality of care. About one of four (26%) was unable to think of anything.
- When asked to name the **worst thing** about the current national health care system, 92% of

voters were able to identify an issue. Their comments focused on the difficulty people have getting access to care (46%) and the cost of health care (38%).

- At least two-thirds of all respondents agreed:
 - Health care professionals should provide information on treatment costs and benefits to allow patients to make good choices (86%)
 - Like public utilities, the health care system should be held accountable for where money comes from as well as how and why it is spent (76%)
 - Basic health care benefits should include coverage for any licensed health care professional (75%)
 - There should be uniform standards or guidelines for health care that professionals can use (73%)
 - Every American should have affordable access to health care services they need (70%). *This is the only attribute where 2 of 3 respondents agreed, but less than half of those who vote Republican agreed.*
 - Health care services should stress prevention over high-tech cures (68%).
- About 50%-60% of all respondents agreed with these items, while about 25% gave a neutral response, and only about one of five disagreed :
 - There is enough money going into health care to provide quality care for all people (60% agreement)
 - Health insurance should be a shared responsibility of individuals, employers and government (59%)
 - Employers should continue to play a major role in providing health care (57%)
 - We should have one basic set of health care benefits for all people (51%) *More disagreed than provided a neutral response.*
 - Health care is a community responsibility for public safety like the fire department or police (50%)
- Less than half of the Washington respondents agreed with these items; about one of four gave neutral responses, and larger proportions disagreed:
 - They would be willing to pay more for health care if they knew what was being covered and where the money was going (42%)
 - There should be one organization that oversees the nation's health care and evaluates the effectiveness of all health care services (40%)
 - They would be willing to pay more for health care if they knew it would help their neighbors get the care they need (40%)
- More respondents disagreed than agreed that:

- Health insurance should be a personal responsibility like auto insurance (35%)
- Health insurance should be paid for by tax dollars and managed by local, state, or federal government (31%).
- When asked who they would trust to create a new health care system, a majority of Washington voters (63%) said they would trust health care professionals. About six of ten Republican, Democrat, and Independents voters all shared this view. The second most trusted group would be the public or common people (50%). Less than half mentioned non-profit organizations (43%), the federal government (32%), business professionals (29%) or academic institutions (27%). Six percent mentioned something else, 5% didn't know, and 2% said there was no one they could trust.
- Compared to the groups listed above, a majority of Washington voters (62%) said they would be inclined to trust a non-partisan, non-profit group of citizens and professionals to frame a new national health care system.
- Washington voters identified the three most important elements of a national health care system as access to health care coverage, affordability, and quality of care.
- Respondents were divided when it came to expectations that the 2008 Presidential election will chart a new vision for a revised health care system with 54% saying it is "likely" and 42% saying it is "not likely." The rest of the respondents "didn't know".
- When asked which party has the most meaningful health care proposal, approximately one in four respondents (25%) said they "don't know." Independent (31%) and Republican voters (26%) were more likely than Democrats (15%) to say "don't know" in response to this question. Given the bias in "don't know" responses, it is not surprising that Democrats emerged as the party with "the most meaningful proposal" (41%). Nearly one of four Independent voters (24%) and 9% of the Republican voters also said the Democrats have the better health plan. Fifteen percent of respondents favored Republican proposals, and 18% said neither party has a meaningful proposal.

CONCLUSIONS

Although most Washington State voters appear to be in a good situation personally with their health insurance coverage, access to health care and quality of care, a large majority believe the national health care system needs improvement. They are especially concerned about the costs of health care and Americans' access to care. Regardless of political leanings, the majority of Washington voters value having enough information to be active participants in health care decisions, accountability in health care spending, benefits that cover a wide range of professional practitioners, and high quality health care standards.

Affordability is an issue that breaks along party lines. Washington voters who tend to vote Republican are less convinced of the need for a system where everyone has access to affordable care (45% of those who vote Republican agreed affordable access was important compared to 90% of Democratic voters and 66% of Independent voters). Of all three groups of respondents, only among Democratic voters did a majority agree they would pay more for health care either because

they knew what was being covered and where the money was going or because by paying more they could help others get needed coverage.

Although Washingtonians see the need for reform, there is no clear consensus about who should lead the charge, who should oversee a national health care system if one emerges, or how it should be paid for. Most voters find the idea of a non-partisan, non-profit organization of citizens and professionals appealing for this role, but many want assurances about the expertise of the people within the organization, its goals and how it would be funded. Most respondents do not trust government to solve the problem and verbatim comments indicate many voters are not convinced that a national health care system will resolve the health care crisis. What is clear is that whatever group tackles the problem needs to rely heavily on health care professionals and public input for advice and counsel.