

THE FIELD POLL

THE INDEPENDENT AND NON-PARTISAN SURVEY
OF PUBLIC OPINION ESTABLISHED IN 1947 AS
THE CALIFORNIA POLL BY MERVIN FIELD

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MAJORITIES OF CALIFORNIANS SUPPORT THE NATION'S NEW HEALTH CARE LAW, BUT THINK MORE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM CHANGES ARE NEEDED. JUST ONE IN THREE BELIEVES THE LAW SHOULD BE REVERSED.

By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

There is greater voter support for the nation's new health care law in California than there is nationally. Whereas most national polls to date have shown pluralities or majorities of Americans opposed to the new law, California voters support it by a 52% to 38% margin. In addition, most voters here (58%) see the new law as only a first step with more changes to the health care system still needed. Just 34% feel the law is taking the country in the wrong direction and should be reversed.

While a relatively large proportion of voters (40%) say they are not very knowledgeable of the specifics of the new law, when read a number of its provisions voters consider many to be highly important. For example, greater than seven in ten rate each of the following as extremely or very important provisions:

- Prohibiting insurers from canceling a person's coverage if they become sick or disabled (81%)
- Prohibiting insurers from denying coverage to children with pre-existing conditions (78%)
- Providing workers with greater flexibility to change jobs and maintain their coverage (72%)

Pluralities of Californians see the new health care law as making both the U.S. and California health care systems better. Yet, relatively few voters (25%) think the law will benefit themselves or their families. Many also fear that their own taxes will go up and that they will end up paying more for health care coverage.

Majorities of Californians believe that low-income residents, the uninsured, children and young adults will likely be the chief beneficiaries of the new law. On the other hand, more voters expect that high-income residents, insurance companies, doctors and businesses, large and small, will be negatively affected than positively affected.

These are some of the main findings from the 2010 TCWF-Field Health Policy Survey, a survey of California voters about the nation's newly enacted health care law conducted by *The Field Poll* and funded by a grant from The California Wellness Foundation (TCWF). The survey, completed April 7 – 27, 2010, interviewed 1,522 registered voters statewide in six languages and dialects – English, Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean and Vietnamese.

The study also updated a number of trend measures about how Californians view the state's health care system that have been asked in previous TCWF-Field Health Policy Surveys. For example:

- More Californians now say they are satisfied (50%) than dissatisfied (42%) with the state's health care system. Last year slightly more said they were dissatisfied (49%) than satisfied (45%).
- The proportion of voters who think the state's health care system will be better off five years from now has increased eight points from 23% in 2009 to 31% in the current survey.
- Yet, Californians' top worries about the health system have changed little over the past year. Similar to last year, greater than eight in ten (85%) say they are concerned about having to pay more out-of-pocket for health care or their health insurance coverage, with 58% very concerned. Another 80% are concerned about not being able to pay for all the costs associated with a major illness or injury, 57% of whom are very concerned. Other concerns relate to employers cutting back on the amount they contribute for worker's health coverage, having coverage canceled or severely limited by their insurance carrier due to a health condition, not having or losing one's coverage, and not having access to quality doctors and health services.
- More Californians (40%) prefer obtaining their health coverage through an employer than from the government (27%) or having personal responsibility for this (24%). Answers are closely tied to a voter's current coverage. Majorities of those who currently receive their insurance through an employer favor employer-provided coverage. Similarly, pluralities who currently receive their insurance from the government favor government-provided coverage, while pluralities of those in the individual market favor taking personal responsibility for their insurance.

Californians support the new health care law

Statewide, 52% of voters support the nation's new health care law, with 30% strongly supportive and 22% somewhat supportive. This compares to 38% who are opposed, 29% strongly and 9% somewhat.

There are wide differences in opinion about the law across subgroups of the California voting population. For example, Democrats support the new law 73% to 14%, while Republicans

take the opposite view, opposing it 74% to 19%. While large majorities of liberals favor the law, majorities of conservatives, and especially Tea Party identifiers, oppose the law. Political moderates support it 54% to 30%, as do non-partisans (53% to 34%).

While white non-Hispanics are evenly divided about the new health care law, majorities of voters across five of the state's major ethnic populations support the legislation.

A voter's past insurance coverage and his or her expectations about maintaining coverage in the future are also tied to opinions about the new law. Majorities of Californians who are uninsured, those who are currently insured but have gone without coverage in the past two years, as well as those who are concerned about losing their coverage in the future support the law. By contrast, a majority of voters who have had continuous coverage over the past two years and who are not concerned about losing their coverage in the future oppose the new law.

A voter's main source of news about the health care law also has some bearing on voter opinions of the law. For example, voters whose main television news source is the Fox News Channel oppose the law 66% to 25%, while voters who cite MSNBC as their main TV news source favor it 64% to 28%.

Most see the new law as the first of many needed health reforms

Voters were asked about their current views about the health care system now that the health care bill has become law. A 58% majority maintain that the new law is an important first step but that many more changes still need to be made. This compares to 34% who think the new law is taking us in the wrong direction and needs to be reversed. Just 5% believe the new law takes care of most of the changes that need to be made to the nation's health care system.

Four in ten Californians admit to being not very knowledgeable about the law's specifics

Four in ten Californians (40%) admit to being not very knowledgeable about the details of the new health care law. Chinese-Americans, Korean-Americans and Latinos in particular report lower levels of knowledge than other ethnic subgroups. Voters with fewer years of formal education are also less familiar with the specifics of the new law than those with more years of education.

Six in ten cite television news as a main source of news about the health care law

Six in ten Californians say they have gotten most of their news about the new health care law from television (62%). Another 43% report getting most of their news from the Internet, 36% from newspapers, 26% from radio and 14% magazines. (*Adds to more than 100% due to multiple mentions.*)

Those citing television news volunteer a wide array of TV news channels. Most frequently mentioned are CNN (22%), Fox News (20%), local news (19%), NBC (13%), ABC (13%), MSNBC (12%), and CBS (11%).

Opinions of media news coverage about the health care law are decidedly mixed. Statewide 31% rate the media as doing an excellent or good job, 38% only fair and 28% say they have done a poor job.

Many are confused about whether the law requires people to change their coverage or their doctors

There is considerable confusion among Californians about whether the new law requires people to change their current health coverage. Statewide 43% think that because of the new law people will be required to change their coverage whether they want to or not. This is nearly as many as the proportion (48%) who say the new law allows people to keep their current coverage if they want to. In addition, one in five voters (20%) believe that they will have to change their own doctor as a result of the new law.

Views about who benefits from the new law and who will be adversely affected

Voters were read fifteen different types of people and groups and asked whether they felt the changes to the health care system from the new law will make each group better off, worse off or have no effect.

Majorities of Californians believe that four types of people are likely to be better off because of the new law. These include low-income residents (73%), the uninsured (72%), children (66%), and young adults (55%). Other groups that pluralities of voters think will be better off are women, senior citizens, the self-employed and middle-income residents. On the other hand, more voters think high-income residents, doctors, insurance companies, and businesses both large and small will be negatively affected than positively affected.

Provisions in the new law that are most important to Californians

When asked how important California voters felt a number of the law's specific provisions were to them, majorities rate many of them as being of high importance. For example, greater than two in three voters statewide consider each of the following provisions to be extremely or very important:

- Prohibiting insurers from canceling a person's coverage if they become sick or disabled (81%)
- Prohibiting insurers from denying coverage to children with pre-existing conditions (78%)
- Providing workers with greater flexibility to change jobs and maintain their coverage (72%)

- Requiring health insurance companies to cover anyone even if they have had a prior illness or chronic condition (69%)
- Creating a health insurance exchange where small businesses and people who don't have employer-provided coverage can shop for insurance (69%)
- Requiring insurance policies sold through the new exchanges to include certain minimum benefits such as hospitalization, doctor visits, prescription drugs, maternity care and certain preventive tests (69%)

Provisions of the new law considered less important or not needed

California voters view a number of other provisions contained in the new health care law to be less important or not needed. For example, fewer than half consider each of the following to be of high importance:

- Requiring insurers to spend at least 80% of their revenue on medical claims
- Requiring large businesses to offer insurance to their employees or be subject to a fine if their employees end up getting government-subsidized coverage
- Preventing illegal immigrants from receiving any government subsidies or assistance for health insurance
- Requiring all legal residents to have health insurance or be subject to a fine with subsidies given to low-income people
- Prohibiting the use of government funds or subsidies to pay for abortion services

Information About the Survey

The 2010 TCWF-Field Health Policy Survey is the fourth in a series of health policy surveys conducted among California voters by *The Field Poll*. Each survey was made possible through a grant from The California Wellness Foundation. This year's findings are based on a survey of 1,522 California registered voters. The survey included a random cross section of voters statewide and was supplemented with additional interviews conducted among Chinese-American, Korean-American, Vietnamese-American and African-American voters. This was done so that the results from these ethnic subgroups could be compared to the state's larger white non-Hispanic and Latino voting populations.

Interviewing was conducted by telephone using live interviewers April 7-27, 2010, in six languages and dialects – English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean and Vietnamese. All calls were made from Field Research Corporation's central location telephone interviewing centers. Up to eight attempts were made to reach and interview each randomly selected voter on different days and times of day during the interviewing period. Interviews were completed on either a voter's landline phone or a cell phone depending on the source of the telephone listings from the voter file. In this survey 17% of all interviews were completed through a cell phone contact.

The main cross-section sample was developed by selecting voters randomly from a list of registered voters throughout California. Supplemental samples of Asian-American voters were developed by randomly selecting voters from a list of voters whose surnames are most associated with these populations and screening them by telephone to confirm their ethnic heritage. After the completion of interviewing, the overall sample was weighted to align it its proper statewide distributions by race/ethnicity and other demographic characteristics of the registered voter population.

Sampling error estimates applicable to any probability-based survey depend upon its sample size. According to statistical theory, 95% of the time results from the overall sample are subject to a maximum sampling error of +/- 2.9 percentage points. The maximum sampling error is based on percentages in the middle of the sampling distribution (percentages around 50%). Percentages at either end of the distribution (percentages around 10% or around 90%) have a smaller margin of error. While there are other potential sources of error in surveys besides sampling error, the overall design and execution of the survey minimized the potential for these other sources of error. The maximum sampling error will be larger for analyses based on subgroups of the overall sample.

About The California Wellness Foundation

The California Wellness Foundation is an independent, private foundation created in 1992, with a mission to improve the health of the people of California by making grants for health promotion, wellness education and disease prevention. The Foundation prioritizes eight issues for funding: diversity in the health professions, environmental health, healthy aging, mental health, teenage pregnancy prevention, violence prevention, women's health, and work and health. It also responds to timely issues or special projects outside these funding priorities.

For more information, visit the Foundation's website, www.tcwf.org. Contact: Gary L. Yates, president and CEO, or Magdalena Beltrán-del Olmo, Vice President of Communications, at (818) 702-1900.