THE HEALING AMERICAN HEALTHCARE SURVEY

June 15, 2021

Exploring Health Insurance Coverage Issues

Abstract

We collected the opinions and concerns of Americans who have health insurance about their coverage. We asked for their thoughts on the potential for a public option based on Medicare. We conducted this survey at the beginning of the Biden Administration as the vaccination program was ramping up and COVID infections were beginning to trend down.

Edward C. Eichhorn

Ed.Eichhorn@medilnkgroup.com

Introduction

We conducted this study to learn about the concerns of Americans who currently have health insurance with their current coverage and to learn their opinions about the potential development of a public option based on Medicare. This public option would expand our insurance market to include Americans who are uninsured and are not eligible for Medicare or Medicaid. We thank everyone who took the time to take our survey and to share their thoughts and opinions with us on these important issues.

Methods

For four months from January to April 2021, we invited responses to our survey during our Healing American Healthcare podcasts and in our newsletter, the Three Minute Read™. We also promoted participation on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter and at our website www.healingamericanhealthcare.org. This survey was designed to be taken online and to take less than five minutes to complete. At the beginning of the survey, we committed to each participant that any personal information that they provided to us would remain confidential.

A copy of the survey form is available in Appendix A. The survey questions were:

1. Please provide your e-mail address (this question was optional)
2. Do you have health insurance and what type?
3. What would make your health insurance plan better? Followed by a list of choices.

We also were interested in collecting demographic information about each respondent. We asked their age, annual family income, and race in questions 4 through 6. They could opt out of any of these questions.

7. Would you support a public option for healthcare insurance that is based on Medicare if it were something you could choose?

For questions 1, 2, 3, and 7 we provided a space for a comment about their opinion about the question.

The graphs of the data we collected and the actual responses to our survey questions are available online through this link. - Survey Graphs and Responses

Each participant in our survey received a 3-month subscription to our newsletter, the Three Minute Read™ and the offer to receive a copy of this report upon its completion.

Survey Demographics

63% of our respondents were over the age of 65 and 31% were between the ages of 46 and 65.

88% of the participants in our survey were Caucasians.

87% of our survey participants shared their family income levels with us. There was a broad distribution of incomes represented in our survey. The largest income group at 28% had annual family incomes between $50,000 and $100,000. 22% had family incomes between $25,000 and $50,000. 16% had incomes below $25,000 and 10% had incomes between $100,000 and $150,000 per year.

Results

We had 67 participants in our survey. In response to our first question asking if they had health insurance, 91% had coverage. The small number of respondents who did not have coverage chose not to respond to this question. The three largest groups of respondents with coverage had either employer provided insurance, Obamacare plans or Medicare. It was interesting that, each of these groups represented 30% of the responses to our survey for a total of 90% of our responses. When asked what would make their insurance plans better, 37% said that they were happy with their current plan. There were many comments about lowering the cost of coverage or their out-of-pocket costs. 28% would like lower premiums and lower deductibles. 26% would like lower costs for their medications. 25% would like reduced copays. A smaller group of responses were interested in having larger provider networks and streamlined services. 19% would like the elimination of pre-authorization requirements and 16% of our survey participants want their provider networks to be expanded.

On the question of support for a public option for healthcare insurance based on Medicare, 55% responded in support of a public option and 44% were opposed. This question had the most comments of any of the questions in our survey. Of the 67 participants 65 commented on this question. There were 35 comments by those who supported this option and 30 comments by those who were opposed to it.

The positive commenters favored choice and universal healthcare for the uninsured and at-risk communities. They also believed that a public option could reduce overall healthcare and prescription costs while preventing price gouging by private insurance companies. Some participants said, if we had a public option prices for coverage would drop because more choice is always better. Some commented that a public option might force for-profit insurance companies to spend more on care and less on advertising and executive pay. One response came from someone who shared that he or she had spent 30 years working in healthcare financial management. From that perspective this participant recognized the value of a plan like Medicare that could be available to everyone and believed that it could be introduced in a way that would minimize market disruption through a well-planned transition.

One cancer patient responded to our survey in support of a public option by sharing that her family monthly premium was $2,200 plus an additional $8,150 per year in out-of-pocket expenses to treat her cancer. Based on her family income, more than 44% is committed to insurance and her treatment costs. Without support from friends and family

these costs would be unaffordable for this family. Another respondent said, no one should go bankrupt because of the current broken, system.

Some respondents who would support a public option took this opportunity to voice their frustration with our nation's unstructured approach to healthcare. One participant said, that while living in one of the richest countries in the world, it is ridiculous that we don't have government coverage for everyone." Another shared that, "Premiums, co-pays, deductibles, and medication costs are out of control. Every single year they go up, but our wages don't." He or she must fight for the payment for much needed medication. A respondent voiced frustration of the experience with healthcare insurance by saying, "It is ridiculous especially since I have health insurance and still cannot afford to live!" it was also stated that healthcare costs have grown faster than income and even with The Affordable Care Act health insurance is awfully expensive.

In general, many of the negative commenters expressed the opinion that a public health insurance plan based on Medicare would increase the cost of care while potentially reducing the quality of care. They voiced concerns that a public option based on Medicare would bring about socialized medicine and the potential for decreased incentives to improve or excel in healthcare. Some of these survey participants were also concerned that using Medicare as a model to build a public option would increase the federal budget deficit because they believe that Medicare pays out more than it collects. Based on their concerns about the Medicare budget, they believe this would not be a good way to expand coverage for the general population.

The survey respondents opposed to a public option based on Medicare were not all opposed to other approaches to expand health insurance options for the uninsured. One respondent suggested that our nation should develop a plan based on a public/private partnership rather than a plan based on Medicare. This individual suggest we consider a plan for everyone like they do in France, Germany, or Switzerland or we should consider the establishment of a demonstration project in a few states with different demographics and sizes that could provide a better understanding of how to develop a public option in our country. Some believe public options are frequently much costlier and always provide poorer coverage. Instead, they suggest we should allow interstate commerce in insurance and allow uninsured people, like those who are self-employed, to form national health care groups to take advantage of the discounts available to large corporations and governments. Another was not opposed to it in principle, but suggested the devil is in the details. One respondent who was opposed to a public option that would be available to anyone, suggesting a limited basic government plan for low-income people to have basic healthcare costs covered.

Much like the group that would support a public option several of the respondents who were opposed to a public option based on Medicare voiced frustration or concerns about this approach. One respondent shared that people deserve good healthcare insurance -- not third rate like Medicare. Another said that if healthcare was provided by the government, it would be free for all and good care for no one. Another said the government does nothing efficiently

and it has no business in healthcare at all. One respondent said, “Like about 200M Americans I have employer-based coverage, supplemented by MA (Medicare Advantage). For the remainder there should be bare bones coverage supported by our tax dollars. I have already paid for Medicare during my working years - Why should I pay again for the indigent?”

Discussion of Results

Healthcare in the United States is complicated. As a nation, we have many opinions on healthcare from our individual experiences and our perceptions of how our healthcare system delivers care and how we pay for it. Almost anyone has a story about their care or the care of their friends or family. It is well known that we have the most expensive healthcare system in the world by any measure. It is a large part of our economy at more than $3.4 trillion per year.

Most of the participants in our survey have health insurance. Roughly 90% of them had employer-based plans, Obamacare coverage or Medicare. 40% of them were happy with their coverage although most of the respondents to our survey would like lower costs for medications, lower premiums, co-pays, and out-of-pocket expenses. There were many thoughtful comments about why we should have a public option based on Medicare and why this may not be a good idea.

For the respondents to this survey who were happy with their health insurance plans, a good follow up question would be have they ever make claims to their insurance carrier for a serious illness and were they still happy after that experience. People with serious illness face the potential for financial ruin while trying to meet the challenges of paying for their care that is not completely covered by their insurance. People with chronic illness often face difficult challenges to maintain their drug therapy because of the high cost of pharmaceuticals. Those who distrust the government do not want it to be involved with healthcare and have concerns about socialism creeping into healthcare if there is more government involvement in it.

There were also some interesting misunderstandings expressed in the comments that we received that we need to address. It was said that we should develop a plan for low-income individuals. We have had Medicaid for the last 56 years that exists to provide coverage for low-income individuals. Obamacare also provides subsidized care for Americans who have low incomes. President Biden’s’ American Rescue Plan increases these subsidies for the next two years. Another respondent said that the government should stay out of healthcare. Today 47% of all healthcare expenses are paid by the government for programs like Medicare, Medicaid, the Veterans Administration, Tricare for military dependents and retirees and care for Native Americans. There was also great concern about the high cost of Medicare. However, Medicare pays less for care than

private insurance does on a per capita basis. These misunderstandings of our healthcare system are very understandable because our system is extremely complicated and confusing.

We began collecting data for this survey as the Biden administration was coming into office while promising to ramp up the distribution and administration of vaccines to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. We wanted to learn if individual responses to the broad issues of health insurance coverage and the potential for the development of a public option had changed during this difficult and challenging time. This was the beginning of the effort to make vaccines available to the public after the nation had been facing the restrictions imposed to fight the pandemic for almost a year. 55% of our respondents support a public option based on Medicare and 45% of them were opposed to it. These results of our survey are consistent with studies that were done before the pandemic by organizations like the Kaiser Family foundation, Fivethirtyeight.com and the Commonwealth Fund. In general, previous surveys also indicate most Americans who are satisfied with their coverage do not want it to change. At the same time in the past most Americans also supported the development of public plans. The data collected in our survey suggests that although in many ways the pandemic has been the most difficult time in healthcare since the Spanish flu of 1918, opinions about the future of healthcare have been relatively consistent before and during this pandemic. Americans who have health insurance generally want to keep the coverage that they have. They would like it to cost less and a majority of our survey participants who have coverage would support a public option to provide coverage for others.

It is well known that the cost of healthcare in the United States is twice the average for the other 36 nations that are a part of the Organization for Cooperation and Economic Development of the United Nations, yet we still have 29 million uninsured Americans. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid studies have suggested that without some change in how we deliver and pay for healthcare, these costs will continue to grow over the next five years. As a nation we need new approaches to lowering the cost of healthcare. Our survey suggests that there is support for the development of a public option that is a good first step to address the problems of the high cost of care while reducing the number of uninsured Americans.

Appendix A Survey Questionnaire



We are dedicated to providing objective analysis of current discussions on healthcare initiatives that impact the health and well-being of Americans today, and in the future. Your responses to this brief survey will ensure that the perspectives of American citizens are represented in our work.

All responses will be kept confidential. Information gathered in this survey will be reported in aggregate form only.

Thank you for participating!

Continue >

1. Please enter your email address.

Email Address:
emailaddress@xyz.com

* 2. Do you have health insurance?

- Employer-based plan

- Obamacare plan
- Personal private insurance
- Parents' insurance plan
- Short-term non-Obamacare coverage
- Original Medicare
- Medicare Advantage
- Medicaid
- I do not have health insurance. Please tell us why.
- Other

  - Comment:
  - 500 characters left.

* 3. What would make your health insurance plan better? (Check all that apply.)
  - I am happy with my plan as it is
  - Lower cost premiums
  - Lower deductible
  - Expanded network of providers (doctors, hospitals and pharmacies)
  - Reduce the cost of my medications

- [ ] Reduce co-pays
- [ ] Eliminate pre-authorizations
- [ ] Other

* 4. Please share with us your age.
  - 26 or younger
  - 27 to 35
  - 36 to 45
  - 46 to 55
  - 56 to 65
  - Over 65
  - I do not wish to answer this question

* 5. How would you classify yourself?
  - African-American
  - Caucasian
  - Native American
  - Hispanic/Latino
  - Asian-American
  - Other
  - I do not wish to answer this question

* 6. Please share with us your family income.
  - Below $25,000
  - $25,001 to $50,000
  - $50,001 to $100,000
  - $100,001 to $150,000
  - $150,001 to $200,000

- $200,001 to $250,000
- $250,000+
- I do not wish to answer this question

* 7. Would you support a public option for healthcare insurance that is based on Medicare if it was something you could choose?
  - Yes. Please tell us why.
  - No. Please tell us why.
    - Comment:
    - 500 characters left.

* 8. Would you like to receive a copy of the report that is prepared as a result of this survey?
  - Yes
  - No