Public Opinion on Medicare and Priorities for the Future

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Three Main Themes Of Public Opinion On Medicare

• Medicare is popular and perceived to be working well.

• The public is concerned about Medicare’s financial future.

• Americans are resistant to most proposed changes to Medicare, particularly those that are perceived as scaling back benefits.
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Medicare Is Viewed Almost Universally As Important

How important is Medicare **for you and your family**? (Nov. 2014)

- **Very Important**: 58%
- **Somewhat Important**: 19%
- **Not too important**: 10%
- **Not at all important**: 11%

How important is the Medicare program **for the country as a whole**? (Apr. 2009)

- **Very Important**: 77%
- **Somewhat Important**: 19%

By Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Not too important</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-64</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Polls
Eight In Ten Seniors Believe Medicare Is Working Well

Would you say the current Medicare program is **working well for most seniors**, or not? (Nov. 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Yes, working well</th>
<th>No, not working well</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total public</strong></td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age 18-64</strong></td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age 65+</strong></td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCE:** Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 5-13, 2014)
Medicare Beneficiaries Over 65 Are More Likely To Be Satisfied Than Younger Adults With Private Insurance

Percent who say they are \textbf{very satisfied} with each of the following:

- **Choice of hospitals**: Ages 65+ with Medicare - 75%, Age 18-64 with private insurance - 63%
- **Choice of primary care doctors**: Ages 65+ with Medicare - 72%, Age 18-64 with private insurance - 62%
- **Choice of specialists**: Ages 65+ with Medicare - 68%, Age 18-64 with private insurance - 52%
- **Doctor visit copay**: Ages 65+ with Medicare - 61%, Age 18-64 with private insurance - 42%
- **Annual deductible**: Ages 65+ with Medicare - 55%, Age 18-64 with private insurance - 31%
- **Prescription copay**: Ages 65+ with Medicare - 51%, Age 18-64 with private insurance - 48%
- **Monthly premium**: Ages 65+ with Medicare - 48%, Age 18-64 with private insurance - 36%

\textbf{SOURCE}: Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll (conducted May 13-19, 2014)
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• Americans are resistant to most proposed changes to Medicare, particularly those that are perceived as scaling back benefits.
Most Think Medicare Has Major Financial Problems

AMONG TOTAL PUBLIC: Which of the following four statements comes closest to your own view of the financial status of the Medicare program?

November 2014

- The program is in financial crisis: 23%
- The program has major problems, but is not in financial crisis: 37%
- The program has minor financial problems: 24%
- The program has no financial problems: 5%
- Don't know/ Refused: 11%

60% say major problems or financial crisis (down from 74% in 2009)

SOURCE: Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 5-13, 2014)
Many Current And Future Retirees Are Not Confident In Medicare’s Ability To Maintain Future Benefits

How confident are you that the Medicare system will continue to provide benefits of at least equal value to the benefits received by retirees today?

- [ ] Very confident
- [ ] Somewhat confident
- [ ] Not too confident
- [ ] Not at all confident

Workers planning to retire

- 9%
- 30%
- 31%
- 29%

Retirees

- 12%
- 39%
- 27%
- 18%

60% not confident

45%

A number of factors underpin the anti-redistributionist shift in public opinion that I wrote about last week.

First, and perhaps most important, is the emergence of significant resistance to downward redistribution among the elderly, a major voting bloc.

The views of older voters deserve scrutiny. They “worry that redistribution will come at their expense, in particular via cuts to Medicare,” Vivekina Ashok, a Ph.D. candidate in political science at Yale; Ilyana Kuziemko, a professor of economics at Princeton; and Ebonya Washington, a professor of economics at Yale, write in a March 2015 Brookings Institution essay, “Support for Redistribution in an Age of Rising Inequality”— an essay my Times colleague Neil Irwin also discussed in a recent column that asked why Americans don’t want to soak the rich.

In the end, Ashok, Kuziemko and Washington conclude that the elderly have grown increasingly opposed to government provision of health insurance and that controlling for this tendency explains roughly half of their declining relative support of redistribution.
Concern – And Confusion – About ACA’s Impact On Medicare

Do you think the **Medicare program will be better off or worse off under the health reform law**, or don’t you think it will make much difference? (Sept. 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age 18-64</th>
<th>Better off</th>
<th>26%</th>
<th>It won't make much difference</th>
<th>22%</th>
<th>Worse off</th>
<th>31%</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
<th>21%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age 65+</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To the best of your knowledge, would you say the health reform law does or does not **establish a government panel to make decisions about end-of-life care for people on Medicare**? (Dec. 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age 18-64</th>
<th>No, law does not do this</th>
<th>41%</th>
<th>Yes, law does this</th>
<th>41%</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
<th>19%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age 65+</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Polls
Three Main Themes Of Public Opinion On Medicare

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Most Want No Spending Cuts To Medicare

AMONG TOTAL PUBLIC: Percent who say they would support *spending reductions to federal programs* as a way to reduce the federal deficit (2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>NO reductions</th>
<th>MINOR reductions</th>
<th>MAJOR reductions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public education</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicare</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Security</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicaid</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health insurance subsidies</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aid to farmers</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National defense</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food stamps</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment insurance</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaries/benefits for fed. govt. workers</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The conflict in Afghanistan</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign aid</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reluctance To Cut Medicare Spending Across Party Lines

Percent who say they would support **spending reductions to Medicare** as a way to reduce the federal deficit (2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No reductions</th>
<th>Minor reductions</th>
<th>Major reductions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total public</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the president and Congress made the right changes, they could reduce the deficit without major reductions in Medicare spending. 75%

Don’t know/Refused 7%

If the president and Congress made the right changes, they could reduce the deficit without major reductions in Medicare spending. 75%

Don’t know/Refused 7%

Could be made without increasing costs for people on Medicare 51%

Would lead to higher costs for people on the program 35%

Don’t know 13%

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health, The Public’s Health Care Agenda for the 113th Congress (conducted January 3-9, 2013)
Support For Various Deficit-Reducing Changes To Medicare

Percent who favor each of the following Medicare proposals to reduce the federal budget deficit:

- **Requiring drug companies to give the government a better deal on medications for low-income beneficiaries**
  - Total public: 85%
  - Ages 18-64: 86%
  - Ages 65+: 83%

- **Increasing premiums for high income seniors**
  - Total public: 59%
  - Ages 18-64: 60%
  - Ages 65+: 56%

- **Gradually raising eligibility age to 67 for future retirees**
  - Total public: 48%
  - Ages 18-64: 43%
  - Ages 65+: 64%

- **Reducing Medicare payments to hospitals/other providers**
  - Total public: 46%
  - Ages 18-64: 48%
  - Ages 65+: 35%

- **Increasing Medicare payroll taxes**
  - Total public: 43%
  - Ages 18-64: 43%
  - Ages 65+: 44%

- **Increasing premiums for all seniors**
  - Total public: 13%
  - Ages 18-64: 12%
  - Ages 65+: 17%

**SOURCE:** Kaiser Family Foundation/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health, *The Public’s Health Care Agenda for the 113th Congress* (conducted January 3-9, 2013)
Views on Changing Medicare to a Defined Contribution System

Percent who say each is closer to their view of what Medicare should look like in the future:

- **Medicare should continue as it is today,** with the government guaranteeing seniors health insurance and making sure that everyone gets the same defined set of benefits.

- **Medicare should be changed to a system in which the government would guarantee each senior a fixed amount of money** to put toward health insurance. Seniors would purchase that coverage either from traditional Medicare or from a list of private health plans.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Total Public</th>
<th>Democrats</th>
<th>Independents</th>
<th>Republicans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ages 18-39</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 40-54</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 55-64</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 65+</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCE:** Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 5-13, 2014)
Younger Adults More Likely To Say Private Plans Offer Better Benefits And More Provider Choice

Which do you think offers more generous health benefits?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age 18-64</th>
<th>Medicare</th>
<th>About equal</th>
<th>Private plans</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age 18-64</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 65+</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which do you think offers more choice among doctors and hospitals?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age 18-64</th>
<th>Medicare</th>
<th>About equal</th>
<th>Private plans</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age 18-64</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 65+</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 5-13, 2014)
The Evolution Of Seniors’ Views On Part D

AMONG AGES 65+: As you may know, Medicare provides a prescription drug benefit, known as Medicare Part D. Given what you know about it, in general, do you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of the Medicare prescription drug benefit?

![Graph showing the evolution of seniors' views on Part D from 2004 to 2013.](image)

NOTES: Question wording varied slightly in 2004-2006 surveys. Neither/neutral (Vol.) and Don’t know/Refused answers not shown.

SOURCE: Kaiser Family Foundation surveys
Two-Thirds Favor Adding Medicare Dental and Vision Coverage At A Cost For Recipients

AMONG ALL ADULTS: Medicare doesn’t currently include vision and dental coverage. Would you favor, oppose or neither favor nor oppose adding dental and vision coverage for Medicare at an extra charge for Medicare recipients?

67% Total Favor

- Strongly favor: 38%
- Somewhat favor: 29%
- Neither favor nor oppose: 9%
- Somewhat oppose: 13%
- Strongly oppose: 11%

24% Total Oppose

Source: Associated Press-GfK Poll conducted Nov. 18-22, 2010
Improving Coverage For Long Term Care Ranks At The Top Of Improvement Priorities

AMONG THOSE AGES 65+: If the country could afford to make **ONE improvement to Medicare**, which of these three possible improvements would you choose?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improvement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving coverage of nursing home and other long-term care services</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adding coverage of dental services, vision services, and hearing aids</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adding an annual limit on Medicare costs seniors pay out of their own pockets</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Kaiser Family Foundation 2012 National Survey of Seniors (conducted May 29-July 8, 2012)