

# Key Health Care Proposals Get Bipartisan Public Support Despite Debate's Increased Political Polarization

October 8, 2009

[Full Report \(PDF\)](#)

[Questionnaire with Findings, Methodology \(PDF\)](#)



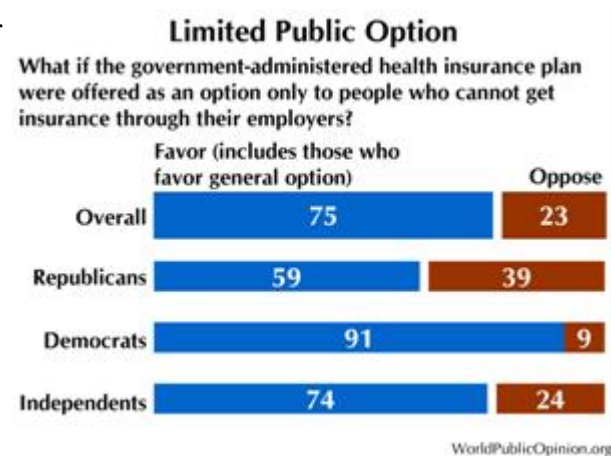
A new poll conducted by WorldPublicOpinion.org (WPO) together with the Brookings Institution finds that over the last year, as the health care debate has intensified, a bipartisan consensus that the government is responsible for ensuring access to health care has fractured. Nonetheless, a majority of the public still says the government is responsible, and there is bipartisan support for numerous key reform proposals, including a limited public option, new constraints on the health insurance industry, tort reform, and cross-state purchasing.

In 2008, asked whether the US government "should be responsible for ensuring that its citizens can meet their basic need for health care," 77% said that it should be, including clear majorities of all parties. However, the new WPO/Brookings poll finds that Republican support for the proposition has dropped from 55% support to 29%, while a 67% majority now rejects this view. Overall, support has dropped 17 points, but 60% still say that government is responsible.

Despite this disagreement at a broad level, there is bipartisan support for a number of specific proposals.

On the public option, when asked whether the government should provide insurance to all who want it, 57% are in favor, but a majority of Republicans are opposed (65%). However, asked about a more limited public option available only to those who cannot get health insurance from an employer, public support rises to 75%, including 59% of Republicans.

A proposal that the government require insurance companies to accept every applicant for coverage enjoys overwhelming support. Overall, 82% backed such a reform, including 90% of Democrats, 80% of independents and 73% of Republicans.



Government regulation of malpractice suits against doctors has the support of a more modest majority--55%-- but is also backed by individuals from both major parties, including 64% of Republicans and a 50% plurality of Democrats.

Cross-state purchasing of insurance is likewise strongly supported by large majorities of Americans across the partisan spectrum. Two-thirds (65%) support changing the rules, including 69% of Republicans, 64% of Democrats, and 61% of independents.

More broadly there is also strong bipartisan consensus that the government is doing a poor job ensuring that Americans can meet their basic health care needs. Sixty-six percent said the government is doing not doing this well, including majorities of Republicans (58%), Democrats (67%) and independents (74%).

The question of whether waste, fraud and abuse can be cut from the health care system without denying people the treatment they need has stirred considerable debate. However, an overwhelming 3 in 4 Americans believe it can be done, including majorities of Republicans (79%), Democrats (78%), and independents (72%).

As debate over health care reform rages in Congress, half of all Americans report that they are getting increasingly alienated. Asked how they were responding to the debate, only 24% percent say the debate is drawing them closer to the Democrats' ideas, and just 21% say they are drawing closer to the Republicans' ideas. Fifty percent say they are less supportive of both sets of ideas.

Steven Kull, director of WPO comments, "The current partisan debate seems to be alienating many Americans and fracturing the public consensus on the role of government in health care. The good news is that among the public, Republicans and Democrats are still able to find common ground on specific reforms."

Four in five (79%) expect that if health care reform is enacted, their taxes will go up. However, only those who think their taxes will increase a lot tend to oppose reform proposals. For instance, on a generally available public option, those who think their taxes will go up a little are strongly supportive (81%) as does a majority of those who think their taxes will go up somewhat (53%). Only among those who expect their taxes to go up a lot, is a majority opposed (73%).

Americans express anxiety about health care reform. Asked to choose between two statements 53% chose "I'm afraid that government action will only make our health care system worse" while just 44 % chose "I'm confident that government action can improve our health care system."

William Galston, senior fellow in Governance Studies at Brookings, observes that "While many Americans support specific reform proposals, this support is compromised by an underlying lack of confidence in government."

The poll of 1400 Americans was fielded from September 26, 2009 to October 5, 2009. It was conducted using the web-enabled KnowledgePanel<sup>®</sup>, a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. population. Initially, participants are chosen scientifically by a random selection of telephone numbers and residential addresses. Persons in selected households are then invited by telephone or by mail to participate in the web-enabled KnowledgePanel<sup>®</sup>. For those who agree to participate, but do not already have Internet access, Knowledge Networks provides at no cost a laptop and ISP connection. Panelists receive unique log-in information for accessing surveys online and are contacted by an email inviting them to participate in a study. More technical information is available at <http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp/reviewer-info.html>.

The size of the sample answering each question varied, though all had over 800 respondents. The margin of error varied from +/- 2.6 to 3.5 percentage points.