



Analysis of items Assessing Reasons to Support or Oppose

Government-Sponsored Healthcare Coverage in the Asclepius Spring 2022 Survey

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In 2022, The Asclepius Initiative (TAI) conducted a survey of 1000 adult Kentuckians, assessing their attitudes and beliefs regarding the US healthcare delivery system, and their willingness to entertain alternative delivery models. The survey was put into the field by Qualtrics, while the data analyses were performed internally by TAI.

This report reflects additional analyses that were conducted to assess the expressed reasons in favor of or in opposition to the concept of a national government sponsored health care coverage program. In addition to the pool of structured questions, two open ended questions were asked of all respondents:

- a) What feature of a national health insurance plan would be most important to you?
- b) What fears/concerns do you have with the idea of a national health insurance program?

Methodology

In the spring 2022 survey, respondents were asked: *“Do you support a national government health plan that would provide health insurance for everyone?”* Those who answered “yes” were asked *“Tell us why you answered the way you did. Please check all that apply”* and given a list of 5 supportive reasons, plus “Other,” with a space for an insertion. Those who answered “no” were also asked why they answered the way that they did and were given a list of 5 reasons, plus “Other”.ⁱ Of the 1000 respondents, 67.3% supported the idea of a national government health plan, and 23.0% were opposed. The opinions of supporters and opponents will be considered in more depth, while the 9.7% who did not express an opinion will not be further addressed in this report.

1. Reasons for Support

Supporters indicated whether or not they endorsed a specific reason for their position. As Table 1 indicates, three reasons were endorsed by a majority of supporters: *healthcare is a right, healthcare will be more affordable, and healthcare will be more efficient*:

Table 1: Supportive affirmed reasons	Total Supportive Who Endorsed	Percent
Healthcare is a right and this would make sure everyone was covered	445	66%
Current healthcare costs are too high, and this may make healthcare costs more affordable	413	61%

Having everyone on the same health insurance system would be more efficient for patients and providers	343	51%
A national plan would increase the quality of care provided	235	35%
It would make receiving care less complicated	167	25%

N = 673.

2. Reasons for Opposition

As Table 2 reports, three reasons also were endorsed by a majority of opponents to a universal government-sponsored health insurance plan: *opposition to government involvement in healthcare*, *potential for increased costs*, and *greater implementation expenses*.

Table 2: Opponent affirmed reasons	Total Opposed Who Endorsed	Mean
I do not believe the government should run a healthcare insurance program	173	75%
Current healthcare costs are already too high, and this would make healthcare costs worse	125	54%
Too expensive to implement	121	53%
It would limit competition	88	38%
I'm worried that I won't be able to see my doctors	79	34%

N=230

3. Other Reasons for Support

As noted above, in the Spring 2022 sample of 1,000, there were 673 supporters of a national government health plan that would provide health insurance for everyone. In addition to the reasons noted above, the supporters contributed eleven responses to the “Other” category. Not all of the “Other” reasons offered by supporters of a national government health plan were all actually supportive. Some of the compelling supportive reasons were negative attitudes toward insurance companies, the inequity of the current system, the burden of handling paperwork and claim denials when one is ill, and the prospect of a healthier population.

Table 3: “Other” reasons for support (each reason mentioned by 1 out of 673 respondents)

1. Current insurance corporations are just stealing from the public.
2. We could have healthier Kentuckians if they could see a doctor and not worry
3. It is too much work when you are ill to deal with all the work that goes into dealing with health insurance
4. It would keep the elite and rich from getting huge big item (for instance organ transplants, NICU baby services) and other expensive health care
5. There is a level of care I think all of humanity deserves.
6. We already have Medicaid
7. It is almost that way, the government pays for the deadbeats
8. Need to know more about the plan to give a real opinion
9. I am concerned about quality of care and specialization in medicine.
10. Care would become worse, longer wait times for needed care.
11. Government would be in control of health care instead of patient and medical care providers

4. Other reasons for Opposition

There were only 230 opponents of a national government health plan that would provide health insurance for everyone in the Spring 2022 sample of 1,000. Nonetheless, that group generated 18 additional reasons for opposition. Those reasons could be sorted into three categories: distrust of government control, distrust of government efficiency, and concerns with equity and cost.

Table 4: Other reasons for opposition (each reason mentioned by 1 of 230 opponents)

(Distrust of government control)

1. I don't believe it would allow the freedom of personal healthcare choices. I also don't think it would give everyone unbiased and equal access to all medical options.
2. Healthcare is something that should be local, and run by locals.
3. It could take treatment decision out of the Doctors control
4. The government would decide who lives and dies.
5. I do not trust our government enough to rely on them for healthcare.
6. I do not want the government to dictate my medical decisions
7. It would give the government more control and power than it needs
8. Quality of care will suffer

(Distrust of government efficiency)

9. Government is not efficient. Same reason I never chose Tricare Prime
10. governments would make a train wreck out of health insurance.
11. The Gov't is the most corrupt group and is incapable of running anything
12. it would raise taxes and you would have to wait longer for appointments
13. Delayed treatment

(Concerns over equity and costs)

14. Some would not equally contribute and I think that is unfair
15. Someone is got to pay
16. It's not fair to others who can't really afford out the pocket to see the doctors without health insurance
17. The government has no need to make a profit. Therefore, everything costs twice as much, work half as well, and three times as complicated. And where, pray tell do we get the money

for national health insurance? Does the government DO anything to make money? NO. They make money by raising taxes.

18. I do not agree with the government taxing me for owning a body. I can't sell my body if I don't want to pay, or can't pay the tax on it.

5. Most important attributes of a national health insurance plan

Responses to two additional open-ended questions provide insight into reasons for support vs. opposition to government-sponsored health care. One question asked, “*What feature of a national health insurance plan would be most important to you?*” The one thousand free-text responses were alphabetized to group identical responses together. For example, 53 respondents provided the identical response of “Less cost.” Next, comparable terms were sorted into categories. For example, Less cost, Cost, Affordability, No Co-Pay, Co-Pay and Free were grouped together in the category Affordability. As shown in Table 5, the three categories of Affordability, Accessibility and Specialty Care accounted for more than 40% of responses (420/1000). Additional synonyms might be identified, and classifications made, although they are unlikely to be more popular than the aforementioned three.

Table 5: What feature of a national health insurance plan would be most important to you?

Good Affordability: Affordability(26), Co-pay(16),No co-pay(35),Cost(38),Free(32),Less cost(53),Premium(11),Prescription cost(11): 224
Universal Access: Accessibility(11),Availability(26),Coverage(60),Ease of use(9),Equal coverage(32): 138
Specialty Care: Dental (44), Vision (14): 58
<u>Total 420 classified</u>

6. Concerns about a national health insurance plan

A second open-ended question asked: “*What fears/concerns do you have with the idea of a national health insurance program?*” As shown in Table 6, the greatest category of responses, reported by nearly one-fifth of respondents was “No Concerns.” That is consistent with the majority of respondents being favorably disposed toward a national health plan that would provide health insurance for everyone, but it is noteworthy that 80% of respondents had some concerns. Respondents were particularly concerned with a reduction in the quality of care, including long waiting times and not being able to get access to advanced procedures . Respondents also feared an increase in health care costs and taxes. A small segment of respondents expressed extreme animosity, claiming that government could not be trusted with medical decisions and that government-supported health care amounts to Communism. Finally, a small set of respondents expressed concerns such as “*Nobody would work if they had free health insurance*”, “*people would abuse it that pay nothing.*” One respondent disparaged non-citizens: “*illegal immigrants would water it down.*” As with the question about what is important, further analysis could uncover additional categories.

Table 6: What fears/concerns do you have with the idea of a national health insurance program?

No Concerns: None (138), n/a (23), not sure (9), Nothing (11): 181

Reduction in Quality-of-Care: Low quality/limited health care (62), Not being able to get adequate care (36), Long wait times (29): 127
Poor Affordability: Cost (58), High cost/taxes (45), Co-Pays (6): 109
Government control: Government control (29), Distrust of government/bureaucracy/ socialism/ communism (37): 66
Potential for abuse 14
<i>Total 497 classified</i>

7. Integrated findings and Discussion

The arguments for and against a national government health plan that would provide health insurance for everyone can be most easily discerned by integrating the results of the six analyses.

Table 7: Summary of Reasons for Support and Opposition to a National Government Health Insurance Plan/Program

Reasons for support: healthcare is a right; healthcare will be more affordable, and healthcare will be more efficient
Other Reasons for Support: negative attitudes toward insurance companies, the inequity of the current system, the burden of handling paperwork and claim denials when one is ill, and the prospect of a healthier population.
Most important in national health insurance plan: good affordability, universal access, access to specialist care
Reasons for Opposition: opposition to government involvement in healthcare, potential for increased costs, and greater implementation expenses.
Other reasons for opposition: distrust of government control, distrust of government efficiency; Concerns over equity and costs
Concerns about national health insurance plan: reduction in quality of care, poor affordability, government control, potential for abuse

DISCUSSION

These analyses revealed several themes. Although supporters of a national health plan see proper medical care as a **human right**, opponents expect beneficiaries to work for it. One opponent mentioned a preference for excluding undocumented immigrants altogether.

Meanwhile, concerns about costs and affordability are the second most common reasons given for both support AND opposition to a national government health insurance plan. Supporters believe that elimination of insurance company profit and administrative overhead from the healthcare system, and a healthier population, will lead to reduced nation-wide medical expenditures, whereas opponents believe that an increase in the number of people covered will lead to increased costs and increased taxes.

Opponents of a national government health insurance plan do not trust the government to create and administer health insurance in a satisfactory manner. The skeptics fear long waits for treatment, denial of expensive medical care, incompetent personnel, and general inefficiency.

Healthcare is a topic that activates feelings of vulnerability and fear in many people. This may involve concerns about susceptibility to cancer, pandemic illnesses, the prospect of dementia, the discomfort of needles and surgery, and the ever-looming threat of bankruptcy due to high medical bills.

People can also feel vulnerable because the current U.S. healthcare system inherently imposes power imbalances between those who deliver and those who receive care and is far too often insensitive to or discriminating on the basis of racial, gender, ethnic, socio-economic, or cultural identities. Furthermore, health care providers may seem indifferent to the loss of dignity due to long, unexplained wait times, the loss of privacy associated with certain medical procedures, and oblivious to the social determinants of health that can affect patient compliance with medical recommendations.

Opponents of a national government healthcare insurance plan use this dynamic to their advantage by playing to fears of powerlessness and espousing the desirability of “private” insurance. Opponents also incite outrage over burdensome tax increases, inability to obtain care in a timely fashion, and imagined “death panels” that will usurp end-of-life decisions from families with respect to their loved ones.

Conclusion

Those who support the idea of a national government sponsored healthcare insurance program outnumber those who oppose such a system by a factor of nearly 3:1. Supporters believe that healthcare is a basic human right, that current healthcare costs are too high, a national plan has the potential for increased efficiency, and should make costs more affordable. They were less inclined to say that a national plan would increase the quality of care or make care less complicated.

Opposition to such a national plan is primarily attributable to sentiment against the idea of government control, followed by concern that health care costs would rise, that it would be too expensive to implement, that it would limit competition, and that the ability to see their doctors would be curtailed.

Understanding the basis of antagonism towards the government, and how it might be addressed will be helpful in improving public understanding of the evidence and increasing public support for a national government sponsored health insurance plan. There is also an opportunity to explain that government financing of healthcare is not synonymous with government control over medical decision-making. Portions of the public do not yet recognize that commercial health care insurance companies impose far more leverage over what, when, and how medical care is delivered, by way of restricted networks and

pre-authorization procedures, than either traditional Medicare or Medicaid. The fear of a zero-sum scenario (if you get the care you need, I won't get the care I need), could be mitigated by channeling the cost savings as projected by the Congressional Budget Officeⁱⁱ and others into the training of additional medical and support personnel and facilities to offset the increase in demand. This would not only benefit the physical, mental, emotional, and financial well-being of patients, but it would also increase worker productivity via less absenteeism and create jobs in healthcare, thus benefitting workers and the economy.

ⁱ There are several methodological limitations to the spring 2022 approach: (1) It does not assess the responses of opponents to pro-single payer reasons, nor the responses of supporters to opposition reasons. (2) binary checklist responses do not assess the strength of the endorsement of a reason, as does a Likert scale, and (3) different respondents will have different criteria for determining that a reason did or did not influence their answer. Some respondents may only check a reason if it was dispositive while others may endorse any reason with which they are in sympathy, even if the reason did not occur to them as they were indicating whether or not they supported a government health plan.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/56811>