



MARYLAND

FAMILY POLICY IMPACT SEMINAR

Examining Health Care: What's the Public's Prescription?

A look at Maryland citizens' thinking on health care reform

The quality, accessibility, and affordability of health care in America impacts the well-being of our society. As is, health care is of great concern to Americans and in desperate need of reform. In order to effectively address the diverse needs and numerous concerns surrounding health care, policymakers must consider the perspectives of citizens. This policy brief presents findings from public deliberations on health care policy held across the state of Maryland.

The Deliberative Process

Deliberative democratic practice involves citizens discussing, not debating, concerns, drawbacks, and tradeoffs of health care policy perspectives with the guidance of a trained moderator. Participants are encouraged to search for a shared sense of direction and agree upon and engage in follow-up actions. The assumptions of this approach are that, given a topic of significance, a non-partisan approach to the issue, a communal public venue, and a skilled moderator, citizens can and will engage in the deliberative process. This engagement around issues full of tension, personal interest, and diverse perspectives allows participants to consider diverse approaches to health care reform.

Forum Participants

Gender: 90.5% female	9.5% male
Race/Ethnicity: 1% Asian	6% Other
6% African American	87% Caucasian
Age: 18% 18-30	46% 46-64
14% 31-45	22% 65 or older
Residence Type:	
13% rural	24% small town
6% large city	57% suburban
Who pays for insurance?	
39% employer	11% Medicare
18% individual	27% combination
5% other	

Maryland Citizen Voices

The opinions of 87 Marylanders who participated in one of five recent public forums on health care were collected and compiled. Participants who were thinking differently about health care after participating in the forum said:

- *It's a more difficult issue than I thought*
- *I've been forced to try to figure out ways to make all approaches work--instructive and thought-provoking.*
- *I'm considering what has to be set aside for the greater good of the health care system*
- *I'm more aware of some of the issues holding us back from making changes in the system*
- *It helped me to see some other perspectives I hadn't previously considered*
- *My stance on issues hasn't changed, but thinking about other people's priorities, I am more aware of how others are thinking*
- *The Medicare crisis is cause for great concern, more as we age*

Participants suggested that citizens in their communities:

- *Initiate continuing conversations about health care concerns of residents particular to the community*
- *Hold town meetings with a diverse representation of stakeholders*
- *Be more active in their own health care, be aware of risk behaviors, ask doctors questions*
- *Think about what value they personally assign to health care and what they would be willing to pay for in terms of taxes, coverage, and quality*
- *Be aware of others' lack of access to health services and be sensitive to the special health needs of others*
- *Open up to being willing to pay for universal health care*
- *See all sides of the issue*

Perspectives on Health Care in America

- 77.4% of participants strongly agreed with the statement, all Americans should have some kind of health insurance, while 16.7% somewhat agreed.
- 60% strongly agreed with the statement, doctors should treat patients as full partners in their health care, while 34% somewhat agreed.
- 54% agreed that huge malpractice awards are driving up the cost of health care, while 30% somewhat agreed.
- 54% strongly or somewhat agreed that, regardless of income, minorities do not receive the same quality health care as whites do.
- 90.5% strongly or somewhat agreed that the public should have easier access to information about doctors' mistakes.
- 60.7% strongly agreed that patients dealing with many parts of the health care system often have no one to oversee the whole picture, while 30% somewhat agreed.

Perspectives on Health Care Reform

- 65% strongly favored and 25.5% somewhat favored expanding Medicare to include prescription drugs.
- 48% strongly favored and 38% somewhat favored requiring doctors to be retested periodically to ensure that they are still competent.
- 47% strongly favored and 31% somewhat favored making people whose choice behavior threatens their own health pay more for insurance.
- 57% strongly favored and 28% somewhat favored having the government collect and publish information on medical mistakes.
- 38.5% strongly favored and 31.5% somewhat favored providing all Americans with health care they can afford.
- 39.5% strongly favored and 41% somewhat favored creating local and regional health care systems to make doctors and hospitals share services and equipment.

Perspectives on Reform Tradeoffs

- 47% favored, 40% opposed, and 13% were not sure about health care providers coordinating and sharing facilities and resources, EVEN IF

patients would have to wait longer for some services.

- 77% favored, 13% opposed, and 10% were not sure about doctors spending more time with their patients, EVEN IF it raises the cost of health care
- 60% favored, 31% opposed, and 9% were not sure about all Americans having access to basic health care services, EVEN IF it means cutting coverage of some costly treatments

Implications

These findings provide important insight as to what Maryland citizens are thinking about health care policy and reform. Based on these perspectives, policymakers should find ways to provide insurance for all Americans. Allowing 41 million citizens to live without insurance is viewed as unacceptable. Limiting malpractice costs, fostering patient responsibility in health care, and coordinating health care system fragments are other policy reform considerations.

Engaging citizens in discussions about health care reform is critical in helping policymakers make use of public perspectives in legislating health care policies. If offered the opportunity, citizens can and will engage in deliberation around important issues.

Suggestions for Policy and Programming

- Efforts to engage citizens in public deliberation should be supported throughout the state in order to create a representative voice and shared sense of direction among Marylanders.
- Policymakers should rely on community organizations and research institutions to gather public perspectives on important policy issues.
- Community stakeholders should consider ways to engage diverse groups of citizens in deliberation. Policymakers should use citizen perspectives to inform health care policies.

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