

# KAISER PUBLIC OPINION SPOTLIGHT

Kaiser Public Opinion Spotlights provide in-depth analysis of public opinion on a variety of health care and health policy topics. Each Spotlight uses public opinion data from Kaiser surveys and other sources to examine current views and trends. All Spotlights available at [www.kff.org/spotlight](http://www.kff.org/spotlight)

Updated: April 2006

## The Public On Medicare Part D – The Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit

### **Historical Support for A Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit**

Historically, Medicare has not provided coverage for outpatient prescription drugs. Given the important role prescription drugs play in health care, and the rising costs associated with them, different proposals to add a drug benefit to Medicare have been proposed in the past. The most recent - the Medicare Modernization Act – passed in 2003 and created Medicare Part D, an outpatient prescription drug benefit set to go into effect in January 2006.

In the period leading up to passage of this law, there was overwhelming support for the addition of a prescription drug benefit to Medicare, and this support was consistent even when the cost of adding such coverage was discussed.

### **Seniors' Views on the New Prescription Drug Benefit**

Since we began tracking seniors' views of the Medicare prescription drug benefit in February 2004, more seniors have had an unfavorable than a favorable impression of the benefit (with the exception of August 2005, when the shares with favorable and unfavorable impressions were equal at 32%). Most recently, in April 2006, 46% of seniors have an unfavorable impression, and 30% have a favorable impression.

### **Seniors' Understanding of Benefit**

Seniors' reported understanding of the benefit has gradually increased over the past year, though there are still gaps in seniors' knowledge. In April 2006, over half of seniors say they do not have a good understanding of the benefit (53%) and nearly half (46%) said they do not have enough information to understand how the new benefit will impact them personally.

### **Seniors' Plans for Enrollment**

In April 2006, about three in ten (31%) of seniors say they have already enrolled in a Medicare drug plan, and another 13% say they plan to enroll. With just over 1 month to go until the end of the enrollment period (before penalties for late enrollment kick in), nearly four in ten (38%) say they do not plan to enroll, and 16% say they don't know yet whether they will enroll.

There are important gaps in seniors' knowledge of enrollment deadlines. Medicare beneficiaries have to sign up for the drug benefit by May 15 or pay higher premiums if they enroll in the future, unless they previously had what the government calls "creditable" coverage. Among seniors who may still enroll – those still deciding or say they plan to enroll but haven't yet - nearly half don't know about the deadline or the penalty for late enrollment.

Among the 54% of seniors who say they will NOT enroll, or don't yet know whether they will enroll in a Medicare prescription drug plan, the most commonly cited reason is that they already have help paying for prescription drugs from an insurance plan or program (65%).

### **Early Experiences of Enrollees**

Most enrolled seniors are satisfied with their drug plans and are not having problems filling prescriptions under their new plans. However, it's important to note that nearly two in ten enrolled seniors who have tried to fill prescriptions did report having a problem getting their drugs. We will probe the nature of the problems seniors are having getting their prescriptions filled in greater depth in future surveys.

### **Awareness and Use of Medicare Information Resources**

While many seniors know about Medicare's hotline and website, few report using them. About six in ten seniors say they have heard of Medicare's toll-free phone number, 1-800-MEDICARE (61%) and the website Medicare.gov (62%). However, just 12% say they've called the hotline and just 9% have looked for information on Medicare.gov.

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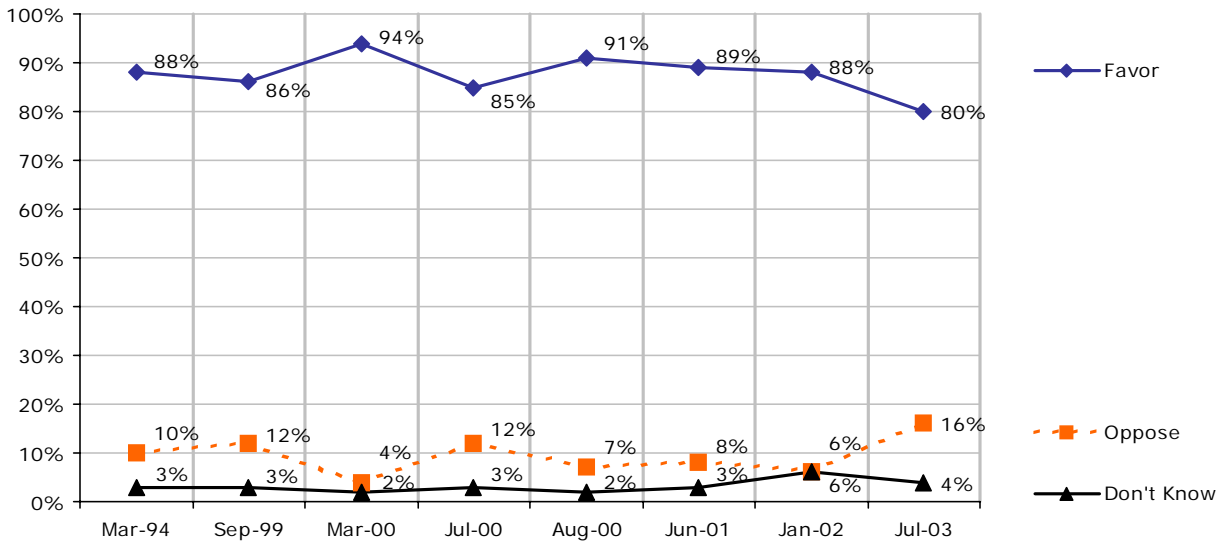
[Comparing Medicare Drug Plans on Medicare.gov](#)

**1. Historical Support For Addition of Prescription Drug Benefit to Medicare**

Before 2006, Medicare did not include coverage for outpatient prescription drugs. Given the important role of prescription drugs in health care, and the rising costs of these drugs, several proposals to add a drug benefit to Medicare have been proposed in the past. The most recent - the Medicare Modernization Act - passed in 2003 and created Medicare Part D – an outpatient prescription drug benefit that began covering seniors in January 2006.

In the period leading up to passage of the Medicare Modernization Act, there was overwhelming support for the addition of a prescription drug benefit to Medicare. Between eight and nine in ten Americans supported providing prescription drug coverage for seniors through Medicare, and this support was very consistent over time.

**Historical Support for Addition of Prescription Drug Benefit to Medicare**



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation Public Opinion Spotlight

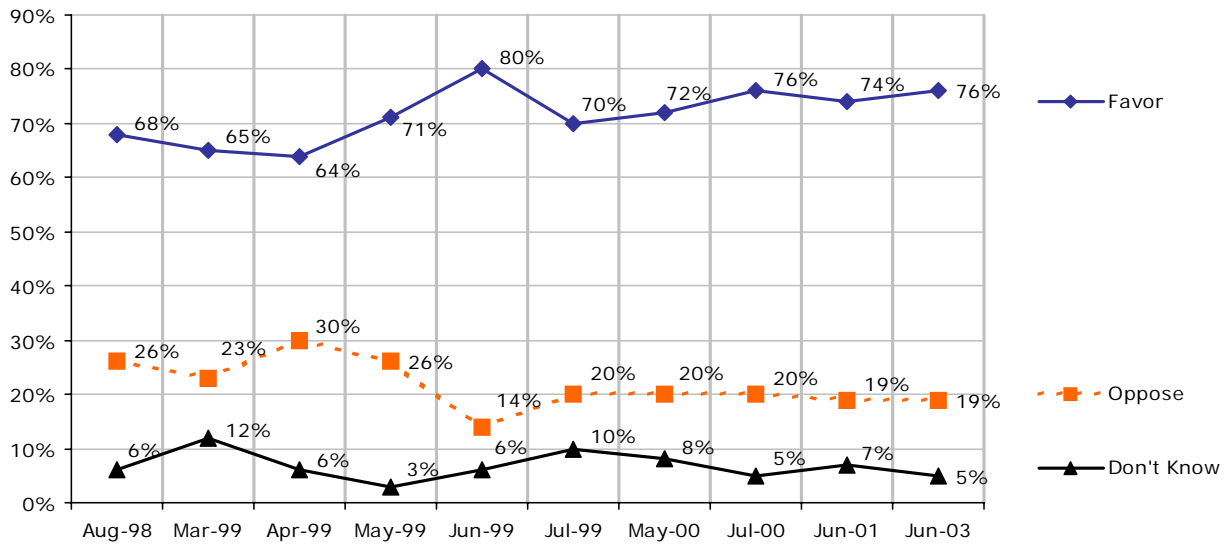
**Sources:**

- July 2003: Time/CNN/Harris Interactive Poll
- January 2002: NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll
- June 2001: Pew Research Center News Interest Index Poll
- August 2000: Pew Research Center People & The Press Campaign 2000 Typology Survey
- July 2000: Kaiser/Harvard/Newshour Prescription Drugs Survey
- March 2000: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Johns Hopkins University Chronic Illness and Caregiving Survey
- September 1999: Harris Poll
- March 1994: New York Times Poll

## 2. Historical Support For Drug Benefit Even if Costs Increase

In the years leading up to the passage of the Medicare Modernization Act, support for adding a prescription drug benefit to Medicare remained high despite the cost of adding such coverage. Between 1998 and 2003, roughly seven in ten Americans supported expanding coverage even when the cost of adding such a benefit was mentioned. In June 2003, 6 months before the law was passed, more than three-quarters of Americans supported expanding Medicare to provide coverage for seniors, even when the cost to government of \$400 billion was mentioned.

### Historical Support for Drug Benefit Even If Costs Increase



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation Public Opinion Spotlight

#### Sources:

July 2003: Gallup Poll

June 2001: CBS News/New York Times Poll

July 2000: Kaiser/Harvard/NewsHour Prescription Drugs Survey

May 2000: ABC News Poll

July 1999: CBS News Poll

June 1999: Time/CNN/Yankelovich Partners Poll

May 1999: Employee Benefit Research Institute, Consumer Education Council Health Confidence Survey

April 1999: Kaiser/Harvard Health News Index Poll

March 1999: NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll

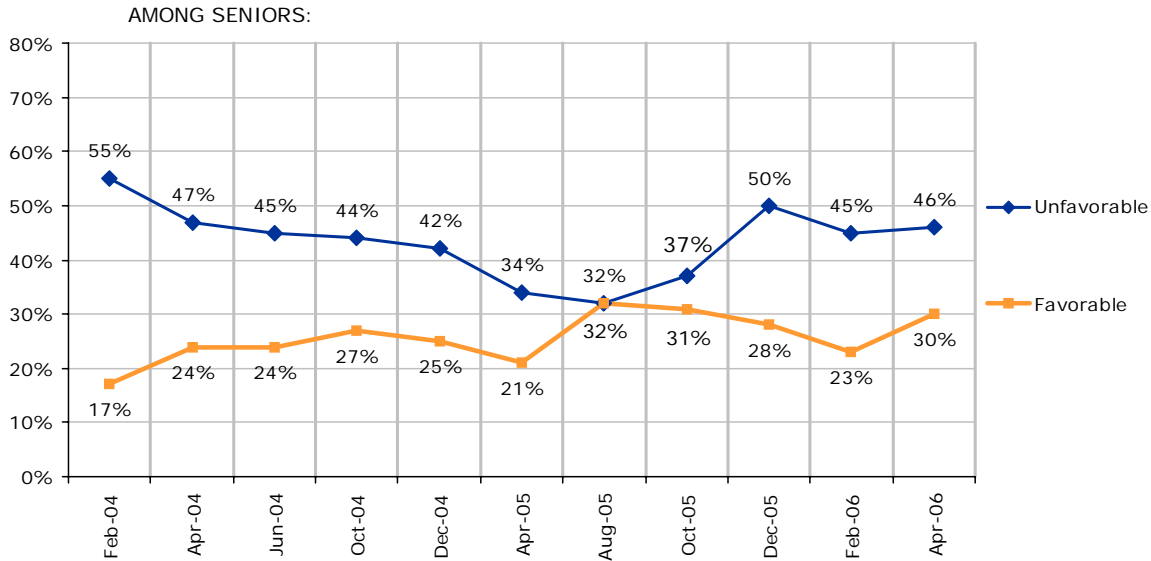
August 1998: Kaiser/Harvard Medicare Policy Options Survey

### 3. Seniors' Views Of Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit

Since we began tracking seniors' views of the Medicare prescription drug benefit in February 2004, more seniors have had an unfavorable than a favorable impression of the benefit (with the exception of August 2005, when the shares with favorable and unfavorable impressions were equal at 32%). Most recently, in April 2006, 46% of seniors said their impression of the benefit was unfavorable, compared with 30% who said they had a favorable impression.

#### Current Views of the Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit

Given what you know about it, in general, do you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of this new Medicare prescription drug benefit?\*



\*Note: Feb-04 to Dec-04 responses based on the question "Given what you know about it, in general, do you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of this new Medicare law"; Don't know responses not shown

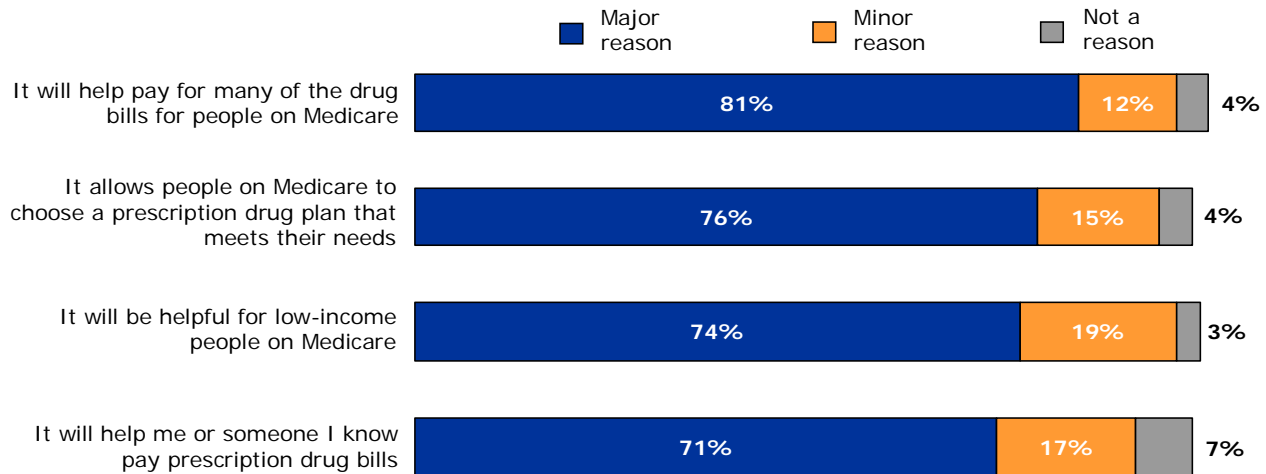
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation surveys

#### **4. Reasons For Favorable Impression**

In February 2006, among the 22% of all adults, including seniors, who said they have a favorable impression of the new Medicare drug benefit, large majorities say that major reasons for their favorable impression are that it will help pay many of the drug bills for people on Medicare (81%), it allows people on Medicare to choose a plan that meets their needs (76%), it will be helpful for low-income people on Medicare (74%), and it will help them or someone they know pay prescription drug bills (71%).

##### **Reasons For Favorable Impression**

Among the 22% of the public who say they have a favorable impression of the new Medicare prescription drug benefit: Percent who say each of the following is a major, minor or not a reason for their impression...



\* Don't know responses not shown

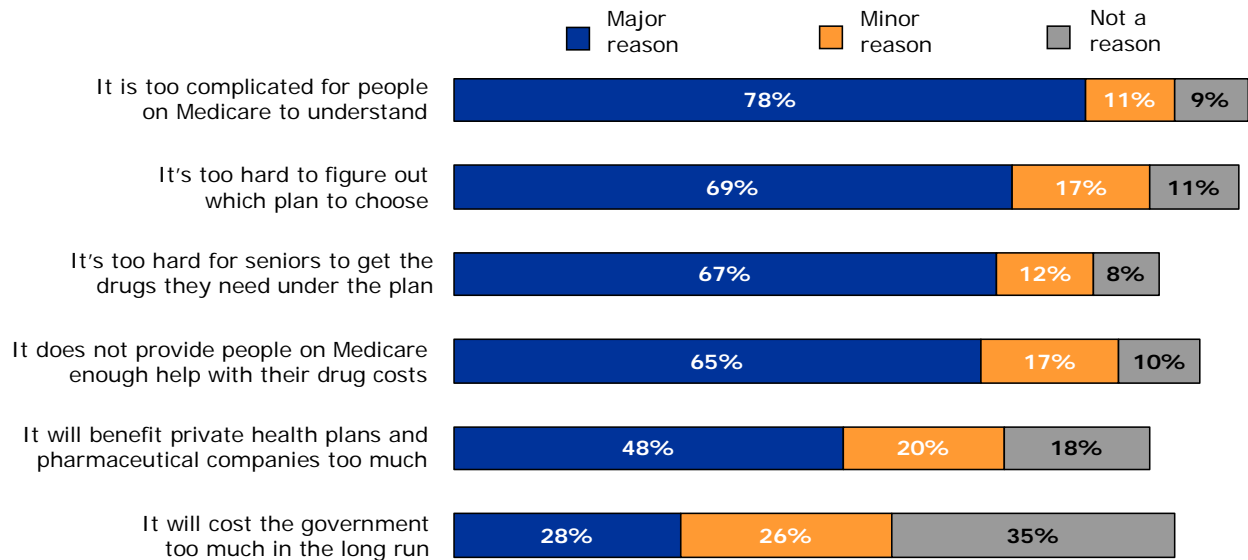
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted Feb. 2-7, 2006)

## 5. Reasons For Unfavorable Impression

In February 2006, the most commonly cited complaint among the 36% of all adults, including seniors, who said they have an unfavorable impression was that the benefit is too complicated for people to understand (78% of those with an unfavorable impression said this was a major reason). Nearly seven in ten also cited as major reasons that it is too hard to figure out which plan to choose (69%), it's too hard for seniors to get the drugs they need (67%), and it doesn't do enough to help seniors with drug costs (65%). Fewer people cited as reasons for their unfavorable impression that it will benefit private health plans and drug companies too much (48%), and that it will cost the government too much in the long run (28%).

### Reasons For Unfavorable Impression

Among the 36% of the public who say they have an unfavorable impression of the new Medicare prescription drug benefit: Percent who say each of the following is a major, minor or not a reason for their impression...



\* Don't know responses not shown

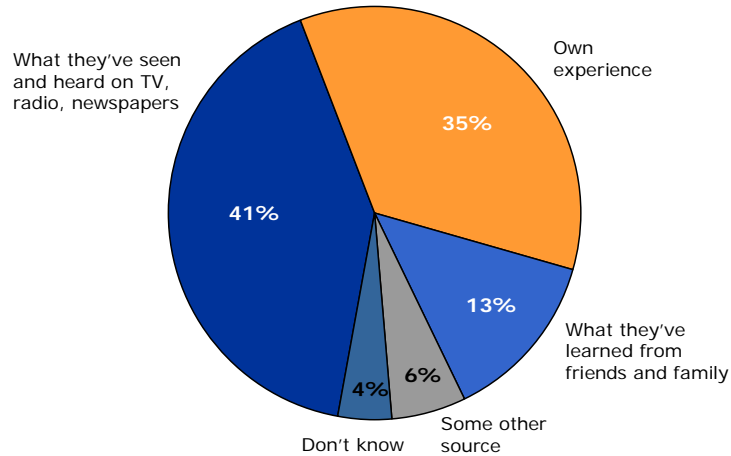
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted Feb. 2-7, 2006)

## **6. Basis For Seniors' Impressions of Benefit**

Nearly half (48%) of seniors who have a favorable or unfavorable impression of the Medicare drug benefit say that this impression is based either on their own experience (35%) or what they've learned from friends and family (13%). About four in ten (41%) say their impression is based on what they've heard from the media, and 6% say it is based on some other source of information.

### **Basis For Seniors' Impressions of Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit**

Among the 76% of seniors who have a favorable or unfavorable impression of the new Medicare drug benefit, percent who say that impression is based mainly on...



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted April 6-11, 2006)

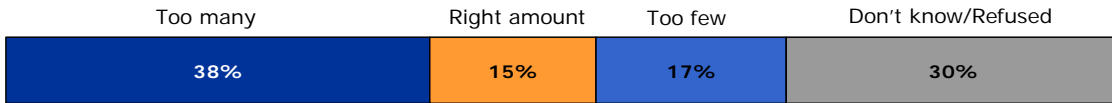
**7. Seniors' Beliefs About Number of Plans to Choose From**

In February 2006, nearly four in ten seniors (28%) said they thought people on Medicare have too many drug plans to choose from, while 15% said they have too few to choose from, and 17% said they had about the right amount. Nearly half of seniors (49%) said they did not know how many plans people on Medicare would have to choose from. When told that most people on Medicare would have at least 40 plans to choose from, two-thirds (66%) said having this much choice makes it confusing and difficult to pick the best plan, while about one in five (21%) said it is helpful and provides an opportunity to find the best plan.

**Seniors' Beliefs About Number of Plans to Choose From**

AMONG SENIORS:

Do you think people on Medicare have too many, too few or about the right amount of drug plans to choose from?



Just your best guess, how many drug plans do you think most people on Medicare will have to choose from?



Most people on Medicare will have at least 40 different drug plans to choose from. Which comes closer to your view? Having many plans to choose from...



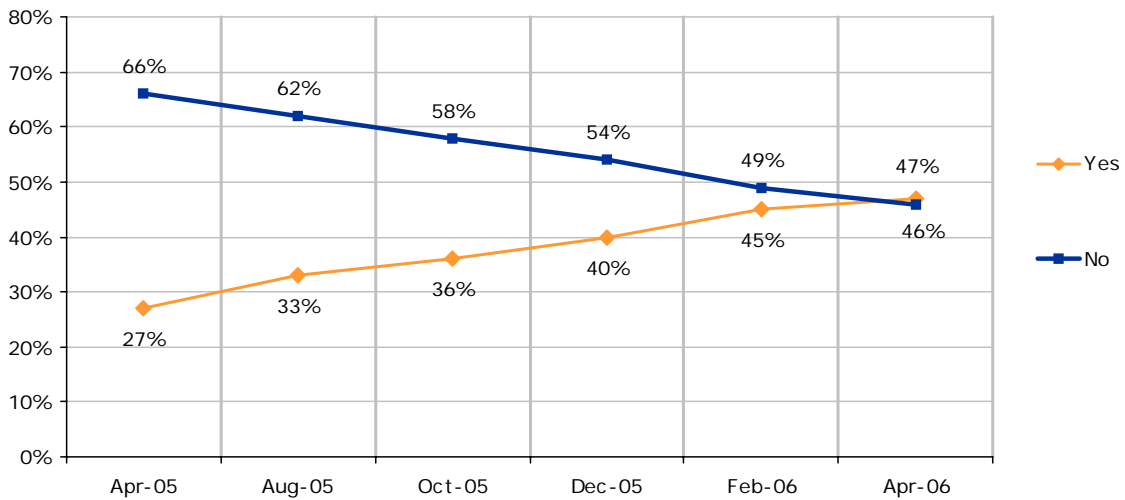
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted Feb. 2-7, 2006)

**8. Seniors' Understanding Of Personal Impact**

In April 2005, two-thirds of seniors (66%) said they did not have enough information to understand how the new benefit would impact them personally, while just over a quarter (27%) felt they had enough information. Understanding among seniors has gradually increased over the past year, and in April 2006, nearly half (47%) said they had enough information about the benefit to understand how it would impact them personally, while a similar share (46%) said they still did not have enough information.

**Seniors' Understanding Of Personal Impact**

AMONG SENIORS: Do you feel you have enough information about the benefit to understand how it will impact you personally, or not?



\*Don't know responses not shown

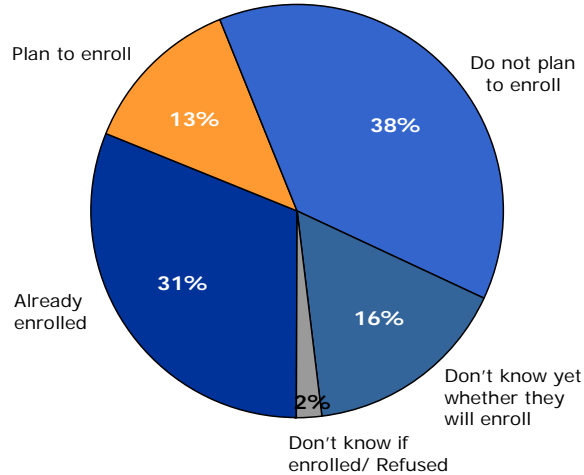
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation surveys

### **9. Seniors' Reported Enrollment and Plans For Enrollment**

In April 2006, about three in ten (31%) of seniors say they have already enrolled in a Medicare drug plan, and another 13% say they plan to enroll. With just over 1 month to go until the end of the enrollment period (before penalties for late enrollment kick in), nearly four in ten (38%) say they do not plan to enroll, and 16% say they don't know yet whether they will enroll.

#### **Seniors' Reported Enrollment and Plans for Enrollment**

AMONG SENIORS: Since November of 2005, when you could first sign up, have you enrolled in a plan that offers the new Medicare drug benefit, or not? IF NOT ENROLLED: Do you think you will enroll in a Medicare drug plan, you will NOT enroll in a Medicare drug plan, or don't you know yet?



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted April 6-11, 2006)

**10. Seniors' Knowledge of Drug Plan Deadlines**

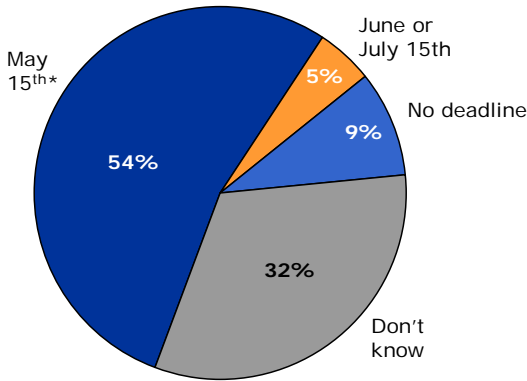
There are important gaps in seniors' knowledge of enrollment deadlines. Medicare beneficiaries have to sign up for the drug benefit by May 15 or pay higher premiums if they enroll in the future, unless they previously had what the government calls "creditable" coverage.

Among seniors who may still enroll – those still deciding or say they plan to enroll but haven't yet - nearly half (46%) are unaware of the enrollment deadline, saying either an incorrect deadline, or that they don't know. A similar share believe there is either no financial penalty for late enrollment (21%) or don't know if there is a penalty (33%).

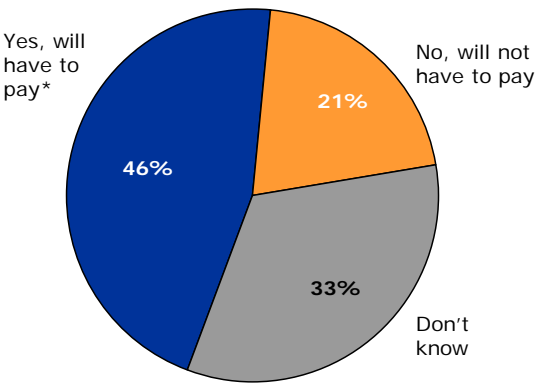
**Seniors' Knowledge of Drug Plan Deadlines**

Among seniors who may still enroll (n=139): To the best of your knowledge...

When is the 2006 deadline for seniors to enroll in a new Medicare drug plan?



Would a senior WITHOUT drug coverage have to pay a financial penalty for late enrollment if s/he waits until 2007 to sign up for a Medicare drug plan, or not?



\*Correct answer

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted April 6-11, 2006)

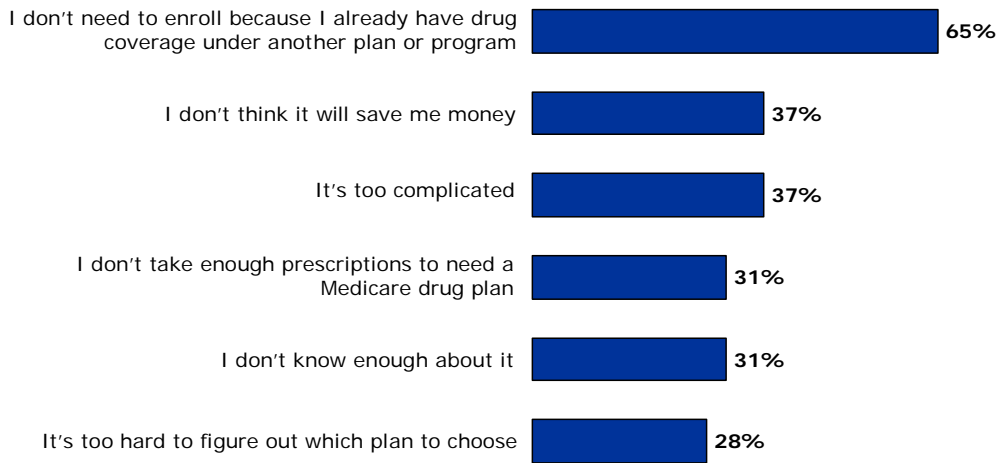
**11. Seniors’ Reported Reasons for NOT Enrolling**

Among the 54% of seniors who say they will NOT enroll, or don’t yet know whether they will enroll in a Medicare prescription drug plan, the most commonly cited reason is that they already have help paying for prescription drugs from an insurance plan or program (65%). Nearly four in ten seniors who are not currently planning to enroll say they don’t think a Medicare drug plan will save them money or that the benefit is too complicated (37%).

Around three in ten seniors say they don’t take enough medication to need a prescription drug, or that they don’t know enough about the benefit (31%), or say that it’s too hard to figure out which plan to choose (28%).

**Seniors’ Reported Reasons for NOT Enrolling**

Among the 54% of seniors who say they will NOT enroll, or don’t know yet whether they will enroll in a Medicare drug plan: Percent who say each of the following is a MAJOR reason...



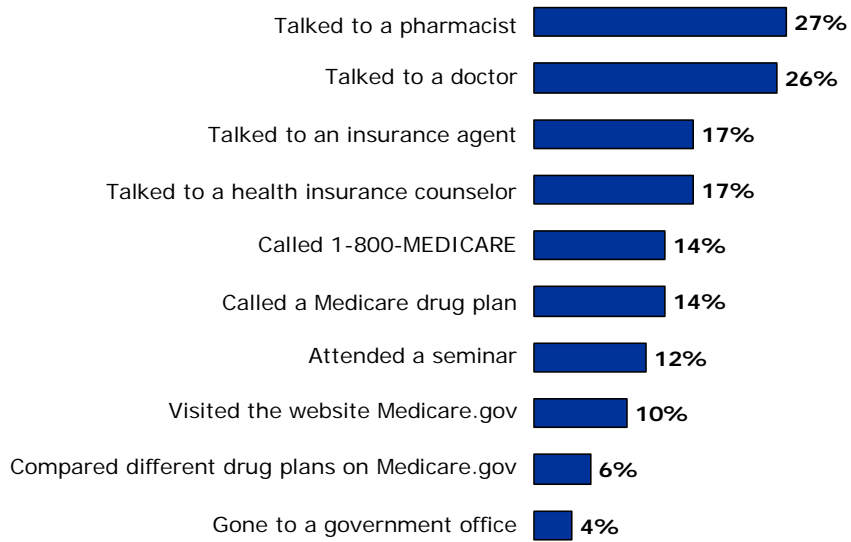
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted April 6-11, 2006)

## **12. Seniors' Reported Use of Information Resources**

More than a quarter of seniors say they have talked to a pharmacist (27%) or a doctor (26%) for information about the Medicare drug benefit. Fewer say they have used other information resources, including calling 1-800-MEDICARE (14%) and visiting Medicare.gov (10%).

### **Seniors' Reported Use Of Information Resources**

Percent of seniors who say they have done each of the following for information about the Medicare drug benefit...



Note: Adds to more than 100% because of multiple answers

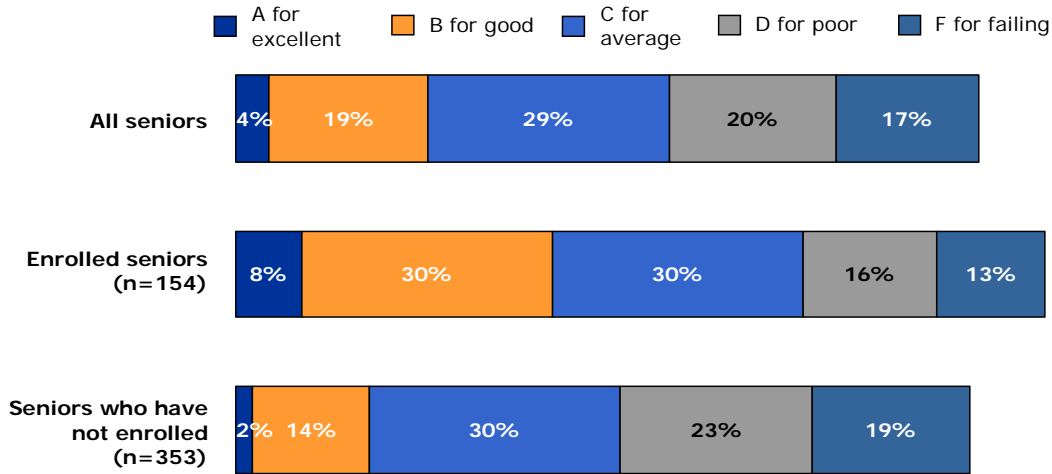
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted Feb. 2-7, 2006)

### 13. Seniors' Views on Implementation of Benefit

When asked to assign a letter grade to the overall implementation of the Medicare drug benefit, two-thirds of seniors (66%) give it a "C" or lower, and just under one-quarter (23%) give it an "A" or "B". Seniors who have enrolled in a drug plan are more positive about how the drug benefit has been implemented – nearly four in ten (38%) give it an "A" or "B" grade.

#### Seniors' Views on Implementation of Benefit

Among seniors: Overall, what grade would you give the implementation of the new Medicare drug benefit so far?



Note: Don't know responses not shown

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted Apr. 6-11, 2006)

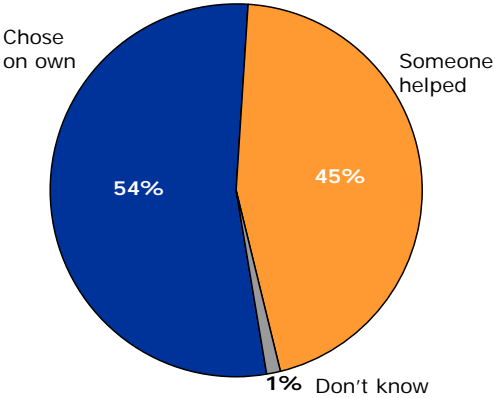
**14. Seniors' Experiences with Choosing a Drug Plan**

Roughly equal shares of enrolled seniors said they chose their Medicare drug plan on their own (54%) and that someone helped them choose their plan (45%). Enrolled seniors were split on whether the experience was easy or difficult – 51% said it was “very” or “somewhat” easy to choose a plan, while 48% said it was “very” or “somewhat” difficult to choose.

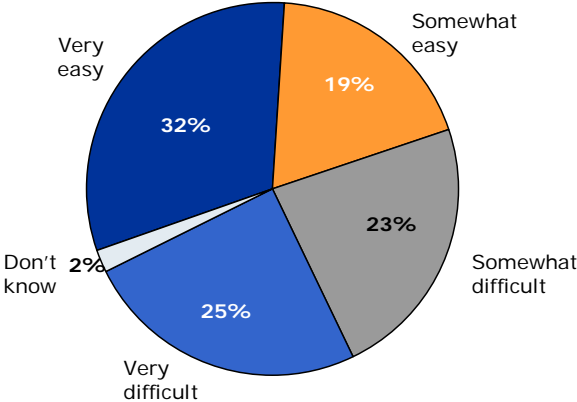
**Seniors' Experiences with Choosing a Drug Plan**

AMONG ENROLLED SENIORS (n=154):

Did you choose this drug plan on your own or did someone help you?



Would you say it was very easy, somewhat easy, somewhat difficult or very difficult to choose a Medicare drug plan?



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted April 6-11, 2006)

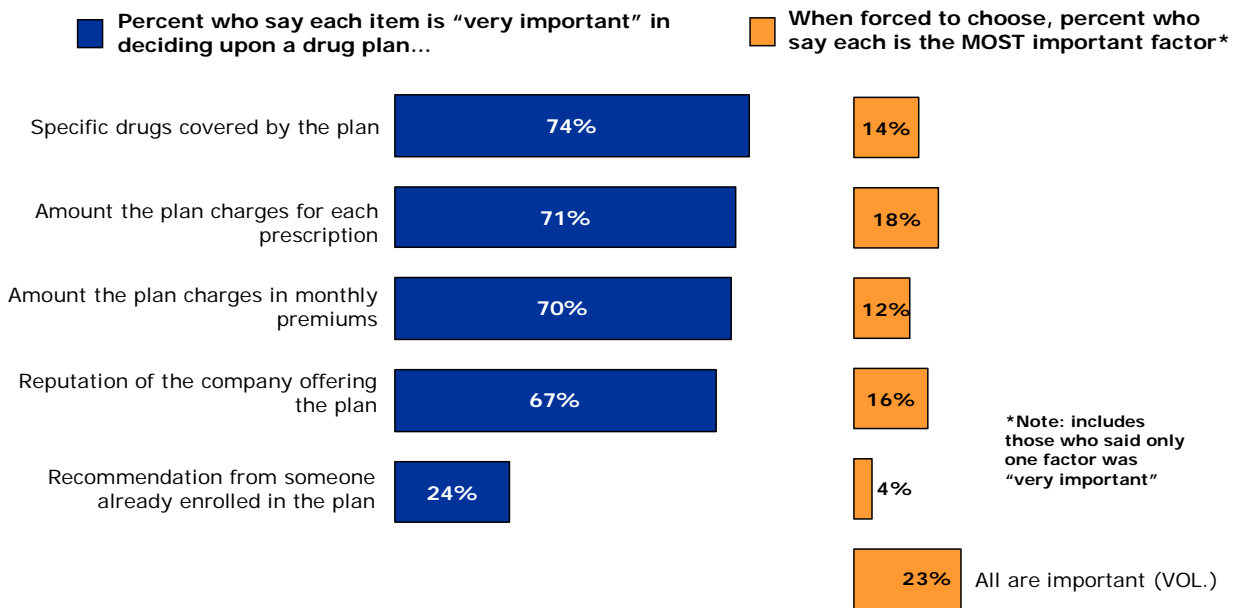
**15. Important Factors in Choosing a Drug Plan**

When asked about important factors in choosing a Medicare drug plan, majorities of seniors said each of the factors was “very” important – including the drugs covered by the plan (74%), the cost for each prescription (71%) and the monthly premium (70%). A recommendation from someone already enrolled in the plan was somewhat less important with just under one-quarter (24%) saying this was a “very” important factor.

When asked to choose the MOST important factor, there was no clear favorite. Nearly one-quarter (23%) of seniors said *all* the factors were important to their decision.

**Important Factors in Choosing a Drug Plan**

AMONG ENROLLED SENIORS (n=154):



Note: “VOL.” indicates a volunteered response

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted April 6-11, 2006)

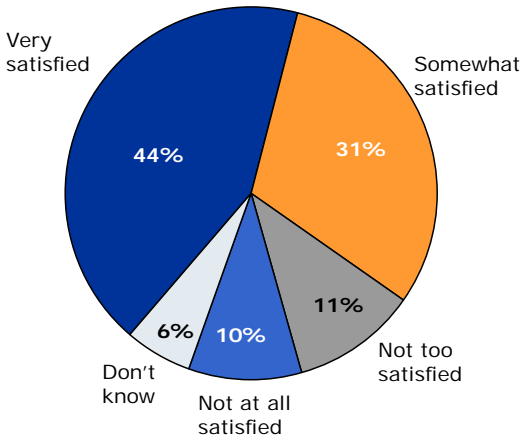
**16. Seniors' Reported Satisfaction with Drug Plan**

Three-quarters of enrolled seniors report being "very" (44%) or "somewhat" (31%) satisfied with their Medicare drug plans, while two in ten (21%) say they are "not too" or "not at all" satisfied. Over half (55%) of enrolled seniors say they think they will save money using their new plans, while about two in ten say the plan will cost them more (19%) or will cost about the same as they paid previously (19%).

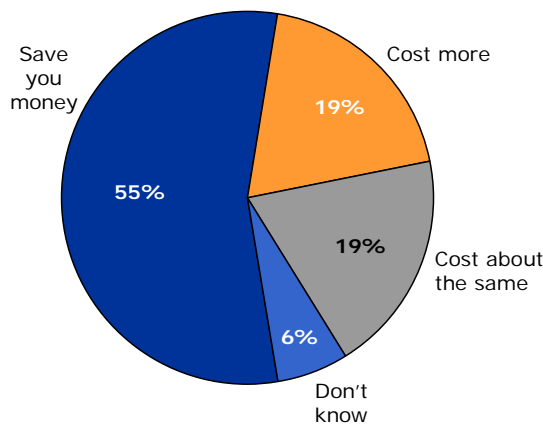
**Seniors' Reported Satisfaction with Drug Plan**

AMONG ENROLLED SENIORS (n=154):

How satisfied are you with the Medicare drug plan you are enrolled in?



Compared to what you were paying before, do you think your new Medicare drug plan will...



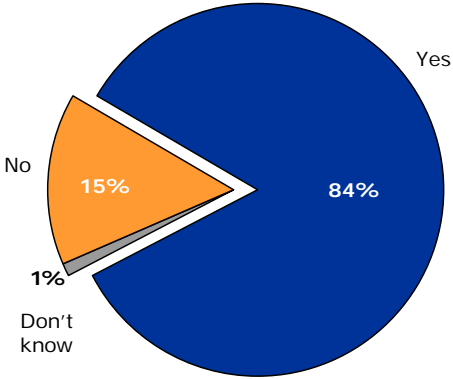
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted April 6-11, 2006)

### **17. Seniors' Reported Problems Filling Prescriptions**

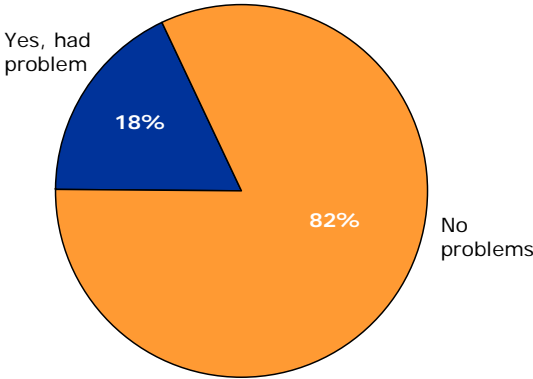
A large majority (84%) of enrolled seniors say they have tried to fill a prescription under their new drug plan, and most of these seniors have not experienced any problem getting their prescriptions filled (82%). Fewer than one in five (18%) of enrolled seniors who have tried to fill prescriptions report problems.

#### **Seniors' Reported Problems Filling Prescriptions**

Among enrolled seniors (n=154): Have you tried to fill any prescriptions under you new Medicare drug plan yet?



Among 84% of enrolled seniors who have tried to fill a prescription (n=12): Have you experienced any problems getting your prescriptions filled or not?



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted April 6-11, 2006)

**18. Seniors' Reported Awareness Of Medicare Information Sources**

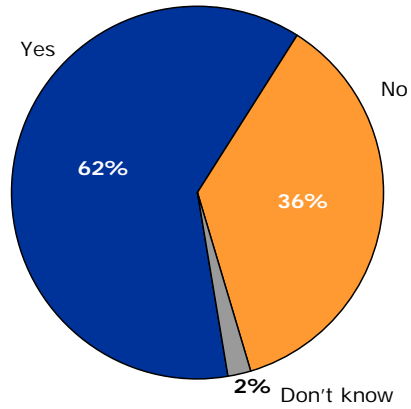
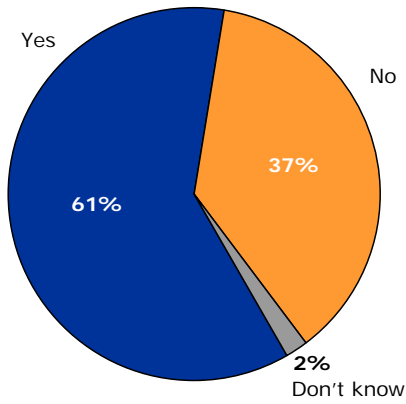
In April 2006, about six in ten (61%) seniors say they have heard of Medicare's toll-free hotline, 1-800-MEDICARE, and the website Medicare.gov (62%).

**Seniors' Reported Awareness of Medicare Information Resources**

AMONG SENIORS:

Have you heard of a toll-free phone number, 1-800-MEDICARE, that you can call to get information about Medicare?

Have you heard of the website Medicare.gov?



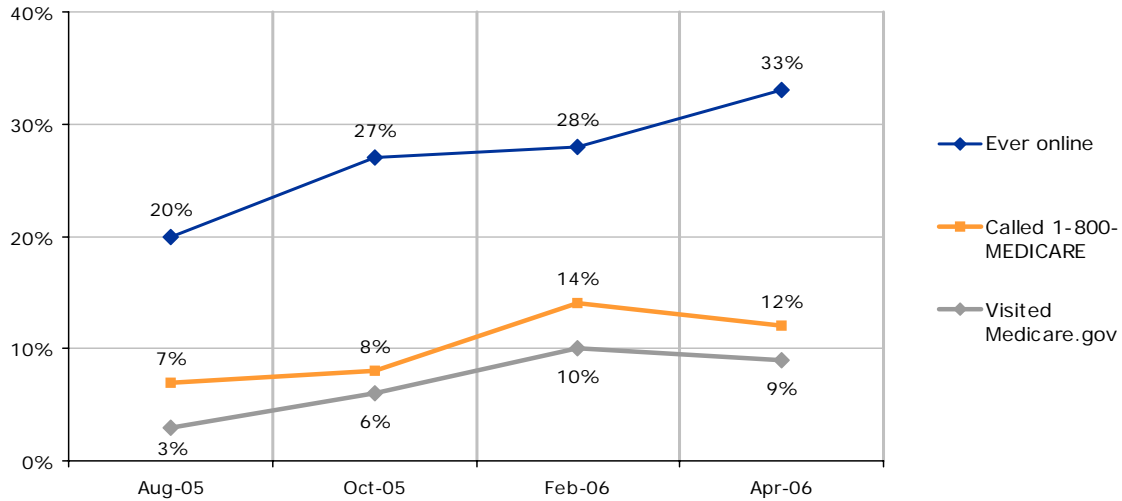
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted April 6-11, 2006)

## **19. Trend in Seniors' Use of Medicare Information Sources**

Since August 2005, the share of seniors who say they have ever been online has increased from 20% to 33%. In August 2005, just 3% of seniors said they had ever visited Medicare.gov, a share that increased to 9% in April 2006. Similarly, the share of seniors who say they have ever called 1-800-MEDICARE increased from 7% in August 2005 to 12% in April 2006.

### **Trends in Seniors' Use of Medicare Information Sources**

Percent of seniors who say they have called 1-800-Medicare or visited the website Medicare.gov...



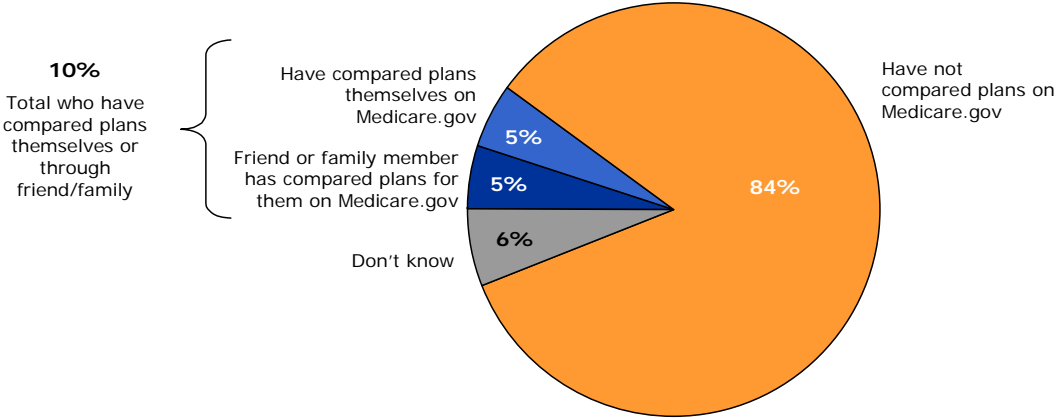
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation surveys

**20. Comparing Medicare Drug Plans on Medicare.gov**

A total of 10% of seniors say they have either compared different drug plans on Medicare.gov themselves (5%), or that a friend or family member has done so for them (5%).

**Comparing Medicare Drug Plans on Medicare.gov**

Among seniors, percent who have compared plans on Medicare.gov themselves, or whose friends or family have compared plans for them on Medicare.gov



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted April 6-11, 2006)