

**EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE UNTIL:
9:30 AM, ET, Friday, June 19, 1998**

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New National Survey on Contraceptive Coverage:

**AMERICANS SUPPORT REQUIRING INSURERS TO COVER CONTRACEPTIVES,
EVEN IF PREMIUMS RISE**

More Women and Men Say Contraceptives Should Be Covered Than Say Viagra

MENLO PARK, CA – Most Americans support requiring insurers to provide contraceptives as part of prescription coverage, even if premiums rise, according to a new national survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation. The public is also more likely to say contraceptives should be covered by insurers (75%) than Viagra, the new male impotence drug (49%).

Most Americans (62%) are not aware of proposals to require contraceptive coverage now before Congress. After learning that a “bill before Congress would require any health insurance plan with prescription coverage to pay for birth control methods just like any other prescription,” three quarters of Americans say they favor such a policy (45% “strongly favor” and 30% “somewhat favor” vs. 8% “strongly oppose” and 8% “somewhat oppose”). Both women and men (ages 18 and older) say contraceptives should be covered by insurers, though women (81%) are more likely to support such a policy than men (68%). Most (82%) who favor contraceptive coverage say *all* prescription methods currently on the market – oral contraceptives, IUDs or intra-uterine devices, Norplant implants, diaphragms, the injectable Depo-Provera, and cervical cap – should be paid for.

Support remains strong when people are told that contraceptive coverage could result in higher premiums. For example, when told that “the average cost individuals pay for health insurance could increase by \$1-5 per month:” 43 percent “strongly favor” and 30 percent “somewhat favor,” vs. 12 percent “strongly oppose” and 8 percent “somewhat oppose.” Support drops somewhat, although a majority continues to favor contraceptive coverage, if premiums were to rise by larger amounts. For example, when asked their reaction if premiums were to rise by as much as \$20 more per month: 30 percent “strongly favor” and 29 percent “somewhat favor,” vs. 19 percent “strongly oppose” and 13 percent “somewhat oppose.”

“Both men and women think comprehensive coverage for contraception makes sense; they think it should be part of prescription coverage, and they say they are willing to pay for it,” said Felicia H. Stewart, MD, Director of Reproductive Health Programs, Kaiser Family Foundation.

Americans More Mixed on Whether Viagra Should be Covered by Insurance

The new drug, Viagra, which sparked a recent debate over insurance coverage when it came on to the market earlier this Spring, draws more mixed views from Americans: 49 percent say the male impotence drug should be covered as part of prescription coverage; 40 percent say it should not be covered; and, 11 percent don’t know. Women (51%) are as likely to favor coverage of Viagra as men (47%).

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Women of “Reproductive Age” and Privately Insured Supportive of Contraceptive Coverage

Women between the ages of 18-44, so-called “reproductive age,” are most supportive of legislation to require coverage of prescription contraceptives: almost nine out of ten favor such a policy (67% “strongly *support*” and 21% “somewhat *support*” vs. 4% “strongly *oppose*” and 5% “somewhat *oppose*”). There is no drop in support if the additional cost for providing this coverage falls in the low range (\$1-5 per month) for an individual premium (87% *support* vs. 11% *oppose*); even at the higher range (\$15-20 per month): 74 percent support (22% *oppose*). Women in this age range also are the most likely to say *all* methods should be covered (83%).

Three quarters of these women, who are most likely to use prescription contraceptives, say whether or not a certain method is covered by their insurance is something they would factor into their decision about what to use: 40 percent say coverage is “very” important, and 34 percent say “somewhat” in choosing birth control.

Family planning services, including contraceptives, are a required benefit under Medicaid, the public program that provides health coverage for low-income Americans. The contraceptive coverage proposal now before Congress applies to the privately insured population. Among this group, which would most directly benefit from the expanded coverage as well as potentially bear some of the additional costs if their insurer does not currently provide a full-range of contraceptive options, most support the policy. Eight out of ten privately-insured Americans, excluding those eligible for Medicare (65 and older), support contraceptive coverage (47% “strongly *support*” and 33% “somewhat *support*” vs. 7% “strongly *oppose*” and 8% “somewhat *oppose*”). Even if their premiums were to go up, this group says they would still favor it (\$1-5 per month: 78% *support* vs. 18% *oppose*; \$15-20 per month: 64% *support* vs. 31% *oppose*). Women of reproductive age and the privately insured are no more likely than the average American to know that legislation has been proposed.

Methodology

The *Kaiser Family Foundation 1998 National Survey on Insurance Coverage of Contraceptives* is a random-sample telephone survey of 1,015 adults 18 and older living in the United States. It was designed by staff at the Foundation and Princeton Survey Research Associates (PSRA) and conducted by PSRA between May 22-26, 1998. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3 percent for the national sample; it may be higher for smaller sub-groups.

The Kaiser Family Foundation, based in Menlo Park, California, is an independent national health care philanthropy and is not associated with Kaiser Permanente or Kaiser Industries.

The questionnaire and top line from the survey are available by calling the Kaiser Family Foundation’s publication request line at 1-800-656-4533 (Ask for documents #1404). This release is also available on the Kaiser Family Foundation website at www.kff.org.