

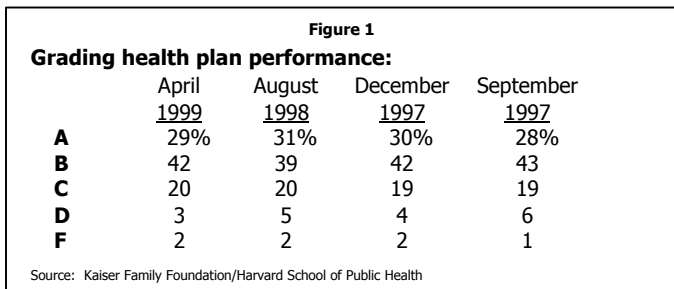
THE PUBLIC, MANAGED CARE, AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

Debate over regulation of managed care continues in Congress and in the states. As policy makers assess the different proposals, The Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health have been monitoring consumer experiences with managed care and attitudes towards alternative consumer protection approaches. This *Public Opinion Update* summarizes key findings from surveys conducted between 1997 and 2000, a period in which the intensity of public debate and media attention paid to managed care issues varied substantially.

Overall, these surveys illustrate remarkable stability in public opinion. Concern about managed care and support for consumer protection proposals remain strong, yet arguments about potential costs and consequences of reforms also continued to resonate with the public. Our latest survey conducted in February 2000 found that most Americans believe problems with managed care have not gotten better (74%) and that most think legislative action is more urgent (48%) or as urgent (40%) as it was when this debate began.

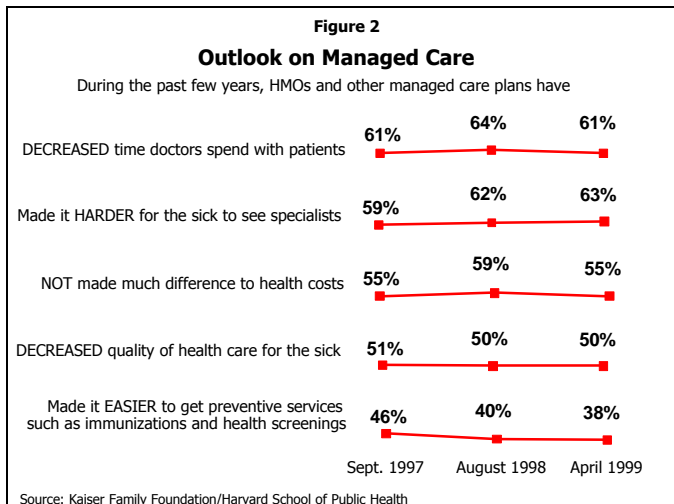
CONSUMER RATINGS OF HEALTH PLANS

Consumers give consistently high ratings to their own health plans, with majorities giving their plans a grade of B or higher (Figure 1). However, people with different types of coverage give different grades. People with traditional fee-for-service plans are more likely to give their plans an A (37% compared to 26% of people in managed care) and, within managed care, ratings differ according to how restrictive the plan is (29% in loose managed care give their plans an A compared to 22% in strict managed care).

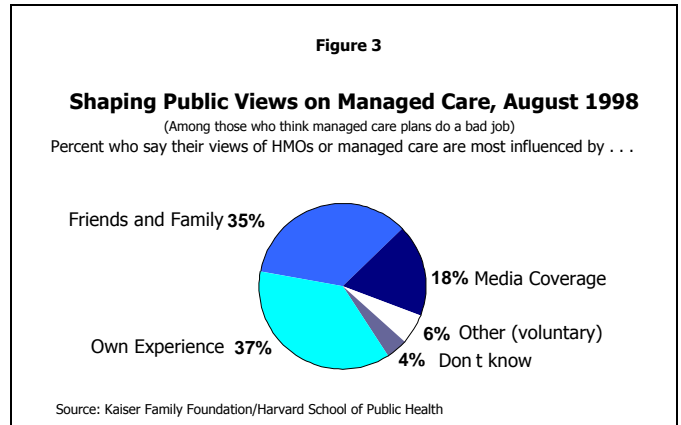


PUBLIC CONCERN ABOUT MANAGED CARE

Americans continue to express generally negative views about managed care (Figure 2). These negative views on managed care have not changed significantly since 1997. While many say that managed care has increased access to preventive health services,



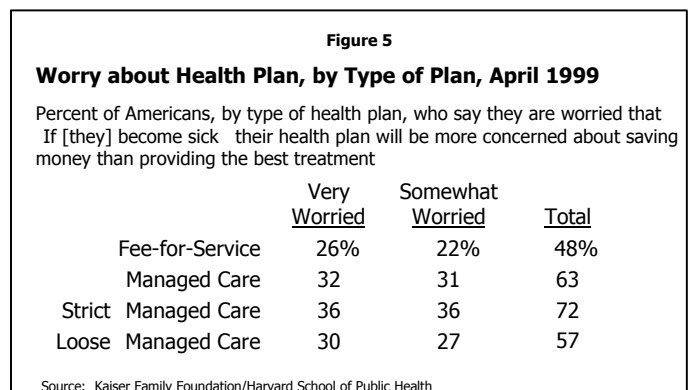
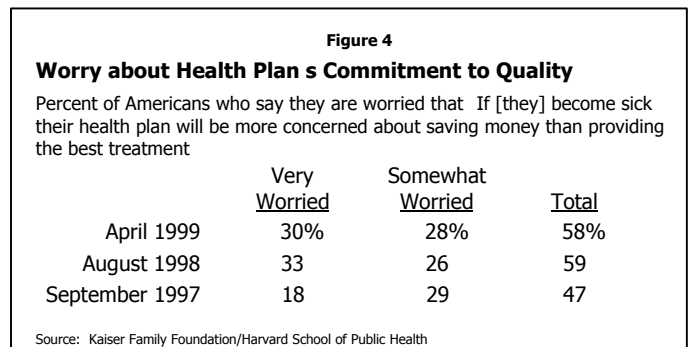
majorities believe managed care has decreased access to specialists, the time doctors spend with patients and quality of care for the sick. And one in two Americans feel that managed care has not produced significant health care savings.



In February 2000, few Americans say the situation is improving: just 15 percent believe that HMOs have done a better job serving consumers over the past few years, while 40 percent say they've done a worse job and 34 percent say they've done about the same.

When asked what has shaped their negative outlook on managed care, most say personal experiences (37%) or the reports of friends and family (35%) have influenced their views; 18 percent say their views are shaped by the media (Figure 3).

Americans continue to express worry that if they become sick, their health plan will be more concerned about saving money than delivering quality care (Figure 4). Americans with more restrictive managed care plans report greater concern (Figure 5).



CONSUMER EXPERIENCES WITH HEALTH PLANS

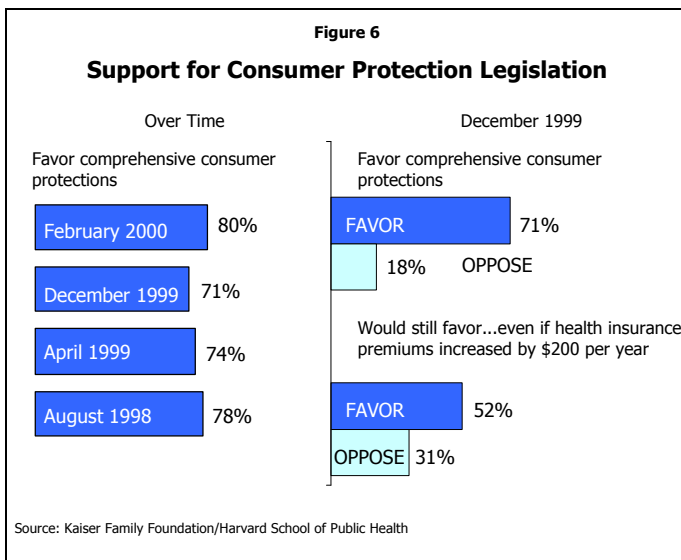
Based on August 1998 findings, more than half (57%) of all Americans say they personally--or someone they know--have experienced at least one of the types of problems addressed by consumer protection proposals, up from 48 percent in December 1997.

Problems with Health Plan¹

- 36 percent report problems getting enough information from their health plans
- 30 percent report problems getting a health plan to pay for a visit to the emergency room
- 26 percent report problems getting permission to see a medical specialist
- 22 percent have wanted--but been unable--to file an appeal to an independent reviewer for a denied claim
- 15 percent have had difficulty getting permission from a health plan or regular doctor to see a gynecologist
- 13 percent have wanted to sue a health plan for malpractice

PUBLIC FAVORS PROTECTIONS AND WANTS TO SEE CONGRESSIONAL ACTION, BUT CRITICISMS REGISTER

Support for comprehensive consumer protection legislation is high, with about three out of four Americans supporting such laws over time (Figure 6). However, as shown, support declines when potential cost consequences are raised.

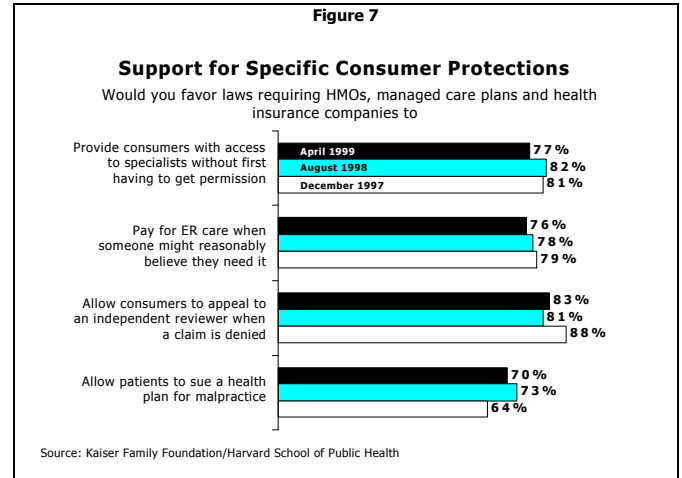


In February 2000, after more than two years of Congressional debate about patients' rights, few Americans say that the urgency for legislation is waning. Nearly half (48%) of the public thinks a law is needed more urgently now than when the debate first began, and 40% think it is about as urgent now. Only five percent believe passing such a law is less urgent now than it was two years ago.

¹Reported problems with any kind of health plan.

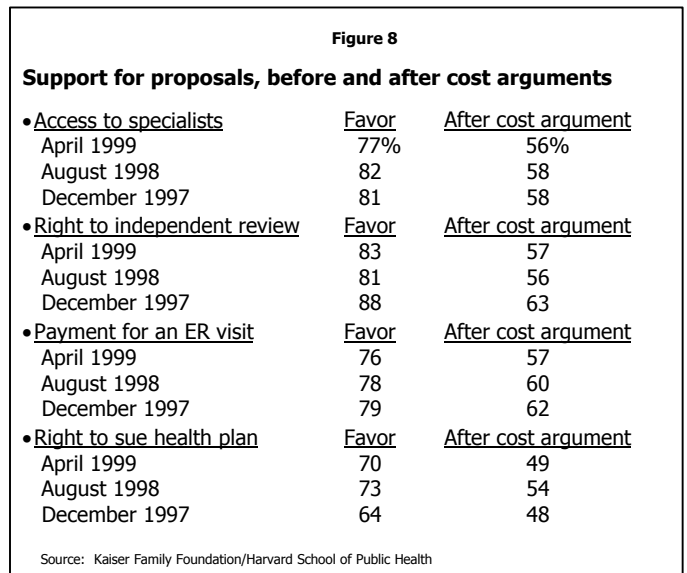
SPECIFIC PROPOSALS

Many of the specific consumer protections currently under legislative consideration remain popular among Americans (Figure 7).



On the most controversial issue in the patients' rights debate, 66% of Americans in February 2000 say it is important that any legislation include the right to sue a health plan (43% say it is very important and 23% say it is somewhat important).

However, criticisms by opponents that regulation will drive up costs or cause employers to drop coverage continue to register with the public (Figure 8).



Support for specific protections drops by about 20 percentage points when the cost is mentioned, but a plurality or majority still favor each of the protections.

Other possible consequences of increased regulation, such as employers dropping coverage, also register strongly with the public.

For complete question wordings, margins of error or other analysis, visit our web site at www.kff.org or call our Publications Request Line at 1-800-656-4533. Unless otherwise noted, trends used in this *Public Opinion Update* are from the following surveys conducted by the Kaiser/Harvard School of Public Health Program on The Public and Health Policy; a joint program of the Kaiser Family Foundation and staff of the Harvard School of Public Health (under the direction of Professor Robert J. Blendon, Sc.D.): September, 1997: Survey of Americans Views on Managed Care (#1328) (11/97); December, 1997: Survey on Americans Views on Consumer Protections in Managed Care (#1356) (1/98); April, 1998: Update on Americans Views and Experiences in Managed Care (#1501) (4/98); August, 1998: Survey of Americans Views on the Consumer Protection Debate (#1438) (9/98); April, 1999: Update on Americans Views on Consumer Protections in Managed Care (#1502) (4/99); December, 1999: National Survey on Health Care and the 2000 Elections (#1572) (1/00); and February, 2000: Health News Index (#3004) (2/00). To request additional free copies of this publication, please ask for document #3005.