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The Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health's *Health News Index* is designed to help the news media and people in the health field gain a better understanding of which health news stories Americans are following and what they understand about issues covered in the news. Every two months since 1996, Kaiser/Harvard has issued a new index report. This report is based on a survey of 1,203 adults. The survey asked respondents about major health issues covered in the news between December 28, 2001 and January 28, 2002. For comparison purposes, respondents were also asked about other leading issues in the news during the same period.

Health News Stories Followed by the Public

News stories about anthrax continued to hold the public's attention during this period. Reports about the ongoing anthrax investigation were followed closely by 72% of the public, down

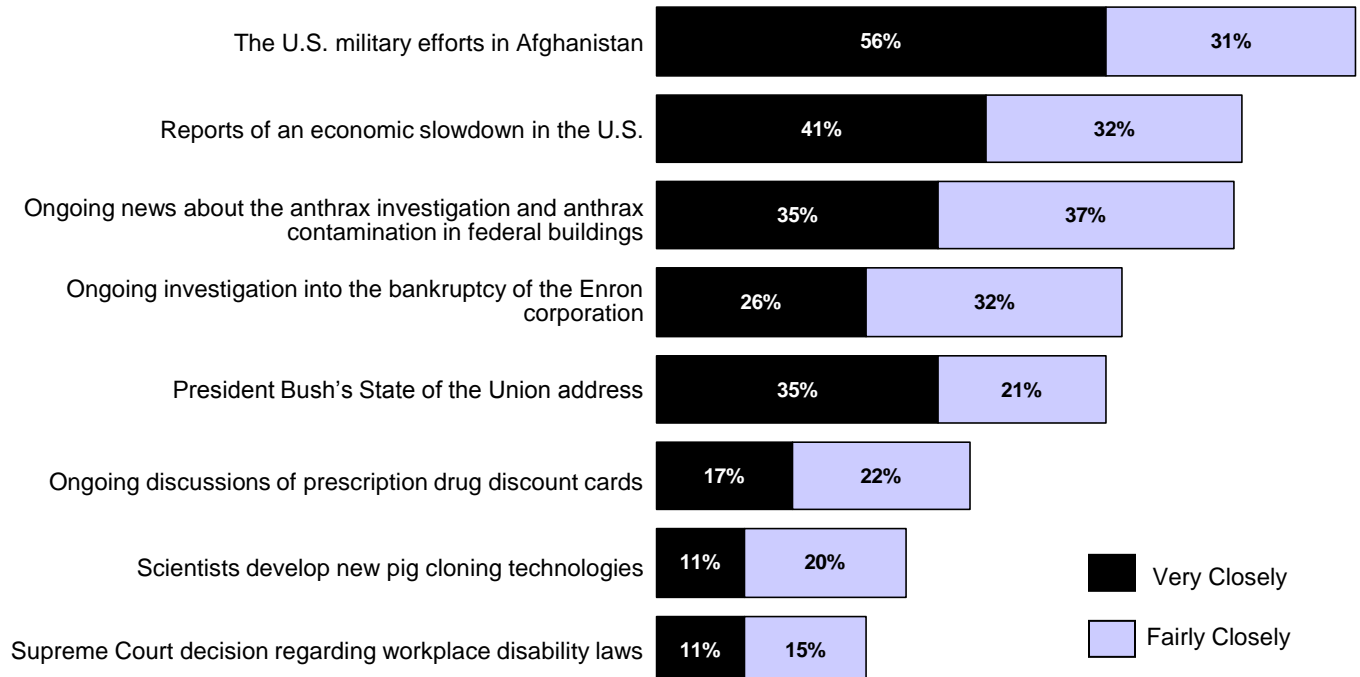
somewhat from the 83% who reported following the anthrax story closely in November/December 2001.

By comparison, two of the top three non-health news stories reported in the November/December 2001 *Health News Index* remain the top stories during this time period. Nearly nine out of ten (87%) said they closely followed reports of the U.S. military efforts in Afghanistan (89% in November/December 2001). Reports of an economic slowdown in the U.S. were followed closely by 73%, similar to the 76% closely following this story in November/December 2001. More than half of the public closely followed stories about the Enron bankruptcy (58%) and President Bush's State of the Union address (56%).

Among other health issues in the news, nearly four in ten (39%) closely followed stories about prescription drug discount cards. Three in ten (31%) followed stories about new pig cloning technologies, and one-quarter (26%) followed news about the Supreme Court decision regarding workplace disability laws.

**KAISER/HARVARD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH
HEALTH NEWS INDEX**

How closely Americans followed leading stories in the news from December 28, 2001 to January 28, 2002



WHAT THE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDS ABOUT HEALTH STORIES IN THE NEWS

Prescription Drug Discount Cards

Nearly four in ten (39%) adults closely followed ongoing discussions of prescription drug discount cards in the news. However, only 15% knew that a private pharmaceutical company (Pfizer) recently announced a drug discount card program. One in ten (10%) erroneously thought that Congress had passed a bill to provide a new national drug discount program, and three-quarters (75%) said they did not know what action had been taken. Similarly, fewer than one in five (17%) knew that the proposed drug discount program would be available only to low-income seniors. Another 20% thought the program would be available to all Americans, eight percent thought the program would be available to all low-income families, and 55% said they did not know.

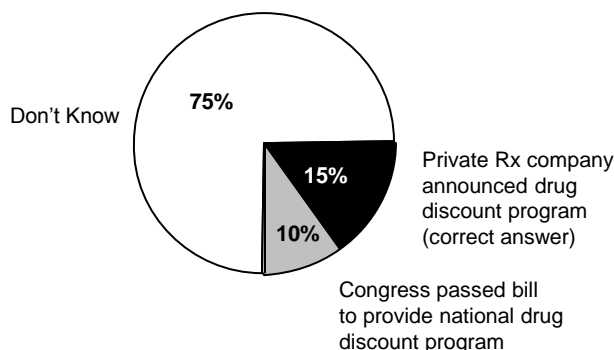
Age Differences

Perhaps not surprisingly given their increased likelihood to use prescription drugs, older Americans appear to be paying more attention to news coverage of prescription drug discount cards. Virtually half (48%) of those fifty and over report following ongoing discussions of prescription drug discount cards closely, compared with nearly two in five (38%) of those ages thirty to forty-nine, and one in five (20%) of those under age thirty. When asked about recent action regarding drug discount cards, almost twice as many adults over fifty (20%) gave the correct answer as those under thirty (10%) or those thirty to forty-nine (13%). On the other hand, people of all ages were about as likely to know to whom the prescription drug discount program would apply.

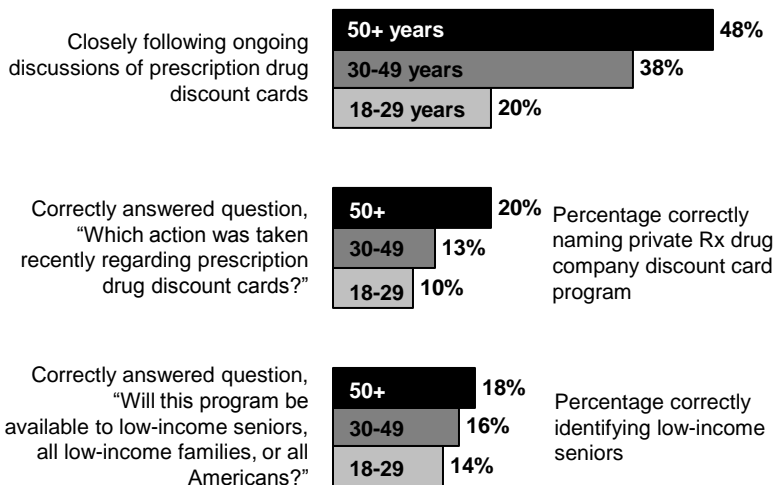
Importance of prescription drugs

The issue of prescription drug coverage is one that a growing share of people say is important. When asked to name the most important problem in health or health care for the government to address, a greater percentage (10%) mentioned this issue in February than at any time in the last year. The two other issues mentioned most frequently this month were elderly care/issues (11%) and cost of health care (10%).

Which action was taken recently regarding prescription drug discount cards?



Age Differences



Percent mentioning coverage of prescription drugs as most important health problem for government to address

