



EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE AT:
10 a.m. ET, Tuesday, October 21, 2008

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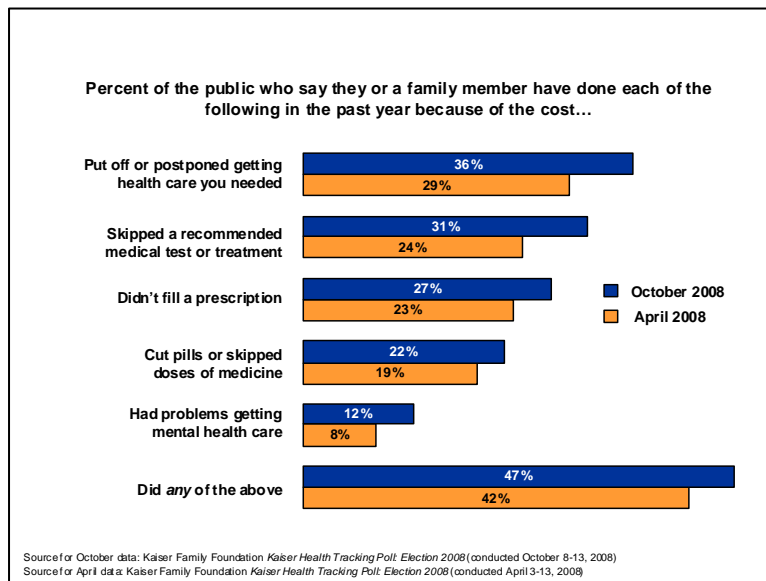
GROWING NUMBER OF AMERICANS REPORT PROBLEMS PAYING MEDICAL BILLS AND DELAYING AND SKIPPING CARE DUE TO COSTS

Almost One in Five Have Medical Bills of \$1,000 or More

Menlo Park, CA -- With two weeks remaining until Election Day, more people are reporting problems with health care bills, and paying for health care retains a solid hold on the public's list of their top economic concerns, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation's final election 2008 tracking poll.

About one in three Americans now report their family has had problems paying medical bills in the past year, up from about a quarter saying the same two years ago. Almost one in five (18%) of Americans report household problems with medical bills amounting to more than \$1,000 in the past year.

Nearly half (47%) of the public reports someone in their family skipping pills, postponing or cutting back on medical care they said they needed in the past year due to the cost of care. For example, just over one-third say they or a family member put off or postponed needed care and three in ten say they skipped a recommended test or treatment – increases of seven percentage points from last April's tracking poll which asks the same question.



“Health care is now every bit as much an economic issue for the American people as job insecurity, mortgage payments and credit card debt,” said Kaiser President and CEO Drew Altman.

In the voters' minds the financial meltdown has not displaced the need for health reform, the poll found. Nearly twice as many voters say that in the face of the economic challenges "it is more important than ever to take on health reform" (62%) than say "we cannot take on health reform right now" (34%). However, a partisan gap remains on this question with majorities of Democratic (75%) and independent (61%) voters agreeing that health care reform is more important than ever, while over half (54%) of Republicans believe it should not be addressed right now.

Not surprisingly, an increasingly large majority of the public – seven in ten – report a "serious problem" with at least one of seven relevant economic challenges due to recent changes in the economy, up 12 percentage points from two months ago. The biggest change among the economic problems measured was with losses in the stock market, which is now a problem reported among three in ten Americans (31%), doubling from two months ago. However, paying for gas (39%) and getting a good paying job or raise (35%) continue to lead as serious problems. Paying for health care or health insurance is reported by nearly three in ten (28%). Paying for health care ranked fourth among economic problems, ahead of paying for food, problems with credit card or other personal debt and paying the rent or mortgage.

"People's budgets are being strained in multiple ways these days, and health care is no exception," said Mollyann Brodie, Kaiser vice president and director for Public Opinion and Survey Research. "Our surveys suggest that medical bills are a real issue for lots of families. One undesirable result: people report there are times that they neglect taking care of their health problems."

The October *Kaiser Health Tracking Poll: Election 2008*, the eleventh and final in a series designed and analyzed by the Foundation's public opinion research team, also examines voters' specific health care issue interests and perceptions of the major presidential candidates' positions on health care and reform. Kaiser will begin a new tracking poll series next year.

Making health care and health insurance more affordable is the most important health care issue cited by voters (50%), doubling the second ranked issue, expanding health insurance coverage for the uninsured (23%). The survey also shows that while voters tend to disagree about whether there is enough regulation in terms of the safety or cost of health care, majorities of those among all political parties agree that more regulation is needed in terms of how health insurance companies treat people with preexisting health conditions (72% of Democrats, 67% of independents, and 51% of Republicans).

The poll is a nationally representative random sample of 1,217 adults ages 18 and older, including 1,115 adults who say they are registered to vote, who were interviewed by telephone between October 8 and 13, 2008. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is plus or minus 3 percentage points and plus or minus 4 percentage points for the sample of registered voters. For results based on subgroups, the sampling error is somewhat higher.

The full question wording and results and a brief on the poll can be viewed online at http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/h08_posr102108pkg.cfm.

The Kaiser Family Foundation is a non-profit private operating foundation, based in Menlo Park, California, dedicated to producing and communicating the best possible information, research and analysis on health issues.

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