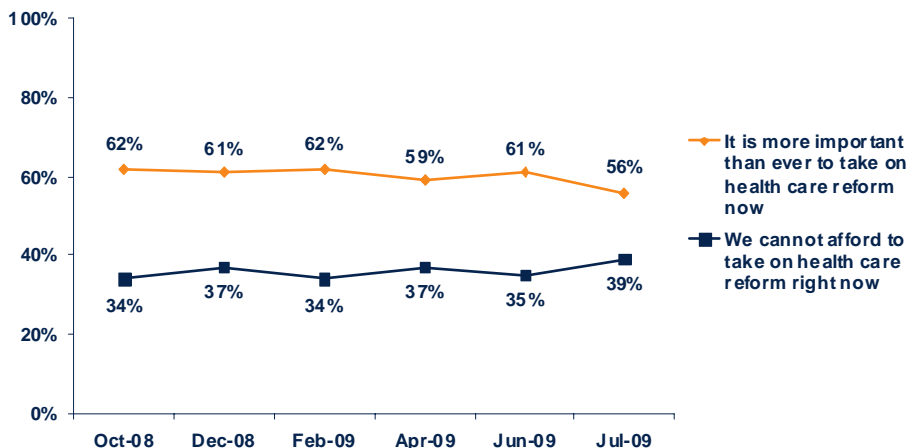


## JULY SURVEY FINDS CONTINUING SUPPORT FOR HEALTH CARE REFORM

**Urgency of reform.** As has been true since last October, the majority of the public (56 percent) says that health care reform is more important now than ever before. Four in ten, in contrast, say we cannot afford to take on reform now given the nation's economic troubles. There remain stark partisan splits on this issue, with seven in ten Democrats backing reform now and six in ten Republicans taking the opposite view. Political independents tilt the balance by backing reform now 54 percent to 42 percent who say we can't afford it.

### Health Care Reform... Is Now the Right Time?

Which comes closer to describing your own views? Given the serious economic problems facing the country...



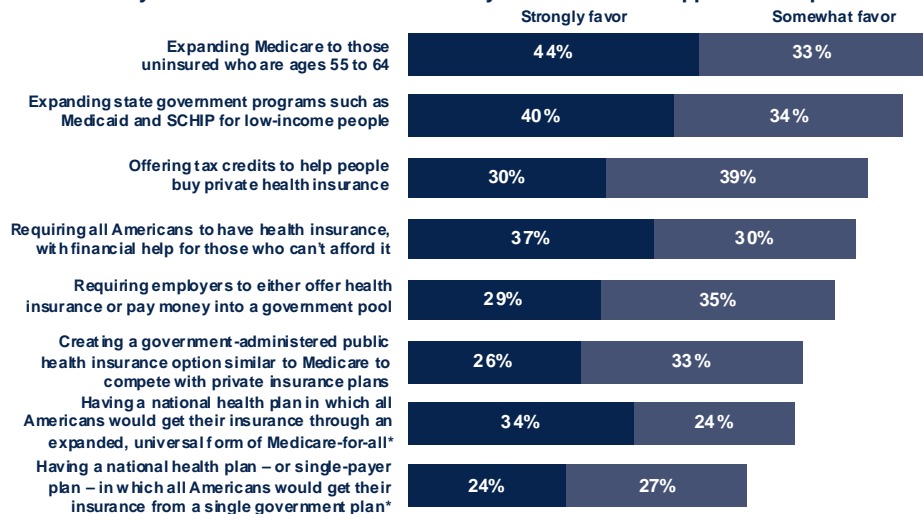
**How will reform affect family, nation?** Twice as many say that the country will be better off than worse off if Congress and the president pass health care reform (51 percent to 23 percent). And while there is no consensus among Americans as to how a health care plan would affect them personally, a plurality of 39 percent continues to think it would leave them better off, compared to 21 percent who expect they would be worse off. Roughly a third (32 percent) don't see health care reform making a difference for them, obviously a critical group for proponents and opponents to sway.

### Support for expansion proposals.

As we also have found in our tracking polls since February, clear majorities support a variety of methods of expanding health insurance coverage, including Medicaid expansion (74 percent), an individual mandate (68 percent), an employer mandate (64 percent) and a public plan (59 percent).

### Support Remains for Many Ways of Expanding Coverage

Now I'm going to read you some different ways to increase the number of Americans covered by health insurance. Please tell me if you would favor or oppose each option.



Items marked with an \* asked of two separate half samples as a wording experiment. Various items based on half samples.

**BUT THE SURVEY ALSO SUGGESTS THAT CRITICISMS OF THE SPECIFIC LEGISLATION BEING FORMULATED IN CONGRESS ARE REGISTERING WITH THE PUBLIC AND SUPPORT IS SOFTENING SOMEWHAT**

The survey finds that more Americans are worried that Congress will pass a reform bill that's not good for their family (54 percent) than are worried that health care reform won't happen this year at all (39 percent). While the data make clear that Republicans are driving the concern (67 percent worry that Congress will pass a plan that will negatively impact their family), there is also a substantial amount of concern among Democrats (45 percent) and political independents (54 percent).

The survey also suggests that support has been softening across a variety of opinions related to reform:

- **Reform now:** While most Americans (56 percent) say the country's economic problems make health care reform more important than ever, this is down 5 percentage points from last month.
- **Will you be better off?** The percentage who believe they will be *worse off* if health care reform passes – 21 percent – is nearly double what it was in February, while the percent who think they will be better off (39 percent) has not changed much since then.
- **Will the country be better off?** There is a similar pattern on views as to whether *the country* will be better off if health care reform passes. In this case, the proportion who think the United States will be better off is down 8 percentage points since February while the proportion who think the country will be worse off is up 11 points over the same time period.

While last month Republicans were divided on whether the country would be better or worse off (33 percent vs. 34 percent, respectively), they now tilt decisively toward the negative. Democrats still overwhelmingly think health care reform would benefit the country (65 percent), but their level of optimism is down 11 percentage points from last month.

July 2009	Dems	Inds	Reps
Country better off	65%	53%	27%
Country worse off	11	24	43
No difference	16	15	19
Depends/DK/Ref	7	8	12

- **Specific proposals for expanding coverage:** Clear majorities still support the public plan, Medicaid expansion and individual and employer mandates. Support for several proposals is down overall, while for some other proposals strength of support has weakened. For example, support for an employer mandate is down 5 points since last month and "strong support" is down 13 points (from 42 percent to 29 percent).

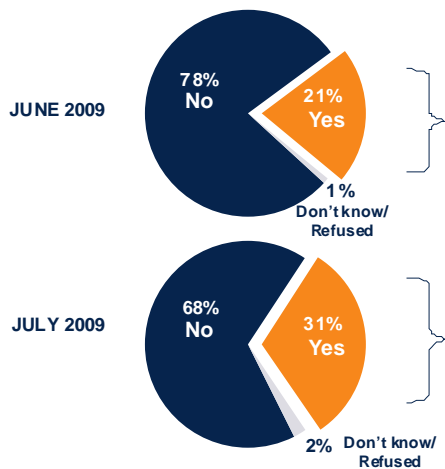
The softening in support reported here coincides with the beginning of debate about the concrete details of legislation on Capitol Hill and an increase in the intensity of the public debate more generally, and is consistent with patterns in public opinion observed in past reform debates.

**Attention and advertising.** Though rapt attention to Washington's work on health care reform is limited to a quarter (27 percent) of the population, a percentage that hasn't changed much in recent months despite the fact that the debate has heated up considerably since then, there has been a substantial increase in the number of people reporting having seen an ad, particularly a negative ad.

Specifically, the proportion of the public who reports seeing an ad about health care reform is up 10 percentage points from June, from 21 to 31 percent. And among that larger share of Americans, nearly even numbers report seeing a negative ad as have seen a positive ad, a change from June when viewing of positive ads clearly dominated.

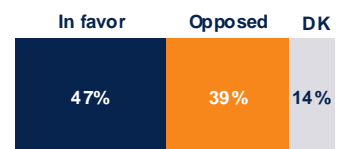
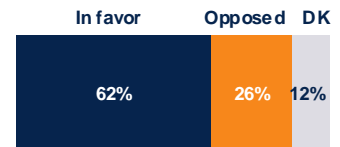
**More Have Seen Ads, More Have Been Negative**

During the past seven days, did you see, hear or read any advertisements having to do with proposed changes in the health care system?



As far as you could tell, were those ads in favor of or opposed to passing some sort of health care reform this year?

(Based on those who have seen advertisements)

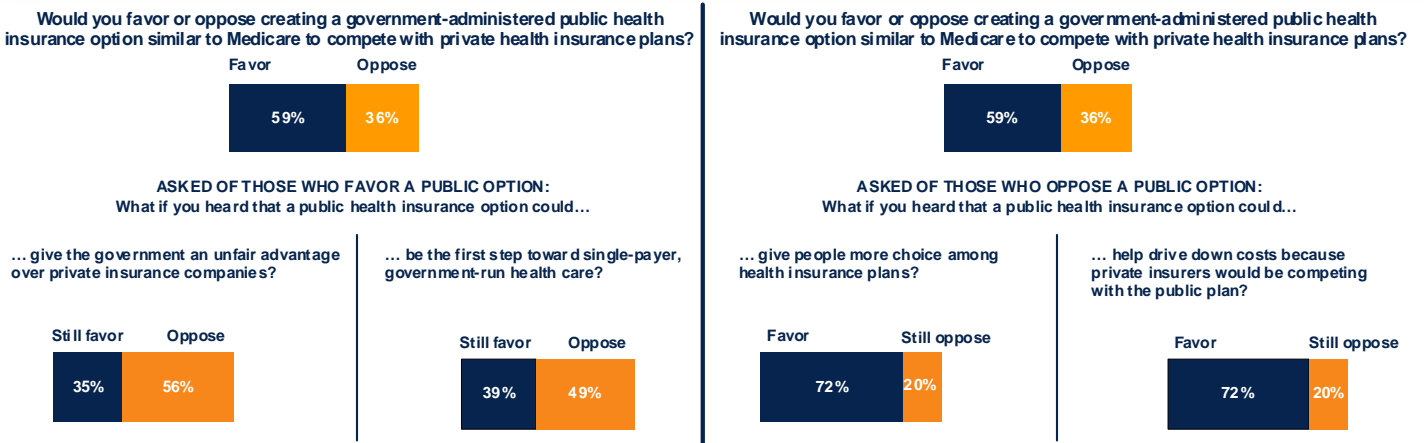


**PUBLIC PLAN RETAINS MAJORITY SUPPORT. ONE IN FOUR WOULD DEFINITELY LOOK INTO SUCH A PLAN, ONE IN FOUR WOULD DEFINITELY NOT.**

The public plan option – cause of much discussion and disagreement on Capitol Hill – is backed by a solid majority of Americans in the current poll (59 percent). Consistent with the pattern of softening of support laid out above, however, this is down from 67 percent in April.

Americans’ views on the topic remain malleable, as demonstrated by the results of argument testing embedded in the survey. When supporters are read arguments commonly heard in the debate, such as that the plan might give the government an unfair advantage over private companies, or that it might be the first step toward “single-payer, government-run health care,” overall support falls roughly 20 to 25 percentage points. Alternatively, arguments about how a public plan could increase choice or lower costs boost support to roughly seven in ten.

**Public Plan: Argument Testing**

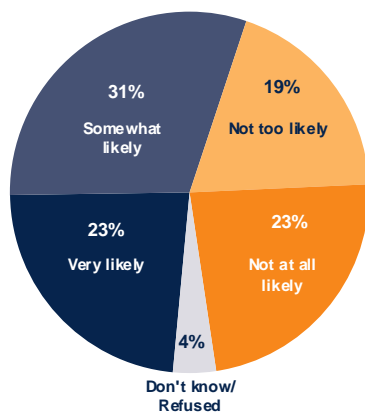


Note: Graphs showing "Still favor" and "Oppose" are based on total, where "Oppose" includes those who initially opposed along with those who opposed after hearing the follow up. Graphs showing "Favor" and "Still oppose" are based on total, where "Favor" includes those who initially favored along with those who favored after hearing the follow up.

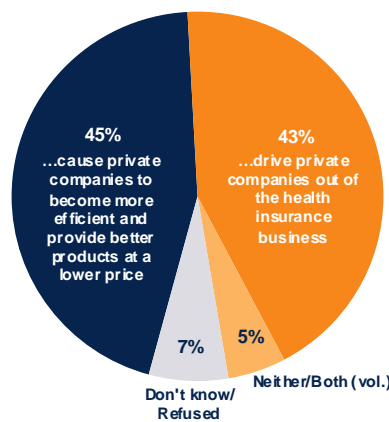
Opinion is more divided when it comes to the effect a government-administered health insurance option might have on private competitors. Just over four in ten (43 percent) say that the availability of a public plan would be more likely to drive private companies out of the health insurance business, while just as many (45 percent) hold the opposite view, saying it would cause private companies to become more efficient and provide better products. Perhaps not surprisingly, Republicans two to one think private companies will suffer, while a majority of Democrats (56 percent) say such a plan will promote efficiency. Independents are divided on the issue.

**Opinions on the Public Plan**

**If there were a government-administered public plan offered, how likely would you be to look into purchasing it as health insurance coverage for your own family?**



**If there were a government-administered public plan, do you think it would be more likely to ...?**



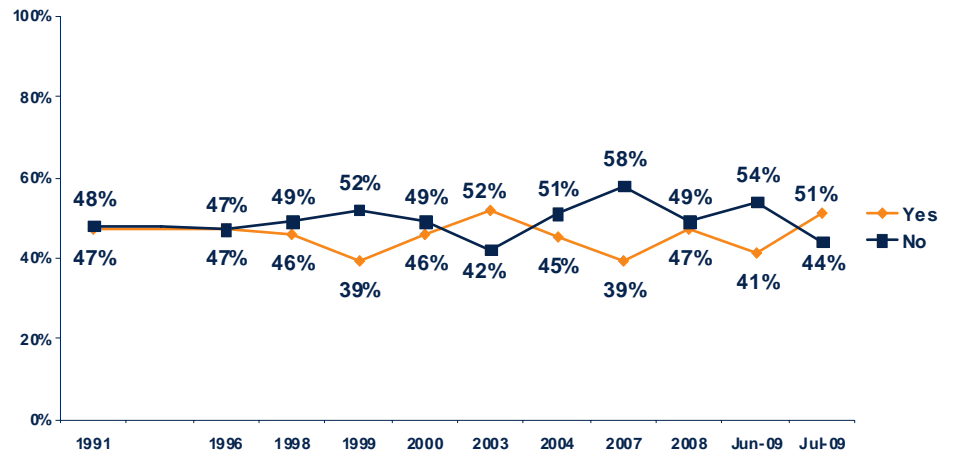
As to whether people would be interested in purchasing a public plan if it were made available, the survey suggests that about a quarter of the public (23 percent) would be “very likely” to look into the plan’s details, while just as many say they are “not at all likely” to consider such a plan. Strong interest in purchasing a plan is highest among those without insurance coverage – rising to 36 percent in this group – and among that half of the population that has had to postpone care due to cost over the past year (where 30 percent express strong interest).

**OVERALL WILLINGNESS TO PAY TICKS UP. SUPPORT FOR VARIOUS TAX PROPOSALS STAYS HIGH, BUT STRENGTH OF SUPPORT SOFTENS SOMEWHAT**

**Big picture.** The public remains divided in their willingness to pay to provide health coverage to more of their fellow citizens, with 51 percent expressing support for the idea of some personal sacrifice and 44 percent opposed. Contrary to the modestly souring trend in the rest of the survey, willingness to pay is actually up ten percentage points from our June tracking survey.

**Willing to Pay More in July**

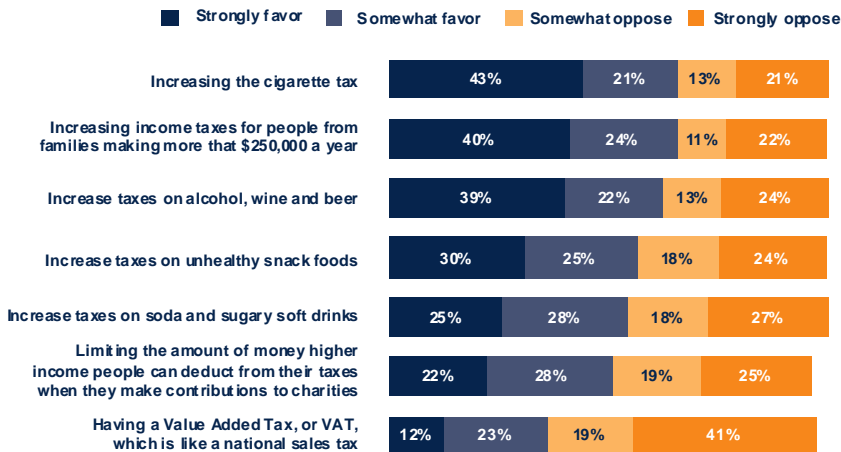
Would you be willing to pay more – either in higher health insurance premiums or higher taxes – in order to increase the number of Americans who have health insurance, or not?



**Specific tax proposals.** When it comes to specifics, we continue to find majority support for: increasing the cigarette tax (65 percent support); increasing taxes for families making more than \$250,000 annually (64 percent); and increasing taxes on alcohol, wine and beer (62 percent). Taxing unhealthy snack foods or sodas hovers a bit closer to the 50 percent mark, backed by 55 percent and 53 percent, respectively. Exactly 50 percent back limiting charitable deductions for upper income Americans.

**Other Tax Options**

Please tell me if you would favor or oppose each of the following to help pay for health care reform and provide coverage for more of the uninsured.



The one tax proposal clearly opposed by a majority was the Value Added Tax (VAT). Six in ten are opposed to having a VAT, including four in ten who “strongly oppose” the idea.

Overall support for most tax proposals has been quite consistent since April, but strength of support is down across the board this month. For example, the proportion who “strongly support” taxing the wealthy is down from 49 percent to 40 percent, driven primarily by a drop in support among those in households making more than \$75,000 per year.

**Tax treatment of employer-provided health benefits.** Views on a possible change in treatment of employer-provided health benefits have remained quite stable in KFF polling over the past several months, with a narrow majority opposed to making such a change (53 percent in the current survey) and roughly four in ten in favor.

## POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ATTRIBUTES AND MESSAGES

**Most positive: access to own doctor, saving Medicare, covering pre-existing conditions.** Provided with a number of possible elements, effects and arguments regarding health care reform proposals, the public is most moved toward supporting a plan if it: allows them to keep their own doctor and health plan; would save Medicare; and would ensure that people with pre-existing conditions are able to get reasonably priced coverage.

### Positive Messages

If you heard that a new health care reform proposal ... would that make you more likely to support it, less likely to support it, or wouldn't it make a difference?

More likely to support	
74%	Let people keep their own doctors and health plans if they wanted to
67	Would help ensure the long-term financial health of Medicare
66	Would mean that people with a history of illness would not be denied coverage and could get it at the same price as healthier people
63	Would save the country money over time
63	Would provide financial help to buy health insurance to those who need it
63	Would be paid for in a way that would not increase the federal budget deficit
59	Would provide financial incentives for doctors and hospitals treating Medicare patients to provide higher quality care

Note: Various items based on half samples.

**Most negative: higher costs, limited choice, harming Medicare.** Americans are most likely to be moved to oppose a health care reform plan by arguments that a proposal would increase their premiums or other out-of-pocket costs, would impact doctors' willingness to treat Medicare patients, or would limit their own choice of doctors. Arguments about government over-involvement are nearly as persuasive.

### Negative Messages

If you heard that a new health care reform proposal ... would that make you more likely to support it, less likely to support it, or wouldn't it make a difference?

Less likely to support	
66%	Was going to increase people's insurance premiums and other out-of-pocket costs
62	Limited your own choice of doctors
62	Would result in cuts in Medicare payments that might make doctors less willing to take Medicare patients
59	Would get the government too involved in your personal health care decisions
58	Would reduce the quality of care provided to seniors under Medicare
58	Was going to increase taxes
45	Was going to increase the federal budget deficit

Note: Various items based on half samples.

## THE TRILLION DOLLAR PRICE TAG AND THE BUDGET DEFICIT

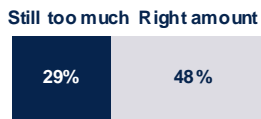
### One Trillion Dollars?

Some estimates suggest that reforming health care could cost roughly one trillion dollars over the next ten years, which equals about one hundred billion dollars a year. Would you say this is too much, too little, or about the right amount to spend to reform health care?

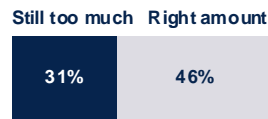


ASKED OF THOSE WHO SAY "TOO MUCH":  
What if you heard that...

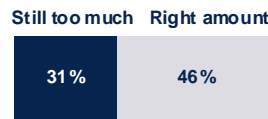
... spending this amount would mean nearly everyone in the US would have health insurance coverage?



... one trillion dollars over 10 years is a relatively small amount, about 3% of the country's projected health spending over that time period?



... this spending on health reform would eventually be offset by longer term savings?



Note: Follow up questions asked of different half samples of those who initially said "too much." Responses shown on bottom graphs are based on total, where "right amount" includes those who initially said "right amount" and those who said "right amount" after hearing the follow up.

As discussion over the price tag of health care reform intensifies, we asked Americans whether they thought one trillion dollars over ten years would be too much, too little, or about the right amount to spend on health care reform. Roughly four in ten found that figure too high, while just over a third said it was the right amount and one in ten thought it was too little. Adding the latter two categories together creates a roughly even split in the public on this 'price point.'

Provided with arguments that put the \$1 trillion price tag into a larger financial context or stress the benefits of the plan, roughly one in four of those originally concerned about the level of spending change their minds, and the plurality tips to the "right amount" category.

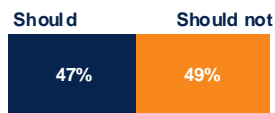
## CHANGES IN HOW INSURANCE COMPANIES TREAT THOSE WITH PRE-EXISTING CONDITIONS AND THOSE WHO ENGAGE IN UNHEALTHY BEHAVIORS

**Pre-existing conditions.** The public continues to support government mandating that insurance companies cover pre-existing conditions. Overall, roughly three in four (77 percent) say they favor "the federal government requiring health insurance companies to cover anyone who applies." This is a similar *overall* level of support to our last sounding of this issue in December, but the percentage of Americans who "strongly support" this change has dropped from 58 percent to 46 percent.

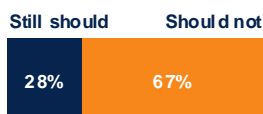
The survey found that though the majority of those who support this idea continued to back it despite being challenged, enough changed their mind to turn the overall result to 48 percent favor, 44 percent oppose when read the argument that this requirement might mean that healthier people would pay somewhat more for insurance than they do now while sick people would pay less.

### Insurance Premiums and Unhealthy Behaviors

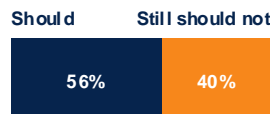
Do you think health insurance companies should or should not be permitted to charge higher premiums for people who engage in unhealthy behaviors, such as smoking or being very overweight?



**Supporters were asked:** What if you heard that permitting insurance companies to charge these people higher premiums could make it harder for low-income people and those who are experiencing real health problems to get insurance?



**Opponents were asked:** What if you heard that permitting insurance companies to charge these people higher premiums could help control health care costs and promote healthier behaviors?



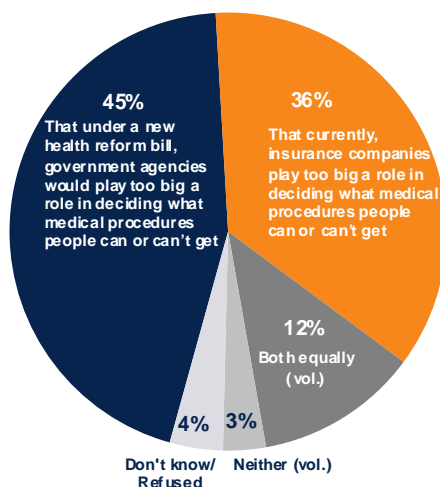
Note: Follow up question on left asked of those who initially said "should." Graph below it based on total, where "should not" includes those who initially said "should not" along with those said "should not" after hearing the follow up. Follow up question on right asked of those who initially said "should not." Graph below it based on total, where "should" includes those who initially said "should" along with those who said "should" after hearing the follow up.

**Higher premiums for unhealthy behavior.** The public is quite divided on the question of whether insurance companies should be allowed to charge higher premiums to those who smoke or are overweight, with 47 percent in favor of this and 49 percent opposed. Argument testing suggests that it is somewhat easier to change the minds of supporters of this plan than that of opponents.

**Insurance companies the problem, or government the problem?** In the battle of “who’s scarier, insurance bureaucrats or government bureaucrats,” it’s the government that currently generates the most public fear. Overall, more people worry that government agencies would play too big a role in determining what medical procedures people can or can’t get under a new system (45 percent) than worry about the role insurance companies play in the current system (36 percent). Roughly one in eight (12 percent) are bothered by both.

## Whose Meddling Is Worse: Gov’t or Insurance Companies?

Which worries you more?

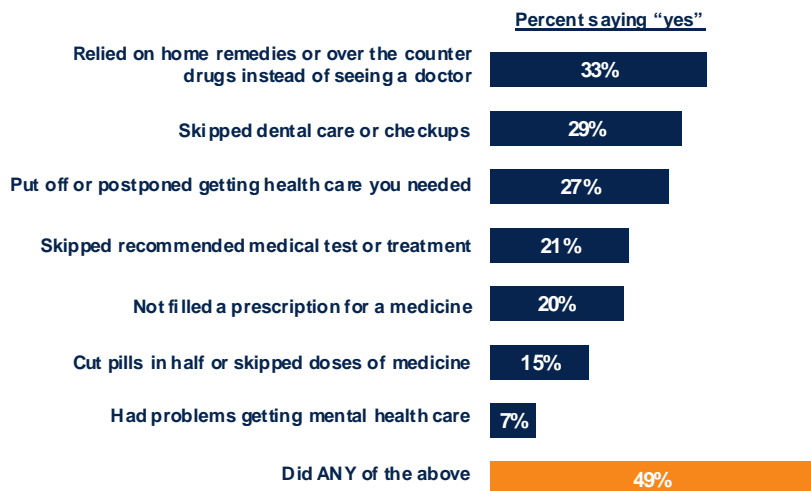


## EXPERIENCES: COST-RELATED PROBLEMS WITH HEALTH CARE DOWN SOMEWHAT

The poll suggests that, mid-summer, Americans are finding some relief from their difficulties in affording health care, with both concern and reports of actual negative experiences down somewhat from the spring. Still, fully half of all adults (49 percent) say they have put off some sort of needed care over the past twelve months because of its cost.

## Putting Off Care Because of Cost

In the past 12 months, have you or another family member living in your household... because of the COST, or not?



Overall, one in five (21 percent) report having had a problem paying medical bills over the course of the past year, similar to February of this year and down 5 percentage points from April and June. And the percentage who say they are “very worried” about having to pay more for their health care or health insurance is at an all time low in our surveys – 31 percent, down from 37 percent in April. The proportion who are “very worried” about not being able to afford the health care services they need or about losing their health insurance, on the other hand, has been stable since the spring (now 34 percent and 29 percent, respectively).

This publication (#7945) is available on the Kaiser Family Foundation’s website at [www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org).