

*This month, the bipartisan Congressional “super committee” began negotiations on a deficit reduction package that is likely to include at least some proposed changes to the nation’s major health programs, Medicare and Medicaid. Probably reflecting current levels of distrust in Congress documented in many polls, a majority of the public expresses little to no trust in the super committee to make the right recommendations, and most don’t believe the committee can deliver a proposal that will get enough support from both parties to pass in Congress. While the public wants the committee to consider both tax increases and spending cuts as part of an overall deficit reduction strategy, more than half remain opposed to any reductions to spending on Medicare, and almost half oppose cuts to Medicaid.*

*Views on the health reform law remain split this month, with roughly equal shares viewing the law favorably and unfavorably. With several of the law’s provisions set to impact those with pre-existing conditions, the poll finds that about half of Americans say they or someone in their household has a pre-existing condition and one in five in this group say they have had difficulty getting health insurance because of it.*

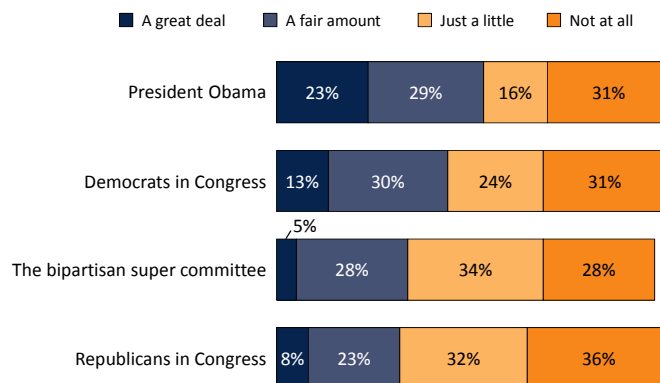
### PUBLIC EXPRESSES LITTLE TRUST IN SUPER COMMITTEE, LACKS CONFIDENCE IT CAN GET THE JOB DONE

As the super committee begins its negotiations on how to reduce the deficit, this month’s Kaiser Health Tracking poll takes a deeper

look at what the public thinks about the joint House-Senate committee. After hearing a brief description of the super committee,<sup>1</sup> half the public (50 percent) say they think the formation of the committee was a good idea, while almost four in ten (38 percent) say it was a bad idea. While Americans are somewhat split on the merits of its formation, they are more unified when it comes to expressing little to no trust in the committee. More than six in ten (62 percent) say they trust the super committee “just a little” (34 percent) or “not at all” (28 percent) to make the right recommendations about ways to reduce the deficit, while only 5 percent say they trust the group “a great deal.” This puts the super committee on similar footing with Congressional Democrats and Republicans in general when it comes to the level of public trust on dealing with the deficit, while President Obama fares slightly better in the public’s judgment (just over half say they trust the president at least “a fair amount” to make the right recommendations about ways to reduce the deficit).

### Majority Expresses Little or No Trust in Super Committee

How much do you trust each of the following to make the right recommendations about ways to reduce the federal budget deficit?



Note: Don't know/Refused answers not shown.  
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll (conducted September 7-12, 2011)

<sup>1</sup> Questionnaire description read as follows: “The legislation to raise the federal debt ceiling that was passed by Congress and signed by the president at the end of July calls for the creation of a bipartisan committee, sometimes referred to as the super committee. The committee is made up of 12 members of Congress—6 Republicans and 6 Democrats—and must come up with a plan to cut at least \$1.2 trillion from the federal budget deficit over the next 10 years. They must make their recommendations to Congress by November 23.”

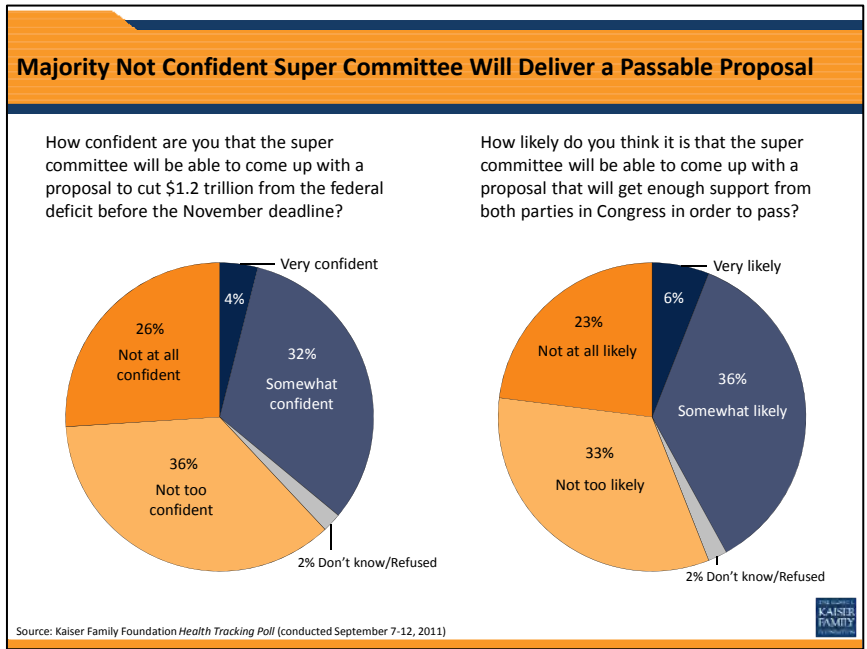
Percent who say they trust each of the following “a great deal” or “a fair amount” to make the right recommendations about ways to reduce the federal budget deficit:				
	Total public	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
President Obama	52%	83%	45%	13%
Democrats in Congress	43	72	33	15
The bipartisan super committee	33	41	31	28
Republicans in Congress	31	17	30	59

Not surprisingly, trust in these groups divides along party lines. Democrats are much more likely to place at least “a fair amount” of trust their own party leaders (72 percent) and President Obama (83 percent) to make the right recommendations about ways to reduce the federal budget, while six in ten Republicans (59 percent) say the same

about Republican members of Congress. Views on the super committee are less partisan, with a slightly higher share of Democrats compared with Republicans and independents saying they trust the panel at least “a fair amount” to make the right decisions (41 percent vs. 28 percent and 31 percent, respectively).

Americans are also skeptical of the super committee’s ability to deliver a proposal that can pass in Congress. Six in ten (62 percent) say they are “not too” or “not at all” confident that the committee can come up with a proposal to cut \$1.2 trillion from the federal deficit before the November deadline. A similar share (56 percent) think it is “not too” or “not at all” likely that the committee will come up with a proposal that will get enough votes from both parties in Congress in order to pass.

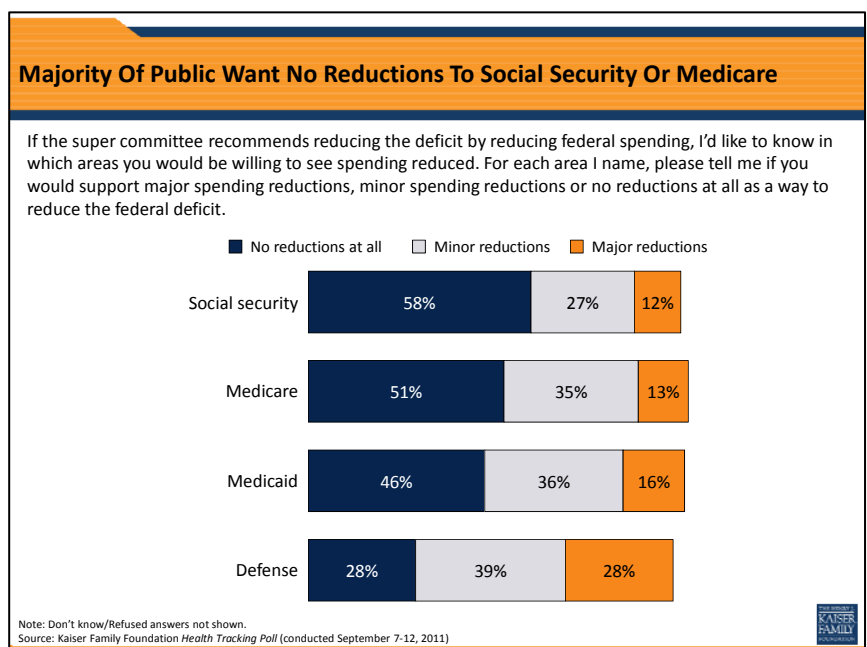
Those who identify as Democrats express somewhat higher levels of confidence in the super committee compared with independents and Republicans (46 percent vs. 33 percent and 29 percent, respectively, are at least “somewhat confident”). Still, even among Democrats, most are not confident that the committee can meet the deadline (53 percent), and most think it is unlikely the group can come up with a proposal that will pass in Congress (52 percent).



### PUBLIC TO SUPER COMMITTEE: DON'T CUT SOCIAL SECURITY OR MEDICARE

Americans continue to resist spending cuts to major public programs as a way to reduce the deficit. When asked about specific areas where the super committee might recommend cuts, more than half the public says they would not support *any* reductions to spending on Social Security (58 percent) or Medicare (51 percent). Almost half (46 percent) say the same about Medicaid, while 36 percent would support minor reductions and just 16 percent want major reductions in Medicaid spending. The public’s resistance to cutting these three central entitlement programs has persisted over recent months and continues in the context of the super committee, despite the continuing focus on the need for debt reduction and heavy news media coverage of the committee’s charge.

One area where the public appears more open to reductions is defense spending. A plurality (39 percent) say they would support minor reductions to defense spending in order to reduce the deficit, and almost three in ten (28 percent) would accept major reductions in this area.

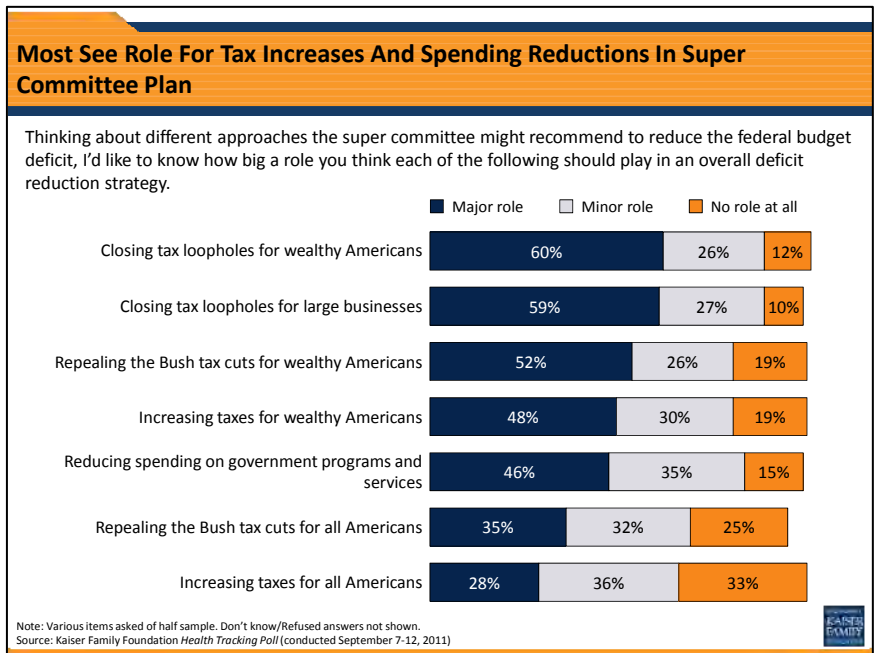


Despite the recent focus on Social Security in the Republican presidential debates, majorities across all parties—including Democrats, independents, and Republicans, as well as those who call themselves supporters of the Tea Party—say they do not want the super committee to make *any* reductions to spending on Social Security. When it comes to Medicare and Medicaid, independents and Republicans are somewhat more likely than Democrats to say they would support some spending reductions. But even among Republicans, four in ten want no reductions to Medicare (and just 15 percent support major reductions), and a third want no reductions to Medicaid (while one in five support major reductions).

If the super committee recommends reducing the deficit by reducing federal spending, I'd like to know in which areas you would be willing to see spending reduced. To reduce the deficit would you support major reductions, minor reductions, or no reductions to spending on each of the following?					
	Total public	Democrats	Independents	Republicans	Tea Party Supporters (regardless of party affiliation)
<b>Social security</b>					
No reductions	58%	65%	58%	52%	52%
Minor reductions	27	24	27	31	28
Major reductions	12	9	13	14	16
<b>Medicare</b>					
No reductions	51	62	47	40	37
Minor reductions	35	26	37	43	41
Major reductions	13	11	14	15	22
<b>Medicaid</b>					
No reductions	46	56	43	32	30
Minor reductions	36	29	39	45	40
Major reductions	16	14	15	21	29
<b>Defense</b>					
No reductions	28	24	30	38	43
Minor reductions	39	39	38	42	41
Major reductions	28	34	30	18	16

The public sees a role for various options on the revenue side for the super committee to consider, with options that impact wealthy Americans and large businesses being the most popular. Six in ten say a major part of the super committee's strategy should be closing tax loopholes for wealthy Americans (60 percent) and large businesses (59 percent). About half also think repealing the Bush tax cuts for wealthy Americans (52 percent) or increasing taxes for this group (48 percent) should play a major role. There is less appetite for tax increases that affect all Americans. Just over a third (35 percent) see a major role for repealing the Bush tax cuts for all Americans, while somewhat fewer (28 percent) support the idea of increasing taxes for everyone.

And at the same time that most Americans report a desire to preserve spending on major public programs, almost half (46 percent) say "reducing spending on government programs and services" should play a major role in the super committee's recommendations.



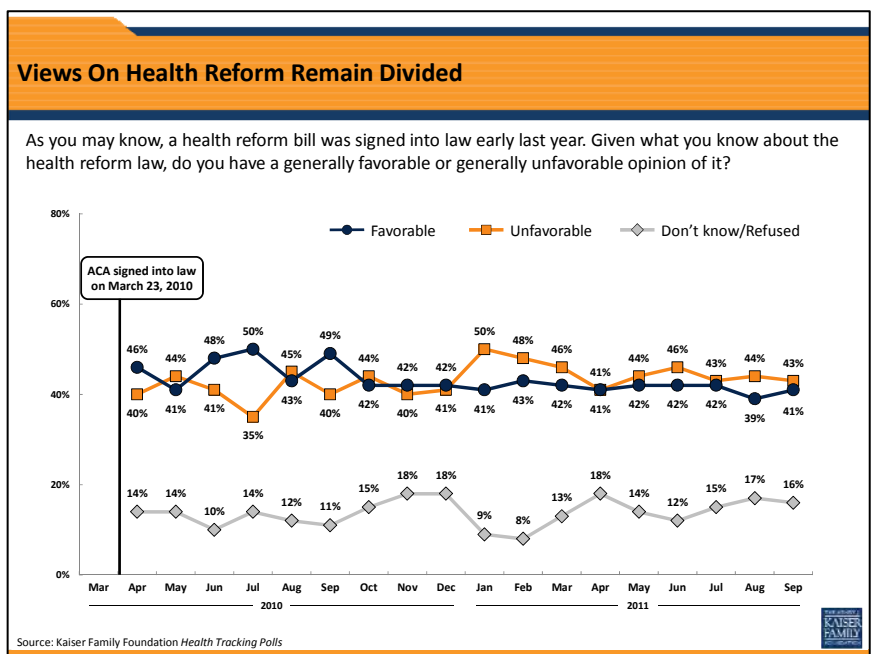
Not surprisingly, Democrats are more likely to support tax increases as a way to reduce the deficit, Republicans are more likely to support spending reductions, and independents lie somewhere in between.

Percent who say each should play a "major role" in super committee's deficit reduction strategy, by political party				
	Total public	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Closing tax loopholes for wealthy Americans	60%	68%	62%	41%
Closing tax loopholes for large businesses	59	61	60	51
Repealing the Bush tax cuts for wealthy Americans	52	69	49	31
Increasing taxes for wealthy Americans	48	64	44	29
Reducing spending on government programs and services	46	40	47	59
Repealing the Bush tax cuts for all Americans	35	45	33	24
Increasing taxes for all Americans	28	36	26	17

### VIEWS ON HEALTH REFORM REMAIN SPLIT

Americans' opinions of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) remain divided, much as they have since the law was passed. This month, 41 percent say they have a favorable view of the law, while 43 percent have an unfavorable view. Support for the law continues to be divided along party lines, with most Democrats holding a favorable view (65 percent) and most Republicans an unfavorable view (76 percent). After reaching a high in August, the share of Republicans with a favorable view of the law dropped from 24 percent down to 14 percent this month, possibly as a result of the criticism of the ACA from Republican candidates in the presidential primary campaign.

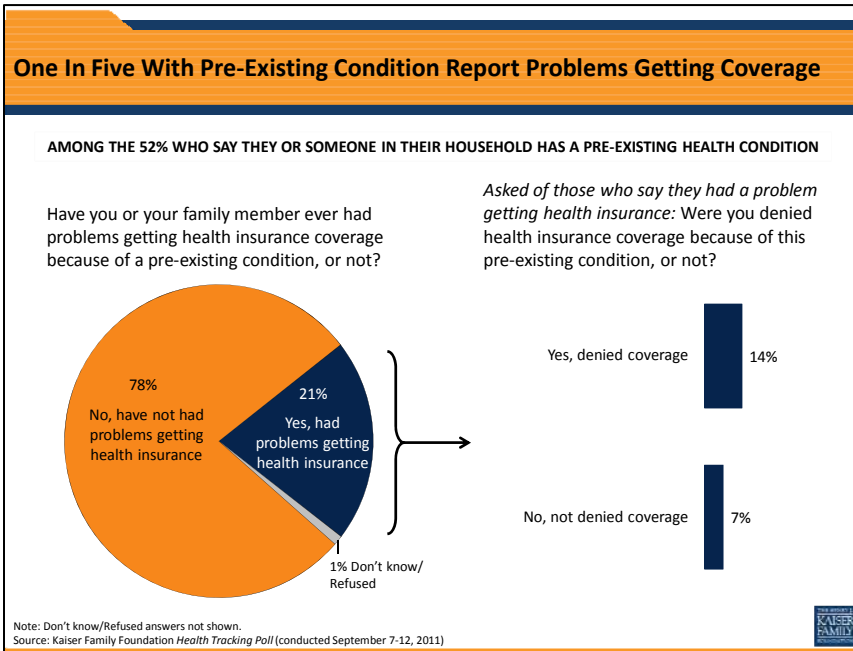
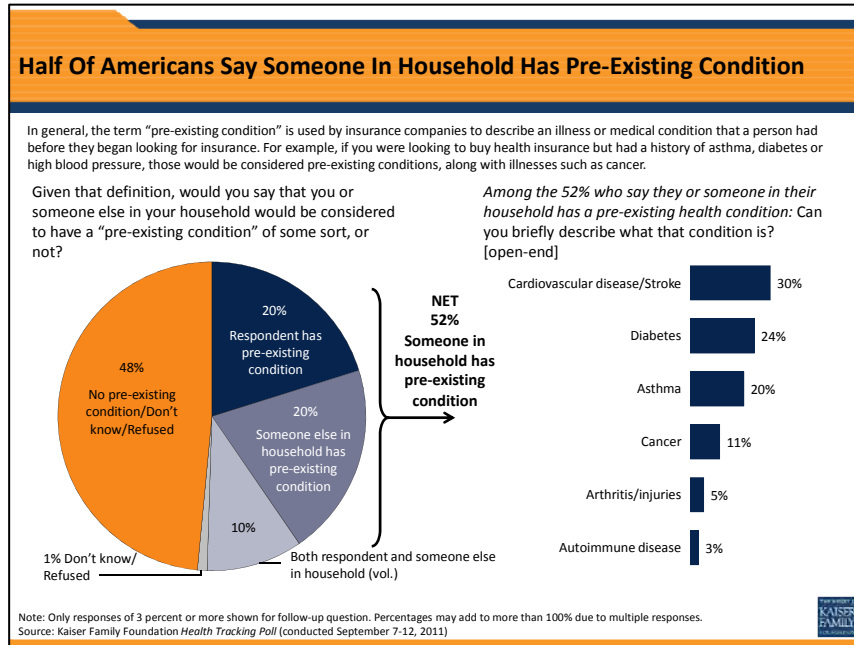
Overall, about a third of the public expects the law won't make much difference for them and their families (34 percent), while a similar share (32 percent) expects to be worse off under the law and nearly as many expect to be better off (27 percent). The public is similarly divided on whether the country will be better off (38 percent) or worse off (36 percent), while one in six (18 percent) expect no difference for the country. And as has been the case since the beginning of this year, more than half (52 percent) want Congress to keep the law as is (19 percent) or expand it (33 percent), while fewer than four in ten (37 percent) want it repealed and replaced with a Republican-sponsored alternative (16 percent) or repealed outright (21 percent).



## PROBLEMS GETTING HEALTH INSURANCE AMONG THOSE WITH PRE-EXISTING CONDITIONS

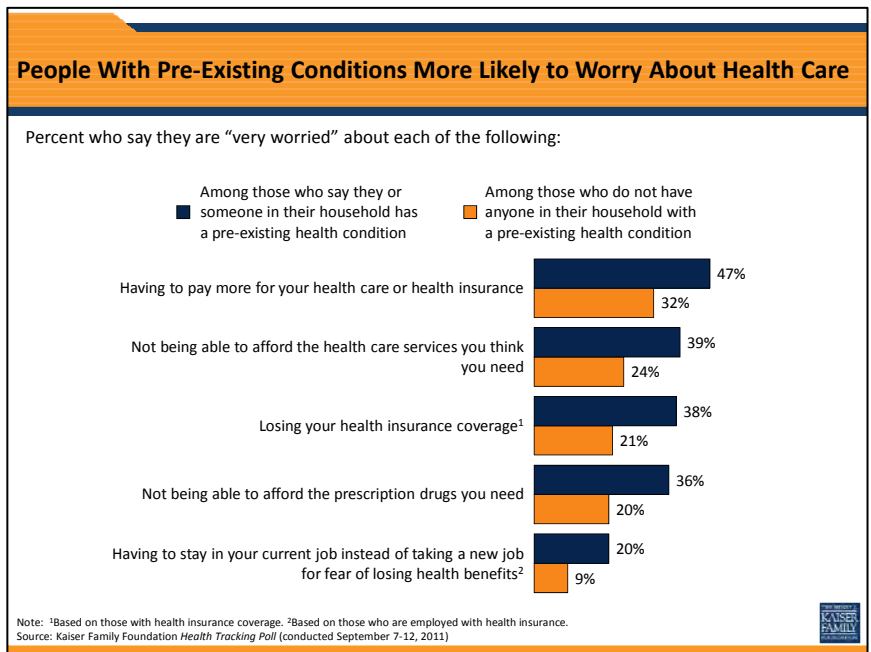
With several elements of the ACA targeted toward individuals with pre-existing conditions, this month’s poll also took a deeper look at this group, examining their worries and experiences with the health care system and their views of the law.

Overall, about half (52 percent) of the public say they or someone else in their household has what would be considered a “pre-existing condition”, with the most commonly reported condition being cardiovascular disease or stroke (30 percent of those who say they live in a household where someone has a pre-existing condition), followed closely by diabetes (24 percent) and asthma (20 percent). Older Americans are slightly more likely to report having a pre-existing condition (59 percent of those ages 65 and older say someone in their household has such a condition), but still half of those under age 65 say someone in their household would qualify as having one.



A fifth (21 percent) of this group (representing 11 percent of the public overall) say they or their family member has ever had difficulty getting health insurance because of a pre-existing condition, including 14 percent who say they were denied coverage because of the condition (7 percent of the public overall). Most of those who had problems say they were eventually able to obtain insurance. On the other hand, 6 percent of all those with a pre-existing condition in their household (3 percent of the general public) say they had a problem and did not eventually get health coverage.

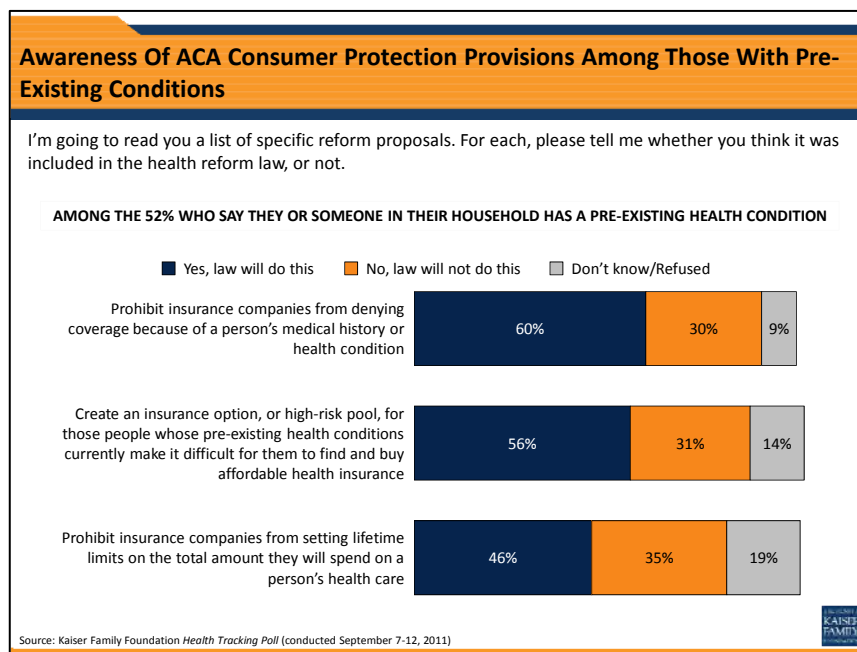
Given the fact that a substantial share of this group has experienced problems getting health insurance in the past, it comes as no surprise that they are more likely to be worried about affording health care and losing their coverage altogether. Almost half (47 percent) say they are “very worried” that they will have to pay more for their health care or insurance, compared to a third (32 percent) of those with no pre-existing condition. Further, nearly four in ten Americans who live in a household where someone has a pre-existing condition are “very worried” that they won’t be able to afford necessary health care (39 percent) and a similar share say they are very worried about losing their insurance (38 percent). Two in ten say they are very worried about having to stay in their current job instead of taking another because they might lose their health benefits, twice as many as among those who say they live in a household where no one has a pre-existing condition (9 percent).



Worries about “job lock” may be rooted in the fact that over a third (36 percent) of those who have had difficulty getting insurance because of a pre-existing condition say that in the past year, someone in their household has stayed in one job rather than take another one in order to maintain their health insurance benefits, compared to fewer than a quarter (23 percent) of those who did not have trouble getting insurance.

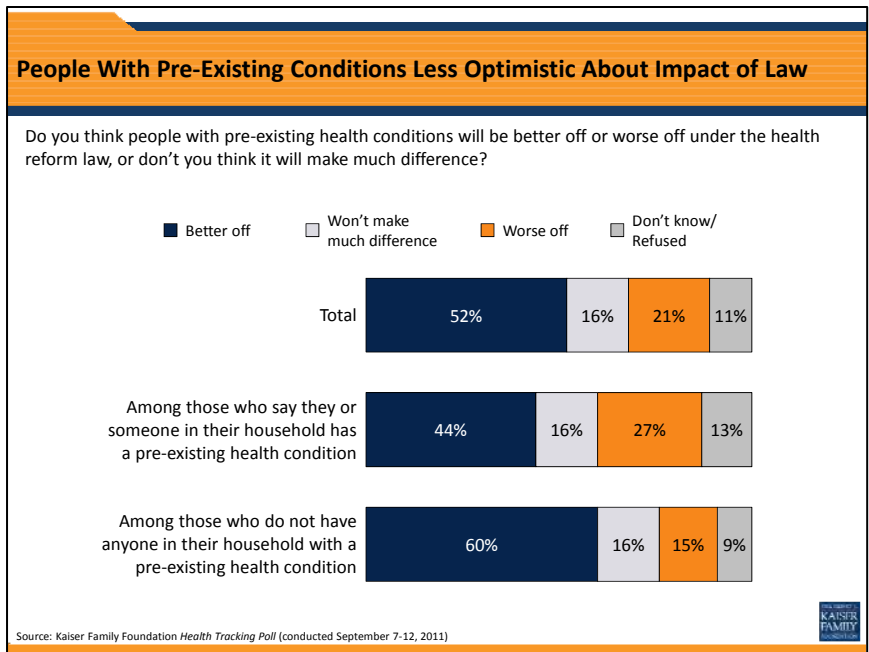
### AWARENESS AND OPINIONS OF ACA AMONG THOSE WITH PRE-EXISTING CONDITIONS

Several of the signature elements of the ACA directly benefit those who have pre-existing conditions—the law creates high-risk pools to provide an affordable insurance option to individuals with pre-existing conditions and also prohibits insurance companies from denying coverage because of a current or previous medical condition. The law’s provision prohibiting insurance companies from setting lifetime coverage limits will also benefit those with health conditions that require them to use more care. However, many of those with pre-existing conditions remain unaware of these provisions.



Among those who report having a pre-existing condition in their household, about four in ten are unaware of the law's guaranteed issue provision (30 percent say the law does not include such a provision and another 9 percent don't know), and a similar share are unaware that the law creates high-risk pools (31 percent say it does not and 14 percent don't know). Over half either think the law does not prohibit insurance companies from setting lifetime caps (35 percent) or don't know if it does or not (19 percent).

While a majority (52 percent) of Americans say that people with pre-existing conditions will benefit under the new health reform law, individuals who report living in a household where someone has a pre-existing condition are somewhat less optimistic about their future under the ACA. A little over four in ten (44 percent) of those in pre-existing condition households say this group will be better off, compared to six in ten (60 percent) of those who do not live with someone who has a pre-existing condition.



#### Methodology

This *Kaiser Health Tracking Poll* was designed and analyzed by public opinion researchers at the Kaiser Family Foundation led by Mollyann Brodie, Ph.D., including Liz Hamel, Sarah Cho, and Theresa Boston. The survey was conducted September 7 through September 12, 2011, among a nationally representative random sample of 1,207 adults ages 18 and older. Telephone interviews conducted by landline (704) and cell phone (503, including 224 who had no landline telephone) were carried out in English and Spanish by Princeton Survey Research Associates.

The margin of sampling error for results based on the full sample is plus or minus 3 percentage points. For results based on subgroups, the margin of sampling error may be higher. Note that sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error in this or any other public opinion poll.

The full question wording and methodology of the poll can be viewed online at <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/8230.cfm>

This publication (#8230-F) is available on the Kaiser Family Foundation's website at [www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org).