



# HEALTH DESK

A PARTNERSHIP OF THE KAISER FAMILY FOUNDATION AND THE NEWSHOUR WITH JIM LEHRER

**EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE UNTIL:  
Tuesday, May 16, 2000, 6:00 p.m. EDT**

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## ***NewsHour/Kaiser Survey Spotlights Misconceptions About the Medically Uninsured***

### ***Survey Examines Difficulties Faced by Those Without Health Coverage***

MENLO PARK, CA – This year's first nationwide survey on Americans' attitudes about the growing number of people without health insurance – and about the problems faced by the uninsured – was released today by *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* and the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation.

The results of the survey are a central focus of a two-part *NewsHour* series on the uninsured that is set to begin airing on Tuesday, May 16, 2000, at 6:00 p.m. EDT. Complete survey results and national and state-by-state background information on the uninsured, as well as an interactive quiz, are available on *The NewsHour's* Web site at [www.pbs.org/newshour](http://www.pbs.org/newshour). Audio, video, text transcripts, and extended interviews from *The NewsHour* segments will also be available.

The new survey polled both insured and uninsured Americans on the topic of lack of health coverage. It found that half of Americans (53%) report knowing someone who is without health insurance. The public believes that the lack of coverage is a serious national problem. For example, more than eight out of 10 Americans (84%) think health care should be provided equally to everyone. At the same time, however, the public is stymied about how to solve the growing uninsured problem. When respondents were asked to choose among four proposals for covering the uninsured that have been discussed by policymakers, no one option emerged as a dominant choice.

The survey also underscores the difficulties uninsured people face getting medical care. For example, they are half as likely as people with insurance to get preventive care. They are less likely to have gotten such preventive services as mammograms (16% vs. 40%) and Pap smears (49% vs. 76%) among women, or prostate exams (12% vs. 20%) among men. They are also less likely than those with health insurance (64% vs. 91%) to have a regular source of care when they are sick or need medical advice, or to have routine physical examinations (47% vs. 70%). They are more likely to have problems paying medical bills (39% vs. 18%) and to have ever been contacted by a collection agency for medical care expenses (39% vs. 27%).

The survey is only the latest fruit of the two-year-old media partnership between the Kaiser Family Foundation and *The NewsHour*, which supports the work of *The NewsHour's* Health Policy Unit. "The partnership has enabled us to provide our viewers with superb coverage of health care and health policy issues," said *NewsHour* executive editor Jim Lehrer. "Our two-part series on the uninsured and the accompanying survey underscores our mutual commitment to providing the public with comprehensive reporting and analysis of the critical health issues the nation faces."

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### **Mixed Perception of the Uninsured**

The American public has become increasingly aware of many of the problems faced by people without health insurance. More than six in 10 respondents were aware that uninsured individuals are less likely than insured individuals to have had a recent physician visit (74% were aware); have a regular source of medical care (68%); use preventive health services (62%); and are more likely to postpone seeking medical care (65%).

Yet at the same time, public perceptions of who constitutes America's 44 million uninsured remain largely inaccurate. Overall, 57% of the public incorrectly believes that more of the uninsured are unemployed or from families where people are unemployed, while in fact, the majority of uninsured individuals come from working families.

More than six in 10 (61%) uninsured adults under age 65 work full or part time. Most are low-income, with over half (52%) making less than \$20,000 per year. Almost six in 10 (59%) have been uninsured for more than two years. The most important reasons given for being uninsured by survey respondents was that insurance is too expensive to afford on their own (47%); their job doesn't offer coverage (15%) or they are unemployed or between jobs (15%). In addition, many people without health coverage are embarrassed about their lack of insurance – 43% said they are uncomfortable telling their families and friends they are uninsured.

The survey also found that uninsured people live on the edge. They are twice as likely as the insured to have difficulty paying their rent or mortgage (29% vs. 12%) and face problems with collection agencies (36% vs. 16%), and less than half as likely to have been able to save money for the future (26% vs. 58%) or to invest in the stock market (9% vs. 41%). More than three-quarters of respondents (76%) said that buying health insurance would require them to give up other things, including basic necessities such as food (21%) and rent (13%).

### **Public Not Willing to Pay, Divided on Reform Options**

The survey also underscores why this problem has been so difficult to solve. While slightly more than half (53%) of the American people are willing to pay at least \$30 per month more to cover the uninsured, a politically formidable percentage of the American people (46%) are only willing to pay a small amount (\$5 a month) or nothing at all to help uninsured people get coverage.

Moreover, the survey suggests how difficult it will be to reach consensus on addressing the issue. Survey respondents voiced roughly equal support for proposals that expand public programs such as Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (21%); requiring business to offer private health insurance to their employees (21%); a government-sponsored health insurance program for all Americans (21%); and providing tax deductions and credits to help people purchase private coverage on their own (20%).

"The unwillingness to pay more on the part of a large number of Americans and the lack of consensus on an approach to the problem suggest that incremental approaches are likely to continue to be favored in the future," said Drew Altman, PhD, President of the Kaiser Family Foundation.

The Kaiser Family Foundation, based in Menlo Park, California, is an independent national health care philanthropy and is not associated with Kaiser Permanente or Kaiser Industries. The foundation provides financial support for *The NewsHour's* health policy unit, conducts surveys with *The NewsHour* and provides background research on health-related stories. The next *NewsHour/Kaiser* health survey will focus on the elderly and prescription drugs.

*The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, which is broadcast on more than 300 PBS stations nationally and by satellite throughout much of the world, is produced by MacNeil/Lehrer Productions. *The NewsHour* is funded by Archer Daniels Midland, Travelers Insurance, Salomon Smith Barney, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and PBS viewers.

### **Methodology**

*The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*/Kaiser Family Foundation National Survey on the Uninsured is the product of an ongoing partnership between the two organizations to improve coverage of health issues. The Foundation provides financial support for *The NewsHour* Health Desk, conducts surveys with *The NewsHour* and provides background research on certain health-related issues covered by *The NewsHour*. Representatives from *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* and the Kaiser Family Foundation worked together to develop the survey questionnaire and to analyze the results, with *The NewsHour* maintaining sole editorial control over its broadcasts on the surveys.

The results of this project are based on a telephone survey conducted between January 10 and February 9, 2000, among a total sample of 1,985 adults 18 years or older (921 uninsured adults and 1,064 insured adults). This includes a nationally representative random sample of 1,205 adults (167 uninsured adults and 1,064 insured adults) and a national, randomly selected oversample of 754 uninsured adults (the results are weighted to reflect the actual distribution in the nation.) Since few Americans ages 65 and older are uninsured due to the Medicare program, we present all comparisons between insured and uninsured adults based on those under age 65 (866 insured and 890 uninsured). Fieldwork was conducted by ICR/International Communications Research. The margin of sampling error for all adults is +/- 3 percent, for uninsured adults under age 65 it is +/- 3.5 percent, and for insured adults under age 65 it is +/- 3.5 percent. For results based on subsets of respondents the margin of error is higher. Note that in addition to sampling error there are other possible sources of measurement error.