

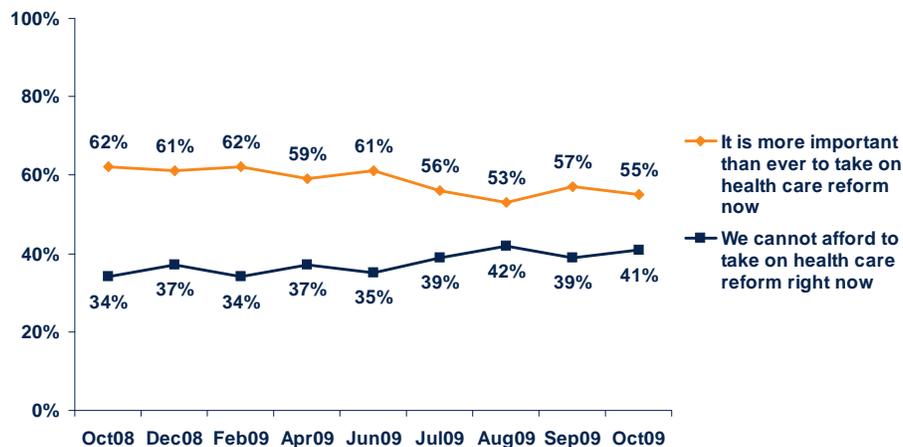
In contrast to recent months, public opinion on health care reform stabilized in October with no dramatic changes in support, opposition or even public interest. A majority continues to say now is the time for health care reform; several key proposals (individual mandate, public plan) garner public support; opinion on policy specifics remains malleable; partisans are poles apart; and a significant minority remains concerned about their personal welfare if health care reform passes.

### Health Care Reform: The Big Picture

Overall, 55 percent of Americans say it is more important than ever to take on health care reform now, compared to 57 percent last month and 53 percent in August. The large partisan divides on this question continue.

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

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



Also like last month, the October tracking survey finds the public divided between the half who would like to see Congress and the president continue trying to pass a major health care reform bill this year (49 percent) and half who would either prefer to see a more limited version pass this year (22) or would rather leave health care reform for another time (26 percent). Again, there are important divides between political groups here.

Which comes closer to your opinion about what Congress and the president should do regarding health care reform this year?

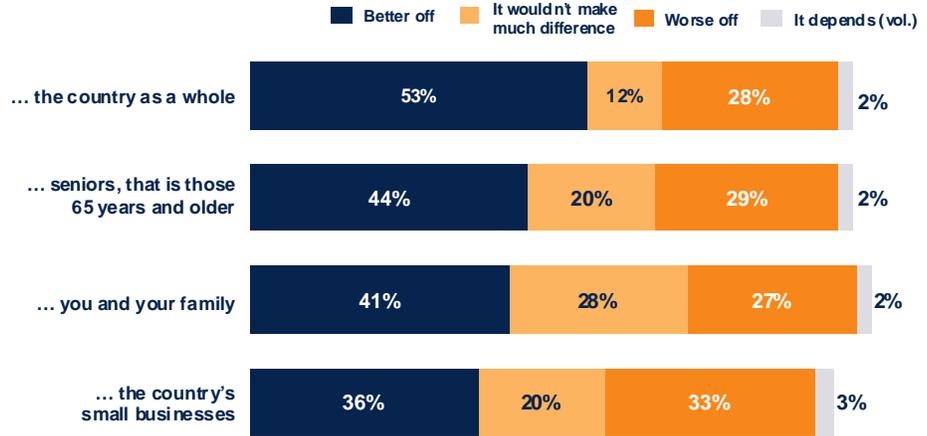
	They should continue trying to pass a major reform of the health care system	They should stop trying to pass a major reform this year and instead work on passing a more limited version	They should leave health care reform for another time
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>26%</b>
Republicans	22	30	46
Independents	48	23	25
Democrats	70	16	12

## Will Reform Help? Hurt?

There has been no large scale change in views of how reform might affect individual families, seniors or the country as a whole. Overall, Americans continue to be more likely to view reform as most beneficial to the country as a whole (53 percent). The tracking surveys also continue to find a somewhat larger percentage of Americans saying reform will be good for their own family generally (41 percent) than saying it will leave them worse off (27 percent). In a new poll question, we find that the public is more divided about the impact on small business, with 36 percent saying these key employers will be better off and nearly as many (33 percent) saying the country's small businesses will be worse off.

## Reform's Impact: Country, Seniors, Self, Small biz

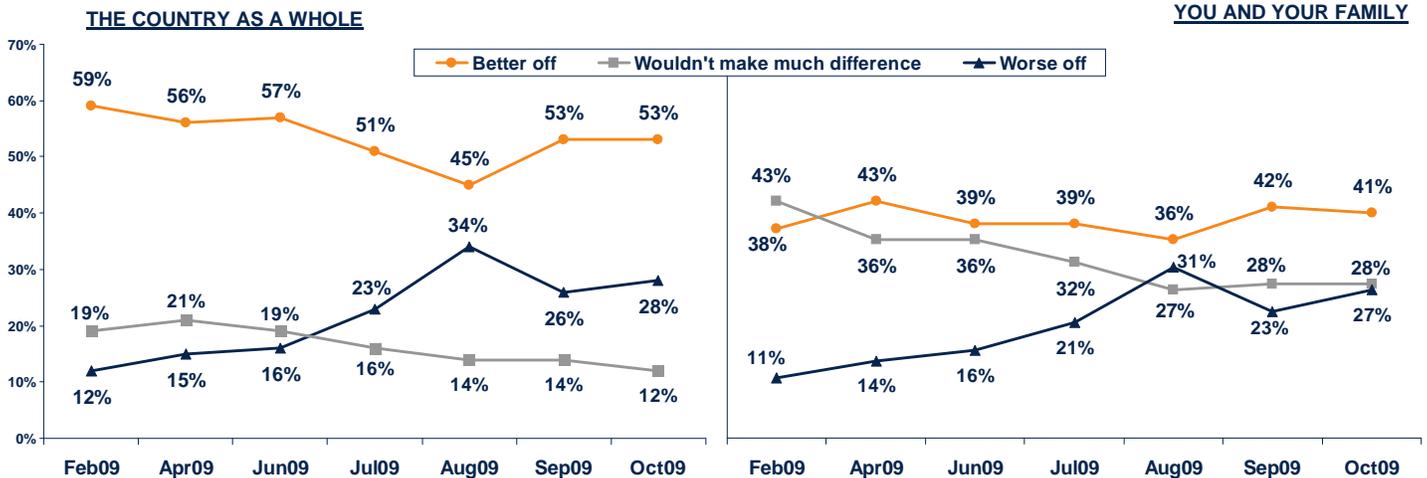
Do you think each of the following would be better off or worse off if the president and Congress passed health care reform, or don't you think it would make much difference?



Views about personal and national impact did not alter much over the course of the last month, in contrast to a rise in concern during the August town hall season and a subsequent ebb in concern in September, though the percentage who thought they personally might be worse off is up four percentage points.

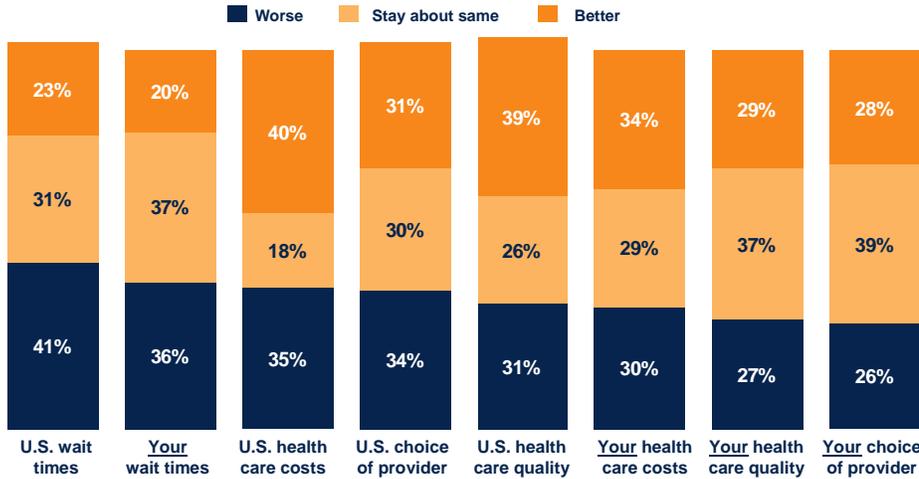
## Impact on Country and Own Family: Time Trend

Do you think ... would be better off or worse off if the president and Congress passed health care reform, or don't you think it would make much difference?



## More Detailed Look: Impact of Reform

If the president and Congress do pass health care reform, do you think that would make each of the following better, worse or would it stay about the same?



Note: National and personal items asked of separate half samples. Response wording shortened.

Similarly, there is no consistent movement in the more detailed measures we ask about impact, including impact on quality, cost, choice and wait times at the personal and national level. Americans do, however, continue to be more skeptical about the national and personal impacts of reform when questioned about specifics than when asked about impact more generally, as in the items discussed above.

For example, on the personal and family level, while 41 percent say they would be *generally* better off if health care reform passes, fewer think their costs (34 percent) or their quality (29 percent) would be better. And more say their wait times would be worse (36 percent) than see any improvement in personal wait times (20 percent).

When it comes to views of *national* impact, while Americans by a two to one margin think the overall effect of reform would be positive rather than negative, their views on the impact on national wait times, costs, quality and choice of provider are much more mixed, as seen in the chart above.

### Impact on Economy

Views are also mixed when it comes to how health care reform will impact the economy, and heavily influenced by whether the horizon in question is short term or long term.

Overall, the public is more likely to say that reform will help rather than hurt the economy in the *long term* (49 to 37 percent). In the short term, however, more see health care reform as harming the economic situation (41 percent) than helping it (32 percent).

Democrats are the most likely to see reform as being good for the country's economic situation, with

70 percent seeing it helping in the long term and 48 percent helping in the short term. A majority of Republicans see it as bad in the short term and bad in the long term.

## Health Reform and the Economy

Do you think passing health care reform would do more to help the country's ... economic situation, do more to hurt the country's ... economic situation, or wouldn't it impact the economy in the ... ?



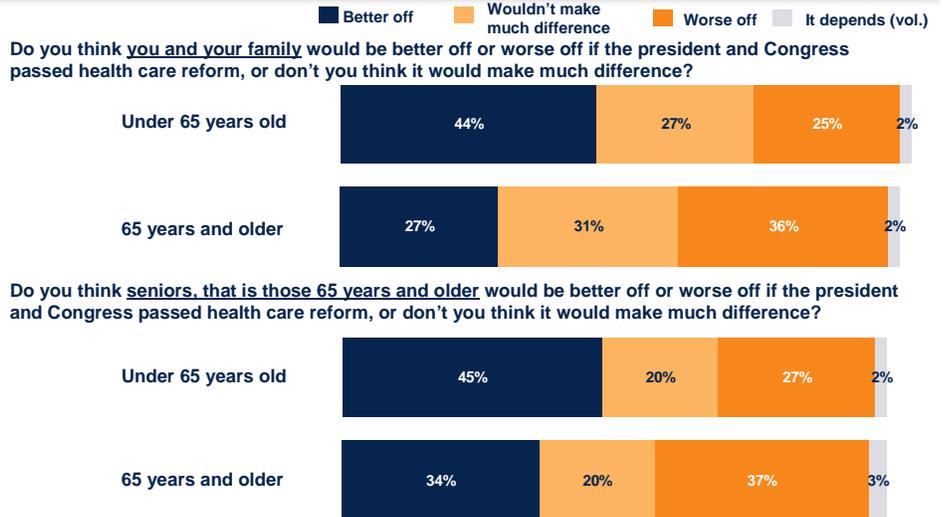
	Help short-term	No impact on short-term	Hurt short-term	Help long-term	No impact on long-term	Hurt long-term
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>37%</b>
Republicans	16	14	66	21	8	67
Independents	27	26	41	45	12	36
Democrats	48	25	24	70	10	17
18-39 years old	34	25	38	57	9	30
40-64 years old	32	22	43	45	12	39
65 and older	28	18	45	39	8	46
Want reform now	46	28	21	71	11	14
Opposed to reform now	15	15	67	20	9	67

## Impact on Seniors

As has been true in recent months, seniors – all of whom are eligible for health insurance through the Medicare program – are less likely to see reform as benefiting them and more likely to see themselves as being harmed by changes being considered by Congress and the president.

Seniors' opposition may in part be driven by proposals that would fund health care reform in part by using savings in the Medicare program. Six in ten seniors (59 percent), for example, are opposed to limiting increases in Medicare provider payments as a way to fund health care reform, a higher level of opposition than that shown by their younger counterparts (44 percent of those ages 18-64 opposed).

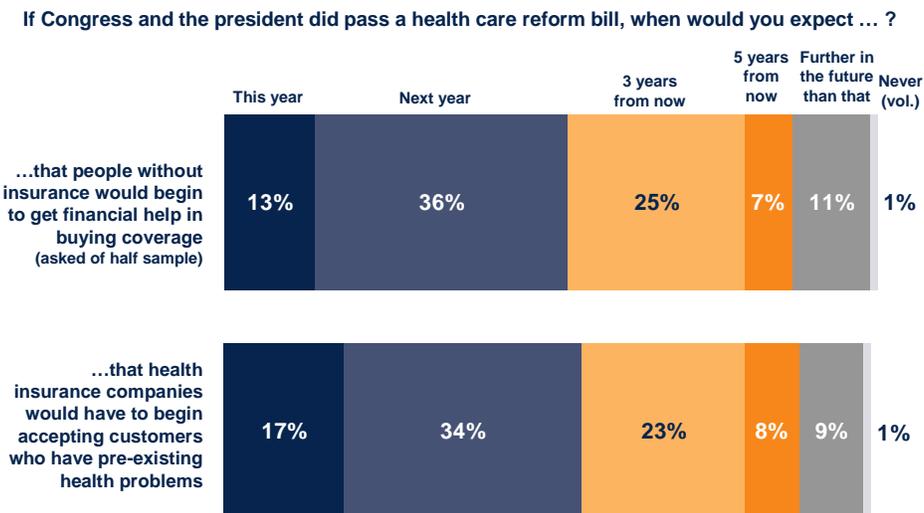
## Seniors Less Convinced Reform Will Benefit Them



## When Will Insurance Reforms and Subsidies Start? And Will They Be Enough?

In terms of timelines, roughly half the public currently believes that if reform passes, the uninsured would begin getting financial help within the next year, and roughly as many think that rules protecting those with pre-existing conditions would be phased in during the same time frame. In fact, these key provisions of the committee bills circulating on Capitol Hill would be implemented on a slower timeline.

## When Will Key Provisions Start if Reform Passes?



A narrow majority of Americans profess some skepticism about the affordability of the plans Congress and the president are discussing. Overall, 52 percent say they think most of the uninsured will still have trouble paying for adequate coverage post-reform, compared to 40 percent who think the government will provide enough financial help.

## Support Remains for Individual Mandate, Public Plan; But Opinion Malleable

Two in three Americans continue to report that they favor an individual mandate, including four in ten who favor this proposal strongly. These numbers have been roughly stable since July.

And 57 percent say they favor “creating a government-administered public health insurance option to compete with private health insurance plans,” similar to last month.

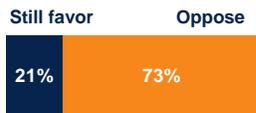
There are distinct differences across political groups here, with most Democrats and political independents in favor of both proposals, and most Republicans opposed. Republicans are particularly strong in their opposition to a public plan, with just over half (53 percent) saying they “strongly oppose” this idea.

### Individual Mandate

Would you favor or oppose requiring all Americans to have health insurance, either from their employer or from another source, with financial help for those who can't afford it?



**Supporters were asked:** What if you heard that this could mean that some people would be required to buy health insurance that they find too expensive or did not want?



**Opponents were asked:** What if you heard that without such a requirement, insurance companies would still be allowed to deny coverage to people who are sick?



Note: Follow up question on left asked of those who initially favored. Graph below it based on total, where “oppose” includes those who initially opposed along with those who opposed after hearing the follow up. Follow up question on right asked of those who initially opposed. Graph below it based on total, where “favor” includes those who initially favored along with those who favored after hearing the follow up.

Majorities of those who report currently being uninsured – many of whom would likely be required to get insurance or pay a penalty if the individual mandate passed – say they would support both an individual mandate and a public plan.

Argument testing suggests, however, that opinion has not become more firm on these topics over time. When proponents of the individual mandate are told this might mean some people might be forced to buy health insurance they didn't want, support falls to 21 percent.

Similarly, support for the public plan falls to 32 percent if people are told that this “could give the government plan an unfair advantage over private insurance companies,” one of the main messages lobbed against the public plan by those who oppose it.

When opponents are told that the public option could be fashioned to work on a trigger mechanism, most (about seven in ten in this group) still remain against the plan, though enough change their minds to bump overall support up from 57 to 65 percent.

### Public Option

Would you favor or oppose creating a government-administered public health insurance option to compete with private health insurance plans?



**Supporters were asked:** What if you heard that a public health insurance option could give the government an unfair advantage over private insurance companies?



**Opponents were asked:** What if you heard that a public health insurance option was a fallback that would only kick in if not enough people had affordable health plans available through the private marketplace?



Note: Follow up question on left asked of those who initially favored. Graph below it based on total, where “oppose” includes those who initially opposed along with those who opposed after hearing the follow up. Follow up question on right asked of those who initially opposed. Graph below it based on total, where “favor” includes those who initially favored along with those who favored after hearing the follow up.

## How to Pay for It

Overall, a majority of Americans continue to say they support increasing taxes on the wealthy and on health insurance companies who offer particularly expensive policies. Half say they would favor having health insurance companies “pay a fee based on how much business they have.”

## Some 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.

■ Strongly favor ■ Somewhat favor ■ Somewhat oppose ■ Strongly oppose



At the same time, this is the one area of the survey where we did see some change over the course of the last month. The percentage who favors raising taxes on the rich is down seven percentage points, as is the percentage who favored fees on the health insurance industry. The proportion opposed to the tax on so-called Cadillac plans is up seven percentage points.

The public is divided in their views on limiting Medicare provider payments as a way to fund reform, with 45 percent in favor and 46 percent opposed. Support for this proposal dropped 7 percentage points over the past month (from 52 percent in September).

As was true of views on the individual mandate and the public plan option, views on taxing companies that provide particularly expensive policies is quite malleable. Support ranges from 21 percent to 68 percent depending on which arguments people hear.

## Taxing Health Insurance Cos. Offering Expensive Policies

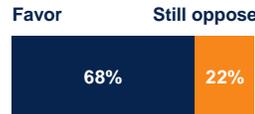
Would you favor or oppose having health insurance companies pay a tax for offering very expensive policies?



**Supporters were asked:** What if you heard that this might result in these costs being passed on to the consumer?



**Opponents were asked:** What if you heard that this will discourage expensive health insurance policies which could help lower health care costs for everyone?



Note: Follow up question on left asked of those who initially favored. Graph below it based on total, where “oppose” includes those who initially opposed along with those who opposed after hearing the follow up. Follow up question on right asked of those who initially opposed. Graph below it based on total, where “favor” includes those who initially favored along with those who favored after hearing the follow up.

## Attention/Knowledge/Ads

There was no reported increase in attention to health care reform issues despite the intense negotiations taking place on Capitol Hill, perhaps in part because these are less grabby than the August town hall fireworks and in part because attention to health care reform has reached its saturation point and will now plateau. Overall, 78 percent of Americans say they are following the debate at least somewhat closely, including 34 percent following very closely (compared to 36 percent last month).

Neither has there been an increase since last month in the proportion of Americans who say they know "a lot" about how proposals would affect them and their family (26 percent now, 24 percent last month).

And for the first time since we began tracking this year, the proportion of the public who report seeing an ad about health care reform went down. The survey, which was in the field from October 8 to the 15<sup>th</sup>, only overlapped with the first few days of a new industry advertising campaign aimed at seniors in key states.

When it comes to evaluating media coverage, half continue to say the coverage focuses mainly on politics and controversies, compared to about one in ten who say the coverage is about how reform would affect their own families and a third who view the coverage as a mix of the two.

## Emotional Reaction to Reform

### Feelings Differ Based on Perceived Urgency of Reform

Please tell me if each of the following does or does not describe your own feelings about the health care reform plans being discussed in Washington.

Yes, describes feelings...

...among those who want reform now	...among those who are opposed to reform now
Hopeful (86%)	Frustrated (75%)
Optimistic (77)	Angry (59)
Positive (72)	Confused (50)
Anxious (50)	Anxious (50)
Frustrated (49)	Hopeful (32)
Confused (49)	Optimistic (30)
Angry (27)	Positive (22)

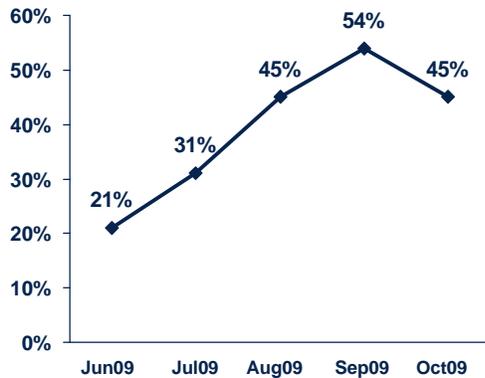
## Conclusion

Opinion on the benefits and costs of health care reform stabilized somewhat in October after a bumpy couple of months. At the same time, the last of five separate Congressional committees finished up work on their proposal for reform and the coalition of industry groups supporting reform began to show some more serious fractures. Therefore, public opinion may continue to be a moving target throughout the fall as the proposals continue to move through Congress and the media focuses attention on the emerging House and Senate proposals and then ultimately on one final bill.

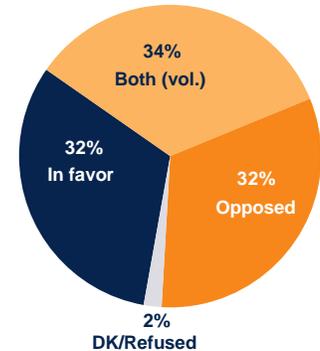
This publication (#7997) is available on the Kaiser Family Foundation's website at [www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org).

## Decrease in Reported Viewing of Ads

Percent who say during the past seven days, they have seen, heard or read any advertisements having to do with proposed changes in the health care system:



AMONG THOSE WHO SAY THEY HAVE SEEN, HEARD, OR READ ANY HEALTH REFORM ADS: As far as you could tell, were those ads in favor of or opposed to passing some sort of health care reform this year? (Oct 2009)



Hope continues to top the list of emotions evoked by the health care debate, followed closely by frustration. Anger continues to be the least commonly experienced feeling of the seven measured by the survey.

The percentage who say they are hopeful about the reform plans being discussed in Washington is down six percentage points since last month, while the percentage who report being angry is up nine points. While those opposed to reform are twice as likely to report they are angry than those in favor, the uptick in anger came from across both groups.

There is no other real change on these measures, with half the public continuing to say they are confused about the plans.