



## Health News Stories Followed By The Public

Contacts: Matt James (415) 854-9400 Chris Ferris (202) 347-5270

February 1997

The Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard Health News Index is designed to help the news media and people in the health care field gain a better understanding of what health stories in the news Americans are following and what they understand about the health issues covered in the news. Every two months, Kaiser/Harvard will issue a new index report. This fourth report is based on a survey of 1,003 American adults. The survey asked respondents about major health issues covered in the news between January 1 and February 7, 1997. For comparison purposes, respondents were also asked about other leading issues in the news during the same period.

The health issue most closely followed by Americans during the first five weeks of 1997 was the series of bombs that exploded at abortion clinics in Atlanta, GA, and Tulsa, OK; 62% of those surveyed said they followed that story very or fairly closely. Fifty-one percent said they followed the controversy over whether women in their forties should have regular mammograms.

Slightly less than half (49%) followed President Clinton's plans and policies to expand health insurance to certain uninsured people. The same proportion (49%) followed the debate about how to reform the Social Security system very or fairly closely.

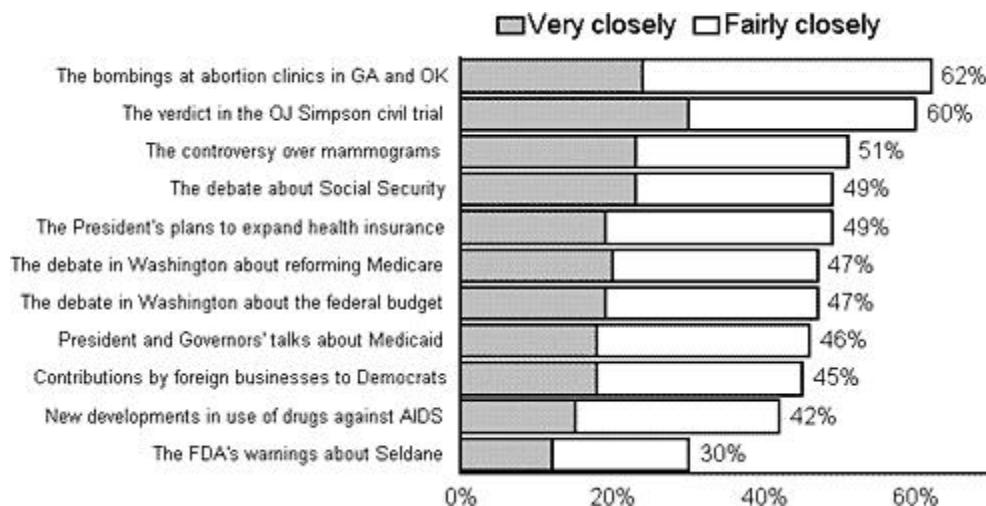
Nearly half of those surveyed said they followed the debate in Washington about the federal budget (47%) and reforming Medicare (47%), the federal program that provides health

insurance for elderly Americans. Almost half (46%) said that they had followed the discussions between the President and the nation's governors about the Medicaid program.

The reports of new developments in the use of certain drugs to fight AIDS was followed by about two in five (42%) of those surveyed. Thirty percent of Americans followed the coverage of the FDA's warnings about the allergy drug Seldane.

### The Kaiser/Harvard Health News Index

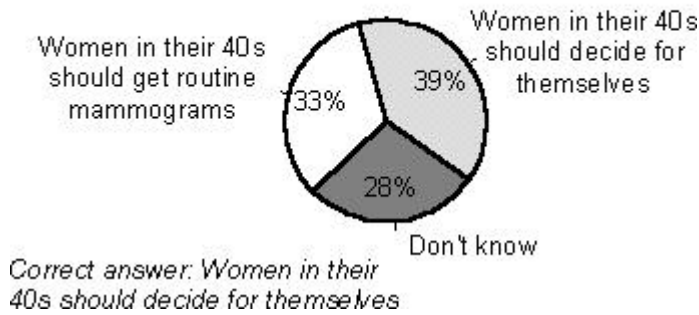
How closely Americans followed leading stories in the news from January 1 to February 7, 1997



### What the Public Understands about Health Stories in the News

In January a government panel recommended that women in their forties should decide for themselves whether to get regular mammograms. Although 51% of Americans followed this story very or fairly closely, only 39% knew what the panel had actually recommended. In December, a similar proportion (43%) knew that the National Radiological Society had advised women to start getting mammograms at age 40.

### What did the government panel advise regarding mammograms?

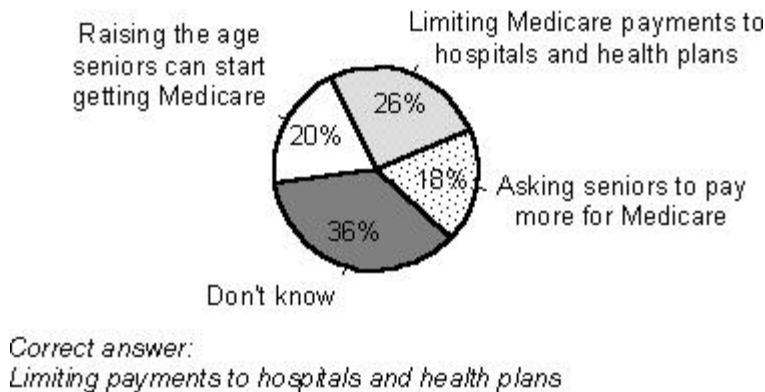


### Medicare:

Only one quarter (26%) of Americans knew that President Clinton's budget proposal included a plan to limit payments to hospitals and health plans as a way to reduce spending on Medicare. One-fifth (20%) incorrectly thought the President's proposal recommended raising the age seniors can start getting Medicare.

Nearly the same proportion (18%) said the President suggested asking seniors to pay more for their health care. More than a third (36%) said they didn't know what the President had proposed.

### What did the President's budget proposal suggest to reduce spending on Medicare?



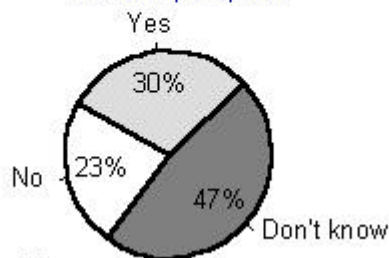
### Expanding Health Insurance to Children:

Americans knew little about President Clinton's proposal to expand health insurance to 5 million uninsured children. Only three in ten (30%) knew that in his State of the Union address the president had proposed extending health insurance to

certain groups of people.

Of the 30% who knew that the President had made such a proposal to expand health insurance, most (80%) knew that that the proposal would cover children. About two-thirds of those surveyed incorrectly said the President was proposing health care coverage for working people (71%), all low-income people (65%), and people who need long-term care (60%).

In his State of the Union address, did the President propose expanding health insurance for certain people?

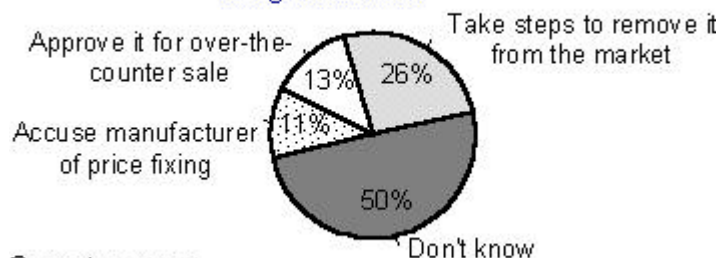


Correct answer: Yes

### Seldane:

About one-fourth (26%) of Americans knew that the FDA had taken steps to have the allergy drug Seldane removed from the market. Another quarter incorrectly thought that the FDA had approved Seldane for sale over-the-counter (13%) or had accused the manufacturer of price fixing (11%). Fifty percent said they didn't know what the FDA had done.

What did the FDA do regarding the allergy drug Seldane?



Correct answer:

Take steps to remove it from the market.