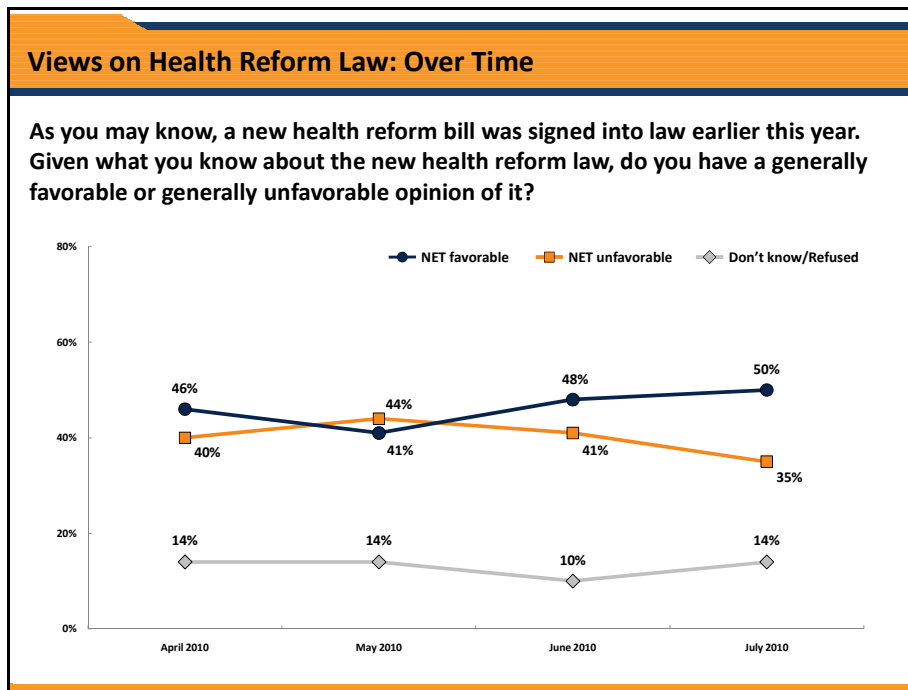


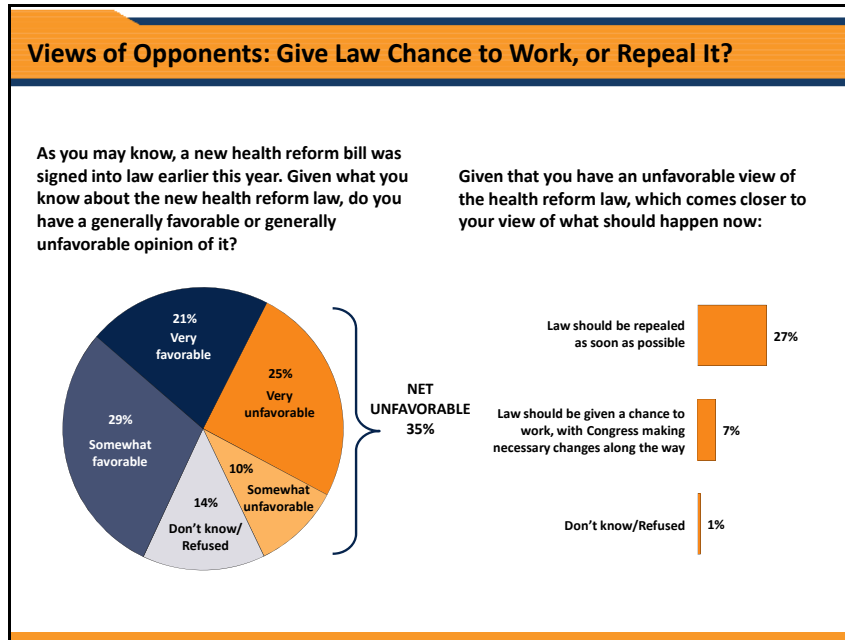
Unfavorable views of the health reform law have trended down since June, while favorable views have remained fairly steady. We took a special look at seniors in this tracking poll. As we've seen throughout the health reform debate, seniors tend to have more negative views about the new law than other adults, but still fewer than half of all seniors have an unfavorable opinion of the law. Many seniors remain unaware of the Medicare-related provisions in the new law, particularly those that would expand benefits, such as phased in prescription drug coverage in the "doughnut hole" and improved coverage of prevention benefits. Further, many seniors have misconceptions about the law; for example, half mistakenly believe the law cuts Medicare benefits that were previously provided to all people on Medicare, and more than a third think it will allow a government panel to make decisions about end-of-life care. Nearly half of seniors think the health reform law will weaken the financial status of the Medicare Trust Fund. Seniors with favorable views of the law are more likely than those with unfavorable views to be aware of some of the law's benefit improvements for Medicare. Conversely, seniors with unfavorable views are more likely to be aware of tax and premium increases included in the law, and more likely to harbor misconceptions about cuts in benefits, as well as "end-of-life panels."

Overall views of health reform

The share of the public with favorable views of the health reform law remained about the same this month, while unfavorable views trended downward. Half the public now expresses a favorable view of the law, while 35 percent say they have an unfavorable opinion (down from 41 percent in June).

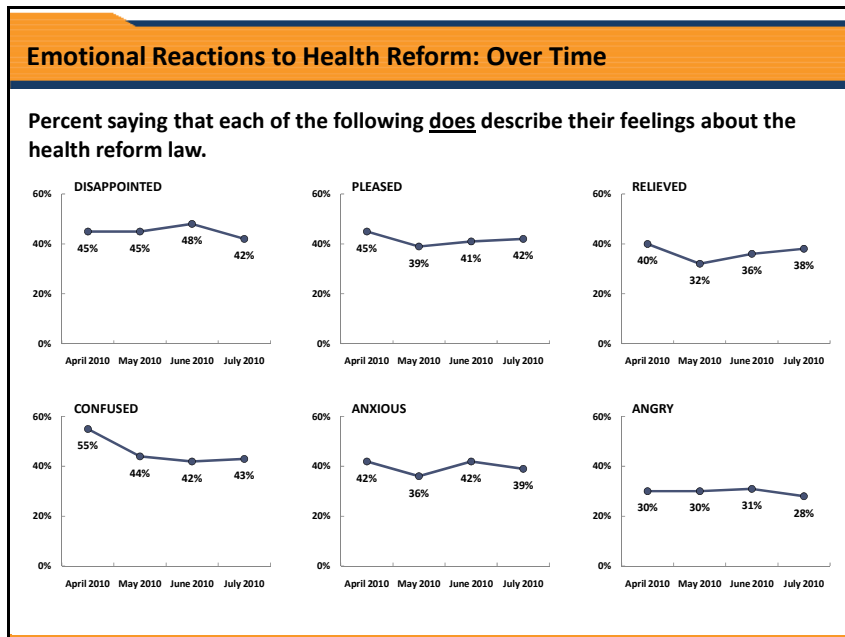


Similar to last month, when those with an unfavorable view are asked what should be done next, most choose repeal, so that 27 percent of the public overall say the law should be repealed, 7 percent have an unfavorable view but say they law should be given a chance to work, and half have a favorable view of the law.



Views of how the law will impact people personally and the country as a whole have not changed much in recent months. The public is split roughly into thirds on whether the law will leave their own family better off (32 percent), worse off (29 percent), or not make a difference (33 percent). People are somewhat more likely to see a positive rather than a negative impact for the country as a whole (43 percent vs. 35 percent), while 15 percent don't expect much difference.

There has also been little movement in people's reported level of understanding of how the law will impact them, and in people's emotional reactions to the law. More than six in ten (63 percent) say they feel they understand how the law will impact them and their family, while a third (32 percent) say they do not. About four in ten say various words describe their feelings about the law, including "confused" (43 percent), "disappointed" (42 percent), "pleased" (42 percent), "anxious" (39 percent), and "relieved" (38 percent). Fewer (28 percent) would describe themselves as "angry."



As we've seen throughout the health reform debate and since the law's passage, views of the law and its potential impacts continue to be highly partisan, with Democrats much more likely to be favorable and to perceive positive impacts, Republicans more likely to be unfavorable and perceive negative impacts, and independents somewhere in the middle.

As you may know, a new health reform bill was signed into law earlier this year. Given what you know about the new health reform law, do you have a generally favorable or generally unfavorable opinion of it?				
	All	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.
NET Favorable	50%	73%	48%	21%
Very favorable	21	33	19	6
Somewhat favorable	29	40	29	15
NET Unfavorable	35%	15%	37%	69%
Somewhat unfavorable	10	8	11	16
Very unfavorable	25	7	26	53
Don't know/ Refused	14%	12%	15%	10%

A closer look at seniors: favorability and the perceived impact on Medicare

As has been true throughout the course of the health reform debate, seniors' views of the new law are more negative than those of their younger counterparts. However, negative views still do not reach a majority level among seniors, and many are undecided or don't think the law will have much impact on them.

A plurality (46 percent) of those ages 65 and over have an unfavorable view of the law, while 38 percent are favorable and 17 percent don't know enough to say. By comparison, a majority (53 percent) of those under age 65 have a favorable view. Seniors are also less likely than younger adults to think they will personally be better off under the new law (20 percent vs. 35 percent), though the plurality of seniors (37 percent) don't think the law will make much difference for them. About a third (35 percent) of seniors think they'll be worse off.¹

	All	Ages 65+	Ages 18-64
General opinion of health reform law			
Favorable	50	38*	53
Unfavorable	35	46*	33
Don't know/Refused	14	17	14
You and your family under health reform law			
Better off	32	20*	35
No difference	33	37	32
Worse off	29	35*	27
Country as a whole under health reform law			
Better off	43	31*	46
No difference	15	18	14
Worse off	35	43*	33
Percent saying each word describes their feelings about health reform law			
Confused	43	45	43
Pleased	42	35*	44
Disappointed	42	52*	39
Anxious	39	42	38
Relieved	38	30*	40
Angry	28	37*	26

* indicates statistically significant difference between ages 18-64 and ages 65+ (p<.05)

As with the general public, seniors who identify as Democrats are more likely to express favorable views of the law, while Republicans are more likely to express negative views, and independents are somewhere in between.

¹ Note: Responses for seniors on most questions reported here do not differ significantly whether looking at all seniors, the 91 percent of seniors who say they are registered to vote, or the 76 percent of seniors who say they "always" or "nearly always" vote in mid-term elections.

When it comes to the impact on seniors and on the Medicare program, the public overall is pretty evenly split between thinking each will be better off and worse off under the new law, while pluralities of those ages 65 and over think that seniors (48 percent) and the Medicare program (43 percent) will be worse off. In each case, about a quarter of seniors think things will be better under the new law, and about one in five think there will be no difference. Again, note that while they tilt more negative than younger adults, negative views do not reach a majority among seniors.

Do you think (EACH) will be better off or worse off under the new health reform law, or don't you think it will make much difference?	All	Ages 65+	Ages 18-64
Seniors, that is those ages 65 and older			
Better off	36	23*	39
No difference	18	20	18
Worse off	36	48*	33
Don't know/Refused	10	9	10
The Medicare program			
Better off	33	25*	35
No difference	22	19	22
Worse off	30	43*	27
Don't know/Refused	15	13	15

* indicates statistically significant difference between ages 18-64 and ages 65+ (p<.05)

When asked to say in their own words why they think the Medicare program will be worse off under the new law, seniors give a variety of responses. Twenty-two percent of seniors who expect things to get worse for Medicare say it is because they foresee cuts in services or cuts to the program in general, followed by 15 percent who express general cost concerns, 9 percent who fear too much government involvement, and 8 percent who say health reform will hurt seniors in general.

What is the main reason you think the Medicare program will be worse off under the new health reform law? (Sampling of open-ended responses among seniors who say the Medicare program will be worse off)
<i>"Because I think they are cutting a lot of benefits that were already there."</i>
<i>"They will take money out of Medicare for other programs."</i>
<i>"Because decisions are made by bureaucrats rather than doctors or citizens."</i>
<i>"Too much money. It's putting the country in debt and we don't have the money to support and all it will do is raise taxes."</i>
<i>"I don't think the Congress will be able to make it work for the senior people. Seniors won't get as much benefits. They won't be able to get what they really need such as health care."</i>
<i>"They are going to cut payments to doctors and hospitals."</i>
<i>"It costs too much and everything will be rationed for old people. We will have to wait in line like in England. Cannot give insurance to so many without enough doctors so will have to be rationed."</i>

Seniors' awareness of Medicare provisions in the law

When it comes to the specific provisions of the health reform law that affect Medicare, seniors' level of awareness is mixed. About half of seniors are aware that the new law will increase the Medicare payroll tax on upper income Americans (56 percent), result in premium increases for some higher income Medicare beneficiaries (52 percent), and gradually close the "doughnut hole" (50 percent). Over four in ten recognize the law will limit increases in Medicare provider payments (44 percent) and reduce payments to Medicare Advantage plans (42 percent). However, just a third (33 percent) know the new law will eliminate co-pays and deductibles for some preventive services under Medicare, and about a quarter (26 percent) know it will provide bonuses to primary care physicians treating Medicare patients.

AMONG SENIORS: To the best of your knowledge, would you say the new law does or does not do each of the following?			
	Yes	No	DK/Ref.
Increase Medicare payroll tax for upper-income Americans	56%	25%	19%
Increase premiums some higher income people on Medicare pay to receive coverage for doctor visits and prescription drugs	52	28	20
Gradually close the Medicare "doughnut hole"	50	25	24
Limit future increases in Medicare payments to providers	44	37	19
Reduce Medicare payments to private plans, also known as Medicare Advantage plans, that provide coverage to some people on Medicare	42	31	27
Eliminate co-pays and deductibles that people previously had to pay for many preventive services under Medicare	33	45	22
Provide a bonus to physicians who provide primary care services to people on Medicare	26	44	30

Note: Question wording for some items abbreviated. See Topline: <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/8084.cfm> for full question wording.

On the other hand, large shares of seniors believe the law includes several elements that are not actually part of the legislation. Half of seniors say the law will cut benefits that were previously provided to all people on Medicare, and more than a third (36 percent) incorrectly believe the law will "allow a government panel to make decisions about end-of-life care for people on Medicare." Just over half (52 percent) also believe the law will cut payments to doctors who see Medicare patients. Prior to health reform, existing law would have cut payments to doctors by 21 percent this year. There was some discussion during the health reform debate about preventing these cuts in physician payments from taking effect, but these provisions were not included in the final health reform law. In subsequent legislation, however, Congress addressed this issue.² Many seniors may have mistakenly believed the health reform law cut payments to doctors based on what they were hearing in the news at about the same time.

AMONG SENIORS: To the best of your knowledge, would you say the new law does or does not do each of the following?			
	Yes	No	DK/Ref.
Cut payments to doctors who see Medicare patients	52%	32%	17%
Cut benefits that were previously provided to all people on Medicare	50	34	16
Allow a government panel to make decisions about end-of-life care for people on Medicare	36	48	17

² The Preservation of Access to Care for Medicare Beneficiaries and Pension Relief Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-192) averts cuts in payments to doctors until November 30.

Despite the fact that the CMS Office of the Actuary predicts the health reform law will extend the life of the Medicare Part A Trust Fund from 2017 to 2029³, nearly half (45 percent) of seniors think the health reform law will *weaken* the financial condition of the fund, compared with 14 percent who think it will be strengthened and three in ten who say it will have no impact.

AMONG SENIORS: Do you think the health reform law will (strengthen) the financial condition of the Medicare trust fund that pays for hospital services, (weaken) the financial condition of the Medicare trust fund, or will it not have much of an impact?	
Strengthen	14
Weaken	45
Not much impact	30
Don't know/Refused	11

Seniors' perceptions of the law's impact on Medicare beneficiaries

More than half of seniors think that with the new law, it will be more difficult for people on Medicare to find a doctor who is willing to see them (57 percent) and to get the health care services they need (53 percent), while fewer than four in ten of those under age 65 express these views. Half of seniors (compared with 37 percent of younger adults) think the average person on Medicare will have to spend more money on health care out of their own pocket under the new law, while about one in ten seniors say they'll spend less and a third say it won't make much difference.

With the new law, do you think...	All	Ages 65+	Ages 18-64
...it will be easier, harder or about the same as it is now for the average person on Medicare to find a doctor who is willing to see them?			
Easier	25	13*	28
Same as it is now	28	25	29
Harder	42	57*	39
...it will be easier, harder or about the same as it is now for the average person on Medicare to get the health care services they need?			
Easier	28	14*	32
Same as it is now	27	25	28
Harder	39	53*	36
...the average person on Medicare will have to spend (more) out of their own pocket, (less) out of their own pocket, or about the same amount they spend now on health care?			
Less	23	11*	25
About the same	32	33	32
More	40	50*	37

* indicates statistically significant difference between ages 18-64 and ages 65+ (p<.05)

Link between awareness, perceptions, and favorable/unfavorable views

In an effort to learn more about what might be driving seniors' opinions of the health reform law, we looked at differences in awareness and perceptions between seniors with a favorable and an unfavorable view of the law. Overall, we find that those with a favorable view are more likely to be aware of some provisions that are likely to benefit people on Medicare, while those with an unfavorable view are more likely to be aware of increases in taxes and premiums that occur under the law, and more likely to incorrectly think the law includes cuts in benefits or that it allows a government panel to make end-of-life care decisions.

³ Office of the Actuary, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, "Estimated Effects of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, as Amended on the Year of Exhaustion for the Part A Trust Fund, Part B Premiums, and Part A and Part B Coinsurance Amounts," April 22, 2010.

Not surprisingly, seniors with an unfavorable view of the law are much more likely than those with a favorable view to say the Medicare program will be worse off (76 percent vs. 11 percent). Overwhelming majorities of those who are unfavorable think the new law will make it harder for the average person on Medicare to find doctors willing to treat them (86 percent) and to get the care they need (80 percent), and increase their out-of-pocket costs (77 percent). Between a fifth and a quarter of seniors with a favorable view express these same opinions. Three-quarters (77 percent) of those with an unfavorable view think the law will weaken the condition of the Medicare trust fund, compared with just 15 percent of those with a favorable view.

Seniors who view the law unfavorably are more than twice as likely as those with favorable views to mistakenly believe the law will cut benefits previously provided to all beneficiaries (70 percent vs. 32 percent), and more than three times as likely to believe it allows government panels to make end-of-life decisions for people on Medicare (55 percent vs. 17 percent).

In terms of awareness of provisions that are actually included in the law, differences between seniors with favorable and unfavorable views are mixed. Those with a favorable view are more likely to recognize that the law gradually closes the doughnut hole and provides bonuses to primary care physicians, while those with an unfavorable view are more likely to know about the increase in the Medicare payroll tax and premium increases for some higher income beneficiaries.

	Seniors with a favorable view of the law	Seniors with an unfavorable view of the law
Percent who say the following about the new law...		
Medicare program will be worse off under the new law	11	76*
Will make it harder for people on Medicare to find doctors	26	86*
Will make it harder for people on Medicare to get needed health care	20	80*
Will increase out-of-pocket health care costs for people on Medicare	21	77*
Weakens financial condition of the Medicare trust fund	15	77*
Percent who believe law will do each of the following...		
Cut benefits previously provided to all people on Medicare**	32	70*
Allow a government panel to make decisions about end-of-life care**	17	55*
Cut payments to doctors who see Medicare patients**	33	76*
Gradually close the Medicare "doughnut hole"	62	48*
Provide a bonus to primary care physicians treating people on Medicare	35	20*
Increase premiums for some higher income Medicare recipients	40	63*
Increase Medicare payroll tax for upper-income Americans	49	66*
Eliminate cost-sharing for some preventive services	37	31
Reduce Medicare payments to Medicare Advantage plans	44	44
Limit future increases in Medicare payments to providers	42	52

Note: Question wording abbreviated. See Topline: <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/8084.cfm> for full question wording.

* indicates statistically significant difference between seniors with favorable and unfavorable views (p<.05)

** indicates provisions that are not actually included in the health reform law.

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, Claudia Deane, Carolina Gutiérrez, and Theresa Boston. The survey was conducted July 8 through July 13, 2010, among a nationally representative random sample of 1,504 adults ages 18 and older, including 406 adults ages 65 and older. Telephone interviews conducted by landline (1,100) and cell phone (404, including 125 who had no landline telephone) were carried out in English and Spanish. The margin of sampling error for the total sample is plus or minus 3 percentage points, for those ages 18 to 64 it is plus or minus 4 percentage points, and for those ages 65 and older it is plus or minus 6 percentage points. For results based on subgroups, the margin of sampling error may be higher. The full question wording, results, charts and a brief on the poll can be viewed online at <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/8084.cfm>

Additional copies of this publication (#8084-F) are available on the Kaiser Family Foundation's website at www.kff.org.