

WOULD A SINGLE PAYER SYSTEM HELP REDUCE HEALTH CARE COSTS?

With a presidential election on the horizon, health care has once again become a subject of intense debate. The ranks of the uninsured continue to increase and include a growing number of full-time workers who cannot afford the cost of health insurance, as employers continue to shift costs to employees. The growth of uninsured further escalates health care cost increases as the cost of providing care to the uninsured is passed on to those with insurance.

A spirited discussion on the ISCEBS listserve regarding potential solutions to the rise in health care costs, and whether or not a single payer system akin to that in Canada is a viable option, served as the basis for this member survey. Over 400 members shared their opinions on this highly debated topic.

Seventy-nine percent of the respondents believe Americans should, as a matter of social justice and equity, have access to health care at an affordable cost. Sixty-two percent of the respondents opposed a single payer system in principle. When looking at respondents who do not have health insurance through their employer, opposition to a single payer system in principle dropped to 52%.

Approximately half of the respondents said that support for the single payer concept does depend on whether it will slow the rising cost of health care. This suggests that some respondents would shift to supporting a single payer system if it could slow the rising cost of health care.

However, respondents were skeptical that a government-run health care system would achieve cost-reduction savings. Seventy-one percent disagreed that health care costs would be more reasonable because government would manage resources (i.e., preventing hospitals from acquiring expensive technology readily available at another hospital). The split between agree (41%) and disagree (59%) narrowed when asked if lower reimbursement rates established by the government (similar to Medicare) would make health care costs more reasonable. The respondents were evenly split as to whether a single payer system would lower administrative costs (such as eliminating COBRA, etc.). Sixty-nine percent of the respondents agreed that there would be LESS innovation under a single payer system.

Several questions regarding quality were put to the members. An overwhelming 70% of the respondents agreed that there would be reduced quality of care under a single payer system. Further, 69% agreed that a single payer system would create long waits for necessary care.

Looking at the economy, 68% of the respondents did not feel that a single payer system could stimulate economic growth by freeing up capital which could be invested in other parts of the economy.

When weighing in on the inevitable—paying for rising health care costs—41% of the respondents voted for the status quo. Twelve percent favored a national sales tax, while 43% suggested any combination of payroll, employer or national sales tax could be an effective way.

The demographics of the survey respondents showed that 60% worked in organizations with over 500 employees, 90% have health insurance through their employer and 88% have over ten years of industry experience.

Special thanks to Society members Doug Quick, CEBS, Actuarial Consulting Group, Richmond, Virginia and Ted Carlson, CEBS, Carlsons Consulting in Houston, Texas for helping with the survey and results.



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SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. I believe all Americans should have, as a matter of social justice and equity, access to health care at an affordable cost.
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Strongly Disagree	9%
Disagree	13%
Agree	51%
Strongly Agree	27%
Total	100%

2. In principle, I oppose a single payer system.
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Strongly Disagree	13%
Disagree	25%
Agree	28%
Strongly Agree	34%
Total	100%

3. My support for a single payer system depends on whether it will slow the rising cost of health care.
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Strongly Disagree	21%
Disagree	32%
Agree	35%
Strongly Agree	12%
Total	100%

4. A single payer system would generally HELP economic growth and competitiveness by freeing up capital which could be invested in other sectors of the economy.
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Strongly Disagree	29%
Disagree	39%
Agree	26%
Strongly Agree	6%
Total	100%

5. A single payer system would result in less innovation.
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Strongly Disagree	5%
Disagree	25%
Agree	38%
Strongly Agree	31%
Total	100%

6. It would cost LESS to administer a single payer system by a significant amount because a universal program would streamline claim handling, reduce distribution expenses and eliminate compliance costs (COBRA administration, etc.).

Strongly Disagree	21%
Disagree	31%
Agree	31%
Strongly Agree	17%
Total	100%

7. Under a single payer system, health care costs would be more reasonable because the government would establish reimbursement rates to providers as they currently do under Medicare.

Strongly Disagree	18%
Disagree	41%
Agree	34%
Strongly Agree	7%
Total	100%

8. Under a single payer system, health care costs would be more reasonable because the government would more effectively manage resources (for example, prevent hospitals from acquiring expensive technology that is readily available at another hospital).

Strongly Disagree	29%
Disagree	42%
Agree	25%
Strongly Agree	4%
Total	100%

9. Under a single payer system, government price controls would result in reduced quality of care.

Strongly Disagree	4%
Disagree	25%
Agree	39%
Strongly Agree	31%
Total	100%

10. Creation of a single payer system will create long waits for necessary care.

Strongly Disagree	3%
Disagree	28%
Agree	40%
Strongly Agree	29%
Total	100%

11. The best way to pay for rising health care costs is:

Payroll Tax	2%
Employer Tax	2%
National Sales Tax	12%
Any Combination of 1, 2, or 3	43%
Same as Current	41%
Total	100%

DEMOGRAPHICS

12. Employer Size

One Employee	4%
2-500	35%
500-1,000	6%
1,000+	54%
Total	100%

13. Do you have health insurance through your employer?

Yes	90%
No	10%
Total	100%

14. Years working in employee benefits

1-5	2%
6-10	10%
11-20	39%
20+	49%
Total	100%