Cornell survey: Health insurance reform a top priority for New Yorkers

Most New Yorkers view health insurance and health care costs as important issues that should be addressed by New York's government leaders, and they are willing to pay higher taxes to reduce the number of uninsured, according to a new Cornell study.

Among the key findings:

- Nine in 10 New York residents want the state's elected officials to reduce the number of uninsured and reduce the costs of health coverage and health care;
- New Yorkers support expanding public coverage through existing programs; 60 percent would be willing to pay $50 or more a year to reduce the number of uninsured by 25 percent;
- New Yorkers are open to a range of possible reform options, including a model that shares responsibility among employers, employees and the government, a single-payer system and high deductible health plans.
- A majority of New York employers agree that responsibility for health insurance rests with employers as well as workers above the poverty level, while they cite costs as a major barrier to offering coverage.
- Employers indicate they would be likely to continue to offer private coverage even if public coverage expands. However, they say the availability of public coverage could alter how they do business, for example, by changing decisions about pay raises and eligibility for coverage.

The study, funded by the New York State Health Foundation and conducted by researchers in the Department of Policy Analysis and Management in Cornell's College of Human Ecology, reveals the opinions of upstate and downstate New York residents and employers on health insurance reform options. The report provides an important baseline for policymakers seeking to assess the views of New Yorkers and to compare the results of future opinion polls.

"Our research indicates that New Yorkers have strong feelings about health insurance reform," said Kosali Simon, the associate professor of policy analysis and management who leads the project at Cornell. "It will be important to continually gauge opinions of employers and residents as details of reform packages are hammered out at either the state or national level."

"New Yorkers are clearly demanding solutions to the problem of the uninsured," said New York State Health Foundation President and CEO James R. Knickman. "The current economic downturn affirms the link between economic security and health security. We need to keep pushing forward on a health reform agenda now more than ever."

The research is based on the findings from quantitative and qualitative research conducted throughout the spring of 2008.

Quantitative work for this study was conducted by Cornell's Survey Research Institute. The full report, "Informing Health Care Reform Options for New York State," can be found at http://www.human.cornell.edu/che/PAM/Research/upload/nyshealth08.pdf.

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