



# What Ohioans Ages 65 and over Think about *Healthcare Reform*

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Results From The Health Foundation of Greater Cincinnati



Americans over the age of 65 are an important demographic group to understand when thinking about healthcare reform. They have possibly the most to lose with healthcare reform: their access to Medicare, an affordable, government-run, essentially universal health insurance system that covers the vast majority of Ohioans and Americans ages 65 and older.

Both supporters and opponents of healthcare reform see older adults as a key audience that could affect next year's Congressional elections. Senior citizens are more likely to vote than adults ages 18-64, and the difference is much larger in elections that do not include presidential races.

Older adults are paying more attention to the healthcare reform debate than adults ages 18-64. Some groups are playing on the fears of older adults with discussions of death panels and Medicare benefit cuts. But despite all this noise, results from the Fall 2009 *Ohio Health Issues Poll* show that Ohio adults ages 65 and older largely support healthcare reform.

## Older Ohioans Satisfied with, Want to Keep their Insurance

Nine out of ten Ohio adults ages 65 and over (93%) are insured, compared to three out of four Ohio adults ages 18-64 (77%). Almost all Ohioans ages 65 and

### Health Insurance

#### Currently insured



#### Satisfied with my current health insurance plan (asked of insured Ohioans only)



#### Being able to keep the health insurance plan I have now is extremely important



### Proposed Healthcare Reform Changes

#### Think a public option will improve the healthcare system



#### Think that paying doctors to prevent and manage illness rather than for each test and procedure will improve the healthcare system



#### Favor a mandate requiring all Americans to have health insurance



#### Favor tax breaks to help people buy private insurance



#### Favor a mandate requiring all employers to offer insurance or pay into a fund to cover those without insurance



older (96%) were satisfied with their current health insurance plan. And Older Ohioans want to keep their current insurance: 3 out of 4 Ohioans ages 65 and older (77%) said it was extremely important to be able to keep their current health insurance.

## Older Ohioans Support Changes to the Healthcare System

The healthcare reform debate includes many changes to the system, some of which are supported by older Ohioans. Two-thirds of Ohioans ages 65

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These findings unless otherwise noted are from The Health Foundation of Greater Cincinnati's *Ohio Health Issues Poll*, part of the *Ohio Poll* conducted September 16-26, 2009, by the Institute for Policy Research at the University of Cincinnati. A random sample of 818 adults from throughout Ohio was interviewed by telephone. In 95 of 100 cases, statewide estimates will be accurate to  $\pm 3.4\%$ . In addition to sampling error, there are other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as non-response, question wording, or context effects that can introduce error or bias. For more information about the *Ohio Health Issues Poll*, please visit [www.healthfoundation.org/ohip.html](http://www.healthfoundation.org/ohip.html).

and over (66%) thought that a public option would improve the current healthcare system. Just over half of older Ohioans (57%) thought a change in the way that doctors are paid to focus on preventive care would improve the current healthcare system. Over 60% of older Ohioans also favor having individual and employer mandates and offering tax breaks to help people buy private health insurance.

### Choice and Affordability Important to Older Ohioans, but Keeping Current Plan MOST Important

Choice and affordability in healthcare and insurance are extremely important to Ohioans ages 65 and over. For example, older Ohioans felt it was extremely important to be able to choose any doctor or hospital (83%), to keep their current health insurance plan (77%), and to get affordable insurance regardless of age or medical history (74%).

Not surprisingly, Ohioans ages 65 and over have slightly different healthcare priorities than Ohio adults ages 18–64. When asked to identify what was MOST important, keeping their current health insurance plan topped the list for seniors. For Ohio adults ages 18–64, the MOST important issue was having their health insurance plan cover any medical test or treatment they and their doctor think they need.

### Seniors Say Healthcare Reform Will Not Increase Costs, Lower Healthcare Quality

Despite the discussions of death panels and Medicare cuts that flooded the media in August and September, Ohio’s seniors think that healthcare reform will not increase their costs or lower the quality of their healthcare. Ohioans ages 65 and older seem to think that healthcare reform will mostly keep things the same for them, if not make them better.

#### Important Healthcare Issues

##### Being able to choose any doctor or hospital is extremely important



##### Being able to keep the health insurance plan I have now is extremely important



##### Being able to get affordable health insurance regardless of age or medical history is extremely important



##### Having my health insurance plan cover any medical test or treatment I or my doctor think I need is extremely important



##### Being able to get affordable health insurance regardless of whether I am employed or not is extremely important



#### Individual Effects of Healthcare Reform

##### Healthcare reform will make the quality of my healthcare better or keep it the same



##### Healthcare reform will make the cost of insurance better or keep it the same



##### Healthcare reform will make out-of-pocket costs better or keep them the same



##### Healthcare reform will make wait times for nonemergency procedures better or keep them the same



##### Healthcare reform will make my choice of doctors better or keep it the same



■ Better      ■ About the same