

National Survey Finds Public Split on Medicare for All, in Favor of a Medicaid Buy In Policy

Public more supportive of policies when described as an expansion of Medicare or Medicaid.

A recent poll conducted by researchers at Boston University and Harvard University found that the public is divided on support for Medicare for All proposals but have strong support for Medicaid Buy In. The research also found that when people are given the names of the policies and the policies are described as an expansion of an existing program they are more likely to support the policy. The national poll looked at public support of two health care reform proposals described with and without the terms Medicare and Medicaid. A poll of 5,051 respondents was conducted over the period of September 12 through 26, 2018 by Civis Analytics.

“Medicare for All has dominated the media over the last few years and it is evident that the attention means that more people have strongly held opinions of the policy” said Mahesh Karra, Assistant Professor of Global Development Policy at Boston University’s Frederick S. Pardee School of Global Studies. “People like Medicare and despite the belief that voters would not support an expansion of the program, we find that support among all groups increases when Medicare is used to describe a single payer reform.”

On the other hand, Medicaid Buy In, a policy that has begun to be discussed in several states that would allow people to purchase Medicaid plans, has significantly higher support. Many people did not have an opinion of the policy but of those supporting the policy outnumber those opposed by a factor of five to one. “Medicaid Buy In likely enjoys strong support because of the idea that the program is a choice and opens a popular program to the larger public,” said Emma Sandoe, a Health Policy Ph.D. student at Harvard University. “The policy also has not been in the political spotlight, which means political polarization has not sorted support based on their political parties.”

Support is split on Medicare for All but strong for a Medicaid Buy In proposal

The public is split on support for a Medicare for All proposal with more people opposed to the plan than favor. However more people are in support of the proposal when the words Medicare for All are used and the program is described as an expansion of Medicare.

- In total, 36.1 percent of poll respondents are in favor of a “Medicare for All” plan, 38.0 percent are opposed to this plan and 25.9 percent have no opinion.
- 51.3 percent of poll respondents are in favor of a “Medicaid Buy In” plan and 9.6 percent are opposed while 39.1 percent have no opinion.

Support varies by age

Medicare for All, or the single payer program available to all, enjoys the strongest support among Millennials while Baby Boomers and those over the age of 65 are less likely to support the reform. People over the age of 65 are less likely to oppose Medicare for All when the program is described as an expansion of Medicare.

- People under the age of 64 have a 3.0 percentage point higher likelihood of supporting Medicare for All compared to people over the age of 65.
- People under the age of 64 have a 7.8 percentage point higher likelihood of supporting Medicaid Buy-In compared to people over the age of 65.

Using Medicare and Medicaid to describe the programs encourage support.

This poll shows that people are more comfortable with policies that are viewed as expansions of current policies than new programs. Medicare and Medicaid both poll highly with the general public. This poll draws comparisons with prior polling around the public support of the Affordable Care Act. In that polling people were generally supportive of the Affordable Care Act when described the policy but opposition grew when the name “Obamacare” was used to describe the program. Here, we see that support increases when the names of the programs are used to describe the policies.

- When poll respondents are given the terms “Medicare for All” to describe the policy of a single government run program, respondents have a 3.4 percentage points higher likelihood of describing the policy favorably than when they are given the policy without the terms “Medicare for All.”
- When people are given the term “Medicaid Buy In”, respondents respond 5.1 percentage points more likely to respond favorably to the policies than if they are described the policies without the term “Medicaid Buy In”.

Additionally, like the Affordable Care Act, support for the components of the policy is stronger than overall support. People believe that these policies will achieve goals that are important to the public like reducing health care costs, improving access to care, and providing good health care coverage.

- People believe that Medicare for All and Medicaid Buy In policies would keep their health care costs low with 49.6 percent agreeing with this statement and 20.6 percent disagreeing with this statement.
- People agree that these policies would improve coverage, access to care, and would be available to people that earned the benefits at high rates.
- People believe that Medicaid Buy In and Medicare for All policies would disrupt the current health care system.