

Senior Citizens More Wary of Health Care Reform; Many Unaware of Changes that Affect Medicare

Senior citizens are more negative about health care reform than their younger counterparts, with 46 percent of seniors holding an unfavorable view of the law, while 38 percent hold a favorable opinion, a Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll for July 2010 reports.¹ While 35 percent of seniors think they are worse off under reform, a greater share, 57 percent, say they will be better off (20 percent) or it will make no difference (37 percent), Kaiser said.

Senior citizens also had mixed awareness about the specific provisions of the new law that affect Medicare. For example, 52 percent were aware that the new law will result in premium increases for some higher income Medicare beneficiaries; while 50 percent knew it will gradually close the Medicare “doughnut hole” for prescription drug costs. However, only 33 percent knew the law will eliminate Medicare co-pays and deductibles for some preventive services.

Large shares of seniors mistakenly believe the law includes provisions that cut some previously universal Medicare benefits and creates “death panels.” About 50 percent said the law will cut benefits that were previously provided to all people on Medicare, and 36 percent incorrectly believe the law will “allow a government panel to make decisions about end-of-life care for people on Medicare.”

In addition, the Kaiser Poll reports that only 14 percent of seniors know that Medicare’s actuaries predict the health care reform law will extend the life of the Medicare Part A Trust Fund by 12 years from 2017 to 2029. Nearly half, about 45 percent, of seniors think the health reform law will weaken the financial condition of the fund.

HealthSMART Tip: Senior citizens should review their Medicare booklets for 2011 to be aware of new benefits. For those with traditional Medicare, certain preventive services will now be covered without a required co-payment, beginning January 2011. These include **mammograms** and **colorectal cancer screenings, bone mass measuring, and nutritional counseling for those at risk of diabetes**. Under health care reform, Medicare beneficiaries are also entitled to a free annual wellness checkup beginning in 2011, so take advantage of this opportunity to develop a plan for your personal health. A proactive plan can help you avoid outbreaks of chronic diseases and can help reduce overall health care costs.

To view the complete Kaiser Health Tracking Poll – July 2010, go to:
<http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/8084.cfm>

¹ Kaiser Family Foundation. *Kaiser Health Tracking Poll - July 2010*. July 29, 2010. Available at: <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/8084.cfm>