

Poll: Many Americans fear growing health costs

AP Associated Press

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WASHINGTON – As Washington considers overhauling the nation's health care system, a new poll finds considerable concern about health costs, with nearly half of all Americans worried about paying for future care.

Nearly one in four people expressed fear of losing coverage in the next year. About the same number reported that they or a family member delayed seeing a doctor in the past year because of what it might cost.

The survey, released Wednesday, was conducted by the University of Michigan to measure consumer confidence in the health care system. The study was financed by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, a health care philanthropy.

In its measure of consumer confidence about insurance coverage and access to care, the poll found a drop of 1.3 points from April to May. The confidence index, which the pollster and foundation officials initiated in May, was fixed at 100 points and dropped to 98.7. The index will be tracked and released monthly.

Overall, 46 percent of those polled worried they would not be able to afford health care in the future. In February, the government estimated that health care costs this year would average \$8,160 for every man, woman and child in the U.S. — an increase of \$356 per person from 2008.

Concerns about losing insurance coverage in the next year were reported by 24 percent of those surveyed. The biggest group fearing such a loss was between 50 and 64 years old, and more females than males fretted about losing their health insurance.

"As the economy continues to falter, health care insecurity is becoming an even greater issue," said Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, president and chief executive of the foundation, which provides extensive financing for health care research.

One of the brighter findings of the poll: 86 percent of people reported receiving quality health care — described as either good, very good or excellent. And 88 percent had health insurance.

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The Senate measure would cost about \$1 trillion over 10 years, but leave 37 million people uninsured, according to an analysis from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office.

The survey for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation asked about the importance of health care reform as part of the Obama administration's approach to addressing the economic crisis. More than three in four people, 86 percent, saw health care reform as an integral part of tackling the nation's economic woes.

The monthly telephone survey of more than 500 people had a margin of error of plus or minus 4.3 percentage points.

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Health survey: <http://www.rwjf.org/confidence>