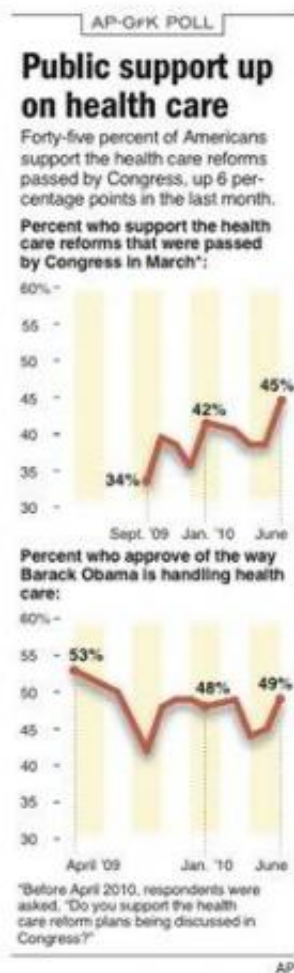


AP-GfK poll: Public thumbs up for Obama health law

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Graphic shows poll results on public opinion about health care

(AP) -- The vital signs are improving for President Barack Obama's health care plan.

The latest Associated Press-GfK poll on Obama's top domestic achievement finds support for the new overhaul has risen to its highest point since the survey started asking people about it in September - six months before it became law.

The results now: 45 percent in favor, 42 percent opposed. That's a significant shift in public sentiment considering that opposition hit 50 percent after Obama signed the health plan into law in late March and that in May, supporters were outnumbered 39 percent to 46 percent.

"I thought when people began to realize what was in the health care package that they would see it's a good, solid program and that would dispel some of the misinformation," said Brigham Young University English professor Claudia Harris, 72, of Orem, Utah.

Electrical contractor Kerry Eisley of Moscow, Pa., said he thinks people are starting to get nuts-and-bolts information on how the law affects them.

"If we can insure more people across the United States and get the cost of health care down, I think that's a better thing," said Eisley, 43, a Republican who supports the plan, which passed without the vote of any GOP lawmaker.

The poll found support increased since May among men (from 36 percent to 46 percent), people in their prime working years (from 35 percent to 49 percent among 30-49 year-olds) and Republicans (from 8 percent to 17 percent.) The uptick among Republicans comes even as party leaders are calling for the law's repeal.

The changes coincide with a concerted effort by the Obama administration, congressional Democrats and their allies to sell the immediate benefits of the law.

Among the selling points: coverage for young adults on their parents' plan until they turn 26; a \$250 rebate check for older people with high prescription costs; tax credits for some small businesses that cover their employees; and federal money to train more primary care doctors and nurses.

"They are clearly making progress in convincing more Americans that this bill is the right way to go," said Robert Blendon, a Harvard University public health school professor who tracks opinion trends on health care.

Despite the gains, the prognosis for Obama and the Democrats is guarded.

"In my view, they can claim victory if it gets a majority," Blendon added. "The country is so polarized, it just might not make it."

The \$1 trillion, 10-year health care remake puts the nation on a path to coverage for all. Starting in 2014, everyone in the U.S. will be required to carry health insurance. The government will provide tax credits to help middle-class people not covered at work buy a policy through new competitive health insurance markets. Medicaid will be expanded to help low-income people. The plan is paid for through a combination of Medicare cuts and tax increases.

One complication for the president is that older people remain opposed to the law. Just last week, Obama answered questions at a televised town hall meeting in a senior center, but his assurances seem to be having little effect. The poll found that 56 percent of people 65 and older don't like

the new law.

"I don't know if it's sustainable, and that's got us worried," said Audrey Guillot, 69, whose family owns a general store in Pierre Part, La. "How much can we borrow? How long before other countries start calling in our debts? Medicare is about to go broke - when do you address that? How many bridges to nowhere can we build?"

The poll found that 51 percent trust Democrats to do a better job of handling health care, an issue that more than three-fourths rate as personally important to them. By comparison, 38 percent said they trusted Republicans.

Daniel Lowery, 23, a shipper at a Lowe's distribution center in Ohio, said he thinks Democrats "are headed in the right direction, for the most part." But he complained they haven't clearly explained how the complex law works.

"I think people would be more for it if they actually explained what they're giving us, because I barely know, and I watch news every day," said Lowery, who lives in Fostoria, south of Toledo.

The AP-GfK Poll involved landline and cell phone interviews with 1,044 randomly chosen adults and was conducted by GfK Roper Public Affairs & Corporate Communications from June 9-14. It has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 4.3 percentage points.

More information: <http://www.ap-gfcpoll.com/>

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