

# Support for Massachusetts landmark health reform law rises in 2011

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A new poll by the Harvard School of Public Health and The Boston Globe finds 63% of Massachusetts residents support the health care reform legislation enacted in 2006, 21% oppose it while 6% are not sure and 9% have not heard or read about the law. The percentage of residents supporting the law has increased since a 2009 poll (53%). Support for the law varied by party affiliation, with 77% of Democrats, 60% of Independents, and 40% of Republicans saying they support the legislation. The poll was conducted May 24-26, 2011.

Despite a difficult financial environment in the state, the [poll](#) found that 74% want the law to continue, with 51% favoring continuing it with some changes and 23% continuing it as is. Only 9% of state residents favored repealing the health reform law. There has been virtually no change in those wanting to repeal the legislation since the 2009 poll (10%).<sup>1</sup>

A central piece of the legislation is a mandate for all uninsured Massachusetts residents to purchase health insurance or pay a fine, with some exemptions and financial support for low-income residents. Support is lower for the mandate provision than for the overall law. About half (51%) of Massachusetts residents say they support this mandate, while 44% oppose it.

"The picture of how the Massachusetts [health care](#) law is working out is different than many national commentators suggest. Most people in Massachusetts approve of this law, and it hasn't negatively affected

them," said Robert Blendon, Professor of [Health Policy](#) and Political Analysis at the Harvard School of Public Health.

## **Impact of the Law on Individuals**

The principal intent of the Massachusetts legislation was to provide [health coverage](#) for nearly all of the state's residents, and Massachusetts now is the only state where nearly all of the population has [health insurance coverage](#). The poll found that 68% of residents thought the health reform law was successful in reducing the number of uninsured in the state, 14% thought it was not successful, and 8% were unsure.

The poll asked respondents about the impact of the [health reform](#) law on their own health care in terms of costs, quality of care, their ability to pay medical bills if they were to get sick, and the amount of time it takes them to get an appointment with a physician. On the latter three measures – quality of care, ability to pay medical bills, and amount of time it takes to get an appointment – a majority or near majority felt the law did not have much of an impact on them. Looking at those who reported an impact, more thought it helped than thought it hurt their quality of care (22% vs. 14%) and their ability to pay their medical bills (27% vs. 13%). There was no statistical difference between those who thought it was helping versus hurting the amount of time it takes to get an appointment with a doctor (13% helping vs. 17% hurting). The public felt somewhat differently about the law's impact on the cost of their care—only 33% said it did not have much of an impact on the cost of their own care, while roughly half said the law had an impact on those other aspects of their care. Looking at those who thought the law did have an impact on the cost of their care, 30% said it hurt while 23% said it helped; this difference was not statistically significant.

## **Impact of the Law on Health Care Costs Across the**

## State

Health care costs in Massachusetts have risen in recent years for many people. When asked about the main factors that are influencing rising costs in Massachusetts, only 20% of residents said rising costs were due mainly to the health insurance law, while 72% thought rising costs were due to other factors. The Massachusetts public is split on whether the state can afford to continue with this law as it currently stands. Forty-two percent said it could afford to continue, 38% said it could not, and 9% were unsure.

"Massachusetts is a high health care-cost state, but most residents do not blame the [health care law](#) for rising costs," says Gillian SteelFisher, Assistant Director of the Harvard Opinion Research Program and Research Scientist at the Harvard School of Public Health.

## Views on National Health Care Legislation

Some analysts have suggested that the Massachusetts law served as a model for national health care legislation passed by the U.S. Congress in March 2010, and the poll asked residents about their overall support for that national legislation. More Massachusetts residents support the national health care legislation of 2010 than oppose it (40% vs. 27%), while 24% say they neither support nor oppose it. Comparing these results to the most recent national polling data using the same question wording (AP-GfK Poll conducted by GfK Roper Public Affairs & Corporate Communications; March 24-28, 2011), Massachusetts residents appear to be more favorable toward the national legislation than the nation as a whole. The AP-GfK poll found that fewer adults in the U.S. supported the legislation of 2010 than opposed it (35% vs. 45%), while 17% neither supported nor opposed it.

The Massachusetts poll also asked residents' for their views on whether or not the Massachusetts law should have been used as a model for the national health care [legislation](#), as former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney has taken the position publicly that it should not have been. The Massachusetts public is nearly evenly divided as to whether or not they agree with former Governor Romney; 43% say the Massachusetts law should have been used as a model for national [law](#) while 47% say it should not have been and 8% are not sure.

Provided by Harvard School of Public Health

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