

The Affordable Care Act: Translational research experiment to improve health

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An [editorial](#) by Harry P. Selker, MD, MSPH, William H. Frist, MD, and Stuart Altman, PhD, published in the November 27 issue of *Science Translational Medicine* says the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) is an example of the role of experimentation in improving health at the public policy level.

The authors point out that while the ACA is an experiment, it is not radical. It builds on learning from previous experiments such as the establishment of Medicaid and, more recently, Massachusetts health care reform. It also uses extant structures by being built upon existing private insurance providers. As the rollout of the ACA continues, like any good experiment, there are mechanisms for adjustments that should improve the overall outcome.

The authors encourage scientists and clinicians to help the public to better understand the ACA by likening it to traditional biomedical research: it follows tested approaches used in all clinical and translational research, and we stand to learn a great deal from it about ways to advance health care and wellness in the United States.

Selker and Altman are also authors in the recent book, [The Affordable Care Act as a National Experiment: Health Policy Innovations and Lessons](#), for which Frist wrote the forward. The book was edited by Selker and June S. Wasser, MA and published by Springer Science+Business Media.

Selker is Dean of the Tufts Clinical and Translational Science Institute (CTSI) and Executive Director of the Institute for Clinical Research and Health Policy Studies at Tufts Medical Center. He has contributed extensively to clinical, health services, and [health policy](#) research, with a focus on translational research that ultimately has impact on the public's health. He has advised policymakers around healthcare delivery and research, including the House and Senate authors of the ACA.

Nationally, Dr. Selker has served as president of the Society of General Internal Medicine, the Society for Clinical and Translational Science, and the Association for Clinical Research Training, and serves on boards of many organizations. He is an active advisor on research, research training, and health policy in the United States and internationally. Board-certified in internal medicine, he practices at Tufts Medical Center.

[Frist](#) is a nationally recognized heart and lung transplant surgeon, former U.S. Senate Majority Leader, and Chairman of the Executive Council of Cressey and Company. Senator Frist represented Tennessee in the U.S. Senate for 12 years where he served on both the Health and Finance committees. He was elected Majority Leader of the Senate having served fewer total years in Congress than anyone in history. His leadership was instrumental to the passage of the 2003 Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement and Modernization Act and PEPFAR, the unprecedented national commitment to fight HIV/AIDS globally. He is currently Adjunct Professor of Cardiac Surgery at Vanderbilt University and Clinical Professor of Surgery at Meharry Medical College. He is also Co-Chair of the Health Project at the Bipartisan Policy Center. His board service includes the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Kaiser Family Foundation, and the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

[Altman](#) is the Sol C. Chaikin Professor of National Health Policy at Brandeis University. He is an economist whose research interests are primarily in the area of federal and state health policy. He is the current

Chair of the Massachusetts Health Policy Commission. Among his other professional achievements, he served 12 years as Chairman of the congressionally legislated Prospective Payment Assessment Commission (ProPac) formed to advise Congress and the Administration on the functioning of the Medicare Diagnostic Related Group (DRG) Hospital Payment System and other system reforms. In addition, he is Chair of The Health Industry Forum, which brings together diverse group leaders from across the [health care](#) field to develop solutions for critical problems facing the healthcare system and a member of The Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences and their Committee on the Future of Emergency Care in the United States.

Provided by Tufts Clinical and Translational Science Institute

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