

Despite recent problems, support for the Massachusetts health insurance law remains high

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A new poll by *The Boston Globe* and Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) finds, eight years into the state's universal health insurance legislation enacted in 2006, 63% of Massachusetts residents support the law and 18% oppose it, while 7% are not sure, and 12% have not heard or read about the law. The percentage of residents supporting the law remains unchanged since a 2011 Boston Globe/HSPH poll. Support for the law varies by party affiliation, with 77% of Democrats, 60% of Independents, and 49% of Republicans saying they support the legislation. The poll was conducted May 27-June 2, 2014.

The poll also asked Massachusetts residents about their support for the national health care legislation passed in 2010 by President Obama and Congress, which remains controversial nationwide. In contrast to U.S. adults as a whole, a majority (57%) of Massachusetts residents approve of the national legislation, while only a third (34%) disapprove. In comparison, a recent Pew Research Center/USA Today poll found that 41% of U.S. adults approve of the national [law](#) and 55% disapprove, indicating that Massachusetts residents are considerably more favorable than Americans as a whole toward the national legislation.

"Despite news reports of rollout problems, at both the state and national levels, the Massachusetts public still supports the state law and the national Affordable Care Act," said Robert Blendon, Sc.D., Richard L. Menschel Professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis at Harvard

School of Public Health.

Public perceptions of impact of the Massachusetts law

When asked about the impact of the Massachusetts health insurance law on their own health care in terms of costs, quality of care, their ability to pay medical bills, and their ability to see a doctor, few Massachusetts residents see the law having a negative impact. Over four in ten feel the law is not having much of an impact on the quality of their care, their ability to pay medical bills, and their ability to see a doctor. Looking at those who do report an impact, more think it is helping than think it is hurting the quality of their care (23% vs. 16%), their ability to pay their medical bills (25% vs. 15%), and their ability to see a doctor (25% helping vs. 10% hurting). The public feels somewhat differently about the law's impact on the cost of their care—just over a third (35%) say it is not having much of an impact on the cost of their own care, while about as many say it is hurting (25%) as say it is helping (22%).

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 finds that 58% of residents think the health insurance law has been successful in reducing the number of uninsured in the state, 19% think it has not been successful, and 11% are unsure. By about two-to-one, Massachusetts residents believe the health insurance law will make the health care situation in the state better (44%) rather than worse (21%) in the long run.

Problems with website

As widely covered in the news media, there have been problems with the Massachusetts state health insurance website where people who do not

have health insurance can choose among various health insurance plans. Only 46% of Massachusetts residents have heard or read about these problems, including 24% who think the problem is likely to be resolved by the fall, and 20% who do not expect the website to be working properly by then.

Support for requirement that individuals buy health insurance

A central piece of the [legislation](#) is a requirement that all uninsured Massachusetts residents purchase [health insurance](#) or pay a fine, with some exemptions and financial support for low-income residents. Support is lower for this provision than for the overall law. However, a majority (55%) of Massachusetts residents say they support this requirement, while just 36% oppose it. Opposition to this part of the law has dropped slightly from 44% in 2011.

Methodology

The Public Perceptions of the Massachusetts Health Insurance Law poll was conducted by The Boston Globe and Harvard School of Public Health. Representatives of the two organizations worked closely to develop the survey questionnaire and analyze the results of the poll. The Boston Globe and Harvard School of Public Health are publishing independent summaries of the poll's findings, and each organization bears sole responsibility for the work that appears under its name. The Boston Globe and Harvard School of Public Health paid for the survey and related expenses.

The project team was led by Robert J. Blendon, Sc.D., Richard L. Menschel Professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis at Harvard School of Public Health, and Gideon Gil, Health and Science editor of

The Boston Globe. The Harvard research team also included John M. Benson and Kathleen J. Weldon.

Interviews were conducted with 506 randomly selected Massachusetts state residents, ages 18 and older, via telephone (including cell phones and landlines) by SSRS of Media, Pennsylvania. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. The interviewing period was May 27-June 2, 2014. The data were weighted to reflect the demographics of the state's adult population as described by the U.S. Census.

When interpreting these findings, one should recognize that all surveys are subject to sampling error. Results may differ from what would be obtained if the whole Massachusetts adult population had been interviewed. The sampling error for this survey for questions asked of the whole population is ± 5.3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

More information: — [Click here for the complete survey.](#)

— [Click here for the charts.](#)

— [Read a Boston Globe article about the poll.](#)

Provided by Harvard School of Public Health

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