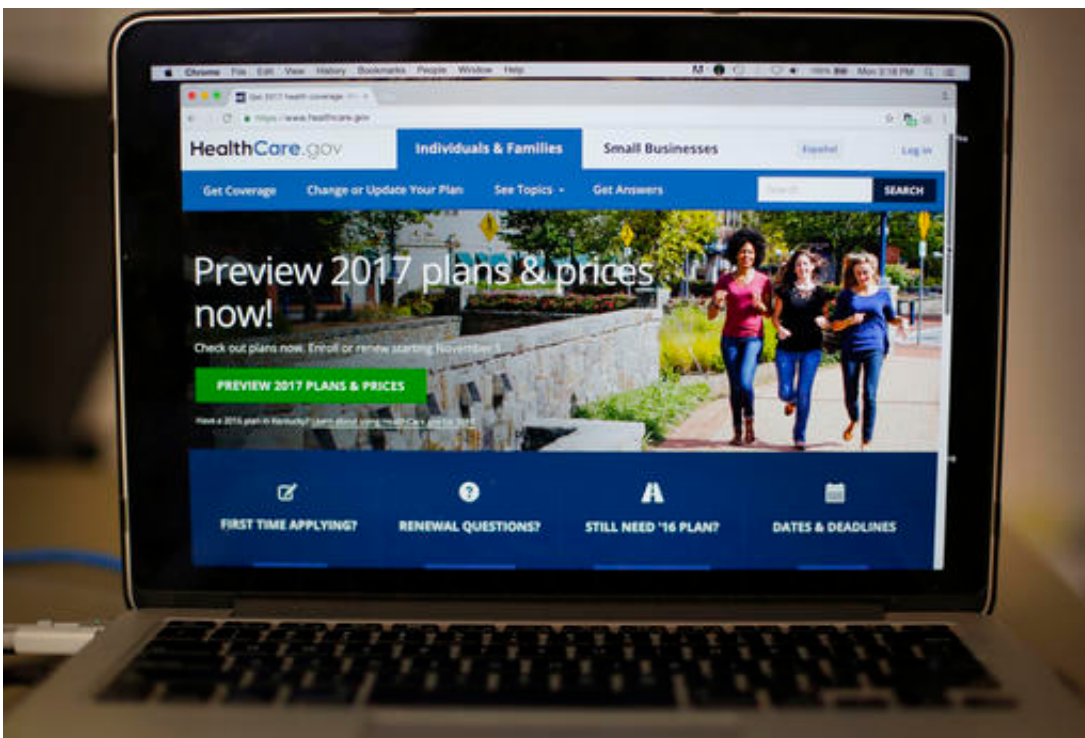


AP-NORC Poll: Broad worries about potential health care loss

January 27 2017, by Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar And Emily Swanson



In this Oct. 24, 2016 file photo, the HealthCare.gov 2017 web site home page is seen on a laptop in Washington. Though "Obamacare" still divides Americans, a majority worries many will lose coverage if the 2010 law is repealed in the nation's long-running political standoff over health care. A new poll by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds that 56 percent of U.S. adults are "extremely" or "very" concerned that many will lose health insurance if the health overhaul is repealed. That includes more than 8 in 10 Democrats, nearly half of independents, and more than 1 in 5 Republicans. Another 45 percent of Republicans say they're "somewhat" concerned. (AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais, File)

Though "Obamacare" still divides Americans, a majority worry that many will lose coverage if the 2010 law is repealed in the nation's long-running political standoff over health care.

A new poll by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds that 56 percent of U.S. adults are "extremely" or "very" concerned that many will lose health insurance if the health overhaul is repealed. That includes more than 8 in 10 Democrats, nearly half of independents, and more than 1 in 5 Republicans. Another 45 percent of Republicans say they're "somewhat" concerned.

"No one should go without health care for even a day," said Wendy Narug of DeMotte, Indiana, a small town south of Gary. A political independent who leans Republican, Narug works caring for people with disabilities. She favors repealing the Obama health law, but not until Congress and President Donald Trump have a replacement ready.

Released Friday, the poll serves as a reality check for Republicans as they try to find a path to repealing and replacing former President Barack Obama's signature legislation. It found that even as few Americans want to keep the health law in its current form, many provisions enjoy broad popularity. The exception: the law's requirement that most Americans carry health insurance or face fines.

"They should come up with something that's a little easier and more affordable for everyone," said Narug. "Some people have to pay hundreds of dollars just to go to their doctors."

The health law offers subsidized private insurance for those who don't have job-based coverage, along with a state option to expand Medicaid for low-income people. About 20 million people have gained coverage since it passed. Employer coverage has also increased, but experts credit the law for the vast majority of the gains. Some 28 million people

remain uninsured.

Trump has said he wants to replace "Obamacare" with a plan that provides insurance for everybody and lowers deductibles. But his pick for health secretary recently cast doubt on the notion that a Trump administration replacement is ready to go. Questions remained after Trump attended the GOP congressional retreat in Philadelphia this week.

Overall, Americans remain divided, with 53 percent wanting to keep the law in some form, and 46 percent favoring its repeal.

Most of those who favor repeal say that should happen only when a replacement is ready. And most of those who want to keep the law say changes are needed. Among those who favor keeping it, only 1 in 4 think it should remain unchanged.

"If the Affordable Care Act was affordable, I would have no problems with it," said Kevin Wollersheim, a delivery truck driver from the Minneapolis suburb of Hopkins. "Costs were supposed to go down, or at least not go up at such a high rate."

Wollersheim is uninsured and expects he'll have to pay about \$200 in fines at tax time for failing to comply with the law's coverage requirement. He said he didn't even bother to look this year because premiums on Minnesota's individual insurance market jumped by 50 percent and more.

That coverage requirement—known as the individual mandate—is a top target for Trump and GOP lawmakers.

The poll found that only about 1 in 3 support it, while just over half are opposed. Among Republicans, opposition rises to nearly 3 in 4.

"Don't fine people; just make it affordable," said Madlyen Sharp, a retired factory worker from West Plains, Mo., near the Ozarks.

The requirement was modeled on one that former GOP Gov. Mitt Romney signed into law in Massachusetts in 2006, designed to get healthy people into the insurance pool and help control premiums. At the federal level, it narrowly survived a Supreme Court challenge in 2012.

Although the Obama administration argued that the mandate was essential for stable insurance markets, the main insurance industry trade group recently told Congress there are other workable alternatives. Trump's executive order on health care opened the way for broader "hardship" exemptions.

Other major provisions of the health care law fared far better in the poll. They included elimination of out-of-pocket costs for preventive care (favored by 77 percent), allowing young adults to stay on parental plans until age 26 (73 percent), forbidding insurers from denying coverage to people with pre-existing health problems (69 percent), and the Medicaid expansion (66 percent). The first three are favored even by most of those who would get rid of the law.

Although Trump and other Republicans have made it seem like "repeal and replace" would be an easy matter, many Americans seem to question that.

"Obamacare" is like "a 1,500-foot battleship driving along," said Michael Wolski of Lakeland, Fla., who administers a homeless shelter. "The infrastructure has already been changed; it's already in place. (Trump) can't just rescind it. And what's he going to replace it with?"

The AP-NORC poll of 1,036 adults was conducted Jan. 12-16, using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak panel, which

is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.7 percentage points.

Interviews were conducted online and using landlines and cellphones.

More information: AP-NORC: www.apnorc.org/

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