

Memorandum

To: Interested Parties

From: The Herndon Alliance and Lake Research Partners

Subject: Key Messaging Lessons about System Changes in Health Care Reform

Date: February 27, 2009

BACKGROUND

Health reform requires **affordable health care, improved quality, and cost containment**. The American public is concerned about the cost of their healthcare (81%) and that all people have access to affordable care (62%). These two issues cannot be separated. Half of Americans (53%)¹ say their household has cut back on health care in some way because of cost concerns. We know that people without good coverage don't get prevention services and are more likely to die (e.g. cancer). **People without coverage are outside our health care system and will not benefit from the health system changes that need to be made. We will not be able to control costs if patients don't get the care they need. And we must address costs for those that now have insurance as well as for those who don't – merely shifting costs to those who now have coverage is not a solution.** Voters understand these connections and want a health system with affordable quality coverage for themselves and others.

A new poll conducted by Lake Research Partners² on behalf of The Herndon Alliance shows:

- ✓ **There is widespread voter support for health system change reforms.**
- ✓ **Nearly 7 in 10 voters say we need a complete overhaul or major reform to the health care system.**
- ✓ **Voters think about system reform in personal terms** and consider how changes will affect their personal relationship with their doctors.
- ✓ They trust their doctors and **consistently support changes to help their doctors do their jobs.**

¹ Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll, February 2009. <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/7867.cfm>

² Lake Research Partners designed and administered this survey that was conducted by telephone using professional interviewers February 2-8, 2009. The survey reached a total of 800 likely voters nationwide. The margin of error for the total results is +/- 3.5%.

KEY FINDINGS

- ✓ **The greatest dissatisfaction among voters is with the rising costs of health care** (81% dissatisfied, 57% strongly), and the lack of coverage for everyone (62% dissatisfied, 38% strongly).
- ✓ **People are happy with their doctors and trust their doctors' training and ability to give good care.** 78% of voters are satisfied with their doctors' training (26% strongly) and 72% (27% strongly) are happy with their quality of care. However, over one-third are dissatisfied with prevention of medical errors (39% dissatisfied, 16% strongly).
- ✓ **Voters solidly support changes to the health care system to improve the quality of care we receive and help control rising costs.** Voters believe we need to overhaul how we pay for and deliver health care by over 2-to-1 (60% favor health system change, 28% oppose).
 - **Support for reform (after hearing arguments) is strong across partisan lines**, with the strongest support among Democrats (67% favor, 21% oppose) and Independents (59% favor, 27% oppose), and with over half of Republican voters on board (52% favor, 42% oppose).

VOTER SUPPORT FOR SPECIFIC REFORMS

- ✓ Voters want reforms that **help doctors do their jobs and support doctors in doing what is right for their patients.**
- ✓ **Voters solidly support payment reform** and want to reward doctors for providing quality care, by a +62 point margin, with 77% supporting this reform (48% strongly) and 15% opposing this reform (8% strongly).
- ✓ **Voters feel strongly about prevention** and they support providing incentives for people to actively manage their health before they get sick. Three-quarters of voters support providing incentives (50% strongly) and 20% oppose it (12% strongly).
 - Voters are less supportive of penalties for people who don't actively manage their health, with 45% supporting this (23% strongly) and 47% opposing it (30% strongly).
- ✓ **By an overwhelming margin (+57 points), voters support allowing health professionals other than doctors to provide more care to free up doctors and help control costs.**
 - They strongly support encouraging patients, through lower costs or more flexible appointments, to see providers other than doctors and to free up doctors to spend time with those who need it most, with 76% supporting this reform (50% strongly) and 19% opposing it (11% strongly).
- ✓ **By very wide margins (+56 points) voters support instituting comparative effectiveness reforms to supplement doctors' clinical knowledge, but voters need to be reassured that scientific and cost effectiveness data do not replace their doctor's judgment.**
 - Seventy three percent of voters (45% strongly) support creating an independent organization that supports health providers by giving them information about best treatments to rely on in addition to their own judgment.

TOP MESSAGES

- ✓ **Messages in favor of reform test very strongly, especially messages that reinforce giving doctors information to provide good care.** Comparative effectiveness tests well with or without explicitly mentioning costs.
- ✓ **Messages regarding reforms to promote comparative effectiveness test very strongly among all groups, whether or not that assessment is described as including costs.** The top message for women, Democrats, and Independents is “Comparative Effectiveness w/out Costs.” For seniors and Republicans, “Comparative Effectiveness w/Costs” is most effective (see message boxes below).
- ✓ Though not as intense, a message about reducing over-use of the health care system still has broad support.

TEXT OF TOP TIER MESSAGES

[Comparative Effectiveness w/out Costs] We need to make sure doctors have access to the latest research that compares the effectiveness of different types of treatments, such as comparing which drugs work best. That will help doctors and patients choose the best treatment for their patients’ situation and make more informed choices rather than risk receiving less effective treatments. (46% very convincing, 84% convincing).

[Comparative Effectiveness w/Costs] We need to make sure doctors have access to the latest research that compares the clinical and cost effectiveness of different types of treatments, such as comparing which drugs work best. That will help doctors and patients choose the best treatment for their patients’ situation and make more informed choices rather than waste money on less effective treatments. (40% very convincing, 81% convincing).

[Evidence-Based Medicine] Advances in health care occur so fast we need to provide doctors with constantly updated information based on the most current scientific evidence available. The best information should be available to your doctor and only effective health services should be covered. This would help your doctor do what’s right for you and give you the best quality care. (36% very convincing, 78% convincing).

TEXT OF SECOND TIER MESSAGE

[Over-Use Doesn’t Help] We have amazing advanced technology in health care, but just because it’s there doesn’t mean we have to use it every time. Over-use of the health care system contributes to the high cost of tests and treatments for everyone, and often does nothing to improve our health and can actually harm it. We need to support doctors with the best information about prevention, and the treatments that actually work the best for patients. (33% very convincing, 80% convincing).

OPPOSITION MESSAGES

- ✓ Opposition messages raise some **doubts for voters that changes will affect their relationship with their doctors or the quality of the care they receive.** Interfering with the doctor is the strongest concept in opposition messages.
- ✓ **In a head to head contest against the opposition messages, the top pro-reform messages win by a margin of +29 points.**

- ✓ **The broad consensus in support of health system reforms remains robust** – even after hearing opposition arguments (56% favor reform, 27% oppose).

TEXT OF OPPOSITION MESSAGES

[Interfere w/Doctor] Forcing doctors to accept government mandated guidelines about treatments means putting government bureaucrats in charge of our health care, not your doctor. And pushing care down to lower level providers like nurses means we'll get lower quality care from people with less training. This isn't reform, it's a government takeover that will hurt patient care. (34% serious doubts, 68% doubts).

[Rationing] Doctors offices are already struggling with too much paperwork and a shortage of staff. Adding rules and regulations to what kinds of treatments doctors should provide and having financial incentives for so-called cost efficiency will lead to rationing of care, so millions of Americans will be denied access to their choice of health treatment. (29% serious doubts, 62% doubts).

KEY MESSAGING LESSONS

- ✓ Voters need to be reassured that change will help **control costs and improve the quality of care they receive**.
- ✓ Messages in favor of reform test very strongly, especially messages that **reinforce the doctor-patient relationship**. Voters think about change in personal terms and how it will affect their relationship with their own doctor. Messages need to resonate with voters on a personal level.
- ✓ Messages that focus on providing doctors with scientific and cost effectiveness evidence, modernizing the health care system with health information technology, and controlling over-use of the health care system are seen by voters as both **supporting doctors** and **improving care** for patients.
- ✓ Opposition messages raise some doubts for voters about reforms, and voters need to be reassured that changes will help control costs and improve the quality of the care they receive by supporting doctors.
- ✓ Still, even after hearing opposition messages, voters still strongly favor health system reforms by a two-to-one margin.