

HARVARD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Public Attitudes about Medicare

This poll was conducted for the Harvard School of Public Health via telephone by SSRS, an independent research company. Interviews were conducted from May 13 – 26, 2013, among a nationally representative sample of 1,253 respondents age 18 and older, including an oversample of those age 65 and older (501 respondents age 65+ were interviewed). The margin of error for total respondents is +/- 3.6 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

1. How closely are you following the debate about Medicare spending and the budget deficit—very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely?

Very closely	Fairly closely	Not too closely	Not at all closely	Don't know/Refused
17	25	25	31	2

2. If a candidate for Congress supports making major cuts in Medicare spending to reduce the federal budget deficit, would that make you (MORE) likely or (LESS) likely to vote for that candidate, or wouldn't it make much difference in your vote?
(If More/Less, ask:) Is that much (more/less) likely to vote for that candidate or somewhat (more/less) likely?

Much more likely	Somewhat more likely	Wouldn't make much difference	Somewhat less likely	Much less likely	Don't know/Refused
7	6	29	16	38	4

3. Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of Medicare?
(GET ANSWER, THEN ASK) Is that a very (favorable/unfavorable) or somewhat (favorable/unfavorable) opinion?

Very favorable	Somewhat favorable	Somewhat unfavorable	Very unfavorable	Don't know/Refused
36	36	12	7	9

4. To the best of your knowledge, is Medicare **primarily** a federal government program, a state government program, or a private insurance program?

Federal government program	State program	Private insurance program	Don't know/Refused
74	15	4	7

5. To the best of your knowledge, is Medicare one of the largest items in the federal budget, or is it not?

Yes it is	No it is not	Don't know/Refused
53	36	11

6. Do you think Medicare spending is a major cause, a minor cause, or not a cause of the size of the federal budget deficit?

Major cause	Minor cause	Not a cause	Don't know/Refused
31	41	23	5

7. For the average person over 65, do you think the Medicare program pays for almost all, most, about half, or only a little of their health care costs?

Almost all	Most	About half	Only a little	Don't know/Refused
15	26	35	21	4

8. People who receive Medicare have paid payroll taxes for much of their working lives and pay premiums for their current Medicare coverage. Do you think most people receiving Medicare get health insurance benefits worth more money than they pay into the system, less than they pay into the system, or receive about the same amount as they pay?

More	Less	About the same amount	Don't know/Refused
24	41	27	8

9. Thinking about 15 years into the future, do you think Medicare will pay a higher level of benefits than it does now, about the same level, a lower level of benefits, or do you think that Medicare will no longer exist 15 years from now?

Higher level	About the same level	Lower level	Medicare will no longer exist	Don't know/Refused
8	18	38	32	5

10. Which do you think is better run, (the federal Medicare program) or (private health insurance plans that people get through their jobs), or do you think they are about equally well run?

The federal Medicare program	Private health insurance plans	About equally well run	Don't know/Refused
15	41	39	5

11. Do you think it is easier or harder for patients with Medicare than for patients with private health insurance plans to get an appointment with a doctor, or isn't there much difference?

Easier	Harder	There isn't much difference	Don't know/Refused
12	37	47	5

12. Do you think patients with Medicare receive better or worse health care than patients with private health insurance plans, or is it about the same?

Better	Worse	About the same	Don't know/Refused
5	27	66	2

13. Do you think Medicare pays doctors more, less, or about the same as private health insurance plans pay doctors for the same types of health care?

More	Less	About the same	Don't know/Refused
13	50	30	7

14. Do you think Medicare pays hospitals more, less, or about the same as private health insurance plans pay hospitals for the same types of health care?

More	Less	About the same	Don't know/Refused
16	46	33	5

15. Which do you think is the bigger problem for people on Medicare today?

They don't get the care they need	They get too much care they don't need	Neither (vol)	Both (vol)	Don't know/Refused
61	21	5	6	7

(Asked of one half of total respondents; n = 640)

- 16a. Thinking about people who have Medicare today, how often do you think Medicare withholds high-cost prescription drugs, medical care, or surgical treatments from people who might benefit from them in order to save money? Would you say...?

Very often	Somewhat often	Not too often	Not at all	Don't know/Refused
20	43	24	6	7

(Asked of one half of total respondents; n = 613)

- 16b. How likely do you think it is that because of budgetary problems Medicare in the future will withhold high-cost prescription drugs, medical care, or surgical treatments from people who might benefit from them? Would you say...?

Very likely	Somewhat likely	Not too likely	Not at all likely	Don't know/Refused
33	44	15	5	3

17. Currently, are you employed full-time, part-time, or not at all?

(Asked of total who are not currently employed)

18. Are you retired, or not?

17/18. Combo Table

Employed full-time	Employed part-time	Retired	Not employed and not retired
44	15	20	21

19. (When you retire,) If you had a choice, would you prefer to get your Medicare health insurance benefits from the current government Medicare program, or from a private health plan, such as a PPO or HMO, offered through Medicare?

From the current government Medicare program	From a private health plan, such as a PPO or HMO, offered through Medicare	Don't know/Refused
34	56	10

20. Here are two different ways Medicare could pay doctors. Which of these do you think would be better for you?

Your doctor gets paid a fee each time they see you	Your doctor gets paid a fixed amount of money so they can manage all of your health care for the year	Makes no difference (vol)	Don't know/Refused
65	30	2	3

21. If in the future there are cuts in the payments doctors receive from Medicare, do you think doctors will be less willing to treat patients who are seniors, or won't it make much difference?

Doctors will be less willing to treat patients who are seniors	It won't make much difference	Don't know/Refused
64	35	1

- 21a. Do you think Medicare spending is rising faster, slower, or at about the same rate as it was five years ago?

Faster	Slower	About the same	Don't know/Refused
62	9	24	5

22. If the President and Congress do not take action, do you think the Medicare trust fund is likely to run out of money in the next 15 years, or not?

Yes	No	Don't know/Refused
77	19	4

(Items a-f asked of one half of total respondents; n = 651)

(Items g-l asked of one half of total respondents; n = 602)

23. A number of reasons have been suggested for why Medicare costs are rising. For each of the following, please tell me if you think it is one of the most important reasons, a major reason, a minor reason, or not a reason **why the Medicare costs are rising**. How about (INSERT)? Do you think this is one of the most important reasons, a major reason, a minor reason, or not a reason **why the Medicare costs are rising**?

- a. More people are going on Medicare and there are fewer people under age 65 to pay taxes to support them

One of the most important reasons	Major reason	Minor reason	Not a reason	Do not think Medicare costs are rising (vol)	Don't know/Refused
19	49	19	10	1	2

- b. Fraud and abuse by people, doctors, and hospitals

One of the most important reasons	Major reason	Minor reason	Not a reason	Do not think Medicare costs are rising (vol)	Don't know/ Refused
24	46	23	5	1	1

- c. New drugs, tests and treatments being offered to seniors

One of the most important reasons	Major reason	Minor reason	Not a reason	Do not think Medicare costs are rising (vol)	Don't know/ Refused
6	27	42	20	1	4

- d. Excessive charges by hospitals

One of the most important reasons	Major reason	Minor reason	Not a reason	Do not think Medicare costs are rising (vol)	Don't know/ Refused
23	55	14	5	1	3

- e. Money that is being collected for Medicare is being spent on programs other than Medicare

One of the most important reasons	Major reason	Minor reason	Not a reason	Do not think Medicare costs are rising (vol)	Don't know/ Refused
17	47	20	11	1	4

- f. People don't get enough preventive care

One of the most important reasons	Major reason	Minor reason	Not a reason	Do not think Medicare costs are rising (vol)	Don't know/ Refused
16	42	29	10	1	2

- g. People on Medicare are living longer so they cost the program more money

One of the most important reasons	Major reason	Minor reason	Not a reason	Do not think Medicare costs are rising (vol)	Don't know/ Refused
13	42	26	17	*	2

h. Poor management by the government

One of the most important reasons	Major reason	Minor reason	Not a reason	Do not think Medicare costs are rising (vol)	Don't know/ Refused
30	43	18	8	*	1

i. Malpractice lawsuits and settlements

One of the most important reasons	Major reason	Minor reason	Not a reason	Do not think Medicare costs are rising (vol)	Don't know/ Refused
10	39	35	12	*	3

j. Excessive charges by doctors

One of the most important reasons	Major reason	Minor reason	Not a reason	Do not think Medicare costs are rising (vol)	Don't know/ Refused
18	43	29	9	*	2

k. Excessive charges by pharmaceutical companies

One of the most important reasons	Major reason	Minor reason	Not a reason	Do not think Medicare costs are rising (vol)	Don't know/ Refused
20	55	20	4	*	2

l. People receiving drugs and medical treatments they don't need

One of the most important reasons	Major reason	Minor reason	Not a reason	Do not think Medicare costs are rising (vol)	Don't know/ Refused
17	42	29	9	*	3

24. Please tell me whether you favor or oppose major reductions in future spending on Medicare for each of the following purposes. (First/Next) would you favor or oppose major reductions in future spending on Medicare to (INSERT)?

	Favor	Oppose	It depends (vol)	Don't know/ Refused
a. Pay for an income tax cut	28	67	1	5
b. Improve Medicare's long-term financial outlook	67	29	1	3
c. Reduce the federal budget deficit	36	60	1	3
d. Provide financial help for uninsured people so they can get health insurance	56	41	1	2

25. What is your age?
25a. Could you please tell me if you are ...?

18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
22	35	26	18

(Asked of total age 65+; n = 501)

26. Are you covered by Medicare, the government health insurance program for people age 65 and over, or not?

Yes, covered	No, not covered	Don't know/ Refused
93	6	1

27. Currently, the age of eligibility for receiving Medicare is 65. If you (had been/were) asked to wait two years longer before receiving Medicare benefits, would that (have been/be) a problem for you and your family, or not?

(Asked of total who say waiting for benefits for 2 years longer would be a problem; n = 480)

- 27a. Would it be a very serious problem, a somewhat serious problem, or not too serious problem?

27/27a. Combo Table

Very serious problem	Somewhat serious problem	Not too serious problem	Not a problem	Don't know/ Refused
24	15	4	53	4

DEMOGRAPHICS

E. RECORD GENDER OF RESPONDENT

Male	Female
48	52

28. In general, would you say that your health is excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor?

Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor
28	28	21	17	6

29. Is your home owned or rented?

Owned	Rented	Don't know/ Refused
66	33	1

(Asked of total landline respondents; n = 841)

L1. Now thinking about your telephone use...Does anyone in your household, including yourself, have a working cell phone?

(Asked of total cell phone respondents; n = 412)

C1. Now thinking about your telephone use, is there at least one telephone INSIDE your home that is currently working and is not a cell phone?

L1/C1. Combo Table

Landline only	Both LL and Cell	Cell phone only
12	54	34

30. Including yourself, how many people are there living in your household?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8+	Refused
15	32	20	19	8	4	1	*	1

(Asked of total with 2+ people in HH; n = 932)

30a. How many of these are adults, 18 or older?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8+	Refused
5	61	21	9	3	1	--	--	--

31. What is the last grade of school you completed?

High school graduate or less (NET)	47
Less than high school graduate	13
High school graduate	32
Technical school/Other	2
Some college	25
College grad+ (NET)	28
Graduated college	18
Graduate school or more	10
Don't know/Refused	*

32. Is your total annual household income from all sources, and before taxes:
- 32a. Is your total annual household income from all sources and before taxes less than \$50,000, \$50,000 but less than \$100,000, or over \$100,000?
- 32b. Is that 100 but less than 150 thousand, 150 but less than 200 thousand, 200 but less than 250 thousand, or 250 thousand and over?

Less than \$50K (NET)	51
Less than \$15K	17
\$15K but less than \$25K	11
\$25K but less than \$30K	8
\$30K but less than \$40K	8
\$40K but less than \$50K	7
Less than \$50K (unspec)	1
\$50K but less than \$100K (NET)	27
\$50K but less than \$75K	15
\$75K but less than \$100K	12
\$50K but less than \$100K (unspec)	*
\$100K+ (NET)	15
\$100K but less than \$150K	9
\$150K but less than \$200K	3
\$200K but less than \$250K	1
\$250K+	1
\$100K+ (unspec)	1
Don't know/Refused	6

33. Are you of Hispanic origin or background?

(Asked of total Hispanics; n = 103)

- 33a. Are you White Hispanic or Black Hispanic?

(Asked of total non-Hispanics; n = 1150)

34. Would you consider yourself to be White, Black or of some other race?

Race Summary Table

White non-Hispanic	65
Black non-Hispanic	12
Asian/Chinese/Japanese	3
Native American/American Indian/Alaska Native	2
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1
Hispanic (NET)	14
White Hispanic	11
Black Hispanic	1
Hispanic unspecified	2
Other	1
Don't know	--
Refused	2

35. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as:

A Republican	A Democrat	An independent	Other (vol)	Don't know/ Refused
24	33	35	3	5

(Asked of total independents, other, don't know or refused; n = 502)

36. As of today do you lean more to the (Democratic Party) or the (Republican Party)?

Leaned Party Table

Republican/ lean Republican	Democrat/ lean Democrat	Independent	Other (vol)	Don't know/ Refused
35	45	15	2	5

37. Are you registered to vote at your present address, or not?

Yes	No	Don't know/ Refused
76	23	1

38. Generally speaking, would you describe your political views as...?

Very conservative	Somewhat conservative	Moderate	Somewhat liberal	Very liberal	Don't know/ Refused
13	22	32	17	10	6