



Health Care Poll

EDITOR

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Reactions to Medicare Reform and Drug Benefit Bill Remain More Negative than Positive, Although Older Voters Are Somewhat Less Negative than in December

According to the results of a recent Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll that compared results from the same questions asked in December 2003, one quarter of the U.S. public remains disappointed that the new Medicare bill passed (25%) while a majority (55%) remains either unsure or needs more information to understand what the benefits mean.

Two months later, pleased or disappointed with the new Medicare bill?

Fewer U.S. adults aged 65 and over are disappointed (41% in February, 51% in December) that the Medicare bill passed.

The prescription drug benefit starting in 2006 for people on Medicare: approve or disapprove?

The total approval rating has gone up for the prescription drug benefit since December, from 55% to 65%, with the largest increase, in general, being among those 65 and older (61% in February, 48% in December).

The drug discount card for seniors – approve or disapprove?

Overall, two thirds of U.S. adults continue to approve of the drug discount card with no significant change from December to February. However, a sizeable increase in approval among those aged 65 and over (44% in December to 54% in February) indicates that the older group has acquired greater knowledge that has made a difference in their opinion.

Approve or disapprove of helping insurers compete with traditional Medicare?

Both the 50-to-64 and 65+ age groups now approve more strongly of a plan to help insurance and managed care plans compete with traditional Medicare: from 47% in December to 55% in February for those under 65 and from 30% to 41% for those 65 and older.

Approve or disapprove of the ban on importing less expensive drugs?

Disapproval was high to begin with (76% in December) and remains phenomenally high in both age groups (net 79%) who “know enough to have an opinion.”

“This survey suggests that President Bush still has much work to do to make the bill a vote winner, although the strength of negativity among older voters – whose votes are most likely to be moved by concerns about Medicare – has lessened. The toughest sell, and getting tougher, is explaining why prohibiting importing drugs at lower prices from Canada is desirable policy,” says Humphrey Taylor, chairman of *The Harris Poll*® at Harris Interactive.

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TABLE 1

Pleased Or Disappointed With New Medicare Bill

"The Congress has passed a new Medicare bill that includes a new prescription drug benefit. Which of the following best describes how you feel about the new Medicare bill?"

Base: All adults

	Total		Age 65+	
	Dec. 2003	Feb. 2004	Dec. 2003	Feb. 2004
	%	%	%	%
Pleased (Total)	20	21	16	26
I am very pleased that it passed	10	9	8	8
I am somewhat pleased that it passed	10	12	8	18
Disappointed (Total)	25	25	51	41
I am somewhat disappointed that it passed	8	9	14	14
I am very disappointed that it passed	18	16	37	27
Don't know	12	12	11	12
Don't know enough about it to have an opinion	42	43	22	20

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly due to rounding

TABLE 2

Approve/Disapprove Of Prescription Drug Benefit

"How do you feel about the four following pieces of the bill?"

(1) Prescription drug benefit for people on Medicare starting 2006

Base: Those who "know enough to have an opinion" (i.e., 57% of all adults)

	Total		Age 50 - 64		Age 65+	
	Dec. 2003	Feb. 2004	Dec. 2003	Feb. 2004	Dec. 2003	Feb. 2004
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Approve (Net)	55	65	57	67	48	61
Approve strongly	25	36	27	40	22	31
Approve somewhat	30	29	30	26	26	31
Disapprove (Net)	33	26	37	29	44	32
Disapprove somewhat	14	12	15	10	21	12
Disapprove strongly	18	14	22	19	23	20
Not sure	12	9	6	4	8	7

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly due to rounding

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TABLE 3

Approve/Disapprove Of Drug Discount Card

“How do you feel about the four following pieces of the bill?”

(2) A drug discount card which will allow seniors to get a modest discount on their prescription drugs

Base: Those who “know enough to have an opinion” (i.e., 57% of all adults)

	Total		Age 50 - 64		Age 65+	
	Dec. 2003	Feb. 2004	Dec. 2003	Feb. 2004	Dec. 2003	Feb. 2004
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Approve (Net)	65	67	68	68	44	54
Approve strongly	29	36	20	32	19	24
Approve somewhat	35	30	48	36	25	29
Disapprove (Net)	25	25	27	29	45	38
Disapprove somewhat	11	12	11	10	19	20
Disapprove strongly	13	13	16	19	26	18
Not sure	11	8	5	3	10	8

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly due to rounding

TABLE 4

Approve/Disapprove Of Helping Insurers To Compete With Traditional Medicare

“How do you feel about the four following pieces of the bill?”

(3) A plan to help insurance and managed care plans to compete with traditional Medicare

Base: Those who “know enough to have an opinion” (i.e., 57% of all adults)

	Total		Age 50 - 64		Age 65+	
	Dec. 2003	Feb. 2004	Dec. 2003	Feb. 2004	Dec. 2003	Feb. 2004
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Approve (Net)	47	54	47	55	30	41
Approve strongly	20	24	19	23	10	12
Approve somewhat	27	30	28	31	19	29
Disapprove (Net)	37	32	42	35	54	47
Disapprove somewhat	15	12	16	15	18	12
Disapprove strongly	22	19	27	20	36	35
Not sure	16	14	11	10	16	12

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly due to rounding

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TABLE 5

Approve/Disapprove Ban On Importing Less Expensive Drugs

“How do you feel about the four following pieces of the bill?”

(4) A law which prohibits importing less expensive drugs from Canada

Base: Those who “know enough to have an opinion” (i.e., 57% of all adults)

	Total		Age 50 - 64		Age 65+	
	Dec. 2003	Feb. 2004	Dec. 2003	Feb. 2004	Dec. 2003	Feb. 2004
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Approve (Net)	17	15	14	9	12	12
Approve strongly	9	7	8	4	6	7
Approve somewhat	8	8	6	5	6	5
Disapprove (Net)	76	79	80	89	85	84
Disapprove somewhat	19	17	17	21	18	15
Disapprove strongly	56	62	63	69	67	69
Not sure	8	6	6	2	3	3

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly due to rounding

Downloadable PDFs of Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Polls are posted at http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters_wsj.asp.

Harris Interactive Methodology

This study was conducted online within the United States between February 10 and 12, 2004 among a nationwide cross section of 2,054 adults, ages 18 years and over. The same questions were asked between December 3 and 5, 2003 among a nationwide cross section of 2,465 adults, ages 18 years and over. Figures for age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, income and region were weighted where necessary to align with population proportions. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents’ propensity to be online. Harris Interactive estimates the results have a statistical precision of ±3.0 percentage points of what they would be if the entire adult population had been polled with complete accuracy.

Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in all polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. They include refusals to be interviewed (nonresponse), question wording and question order, interviewer bias, weighting by demographic control data and screening (e.g., for likely voters). It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors. This online sample was not a probability sample.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

About the Survey

The Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll is an exclusive poll that is published in the award-winning Health Industry Edition of The Wall Street Journal Online at www.wsj.com/health.



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