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HEALTHCARE RESEARCH

The Harris Poll® PEOPLE

About Half of Seniors Likely to Enroll in Medicare Drug Benefit, Up Significantly Since June 2005, but Key Challenges for Enrollment Remain

Forty-one percent of seniors say they are not very or not at all confident that they would be able to choose a drug plan that's right for them

A new Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll shows that about half (49%) of U.S. adults aged 65 and older say they are somewhat likely, very likely or absolutely certain to enroll in a new Medicare drug plan by May 2006, when the initial enrollment period for the new benefit ends. This represents a substantial increase from June 2005 when 32% said they would be somewhat likely, very likely or absolutely certain to enroll. While this increase is encouraging news for the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services, problems still exist regarding seniors' perceptions of the complexity of the drug plan and their confidence in being able to choose a plan that is right for them.

Below are the results of the online survey of 2,160 U.S. adults, of whom 290 are aged 65 or over, conducted by Harris Interactive between Oct. 26 and 28, 2005 for The Wall Street Journal Online's Health Industry Edition.

Steps Seniors Are Taking and Factors That Are Important to Them

More than three in five (62%) seniors have seen or heard an ad for the new Medicare drug benefit and substantial numbers have taken proactive steps to look for information about the plan.

- More than half (53%) of seniors say they have looked for general information about the Medicare drug benefit.
- Fewer seniors, although still substantial numbers, have looked at information from an insurer or health plan that will be offering a Medicare drug plan (45%), talked to a family member or friend about it (35%) or compared the different Medicare drug plan offerings (22%).
- Less than one in 10 seniors have talked to their pharmacist about the benefit (9%), attended an information session or seminar about it (6%) or talked to their doctor about it (4%).

When considering the different options that might be available to them when choosing a Medicare prescription drug plan, the majority of seniors say the most important factor for them personally is related to their out-of-pocket costs. Two in five (40%) seniors say the most important factor for them is the cost of the co-pays and deductibles they would pay for prescription drugs and about one-third (32%) say the most important factor is the cost of the monthly premium they would pay. Other factors seen as most important by seniors include the choice of prescription drugs that are covered by the plan (18%), the network of pharmacies that they could use to fill their prescription (3%) or something else (8%).

Health-Care Poll

Challenges Remain

While there has been an increase in the number of seniors likely to enroll and many have taken proactive steps to look for information on the Medicare prescription drug plan, several challenges still remain.

- The majority of seniors remain skeptical or uncertain about the impact of the Medicare prescription drug plan on affordability of prescription drugs. While 21% of seniors say the plan will make prescription drugs more affordable for seniors over the next two to three years, a similar 22% say it will make prescription drugs less affordable and 27% say it will make them neither less nor more affordable. Additionally, almost one-third (29%) of seniors are not sure of the impact the plan will have, an increase of 15 percentage points from June 2004.
- The majority of seniors say they find the new Medicare prescription drug benefit either somewhat (33%) or very (38%) hard to understand, while much smaller percentages say it's somewhat (6%) or very (2%) easy to understand.
- While 39% of seniors say they are somewhat or very confident that they will be able to choose a drug plan that's right for them (compared to 46% in June 2005), a similar 41% say they are not very or not at all confident that they will be able to do this. More than one-third (35%) say they already have prescription drug coverage so they are not in need of a new plan.

TABLE 1

Impact of Medicare Drug Benefit on Affordability of Prescription Drugs

"In general, do you believe the new Medicare prescription drug benefit will make prescription drugs less affordable, more affordable or neither less nor more affordable for seniors over the next 2 to 3 years?"

Base: All Adults

	Total		Adults aged 65+	
	Oct. 2005		June 2004*	Oct. 2005
	%		%	%
Less affordable	21		23	22
Neither less nor more affordable	25		47	27
More affordable	18		15	21
Not sure	35		14	29

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

*Data from the Harris Interactive Strategic Health Perspectives Survey conducted in June 2004.

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TABLE 2

Understanding the Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit

"Overall, do you find the new Medicare prescription drug benefit is...?"

Base: Adults aged 65 and older

	June 2004*	Oct. 2005
	%	%
Very hard to understand	42	38
Somewhat hard to understand	36	33
Neither hard nor easy to understand	17	21
Somewhat easy to understand	4	6
Very easy to understand	1	2

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

*Data from the Harris Interactive Strategic Health Perspectives Survey conducted in June 2004.

TABLE 3

Seniors' Experience Looking for Information About the Drug Benefit

"The new Medicare drug benefit will be available to seniors beginning in January 2006.

Have you personally seen or done any of the following in the past 3 months?"

Base: Adults aged 65 and older

	Oct. 2005
	%
Seen or heard an ad for the new Medicare drug benefit	62
Looked for general information about the new Medicare drug benefit	53
Looked at information from an insurer or health plan that will be offering a Medicare drug plan	45
Talked to a family member or friend about the new Medicare drug benefit	35
Compared different Medicare drug plan offerings	22
Talked to your pharmacist about the new Medicare drug benefit	9
Attended an information session or seminar about the new Medicare drug benefit	6
Talked to your doctor about the new Medicare drug benefit	4
None of these	18

Note 1: This is a new question, 2005 data only.

Note 2: Multiple-response question.

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TABLE 4

Factors That Matter When Choosing a Prescription Drug Plan

"When considering the different options that might be available to you when choosing a Medicare prescription drug plan, which of the following is most important to you personally?"

Base: Adults aged 65 and older

	Oct. 2005
	%
The cost of the co-pays and deductibles you would pay for prescription drugs	40
The cost of the monthly premium you would pay	32
The choice of prescription drugs that are covered by the plan	18
The network of pharmacies that you could use to fill your prescription	3
Something else	8

Note 1: This is a new question, 2005 data only.

Note 2: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 5

Seniors' Intent to Enroll in Medicare Drug Plan

"How likely are you to enroll in a new Medicare drug plan by May 2006, when the initial enrollment period for the new benefit ends?"

Base: Adults aged 65 and older

	June 2005*	Oct. 2005
	%	%
Absolutely Certain/Very or Somewhat Likely (NET)	32	49
Absolutely certain to enroll	2	12
Very likely	15	13
Somewhat likely	15	24
Not Very/Not At All Likely (NET)	30	16
Not very likely	21	9
Not at all likely	9	7
I already have prescription drug coverage so I don't need a new plan	38	35

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

*Data from *The Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll* conducted June 8-12, 2005 among 2,153 U.S. adults aged 18+.

TABLE 6

Seniors' Confidence in Choosing a Drug Plan

"Whether or not you plan to enroll in a new Medicare drug plan, how confident are you that you would be able to choose a drug plan that's right for you?"

Base: Adults aged 65 and older

	June 2005*	Oct. 2005
	%	%
Very/Somewhat Confident (NET)	46	39
Very confident	13	6
Confident	33	32
Not Very/Not At All Confident (NET)	37	41
Not very confident	25	30
Not at all confident	13	11
Not sure/Too early to tell	16	21

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

*Data from *The Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll* conducted June 8-12, 2005 among 2,153 U.S. adults aged 18+.

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

Methodology

Harris Interactive conducted this online survey within the United States between Oct. 26 and 28, 2005 among a national cross section of 2,160 adults, ages 18 years and over, of whom 290 are aged 65 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.

In theory, with probability samples of this size, one could say with 95 percent certainty that the overall results have a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points of what they would be if the entire U.S. adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. Sampling error for the sample results of adults aged 65 and older is plus or minus 9 percentage points. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. This includes refusals to be interviewed (nonresponse), question wording and question order, and weighting. It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors. This online sample is 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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About The Wall Street Journal Online

The Wall Street Journal Online at WSJ.com, published by Dow Jones & Company (NYSE: DJ; www.dowjones.com), is the largest paid subscription news site on the Web. Launched in 1996, the Online Journal continues to attract quality subscribers that are at the top of their industries, with 764,000 subscribers world-wide as of Q3, 2005.

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In 2005, the Online Journal was awarded a Codie Award for Best Online News Service for the second consecutive year, and its Health Industry Edition was awarded Best Online Science or Technology Service for the third consecutive year. In 2004, the Online Journal received an Eppy Award for Best Internet Business Service over 1 million monthly visitors.

The Wall Street Journal Online network includes CareerJournal.com, OpinionJournal.com, StartupJournal.com, RealEstateJournal.com and CollegeJournal.com.

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