



THE KAISER/HARVARD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAM ON THE PUBLIC AND HEALTH POLICY

KAISER FAMILY FOUNDATION

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THE PUBLIC IS CLOSELY FOLLOWING THE NATIONAL DEBATE ON MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS, BUT DOESN'T GRASP THE KEY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BUSH AND GORE PLANS

WASHINGTON, DC - A new Kaiser/Harvard/Health News Index survey finds that about half of the American people reported that they were following stories about the Bush and Gore prescription drug proposals closely during the month of September. The only story asked about in the survey followed more closely was the recall of Firestone tires (followed by 84%).

However, the survey also found that the essential difference between the Gore and Bush Medicare drug proposals is not understood by a large percentage of the American people. Almost 60% of the American people said that they did not know whose plan relied on private insurance companies and whose plan expanded the traditional Medicare program. Only 24% of the American people knew that the Bush proposal relied primarily on private insurance plans to provide prescription drug coverage, and 27% knew that the Gore plan would expand Medicare to pay directly for part of the cost of prescription medicines.

"There are fundamental differences between the Bush and Gore Medicare drug plans. This survey shows that more needs to be done to explain those differences to the voters so they can make an informed choice on election day," said Drew E. Altman, Ph.D., President of the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Even more of the elderly followed this issue closely (67% closely followed Bush's plan; 59% closely followed Gore's plan). But they were just as confused about what the Gore and Bush plans proposed (about 6 in 10 said they did not know).

"This is another example of why many Americans appear to turn off during political campaigns," says Robert J. Blendon, Sc.D., professor at the Harvard School of Public Health. "They have views about what to do on certain issues, but they often can't tell where the candidates stand."

The Kaiser/Harvard Health News Index is designed to help the news media and people in the health field gain a better understanding of which health stories in the news Americans are following and what they understand about those issues. Every two months since 1996, Kaiser/Harvard has issued a new index report. This Health News Index is based on a national random sample survey of 949 adults conducted September 29 - October 2, 2000. The margin of error is +/-3 percentage points. To obtain full results of this survey as well as to view the results of a recent national survey on prescription drugs and the related public opinion update and fact sheets, please visit our website at www.kff.org. Copies of this Health News Index (publication #3068) are also available by calling the Kaiser Family Foundation's Publications Request Line at 1-800-656-4533.

The Kaiser/Harvard Health News Index will continue to monitor public attention to and understanding of the Medicare prescription drug debate as the campaign season continues.

A JOINT PROGRAM OF THE KAISER FAMILY FOUNDATION AND HARVARD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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