

PNHP Backgrounder: Physician Polls on Single Payer Prior to 2008

State Physician Polls;

A 2007 survey of physicians in NH found that 67 percent of all physicians, and 81 percent of primary care physicians, support single payer. (“favor a simplified payer system in which public funds, collected through taxes, are used to pay directly for services to meet the basic healthcare needs of all citizens”) (New Hampshire Medical Society press release, December 2007).

A 2006 survey of physicians in MN found that 64 percent support single payer (Albers et al, Minnesota Medicine, 2/07)

A 2004 survey of physicians in MA found that 64 percent support single payer (McCormick et al, Archives Int Med, 2/9/04).

National Physician Polls:

A peer-reviewed 2003 poll published in the Annals of Internal Medicine 11/18/03 found that 49 percent of physicians supported national health insurance, while 40 percent were opposed.

The authors subsequently analyzed the results by membership in the AMA (unpublished manuscript). 37.1 percent of AMA members were in support, versus 55.2 percent of members of other organizations, including 69 percent of members of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

This last finding is very interesting because it is often thought that pediatricians only support coverage for children or SCHIP expansion. Another interesting finding from this survey was that pediatric sub-specialists (e.g. pediatric cardiologists) have the highest support of all specialties for single payer, nearly 70 percent).

An older, but still relevant 1999 survey found that 57 percent of academic medicine doctors favor single payer (Simon et al, NEJM, 3/25/99). This figure would likely be higher today.

AMA Polls:

In polling, the AMA pejoratively calls single payer "government-run" health care. In their publications, they portray it in harshly negative terms. Even so, they find growing support for single payer in their polling.

In a 2004 poll by the AMA, 41 percent of physicians supported single payer, up from 18 percent in 1992. Adopting single-payer national health insurance was more highly-favored than expanding existing public programs to cover the uninsured (38 percent), an individual mandate to purchase coverage (27 percent) or an employer mandate (24 percent).

By specialty, psychiatrists were the most likely to support single payer (58 percent) while anesthesiologists were least likely to favor it (30 percent) (Source: AMA Division of Market Research and Analysis, Advocacy Agenda Setting Survey, September 2004).

In steady decline, less than 1/3 of physicians belonged to the AMA by 2007.

American College of Physicians (ACP):

The 124,000-member ACP endorsed single payer as “one pathway” to universal coverage in December, 2007. The ACP is the nation’s largest medical specialty group representing internists.

ACP Past President Dr. Andy Hedberg calls single payer “a mainstream option” for health reform among physicians today.