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NEW POLL GAUGES THE BAY AREA'S VIEWS ON HEALTH CARE **Cost and Quality are the Critical Concerns; Residents Paying Close Attention to** **Candidates' Positions on Health Care**

SAN FRANCISCO-Bay Area residents express concern about the cost and availability of quality health care in the region, with more than seven out of 10 rating the affordability of care as only fair or poor and nearly half (49%) saying that access to care for the uninsured in the area is poor. In contrast, 80% say they are pleased with the quality of care they personally receive.

These are among the key findings of a new poll released today as part of "*The American Public on Health Care: The Missing Perspective*," a project of the Council for Excellence in Government in partnership with the Accenture Institute for Public Service Value and the Institute of Medicine at the National Academies. The survey – conducted by Gallup – will be a focal point of discussion at a town hall meeting tonight at the Mission Bay Conference Center at the University of California San Francisco.

According to the poll, Bay Area residents are also paying attention to the candidates' positions on health care and overwhelmingly say that the candidates priorities on this issue should be controlling the rising cost of health care (86%), providing health insurance for all children (83%), and improving the quality and safety of medical care. They also want straight answers from the candidates as far as how much their reforms would be paid for and how much they would cost individual taxpayers.

A Tale of Two Health Care Systems: Ours and Mine

Bay Area residents are generally negative in their assessment of the affordability of health care in the region, as well as access to care for the uninsured. **Three out of four residents say that access to care for the uninsured is fair (26%) or poor (49%)** and only 3% say it is excellent. However, eight out of 10 rate their care as **excellent (37%) or good (43%)**, compared to just one in five who rate their care as fair (15%) or poor (5%). Not surprisingly, geographic location within the Bay Area plays a role in residents' assessments, with notable differences surfacing between counties.

Cost and Quality Top List of Concerns for Area

Cost (40%) and quality (35%) are nearly tied as top health care concerns of San Francisco area residents. Only 14% of those polled cited access to care as their top concern. For the approximately nine percent of Bay Area residents who reported that they are currently uninsured, cost was cited as the most commonly mentioned barrier to lack of coverage (35%). Another 29% reported that their main reason for not having health insurance coverage is because their employer doesn't offer it.

Cost is also a major driver of overall satisfaction with a health care plan. When asked about their satisfaction with their health insurance plans, 69% of the greater San Francisco area said they were satisfied. The four aspects of coverage they are most satisfied with are: quality (80%), choice (75%), coordination (72%), and coverage (72%). Residents are less satisfied with the out-of-pocket costs they have to pay (52%).

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Ready for Reform, but Reluctant to Change

When asked to pick between the status quo and specific reform proposals, most area residents favor maintaining the current system. Sixty percent of Bay Area residents prefer that employers continue to provide health insurance for their employees rather than give them the money to buy their own private or government insurance. Half (51%) of those polled would also rather have the government continue to give tax credits for employers who provide health insurance instead of providing this tax credit directly to consumers (40%).

When presented with the option to cover all children but leave some adults uninsured, nearly half (48%) felt it was more important to cover the uninsured even if it meant that everyone would be required to buy health insurance, rather than only guaranteeing coverage for children (32%). However, Bay Area residents are evenly split on their willingness to pay more in taxes to cover the uninsured. Half say no (49%) and half (51%) say yes, including 34% who would be willing to pay up to 5% more in taxes.

Health Care is Hot on the Campaign Trail

The poll results indicate that roughly half of greater San Francisco area residents (51%) are paying attention to the candidates' positions on health care in the 2008 elections, with 29% saying they are paying very close attention. While much has been made of the youth movement during this election cycle, as far as health care goes, **Bay Area Seniors continue to lead the way with 36% paying very close attention compared to 32% of those 40-64 and 28% of those under 40.**

With respect to the candidates' health care proposals, Bay Area residents believe that **controlling rising health care costs (86%) and providing health insurance for all children (83%) should be the top health care priorities for the candidates.** In the mid-tier priorities, 75 percent of residents favor providing health insurance for all uninsured Americans. Area residents also want to hear how much planned reforms would cost individual taxpayers and how the candidates would pay for their plans. Providing access to health care for non-US citizens (42%) was lowest on the list of priorities.

The Importance of Information: What the Bay Area Wants to Know

More than half of the polled San Francisco area residents sought out some type of information to learn more about their health care in the past 12 months. More than eight in 10 were looking for information about what is covered and not covered in their plan (83%), and nearly the same amount were seeking information on how to prevent illness by adopting healthier lifestyles (78%). Surprisingly, only 53% were looking for information about the quality or performance ratings of doctors and hospitals covered

When asked about specific types of information they have sought about their health insurance plan, nearly all found the information on quality ratings and prescription drugs costs, as well as how to lead a healthier lifestyle, **to be understandable and useful**, rather than complex and confusing. Those polled were more likely to say information on out-of-pocket costs and coverage features to be complex and confusing.

Electronic Records a Pathway to Better Information

More than half (55%) of Greater San Francisco area residents have heard of electronic health records, and 37% are currently using them. Awareness increases with age, income and education, with awareness highest in the 40-64 age range (70%) and for those in the over \$75K income bracket (70%). For those polled who know of but don't use electronic health records, 39% indicated that they're likely to use such a system if it were available to them. Regardless of use, over half of the residents realize the benefits such as reducing costs and improving quality of care. **Furthermore, the sharing of medical information is strongly supported, with three out of Greater San Francisco residents (74%) favoring this idea.**

Coverage, Cost, and Choice are Top Three Factors in Choosing a Health Plan

When asked to rate the importance of nine different considerations if they were choosing a new health plan, most in the San Francisco area survey "want it all." In order of importance, the top considerations were:

- **Cost:** The total cost you would pay for the health coverage (81% major consideration)
- **Coverage:** The benefits cover the services you need (81%)
- **Choice:** The selection of doctors and hospitals covered under the plan (74%)
- **Prescription Drugs:** Offering low cost prescription drugs (69%)

The poll of 402 Greater San Francisco area residents, including Santa Clara, Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Francisco and San Mateo counties, was conducted by telephone in March 2008 and features an overall sampling error of +/-4.9%.

The results of the survey will be discussed this evening at 7:00 p.m. during a town hall meeting at the Mission Bay Conference Center at the University of California San Francisco. The event, which is free and open to the public, will be moderated by television journalist Frank Sesno, and will feature the Institute of Medicine President, **Dr. Harvey Fineberg**; San Francisco Director of Health, **Dr. Mitchell Katz**; Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger senior Advisor, **Daniel Zingale**; Safeway, Inc. Senior Vice President, **Ken Shachmut**; San Francisco VA Medical Center Chief of Medical Service, **Dr. Paul Volberding**; St. Anthony Free Clinic Medical Director, **Dr. Ana Valdes**; and The Council for Excellence in Government President, **Patricia McGinnis**. But the real "stars of the show" will be the audience – area residents with their own questions, suggestions, and ideas.

This is the third and last meeting in *The American Public on Health Care: The Missing Perspective* series – a project of the Council for Excellence in Government in partnership with Accenture and the Institute of Medicine at the National Academies. Through lively, interactive town hall meetings – underpinned by local and national public opinion survey research by the renowned Gallup– the series explores the challenges, problems and trade-offs of health care...all through the lens of the people most touched by it... the American people.

The effort is modeled closely on the Council for Excellence in Government's *American Jobs: A National Conversation* and *Homeland Security from the Citizens' Perspective* projects, which engaged the public on a wide range of issues and resulted in a set of national recommendations for action.

The Council for Excellence in Government is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that works to improve government performance and citizen participation. The Council's successful Homeland Security and American Jobs projects have set the standard for public-oriented Town Hall meetings.

The Accenture Institute for Public Service Value is a research and development center that helps public service organizations create value and improve social outcomes for their citizens by advancing high performance in public service delivery, policy and governance.

The Institute of Medicine of the National Academies serves as adviser to the nation to improve health and provides independent, objective, evidence-based advice to policymakers, health professionals, the private sector, and the public. The mission of the Institute of Medicine embraces the health of people everywhere.

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