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## 54% of state doctors support national health insurance, survey finds

By [Guy Boulton](#) of the Journal Sentinel

Posted: Sept. 9, 2009

A slight majority of Wisconsin doctors who responded to a survey last summer supported national health insurance or achieving universal coverage through incremental reform, according to researchers from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Wisconsin Medical Society.

The survey of 948 doctors found that more than 54% support legislation for national health insurance and 55% support incremental reform toward universal coverage. That compared with 37% of the doctors who opposed national health insurance and 26% who oppose incremental reform.

Support was stronger among primary care physicians, with 65.6% of the family physicians, internists and pediatricians supporting legislation for national health insurance, compared with 46.2% of the specialists.

"Specialists may not see the kind of problems of access or continuity of care that primary care physicians see every day in their practices," said Donna Friedsam, a researcher at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, who was involved in the survey.

Primary care physicians also were less likely than specialists to oppose legislation for national health insurance, with 24.9% in opposition, compared with 46.3% for specialists.

The American Academy of Family Physicians and the American College of Physicians, which represents internists, are among the medical societies that have stated their general support for the health care reform proposals now before Congress.

"There's surprisingly broad agreement that there's a need for reform," said Tim Bartholow, a family physician and vice president with the Wisconsin Medical Society.

The survey also found general agreement among doctors on what needs to be changed in the health care system, such as the cost of medical malpractice insurance, administrative costs, unhealthy lifestyles, the cost of health care services, insurance reform and the supply of primary care physicians.

"What we learned in this is that physicians agree with everyone else that there are substantial problems in the health care system," said Friedsam, associate director for health policy with the Population Health Institute at the UW medical school.

Primary care physicians were more likely to stress the need to improve the coordination of care.

Only 39% of the physicians surveyed said that proposals to change a payment system that favors specialty care over primary care was extremely or quite important.

Doctors now are paid much higher fees for procedures than for providing preventive care, managing chronic diseases and coordinating care. Specialists can make hundreds of thousands of dollars more per year than primary care physicians.

For example, family physicians make an average of \$173,000, compared with \$419,000 for cardiologists, \$401,000 for urologists and \$391,000 for radiologists, according to a survey by Merritt Hawkins & Associates, a health care staffing company.

"There's no doubt that the system can and should work better than it does now," Bartholow said. "But to do that, we as a society have to decide how we invest in the coordination of care and wellness and prevention - and those are knotty questions."

The survey of 46 questions was mailed to 2,500 randomly selected doctors last summer and had a 38% response rate. It was published in the most recent issue of the [Wisconsin Medical Journal](#).



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