

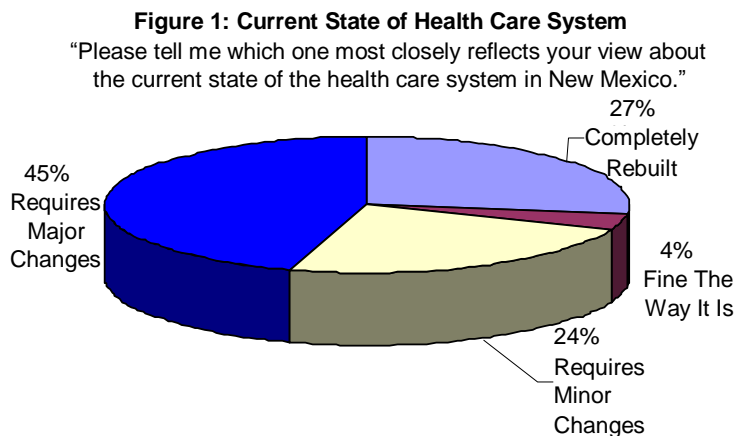
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 Policy Brief

The Public's Views on Health Care Reform prior to the 48th Legislative Second Session 2008

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The 48th Legislative session is underway and four bills concerning proposals for reforming the state's health care system have been offered. The proposals focus in particular on strategies to expand medical care coverage to the state's uninsured population and to improve coverage of the "under-insured" – those whose current coverage does not provide adequate financial protection from health care costs. A statewide survey of New Mexican adults (n=1258, margin of error +/- 3%) conducted by the University of New Mexico Institute for Public Policy from October to December 2007 examines public attitudes regarding health care reform. This brief provides information from that survey that may assist the state legislature in its efforts to reform health care financing in New Mexico.

To provide a context for understanding public attitudes about health care reform in NM we began the survey by asking respondents what they believe is the biggest problem facing New Mexico today. Out of several choices presented, only "Public Education" (22%) was rated higher than "Health Care" (14%) as the state's biggest challenge. To further our understanding about public attitudes about health care we also asked respondents to assess the current state of the health care system in New Mexico. As **Figure 1** indicates, very few New Mexicans believe that the current health care system is "Fine the Way it is" (4%). In contrast, an overwhelming majority (72%) believes that the system either requires "Major Changes" (45%) or needs to be "Completely Rebuilt" (27%). Thus, not only do New Mexicans deem health care to be a very important issue, but they also believe the system is in dire need of major revision.

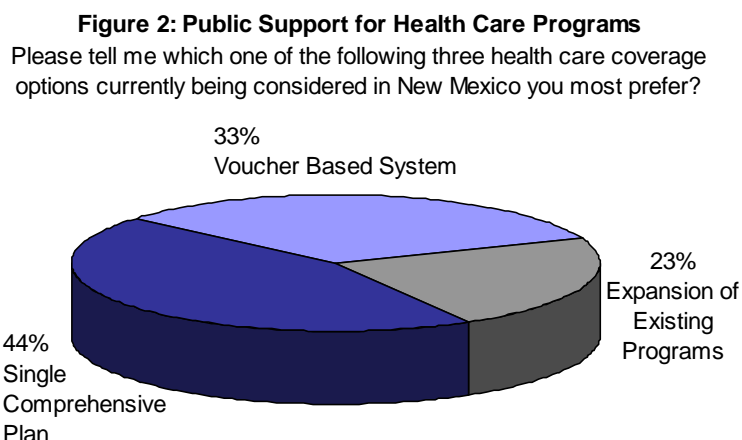


Another major goal of the survey was to determine the public's preferences for funding health care reform in New Mexico. Specifically, we asked respondents to identify how they would prefer paying for programs intended to expand access to health care coverage. Overall, 70% of respondents are in favor of paying more in "State and Local Taxes" as compared to the 30% who favor paying higher "Insurance Premiums". We then asked respondents about their preference regarding the three main strategies the state legislature would be considering during the session.

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Figure 2 shows that New Mexicans hold diverse opinions about the direction a reform plan should take with a plurality of New Mexicans (44%) preferring a “Single Comprehensive Plan” compared to 33% preferring a “Voucher Based Program” and 23% preferring “Expansion of Existing Programs”. Hence, finding common ground will require a concerted and determined effort by the legislature.



Another important line of inquiry involved understanding public attitudes about extending health care coverage to different segments of New Mexico’s population; accordingly, we asked respondents to evaluate this issue. **Table 1** shows that a majority of New Mexicans “agree” or “strongly agree” with expanding access to coverage for the most vulnerable, with the most support shown for a program that extends coverage to children. However, respondents were the least inclined to extend coverage to newcomers – only 24% of respondents believe that undocumented immigrants should receive coverage and 33% say that new state residents should be covered prior to meeting residency requirements. Thus, New Mexicans appear to be less wedded to the concept of covering everyone, making this an important issue to be considered in the task of reforming the health care coverage system.

Table 1: Support for Coverage of Specific Segments of the NM Population

“Now, please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements. State government should provide basic health care coverage to:”

Population Category	Agree Combined	Strongly Agree	Agree
All Uninsured Children	85%	39%	46%
High Health Care Needs/ Pre-existing Conditions	76%	19%	58%
The Homeless	74%	16%	59%
Changes in Health Status	74%	20%	54%
The Underemployed	70%	14%	55%
The Unemployed	62%	12%	50%
All Uninsured Adults	55%	13%	42%
New NM Residents	33%	5%	28%
Undocumented Immigrants	24%	4%	20%

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