

New Poll Says This Is a Top Concern of Voters in 2016

Americans want to know what the next U.S. president will do to lower their rising healthcare costs, a priority shared by Republican and Democratic voters and second only to keeping the country safe, according to a recent Reuters/Ipsos poll.

In all, 62 percent of people surveyed said they would want to know about a presidential candidate's plan for reducing healthcare costs, according to the online poll conducted Dec. 14-18.

While Republican and Democratic candidates are worlds apart on how to address healthcare, poll results show roughly the same proportion of Republican voters, or 62 percent, view it as a priority compared with 67 percent of Democrats, highlighting their frustration with rising drug prices, insurance premiums and deductibles ahead of the 2016 vote.

The only topic that attracted more interest was national security, as 67 percent wanted to know more about how presidential candidates planned to keep the country safe.

Fifty-four percent wanted to know their plan for creating more jobs, 42 percent were interested in plans for education reform and 31 percent in how they would deal with climate change.

U.S. employers have been shifting more health coverage costs onto workers, particularly through high deductible health insurance plans, which can reach \$6,600 in out of pocket costs for an individual and \$13,200 for a family before insurance kicks in. Many of these changes have been ushered in with President Barack Obama's signature healthcare law, as well as recent sharp increases in some prescription drug costs.

"I'm on Obamacare, and it's a horrible situation," said Fred

Voeltner, 64, who was laid off in 2009 and now pays for his own insurance. He is frustrated by how far he has to travel for care and how much more he has to pay each visit. "I'm open-minded," he said. "But I expect to vote for a Republican."

About 40 percent of people polled by Reuters/Ipsos said their healthcare costs rose in the past year, compared with 46 percent who said the costs were about the same and 13 percent who saw a decline. More than 30 percent spent more on prescriptions than last year.

"The growth in out of pocket costs, especially the gradual growth in deductibles, comes at a time when their wages are flat," said Drew Altman, president and CEO of the Kaiser Family Foundation, which found that the average deductible for individuals was \$1,318 this year compared with \$917 in 2010.

Democratic presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont have vowed to remedy rising drug prices in their campaigns. Republican candidates have emphasized plans to repeal Obama's Affordable Care Act, which they blame for raising premiums and other costs.

"Premiums are going through the roof, deductibles are so high that unless you're close to death you're not going to get to use it," Republican front-runner Donald Trump said at a rally in Des Moines earlier this month.

"I will go to Congress and we will repeal every word of Obamacare," Republican rival, Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, told a crowd in Mechanicsville, Virginia, on Friday.

Republican strategists said party candidates are more focused on national security and the economy as dominant issues, noting they have little to gain by offering a detailed plan to tackle healthcare costs that could run up against major business interests, including the pharmaceutical industry.

“Republican candidates generally stay between the guard rails of ‘Obamacare is bad and should be repealed’ and ‘We need to let the market work.’ More specificity than that will certainly produce consequences that none of them want to discuss right now,” said Republican strategist Reed Galen.

During a debate on Saturday, Clinton credited Obamacare with expanding benefits to 17 million Americans but said she would have to fix some “glitches,” referring to the rising costs. Republicans have since attacked her for trying to downplay the impact of such costs on Americans.

Clinton proposed more oversight of health insurers, a \$5,000 tax credit for people struggling with medical expenses and allowing the government’s Medicare program for the elderly to negotiate for lower drug prices.

The Reuters/Ipsos poll surveyed 1,639 adults with a credibility interval of plus or minus 4.6 percentage points.
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