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New National Poll Finds Americans Strongly Opposed to Cutting Medicare Payments for Nursing Home Care As A Means of Financing Health Care Reform

66% Less Likely to Support Re-Election of Local Member of Congress if Voted for Medicare Cuts
“78% of those over 65 believe nursing home care will get worse because of such cuts”

Tallahassee, FL – As federal lawmakers continue to sound out constituents over the August recess on health care reform, and how best to finance a broad-based overhaul, a new *Mellman Group* (D) national survey (1000 Registered Voters, 8/21-24, +/- 3%) finds Americans, by significant margins, strongly oppose cutting Medicare-funded nursing home care over other funding options. Underscoring the unpopularity of cutting Medicare-financed nursing home care – now proposed by Congress – the data finds a full 66% of voters less likely to support their local member of Congress for reelection if they voted to cut seniors’ Medicare-funded care to finance health care reform, believing that cutting such payments would reduce quality care.

Says the new *Mellman Group* poll analysis:

“Voters overwhelmingly oppose cutting Medicare payments to nursing homes as a means of financing healthcare reform, expressing their distaste for this approach in several ways during our brief survey.

First, it is the least popular of the funding options being considered.

Second, cutting Medicare payments to nursing homes is far and away the least acceptable method of financing reform.

Finally, a large majority of voters would feel less favorable toward a Member of Congress who supported such an approach. Voters say they will take out their anger on Members who vote for such nursing home cuts at the ballot box. The reason is straightforward—most Americans believe that cutting such payments will reduce the quality of care seniors receive in nursing homes. *While healthcare reform is important to many Americans, Medicare funds for nursing homes are considered off limits as a way to finance reform.*”

When asked “*If Congress cut \$32 billion in Medicare payments to nursing homes to care for seniors, do you think the quality of care seniors receive in nursing homes would get better, stay about the same or get worse?*” the analysis indicates that, “Seniors are equally concerned, as 78% of those over 65 believe nursing home care will get worse because of such cuts and a majority believe care will get much worse (58%).”

The following are the poll questions and results:

1. Congress is now considering ways to pay for healthcare reform. Which one of the following do you think is the most acceptable way to pay for healthcare reform?

Cutting Medicare payments to nursing homes to care for seniors	3%
Raising taxes on people who make over \$250,000 per year	45%
Requiring people to pay taxes on generous healthcare benefits they receive from their employers	6%
Taxing health insurance companies	14%
None	26%
Don't know	6%

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Representing the Florida Long Term Care Community

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2. And which one of the following do you think is the least acceptable way to pay for healthcare reform?

Cutting Medicare payments to nursing homes to care for seniors	49%
Raising taxes on people who make over \$250,000 per year	8%
Requiring people to pay taxes on generous healthcare benefits they receive from their employers	14%
Taxing health insurance companies	9%
None	14%
Don't know	6%

3. If Congress cut \$32 billion in Medicare payments to nursing homes to care for seniors, do you think the quality of care seniors receive in nursing homes would get better, stay about the same or get worse? **[IF BETTER/WORSE ASK]**. And is that much **[BETTER/WORSE]** or only somewhat **[BETTER/WORSE]**?

Much better	4%	7%
Somewhat better	3%	
Stay about the same	11%	
Somewhat worse	19%	
Much worse	59%	78%
Don't know	4%	

4. If your Member of Congress voted to fund healthcare reform in part by cutting \$32 billion in Medicare payments to nursing homes to care for seniors would you be more likely to vote to reelect them, less likely to vote to reelect them or would it not make much difference to your vote? **[IF MORE/ LESS LIKELY ASK:]** Is that much **[MORE/LESS]** or somewhat **[MORE/LESS]** likely?

Much more likely	5%	7%
Somewhat more likely	2%	
No difference	20%	
Somewhat less likely	17%	
Much less likely	49%	66%
Don't know	6%	

“From the results of this objective, timely and highly significant national survey, it is abundantly clear the public, to its credit, harbors strong antipathy to slashing Medicare beneficiaries’ nursing home benefits to finance any broader reform package,” stated Bruce Yarwood, President and CEO of the American Health Care Association. “We strongly support the laudable objective of the Obama Administration and Congress to expand Americans’ access to care, and help bring down health care costs. However, we will continue to warn both on Capitol Hill and at the local level how and why the \$32 billion Medicare cuts now under consideration will not only harm seniors’ ongoing access to quality nursing home care, but also jeopardize the jobs of the key frontline caregivers who make a significant difference in patients’ care outcomes.”

Emmett Reed, Executive Director of the Florida Health Care Association, noted that Florida nursing homes are seeing an increasingly diverse patient base, and providing a greater variety of acute care, rehabilitative and convalescent services that cannot be delivered elsewhere – care services which are now in jeopardy due to the sheer size and scope of the Medicare funding cuts. “These massive funding cuts will undermine facilities’ ability to effectively treat this more medically complex patient population, and also put the jobs of the direct care workforce they depend upon in substantial danger,” said Reed.

During the August recess, Reed said, the long-term care community has been urging federal lawmakers to keep the interests of nursing home residents and those who care for them foremost in their minds. “Protecting vulnerable seniors during the process of health care reform must always remain a key priority from which we must not deviate.”

The poll and the subsequent analysis can be found on the American Health Care Association’s Web site at www.ahca.org.

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