



Poll: Voters like gov's 'Healthy Utah Plan'

Majority of Utah voters supports private market alternative to expanding Medicaid.

<http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/politics/58075568-90/utah-percent-plan-support.html.csp>

By Kirsten Stewart
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Utah voters overwhelmingly support Gov. Gary Herbert's private market alternative to expanding Medicaid, no matter their gender, age, religion or political persuasion — or how the question is posed.

A poll of 623 registered voters in May and June by Dan Jones & Associates found:

- 88 percent favor Herbert's "Healthy Utah" plan over doing nothing.
- 70 percent prefer Herbert's plan to a straightforward Medicaid expansion as envisioned by the Affordable Care Act.
- 59 percent say they support or strongly support Herbert's plan.

"We tried to ask these questions in many ways and while the degree of support varies, there's strong support almost any way you frame it," said Lincoln Nehring, a health policy analyst at Voices for Utah Children.

The nonprofit advocacy group sponsored the poll, along with the Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce, Utah Hospital Association, American Cancer Association, AARP of Utah and Utah Health Policy Project. The phone and email survey was designed with input from Notalys, which also analyzed the results.

The findings track results of an [earlier voter survey](#) by Brigham Young University.

But this more recent questionnaire gives a more nuanced view of voters' convictions and shows that even the most conservative Utahns — including those who say they value individual responsibility — support a federal role in health care.

At a glance

Other Medicaid survey highlights

71 percent of Utah voters believe it's appropriate for the state to accept federal assistance in health care.

83 percent believe "all legal Utah residents should have access to affordable health insurance."

54 percent say they would be more likely to support candidates who back Gov. Gary Herbert's Healthy Utah plan.

Sixty-four percent of voters who identify as Republican and "very conservative" support the governor's plan, while just 13 percent oppose it, the poll found.

Of the 65 percent who agree that "individuals and families should generally be responsible for meeting their own health care needs," 80 percent also agree that "individuals who are unable to afford health insurance should receive help from government sources."

Utah's Republican governor has been lobbying the Obama administration for flexibility to craft a plan that GOP legislative leaders can get behind.

The closed-door negotiations leave much to the imagination, shown by the fact that only 40 percent of polled voters said they are familiar with the plan.

But when the plan is described as using \$250 million in federal funds to buy private insurance for Utahns living at or near the poverty line, 58 percent say they support or strongly support the idea, with 24 percent undecided and 16 percent opposed or strongly opposed.

When other features of the plan were explained, such as Herbert's desire to have enrollees pay for a portion of their coverage, support increased.

The poll was a random sample of registered Utah voters. Pollsters set a county quota to ensure that every county was represented.

Some responses were given extra weight to even out demographic imbalances among those surveyed. Those polled, for example, were younger than the average Utah voter.

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