National Poll: 3 in 4 Voters Report Rising Health Care Costs, Insurance Denials, or Delays to Care in Past Year

New data reveal broad bipartisan demand for health care reform, with voters looking to the new Congress for action

WASHINGTON, D.C. (Nov. 24, 2026) – Nearly 3 in 4 voters (74%) say they or a family member faced rising health care costs, coverage denials, treatment delays, or surprise bills in the past year, according to a new national poll released today by the National Health Council.

Conducted by Lake Research Partners and Bellwether Research & Consulting, the poll surveyed 1,000 registered voters nationwide, all of whom are also patients.

The poll reveals that voters across party lines say the U.S. health care system is failing patients – and they want Washington to fix it.

Key findings include:

- **Patients are paying more and delaying care:** Half say they are paying more than last year in premiums (50%) and out-of-pocket costs (50%), and nearly a third put off medical care (31%) because of cost. Among voters with private insurance, more than 6 in 10 are paying more in premiums (63%) and out-of-pocket costs (60%).
- **Patients are facing barriers to care:** 1 in 4 had a prescribed medication denied (25%) or waited more than two weeks for prior authorization (24%), and 1 in 5 had trouble finding a specialist (21%).
- **Voters want Washington to drive change:** 78% say the U.S. health care system needs major changes or a complete rebuild, and 74% rate elected officials' work on affordability and access as only fair or poor. More than 8 in 10 would be more likely to support a candidate who made reforming the health insurance system a top priority (84%).
- **Patient-first reforms have near-universal support:** Roughly 9 in 10 favor eliminating surprise billing (91%), requiring price transparency (91%), reducing out-of-pocket costs (90%), requiring insurers to cover treatments doctors prescribe (89%), and increasing screening and early detection for health problems (88%).

“Every one of us is a patient: every voter, lawmaker, doctor, and caregiver,” said **Randall Rutta, Chief Executive Officer of the National Health Council**. “That shared stake is why we have to ask one question of every health care proposal: Does it actually help patients? Today, too often, the answer is no.

“Holding onto a plan isn’t the same as being protected by it. Patients are watching their costs rise and their coverage change, and they’re worried about what that means for their families down the road,” Rutta continued. “The new Congress has a real opportunity to change that, and patients across the country will be watching.”

"At a time when voters agree on almost nothing, health care reform stands out," said **David Mermin, Partner at Lake Research Partners.** "Democrats, Republicans, and independents describe the same problems and reach the same conclusion: The system has to change."

"Voters aren't asking lawmakers to talk about health care differently," said **Christine Matthews, President of Bellwether Research & Consulting**. "They want to see it work differently. Reform is a priority they expect the new Congress to deliver on."

The poll establishes a baseline that the National Health Council will use to measure progress as part of a forthcoming national initiative focused on holding lawmakers and regulators accountable for delivering meaningful results for patients in the 120th Congress and beyond. Drawing on the NHC's nearly 200 member organizations, which together represent more than 200 million Americans living with chronic diseases and disabilities, the campaign will amplify patients' voices and strengthen their collective influence in Washington

Methodology: Lake Research Partners and Bellwether Research & Consulting conducted this online survey of 1,000 registered voters nationwide who are also patients from October 20-28, 2026. Respondents qualified as patients if they or someone in their household had received medical care in the past two years. Results were weighted to reflect registered voters. The margin of error is ±3.1 percentage points and higher for subgroups.

For more information:

- Topline results
- Memo from Lake Research Partners and Bellwether Research & Consulting

About the National Health Council
The National Health Council (NHC) unites nearly 200 national organizations—including leading patient groups, research institutions, providers, caregivers, and businesses across the health care sector—to drive patient-centered health policy. Representing 200+ million Americans with chronic diseases and disabilities, the NHC strengthens its members' collective influence to expand access to quality, affordable, and equitable health care. The NHC fosters collaboration to shape policies that reflect the needs of patients. Learn more at: nationalhealthcouncil.org.

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