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Most Seniors Misinformed, Unaware of Key Provisions of the Affordable Care Act, New Poll from the National Council on Aging Reveals

NCOA Launches "Straight Talk for Seniors on Health Reform" Campaign to Give Older Adults Comprehensive, Unbiased Information on New Law

Washington, DC – (July 26, 2010) – A national survey of adults aged 65 and older for the National Council on Aging (NCOA) finds that most seniors are still confused or unaware of important aspects of health reform, or the Affordable Care Act, including its impact on their own Medicare coverage, the growth of Medicare, and the budget deficit.

NCOA identified the top twelve facts that every senior should know about the health reform law. The "Straight Talk" poll reveals that only 17% of seniors knew the correct answers to more than half the factual questions posed about these key aspects of new law and only 9% knew the correct answers to at least two-thirds of the questions. None of the 636 older adults interviewed for the poll knew the correct answers to all twelve of the factual questions.

Speaking at a town hall meeting at Iona Senior Service Center in Washington, DC, James Firman, president and CEO of NCOA, announced the launch of NCOA's "Straight Talk for Seniors on Health Reform" campaign, aimed at helping seniors get the facts they need about health reform and changes to Medicare. "Seniors need to know the key facts about health reform so that they can be informed consumers and educated citizens," Firman said. The campaign will continue through the fall with additional town hall and educational events, a series of "Straight Talk" educational materials (available at www.NCOA.org/StraightTalk), an interactive online "Straight Talk" quiz for people to test their knowledge of the law and learn more about it, detailed poll results, and webinars to prepare aging services professionals to give "Straight Talk" presentations in their own communities.

Poll Reveals Widespread Confusion, Even on Issues Most Important to Seniors

David Krane, Vice President of Public Affairs and Policy Research at Harris Interactive® gave a full briefing on the NCOA "Straight Talk" poll. The poll was conducted by Harris Interactive® for NCOA by telephone within the United States from July 9-12, 2010 among a nationwide cross section of 636 adults aged 65 and over. The margin of sampling error on the total sample is +/- 4.0 percentage points. The poll was supported by a grant from The Atlantic Philanthropies. Video of Krane's briefing will be available later on Monday July 26 at <http://ventanadc.com/clients/NCOA/POLLSTER/>. The rest of the presentation will be available shortly thereafter.



The poll revealed that even questions with the most direct bearing on seniors and their health drew high numbers of incorrect answers. For example, only 22% of seniors understood that the new law would not cut their basic Medicare benefits. Almost twice as many seniors (42%) held the incorrect view that the law would cut their basic Medicare benefits, while 37% said they did not know.

And with the federal budget deficit looming large in policy debates, it was striking that only 14% of seniors were aware that the new law is projected to reduce the deficit. Many more -- 49% -- incorrectly believed it would increase the deficit. (According to projections by the Congressional Budget Office, the law will reduce the deficit by an estimated \$124 billion over 10 years.)

“The health reform debate was long and complicated and often dominated by political spin that confused seniors,” said James Firman, president and CEO of NCOA. “NCOA is committed to helping seniors get the key facts and information they need to make smart, informed decisions about their own health care. The fact that this poll revealed that so many people are misinformed or don’t know much about the new law means we have our work cut out for us with the “Straight Talk for Seniors on Health Reform” campaign.”

Poll Results At Odds With Seniors’ Impressions of Their Knowledge

Even among the older adults who said they considered themselves “very familiar” (9%) or “familiar” (12%) with the new law, correct answers were few and far between, calling into question how well people were able to assess their understanding of the Affordable Care Act.

“Seniors are certainly confused about the Affordable Care Act, but interestingly, many of them also overestimated their own degree of knowledge,” remarked David Krane of Harris Interactive®, which conducted the poll. “Those who said they were “very familiar” or “familiar” with the law only fared somewhat better than those who self-identified as “not familiar.” In the “very familiar” and “familiar” categories, 65% got less than half the answers right, compared with 85% of the people who self-identified as “not familiar.”

Seniors Dissatisfied with Available Information

A significant number of seniors (38%) said they were “not at all satisfied” with the accuracy and reliability of the information they had received about the new law. Very few (7%) said they were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” (17%).

“Unfortunately, this finding comes as no surprise,” says NCOA’s Firman. “Everywhere I go seniors tell me that what they really want is information they can understand and rely on, from an organization they trust, whose only agenda is helping them get the facts. Everyone is entitled to their own opinions, but not their own facts. NCOA is proud to launch our “Straight Talk” campaign to continue to meet this need among the nation’s millions of older adults and their families and caregivers.”

Other Important Findings

Seniors’ highest rate of correct answers came on a question about whether the law expands coverage to 32 million uninsured Americans (43% correctly answered “yes”). Seniors also showed relatively high awareness of the provision to gradually close the Medicare prescription drug coverage gap, or “donut hole,” with 42% giving the correct answer.



Exploring a range of topics, from new care provisions to the financing of the new law, the poll also found that:

- Only 14% of seniors knew that the law does not cut Medicare payments to doctors; 45% answered incorrectly and 41% said they did not know.
- Only 24% of seniors knew that it is projected to extend the solvency of the Medicare Trust Fund.
- Only 28% knew that the law improves the availability of long-term care at home for seniors with disabilities.
- Only 22% knew about improvements in chronic care.
- Only 33% knew about the new, free yearly wellness visit Medicare will now provide.
- Two out of three seniors either did not know (43%) or gave the wrong answer about the future growth of Medicare spending. Only 34% knew that it will continue to grow under the new law, just more slowly.

About NCOA

The National Council on Aging is a non-profit service and advocacy organization headquartered in Washington, DC. NCOA is a national voice for older Americans - especially those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged - and the community organizations that serve them. It brings together non-profit organizations, businesses and government to develop creative solutions that improve the lives of all older adults. NCOA works with thousands of organizations across the country to help seniors find jobs and benefits, improve their health, live independently, and remain active in their communities. For more information, visit www.NCOA.org.

About Harris Interactive

Harris Interactive is one of the world's leading custom market research firms, leveraging research, technology, and business acumen to transform relevant insight into actionable foresight. Known widely for the Harris Poll and for pioneering innovative research methodologies, Harris offers expertise in a wide range of industries including healthcare, technology, public affairs, energy, telecommunications, financial services, insurance, media, retail, restaurant, and consumer package goods. Serving clients in over 215 countries and territories through our North American, European, and Asian offices and a network of independent market research firms, Harris specializes in delivering research solutions that help us - and our clients - stay ahead of what's next. For more information, please visit www.harrisinteractive.com.