Background
In 2006, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts voted to enact universal health care in the state, requiring all residents be covered by some type of health insurance. The public health insurance option is also known as the “Commonwealth Plan.” Now, as the health care reform debate escalates at the national level, many are curious about the outcomes of the Massachusetts universal health care plan and whether or not it would be a good model for the nation, as a whole.

In 2009, the American College of Emergency Physicians commissioned Harris Interactive to conduct a study among Massachusetts residents to get their opinions about universal health care reform in their state. In particular, to find out how emergency rooms have been affected in terms of crowding, wait times, staffing shortages and whether or not emergency room care should be taken into account when creating the national plan.

Methodology
The survey was conducted by telephone between September 9-September 16, 2009 among 1,002 Massachusetts residents 18+, of whom 108 have the Commonwealth Plan, 665 have private insurance and 332 have Medicaid, Medicare, or military insurance.
Theme 1: While Not Perfect, Many Recognize Positive Outcomes of Universal Health Coverage

Overall, MA residents do not uniformly agree whether universal health care in MA is an adequate model for the national health care plan, though most acknowledge that positive, replicable outcomes have emerged from the plan.

- Most MA residents have a middling to good perception about whether to replicate the MA health plan on a national scale.
  - Two-thirds (67%) say the Massachusetts health plan is at least a fair model for the national health plan, and 4 in 10 (40%) believe it is excellent or good.
  - There is little difference between perceptions of the plan, based on type of coverage – 40% of those with the Commonwealth insurance believe it is excellent/good, compared to 41% of those with private insurance and 38% of those with Medicaid/Medicare/military coverage.
  - More Massachusetts residents Republicans say it is a poor model (42%) than Democrats (10%) or Independents (23%).
- One of the benefits of the plan is an increase in access to and education about medical care. Slight majorities say more people have access to healthcare since universal healthcare was mandated (59%) and that they are more aware of the need to take care of their health (53%).
  - 37% of those on the Commonwealth Plan say they personally have better access to medical care since Massachusetts mandated universal health coverage.
- 88% say something about the MA plan should be replicated on a national scale including:
  - Mandatory requirement that insurance companies offer low cost options (58%)
  - Government subsidy for those unable to afford care (56%)
  - Coverage for dental and vision care (49%)
  - Mandatory coverage through self or employer (45%)
  - Tax incentive or penalty for non-compliance (33%)
- One of the only drawbacks, however, is cost—a majority (63%) say the cost of health care has gone up, overall. 72% also say that there is something inherent in the MA plan that should not be replicated at the national level.

Massachusetts Health Care Plan as Model for National Health Reform

Q825: How good of a model do you believe the Massachusetts universal health care plan is for a national universal health care plan? Base: All Respondents (n=1,002)
Theme 2: Universal Health Care Has Little Impact on Current Coverage and Ability to See Doctor in Timely Manner

Even with the integration of universal health care, the vast majority of people say they are satisfied with their current health insurance coverage and feel they are able to access medical care in a timely fashion. There are few differences in access to care between private and Commonwealth insurance policy holders.

- Most people with private insurance say their personal access to medical care has either not changed (84%) or improved (11%), since Massachusetts mandated universal health care.
  - Commonwealth Plan users are much more likely to say that their care has improved, since universal health care was implemented in MA (37% for Commonwealth Plan users, compared to 11% for private insurees).
- About 9 in 10 Massachusetts residents say they are satisfied with their current health insurance.
  - 91% who have private insurance say they are satisfied with their current coverage and about half (47%) say they are very satisfied.
  - 92% who have Commonwealth Plan say they are satisfied with their current coverage and about half (46%) say they are very satisfied.
- Nearly all, regardless of insurance type, say they have a primary care physician. And, large majorities say it is easy for them to access the medical providers they need, though those with private insurance are slightly more likely to say so.
  - Private insurance: 96% have a PCP; 94% say it is easy to access medical care; and 88% say they get timely appointments with doctor.
  - Medicaid/Medicare/Military: 95% have a PCP; 88% say it is easy to access medical care; and 93% say they get timely appointments with doctor.
  - Commonwealth Plan: 98% have a PCP; 85% say it is easy to access medical care; and 75% say they get timely appointments with doctor.
- Since health care was mandated in MA, almost 7 in 10 (68%) of MA residents say that there has been no change in their wait times to get appointments with doctors.

**Change In Personal Access to Medical Care Since Universal Coverage Mandated**

![Chart showing access to medical care changes](chart.png)

Q810D: How has obtaining medical care changed for you personally, since Massachusetts mandated universal health coverage? Personal Access to Medical Care Base: All Respondents (n=1,002)
Theme 3: ER Still a Key Resource (Particularly for Commonwealth Plan Users)

*Universal health care hasn’t noticeably impacted usage of the ER, though Commonwealth Plan policy holders are much more likely to use and to rely on the ER for care than those with private insurance.*

- About half of Massachusetts residents (47%), have been to the ER in the past year either for themselves or with a member of their family, indicating the importance of this resource.
- Nearly 7 in 10 (68%) Massachusetts residents say there has been no change with respect to how often they visit the emergency room for care since 2006.
  - 36% of Commonwealth Plan users say they are now going to the ER less often, compared to 11% of private insurees.
- While they are just as likely to have primary care physicians, those with the Commonwealth Plan are more likely to visit the emergency room than those with private insurance.
  - Commonwealth Plan users are more likely to have visited the emergency room in Massachusetts in the past year (69%) compared to those with private insurance (44%) or those with Medicaid/Medicare/military insurance (46%).
  - Those with private insurance have visited the emergency room 1.2 times, on average, compared to 2.4 visits among those on the Commonwealth Plan.
- A majority of Commonwealth Plan users (54%) say they would *most likely* turn to the ER if faced with a medical issue in need of immediate attention, compared to only about one-third with private insurance (36%).
- About twice as many Commonwealth Plan users (29%) say they would *most likely* go to the emergency room if they believed they or a family member had the H1N1 virus as those with private insurance (14%).

**Personal Change In ER Visits Since Universal Coverage Mandated**

![Bar Chart](chart.png)

**Q810C:** How has obtaining medical care changed for you personally, since Massachusetts mandated universal health coverage? Frequency of ER Visits Base: All Respondents (n=1,002)
Theme 4: Most Believe ER Care Should Be a Priority, If Not One of the Top Priorities, In National Health Care Plan

Most acknowledge that ERs face significant challenges, primarily driven by strapped resources, and half believe that ER services should be addressed as a top priority for any national health care plan.

- Over 8 in 10 (84%) feel ER care should receive some kind of priority in national health care reform.
  - Half (50%) say it should be one of the top priorities, if not the highest priority, in healthcare reform at the national level.
- In terms of challenges facing emergency rooms, nearly all say ERs face challenges (91%), the greatest being long wait times (35%), overcrowding (24%), and staffing shortages (23%).
  - Among respondents who visited the ER in the past year, as well as prior to 2006, some say wait times in the ER have gotten longer (23%) and some say shorter (33%) today, compared to 2006.
  - Among respondents who visited the ER in the past year, as well as prior to 2006, some say crowding in the ER has gotten worse (30%) and some say better (33%) today, compared to 2006.
- Commonwealth Plan users are more likely to notice changes in ER services, since health care was mandated in MA – perhaps because they use the ER more routinely.
  - 25% of Commonwealth Plan users say ERs are now less crowded, compared to 14% of private insurees.
  - 25% of Commonwealth Plan users say there are longer waits in the ER today, compared to 13% of private insurees.

**Priority of Emergency Room Care In National Health Care Reform**

Q840: How much of a priority should emergency room care be as part of healthcare reform at the national level?

*Base: All Respondents (n=1,002)*