

June 8, 2009

# Americans Overwhelmingly Support Investment in Prevention

## Disease Prevention Plays a Lead Role in Health Care Reform

**To:** Interested Parties

**From:** Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research  
Public Opinion Strategies

---

*The following analysis is based on a national research project funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Trust for America's Health, and conducted jointly by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research and Public Opinion Strategies. The national survey of 1,014 registered voters was conducted May 7<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009. The margin of error is +/- 3.1 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.*

With 72 percent of American voters believing that the country is getting less healthy and 60 percent saying that the American health care system needs a complete overhaul or major reform, the national electorate is voicing a call for change to our health care system. And prevention is playing a lead role.

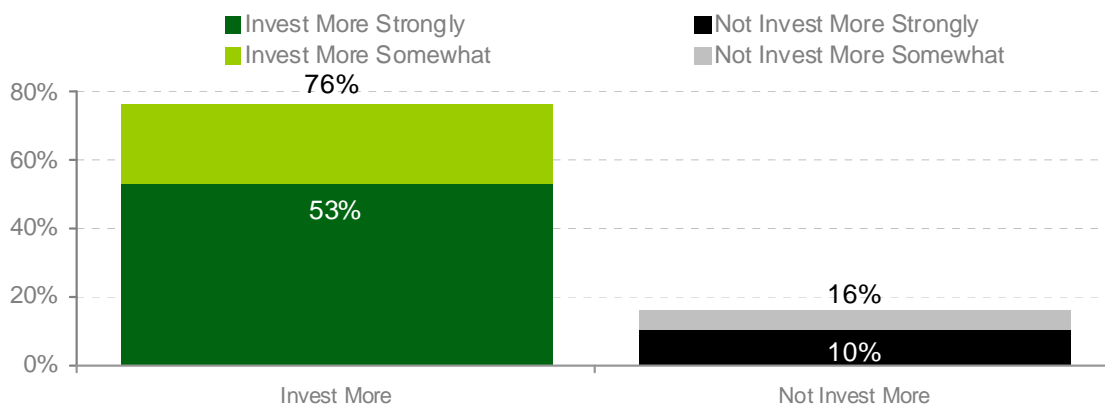
More than three-quarters of American voters support increasing funding for prevention, and the data shows that they clearly point to prevention's effect on reducing disease, keeping people healthy, and improving quality of life as the most compelling reason why. While a vast majority believes that prevention will in fact save us money, more than 7 in 10 support an investment in prevention regardless of whether it will save money or not.

### Voters Show Strong Support For Increased Investment in Prevention

More than three-quarters (76 percent) of American voters believe the level of funding for prevention<sup>1</sup> should be increased, and they believe this with a high level of intensity—a 53-percent majority feel *strongly* that we should invest more in prevention.

---

<sup>1</sup> Respondents were given a description of "prevention." Please see question language on following page.



*“Just so everyone has the same information, when we talk about prevention we mean providing people with information and resources and creating policies that help people make healthier decisions. Thinking about the level of funding for prevention in the United States, do you think we should invest more in prevention, or do you think we should not invest more in prevention?”*

Support for an increased investment in prevention is as broad as it is deep. This support is not bound by political partisanship—86 percent of Democrats, 71 percent of Republicans, and 70 percent of Independents believe we should invest more in prevention—nor by geography (79 percent in the Northeast, 78 percent in the South, 76 percent in the West, and 72 percent in the Midwest support more prevention funding). At least 65 percent of every demographic subgroup supports increasing our investment in prevention, including conservatives and the least healthy segment of the population.<sup>2</sup>

### A Sizable Shift Toward Prevention

When it comes to approaches to health and sickness, voters believe that we should be giving more emphasis to prevention rather than more emphasis to treatment by a nearly four to one ratio (59 – 15 percent). As shown in the table below, this represents a significant shift toward prevention on this measure, albeit occurring over the last two decades. In 1987, only 45 percent said we should be giving more emphasis to prevention, while 43 percent thought we should be giving more emphasis to treatment or that the balance was right.<sup>3</sup>

	1987	May 2009	Change
<b>More emphasis to prevention</b>	45	59	+14
<b>More emphasis to treatment</b>	11	15	+4
<b>Right balance</b>	32	22	-10

*There are two approaches to health and sickness. One approach – treatment – which seeks to cure sickness, and another approach – prevention – which seeks to prevent sickness. At the moment, do you think that health care services in your area have got the right balance between treatment and prevention -- or should we be giving more emphasis to treatment, or more emphasis to prevention?*

<sup>2</sup> Least healthy is defined as scoring between 0 and 5 on the health scale, and falling into at least 2 of the 3 following categories: currently a smoker, had 5 or more drinks in the past week and/or exercise a few times a month or less.

<sup>3</sup> 1987 data from a survey by Prevention Magazine, conducted by Louis Harris & Associates and based on telephone interviews with national adult samples of 1,250. 2009 data reflects opinions of national registered voters.

## Prevention Ranks As The Top Health Care Reform Priority

When given a list of current proposals being considered to reform health care, investing in prevention trumps them all, including the popular notions of providing tax credits to small businesses and prohibiting health insurers from denying coverage based on health status.

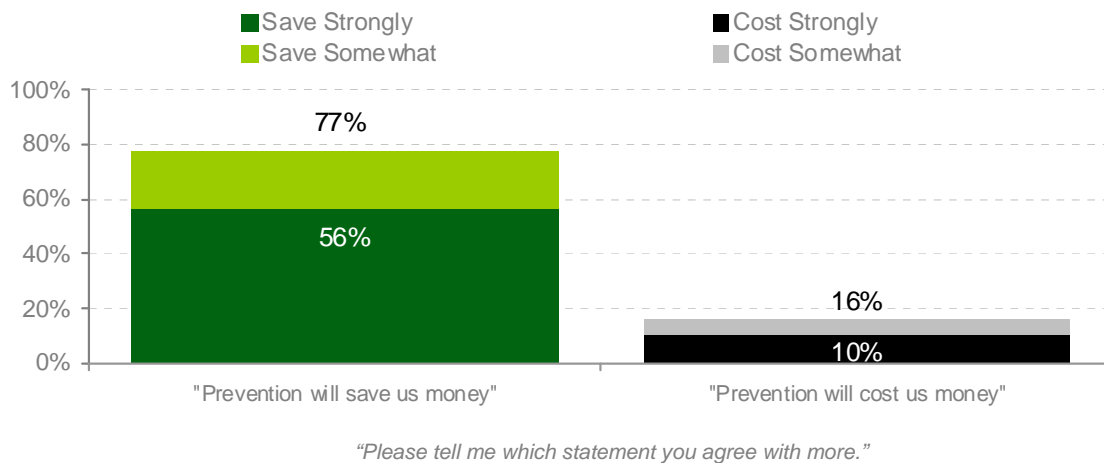
As demonstrated by the following table, when asked how important a priority each proposal is on a scale from zero to ten (where zero means not at all important and ten means very important), seventy percent rank investing in more prevention between 8 and 10, a very strong score. Nearly half the population (46 percent) rates it a 10 on this scale, and prevention receives the highest mean score rating, indicating an extremely high level of intensity.

	Mean	% 8 – 10 score
Invest in more prevention to help people stay healthy and reduce diseases such as diabetes, cancer and heart disease.	8.0	70
Provide tax credits to small businesses to help small businesses provide affordable health insurance to their employees.	7.9	66
Prohibit insurance companies from denying coverage because of age, medical history, or pre-existing condition.	7.7	66
Require all Americans to have health insurance while providing financial assistance to those who cannot afford it.	6.7	52
Require all businesses to provide health care for their employees or contribute to a fund to help pay for their coverage.	6.7	50
Give all Americans a choice of keeping their current insurance or joining a national insurance pool with a choice of private and public plans administered by the government.	6.1	43

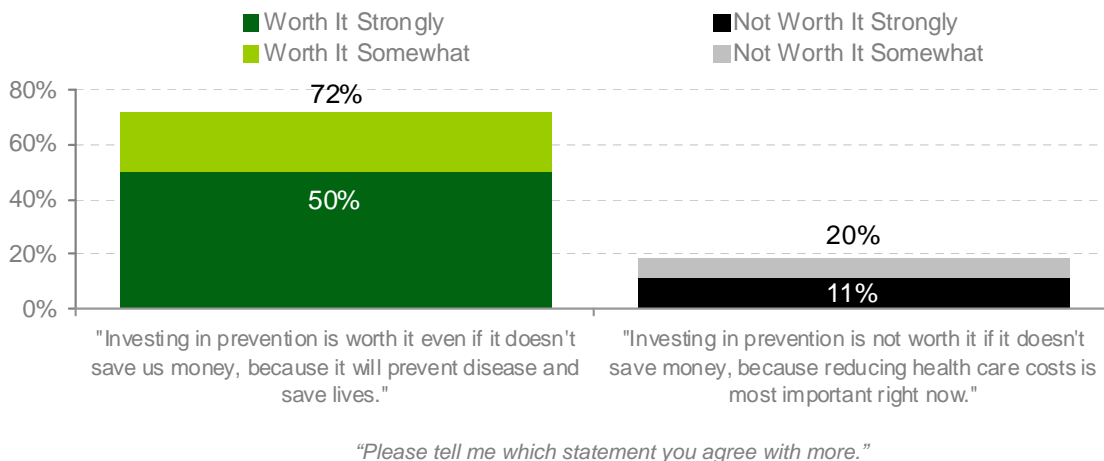
*Now, I am going to read you a list of proposals related to health care. For each, please tell me, on a scale of 0 to 10, how big a priority that proposal is for you in reforming health care in our country. Zero means it is not at all an important priority.*

## Voters Overwhelmingly Think Prevention Will Save Money, And They Strongly Support Prevention Even If It Doesn't

By a wide margin, American voters believe that prevention will save us money, rather than cost us money. In a forced-choice exercise where voters were asked to choose the statement they agree with more, 77 percent say “prevention will save us money” against just 16 percent who say “prevention will cost us money” (see figure on following page). An outright majority (56 percent) agree with the “save us money” statement *much* more, a high level of intensity.



In a similar forced-choice exercise, an overwhelming 72 percent majority reports that “investing in prevention is worth it even if it doesn’t save money, because it will prevent disease and save lives,” including 50 percent who agree with this statement strongly. Only 20 percent agree more with the sentiment that investing in prevention is not worth it if it doesn’t save money.



This commitment to investing in prevention regardless of cost implications is largely the result of a belief among voters that human health is a better reason to invest in prevention than saving money. In a third forced-choice, 57 percent say “we should invest in prevention to keep people healthier and improve quality of life,” against 21 percent who believe that “we should invest in prevention to lower health care costs.”

### The Bottom Line

American voters, from coast to coast and across the political spectrum, make it clear that not only do they view prevention as an important part of health care reform, but they are overwhelmingly in favor of increasing our investment in prevention programs. On this issue, people believe it’s less about cost and more about keeping people healthy and improving quality of life, as voters strongly support investing in prevention even if it does not save us money.