

[The Herndon Alliance](#)—a coalition of 80+ minority, faith, labor, advocacy, and provider organizations—working with [Lake Research Partners](#) and [American Environics](#) undertook and completed extensive public opinion research with the goal of reframing the health care debate to connect messages with the deeply held beliefs and values of the American public.

### Overarching Results:

- **Health care reform can be successful** IF we address the values and concerns of the American voter.
- Americans are hungry for change and overwhelmingly favor **Guaranteed Quality Affordable Health Care for All**. This phrase links the uninsured, underinsured, and insured together in their concerns about affordability. ‘Universal care’ focuses more on the uninsured. This support holds firm even after attack messages of “big government” and “higher taxes”.
- The core values for voters in this debate are **Choice, Control, Peace of Mind and Personal Responsibility**. Tapping into these values increases voters support of progressive policies – the issues are key to being heard and need reinforcing.
- The strongest messages tap into core values such as **American ingenuity and American solutions, guaranteeing quality affordable health care, choice and fairness for those who work hard, pay taxes and play by the rules**.

### Keys to Being Heard:

- **Control and Better Choices - Choice is Crucial:**
  - Americans want to feel they are in control of their health care and reject approaches that place insurance companies, government or employers between them and their medical providers. Voters fear change and a decrease in quality and choice. Voters want to have the choice to keep aspects of the current system with which they are satisfied including their current health plan. Choices give control and are a proxy for quality.
    - *Example: I call my plan, the American Health Choices plan. ... If you have private insurance you like, nothing changes ... you can keep that insurance. ... If, however, you don't have health insurance or you don't like the insurance you have, you can choose from the same wide variety of private plans that members of Congress choose from. ... You will have access to a public plan that will provide a stable, competitive alternative to private insurance if that is your choice. – [Senator Hillary R. Clinton](#)*

➤ **Personal Responsibility:**

- The public is looking for reforms that clearly communicate a role for personal responsibility. Everyone paying something on a “sliding scale” – even a small amount such as \$5 - and taking responsibility for their own health through preventative measures are powerful cues to voters. These are progressive strategies that can satisfy the need for personal responsibility. Personal responsibility does not mean voters embrace HSA’s and individual mandates.
- *Example: We believe individuals have a responsibility to maintain and protect their health. People must have access to the information and tools they need to lead healthy lives, including coverage for preventive care and disease management. But in a reformed system, it is also fair to expect that people take care of themselves as best they can, given that others are asked to share the cost of illness when it occurs.”* - [Better Health Care Together - Principles](#)
- Prevention: The public sees prevention as encouraging and supporting personal responsibility. It is also important to emphasize that health care reform will make it easier to get preventive care that keeps people healthier and reduces costs.
  - *Example: The AFL-CIO union movement is fighting for a unique American plan for secure, high-quality health care for all that: ... Gives every family the opportunity and the responsibility for preventive care.* [AFL-CIO - Website](#)

## **Strong Messages:**

➤ **American Ingenuity; an American Solution:**

- The public is eager for a uniquely American solution and believes American ingenuity can produce the best solution to our health care crisis.
  - *Example: The time has passed for incremental reform – what we need is an American solution to fix our broken health care system,”* [Andy Stern - 2/21/07 SEIU Press Release](#).

➤ **Role of Government as Watchdog, Enforcer and Guarantor**

- Americans want a guaranteed alternative, like a “public plan,” to their private insurance that is fair, affordable, and allows people to see their private doctors. However, people do not want to be pushed into the public plan. They believe the competition that comes from a public alternative may lower costs.
  - *Example: Edwards' Health Care Markets will also drive down costs by making private insurers compete with a public plan.* [Senator John Edwards - Press Release](#)

- They want government involvement as a watchdog and enforcer of rules that ensures individual choices are available, responsible behavior is rewarded, and greed is punished.
  - *Example: Government should be the watchdog and the enforcer of rules, and it should efficiently manage public insurance plans. Given the powerful interest groups with a financial stake in health care, the government should serve as a watchdog and enforcer of rules to ensure fairness, access and that the patient's health comes first.* [Change to Win - Principles for Health Care for All Americans.](#)
  
- **Channel the Anger – Not Fear:**
  - The public is angry about greed in health care and a successful approach will channel that anger. The insurance and drug companies are viewed as making excessive profits.
    - *Example: "It's time to let the drug and insurance industries know that while they'll get a seat at the table, they don't get to buy every chair."* [Senator Barack Obama, Speech in Iowa City, IA, 5/27/07](#)
  - Stopping the insurance companies from denying coverage for pre-existing conditions is a very powerful element of health care reform. Voters want to rein in the outrageous greed of insurance companies, force them to treat people fairly, and hold them accountable. This gives the insured a concrete benefit, improves their peace of mind, and makes insurance affordable.
    - *Example: "It also means changing the way insurance companies do business in America. I will start by banning insurance company discrimination. Right now, insurance companies have free reign to cherry pick the healthiest patients and shut out anyone who seems to them like a bad risk. Insurance companies spend \$50 billion a year on elaborate calculations and schemes to figure out how not to insure people. \$50 billion trying to shut out those who need care the most."* [Senator Hillary R. Clinton - Sept 17, 2007](#)
  
- **On the Side of Small Business**
  - Small business owners are an important swing constituency and are viewed very positively by the American public. It is essential to craft proposals that clearly benefit small business. It is essential to have small business owners personally voice their support for reform.
    - *Example: We also know that health care costs are plaguing too many of our small businesses. That's a serious problem, because small businesses are now the engine of job creation in America... Now, under my plan, we won't require small businesses to cover employees. Instead we will provide tax credits to ensure that many of them do.* [Senator Hillary R. Clinton - Remarks on American Health Choices Plan](#)

## Overcoming the Barriers:

Herndon's research has tackled the all too familiar obstruction messages which have been used repeatedly and effectively by those who are against real reform. Issues like higher taxes and rising costs, big government and immigration. Framing the solution as a Guaranteed Affordable Choice is far more effective than health savings accounts, tax credits and single payer plan.

- **COST** - Cost is a formidable attack worrisome to many voters. They firmly believe that immediately covering 47 million uninsured people, who will have pent-up health care needs, will cost more money and more taxes. This is a problematic attack since voters are coming to the table to lower their costs and are increasingly tax sensitive in this economy.

**Response** - Cost is best addressed with a message that talks about helping hard working middle class families afford health care and get peace of mind.

- ***Example:** "It's just wrong for people who work hard and pay taxes to go without affordable, quality health care. Under the current system, many hard-working middle class people are finding it increasingly difficult to afford health care they can count on for themselves and their families. This program is about doing what is morally right by making quality health care coverage affordable for hard-working people who want to be responsible but can't afford it today. It would give millions of hardworking families peace of mind."*

- **QUALITY/ SCARCITY** - Voters, especially women, worry about maintaining their quality of care and again worry about the impact of 47 million uninsured.

**Response** - Keeping one's current coverage and the individual having the choice of coverage including their current plan is key to dealing with quality attacks. Also messages that help include: better access to care with prevention, less emergency room use, simplified insurance, and keeping your doctor.

- ***Example:** "Doctors and hospitals are overloaded now because they have to fight with insurance companies for every charge, and emergency rooms are overflowing with uninsured people who need care. This proposal will reduce the burden on the health care system by simplifying and standardizing insurance coverage, and making it much easier for people to get the preventive care they need so they don't get sicker and need more expensive treatment. And those with good health coverage now will be able to keep their coverage and keep their doctor."*

- **BIG GOVERNMENT** - Voters worry about a big government bureaucracy attached to the health care reform.

**Response:** It helps to talk about the current bureaucracy of insurance companies. It also helps to talk about the plan being administered by an independent agency and using the government to set standards and be the watchdog, but not the doctor.

- ***Example:** "Private insurance is already like the IRS and the DMV, with lots of red tape, limiting your choices, denying people coverage when they need it most and making profits of at least 25 percent off the top. This proposal forces insurance companies to compete on a level playing field—providing a standard package of benefits with prices everyone can understand and afford, and accountability that forces them to deliver what they promise. Government is the watchdog, not the doctor"*

- **Illegal Immigration/Insuring the “Undeserving”** - Illegal immigration is a dangerous potential wedge issue that we see emerging in many debates. This problematic attack remains unresolved. **However it will not be possible nor prudent to just evade this issue.**

**Advice:**

- It is important to emphasize that health care proposals are aimed at helping hardworking taxpayers.
- Counter immigration attacks by accusing attackers of trying to avoid the real issue, which is about providing guaranteed affordable health care for all Americans, not settling the immigration debate. However, redirecting the issue this way is not the same as evasion or silence, which would cede the issue to opponents.
- Do not attempt to make a ‘fairness’ argument because many voters feel under siege on the issue of immigration, and the sense that undocumented immigrants broke the law trumps the notion that it is only fair that they receive health care

**Health Care Words to Use and Not to Use**

<b>Words to Use</b>	<b>Words not to Use</b>
Quality affordable health care	Universal coverage
American health care	A system like Social Security; Canadian Style Health Care
A choice of private and public plans	Medicare for All
Sliding scale	Free
Prevention	Wellness
Smart investments; investing in the future	Inexpensive
Choice and control	Competition
Rules; public	Regulations; government
Guaranteed	Required
Giving people control; peace of mind	Government health care for all
Standard package; affordable health plans	Basic health care
Government enforcement/watchdog Personal and shared responsibility	Government health care; public health care