

Poll: Enrollees like Medicare drug plan

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WASHINGTON - Most seniors enrolled in the new Medicare prescription-drug program like what they are getting, according to a new nationwide poll.

More than eight in 10 seniors enrolled in one of the drug plans were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the benefit, according to the poll by Kaiser Family Foundation, a non-profit health-policy research organization.

"We've seen bumps in the road and problems, but it hasn't been the catastrophe that critics predicted," said Kaiser Family Foundation CEO Drew Altman. The poll was based on interviews with 1,585 adults age 65 and older, including 623 individuals enrolled in a Medicare Part D prescription-drug plan.

Among all seniors, views of the Medicare drug program were split. About one-third of all seniors had a favorable opinion of the drug benefit while an equivalent number held an unfavorable opinion, according to the poll.

Seniors enrolled in a drug plan who described themselves as being in fair or poor health were more likely to report major problems with their plan (27 percent) than seniors in excellent or very good health (12 percent).

"That's the opposite of what you would like to see," Altman said. "You would like to see the law working best for those who need it most."

About 22.5 million individuals enrolled this year in a Medicare prescription-drug plan run by insurance companies or managed-care firms.

Medicare is the federal health-insurance program for 43 million Americans who are disabled or age 65 and older.

With its drug program start-up problems apparently over, the challenge now for Medicare is to get more low-income beneficiaries enrolled.

The larger survey has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points. The survey of Part D participants has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

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