

MEMORANDUM

To: CHIP advocates
From: Ed Walz
Date: June 2014
Regarding: CHIP opinion research and research-informed messaging for public communications



The First Focus Campaign for Children sponsored nationwide public opinion research in late May 2014, to explore awareness of and attitudes about the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). This research was conducted by the national opinion research firm American Viewpoint, which has worked with a wide range of Republican political candidates, including Romney-Ryan 2012, and the Republican National Committee. The research suite included an online, nationwide survey of 1,200 registered voters and in-depth, online follow-up interviews with 20 survey respondents. Though the Campaign for Children will not widely release detailed findings, this memo summarizes key takeaways from this phase of the research, offers guidance on the applicability and limitations of the research, and makes research-informed messaging recommendations.

OPINION RESEARCH – KEY TAKEAWAYS

Ignorance and Bliss

While nearly 90 percent of respondents felt they knew enough about Medicare to hold an opinion, only 60 percent felt informed enough to offer opinions about CHIP. That share increased only slightly – to 62 percent – when the state-specific name for CHIP was used.

But respondents comfortable assessing CHIP offered very positive impressions. On a “warmness” (positivity) scale of 0 (cold) to 100 (hot), respondents’ average rating for Medicare was 65.5. The corresponding warmness value for CHIP was 62.5 (61.4 when CHIP was used, instead of the state-specific name). Medicaid, the ACA, and health insurance companies all had cooler average ratings.

Selected respondent subgroup analyses offer interesting perspectives:

- Democrats were more familiar with CHIP than Republicans (75 percent vs. 60)
- Even initial impressions demonstrated bipartisan support – while Democrats favor CHIP 5:1 (62 percent to 12), Republicans also favor CHIP nearly 2:1 (39 to 21 percent)
- Initial support transcends respondents’ views about the role of government – even voters who feel government is already doing too much support CHIP 2:1 (39 to 18 percent)
- Parents were much more likely to feel informed enough about CHIP to offer an opinion (75 percent) than non-parents (57 percent), and much more likely to rate CHIP warmly (47 to 35 percent)
- Men age 60 and older were less likely to be familiar with CHIP (50 percent did not know enough to rate CHIP, while just 6 percent of older men were unable to rate Medicare), and less likely to offer initial support CHIP, with just 54 percent 60+ men giving CHIP an initial warm rating (as compared to 61 percent overall and 70 percent of 60+ women)
- Single women were more likely to support CHIP, with nearly 71 percent of unmarried women giving CHIP an initial warm rating (compared to 66 percent for Medicare with this same age and gender subgroup)
- Politically active voters (volunteering for or giving money to a political campaign, attending debates or rallies, etc.) are more likely to be informed about CHIP (69 percent, compared to just 57 percent of those not active in their communities), and more likely (66 to 51 percent) to favor the extension of CHIP funding

Knowledge is Power

Explaining CHIP generates significant increases in support. Though not surprising, this finding is important, because it underscores the value of advocacy efforts in building public support for congressional action to protect CHIP. Our survey presented respondents a short statement describing the children CHIP serves, illustrating its benefits, noting that funding will expire and outlining the consequences for children, and asking whether and how strongly respondents favor or oppose extending CHIP funding. When informed by that statement, **support for CHIP jumped from 51 percent to 74 percent**. Even more encouragingly, more than half of the increased support (13 of the 23 additional percentage points) was strong support, which is generally cited by opinion researchers as offering the intensity of support required for active engagement on an issue of public debate.

Again, analyses of selected respondent subgroups offer additional information:

- Informing 60+ men about CHIP increases support from 32 percent initially to 64 percent
- Informing women ages 18-34 increases support from a strong initial level of 57 percent to an overwhelming 79 percent
- Informing moms increases support from 67 to 84 percent
- Informing political liberals increases support from 67 to 86 percent
- Informing politically active voters increases support from 66 to 83 percent

These findings indicate that education efforts that emphasize CHIP's value, as well as the threat posed by the expiration of CHIP funding, can play an important role in increasing and strengthening the intensity of support for congressional action.

A Fight We Can Win

Though we hope CHIP's broad popular support and long track record of bipartisan support in Congress and statehouses will help to avoid a contested funding debate, we tested a range of supportive messages against a comparable set of opposing messages, allowing head-to-head comparisons. The following table summarizes the messaging themes we tested and notes the percentage of respondents who agreed with each theme:

Supporting Themes	%	Opposing Themes	%
Bipartisan and effective – Emphasized bipartisan history and broad support, illustrated consequences of failure to extend funding	64.7	Spending – Underscoring preconceptions about waste and irresponsibility in government.	55.2
Track record of success – Emphasized CHIP's benefits and impact	64.3	Ideology – Emphasizing reform over expansion, and highlighting the CHIP eligibility of immigrants and families with higher-than-average incomes	55.2
Right thing to do – A moral message emphasizing our responsibility to protect children	64.5	Role of government – Empathizing with children, but asserting that government shouldn't assume parents' responsibilities	47.4
Work for a living – Stressing CHIP's role as an economic ladder and safety net	63.6		
Like Medicare – Emphasizing CHIP's focus on delivering age-appropriate care for kids, as Medicare does for seniors	61.4		
Invest in the future – Highlighting children's health as a prerequisite for national progress	57.8		

These results are encouraging. The least persuasive supporting message we tested drew more head-to-head support than the most effective opposing message. It is also important to note that American Viewpoint played an active role in generating opposition message ideas and crafting specific language, so the tested messages are likely representative of effective opposition arguments. Taken together, these observations suggest that a debate over CHIP funding is a fight we can win, if effective messages are backed by resources sufficient to support a communications campaign sufficient in scale to reach undecided voters and activate supportive ones.

But an additional advantage of the online testing format employed for this research effort is that it allows respondents not only to assign a single numerical rating to a statement of 75-100 words, but also allows them to interact with the statement, electronically highlighting words and phrases each respondent found most persuasive. The result is a comparative “heat map,” spotlighting the “words that work.” The following table summarizes the words and phrases from supporting messages that were highlighted by 19 percent or more of respondents:

Supporting
Support of 82 percent of Americans
Nation building at home
It’s wrong to stand by while children suffer needlessly
Bipartisan support
Economic lifeline
No better investment in our future than children’s health
State-run
Kids healthy
Uninsured

APPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The opinion research effort that informed the messaging recommendation below explored the views of registered voters – a very broad group of Americans approximating the general public in scope. That focus makes the recommended message approach particularly applicable to public communications like newspaper advertisements or op-eds.

As detailed above, voters’ initial familiarity with CHIP was well below that of Medicare and other health coverage options, and information proved effective at increasing support for CHIP, especially among politically active voters. Consequently, the recommended messaging is applicable to e-newsletters, talking points for partners or policymakers, and other targeted communications to politically-engaged audiences.

But our research did not focus on policymakers and legislative staffers – groups historically reluctant to participate candidly in such surveys. Policymakers and staffers may well have views different from those of voters, as is amply illustrated by the disconnect between public opinion and congressional action on issues like gun violence. With this in mind, the recommended messaging is a useful starting point for conversations with policymakers and staff, but advocates should be prepared for counterarguments, even if those same arguments fell flat with voters.

One additional caveat is that this research focused on the extension of funding for CHIP as currently structured and without consideration of the funding source. To the degree that legislation expands or strengthens CHIP, and to the degree that it requires funding offsets or deficit increases, those provisions could create openings for new arguments for or against the legislation or change the effectiveness of the messages tested above.

RECOMMENDED MESSAGING

This section recommends a messaging theme for this phase of the CHIP debate, which is focused on raising awareness of CHIP's value and the threat posed by expiring funds. It is important to note that, while the sample statement below uses "CHIP" instead of each state's specific name, this is for convenience and consistency only. Research suggests that using the state-specific name for CHIP yields slightly greater support in nearly every instance. Therefore, when possible, and especially in communications aimed at state-specific audiences, using the state-specific name is preferable.

Theme

Bipartisan Health Care that Works for Children

Sample Statement

It's wrong to stand by while children suffer needlessly. But lots of hard-working parents today can't afford \$10,000 health insurance premiums, let alone copays and deductibles.

The Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) was created with bipartisan support from Republicans and Democrats. And it's earned the support of three-fourths of Americans, because CHIP works. It's reduced the rate of uninsured kids by half and protected children from becoming uninsured during the recession.

CHIP is an economic lifeline that delivers peace of mind for millions of working families. With CHIP, working parents they know a job loss won't mean losing their children's health care, and a sick child won't mean bankruptcy.

CHIP is state-run, and each state tailors CHIP to fit its own needs. CHIP is a smart investment, avoiding costly hospital care by keeping kids healthy. And with low administrative costs, CHIP delivers real value for taxpayers.

But CHIP's funding will expire next year, if Congress doesn't act first. Congress needs to protect CHIP, a bipartisan health care plan that works.