

Alaska Survey: Small Businesses Need Healthcare Reform

The high cost of health insurance is a financial burden for small businesses.

Small businesses in Alaska support healthcare reform to relieve them from skyrocketing health insurance rates, according to results of a telephone survey conducted in June 2009 and sponsored by Small Business Majority. The survey, which sampled 300 members of the small business community along with a separate group of 100 commercial fishermen, found:

- Just 21% of Alaska small business owners polled reported that they pay for health insurance for their employees. Of those, 79% say they are really struggling to do so.
- Of the 79% of small employers that don't provide insurance, 92% say they can't afford it. Among the commercial fishermen, who are self-employed, 32% report being uninsured.
- 59% of small business owners and 66% of fishermen say healthcare reform is important for getting the economy back on track.
- The number one concern for Alaska small business owners regarding healthcare reform is controlling costs, followed by assuring high-quality, standard minimum benefits and providing coverage for everybody. Fishermen, however, were more concerned about getting everyone insured—57% chose that as their first or second priority for reform.

Employers accept responsibility to help provide employee health coverage.

- 64% of Alaska's small business owners and 72% of commercial fishermen polled say it's important for individuals, employers, insurers, the government and healthcare providers to share the responsibility for making healthcare more affordable.
- 47% of small business owners believe that their company has a responsibility to provide health insurance for its employees.

Small businesses want reform in many parts of the system.

- A large majority of respondents (82% of small business owners and 84% of commercial fishermen) agree that people should be able to buy health insurance without regard to any past health problems.
- Both groups support the establishment of a health insurance pool to create a marketplace where small businesses, the self-employed and individuals can choose coverage. 87% of Alaska small business owners say they like the idea, as do 81% of the fishermen.

Respondents are politically varied.

- 40% of small business respondents identified themselves as Republican, 16% as Democrat and 28% as independent; of the commercial fishermen surveyed, 30% said they were Republican, 22% Democrat and 31% independent.

About this research: This is a telephone poll of 300 randomly selected small business owners and 100 fishermen in Alaska conducted by the national public opinion firm Lake Research in June 2009. The survey included owners of companies with fewer than 100 employees as well as sole proprietors. The base sample of 300 has a margin of error of 5.7%; the sample of 100 fishermen has a margin of error of 9.8%.