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NEW POLL SHOWS AMERICANS' COMMITMENT TO HELPING THE UNINSURED

*82 Percent of Americans Favor Making Sure Families and Children
Have Access to Affordable Health Insurance, Even if it Costs Them More*

Jan. 10, 2001 – An overwhelming majority of Americans want families and children to have affordable health insurance and most say they would be willing to pay more to provide it, according to a new nonpartisan opinion poll conducted for The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Eighty two percent of Americans say they favor making sure all families and children have access to affordable health insurance coverage, even if it costs taxpayers more. The figure is up seven points from a similar poll conducted by the Foundation one year ago.

“With estimates suggesting that one out six people lack health insurance, it is clear that this issue touches a lot lives,” said Stephen Schroeder, M.D., president and CEO of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. “That’s why people want to do more to help the uninsured.”

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 43 million people lack health insurance in the United States, or one in six non-elderly adults.

The poll is being released today at a conference in New York City entitled *Health Coverage 2001: Meeting the Challenge of the Uninsured*, hosted by the Foundation. The New York conference is the last in a series of seven conferences held around the country since Election Day, designed to foster discussion about the plight of the uninsured and proposed solutions to this problem. Co-sponsored by Families USA and the Health Insurance Association of America – longtime opponents in health care policy debates – along with the American Hospital Association, American Medical Association, American Nurses Association, Catholic Health Association of the United States, Service Employees International Union AFL-CIO, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the conferences convened local and national experts with differing viewpoints to focus attention on the persistent problem of the uninsured.

Key findings of the poll include:

- 70 percent of Americans say they would be willing to pay as much as \$50 a year in additional taxes to assure all Americans had health insurance coverage. This figure is up from 65 percent in 1992.
- 91 percent of Americans say passing laws to help the uninsured receive health care coverage should be a priority of the new president and Congress, just behind protecting Social Security and Medicare.

The survey also shows that Americans do not realize that the majority of the 43 million people who lack health coverage are employed or are in families headed by someone who is employed. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that most people without health insurance in 1999 worked during the year – with one out of six holding full-time jobs.

Attendees at the seven regional conferences, which included federal and state officials, heard directly from members of their community who lack health insurance coverage for themselves and their children.

“All over the country we heard from mothers who worry about what they would do if they became sick,” Schroeder said. “Repeatedly, we heard about the serious risks resulting from a lack of health insurance – people postponing needed medical care, or delaying important tests for cancer or heart disease, because they lack coverage.”

Regional meetings were held in Memphis, Tampa, Seattle, Cleveland, Los Angeles, Salt Lake and New York City. Local physicians, nurses and consumers joined representatives from local businesses, church groups, hospitals, labor unions and the insurance industry to discuss what can be done to help the uninsured, and how government efforts could be enhanced.

Public opinion polls were conducted in each site by national polling firms Public Opinion Strategies and Lake Snell Perry and Associates between Nov. 9- Dec. 14, 2000. A separate national poll was conducted Nov. 11-13, 2000 with 800 adults from across the country. The margin of error is +/- 3.46 percent. For more information on Health Coverage 2001: Meeting the Challenge of the Uninsured, visit The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation website, www.rwjf.org.