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Michigan Residents' Views on Children's Health Issues

Carol S. Weissert

Introduction

In 2003, several studies examined the attitudes of Michigan residents on issues of health care for children. Concerning Kids, a study funded by the Skillman Foundation and conducted by the Center for Survey Research at the University of Connecticut, focused on the perceptions of residents of Metropolitan Detroit toward issues of health and health care for children and youth. A summary of this study is enclosed as a pull out sheet. The study can also be found on the Skillman Center website at www.skillman.org. The second study examined perceptions of residents statewide on issues of health care coverage and access. The results are summarized in the following article by Dr. Weissert.

Summary of State of the State Survey

In early 2003, over 1,000 Michigan residents were asked their opinion of key health-related issues as part of a quarterly State of the State survey conducted by the Michigan State University Institute for Public Policy and Social Research. Funding for the health questions was provided by the Skillman Foundation. A response rate of 39% was achieved with a margin of sampling error of $\pm 3.1\%$. Responses have been grouped into 7 regions, illustrated in the map, below. A summary of results follows.

Health insurance and affordability of health care

One in five (20%) of all Michigan residents viewed access to health care as the policy issue of most importance for children and youth at this time

- Health insurance and the affordability of health care were identified as the most important health care issue for children and youth by the largest percentage of respondents statewide (39%).

- The distribution of those who shared this view was relatively evenly spread across the state except for those residents in the Northern Lower Peninsula where it was higher. There the rate rose to over one in every two persons (57%) (See figure 1)

- The importance of health insurance and the affordability of health care was a non-partisan issue. There was no significant difference in the percentage of Republicans (31%) and Democrats (29%) citing health insurance as the most important health care issue for children and youth.



Importance of Health Insurance

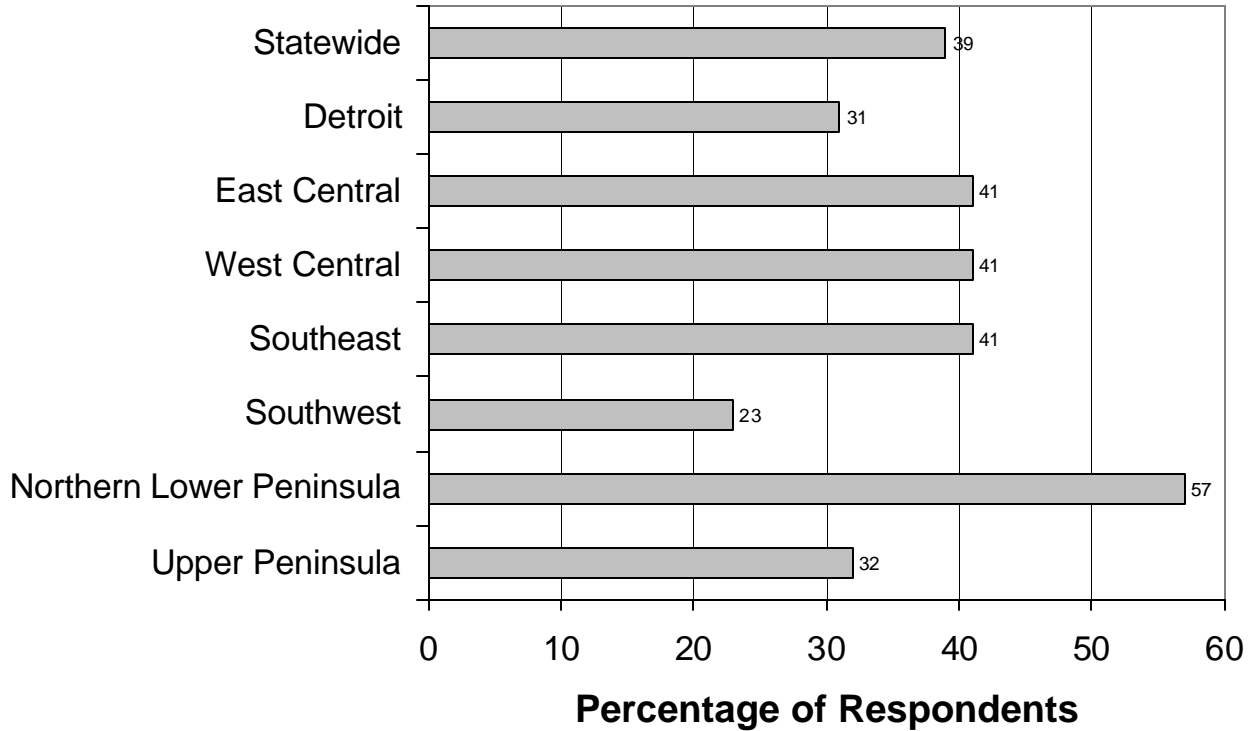


Figure 1: Percentage of members in communities in Michigan who think health insurance is the most important health care issue for children and youth in their community.

Importance of Access to Health Care

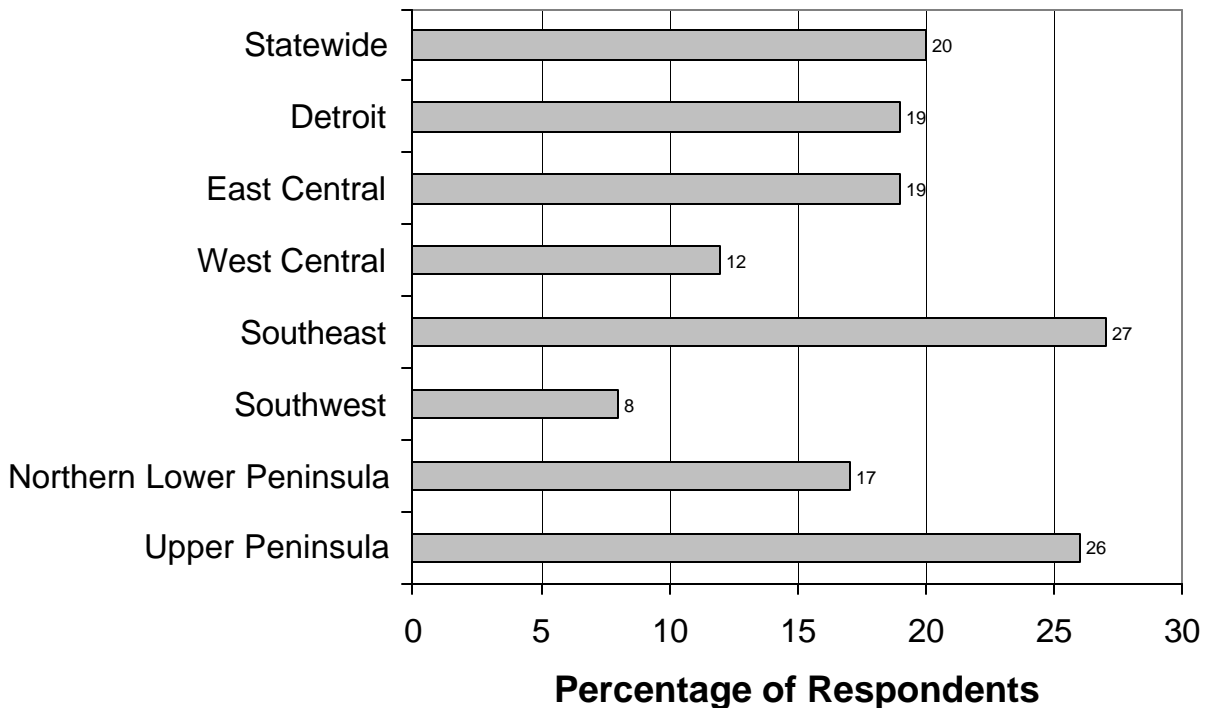


Figure 2: Percentage of members in communities in Michigan who think access to health care is the most important health care issue for children and youth in their community at this time.

Access to health care

- One in five (20%) of all Michigan residents viewed access to health care as the policy issue of most importance for children and youth at this time.
- When respondents were analyzed by region, some differences emerged. Only 8% of those living in the Southwest cited access as the most important issue compared to over one quarter of respondents (27%) in the Southeast and the Upper Peninsula (26%). (See figure 2)
- Partisan differences emerged in those feeling that access to health care was a top priority. Nearly twice as many Democrats (33%) as Republicans (17%) considered the issue of access to health care to be the most important health care issue for children and youth in their community.

Families who are uninsured

- Over three in four (76%) of all residents across the state perceived families without health insurance as a major problem (compared to a minor problem or no problem at all).
- This view was held relatively consistently across the state although it was more prevalent in the Southwest (85%) and Detroit (82%) and less so in the Northern Lower Peninsula (66%).

Quality of health care for children

Residents were asked to rate the quality of health care for their children and youth on a scale of 0 to 10 with 0 being extremely poor quality and 10 being excellent quality. The statewide average was 6.0.

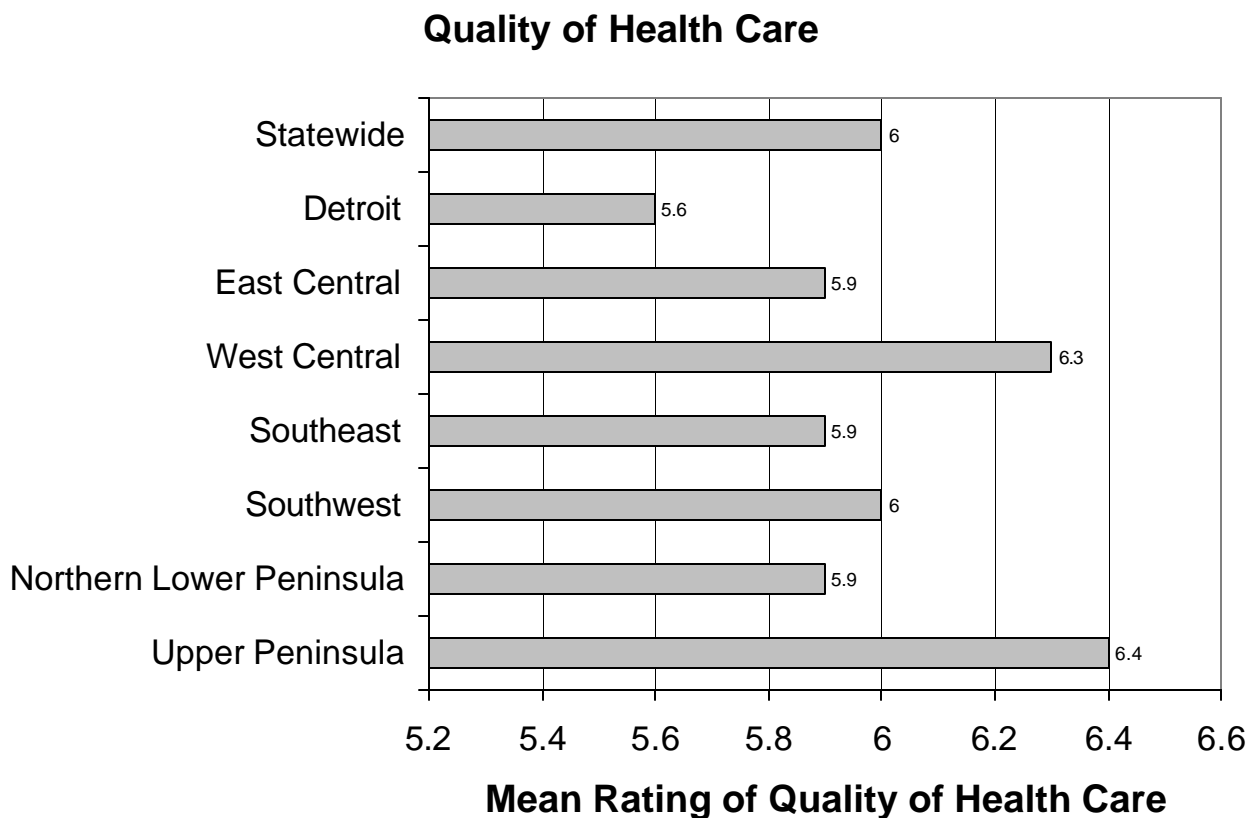


Figure 3: Mean rating of the quality of health care for children in different communities in Michigan.

- Detroit residents rated quality there lower than that found elsewhere in the state (5.6).
- In contrast, residents of the Upper Peninsula (6.4) and West Central (6.3) rated quality higher.

Affordability of health care

- The cost of health care was seen as “very” or “somewhat” affordable by over half of all residents statewide (56%).
- A majority of residents (72%) in the Southwest thought that health care was “very” or “somewhat” affordable.
- In contrast, only 46% of residents in the Northern Lower Peninsula and 45% of those in West Central felt that health care was “very” or “somewhat” affordable.
- There were apparent differences between Republicans and Democrats in their perceptions of the cost of health care. Nearly 3 out of every 4 Republicans (72%) viewed health care as “very” or “somewhat” affordable; fewer than half of the Democrats (47%) thought this.

Familiarity with MIChild health insurance

- Familiarity with MIChild insurance across the state was generally low. Approximately two out of three residents were “not familiar at all” or “not too familiar” with MIChild health insurance (See figure 5).
- Familiarity with the program was highest among residents of Detroit (43%) and the East Central Region (41%).

Affordability of Health Care

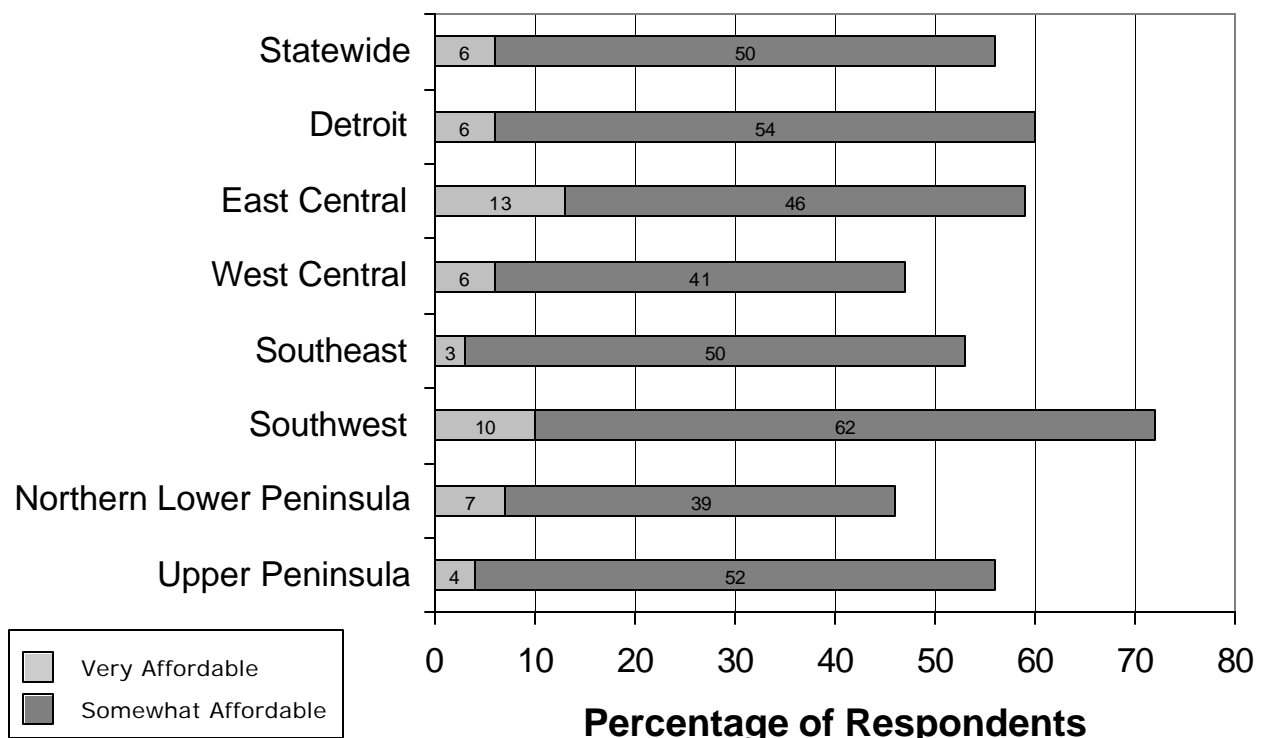


Figure 4: Percentage of respondents who thought the cost of health care is “very” or “somewhat” affordable.

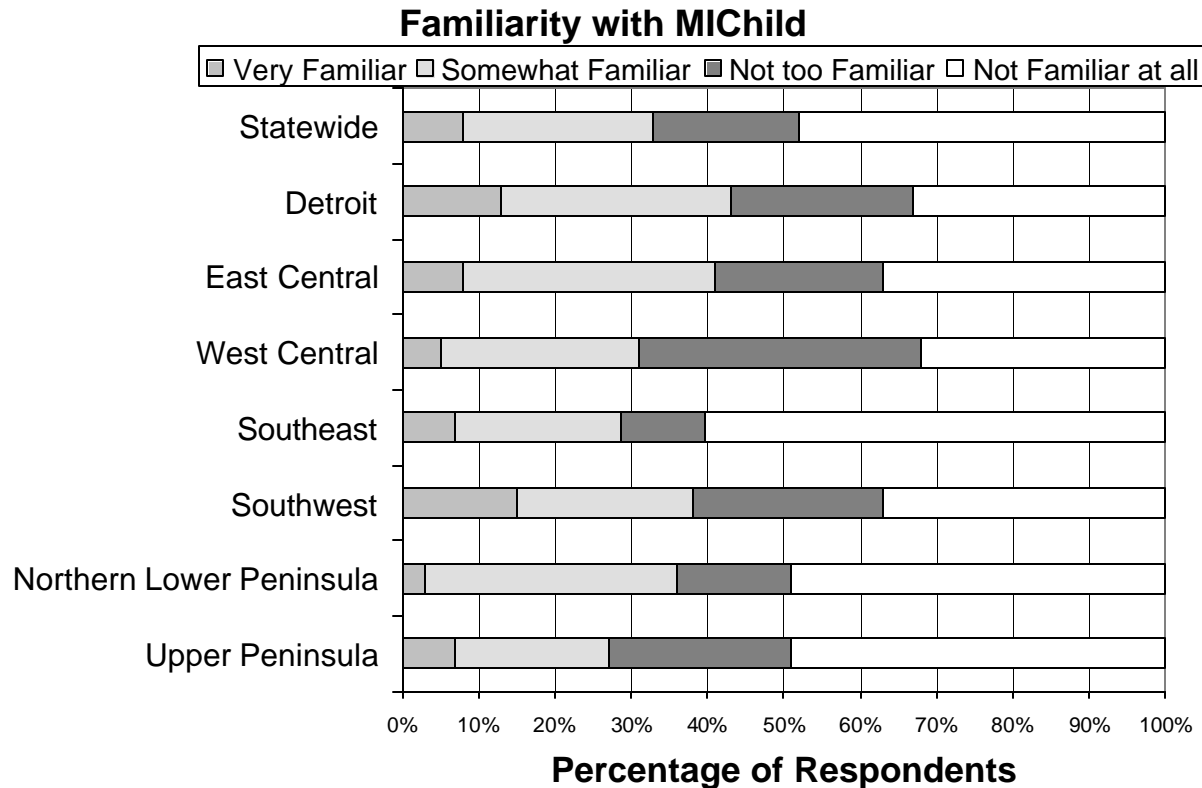


Figure 5: Percentage of respondents who were familiar with the MIChild health insurance program for uninsured children of working families in the state of Michigan.

Expansion of coverage through state government programs

- A substantial majority of residents (86%) across the state supported expanding state government programs for low income people such as Medicaid and MIChild, to provide coverage for people without health insurance
- Level of support ranged from almost all Detroit residents (96%) to three in four of the residents in the Northern Lower Peninsula (75%)

Summary

The picture for Michigan policymakers is decidedly mixed. On the positive side, affordable health care and access are viewed as important issues by residents across the state, and Michigan residents are supportive of state policy to expand health coverage. However, few residents are well informed about MIChild—a major program to provide health care coverage for children—and some important regional variations in defining health problems emerged. Access to health care is much more likely to be viewed as a problem in the Southeast and Upper Peninsula, but the costs are viewed as less affordable in the Northern Lower Peninsula and West Central parts of the state.

For more information:

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The State of the State survey results can be found on the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research (MSU) website: www.ippsr.msu.edu