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FOCUS GROUP REPORT

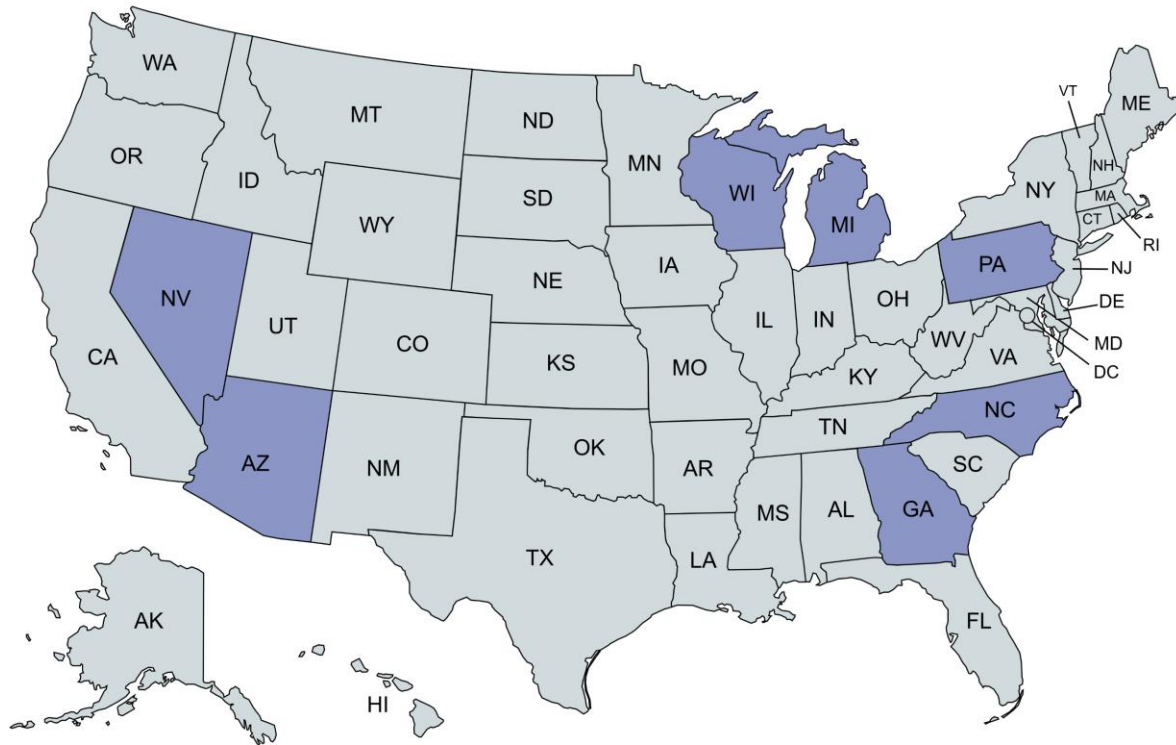
Monday, May 4, 2026

Americans on the State of
Healthcare



Methodology

On April 23, 2026, GBAO conducted three online focus groups in battleground states* with voters who get health insurance through the ACA marketplace, recently uninsured voters, and patient-facing health care professionals.



- ❖ Group 1: Americans who get insurance through the ACA marketplace and have experienced rate hikes, independents/soft partisans
- ❖ Group 2: Recently uninsured Americans, independents/soft partisans
- ❖ Group 3: Patient-facing healthcare professionals, independents/soft partisans

*AZ, GA, MI, NC, NV, PA, WI

Key Takeaways

- Affording healthcare is challenging, with many doing research or going without in order to minimize costs.
- Most see our country's system as deeply flawed, and hope for universal healthcare.
- Knowledge of "public option," "single payer," or "Medicare for All" is very thin, even among providers.
- Many have noticed a recent change in coverage, but not all can articulate why or who is to blame.
- More blame "politicians" writ-large, even if some acknowledge Democrats are more likely to fight for more accessible coverage.

The Country Is Almost Universally Seen As On The Wrong Track, With Some Simply Willing Themselves To Be Optimistic

Moderator: Fill in the blank for me: "I'm feeling BLANK about the direction of the country these days."

"Nothing is going like it's supposed to....I'm discouraged in the president. I feel like he could have did a lot more than what he's doing now." – GA woman, nursing assistant

"Just overall, I'm worried. It's just every day that Trump is president, there's just a little bit of worry. It's like, 'oh, what's he going to do that's going to mess things up for Americans?'" – GA man, ACA marketplace

"When this administration came in, I thought it was going to be good and I think it is in a good direction, but then we get to a point where I think just the war, it makes me nervous. My husband was in the military for 20 years, his dad. So, I worry about that." – NC woman, registered nurse

"I'm nervous because there's so much division. If you watch the news, everything's negative, just constantly negative, everything. But when I go out in the real world, my day-to-day life, there's none of that." – AZ woman, uninsured

"I just feel like a lot is going on negative in the world, but everything has a silver lining, and I feel like a lot of things eventually come full circle. And I am hopeful that the direction everything goes, whether it be the war, the gas prices or the grocery prices or the inflation, everything will come back down and settle." – NC woman, uninsured

"I was hoping that this could be a great era and it's become something very disappointing. We're in wars, we have inflation, we're kicking out immigrants, we're doing things which we shouldn't be doing to citizens and even visitors. So I'm disappointed that we're not the country that I thought we were." – NC man, ACA marketplace

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Healthcare Costs Are A Big Pain Point

"I went shopping for healthcare and decided I can either have healthcare or I can eat and pay rent." – NC woman, uninsured

"[Insurance is] something that's very necessary, but it's like, how can you really afford it if you have other expenses on top of everything? It's just the affordability factor." – AZ man, uninsured

"I'm a contractor, so I have to get my own insurance off the marketplace. And it quadrupled this year without the...They used to give you breaks, and now it's four times as much." – MI woman, ACA marketplace

"Since they're not able to pay for [medication], they're not getting it. So they are getting admitted into the hospital. That's the only way that they can get their medications." – GA woman, nursing assistant

"I own my own business, and so I have to buy health insurance for myself and my family...this year it's a little bit more expensive, but previous years we've been paying \$20,000 a year, maybe sometimes more. It's like an extraordinary expense." – NC man, ACA marketplace

"I think for many patients, I work in the hospital as well, and I work with a wide variety of folks. And I think finances are a big burden for many people. A lot of people have to choose between medications or food." – PA woman, occupational therapist

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Some Attribute Recent Changes To Healthcare To Actions In Washington



"It's hard to follow anything anymore...but on the surface level, it seemed like there were people who were covered before. And **with the cuts, of course, they were not covered anymore.**" – MI man, uninsured

"I think **what has happened in Washington in the last year has not made them go down.** I think it has made the plans generally go up and the coverage less robust, generally speaking." – NV man, ACA marketplace

"In Congress, the insurance was like, okay, **we're going to up premiums, we're going to start cutting funding for resources and Medicaid.** You started to notice that in November, December, and it really started making people realize in around January that people are getting impacted." – MI man, physician assistant

"**They got rid of the subsidies, so your premiums alone skyrocketed.** And then just even an office visit now, I think mine is, I don't know, 50, 60 bucks, and before it was 20. So I think that's what you can attribute it to." – MI woman, ACA marketplace

"I remember hearing [Trump] talk about **pushing it off on the states for Medicaid, Medicare instead of having a federal thing.**"
- GA man, ACA marketplace

"I've definitely noticed some changes, which I may not have noticed if they weren't personally affecting me as much. But one of the more specific things is that I **think the eligibility amount to receive Medicaid has decreased about \$2,000** from where it was last year or something along those lines, which shifted the goalposts." – MI man, uninsured

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Many Are Doing Research To Identify Better Plans, Remedies, Or Other Cost-Saving Strategies



"I talk to ChatGPT about anything. I've sent it pictures of my freckles, I've asked it if this fever and this symptom...AI will tell me if I should see a doctor or not. That or call my mom, and she'll be like, 'Oh, Google this or go to WebMD.'" - NC woman, uninsured

"When my kid...when she was sick...I researched where I can go for cheap, and I did find a pediatrician would take her for only \$125...I just looked up 'low-cost pediatrician near me' and then found a Reddit where someone said, 'this doctor will take....' And then just called." - AZ woman, uninsured

"I have been trying to figure out Medigap, all the different plans for that. There's all of these different letters, A, B, C, D, E, F, G. It goes up to N, I believe. Probably in the last week, I have dedicated probably at least 30 hours reading about this...It's almost like it's made to be confusing." - PA woman, ACA marketplace

"My mom, she's type one diabetic and my partner's type two diabetic. So I just do my own research, Google searching what would be helpful for that, home remedies, things of that nature....Sometimes I'll use ChatGPT to get more detailed information about it." - AZ man, uninsured

"I am fairly in the holistic realm already, so...I have almost like a part of a system where I may trade services of some kind with other practitioners and things." - MI man, uninsured

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Some Have Resorted To Avoiding The Doctor Altogether

"I don't have the funds to be like, 'I'm going to go to the urgent care for a cough.' So then you weigh the, is this serious? Is this not? And so far, I've just not gone." – NC woman, uninsured

"People take their medicine every other day, stagger it, maybe stretch it out. I've seen that. I've seen just **avoiding healthcare altogether**, just not making appointments, not following through, not following up." – WI woman, nurse practitioner

"I think we all just become our own doctor, it sounds like, right? We're all just like, **let's be our own physician because we can't afford to go to one.**" – AZ woman, uninsured

"I had one patient that she was saying that her **health insurance was so high she couldn't go to the doctor. So she started researching stuff on her phone** to try to find out what to take. And when she did that, she ended up putting herself in the hospital." – GA woman, nursing assistant

"I [lost] coverage, and that's made things a little more difficult and just had to go about things a little differently in terms of scheduling things out like various physicals or dental appointments. **Therapy was out of the question, obviously.**" – MI man, uninsured

"I'm a single mom, so for me, **if my daughter needs to go, that's who's going.** She's going before me. So yeah, I'm going less and reserving the appointments for her if I have to." – GA woman, ACA marketplace



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Our Healthcare System Is Seen As Deeply Troubled And “Terminally Ill” Or “Bipolar”

Moderator: If our health care system was a patient, and you were a doctor, what would be your diagnosis?

“Multiple personality disorder...because the patient doesn't know which direction it wants to go to.” – AZ man, uninsured

“[The system has] to be **amputated and cut their limbs off** to start....That's disturbing, but yeah, it needs reform. It needs total reform and we need billionaires to not be billionaires.” – WI woman, nurse practitioner

“A **mental illness** of some sort...Because I feel like healthcare is turned into business, and it should be healthcare.” – NC woman, uninsured

“I would say **terminally ill** for sure, because it seems like for some reason, we just can't get it together. We've been going through this problem for decades now, and I guess the government just keeps butting heads on what's good for the majority of Americans in this country in terms of healthcare.” – NC man, registered nurse

“**Bipolar**...We need to stop sending billions and billions of dollars to other countries to fund wars rather than supplying our citizens here in the United States with proper healthcare.” – MI woman, patient care tech

“I'd say that it needs to be on **life support**. So it's holding on...but our problem is that we've got this middleman system.” – NC man, ACA marketplace



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Providers And Innovation Are Seen As The Strongest Elements Of Our Healthcare System

Moderator: What's going well about our health care system?

"I think we really have access to some very, very **innovative healthcare**....I live near an area where there's a teaching hospital and they're well-known for having some of the **best treatment in the world**....I do think that we have a lot of accessibility to healthcare. The matter is, can you afford it?" – PA woman, ACA marketplace.

"I think everyone who has a PhD and has gone and got a doctorate in whatever it is, therapy or an actual physician, **the healthcare system is very good at making people good doctors**, but it's being able to go to them that's the problem. It's not the healthcare. It's the business side of it." – NC woman, uninsured

"Our healthcare in this country, **the quality of it, is very good**....I would say probably better than any other country in the world. But our system that administers it is horrible." – AZ man, uninsured

"There's a lot of **scientific advancements in the pipeline**. Yeah. COPD can be treated and eczema can be treated with the same medicine. It's pretty wild." – WI woman, nurse practitioner

"I think there's a lot of progression. I think there's a lot of change in for the good. With what I do, **keeping patients at home** is something I never would've thought I would've been doing 10 years ago...There's only me and two other paramedics that are in the program, so **it's groundbreaking stuff**." – PA woman, paramedic



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Most See Canada And Europe As Having Long Wait Times For Care, But Also See Benefits With Lower Costs Or Free Care

"I've been to Italian hospitals, and everybody's there, getting free healthcare. They're overwhelmed. They're understaffed. You're not getting excellent care the way American care is done, but America cares more about business than they care about healthcare." – NC woman, uninsured

"I have relatives that live **overseas**, and you do wait two years to have...You wait two years there. I don't want to wait two years. And they're taxed 60%...I feel like the system isn't working. I don't know what the answer is." – NC woman, registered nurse

"Everybody deserves to be able to go to the doctor...**There should be a basic for everybody and then premium if someone wants....Kind of like how Australia does it**, like a premium if someone's premium." – AZ woman, uninsured

"We shouldn't even have to pay for healthcare. There should be just universal healthcare. Nobody should have to choose between food and medicine. That's just disturbing on so many levels. I don't know. Yeah. **Sweden, Germany, they just take care of their citizens.**" – WI woman, nurse practitioner

"**Canada, for example, they have universal healthcare**, which is all well and good. We need something similar to it. But **people there also say that sometimes they have to wait months or even years** to get into a specialist. I have never had that." – PA woman, ACA marketplace



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Nearly All Wish Our Healthcare System Was “Universal” And “Affordable”

“Personally, as a tattoo artist, I hear so many artists never have insurance or anything like that. It would be nice to know if, say, if I broke my hand, I can go to a hospital. Other countries, I can get it fixed. Here, it's all on me.” – NV man, uninsured

“I feel like healthcare should be made affordable for people regardless of their income...The government should offer more subsidies for prescription medications, because I've heard people say that insulin, which is crucial for diabetics, it can cost \$800 a month.” – NC man, registered nurse

“I'm paying almost close to \$300 or \$400 for insurance right now...I would love to be able to pay...either [for it] to be free or pay \$20, and still be able to get the benefits that I'm paying.” – GA woman, nursing assistant

“There should, in my opinion, be a basic health plan that covers maybe 80%. And then if you want to buy something for the rest, then you can do that.” – NV man, ACA marketplace

“Healthcare should be a basic human right. And not having that, there should be something that should be done about that.” – MI man, uninsured

“[Healthcare] needs to reflect what's happening in the economy...The economy is on a downside and the premiums are going up and the deductibles are going up. They don't align.” – GA woman, ACA marketplace



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Yet Not Many Can Identify The Difference Between “Universal,” “Single Payer,” “Medicare For All,” Or “Public Option”

Moderator: What’s the difference between Medicare for All, single-payer, and a public option?

“I’m not too sure. **Single payer.** I don’t really know what that means, to be honest.” – PA woman, recovery specialist

“I think **it’s just semantic.** I mean, you’re saying Medicare for All, affordable healthcare for everybody, universal access. It’s really this all, I think, one idea that everybody should be able to get healthcare. And right now that’s not the reality.” – NC man, ACA marketplace

“**[Public option means] you get to choose?** You get to choose what kind of insurance you want? I don’t know. Maybe. I don’t know.” – AZ woman, uninsured

“Medicare for all, it would be, I guess, for really anybody who doesn’t meet the requirements to afford healthcare...**Medicare is there to cover whatever expenses they can’t cover themselves.**” – NC man, registered nurse

[Moderator: What about Medicare for All? What’s that mean?] “That’s a good question. **What does that mean?**” – AZ man, uninsured

“I’m familiar with universal healthcare, but the rest of them... **I’ve heard of Medicare, but the rest of them, no,** I have not heard of.” – GA woman, ACA marketplace

“**[Those terms are] just terminology.**” – PA woman, paramedic



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Democrats More Likely To Be Seen As The Party Fighting For More Universal Or Affordable Care

Moderator: What is the (Democratic Party's/Republican Party's) vision on health care?

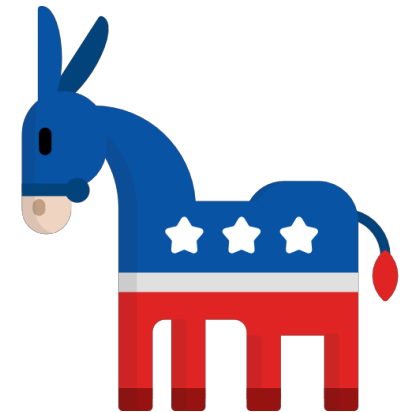
"I think the **Democrats would be more about changing it**. Some of those things you talked about, like perhaps the Medicare for All or universal coverage, I think they would do that more because they're more about support for people and healthcare, and they're the ones who came up with the Affordable Care Act." – NV man, ACA marketplace

"**Democrats are more toward everybody gets healthcare**, and I think this whole...when we had all these immigrants come in and everyone gets free, and then there's just people from America that can't even see somebody. So, it's a touchy thing." – NC woman, registered nurse

"I feel like with Democrats since they're, I guess, more towards socialism, **they want universal healthcare**. They want good healthcare outcomes for everybody." – NC man, registered nurse

"I think the **Republicans are more inclined to talk about saving money, giving wealthier people tax breaks**, and they'd rather have people spend their own money, where the Democrats are more inclined to say that government has a place and that the government can be helpful in directing funds to help people." – NC man, ACA marketplace

"**Democrats are more universal. They all say for all. They all say for all.** But no matter who's in office, it always seems to be the same, right?" – AZ woman, uninsured



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Yet Many Just See “Both Parties” As To Blame For The Current State Of Care, Or Admit They Are Unsure

“To be honest with you, they're **two sides of the same coin**. I've seen healthcare go up in a Democratic administration as well as a Republican administration.” – GA woman, ACA marketplace

“I think if you listen to the politics of any politician, you will **never hear anybody talk about regulating the insurance companies**. You will never hear that.” – MI man, physician assistant

“I think that they share the same vision, be them right or left, Democrat, Republican. **If they're a politician in this country as part of the government, their only goal is to line their pockets** and steal from the people as much money as possible and facilitate large corporations to be able to do whatever they want to us.” – AZ man, uninsured

“I think both approaches have something right about it because you can give out just so much free healthcare or debt, so many subsidies until your whole country, it's in trouble for that alone. And also, from the other end, everybody is not in a position to pay for stuff. So **both of them got good things, both of them got bad parts**.” – GA man, ACA marketplace

“I just feel like it's no matter who's running it, even if the Democrats tried to solve it or fix it or come back and make a change, **I don't feel like there's enough momentum to undo what's already been done**, I guess.” – NC woman, uninsured

“**If something's not going correct, it's both parties**. The Democratic side, the Republican side, I think they're both responsible.” – AZ woman, ACA marketplace

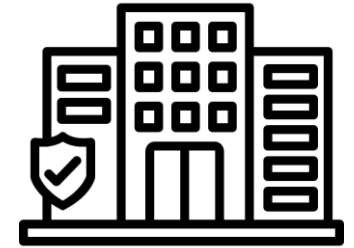


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Insurance Companies Are Also Clearly To Blame

"I think with the **healthcare industry**, I feel like it's basically a **big-money game**. There's different companies that offer certain more perks than others, but at the end of the day, I feel like they're just all playing games and nobody gets the proper care like other countries that they provide free healthcare for their citizens." – AZ man, uninsured

"I've had coverage and times when I've not had coverage. And for me to go in there and for instance, have to have something that is \$1,000 if I have coverage, but when I don't have coverage, it's \$250, it's 75% less. How is that possible? It just goes to show **how much we're being robbed through healthcare, through healthcare companies.**" – AZ man, uninsured



"There's just a **bunch of greed and corruption that's tied up in these companies**, and these companies are only worried about making record-breaking profits. And so, they don't care what happens to their customers, because people have to have health insurance." –NC man, registered nurse

"We've got a **lot of insurance companies that are calling the shots versus the doctors calling the shots**, and the insurance companies and the middlemen are siphoning all the money out of the system, and it's a bad system." – NC man, ACA marketplace

"They're still insurance companies and they're still big and powerful. And **until you do something to tell them to get under control, you can't even get to [better care]....**I mean, nobody's talking about getting these insurance companies to do something." – MI man, physician assistant



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Trump's Recent Comments Calling Medicare And Medicaid "Scams" Are Upsetting

"I feel like there's more people benefiting from Medicare than there [are] people that are scamming the system. So, I feel like we shouldn't just throw the whole thing away just because you may see 20% scams, because that 80% that's benefiting from it, they really need it. So, I think it's really nonsensical to throw the whole thing away." – NC man, registered nurse

"I don't appreciate him calling our lives and our care scams. I find that to be ridiculous." - GA woman, ACA marketplace

"I feel like he's just **talking just to talk**. He's just saying things and he's just unsure about what he's going to do and how to head this in the right direction." – AZ man, uninsured

"I think we could do [healthcare] if we wanted to. So he's just saying what fits with whoever told him to say that, but I think that we could do it if we wanted to, and then it would be kind of universal across the nation." – NV man, ACA marketplace

"For somebody who's never ever had to worry about money at all probably his whole life, healthcare could seem little to him. But to **somebody who's reliant on their insurance to pick up the medication, I can assure you it's not little or scammy to them.**" – PA woman, recovery specialist

"Why was he saying they're scams? I **don't get it**. That's our healthcare system, right? I don't know. I don't know what he means, really." – AZ woman, uninsured



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Some Optimistic That Change Can Happen “If We Want It”

“I think it can't get much worse....And so I think, and **then if we rally, we can make change** and get somewhere better. So yeah, if we rally as voters, yeah.” – WI woman, nurse practitioner

“We're brilliant innovators and we are great scientists and we're going to figure out how to make things better. Science is truth, and **hopefully we'll be able to fund this great new world** that is absolutely going to happen.” – NC man, ACA marketplace



“I **certainly hope 15 years down the line, it's a little bit better**, much better than what we have. Again, I think others have pointed out that we have good healthcare, it's just the affordability of it and the access to it seems like it's purposefully limited. So I think **if that part alone is fixed, then I think a lot of things could be solved.**” – MI man, uninsured

“You guys who say, ‘you know what? Both of these parties are the same,’ they're not the same. And **if you're voting like they're the same, then you're going to always have this crappy system** because it's never going to get changed.” – NC man, ACA marketplace

“I think [universal care] something that will just come in time. I don't know if I'll be around for it. **The people will want [universal care] and vote in people that will support doing it.** I think it'll just come to a critical mass that just pushes it in that direction.” – NV man, ACA marketplace



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Providers In Particular Are Watching The Pitt – And Say It Gets A Lot Right

Moderator: How well do you think the Pitt captures our health care system?

“I think [the Pitt] shows the real world of what healthcare workers really go through....Discrimination that patients may experience in the emergency department, the lack of timely care. I would say providers overlooking certain symptoms or misdiagnosing patients. There's really a plethora of things that people experience in the emergency department that can be very unsettling.” – NC man, registered nurse

“[The Pitt gets right] how people can work multiple jobs, for however many years, and still struggle to get their hand that they cut open on the job stitched up and having to pay thousands of dollars, even though they have coverage or something along those lines.” – MI man, uninsured

“[The Pitt is right about the] stress. Not with just patients, but employees.” – MI woman, patient care tech

“I think [the Pitt] depicts some really serious, well-trained, concerned people who care, and it shows the terrible administration of the hospital and how the pressures of money get in the way of good care.” – NC man, ACA marketplace

“[It gets that] there's a lot of love. There's a lot of family. There's a lot of just looking out for your colleagues. It's a rush. Some people really love that. It can be in cities, like gunshot trauma and the trauma hospitals are intense. And then they joke about [the] Pitt. 'It's the Pitts.'” – WI woman, nurse practitioner



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About Navigator

In a world where the news cycle is the length of a tweet, our leaders often lack the real-time public-sentiment analysis to shape the best approaches to talking about the issues that matter the most. Navigator is designed to act as a consistent, flexible, responsive tool to inform policy debates by conducting research and reliable guidance to inform allies, elected leaders, and the press. Navigator is a project led by pollsters from Global Strategy Group and GBAO.

About the Study

On April 23, 2026, GBAO conducted three online focus groups in battleground states* with voters who get health insurance through the ACA marketplace, recently uninsured voters, and patient-facing health care professionals.

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To learn more about Navigator:

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