



***Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation Poll Finds Broad Support
Among Massachusetts Residents for New Health Care Reform Law***

BOSTON – November 15, 2006 - A new poll by the Harvard School of Public Health finds significant public support for the state's new health reform law. The poll was released today by the **Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation** at a health leadership summit at the JFK Library. The leadership summit was attended by Governor-elect Deval Patrick, and members of the health care, business and advocacy communities.

The new poll--the first ever of public opinion since the health reform law was enacted in April--finds that a majority of Massachusetts residents supports the new law. Support is consistent across a wide variety of groups, including the uninsured, the poor, younger adults, and other groups most likely be affected by the new law. The public overwhelmingly favors the expansion of Mass Health to cover more uninsured children, as well as the employer assessment and other parts of the law that require employers to do more. A smaller majority of the public supports the requirement that individuals purchase health insurance if affordable coverage is available. The public also believes that that the premium contributions required in Commonwealth Care, the new program of state subsidized insurance for lower income people, are reasonable.

"Over the past year, the opinions of elected officials, business leaders, and public interest groups have been widely heard because of the extensive media coverage surrounding passage of the law," said Dr. Robert Blendon of the Harvard School of Public Health, who led the survey team. "Our poll is the first assessment of how the public is responding to the landmark law in Massachusetts. The fact that we found such a high level of public support for the law six months after its passage bodes well for the future."

The poll was released at a **Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation** Leadership Summit at the JFK Library. Members of the health care, business, and advocacy communities, along with public officials, provided their reactions to the findings and participated in panel discussions focusing on strategies for building public understanding and support of the law and ensuring that successful implementation of the law continues.

"The strong public support for the law is very encouraging," said Nancy Turnbull, President of the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (BCBSMA) Foundation. "We have already made significant progress in implementing the law and there is much more to be done. We will need to continue to work together to maintain broad-based public support for this complicated law as other provisions go into effect."

The poll results are based on interviews with more than 1,000 randomly selected Massachusetts residents, age 18 and older, in September 2006. Key findings include the following:

- Eighty percent of the public is familiar with the new law, although most have not heard a great deal about it.
- Two out of three residents support the overall law, and also believe it will help the uninsured and the poor. This support is quite consistent across age and income groups, and among the insured and uninsured.
- Eighty-eight percent endorse the expansion of Medicaid coverage for children.
- Seventy percent of the public supports requiring businesses to provide health insurance or pay a penalty.
- A majority (52%) of the public supports the mandate requiring individuals to purchase health coverage, although support is lower among residents with lower incomes.
- The majority of the public (both those who are insured and those who are uninsured) believes the current premium contributions for the Commonwealth Care plans are reasonable.

While the poll finds broad support for the law, it identified some areas of public concern, including many are concerned that will cause taxes to increase and might negatively impact small business owners.

The report stresses the need to maintain broad public support as implementation proceeds, including focusing on the comprehensive nature of the law, reducing the administrative burden on small businesses, ensuring the affordability of newly created insurance products, and widely publicizing successful achievement of key milestones.

The Massachusetts health reform law, Chapter 58, was enacted in April 2006 with the goal of providing health coverage to nearly all residents of the state over the next few years, through a combination of Medicaid expansions, subsidized insurance products, health insurance market reforms, an individual mandate, and new responsibilities for employers.

The Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation

Since its inception in 2001, the **Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation** (www.bcbsmafoundation.org) has awarded grants of more than \$20 million to spark innovation and strengthen services for uninsured and low-income individuals and families in Massachusetts. The Foundation is governed by its own 18-member Board of

Directors and operates separately from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. The Foundation has an endowment of nearly \$96 million making it one of the largest health philanthropies in New England.