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New Research from EBRI:

Most Workers Like Current Mix of Wages and Health Benefits, But Discontent Growing

WASHINGTON— Most workers are satisfied with the health benefits they have now, but nearly one-third express interest in changing the current mix of benefits and wages offered by their employers, according to the latest findings from the nonprofit Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI).

In 2014, nearly 70 percent of American workers said they were satisfied with the mix of wages and health benefits they currently receive. Slightly more workers said they would give up health benefits to get high wages (19 percent) than those would trade wages for health benefits (12 percent), EBRI found. However, those who would give up benefits for cash has nearly doubled, from 10 percent in 2012 to 19 percent in 2014.

“This growing interest in trading benefits for wages may reflect an intensifying desire for real wage growth in the wake of the Great Recession,” said Paul Fronstin, director of EBRI’s Health Research and Education Program, and co-author of the report. “Choice of health plans is important to workers, and they would like more choices. But most workers express confidence that their employers or unions have selected the best available health plan—and they are not as confident in their ability to choose the best available plan if their employers or unions did, in fact, stop offering coverage.”

EBRI also found that if current tax preferences for employment-based health benefits were to change, and the benefits were to become taxable, nearly half (47 percent) of individuals say they would continue with their current level of coverage. This is up from 40 percent in 2012.

Among the remaining respondents in 2014, 26 percent say they would want to switch to a less costly plan provided by their employer, 20 percent say they would want to shop for coverage directly from insurers, and 7 percent say they would want to drop coverage altogether.

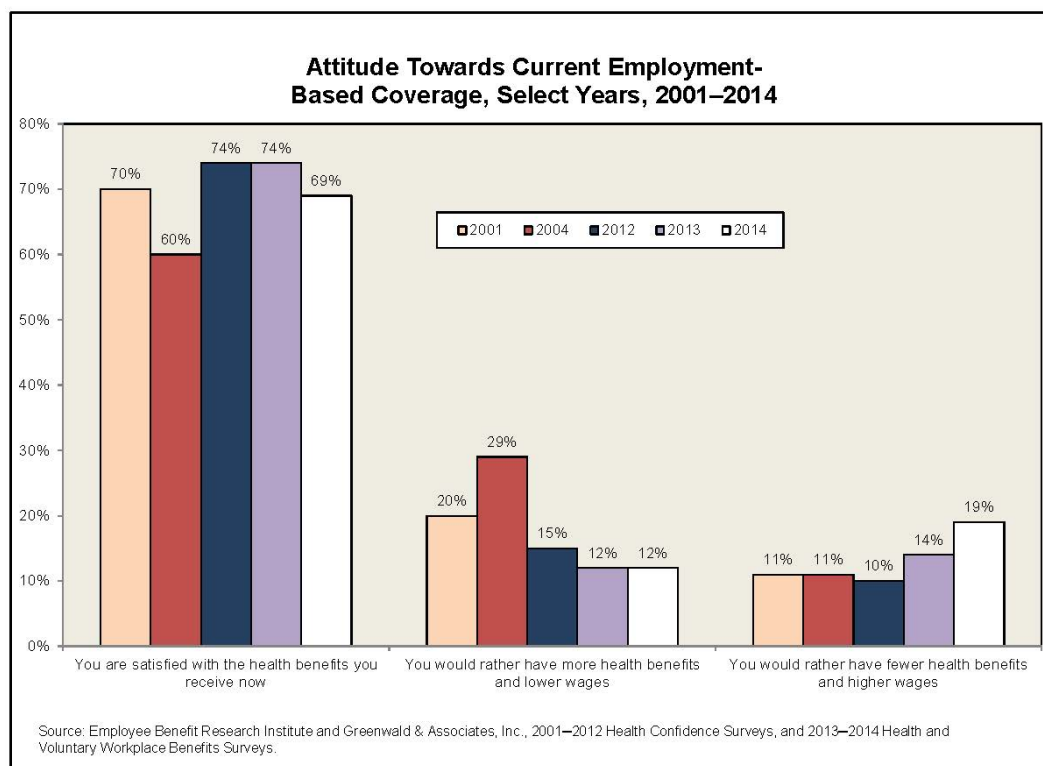
The analysis examines public opinion surrounding employment-based health coverage using data from the 2013 and 2014 Health and Voluntary Workplace Benefits Survey (WBS), conducted by the EBRI and Greenwald & Associates, as well as historical data from the Health Confidence Survey (HCS). Both surveys examine a broad spectrum of health care issues, including workers’ satisfaction with health care today, their confidence in the future of the nation’s health care system and the Medicare program, as well as their attitudes toward workplace benefits.

Among other WBS findings:

- The importance of benefits as criteria in choosing a job remains high among American workers, and health insurance in particular continues to be, by far, the most important employee benefit to workers. This finding has remained constant even following enactment of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 (PPACA), which has raised questions about whether employers will continue to offer health coverage to their workers in the future.
- Choice of health plans is important to workers, and they would like more choices, but most workers express confidence that their employers or unions have selected the best available health plan. Moreover, they are not as confident in their ability to choose the best available plan if their employers or unions did, in fact, stop offering coverage.
- Individuals are not highly comfortable that they could use an objective rating system to choose health insurance nor are they extremely confident that a rating system could help them choose the best health insurance.

The full report, “Views on Employment-Based Health Benefits: Findings from the 2014 Health and Voluntary Workplace Benefits Survey,” is published in the February 2015 *EBRI Notes*, online at www.ebri.org

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