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New Research from EBRI:

Fewer Workers Seeing Health Cost Increases

WASHINGTON—Significantly fewer workers say they experienced health care cost increases in 2015 compared with previous years, according to new research by the nonpartisan Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI).

Results from the 2015 Health and Voluntary Workplace Benefits Survey (WBS) show that one-half of workers report having experienced an increase in health care costs in the past year—down from 59 percent in 2014 and a historical low for the survey. Conversely, those who reported that they did *not* experience a change in health care costs increased from 36 percent to 47 percent between 2014 and 2015.

The WBS finds that high health costs cause many workers to encounter financial difficulties or change their use of health care. Specifically:

- Workers experiencing cost increases continue to report that they are changing the way they use the health care system. Nearly 7 in 10 (69 percent) say these increased costs lead them to try to take better care of themselves, and 52 percent indicate they choose generic drugs more often.
- One-half also say they go to the doctor only for more serious conditions or symptoms (49 percent) and about 4 in 10 delay going to the doctor (43 percent).
- Among those experiencing cost increases in their plans in the past year, 23 percent state they have decreased their contributions to retirement plans, and 4 in 10 (43 percent) have decreased their contributions to other savings as a result.
- Nearly one-quarter (23 percent) also report they have had difficulty paying for basic necessities such as food, heat, and housing, while 34 percent say they have had difficulty paying other bills.
- About one-quarter (23 percent) say they have used up all or most of their savings, 26 percent have increased their credit card debt, 13 percent report that they have borrowed money, 27 percent have delayed retirement, 15 percent have dropped other insurance benefits, 10 percent have taken a loan or withdrawal from a retirement account, and 5 percent have purchased additional insurance to help with expenses.

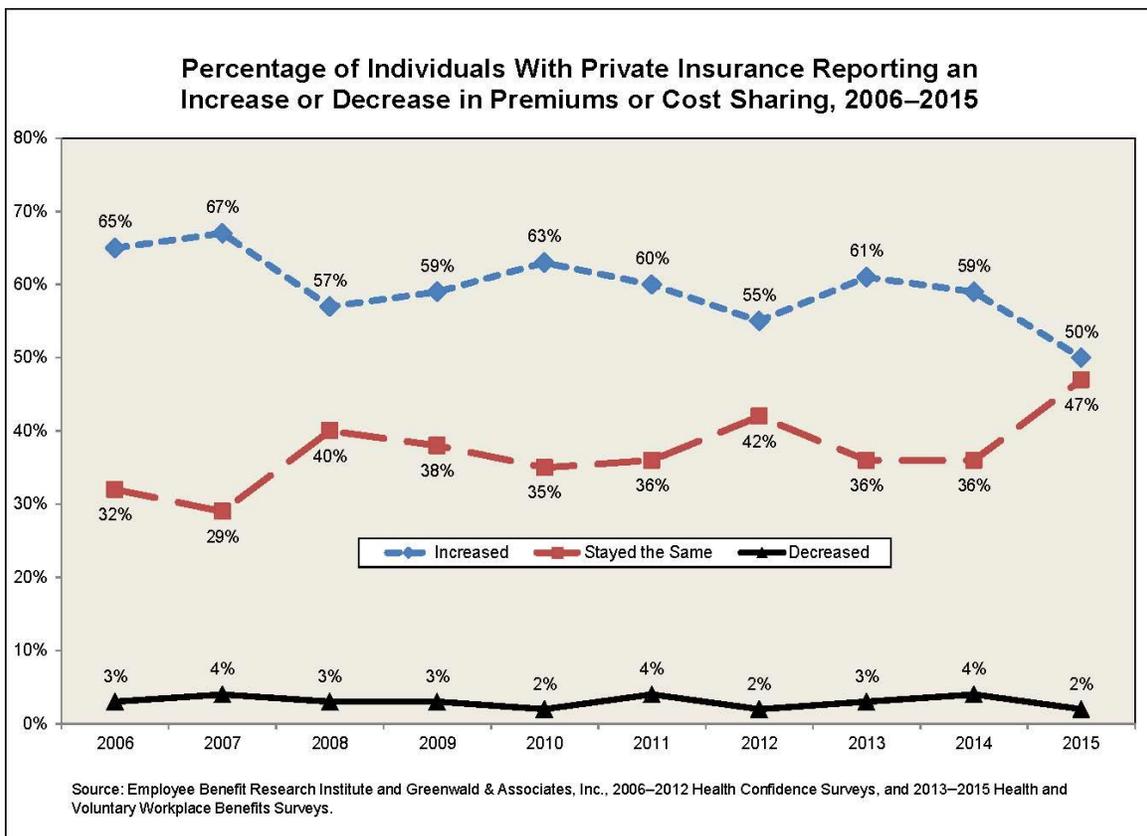
These and other findings are contained in the 2013–2015 Health and Voluntary Workplace Benefits Survey, as well as the 1998–2012 Health Confidence Survey, both conducted by EBRI and Greenwald & Associates.

As earlier waves of the surveys have found, when asked to rate the U.S. health care system, many workers describe it as poor (25 percent) or fair (30 percent). Only a small minority rate it as excellent (4 percent) or very good (13 percent). In contrast to the ratings for the health care system overall, workers' ratings of their own health plans continue to be generally favorable. One-half (50 percent) of those with health

insurance coverage are extremely or very satisfied, while 41 percent are somewhat satisfied and only 9 percent are not satisfied with their current health plan.

The full report, “2015 EBRI/Greenwald & Associates Health and Voluntary Workplace Benefits Survey: Most Workers Continue to Give Low Ratings to Health Care System, but Declining Number Report Health Care Cost Increases,” published in the September 2015 *EBRI Notes*, is online at www.ebri.org

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