

## **Americans Divide on Patients' Rights**

As Congress moves closer to a debate on patients' rights, Americans sharply divide on the issue.

Forty-four percent of the public favors a law making it easier for patients in managed care to sue their health plan, an ABC News/Washington Post poll finds. Slightly more, 49 percent, oppose such a law, saying it would increase the cost of health care too much.

Should it be easier for patients to sue, or would it be too costly?	
Should be easier	44%
Too costly	49

With the Democrats now in control of the Senate, Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-SD) has said that the so-called Patients' Bill of Rights will move up on the agenda, second only to education. The bill would allow patients to sue health plans in federal or state court for up to \$5 million in damages.

George W. Bush favors a competing bill in the Senate that's more limited in its scope; it would permit lawsuits only in federal court and put a \$500,000 cap on damages.

**GROUPS** – Higher-income Americans are more likely than low-income people to support making it easier to sue; that may be because they don't have to worry as much about increased costs of health care. Better-educated Americans (who tend to have higher incomes) are also more apt to back the right to sue.

	Yes, make it easier to sue	No, Would cost too much
<\$20K	31%	58
\$75K+	52	41
Less than HS	31	53
College +	55	37

**TRUST** – Though Americans split about evenly on the right to sue, they favor the Democrats in Congress over Bush to handle the issue, by a 15-point margin, 52-37 percent. Just four in 10 approve of Bush's work on patients' rights to date; as many disapprove.

At the same time, about two-thirds of Americans side with Bush and the Republican leadership on the issue of jurisdiction: Sixty-five percent say state governments, not the federal government, would do a better job regulating health plans. That reflects a long-running phenomenon of greater public trust in state and local government.

METHODOLOGY - This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone May 31-June 3, 2001, among a random national sample of 1,004 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Fieldwork by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Dalia Sussman.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:  
<http://abcnews.go.com/sections/politics/PollVault/PollVault.html>

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Here are the full results (\*=less than 0.5 percent):

\*= less than 0.5 percent

2. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bush is handling patients' rights in the health care system?

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
6/3/01	40	39	21

4. Who do you trust to do a better job handling patients' rights in the health care system - Bush or the Democrats in Congress?

	Bush	Dems	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opin.
6/3/01	37	52	*	3	7

19. On another subject, do you think Congress should make it easier for patients in managed care to sue health plans that deny or delay medical treatment, or do you think this would increase the cost of health care too much?

	Should make easier	Increase cost too much	No opin.
6/3/01	44	49	7

20. Who do you think would do a better job regulating health plans: (the federal government) or (individual state governments)?

	Federal gov't	State gov't	Neither (vol.)	difference (vol.)	No opin.
6/3/01	27	65	4	1	4

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