



## Trump's Healthcare Plan Fails to Impress

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Policy scholars on both left and right say the healthcare plan unveiled last week by Republican presidential contender Donald Trump is confused, unrealistic, and unlikely to replace the Affordable Care Act.

"It appears that this is just some campaign operative copying and pasting boilerplate Republican ideas that they found on the web," Michael Cannon, MA, JM, director of health policy studies at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, told *MedPage Today*.

The GOP front-runner published "Healthcare Reform to Make America Great Again" on Wednesday, following his Super Tuesday victory.

Trump's seven-point plan includes:

- Repealing portions of Obamacare, specifically the individual mandate
- Changing current law to allow health insurers to sell plans across state lines
- Making insurance premiums tax-deductible for individuals
- Allowing tax-free health savings accounts
- Mandating price transparency from all healthcare providers, clinics, and hospitals
- Issuing block grants for Medicaid to improve states' flexibility in managing the program and eliminate federal overhead
- Allowing consumers to buy imported drugs

Cannon said that what seemed most apparent in Trump's plan is his ignorance. Trump advocates creating health savings accounts without recognizing such plans have been around for more than a decade.

"That they're just restating current law tells us this isn't actually a serious effort."

Igor Volsky, deputy director of the left-leaning Center for American Progress Action Fund, acknowledged that Trump might be attempting to split with traditional Republican orthodoxy by raising the issue of drug prices, but he's not biting.

"You have to look at the plan as a packaged deal and that packaged deal isn't so great. You take away coverage from now 20 million people [the number gaining coverage under the Affordable Care Act] and I'm not exactly sure what you give them."

He said Trump is promising Americans they'll be able to get a plan on the individual market while removing the regulations that make those plans accessible.

"If you were part of the expanded Medicaid population, good luck in getting coverage that you can afford or getting any kind of coverage at all."

Jeff Anderson, a senior fellow at the right-of-center Hudson Institute, called Trump's plans "a lot of goodies and not a lot of pay-fors." Anderson is also co-founder of the 2017 Project, an initiative focused on repealing and replacing Obamacare.

Anderson critiqued Trump's decision to create a new tax loophole for consumers on the individual market rather than eliminating a similar provision on the employer's side. He also noted that Trump's plan does not offer support for those who might lose their subsidies after a repeal of Obamacare.

"The way I read his proposal, it would probably even expand Medicaid beyond Obamacare levels," he said. Either that, or "[Trump's] going to have just a horrible coverage shortfall."

And while it isn't written in Trump's proposal, Anderson called his comments to the media on preserving the preexisting conditions mandate a "mistake."

Such a provision negates the entire concept of insurance, Anderson said. "It's sort of akin to a federal mandate that anybody offering home insurance has to cover people whose houses have already burned down."

But Trump's plan had one strong point, Anderson noted: Unlike a plan offered by rival candidate Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), Trump would leave alone the tax treatment for the average person with an employer-based plan.

Trump ruffled opponents of Obamacare in February when he stated that "I like the mandate" and "I don't want people dying in the streets" in an interview with Anderson Cooper.

Cannon noted the marked differences between his proposal and his statements to the media, telling *MedPage Today*, "He's been all over the map, from one day to the next."

"It's a real possibility that Donald Trump could wake up one morning in the White House and decide he wants to negotiate a great deal on a single-payer plan and that he really does like single-payer after all."

He added, "But the odds that Rubio would wake up one morning and decide that he likes single-payer are zero."

As for the promise to repeal other parts of Obamacare, Bob Laszewski, president of consulting firm Health Policy and Strategy Associates in Alexandria, Va., noted that a president's powers are limited.

"Just because a presidential candidate or even a president stands up and says I'm going to repeal Obamacare, I'm going to repeal all the insurance exchanges, I'm going to repeal all of the subsidies ... doesn't mean he's got a snowflake's chance in hell of getting it through Congress," he argued.