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Top Findings and Strategic Messaging Recommendations from Recent National Survey

To: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Trust for America's Health

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On behalf of The Trust For America's Health and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, in consultation with Bellwether Research, conducted a survey among 1,320 registered voters nationwide (1,019 weighted). The survey was conducted between September 8th and 19th, 2016. Voters were randomly selected from a list of registered voters and reached on a landline or cell phone depending on the number they designated on their voter registration. Interviews were conducted by live telephone interviewers; 50 percent were reached on a cell phone.

Included in the sample were three oversamples: 100 Black voters, 100 Hispanic voters, and 100 White non-college voters. Upon completion of the survey, the results were weighted to bring the three oversamples into line with the racial and ethnic composition of registered voters nationwide. The data was weighted to reflect the total population of registered voters, taking into account regional and demographic characteristics according to known census estimates and voter file projections. The data are subject to a margin of error of +/- 3.1 percentage points.

- A majority of registered voters (73 percent) – across the political spectrum and across the country – support investing to improve health. 53 percent strongly favor investing more to improve health. (In 2012, 67 percent favored investments, 51 percent strongly.)
 - While support is strongest from Democrats (87 percent), there is still strong Republican (57 percent) and Independent support (70 percent).
 - Voters in all areas support more investments. Support is strongest among those in cities (82 percent), but strong majorities of voters in suburbs (74 percent), small towns (68 percent), and rural areas (62 percent) favor investments.
 - Support does not vary depending on education attainment, with high levels of support among both college grads (72 percent) and non-college grads (74 percent).

- Women (78 percent) are particularly favorable toward increasing investments, including 80 percent of Independent women and 62 percent of Republican women. Two-thirds (67 percent) of men favor more investments.
- Support is strongest among African Americans (89 percent), followed by Hispanics (82 percent). Seven in ten (69 percent) white voters support investing to improve health (including 69 percent of white non-college and 59 percent of white rural voters).
- Two-thirds (64 percent) say the number of health threats facing our country has increased. The biggest threat is obesity (41 percent), followed by cancer (33 percent). There is a large gap between these two and the second tier of health issues: 14 percent say heart disease and stroke are the biggest threat, followed closely by diabetes and drug use/overdose (11 percent).
 - Substance abuse is seen as a larger threat among voters in rural areas (15 percent), older, white non-college grads (17 percent), whites in the Central U.S. (16 percent), and conservatives (15 percent).
 - Those that identify as liberal are particularly concerned about obesity (45 percent; 24 percent say cancer is the top threat), while conservatives view obesity and cancer as equal threats (37 and 35 percent respectively).
 - African Americans are concerned about obesity and cancer equally (35 and 38 percent, respectively), while obesity is a larger concern for Hispanics (42 percent; 30 percent say cancer is the top threat).
- Nearly all voters with children under age 18, however, believe their own children are very healthy (92 percent give an 8-10 rating on a 10-point scale); this is the case for parents of all ideologies, incomes, education levels, and ethnicities. However, a majority of registered voters (51 percent) believe the current generation of children as a whole will be less healthy than previous generations when they reach adulthood.
 - Republicans (55 percent say less healthy), those in the South and rural areas (57 and 60 percent, respectively), independent women (62 percent), and African American women (68 percent) are particularly concerned about the health of children.
- 50 percent agree that staying healthy is a personal choice and is determined by individual behaviors (same as 2012, 52 percent), versus 44 percent who say it is up to individuals, but there are things we can do to help people make healthy choices. Nearly as many Democrats (45 percent) as Republicans (51 percent) favor a personal responsibility message.
- A belief in personal responsibility as the primary driver for individual health does not impede support for local government involvement. A majority of voters (53 percent) say their local government could do more in health improvement initiatives – this support has grown since 2012 (44-46 percent could do more vs. doing enough). This shift has occurred across political parties and among all races, income levels, and area types.
 - Two-thirds of Democrats (up from 52 percent in 2012), half of Independent voters (up from 41 percent), and a plurality of Republicans (42 percent, up from 36 percent) feel their local government could do more. One of the biggest shifts

- toward local government involvement has come from Independent women (62 percent, up from 43 percent).
- Half of rural voters (52 percent, up from 45 percent) and nearly two-thirds of voters in cities (62 percent, up from 55 percent) say their local government could do more.
 - While support for local government involvement is stronger among those with a household income of \$50,000 or less (60 percent, up from 51 percent), there is still support among those with an income over \$50,000 (51 percent, up from 41 percent).
 - 71 percent of African Americans and 68 percent of Hispanics favor more local government involvement (was 52 and 62 percent, respectively). Half (49 percent) of whites agree (up from 41 percent).
- The survey found significant differences in how voters view their own health and the health of their communities related to income, age, education and area of the country in which they live. The biggest gaps between personal health and community health are among city dwellers, voters under 50, college graduates, and those with a higher household income, as these groups tend to be more upbeat about their own health.

<i>On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate...</i>	% 8-10 Own health	% 8-10 Community health
Total	66	36
18-49	70	30
50+	61	42
Income under 50k	59	37
Income over 50k	72	35
College educated	73	32
Non-college educated	59	39
City	71	31
Suburbs	68	41
Small town	61	38
Rural area	63	33

- Thirty-eight percent feel that their community has a positive effect on their health and the health of their families. Eight percent say it has a negative effect, and 52 percent say no effect. Republicans (43 percent), suburbanites (43 percent), whites (41 percent), and college-educated individuals (43 percent) are more inclined to feel that their community has a positive impact on their health. This may provide a good starting point for some audiences perceived as tough to reach on these issues.
- Messages about the future health of children, access and opportunities for health tested the strongest and were among the most well received in the focus groups. There was consistent ranking of the top messages across the political spectrum and other demographics.

All messages (very convincing reasons to support investments and total convincing reasons to support investments shown):

Message	Very convincing/ total convincing
Kids future/toxic stress	60/84
Access	60/84
Kids future/obesity	55/81
Opportunity w/access	52/80
Beyond doctor w/case study	50/84
Opportunity w/acknowledge	49/82
Beyond doctor w/disparities	48/79
Local	40/79
Econ/jobs	39/75
Cost/ROI	37/69

Top messages by subgroup (very convincing shown):

	Top-Testing Message	2nd Highest Message	3rd Highest Message
Total	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (60)	Access (60)	Kids Future/Obesity (55)
Democrat	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (75)	Access (74)	Beyond Doctor w/Disparities (69)
Independent	Access (58)	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (53)	Access/Opportunity (51)
Republican	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (49)	Kids Future/Obesity (45)	Access (44)
White	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (59)	Access (58)	Kids Future/Obesity (51)
African American	Kids Future/Obesity (74)	Beyond Doctor W/Disparities (74)	Access (73)
Hispanic	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (70)	Acknowledge/Opportunity (65)	Access (63)
Northeast	Access (65)	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (62)	Kids Future/Obesity (57)
Central	Access (59)	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (58)	Kids Future/Obesity (49)
West	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (61)	Access (61)	Kids Future/Obesity (57)
South	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (60)	Access (57)	Kids Future/Obesity (57)
City	Access (66)	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (64)	Kids Future/Obesity (60)
Suburban Area	Access (65)	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (64)	Kids Future/Obesity (54)
Small Town	Kids Future/Obesity (59)	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (57)	Access (52)
Rural Area	Access (52)	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (50)	Kids Future/Obesity (45)
White Non-College	Access (57)	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (55)	Kids Future/Obesity (54)
White Non-College Women	Access (65)	Kids Future/Obesity (64)	Access/Opportunity (56)
18-49	Access (65)	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (64)	Kids Future/Obesity (55)
50+	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (57)	Access (54)	Kids Future/Obesity (54)
Liberal	Access (76)	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (75)	Beyond Doctor W/Disparities (73)
Moderate	Access (61)	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (60)	Beyond Doctor W/Case (56)
Conservative	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (51)	Access (46)	Kids Future/Obesity (45)
Income under 50K	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (66)	Access (64)	Kids Future/Obesity (60)
Income over 50K	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (59)	Access (59)	Kids Future/Obesity (53)
Men	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (58)	Access (54)	Access/Opportunity (46)
Women	Access (65)	Kids Future/Obesity (64)	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (62)
Democratic Women	Access (77)	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (74)	Kids Future/Obesity (71)
Independent Women	Access (66)	Access/Opportunity (64)	Kids Future/Obesity (62)
Republican Women	Kids Future/Obesity (56)	Kids Future/Toxic Stress (47)	Access (47)

- Economic messages (“Econ/Jobs” and “Cost/ROI”) tested well, but not as well as messages focused on children, the future, and general impact on life. However, economic messages were cited by one in five voters in an open ended question about the best reason to support investments – and economics were a big point of focus during focus groups. People understand that if we invest now, we can save money later.

Very convincing shown	Econ/Jobs	Cost/ROI
Total	39	37
Democrat	49	50
Independent	34	35
Republican	31	26
White	37	36
African American	46	42
Hispanic	44	42
Northeast	43	44
Central	35	29
West	41	46
South	38	35
City	42	44
Suburban Area	41	43
Small Town	33	29
Rural Area	36	28
White Non-College	39	34
White Non-College Women	37	34
18-49	36	41
50+	42	34
Liberal	49	55
Moderate	41	38
Conservative	29	25
Income under 50K	42	36
Income over 50K	38	42
Men	38	36
Women	39	38
Democratic Women	48	49
Independent Women	34	40
Republican Women	30	23

- The top proposals for how to improve health are providing more time for kids' physical education, activity, and community sports, as well as creating partnerships between farmers, food suppliers, and community health groups to bring fresh produce and mobile markets to underserved communities. While all proposals were well-received, these two stood out as being the most effective across virtually all subgroups.

<i>Rate the proposal on a scale of 0 to 10 based on how effective you feel it will be at improving community health.</i>	Top Proposal (% 8 to 10)	2nd Highest Proposal (% 8-10)
Total	School Activity (74)	Produce Trucks (74)
Democrat	School Activity (84)	Produce Trucks (83)
Independent	Produce Trucks (71)	School Activity (66)
Republican	School Activity (72)	Produce Trucks (65)
White	School Activity (73)	Produce Trucks (73)
African American	School Activity (87)	Produce Trucks (87)
Hispanic	School Activity (77)	Produce Trucks (75)
Northeast	School Activity (81)	Produce Trucks (80)
Central	School Activity (71)	Produce Trucks (69)
West	Produce Trucks (76)	School Activity (69)
South	School Activity (75)	Produce Trucks (72)
City	Produce Trucks (77)	School Activity (74)
Suburban Area	School Activity (76)	Produce Trucks (75)
Small Town	School Activity (73)	Produce Trucks (69)
Rural Area	School Activity (74)	Produce Trucks (71)
White Non-College	Produce Trucks (78)	School Activity (72)
White Non-College Women	Produce Trucks (81)	Kids Food Choices (74)
18-49	Produce Trucks (74)	School Activity (73)
50+	School Activity (76)	Produce Trucks (74)
Liberal	Produce Trucks (83)	Safe Housing (82)
Moderate	School Activity (77)	Produce Trucks (74)
Conservative	School Activity (66)	Produce Trucks (65)
Income under 50K	School Activity (78)	Produce Trucks (77)
Income over 50K	Produce Trucks (73)	School Activity (72)
Men	School Activity (68)	Produce Trucks (68)
Women	School Activity (79)	Produce Trucks (79)
Democratic Women	School Activity (88)	Produce Trucks (85)
Independent Women	Produce Trucks (83)	Prevent Obesity (74)
Republican Women	School Activity (77)	Produce Trucks (68)

Strategic Messaging Recommendations

- **Focus on children.** Messages around children’s health were among the highest rated in the survey, and there were a number of discussions in focus groups about the need to help children live healthier lives; people are concerned about ACEs and obesity. We can raise concerns to raise interest and show why investments are needed, but then pivot to an aspirational and forward-thinking message on what can be done.
 - Voters are also more receptive to messages that focus on supporting health and how things can benefit children – this is in part because they are seen as too young or don’t have the ability to make decisions for themselves [vs. messages that are seen as dictating lifestyle or behavior to adults.]
 - The way *not* to talk about children is through a “cyber kids” argument about tablets and phones creating a generation of sedentary, unhealthy kids. In the focus groups, this discussion immediately went to parental responsibility. It was difficult to move people beyond this and toward programmatic solutions.

- **Aspirational, community-driven, action oriented messages were strongest, such as “opportunities to the healthy” and focusing on quality of life.** Voters respond most strongly to aspirational messages around health improvement. “Opportunities to be healthy” tested the highest (77 percent favorable) of different phrases tested in the poll. Some variations of this concept this could be: “creating opportunities for everyone;” “helping all individuals/families have the opportunity to be healthy;” and “narrowing the gaps when it comes to affordable, healthy food/quality education/safe neighborhoods.”

- Citing health problems can be important for getting attention and to identify problems (64 percent say the number of health threats we face has increased), but they are best coupled with positive messages for moving forward. Helping people be healthier in the future should be the central frame for specific messages and proposals.
 - Specific examples and case studies can help gain increased support from more skeptical segments, such as rural residents, older voters, Republicans, and higher-income whites.
 - “Prevention” also tested high (70 percent) as a favorable term. It resonates better than “community prevention” (tested in 2012, 62 percent favorable).

- **Community can matter, a local focus is important.**
 - Registered voters are most concerned about health close to where they live in their local communities. Just over a third rate the health in their community as very good, and 53 percent say their local government could do more to improve health of their community.
 - Support for government involvement is slightly higher when mentioning that government should do more to improve health in communities. Mentioning communities produces more favorable results among voters under 30, as well as among Republicans, those in the South and in rural areas, men, and younger, white non-college grads.
 - Republicans, higher income households, suburbanites, and whites are most likely to believe their community impacts their health in a positive way.

- Our focus group discussions also demonstrated that voters are generally most favorable and trusting of the local government, and prefer local-focused approaches, or those where various levels of government (local, state, federal) are working together. Localization makes proposals more “real” and tangible to people understanding what types of efforts these are and how it could impact their own lives.
- Across all groups, “healthy neighborhoods” tested slightly better (66 percent favorable) compared to “community health” (62 percent favorable). And both tested better than “public health” (60 percent favorable). Democrats, however, are equally supportive of all the phrases, and African Americans prefer the term “public health.”
- **Partnerships and collaborations are popular.** Voters generally respond well to partnerships – that improving health needs to be a partnership – between sectors, public-private, and connected to the community. In focus groups, participants felt community partnerships could have a greater impact and they responded favorably to bringing different groups together to improve the quality of life of a community as a whole.
- **Food costs/access and children/school opportunities rank high as paths for supporting opportunity.**
 - Voters recognize that access to healthy, affordable food is something they do not have direct control over – but that having this access can help improve health. Accessibility and cost of healthy foods was a key point of discussion in all regional focus groups and the national, equity-focused group. It is a concrete example of how government, non-profits, businesses, and community organizations could help support better health.
 - Messages about children not having access to healthy food or places to be physically active (where they cannot play outside or walk to school) are particularly well received.
 - In addition, they recognize – and most are receptive to messages – that those living in poverty and/or are low-income do not have the same access or choices around healthy foods. The “opportunity w/access” message was toward the top of the list overall, but it was particularly well-received by Democrats (68 percent found this message very convincing, versus 37 percent of Republicans). It was a top-tier message for African Americans (66 percent very convincing), though there is also deep support for this message among Hispanics (59 percent) and whites (49 percent). More than half (53 percent) of white non-college grads said this message was a very convincing reason to support increasing investments.
 - Access to affordable, healthy food is also a key message or entry approach for explaining and talking about inequity in ways voters understand and are receptive to.
- **Recognize personal responsibility as important for health improvement.** Personal responsibility is still one of the most core values for how voters think about and view health – and a key consideration for messaging about public health efforts. In focus

groups, messages about improving community health alone were met with some resistance; some became skeptical or resistant to the idea that these programs or efforts alone fix the problem without also talking about a role for personal responsibility. For instance, an improvement to community health can make a difference in creating opportunities for people to be healthier or makes healthier choices easier choices.

- **Personal responsibility and increased investments reinforce each other.** The poll shows that personal responsibility is not in conflict with supporting investing in improving health for many voters. This builds on the point that the most effective messaging balances between acknowledging personal responsibility along with supporting opportunities to be healthier. There is significant overlap between those who believe in personal responsibility and believe in investing to improve health; a strong majority (71 percent) of those that favor personal responsibility support more investments to improve the health of communities.
- **Economic messages are reinforcing.** While economic messages did not test as highly compared to messages on children’s health and access/opportunity, they came through strongly (second highest after future/quality of life) in open-ended question asking the best reason to invest more to improve health. Economic arguments were also an important focus of the discussion in focus groups to underscore the point that these efforts are common sense – investing now means savings later -- and that they can have a positive, tangible impact. ROI and cost saving messages also are key in demonstrating accountability around government programs.
 - When speaking about business and economic initiatives, creating partnerships resonates better than incentives. The latter creates some resistance among Independents and Republicans who are more likely to be against tax breaks and more overt government spending. In the survey, a message on creating partnerships to bring fresh produce and mobile markets to underserved areas was rated as very effective by 65 percent of Republicans, while just 45 percent of Republicans said increasing incentives to encourage business owners to open grocery stores in these areas would be effective.
- **In terms of equity, income inequity is most broadly and best understood, and the most relatable – and often seems to serve as a “proxy” for discussing all types of inequity.** In the focus groups, conversations about equity were dominantly focused on income inequity and differences in opportunities for low-income individuals or communities. Nearly no one proactively raised race or ethnicity at the outset, and in general, and attempts to discuss it were often quickly diverted back to talking about income differences instead. In order to connect to a broad audience in a compelling way, we would recommend using “low-income communities” when it comes to who is facing inequities.
- **“Creating opportunities for all” can also help voters understand equity issues.** As mentioned above, “opportunities to be healthy” was the top language tested in the poll. This aspirational tone, and acknowledging that we need to close the gaps that exist, was part of some of the top messages, and helps introduce equity in a way that is broadly understood.