



Georgia Health Initiative

2026

Georgia Gubernatorial Candidate Election Guide



Introduction

Georgia's midterm elections this November will help shape the direction of health and health policy in our state. Georgia Health Initiative® (the Initiative), a nonpartisan, nonprofit private foundation that brings together leaders across sectors to improve health in Georgia, is pleased to present this **2026 Gubernatorial Candidate Election Guide**, highlighting health and health care priorities of candidates running for governor.

The governor plays a unique role in shaping statewide health care policy while maintaining a productive and collaborative relationship with the General Assembly, federal policymakers, other governors, and local government leaders.

In statewide polling commissioned by the Initiative in June 2026, 77% of likely Georgia voters told us that a gubernatorial candidate's views on health care would be important in deciding who they will vote for in the November 2026 election.¹ Across party lines, income levels, ages, and geography, voters agreed that health care costs too much and does not prioritize patients' needs. They identified a range of changes they would like to see in Georgia's health care system.

These findings helped inform questions posed to both candidates for governor. The 2026 Election Guide was designed to give each candidate the opportunity to share, in their own words, how they would approach health and health care in Georgia. Through our government affairs firm, Capital City Public Affairs, the Initiative reached out to both candidate offices to invite their participation. Following outreach, we received a response from one candidate prior to the submission deadline, which is presented in full and unedited.

By publishing this guide, the Initiative seeks to provide information that can inform dialogue on health and health care across the state.



¹ The full report, Georgia Voters' Perceptions and Priorities on Health Care: 2026 Polling Reports, and an accompanying Issue Brief can be found at georgiahealthinitiative.org/our-work/publications-and-releases.

Gubernatorial Candidate Responses

On November 3, 2026, Georgia voters will choose either Keisha Lance Bottoms or Rick Jackson to be their next governor. To educate and inform voters on each candidate's views on health and health care, we asked each candidate to respond to seven questions about their vision for health care leadership in Georgia and how they would respond to specific health care challenges.

While encouraged to submit responses, Rick Jackson's campaign declined to do so. Therefore, provided below are the questions as they were posed to each candidate, followed by the verbatim responses received from Keisha Lance Bottoms's campaign.

Keisha Lance Bottoms

OFFICIAL CAMPAIGN WEBSITE:

keishaforgovernor.com



Leadership Approach on Health Care

1 Please share your vision for how you, as Georgia's next governor, would provide leadership to improve the health and well-being of people and communities throughout our state.

Georgia should be leading the nation in health policy. As governor, I'll use our state's strengths—public health expertise, innovation, and leading hospitals and universities—to deliver results in every community. I'll convene Georgia's world-class assets to coordinate a strategy to preserve our global public health infrastructure amid the chaos from Washington. As governor, I'll expand Medicaid to cut costs and close coverage gaps, keep rural hospitals open, and strengthen prevention and mental health services. My CARE Plan for a Healthier Georgia (tinyurl.com/KLBCARE) is designed to lower costs, improve access, preserve patient choice, and make Georgia's health care system work better for patients, families, providers, and taxpayers.

Addressing Specific Health Care Issues

2 Rural counties in Georgia face significant barriers to care, including provider shortages and lack of transportation. Given the considerable interest in addressing and improving health care access and other challenges in Georgia's rural communities, what specific steps would you take to improve health outcomes for rural Georgians?

Every Georgian deserves access to care close to home. As governor, I'll stabilize rural hospitals and clinics by expanding coverage and strengthening reimbursements so facilities can keep their doors open and jobs stay in the community. With my Rural Care First Initiative, we will grow the rural health workforce with loan repayment, residency and training partnerships, and incentives for providers who practice in shortage areas. We will strengthen broadband access and expand telehealth and mobile clinics while investing in maternal health, behavioral health, and chronic disease prevention and management. And by expanding Medicaid, we will prevent rural hospital closures so that all rural communities can access the care they need.

3 Continuous, high-quality coverage contributes to improved health and well-being for individuals. In recent years, Georgia has taken steps to address coverage by establishing Georgia Access, a State-based Marketplace, and implementing Georgia Pathways to Coverage™, a Medicaid waiver program for adults with incomes below 100% federal poverty level who comply with work reporting requirements. Yet still, 12% of Georgians lack health insurance, the second highest uninsured rate in the nation². In addition, widespread majorities of likely Georgia voters shared that they remain concerned about high health care costs, even with insurance. As governor, how would you approach health insurance access and affordability?

Georgia Pathways is a costly boondoggle, loaded with red tape and provisions designed to cover as few people as possible while taxpayers foot the bill. As governor, I'll end Pathways and expand Medicaid to cover hundreds of thousands of Georgians, keep rural hospitals open, and draw down billions in federal dollars to save money for Georgians. I'll use Georgia Access to maximize enrollment, protect consumers from junk plans, and provide targeted state assistance in response to cuts in federal support. No one should lose coverage because of paperwork. While reducing unnecessary documentation hurdles, we'll expand real-time support, and partner with trusted community leaders to provide hands-on help, especially in underserved communities.

4 Georgia has taken bipartisan steps to improve maternal health, including extending postpartum Medicaid to 12 months, investing in the establishment and sustainability of the Maternal Mortality Review Committee, and implementing best practices in patient safety in birthing hospitals. How do you assess the state's current approach to maternal health? If you believe additional steps are needed, what priorities or policy approaches would you consider to strengthen maternal health outcomes across Georgia?

Georgia has taken bipartisan steps to improve maternal health, but outcomes are still unacceptable, especially for Black moms and rural families. As governor, I'll focus on preventing avoidable deaths by expanding coverage, strengthening the OB workforce, supporting doulas and midwives, and investing in telehealth and maternal mental health — especially in the more than 30% of counties that are maternity care deserts. I will repeal Georgia's abortion ban and return our state to the Roe-era standard so women and doctors, not politicians, make time-sensitive medical decisions and women aren't forced into delayed care. More progress can be made by rigorously investigating every maternal death and consistently employing best practices.

5 Georgia has made progress in making behavioral health a bipartisan priority, including through landmark legislation like HB1013, the Mental Health Parity Act. Still, Georgia faces high rates of unmet mental health needs, workforce shortages, and significant disparities in access to behavioral health services across different populations and regions. As governor, how would you build on current momentum to make continued improvements in behavioral health for Georgians across the state?

Behavioral health must remain a bipartisan priority, and I'll work across the aisle to keep building progress that reaches every community. Georgia has the highest percentage of adults with mental health conditions who can't afford care, and that's unacceptable. I'll strengthen parity so Georgians can actually get appointments and affordable care. I'll expand the crisis continuum statewide: strong 988 coordination, mobile crisis teams, and more crisis stabilization beds so Georgians aren't forced into the ER or jail. And we'll partner with trusted community leaders and groups like Silence the Shame to reduce stigma, connecting people to help sooner. Also, we will treat substance use as a health issue and expand family-centered treatment.

Centering Constituent and Community Input

6 What have voters told you is their primary concern about their own health and their family's health that they want you to address as governor? How would you ensure constituent and community input in shaping priorities and solutions across Georgia's 159 counties?

Across Georgia, voters tell me their biggest concerns are skyrocketing premiums, unpredictable bills, and whether a local hospital will be there in an emergency. Georgians deserve access to routine preventative care, and treatment for severe health setbacks shouldn't bankrupt families. I've built a career on partnership to get results, and as governor I'll stay grounded in community input and local expertise in every region. I'll also use appointments to health-related boards and commissions to ensure broad representation from communities across Georgia's 159 counties.

Vision for a Healthy Georgia

7 What does a healthy Georgia mean to you?

A healthy Georgia is one where a zip code doesn't determine your life expectancy. A place where we measure success by whether kids can learn, seniors can age with dignity, and families can see a doctor without going broke — where everyone can thrive.

Rick Jackson

OFFICIAL CAMPAIGN WEBSITE:

rickjackson.com



The candidate did not provide responses for Georgia Health Initiative's Gubernatorial Candidate Election Guide. Information about the candidate's background and policy stances can be found by visiting their campaign website provided above.

Conclusion

Perspectives and opinions may differ when it comes to health and our health care system, but ongoing dialogue is critical to shaping Georgia's present and future. Through the Initiative's statewide poll from earlier this year, we heard that Georgia voters want their next governor to listen, speak candidly, and prioritize the health issues that are affecting them and their families. Across Georgia – from rural to urban areas; across political parties, ideologies, and demographic groups – people are looking to their elected leaders to make changes that they can see and experience.

Through our work over the last few months, the Initiative was honored to have the opportunity to gather input from voters across the state. We are grateful to everyone who took the time to participate in this process, specifically, the 1,000 voters who took part in the statewide poll published in August. We also appreciated the opportunity to communicate with both the Keisha Lance Bottoms and Rick Jackson campaigns to invite their participation in this gubernatorial candidate survey.

By publishing these findings, our aim is to elevate future-oriented dialogue that moves ideas into action. We believe these types of exchanges are pivotal to the work ahead in improving health in our state, and we are pleased to play a role in doing so.

Regardless of who is elected on November 3, the coming months present a unique opportunity to shape the legacy of health and health care in our state. We look forward to supporting our new governor, as well as other elected officials, as they assume the responsibility and privilege of stewarding the health and well-being for all 11 million of us here in Georgia.



FOR QUESTIONS, PLEASE CONTACT:

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