



WEST HEALTH-GALLUP 2021 HEALTHCARE IN AMERICA REPORT

COVID-19 Brings Growing Worry
About Rising Costs and Inequities
in the U.S. Healthcare System



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Overview

At the close of 2021, Americans report a growing struggle to pay for healthcare, increasing concerns about inequities and access in the U.S. healthcare system, and little faith the federal government will enact reform to make things better anytime soon. Regardless of race, gender or income, Americans are now more burdened by and worried about healthcare costs. While these issues are not new, the degree to which they have been heightened or exacerbated by COVID-19 has reached an all-time high since the beginning of the pandemic, according to measurements by West Health and Gallup.

The *2021 Healthcare in America Report*, drawn from a nationally representative sample of more than 6,600 U.S. adults, provides a comprehensive look at changing attitudes, behaviors and trends in healthcare. The report measures the outsized effect the ongoing pandemic has had on public attitudes as the country tries to recover physically, mentally and financially. This year, Americans witnessed the continuation of a once-in-a-century pandemic, the development of lifesaving vaccines, the politicization of masking and vaccination policies, nursing shortages, worsening health conditions, a growing mental health crisis, action by the Supreme Court on healthcare, massive inflation, and efforts in Congress to pass major healthcare reforms.

However, decades of failed action and the recent weakening of bold measures to lower costs have left Americans at the end of the year viewing a future as bleak as the past. An overwhelming majority of Americans anticipate the costs of healthcare services and prescription drugs will continue to rise in the next 12 months. These concerns are leading to growing pessimism and worry about what actions will be taken to address this problem. According to this survey's estimation, nearly 100 million U.S. adults characterize the healthcare system as "expensive" and "broken."

The groundbreaking data presented in this report captures a critical moment in healthcare and is direct evidence that beyond the threat of illness and death posed by COVID-19, rising costs and postponement of care in response to the pandemic are having a ripple effect on all other areas of the American healthcare experience.

COVID-19 HAS WORSENERD AMERICANS' OUTLOOK ON HEALTHCARE

FIGURE 1

Has COVID-19 changed your view of the U.S. healthcare system?

- Yes, my view of the U.S. healthcare system is better.
- No, my view of the U.S. healthcare system has not changed.
- Yes, my view of the U.S. healthcare system is worse.
- Don't know

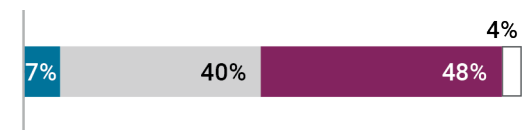


FIGURE 2

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, are you now more concerned or less concerned that some Americans have unequal access to quality healthcare services?

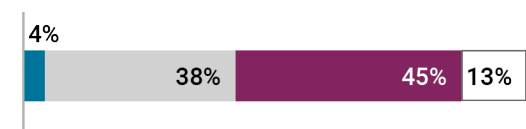
- Less concerned
- Same level of concern
- More concerned



FIGURE 3

In your opinion, is the U.S. government today doing better or worse at controlling the cost of healthcare compared to the years immediately before the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Better
- About the same
- Worse
- Don't know



Note: Percentages may sum to 100% +/-1% due to rounding.
West Health/Gallup

See our full report on COVID-19 on [page 25](#).

Report Highlights

1 Negative perceptions of the U.S. healthcare system related to cost, quality and access grew dramatically over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nearly half of all Americans surveyed (48%) say their view of the U.S. healthcare system worsened due to the pandemic.

An estimated 38 million Americans (15%) say they have greater difficulties in paying for healthcare due to the pandemic.

Sixty percent of Americans report that the pandemic has made them more concerned about unequal access to quality healthcare services. This concern rises to nearly three in four among Black Americans and two in three among Hispanic Americans.

2 The percentage of Americans unable to access treatment or medicine because of cost is rising quickly.

Nearly one-third of Americans report not seeking treatment for a health problem in the prior three months due to its cost — a percentage that has tripled since March.

Even among higher income households (those earning more than \$120,000 annually), 20% report not seeking care in the prior three months because of cost — up from about 3% in March and 5% in June.

One-fifth of U.S. adults (21%) report they or a member of their household had a health problem worsen after postponing care because of cost.

Almost a third of U.S. adults (30%) report that they would not have access to affordable care if they needed it today, up from 18% in February and 22% in June. Forty-two percent of U.S. adults are concerned they will be unable to pay for needed healthcare services in the next year.

3 Few Americans believe they receive good value when weighing the quality of care against the cost.

When evaluating their finances, an estimated 58 million U.S. adults say that healthcare costs are a major financial burden for their family. The financial burden is especially acute for younger Americans (under 50) and households with a yearly income below \$48,000.

Seven in 10 Americans (71%) agree that their household pays too much for the quality of healthcare they receive, an 11-point increase from April to October.

4 Powerlessness and pessimism are feelings shared by all Americans, even across political party lines.

Two-thirds of U.S. adults (66%) think voters have very little to no power in reducing the cost of healthcare in the U.S., but nearly nine in 10 think American businesses, corporations and the U.S. Congress do.

However, more than two-thirds of Americans, regardless of party affiliation, say they are pessimistic about the federal government enacting policies to reduce healthcare costs in the coming year.

5 There's clear disparity in the deadly consequences of skipping critical care.

An estimated 12.7 million Americans report knowing a friend or family member who died this past year after not receiving treatment because they could not afford it. Black Americans (8%) are twice as likely to know someone who died as White Americans (4%).

The Healthcare Cost Crisis Deepens in 2021

Tens of millions of Americans continue to struggle to afford needed healthcare, a trend that has only worsened in 2021.

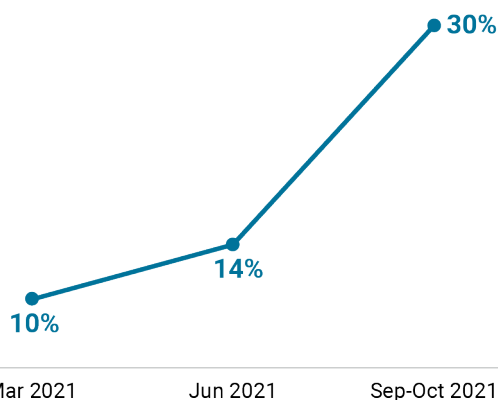


The percentage of Americans who report **skipping care in the prior three months because of its cost** has tripled from 10% in March to 30% in October.

FIGURE 4

Has there been a time in the last three months when you or a member of your household had a health problem, but you did not seek treatment due to the cost of care?

% Yes

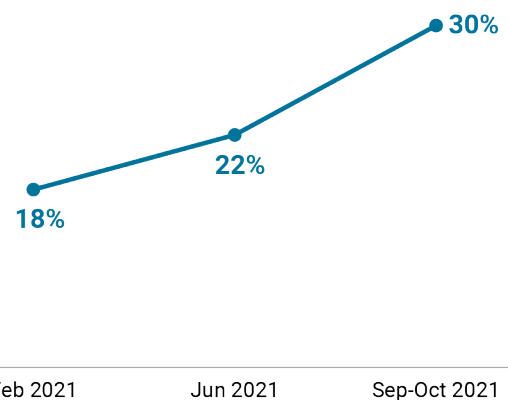


Meanwhile, another 30% of U.S. adults report that **if they needed access to quality healthcare today, they could not afford it**, up from 18% in February and 22% in June.

FIGURE 5

If you needed access to quality healthcare today, would you be able to afford it?

% No



West Health/Gallup

Struggle Across All Income Levels

Throughout the year, there has been a relentless progression of affordability challenges across income brackets. Skipping care due to cost concerns was most acute among the lowest income households in the first half of the year, but by the end of the year, middle-income Americans reported nearly the same level of care avoidance due to cost.

Meanwhile, the nation's highest income earners are also burdened by healthcare costs. About one-fifth of households earning above \$120,000 a year (20%) report not seeking care in the three months prior to being surveyed because of cost, up from just 3% in March.

FIGURE 6
Has there been a time in the last three months when you or a member of your household had a health problem, but you did not seek treatment due to the cost of care?

% Yes

	<\$24K	\$24K-<\$48K	\$48K-<\$90K	\$90K-<\$120K	\$120K-<\$180K	\$180K+
Mar 2021	16%	17%	12%	7%	5%	2%
Jun 2021	28%	18%	17%	9%	8%	2%
Sep-Oct 2021	34%	37%	36%	29%	22%	18%

At the same time, the high cost of prescription drugs has led the rate of Americans going without prescribed medications to double this year, from 6% early in March and 7% in June to 14% in October.

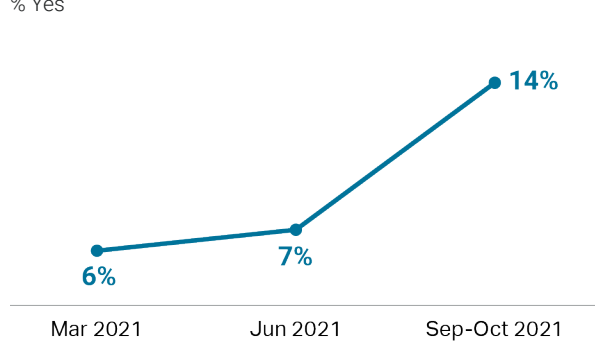
Medication insecurity is exacerbated among households earning below \$48,000 annually. Nearly a quarter of those households (23%) have gone without prescribed medication in the past three months due to cost.



FIGURE 7

Has there been a time in the last three months when you or a member of your household has been unable to pay for medicine or drugs that a doctor had prescribed for you because you did not have enough money to pay for them?

% Yes



	Mar 2021	Jun 2021	Sep-Oct 2021
<\$24K	10%	19%	23%
\$24K-<\$48K	10%	12%	21%
\$48K-<\$90K	6%	7%	16%
\$90K-<\$120K	3%	5%	9%
\$120K-<\$180K	2%	2%	6%
+\$180K	2%	2%	5%

West Health/Gallup

WHY ARE AMERICANS REPORTING DRAMATIC INCREASES IN STRUGGLING WITH HEALTHCARE AFFORDABILITY?

Government support for COVID-19-related care has continued to wane over the course of 2021, and although widespread access to free vaccines has helped slow the death toll, the surge of the delta and other variants has kept infection rates up. The likely result is more out-of-pocket costs to consumers.

Restrictions on in-person activity have also significantly decreased over the course of this year. West Health and Gallup find that 34% of Americans have increased their use of healthcare services in 2021 compared to previous years (and 29% report using more prescriptions or over-the-counter medications this year compared to previous years). Thus, the burden of cost could, in part, have to do with an increase in Americans seeking care after being restricted from doing so for most of 2020.

Other contributing economic factors are outlined in the [“In Their Own Words”](#) section of this report.



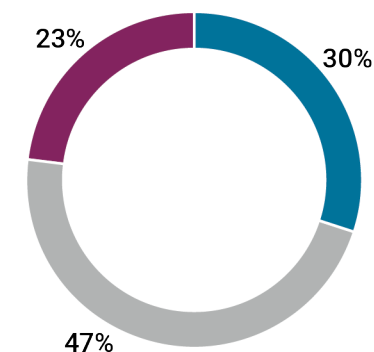
The Financial Burden of Healthcare in 2021

An estimated 58 million U.S. adults (23%) report that healthcare costs are a major financial burden for their family. The burden is greatest among younger Americans (under 50) and households with incomes below \$48,000 a year, with approximately one-third of those households reporting that healthcare costs are a major financial burden.

FIGURE 8

To what extent are healthcare costs a financial burden for you and your family?

■ Not a financial burden ■ Minor financial burden ■ Major financial burden



% Reporting healthcare costs are a major financial burden, by annual income

<\$24K	31%
\$24K-<\$48K	35%
\$48K-<\$90K	27%
\$90K-<\$120K	20%
\$120K-<\$180K	12%
+\$180K	11%

West Health/Gallup

An estimated 28 million Americans report they've had to borrow money in the past year to cover the rising cost of care.

And Americans across all income brackets report higher levels of borrowing this past year compared to December 2020.



At the same time, Americans' healthcare costs are on the rise. Over the past year, the portion of Americans reporting their healthcare costs have increased has reached 50%, up 21 percentage points from six months ago. The rate of Americans borrowing money to pay for needed care is higher now than it was a year ago, rising from 7% in December 2020 to 11% in October 2021.

Dovetailing with these sentiments, U.S. adults continue to cut back on other forms of spending to pay for healthcare, including clothing (26%), food (13%) and utilities (8%). These spending reductions are highest among lower income households.

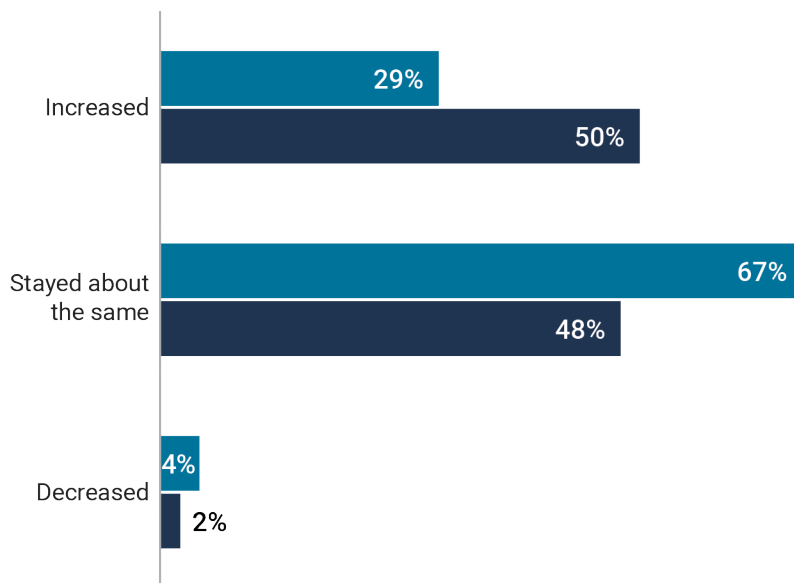
“ I didn't think that medical bills could go to collections... we wanted to buy a house so that's being put on hold.”

- GALLUP PANEL MEMBER, FEMALE, 41

FIGURE 9

In the last 12 months, has the cost of healthcare for you or your household increased, decreased, or stayed about the same?

■ Mar 2021 ■ Sep-Oct 2021



West Health/Gallup

High Cost of Prescription Drugs Remains an Issue for Most Americans

Americans agree (94%) that the cost of prescription drugs is higher than it should be, and this remains consistent regardless of political affiliation.

FIGURE 10

Do you think the cost of prescription drugs in America, in general, is higher than it should be, lower than it should be, or about right?

% Higher than it should be, by political affiliation



“There’s some things that I just don’t want to take because I don’t feel like spending the money for the prescription... you have to weigh out — is the benefit going to be better than having to pay for it... and people shouldn’t have to be in that situation.”

- ANN L., FEMALE, 61

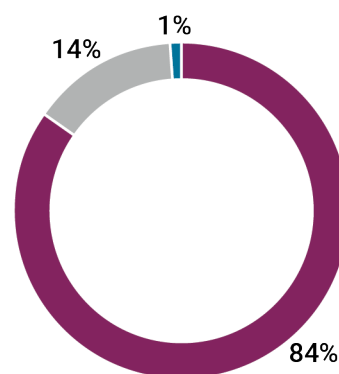
The large majority (84%) expect the cost of drugs to increase over the next 12 months.

And concerns about being unable to pay for prescription drugs are growing: 30% now report that they are concerned or extremely concerned, up 14 percentage points since the start of 2021 and climbing to nearly 50% among those living in households earning less than \$48,000 annually.

FIGURE 11

Over the next year, do you think that the cost of prescription drugs will increase, decrease, or stay about the same?

■ Increase ■ Stay about the same ■ Decrease



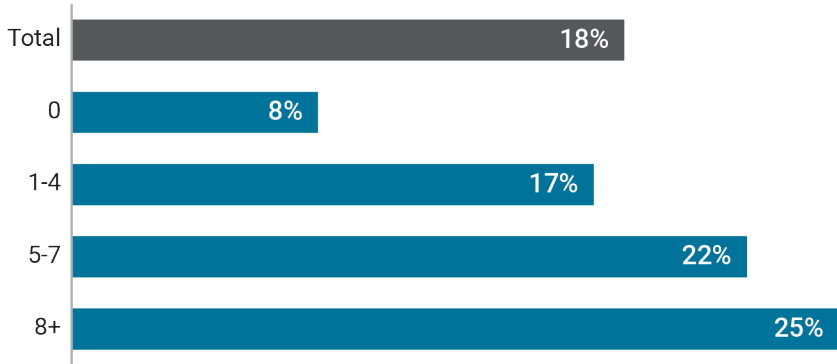
Note: Percentages may sum to 100% +/-1% due to rounding. West Health/Gallup

These concerns are rooted in a grim reality: Nearly one in five adults (18%) report that there has been at least one time in the prior 12 months when they or a family member skipped prescribed medicine to save money. This rate climbs to 25% for households with eight or more prescriptions and 28% for households earning less than \$48,000 per year.

FIGURE 12

Thinking about the last 12 months, have you or a family member skipped a prescribed pill, dose, or other type of medication in order to save money?

% Yes, by number of prescriptions in household



West Health/Gallup

FIGURE 13

How concerned are you that your household will be unable to pay for needed prescription drugs in the next 12 months? (Extremely concerned, concerned, not very concerned or not at all concerned)

	Total	<\$24K	\$24K- <\$48K	\$48K- <\$90K	\$90K- <\$120K	\$120K- <\$180K	\$180K+
Jan 2021 (Extremely concerned + Concerned)	16%	29%	28%	17%	14%	6%	2%
Extremely concerned	4%	8%	6%	4%	3%	1%	1%
Concerned	12%	21%	22%	13%	11%	5%	1%
Sep-Oct 2021 (Extremely concerned + Concerned)	30%	49%	45%	32%	24%	18%	10%
Extremely concerned	8%	18%	14%	8%	6%	3%	2%
Concerned	22%	31%	31%	23%	18%	15%	9%

Note: Extremely concerned + concerned percentages may sum +/- 1% due to rounding.

Cost vs. Value in the U.S. Healthcare System: Americans Aren't Getting Their Money's Worth

Few Americans believe they receive good value when weighing the quality of their care against the costs. An overwhelming majority of Americans (93%) agree citizens across the country are paying too much for the quality of care received. This view is consistent across all income groups and has increased significantly throughout the year, up from 79% in April.

FIGURE 14

Generally, do you think Americans are paying too much, too little, or about the right amount for the quality of care that they receive?

% Too much



West Health/Gallup

Generally, more than half of adults (52%) believe their most recent healthcare experience was not worth the cost, up from 43% in April. And Americans under the age of 50 are nearly twice as likely as those over 65 to report their most recent care experience was not worth the cost.

FIGURE 15

Thinking of the most recent time that you received medical care in-person or remotely, was your experience worth what it cost?

% No



7 in 10

Similarly, on an individual basis, **seven in 10 Americans** (71%) agree that their household pays too much for the quality of healthcare they receive — a sharp 11-point increase between April and October.

Furthermore, 72% of uninsured Americans report their most recent healthcare experience was not worth the cost. Three in four Americans who receive their insurance from a current or former employer believe they pay too much for the quality of care provided. Americans insured by government-based coverage are most likely to report their household pays the right amount for the quality of care and that their care was worth the cost.

FIGURE 16

Thinking of the most recent time that you received medical care in-person or remotely, was your experience worth what it cost?

% No, by insurance status

	Insured	Uninsured	Medicare	Medicaid	Military/ Veteran's	Current or former employer	Plan paid fully by you
Apr 2021	42%	65%	29%	40%	26%	47%	53%
Sep-Oct 2021	50%	72%	39%	53%	28%	54%	56%

Americans Concerned About High Healthcare Costs Going Forward

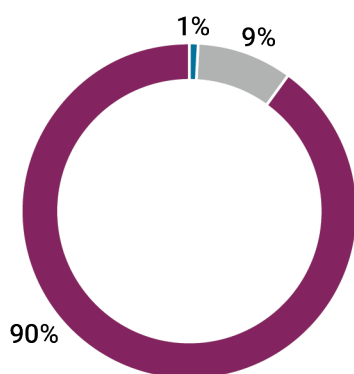
Nine in 10 Americans expect healthcare costs to continue to increase over the next 12 months, and 42% express that they are concerned or extremely concerned they will be unable to pay for needed healthcare services in the next year.



FIGURE 17

Over the next year, do you think that the cost of healthcare services will increase, decrease, or stay about the same?

■ Decrease ■ Stay about the same ■ Increase

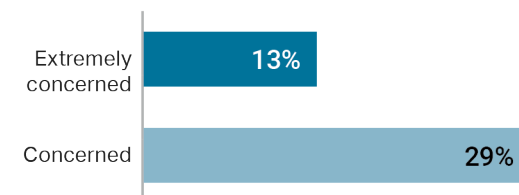


West Health/Gallup

FIGURE 18

How concerned are you that your household will be unable to pay for needed healthcare services in the next 12 months? (Extremely concerned, concerned, not very concerned or not at all concerned)

% Yes



“The prices skyrocketed on everything and I’m on disability. I get one check a month that hasn’t increased, but everything in the world has increased so it’s really hard to make ends meet.”

- DARBIE D., FEMALE, 62

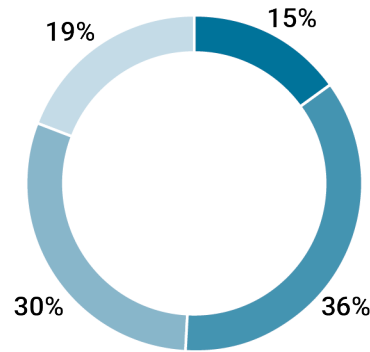
High Anxiety Over Healthcare Costs

The burden of healthcare costs doesn't singularly affect American's wallets. More than half of Americans report that the cost of healthcare contributes some or a lot of stress to their daily life, and the chance of experiencing stress rises steadily among those with lower household incomes. Adults under the age of 50 are about twice as likely to report "a lot of stress" due to healthcare costs compared to those over 65.

When falling ill, 73% of Americans report being somewhat or very worried about insurance covering the cost of treatment, and 71% report being worried about the cost of treatment broadly. Among respondents, there is more concern about the cost of care than missing work or finding a provider to treat the illness. For many Americans, the cost of care may worsen their health conditions due to both care avoidance and added anxiety.

FIGURE 19
How much stress does the cost of healthcare for you and your family contribute to your daily life?

■ A lot of stress ■ Some stress ■ Very little stress ■ No stress



West Health/Gallup

% A lot or some stress due to healthcare costs, by income

<\$24K	60%
\$24K-<\$48K	63%
\$48K-<\$90K	56%
\$90K-<\$120K	48%
\$120K-<\$180K	41%
+\$180K	32%

Amid the stress and worry associated with the cost of care, about three in 10 Americans report not filling a prescription (29%) or not pursuing doctor-recommended procedures, tests or care (31%) in the past 12 months, the latter of which has risen from 24% in January 2021.

Respondents' top reasons for not pursuing needed care or medicine were that they could not afford it, followed by the cost was not worth the care. About two-thirds of Americans (65%) report that knowing the cost of recommended care is important or extremely important in determining whether they choose to pursue that care. Yet, nearly three in four respondents (73%) report they only found out about cost after receiving care during their most recent healthcare service or visit.

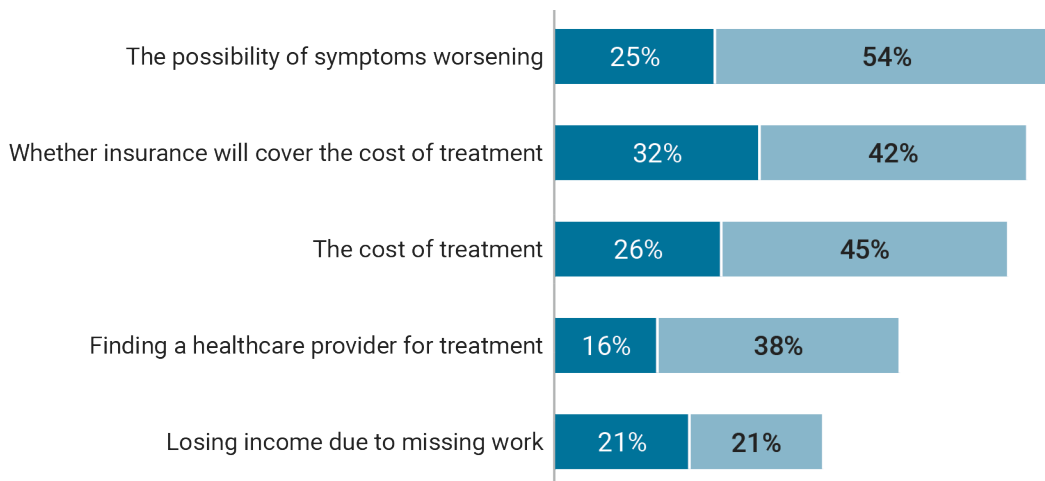
“ I waited eight months to see a therapist because I was concerned about the cost of it. I was concerned if Medicare was going to cover and how much they were going to cover.”

- DARBIE D., FEMALE, 62

FIGURE 20

When you are sick, how worried are you about each of the following?
(Very worried, somewhat worried, not at all worried or does not apply)

■ Very worried ■ Somewhat worried



West Health/Gallup

Racial Disparity in Deadly Consequences of Skipping Care

When care is skipped or delayed, health outcomes suffer. One-fifth of Americans (21%) report a time in the prior 12 months when they or a household member had a health problem worsen after postponing care, with Medicaid beneficiaries (37%) reaching nearly the same level as the uninsured (39%).

The consequences do not stop at worsening conditions. One out of every 20 adults — representing an estimated 12.7 million people — report a time in the past year when a friend or family member died after not receiving treatment for a condition due to their inability to pay for it.

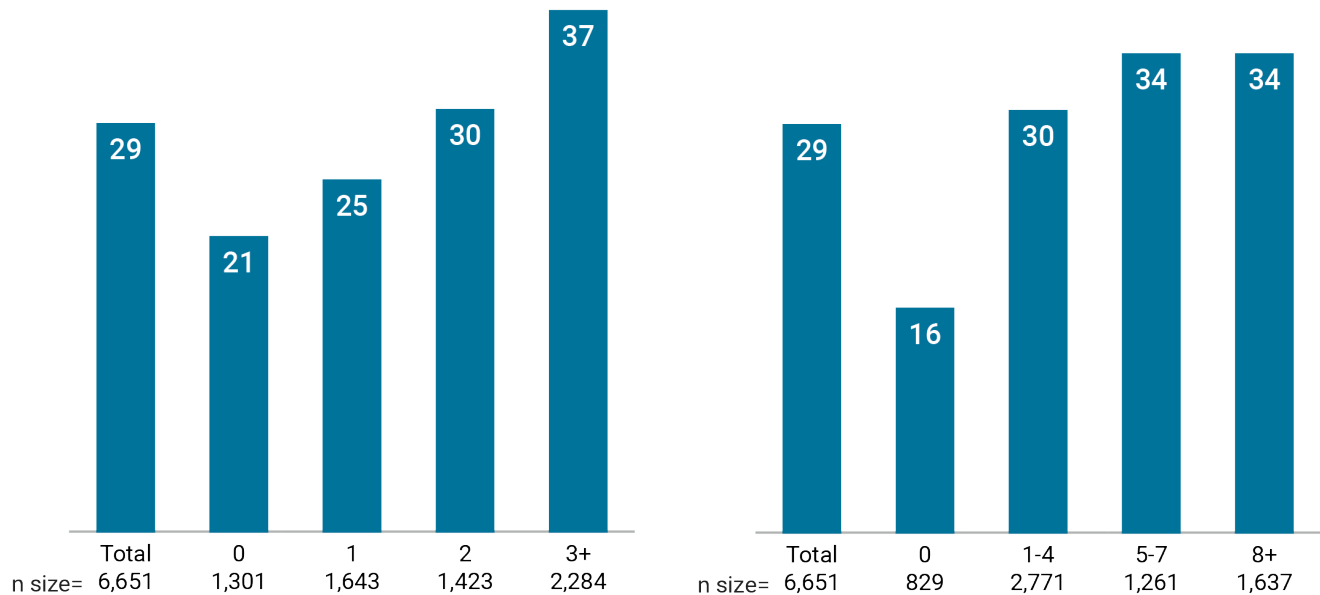
Black adults are twice as likely as White adults to know someone who died because the cost kept healthcare out of reach.

FIGURE 21

Has there been a time in the last 12 months when you chose not to fill a prescription that a healthcare provider prescribed to you?

% Yes, by number of chronic conditions

% Yes, by number of prescription drugs in household





An estimated

12.7 million

Americans have had a loved one die after not receiving much-needed care for a health condition due to their inability to pay for it.

“

My sister-in-law, who died of cancer in July...
couldn't get her extra scan the doctors wanted...
because the insurance wouldn't approve it.”

- DAN R., MALE, 66

In Their Own Words

Expensive and Broken: Common Characterizations of the U.S. Healthcare System



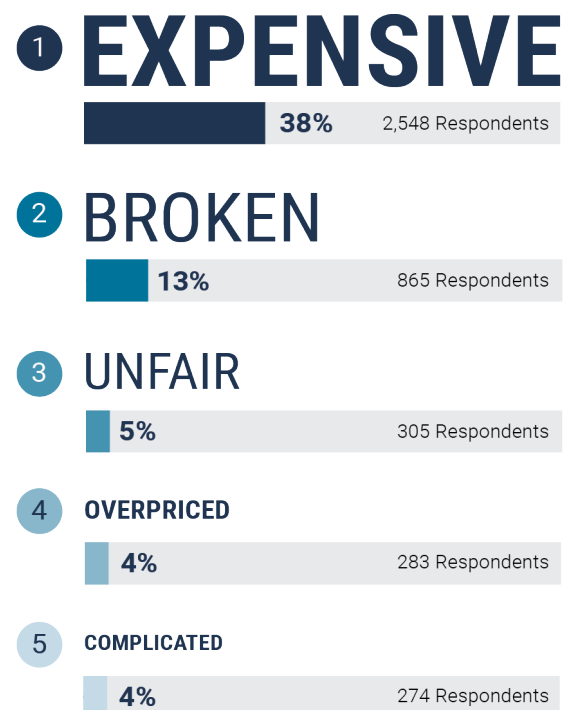
West Health and Gallup began their survey with a simple prompt for Americans: Describe the U.S. healthcare system in “three words or short phrases.” Since this question was deployed first, the responses here are unbiased by the subsequent questions where respondents were asked to report on healthcare cost or access to care. Americans’ words were quite harsh, with **“expensive”** and **“broken”** as the top two descriptors most commonly used. Clearly, the sentiments focus negatively on price or other significant problems with the system, such as fairness and complexity.

The results stand in stark contrast to findings from just two years ago. In 2019, West Health and Gallup conducted a **major survey** on U.S. healthcare costs and found that close to half of Americans (48%) believed the quality of care found in the U.S. was either “the best in the world” (13%) or “among the very best” (36%). This was two-and-a-half times the 18% who reported that the quality of care was either “the worst in the world” (3%) or “among the worst” (16%).

It’s evident that today, the healthcare system is not working for Americans. Thirty-eight percent of respondents — representing almost 100 million people — gave “expensive” as their top descriptor of the U.S. healthcare system. While these findings are likely, in part, due to COVID-19’s exacerbation of cost and care inequities, they also highlight Americans’ struggle with healthcare at a time when the initial waves of the pandemic have abated, but costs have not.

FIGURE 22

Describe the U.S. healthcare system in “three words or short phrases.”



Methodological note: The word “cost” was not included in the survey recruitment materials.

West Health/Gallup

"[COVID-19] exposed everything that's already wrong with healthcare."

- GALLUP PANEL MEMBER, FEMALE, 29

"And I really think this country has enough money, there's enough resources here... absolutely healthcare should be a right. That's how I look at it, it should be a right because you live in this rich country... people are paying a lot in taxes and they deserve that."

- ANN L., FEMALE, 61

"You basically need a Ph.D. to be able to navigate the U.S. healthcare system."

- COREY B., NONBINARY, 24

"It's overwhelming and it's just sad, it's sad right now, but I hope somehow, some way in the future, it can be different."

- GALLUP PANEL MEMBER, FEMALE, 31

AMERICA SPEAKS

"The trust is fading, and I think the country continues to divide. This is going to just get worse."

- CHRISTOPHER L., MALE, 36

"It's so bad, and you have to have such strong patient advocacy for yourself. Because the system — they're not going to advocate for you."

- BLAINE H., MALE, 33

"I need physical therapy for my hip, and I can't pay for that... so I just suffer through it. You wake up at three, four in the morning in excruciating pain and I'm not getting sleep I need. I'm in pain all the time."

- DAWN M., FEMALE, 58

"Healthcare is always at the top of mind, just because we are all human [and] at some point all of us have been sick or will be sick... sometimes I hear candidates minimize the importance of healthcare... you have elderly people, you have people that are lower income, you have people that are new to this country, and that shouldn't make you more or less important, that should not determine whether or not you can or can't get healthcare."

- ANGEL B., FEMALE, 45

"There are people who are having to make the decision of whether or not they feed themselves and their children, or if they get the prescriptions that they or a family member need."

- DANIELLE H., FEMALE, 33

The Cost of Healthcare Is Shaping Election Choices

With healthcare use rising alongside costs, disillusionment runs high among the public. Reducing healthcare costs is a perennial priority for voters, but most do not feel they have the ability to do anything about it themselves. They think Congress and American corporations and businesses have the most power over reducing healthcare costs.

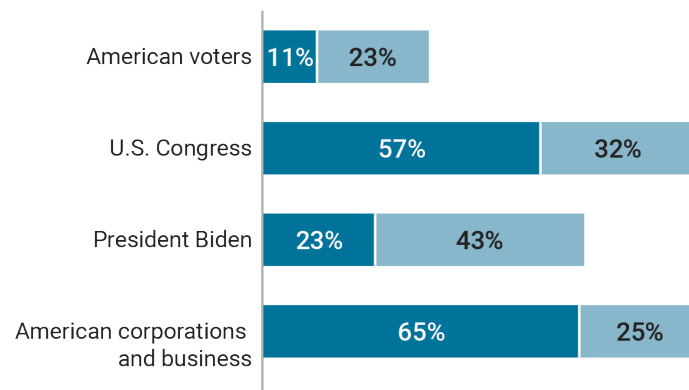


Two-thirds of Americans (66%) report that voters have very little to no power in reducing the cost of healthcare in the U.S., a disconcerting reflection of the helplessness that many citizens have come to hold about the steadily climbing cost of care and medicine. Opinions about Congress and American corporations, however, are different: Nearly 90% of U.S. adults believe Congress or businesses have power to reduce costs, followed by 66% who think President Joe Biden has some or a lot of power. Earlier this year, West Health and Gallup asked Americans if they thought that U.S. employers organizing and acting together could meaningfully affect the costs of healthcare for their employees and 74% reported that they could to a moderate or considerable extent.

FIGURE 23

In your opinion, how much power do each of the following people, or groups of people, have over reducing the cost of healthcare? (A lot of power, some power, very little power or no power at all)

■ A lot of power ■ Some power



West Health/Gallup

More than half of Americans (53%) report that a candidate's plan to reduce healthcare costs is a major priority and another 35% report that it is a minor priority — meaning that 88% of Americans assess a candidate's plan to reduce healthcare costs in determining their vote.

This is especially true for women and Black Americans, both of which are about 10 percentage points more likely than men and White Americans, respectively, to say that a candidate's plan to reduce healthcare costs is a "major priority." Almost half of Americans (49%) report being somewhat likely (37%) or very likely (12%) to vote across party lines to tackle the cost of care issue, although Democrats are more likely than Republicans.

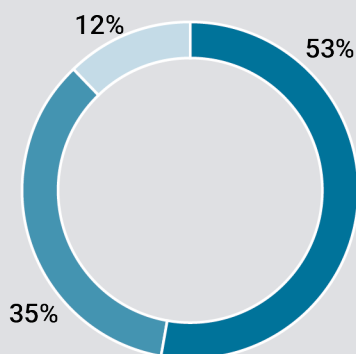
“ I would like to be optimistic and think that... changing our healthcare system is possible, I mean in a sort of literal sense I do think it's very possible. But I do think the political divide and the real sort of partisanship that exists in the country at this moment is what keeps me pessimistic.”

- GALLUP PANEL MEMBER, FEMALE, 32

FIGURE 24

How much of a priority to you is a candidate's plan to reduce healthcare costs when deciding which candidates for public office to vote for?

■ Major priority ■ Minor priority ■ Not a priority



West Health/Gallup



Republicans, Democrats and Independents Are Unified: Healthcare Costs More Than It Should

Political party affiliation has little bearing on Americans’ attitudes about the current cost of care, with overwhelming majorities of Americans across party lines agreeing that the cost of healthcare in America is “higher than it should be.” More than 20% of Democrats, Independents and Republicans alike report that healthcare costs are a “major financial burden” for their families.

FIGURE 25

Do you think the cost of healthcare in America, in general, is higher than it should be, lower than it should be, or about right?

% Higher than it should be, by political affiliation



“ I don’t think the politicians, on either side of the board, really understand what it’s like to be middle or working class.”

- GALLUP PANEL MEMBER, FEMALE, 41

West Health/Gallup

FIGURE 26

To what extent are healthcare costs a financial burden for you and your family?

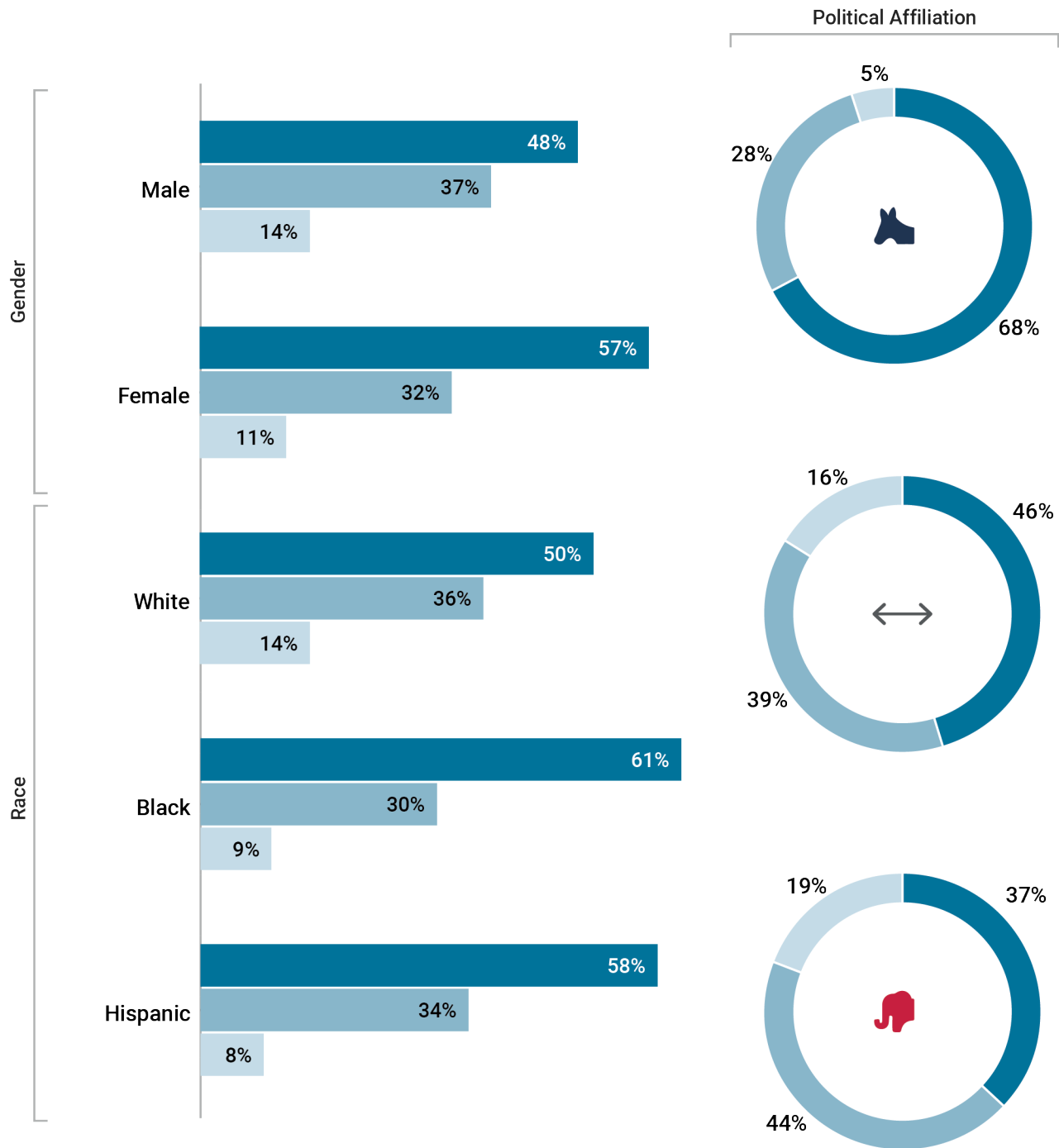
	Political Affiliation		
	Democrat	Independent	Republican
n size=	2,818	1,701	1,738
Major financial burden	23%	24%	21%
Minor financial burden	47%	47%	47%
Not a financial burden	30%	29%	32%

Healthcare Cost Reduction a Priority for Many Voters

FIGURE 27

How much of a priority to you is a candidate's plan to reduce healthcare costs when deciding which candidates for public office to vote for?

■ Major priority ■ Minor priority ■ Not a priority



Note: Percentages may sum to 100% +/-1% due to rounding.
West Health/Gallup

Power But Not Punch – Public Pessimism Regarding Policy Change

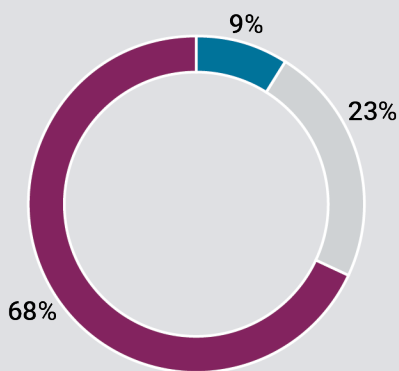
While American adults believe that Congress has substantial power to affect change regarding the cost of care and prescription drugs, 72% are “pessimistic” that the federal government will be able to enact policies in the next year to bring down either the cost of care or prescriptions.

Democrats are only marginally less pessimistic than Independents or Republicans. More than two-thirds of Americans (68%) are also pessimistic about the government being able to ensure equal access to quality healthcare services in the coming year, an issue that was further exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

FIGURE 28

Over the next year, are you optimistic or pessimistic that the federal government will put policies into place that ensure all Americans will have equal access to quality healthcare services?

■ Optimistic ■ Neutral ■ Pessimistic



West Health/Gallup



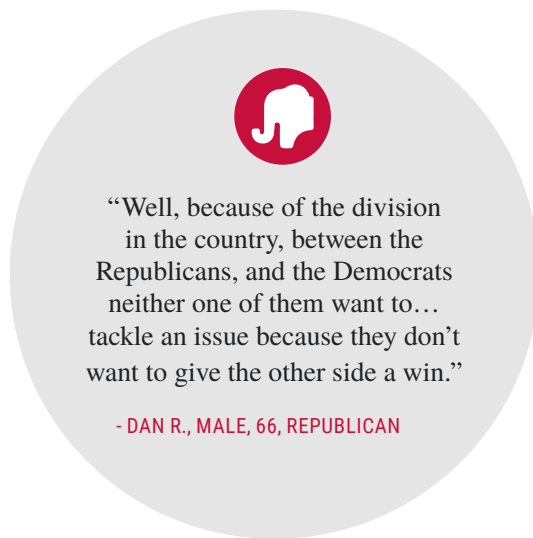


FIGURE 29

Over the next year, are you optimistic or pessimistic that the federal government will be able to enact policies to bring down the cost of healthcare?

■ Optimistic ■ Neutral ■ Pessimistic

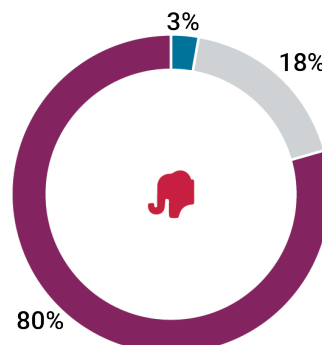
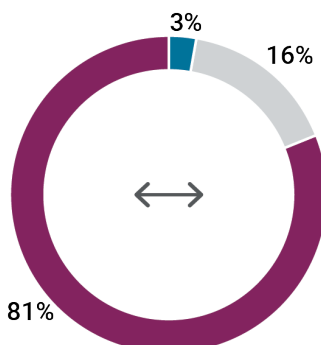
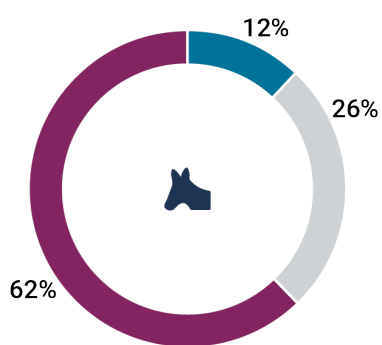
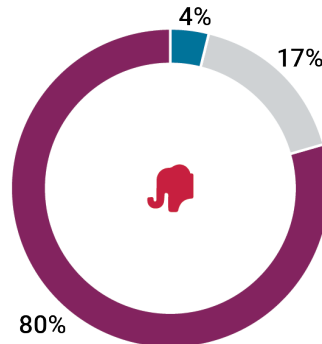
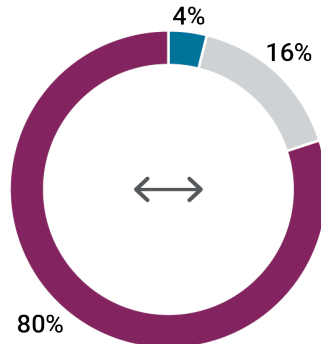
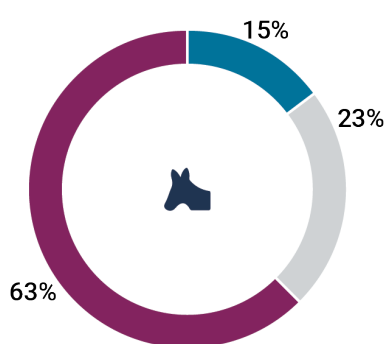


FIGURE 30

Over the next year, are you optimistic or pessimistic that the federal government will be able to enact policies to reduce prescription drug costs?

■ Optimistic ■ Neutral ■ Pessimistic



Note: Percentages may sum to 100% +/-1% due to rounding
West Health/Gallup

Views of U.S. Healthcare System Worsen as a Direct Result Of COVID-19

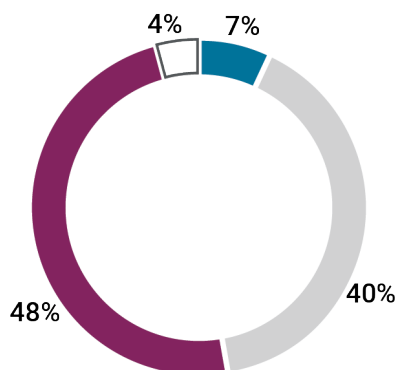
Nearly half of Americans (48%) report that COVID-19 has made their view of the U.S. healthcare system worse, a percentage that grows larger the younger the age group. Fifty-eight percent of those under the age of 30 say they feel this way compared to 38% of adults 65 and older.



FIGURE 31

Has COVID-19 changed your view of the U.S. healthcare system?

- Yes, my view of the U.S. healthcare system is better.
- No, my view of the U.S. healthcare system has not changed.
- Yes, my view of the U.S. healthcare system is worse.
- Don't know



Note: Percentages may sum to 100% +/-1% due to rounding.
West Health/Gallup

Age	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-64	65+
Total	503	1,174	965	2,177	1,756
Yes, my view is better.	7%	4%	5%	9%	12%
No, my view has not changed.	32%	38%	39%	44%	44%
Yes, my view is worse.	58%	55%	52%	42%	38%
Don't know	3%	3%	3%	5%	6%

COVID-19 Heightens Worry About Healthcare Costs

The ability to pay for needed healthcare has always been a top concern for many Americans, but the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened their fears.

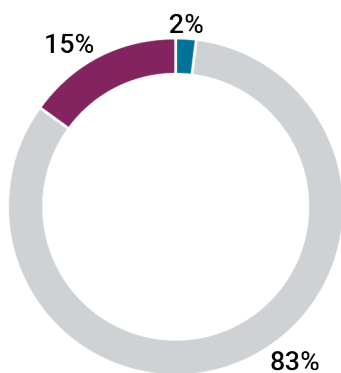
An estimated 150 million Americans (59%) say they have grown more worried about the cost of healthcare services and 45% are more worried about the cost of prescription drugs due to the pandemic.

At the same time, an estimated 38 million Americans (15%) report that their ability to pay for healthcare has become worse due to the pandemic. When asked about the future, the view is even more bleak. More than a third (35%) say they are “more worried” about affording healthcare in the future, a concern shared by at least one in five households making more than \$90,000 a year.

FIGURE 32

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, is your ability to pay for healthcare better, worse, or about the same?

■ Better ■ About the same ■ Worse



West Health/Gallup

FIGURE 33

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, are you now more worried or less worried about the cost of prescription drugs in America?

% More worried about cost of prescriptions due to COVID-19, by income

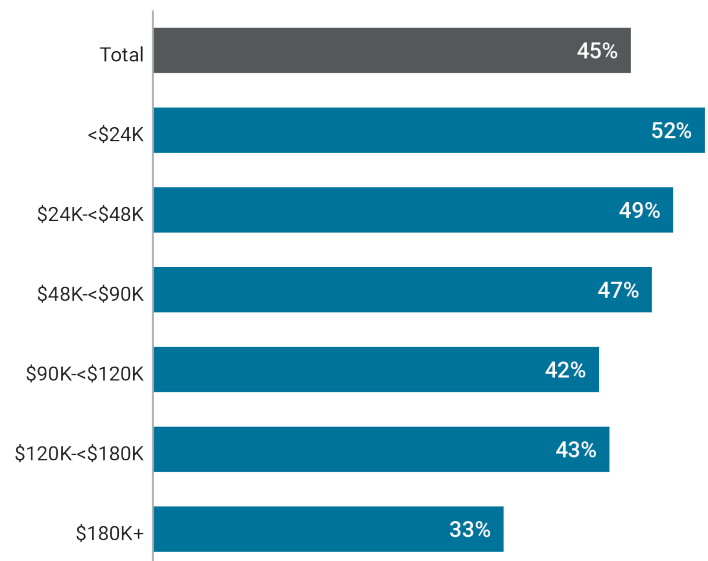
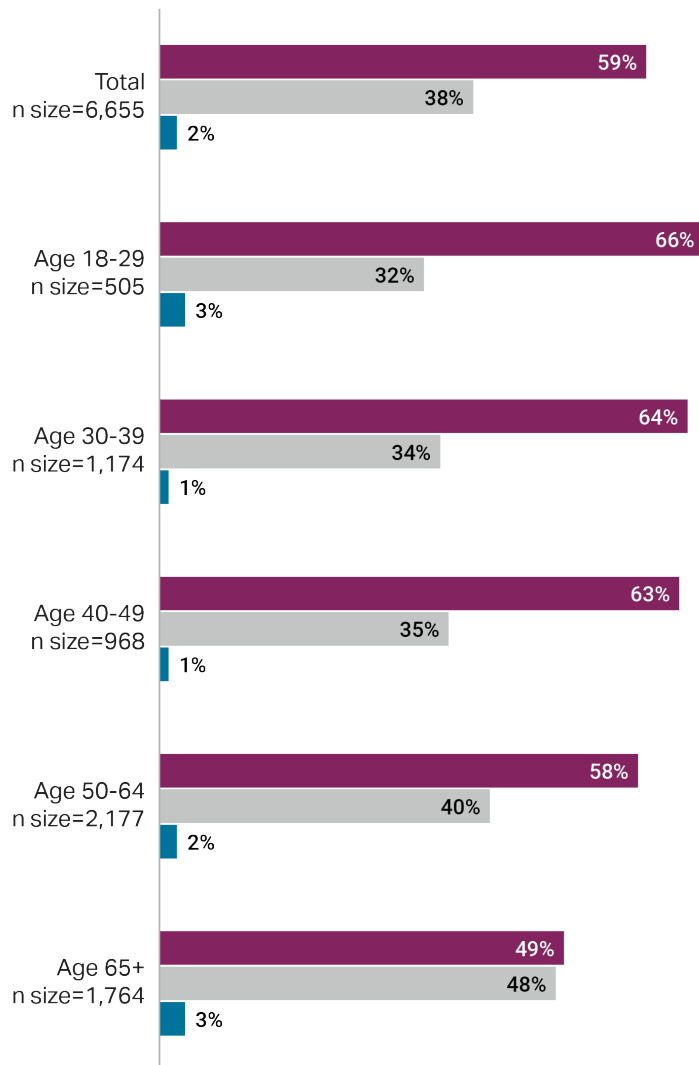


FIGURE 34

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, are you now more worried or less worried about the cost of healthcare services in America?

■ More worried ■ About the same ■ Less worried



West Health/Gallup

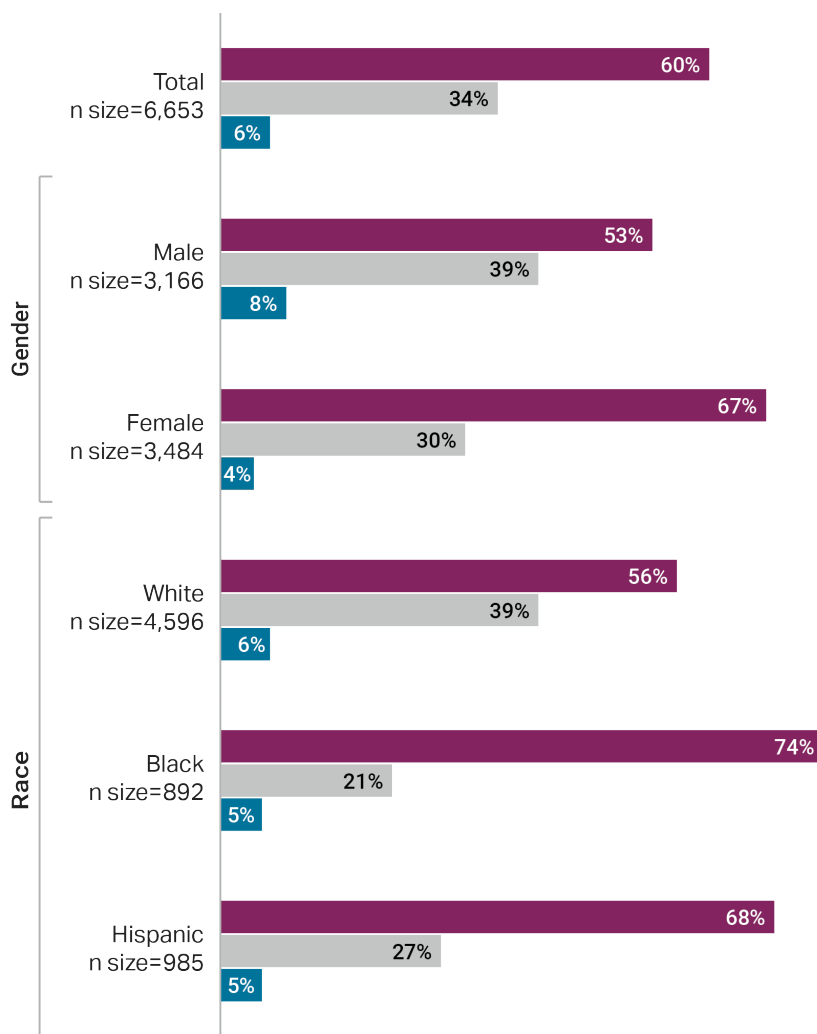
COVID-19 Raises Concern Over Healthcare Equity

Sixty percent of Americans say they have grown “more concerned” about healthcare inequities — specifically unequal access to quality healthcare — amid the COVID-19 pandemic. These concerns increase to 67% among women, 74% among Black Americans and 68% among Hispanic Americans.

FIGURE 35

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, are you now more concerned or less concerned that some Americans have unequal access to quality healthcare services?

■ More concerned ■ Same level of concern ■ Less concerned



“ I think that COVID really illustrated just how dysfunctional the system actually is.”

- COREY B., NONBINARY, 24

West Health/Gallup

Implications and Conclusions

REFLECTIONS ON AMERICANS' 2021 HEALTHCARE EXPERIENCE

Nearly two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, we are beginning to see the long-term impact on healthcare costs emerge. Significantly worsening trends uncovered in recent months underscore the urgency of the U.S. healthcare cost crisis today and the dire projections for the coming years.

Several factors likely contribute to this trajectory (many of which are pandemic related), making this a uniquely challenging moment for the American people. Chief among these are a fragile economy and rising consumer costs. For decades, healthcare costs have grown at a rate double that of Americans' incomes, but as inflation rises to a 30-year high and global supply-chain shortages reach new heights, households across every income bracket are feeling strained by costs in new ways. An estimated 150 million Americans say they have grown more worried about the cost of healthcare services due to the pandemic, and another 38 million report that the pandemic has made their ability to pay for care worse. Concurrently, a greater portion of Americans is delaying and deferring needed care. Earlier this year, West Health and Gallup projected that at least 46 million people delayed care during the pandemic due to cost.

However, our most recent data shows an increased use of care — suggesting that care deferred in 2020 is now being provided in 2021. This increasing use of general healthcare may be driving up costs; as Americans began to interact more frequently with the healthcare system, many found the cost burden to be more extreme than what they remember pre-pandemic. While high healthcare costs did not begin with COVID-19, the pandemic exacerbated this crisis, placing the issue front and center for the American people.

The growing burden of cost is coupled with worsening and widespread pessimism about any kind of solution or reprieve. The power for change, U.S. adults report, lies in the hands of the U.S. Congress and with American businesses. There is also a shared expectation that costs will continue to climb in the year ahead, leaving Americans resigned to the idea that the burgeoning cost crisis — which is estimated to have claimed the lives of more than 12 million Americans this year alone — will persist.

Reflections on 2021 will likely describe it as a year when the cost of healthcare in the U.S. took on a renewed and urgent importance. This year set the stage for policy leaders to choose between legislating for real change or maintaining the status quo. If 2022 brings about the latter, we will likely see continued erosion of Americans' ability to afford much-needed medicine and care beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, putting millions of Americans' health further at risk.

Final Thoughts From West Health

A SHARED EXPERIENCE AND COMMON CAUSE CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEANINGFUL REFORM

In the words of more than half of Americans surveyed, the U.S. healthcare system is “expensive” and “broken.” This sad description is an even harsher reality for the tens of millions of people in this country who are skipping necessary treatments, getting sicker and, in some cases, dying because they cannot afford basic healthcare.

This overwhelmingly negative public sentiment did not form overnight. It’s been years in the making, only to reach new depths of pessimism during a once-in-a-century public health crisis that upended our way of life, created new financial pressures and killed nearly 800,000 Americans.

The question now is: What happens next? Will Americans have to fend for themselves until they are eventually priced out of healthcare? Or will politicians in Washington and across state governments feel their pain and finally take meaningful action to lower costs, improve access and reduce inequities?

At West Health, we’ve made it our mission to promote smart policy solutions and new models of care that improve treatment and reduce costs. We’ve also made it our mission to give voice to the plight of millions of Americans crushed by high medical bills. As we head into the new year, their voices have never been so loud and the need never so urgent.

The COVID-19 pandemic tested us in ways no one imagined and opened our eyes to issues that were hiding in plain sight, particularly when we returned to doctors’ offices and pharmacy counters and found prices as high as or higher than they ever were. But this time, for many Americans, the burden has become too heavy to bear.

It is our hope that out of this shared and painful experience, we and our elected officials can find common cause to make healthcare more affordable for all Americans. We don’t have a moment to lose. Absent action, these problems will continue long after COVID-19 has passed.

Methodology

Results are based on a survey conducted by web over successive field periods of Sept. 27-30 and Oct. 18-21, with 6,663 adults aged 18 and older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia, as a part of the [Gallup Panel](#). Prior Gallup Panel surveys were administered by web March 15-21 (n=3,905) and June 14-20, 2021 (n=4,843). The September-October results were obtained on a West Health survey solely asking about healthcare issues, whereas the March and June measurements were asked toward the end of Gallup's ongoing [coronavirus pandemic](#) tracking survey. For results based on these samples of national adults, the margin of sampling error at the 95% confidence level is +1.5 percentage points for response percentages around 50% and is +0.9 percentage points for response percentages around 10% or 90%, design effect included. For reported subgroups, such as age, political identity, household income, or race/ethnicity, the margin of error will be larger, typically ranging from ± 3 to ± 5 percentage points.

Follow-up qualitative interviews were conducted October 13-22 via Zoom with survey participants who indicated interest in follow-up research participation. Interview respondents were sampled based on responses to the survey and are not representative of the entire survey sample.

Samples are weighted to correct for unequal selection probability, nonresponse, and double coverage of landline and cell users in the two sampling frames. They are also weighted to match the national demographics of gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education, region, population density and phone status (cell phone only/landline only/both and cell phone mostly). Demographic weighting targets are based on the most recent Current Population Survey figures for the 18 and older U.S. population.

About West Health

Solely funded by philanthropists Gary and Mary West, West Health is a family of nonprofit and nonpartisan organizations, including the Gary and Mary West Foundation and Gary and Mary West Health Institute in San Diego and the Gary and Mary West Health Policy Center in Washington, D.C. West Health is dedicated to lowering healthcare costs to enable seniors to successfully age in places with access to high-quality, affordable health and support services that preserve and protect their dignity, quality of life and independence. Learn more at westhealth.org and follow [@WestHealth](https://twitter.com/WestHealth).

About Gallup

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organization in the world.

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