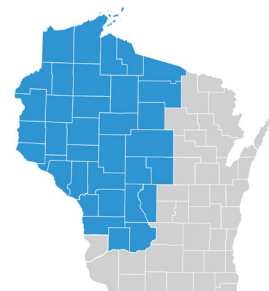




DATA BRIEF NO. 60 | MARCH 2020

Western Wisconsin: Sixty Percent of Adults Experienced Healthcare Affordability Burdens in the Past Year



According to a survey of Wisconsin adults conducted from Oct. 29, 2019 to Nov. 6, 2019, residents of the Western region experienced the highest levels of healthcare affordability burdens. Well over half (60%) of Western region adults experienced one or more of the following healthcare affordability burdens in the prior 12 months.

1) BEING UNINSURED DUE TO HIGH PREMIUM COSTS

- We received too few responses at the regional level to provide a reliable estimate for this statistic.

2) DELAYING OR FORGOING HEALTHCARE DUE TO COST

More than half (56%) of Western region adults encountered one or more cost related barriers to getting healthcare during the prior 12 months, including:

- 40%—Skipped needed dental care
- 35%—Delayed going to the doctor or having a procedure done
- 33%—Skipped a recommended medical test or treatment
- 29%—Avoided going to the doctor or having a procedure done
- 25%—Did not fill a prescription
- 22%—Cut pills in half or skipped doses of medicine.
- 14%—Had problems getting mental healthcare

Smaller numbers reported difficulty getting addiction treatment. Moreover, cost was by far the most frequently cited reason for not getting needed medical care, exceeding a host of other barriers like transportation, difficulty getting an appointment, lack of childcare, and other reasons.

3) STRUGGLING TO PAY MEDICAL BILLS

In the prior 12 months, over a third (33%) of Western region adults experienced one or more of these struggles to pay their medical bills:

- 14%—Contacted by a collection agency
- 14%—Used up all or most of their savings
- 12%—Were unable to pay for basic necessities like food, heat, or housing
- 9%—Racked up large amounts of credit card debt
- 7%—Borrowed money or got a loan or another mortgage on their home
- 7%—Placed on a long-term payment plan

HIGH LEVELS OF WORRY ABOUT AFFORDING HEALTHCARE IN THE FUTURE

Residents of the Western region also reported high levels of worry about affording healthcare in the future. About eight in ten (82%) of respondents reported being "worried" or "very worried" about one or more of these topics: affording nursing home and home care services (78%); costs when elderly (70%); health insurance becoming too expensive (69%); cost of a serious illness or accident (67%); cost of needed dental care (66%); prescription drug costs (59%); and losing health insurance (41%).

DISSATISFACTION WITH THE HEALTH SYSTEM AND SUPPORT FOR CHANGE

Residents in the Western region of Wisconsin were extremely dissatisfied with the health system. Just 28% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "We have a great health care system in the U.S.," while 73% agreed or strongly agreed with "the system needs to change."

Respondents do see a role for themselves in solving problems. They reported actions they have already taken, like researching the cost of a drug beforehand (53%), as well as actions they should be taking—68% believe that taking better care of their personal health is one of the top things they can do personally to address affordability.

But in far greater numbers they saw a role for their elected representatives. Examples of strategies that received support across party lines included (Total/Republican/Democrat/Neither):

- Show what a fair price would be for specific procedures—(92%/89%/95%/92%)
- Require insurers to provide upfront cost estimates to patients—(91%/86%/92%/95%)
- Make it easy to switch insurers if a health plan drops your doctor—(91%/90%/96%/87%)
- Require hospitals and doctors to provide up front patient cost estimates—(91%/89%/93%/92%)

The high burden of healthcare affordability along with high levels of support for change suggest that elected leaders and other stakeholders need to make addressing the cost of healthcare a top priority. Annual surveys can help assess whether or not progress is being made.

Note: For survey methodology and state-wide data, see <https://www.healthcarevaluehub.org/Wisconsin-2019-Healthcare-Survey>



ABOUT ALTARUM'S HEALTHCARE VALUE HUB

With support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Healthcare Value Hub provides free, timely information about the policies and practices that address high healthcare costs and poor quality, bringing better value to consumers. The Hub is part of Altarum, a nonprofit organization with the mission of creating a better, more sustainable future for all Americans by applying research-based and field-tested solutions that transform our systems of health and healthcare.

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