



DATA BRIEF NO. 90 | MAY 2021

Pennsylvania Residents Worried about High Drug Costs—Support a Range of Government Solutions

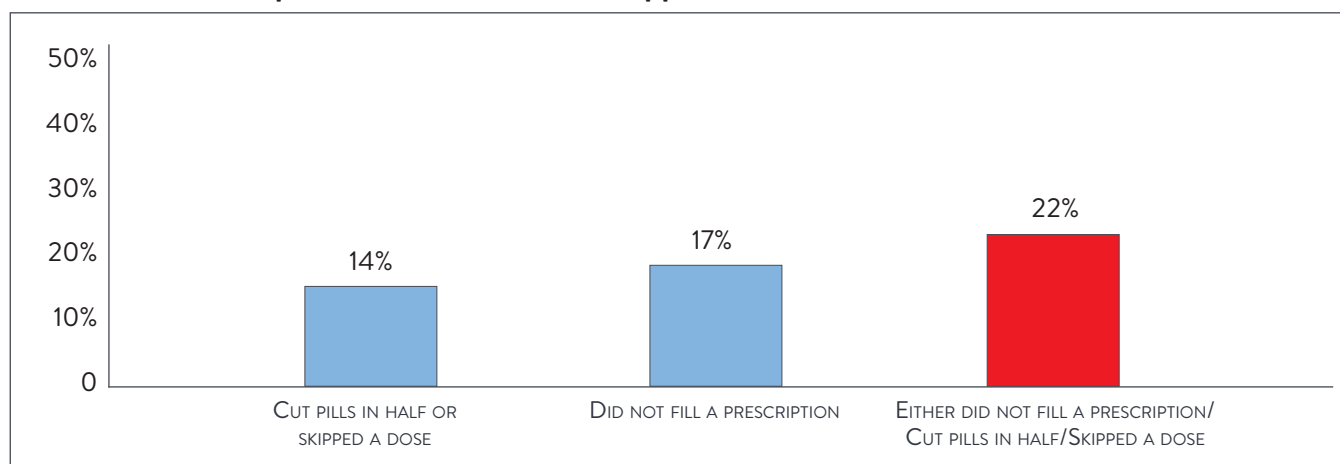
According to a survey of more than 1,150 Pennsylvania adults conducted from Oct. 30, 2020 to Dec. 10, 2020, residents are concerned about prescription drug costs and express a strong desire to enact solutions.

- 1 in 2 are worried about affording the cost of prescription drugs.
- 1 in 5 did not fill a prescription, cut pills in half or skipped a dose of medicine in the past 12 months.
- 28% of rural adults did not fill a prescription, cut pills in half or skipped a dose of medicine in the past 12 months compared to 17% of non-rural adults.
- There is strong support among Pennsylvania adults for government action on drug costs regardless of political affiliation.

Many Pennsylvania residents experienced hardship in the prior 12 months due to the cost of prescription drugs. Indeed, cost concerns led 1 in 5 Pennsylvania adults (22%) to not fill a prescription, cut pills in half or skip a dose of medicine (see Figure 1).

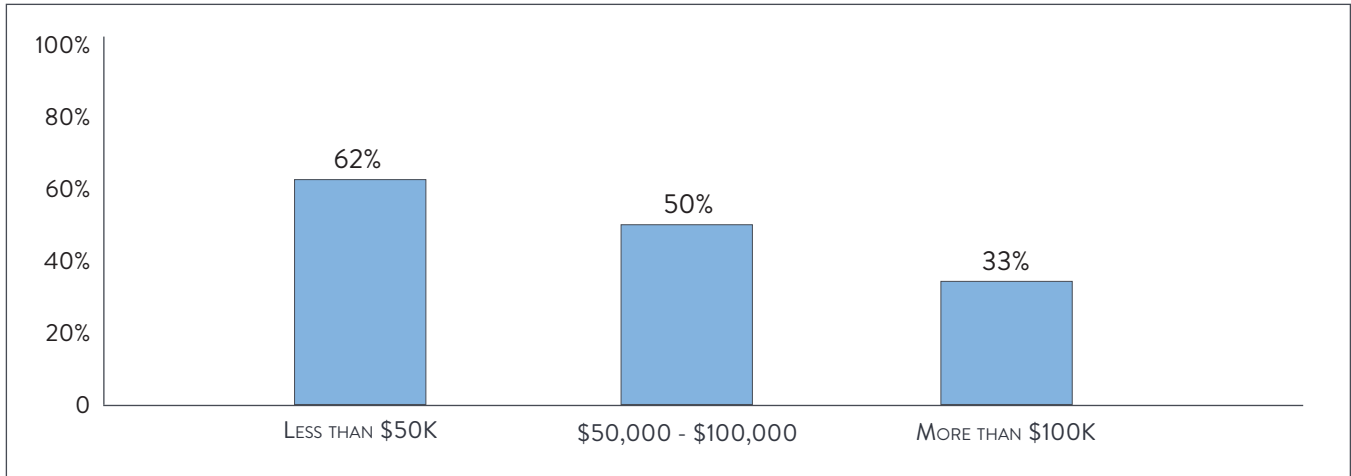
Figure 1

Did not Fill a Prescription, Cut Pills in Half or Skipped a Dose Due to Concerns About Cost



Source: 2020 Poll of Pennsylvania Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub, Altarum's Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

In addition, over half of all survey respondents (51%) reported being either “somewhat worried” or “very worried” about affording the cost of prescription drugs. Worry varied significantly by income group, with residents in households making less than \$50,000 per year being almost twice as worried as those in households making more than \$100,000 per year (see Figure 2).

Figure 2**Somewhat or Very Worried About Affording Prescription Drugs, by Income Group**

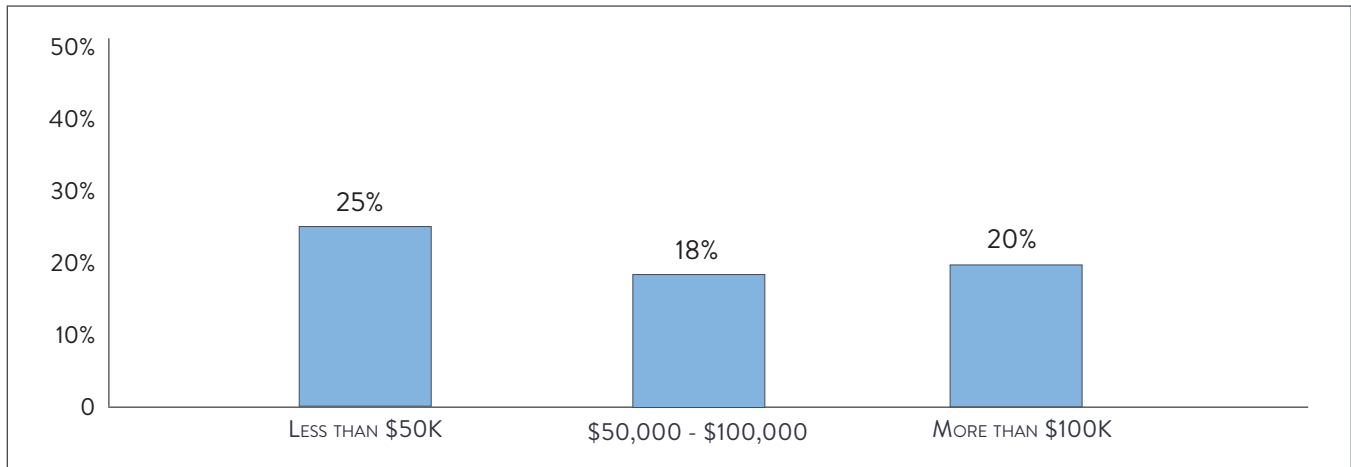
Source: 2020 Poll of Pennsylvania Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub's Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

There is significant regional variation with respect to drug affordability issues in Pennsylvania (see Table 1). Eighteen percent of adults in the South Central/Lehigh Valley, Southwest and Northeast/North Central regions had difficulty affording prescription drugs in the prior 12 months, while adults in the Northwest region fared much worse, with 33% struggling to afford prescription drugs. Surprisingly, most of the regional variation related to adults not filling their prescriptions. In contrast, similar numbers reported rationing prescription drugs, either by cutting pills in half or skipping doses, in each region. Residents of rural areas reported greater prescription drug affordability problems compared to adults in other areas of the state—28% of rural adults either did not fill a prescription, cut pills in half or skipped a dose of medicine in the past 12 months compared to 17% of non-rural Pennsylvania adults.

Table 1**Pennsylvania Adults with Drug Affordability Issues, By Region**

Region	CUT PILLS IN HALF OR SKIPPED A DOSE	DID NOT FILL A PRESCRIPTION	EITHER DID NOT FILL A PRESCRIPTION/CUT PILLS IN HALF/OR SKIPPED A DOSE
SOUTHEAST	13%	14%	19%
SOUTH CENTRAL/LEHIGH VALLEY	12%	12%	18%
SOUTHWEST	12%	13%	18%
NORTHEAST/NORTH CENTRAL	13%	13%	18%
NORTHWEST	20%	29%	33%

Source: 2020 Poll of Pennsylvania Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub, Altarum's Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

Figure 3**Percent Who Did Not Fill a Prescription, Cut Pills in Half or Skipped a Dose of Medicine, by Income Group**

Source: 2020 Poll of Pennsylvania Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub's Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

These hardships have a disproportionate impact on lower income households. As Figure 3 shows, households making less than \$50,000 per year are more likely to have rationed their prescription medicines (by not filling a prescription, cutting pills in half or skipping a dose of medicine) than households with higher incomes. Still, roughly 1 in 5 households have experienced these hardships, regardless of the income group.

When given more than 20 options, the option cited most frequently as being a “major reason” for high healthcare costs was “*drug companies charging too much money*.”

- 70%—Drug companies charging too much money
- 65%—Insurance companies charging too much money
- 65%—Hospitals charging too much money

When it comes to tackling high drug costs, respondents endorsed a number of strategies:

- 92%—Authorize the Attorney General to take legal action to prevent price gouging or unfair prescription drug price hikes
- 91%—Ensure the cost of widely needed vaccines are affordable for all
- 89%—Require drug companies to provide advanced notice of price increases and information to justify those increases
- 89%—Prohibit drug companies from charging more in the U.S. than abroad
- 89%—Set standard prices for drugs to make them affordable
- 87%—Create a Prescription Drug Affordability Board to examine the evidence and establish acceptable costs for drugs

Pennsylvania residents are united in calling for the government to address high drug costs. Many have already tried taking personal action or would take action if given the opportunity:

- 78% would switch from a brand name to a less expensive generic if given the option
- 52% have tried to find out the cost of a drug beforehand

In light of these prescription drug cost concerns—as well as concerns about high healthcare costs generally—it is not surprising that Pennsylvania adults are extremely dissatisfied with the health system:

- Just 34% agreed or strongly agreed that “we have a great healthcare system in the U.S.,”
- While 68% agreed or strongly agreed that “the system needs to change.”

There is remarkably high support for government action on drug costs regardless of the respondents’ political affiliation (see Table 2).

Table 2
Percent Who Agree/Strongly Agree, by Political Affiliation

SELECTED SURVEY QUESTIONS/STATEMENTS	TOTAL	GENERALLY SPEAKING, DO YOU THINK OF YOURSELF AS...		
		REPUBLICAN	DEMOCRAT	NEITHER
MAJOR REASON FOR RISING HEALTHCARE COSTS: <i>DRUG COMPANIES CHARGING TOO MUCH MONEY</i>	70%	71%	69%	69%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD AUTHORIZE THE ATTORNEY GENERAL TO TAKE LEGAL ACTION TO PREVENT PRICE GOUGING OR UNFAIR PRESCRIPTION DRUG PRICE HIKES	92%	93%	91%	91%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD ENSURE THE COST OF WIDELY NEEDED VACCINES ARE AFFORDABLE FOR ALL	91%	88%	93%	91%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD PROHIBIT DRUG COMPANIES FROM CHARGING MORE IN THE U.S. THAN ABROAD	89%	91%	90%	86%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD REQUIRE DRUG COMPANIES TO PROVIDE ADVANCED NOTICE OF PRICE INCREASES AND INFORMATION TO JUSTIFY THOSE INCREASES	89%	87%	91%	88%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD CREATE A PRESCRIPTION DRUG AFFORDABILITY BOARD TO EXAMINE THE EVIDENCE AND ESTABLISH ACCEPTABLE COSTS FOR DRUGS	87%	84%	92%	84%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD SET STANDARD PRICES FOR DRUGS TO MAKE THEM MORE AFFORDABLE	89%	86%	93%	89%

Source: 2020 Poll of Pennsylvania Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub, Altarum’s Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

Comparing 2021 Results to the 2018 CHES Survey

We caution readers against drawing strong conclusions about changes observed between the 2018 and 2021 CHES surveys. While the findings from the two surveys are remarkably consistent, small differences in the weighting approach and in the instrument itself (most significantly the addition of the COVID questions) indicate that direct comparisons should not be made. For more information on the Pennsylvania state surveys, go to www.healthcarevaluehub.org/pennsylvania-state-survey.

Methodology

Altarum’s Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey (CHESS) is designed to elicit respondents’ unbiased views on a wide range of health system issues, including confidence using the health system, financial burden and views on fixes that might be needed.

The survey used a web panel from Dynata with a demographically balanced sample of approximately 1,250 respondents who live in Pennsylvania. The survey was conducted only in English and Spanish and was restricted to adults ages 18 and older. Respondents who finished the survey in less than half the median time were excluded from the final sample, leaving 1,157 cases for analysis. After those exclusions, the demographic composition of respondents was as follows, although not all demographic information has complete response rates:

Demographic Composition of Survey Respondents

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTIC	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
HOUSEHOLD INCOME		
Under \$20K	171	15%
\$20K - \$30K	123	11%
\$30K - \$40K	116	10%
\$40K - \$50K	113	10%
\$50K - \$60K	111	10%
\$60K - \$75K	100	9%
\$75K - \$100K	153	13%
\$100K - \$150K	172	15%
\$150K+	98	8%
PARTY AFFILIATION		
REPUBLICAN	453	39%
DEMOCRAT	411	36%
NEITHER	293	25%
AGE		
18-24	106	9%
25-34	159	14%
35-44	138	12%
45-54	207	18%
55-64	317	28%
65+	216	19%
HEALTH STATUS		
EXCELLENT	142	12%
VERY GOOD	380	33%
GOOD	443	38%
FAIR	163	14%
POOR	29	3%

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTIC	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
GENDER		
MALE	462	40%
FEMALE	695	60%
INSURANCE STATUS		
HEALTH INSURANCE THROUGH EMPLOYER OR FAMILY MEMBER’S EMPLOYER	459	40%
HEALTH INSURANCE I BUY ON MY OWN	95	8%
MEDICARE	355	31%
MEDICAID	155	13%
TRICARE/MILITARY HEALTH SYSTEM	15	1%
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA) HEALTH CARE	8	1%
NO COVERAGE OF ANY TYPE	34	3%
I DON’T KNOW	36	3%
RACE		
AMERICAN INDIAN OR NATIVE ALASKAN	8	1%
ASIAN	17	1%
BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN	51	4%
NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER	5	<1%
WHITE	1052	91%
PREFER NOT TO ANSWER	23	2%
ETHNICITY		
HISPANIC OR LATINO ORIGIN - YES	94	8%
HISPANIC OR LATINO ORIGIN - NO	1063	92%

Source: 2020 Poll of Pennsylvania Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub’s Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

Note: Percentages in the body of the brief are based on weighted values, while the data presented in the demographic table is unweighted.



This survey was conducted for the Community Voices for Health project, supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and in collaboration with Public Agenda. For more information on Community Voices for Health, visit www.communityvoicesforhealth.org

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.

Contact the Hub: 2000 M Street, NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20036
 (202) 828-5100 | www.HealthcareValueHub.org | @HealthValueHub