



DATA BRIEF | JUNE 2024

Rhode Island Survey Respondents Worry about High Hospital Costs; Have Difficulty Estimating Quality/Cost of Care; and Express Bipartisan Support for Government Action

Hospitals provide essential services and are vital to the well-being of our communities. However, a survey of more than 1,000 Rhode Island adults, conducted from February 19 to March 27, 2024, finds that many Rhode Island residents worry about hospital costs and support a variety of government-led solutions across party lines.

HARDSHIP AND WORRY ABOUT HOSPITAL COSTS

A substantial portion of Rhode Island respondents worry about affording health care costs both now and in the future, and many reported experiencing financial hardship resulting from medical bills. Over three in five (60% of) respondents reported being “worried” or “very worried” about affording medical costs from a serious illness or accident. Rhode Island respondents may have cause to worry about affording hospital care—of the 26% of respondents who reported receiving an unexpected medical bill in the past year, 44% say that at least one such bill came from a hospital.

Table 1

Selected Responses to the Open-Text Question “Over the last 12 months, please describe any issues that have occurred due to the merger that affected your preferred health care organization.”

“I couldn’t choose a doctor I wanted.”
“Longer times to get appointments. Appointments are too far out and I end up having to go to ER as I worsened while waiting for that far out appointment. Lots of confusion in the office staff. Costs go up!”
“List [sic] all care and now hv [sic] to go out of state...”
“I had to find a new primary care physician”
“Have not been to my yearly visit”

Source: 2024 Poll of Rhode Island Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub’s Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

SKILLS NAVIGATING HOSPITAL CARE

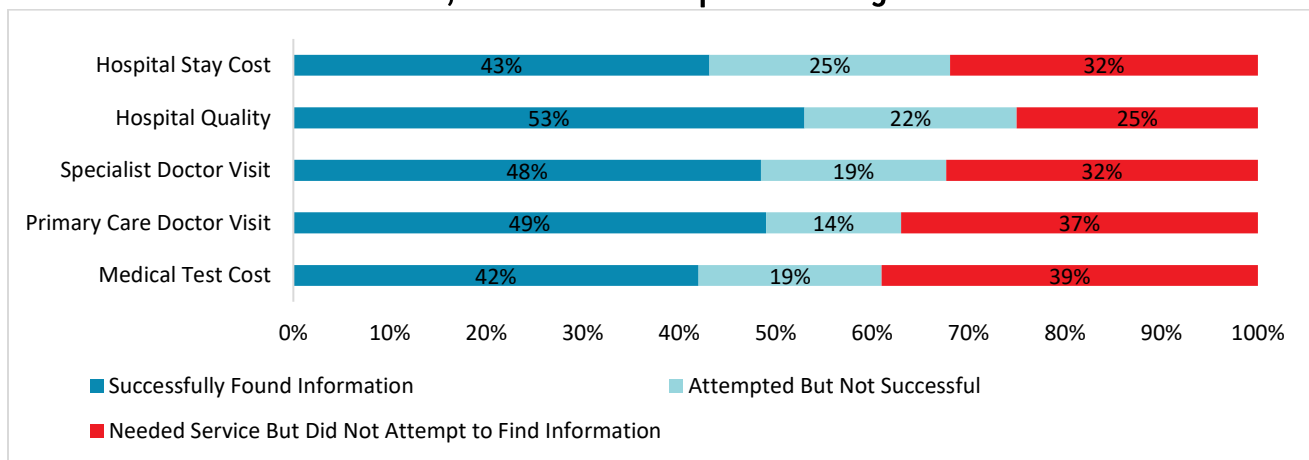
Rhode Island respondents reported high confidence in their ability to know when to seek emergency care, with 65% reporting that they are very or extremely confident about knowing when to go to the emergency department versus an urgent care center or a primary care provider. However, they are slightly less confident in their ability to find hospital costs and quality information. Forty-six percent of respondents are NOT confident they can find out the cost of a procedure ahead of time, and many are NOT confident they can find quality ratings for doctors (49%) or hospitals (50%).

Rhode Island respondents’ lack of confidence may be reflected in the low rates of searching for hospital price and quality information. Out of all respondents, only 28% tried to find the cost of a hospital stay ahead of time and 13% needed a hospital stay but did not search for cost information. Out of those respondents who tried to find hospital cost information or needed a hospital stay, 43% reported finding the information they were looking for, 25% reported they did not find the information they were looking for, and 32% did not attempt to find information when they needed a hospital.

Thirty-nine percent of all respondents reported that they have tried to find quality information on hospitals and 13% needed a hospital but did not try to look for quality information. Out of those respondents who tried to find hospital quality information or needed a hospital stay, 53% were successful at finding quality information, 22% were unsuccessful and 25% did not attempt to find quality information when they needed a hospital (see Figure 1). Figure 1 also captures other health care costs integral to hospital services, including medical tests and primary care/specialist doctor visits.

Figure 1

Of Those Who Needed a Service or Tried to Find the Out-Of-Pocket Cost/Quality of Services in the Past 12 Months, Percent Who Reported Being Successful and Unsuccessful



Source: 2024 Poll of Rhode Island Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub’s Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

Among respondents who needed a service but did not seek out price or quality information, the most frequently reported reasons for not seeking information were:

- 36%—Followed their doctors’ recommendations or referrals;
- 27%—Looking for information felt confusing or overwhelming;
- 22%—Did not know where to look;

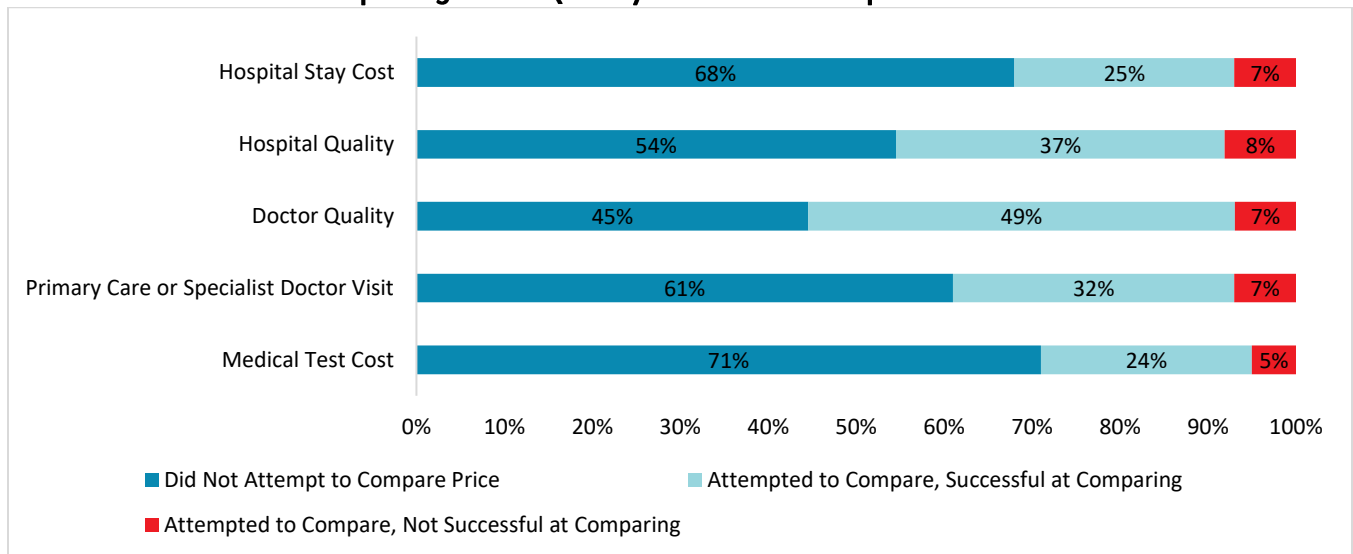
- 21%—Did not have time to look; and
- 15%—It never occurred to me to look for provider quality or price information.

Notably, few of these respondents reported that out-of-pocket cost or quality were unimportant to them (7% and 5%, respectively).

Respondents who attempted to find hospital cost or quality information but were unsuccessful faced a variety of barriers. Among those who were unsuccessful at searching for cost information, respondents reported that resources available to search for price information were confusing (35%), their insurance plan or provider/doctor/hospital would not give them a price estimate (26% and 35%, respectively), and that price information was insufficient (24%). In unsuccessful searches for hospital quality information, respondents reported that resources available to search for quality information were confusing (28%) and that the quality information available was not sufficient (20%).

Among those who were successful at finding the cost for a hospital stay or quality information, over half reported NOT attempting to compare prices or quality between providers (i.e., “shopping”) (see Figure 2). Still, 25% successfully compared cost of a hospital stay, and 37% successfully compared quality across hospitals.

Figure 2
Of Those Who Were Successful at Finding Hospital Cost/Quality Information, Percent Who Were Successful at Comparing Cost/Quality Between Multiple Providers



Source: 2024 Poll of Rhode Island Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub’s Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

Among those that compared cost or quality information for different services, many reported that the cost or quality comparison ultimately influenced their choice of which provider to seek care from. Seventy-six percent of those who compared primary care or specialist doctor visit costs said the comparison influenced their choice, as did 77% of those who compared medical test costs and 66% of those who compared hospital stay costs. Among those who looked for hospital quality information, 87% had their choice influenced by the information.

Although many of the respondents who sought out hospital price and quality information were ultimately successful, many respondents never attempted to find this information. Even among those who were successful at finding hospital cost or quality information, a little over half did not compare prices or quality between providers (i.e., “shopping”). Respondents identified a variety of barriers to finding and comparing cost and quality information, including following doctors’ recommendations, confusion over where or how to find cost or quality information, and providers and insurers not providing cost estimates. These reasons could also be influenced by this information not being accessible, despite federal price transparency mandates for hospitals.¹

It could also stem from the fact that some consumers don’t view health care as a shoppable commodity, especially in emergency situations and settings that lack a selection of treatments/providers. Lack of knowledge of hospital quality and potential costs impedes Rhode Island residents’ ability to plan for needed care and budget for the expense of a hospital stay, which can be costly,² particularly for residents who are un- or under-insured.

SUPPORT FOR “FIXES” ACROSS PARTY LINES

Hospitals, along with drug manufacturers and insurance companies, are viewed as a primary contributor to high health care costs. Out of 15 options, Rhode Island respondents most frequently cited the following as being a “major reason” for high health care costs:

- 79%—Drug companies charging too much money
- 72%—Hospitals charging too much money
- 74%—Insurance companies charging too much money
- 55%—Large hospitals or doctor groups using their influence to get higher payments from insurance companies

Rhode Island respondents strongly endorse several hospital-related strategies, including:

- 91%—Require hospitals and doctors to provide up-front cost estimates to consumers
- 89%—Set standard payments to hospitals for specific procedures
- 87%—Impose price controls on contracts between insurers and health care providers
- 86%—Strengthen policies to drive more competition in health care markets to improve choice and access
- 85%—Set up an independent entity to rate doctor and hospital quality, such as patient outcomes and bedside manner

What’s even more interesting is the level of support for some of these strategies across party lines (see Table 2).

CONCLUSION

The findings from this poll suggest that Rhode Island respondents are somewhat motivated when it comes to searching for hospital cost and quality information to help inform purchasing decisions and plan for a future medical expense. Still, over half did not search for this information at all, suggesting that effort to influence consumer shopping through price transparency initiatives may not be effective for everyone.

It is not surprising that Rhode Island respondents express strong support for government-led solutions to make price and quality information more readily accessible and to help consumers navigate hospital care. Many of the solutions that respondent's support would take the burden of research and guesswork off consumers, such as standardizing payments for specific hospital procedures, requiring hospitals and doctors to provide consumers cost estimates for certain procedures, and establishing an entity to conduct independent quality reviews. Policymakers should investigate the evidence on these and other policy options to respond to respondents' bipartisan call for government action.

Table 2

Percent Who Agreed/Strongly Agreed, by Political Affiliation

Selected Survey Statements/Questions	Total Percent of Respondents	Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as...		
		Republican	Democrat	Neither
Major reason for rising health care costs: <i>Hospitals charging too much money</i>	72%	69%	76%	69%
The government should require hospitals and doctors to provide up-front cost estimates to consumers	91%	93%	93%	88%
The government should set standard payments to hospitals for specific procedures	89%	87%	93%	86%
The government should impose price controls on contracts between insurers and health care providers.	87%	83%	95%	82%
The government should strengthen policies to drive more competition in health care markets to improve choice and access	86%	90%	87%	83%
The government should set up an independent entity to rate doctor and hospital quality, such as patient outcomes and bedside manner	85%	79%	89%	84%

Source: 2024 Poll of Rhode Island Adults, Ages 18+ - Altarum Healthcare Value Hub's Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

Notes

1. As of January 1, 2021, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) requires hospitals to make public a machine-readable file containing a list of standard charges for all items and services provided by the hospital, as well as a consumer-friendly display of at least 300 shoppable services that a patient can schedule in advance. However, Compliance from hospitals has been mixed, indicating that the rule has yet to demonstrate the desired effect. <https://www.healthaffairs.org/content/forefront/hospital-price-transparency-progress-and-commitment-achieving-its-potential>
2. According to Health Forum, an affiliate of the American Hospital Association, hospital adjusted expenses per inpatient day in Rhode Island were \$3,102 in 2022, similar to the national average. See: Kaiser Family Foundation, State Health Facts Data: Hospital Adjusted Expenses per Inpatient Day. Accessed May 30, 2024. <https://www.kff.org/health-costs/state-indicator/expenses-per-inpatient-day/>

Methodology

Altarum’s Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey (CHESS) is designed to elicit respondents’ views on a wide range of health system issues, including confidence using the health system, financial burden and possible policy solutions. This survey, conducted from February 19 to March 27, 2024, used a web panel from Dynata with a demographically balanced sample of approximately 1,100 respondents who live in Rhode Island. Information about Dynata’s recruitment and compensation methods can be found [here](#). The survey was conducted in English or Spanish and 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 1,012 cases for analysis. After those exclusions, the demographic composition of respondents was as follows, although not all demographic information has complete response rates:

Demographic Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender/Orientation		
Woman	651	64%
Man	331	33%
Transwoman	3	<1%
Transman	7	1%
Genderqueer/Nonbinary	7	1%
LGBTQ+ Community	136	14%
Insurance Type		
Health insurance through employer or family member’s employer	409	40%
Health insurance I buy on my own	88	9%
Medicare, coverage for seniors and those with serious disabilities	271	27%
Medicaid, coverage for low-income earners	169	17%
TRICARE/Military Health System coverage	11	1%
Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Healthcare	10	1%
No coverage of any type	27	3%
I don’t know	27	3%
Race		
American Indian or Native Alaskan	21	2%
Asian	30	3%
Black or African American	70	7%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	6	1%
White	839	83%
Prefer Not to Answer	13	1%
Two or More Races	52	5%
Ethnicity		
Hispanic or Latino	87	9%
Non-Hispanic or Latino	925	91%
Age		
18-24	131	13%
25-34	150	15%
35-44	191	19%
45-54	183	18%
55-64	196	19%
65+	157	16%
Party Affiliation		
Republican	159	16%
Democrat	352	35%
Neither	501	50%

Demographic Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Household Income		
Under \$20K	141	14%
\$20K-\$29K	88	9%
\$30K - \$39K	84	8%
\$40K - \$49K	95	9%
\$50K - \$59K	108	11%
\$60K - \$74K	116	11%
\$75K - \$99K	142	14%
\$100K - \$149K	147	15%
\$150K+	91	9%
Education Level		
Some high school	37	4%
High school diploma/GED	181	18%
Some college or training/certificate program	267	26%
Associate degree	112	11%
Bachelor’s degree	217	21%
Some graduate school	37	4%
Graduate degree (e.g. MA, PhD, MD, JD)	161	16%
Self-Reported Health Status		
Excellent	154	15%
Very Good	331	33%
Good	339	33%
Fair	156	15%
Poor	32	3%
Disability		
Mobility: Serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs	167	17%
Cognition: Serious difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions	95	9%
Independent Living: Serious difficulty doing errands alone, such as visiting a doctor’s office	66	7%
Hearing: Deafness or serious difficulty hearing	57	6%
Vision: Blindness or serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses	49	5%
Self-Care: Difficulty dressing or bathing	46	5%
No disability or long-term health condition	698	69%

Source: 2024 Poll of Rhode Island Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub’s Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

Percentages in the body of the brief are based on weighted values, while the data presented in the demographic table is unweighted. An explanation of weighted versus unweighted variables is available [here](#). Altarum does not conduct statistical calculations on the significance of differences between groups in findings. Therefore, determinations that one group experienced a significantly different affordability burden than another should not be inferred. Rather, comparisons are for conversational purposes. The groups selected for this brief were selected by advocate partners in each state based on organizational/advocacy priorities. We do not report any estimates under N=100 and a co-efficient of variance more than 0.30.

ABOUT THE ALTARUM HEALTHCARE VALUE HUB

With support from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Arnold Ventures, the Healthcare Value Hub provides free, timely information about the policies and practices that address high health care 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 health care.

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