



REPORT OVERVIEW

WEST HEALTH-GALLUP 2021 HEALTHCARE IN AMERICA REPORT

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



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

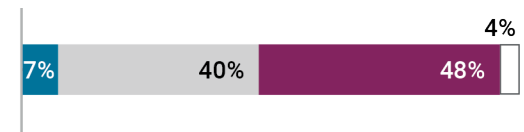


FIGURE 2

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

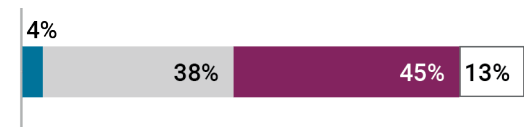
- Less concerned
- Same level of concern
- More concerned



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%).