

More Than Half of U.S. Women Report Negative Healthcare Experiences

New Gallup-Pivotal survey finds women unable to get needed care report greater impacts on their work, family lives and community participation.

WASHINGTON, D.C. — September 18, 2026 — U.S. women who struggle to get needed healthcare are significantly more likely to report that their health affects their work, family lives and community participation. The [new study](#) is one of the most expansive surveys on women's health and opportunity and was conducted by Gallup in partnership with Pivotal, a group of organizations founded by Melinda French Gates working to accelerate social progress for women and young people in the U.S. and around the world.

Broadly, 42% of women say that in the last five years, their health has caused them to feel they could not do everything they wanted to do in life. More than half of women (54%) report at least one health-related impact on their family life or relationships in the past five years, while 42% report an impact on their work or career and 32% on their community participation or voice.

Women who were unable to get needed care despite trying are particularly likely to report health-related impacts across these major areas of their lives: 79% report an impact on their family life or relationships, 66% report at least one health-related impact on their work, and 59% report an impact on their community participation or voice.

The findings come as one in four women rate their physical health as fair or poor, rising to 35% of Black women and 28% of Hispanic women, compared with 22% of White women. Twenty-seven percent of women say the same about their mental health—and nearly half (48%) of all women surveyed reported a current or past mental health condition such as depression, anxiety or PTSD.

Women More Often Report Difficult Experiences Getting Care

When asked about negative care experiences, 51% of women report at least one of four negative healthcare experiences in the past five years, compared with 39% of men. One-third (34%) say a provider minimized or dismissed their symptoms or pain, and a similar share (33%) say they were misdiagnosed or could not get a diagnosis or did not receive needed answers or next steps (31%). A quarter (25%) report they received conflicting or inconsistent provider recommendations. Three in 10 women (30%) who have experienced a health condition say they had to push to be taken seriously or receive treatment.

"Women have been saying for years that the healthcare system is not meeting their needs, but systems don't change without meaningful data. With this survey we can put numbers behind women's experiences and show the real cost of that neglect across their lives, families, workplaces and communities," said Melinda French Gates, philanthropist and founder of Pivotal. "When women cannot get the care, information and support they need, it limits their opportunity and their ability to live up to their full potential. Women deserve better, and this data is an urgent call to action across sectors to help deliver it."

Cost and Information Gaps Create Additional Obstacles

Nearly one in three women (32%) say they skipped or delayed needed care because of cost in the past year, compared with 25% of men. Cost is the most common barrier women report, followed by difficulty finding a nearby provider and difficulty finding time for care because of family responsibilities, including caregiving.

Women also report being left without clear, complete information at critical health moments. Among those who sought or used contraception, 56% say they have to do a lot of their own research to make informed decisions, while 41% say providers do not always share all available options. Younger women are especially likely to

encounter contraception information on social media, with nearly seven in 10 of those ages 18 to 34 who tried to get contraception reporting they've encountered information about it there.

Information gaps also extend to menopause. While 74% of women aged 45 to 54 report current or past symptoms of menopause or perimenopause, just 51% of those who have had symptoms have received a diagnosis. Among women who have experienced menopause, 37% say they first learned about menopause and its symptoms only when they began experiencing symptoms themselves. Women also encounter menopause information more often from family members (61%) and friends (59%) than from doctors or other medical professionals (51%).

Even after women seek menopause care, some report difficulties getting their needs addressed. Among women aged 35 and older who sought or received treatment for menopause symptoms, 24% say they had to push to be taken seriously or receive treatment, 23% say they had to see multiple providers before their symptoms were addressed or diagnosed, and 20% say they were unable to get the care they felt they needed despite trying.

Health Effects Extend Across Life Stages and Into Work

As noted above, 42% of women report at least one health-related impact on their work or career, such as feeling unable to live up to their potential, having fewer career options or feeling that a promotion, new job or leadership position was unrealistic.

Health challenges following pregnancy are often linked to changes in women's work. Black women are more likely than White women to say they returned to work before they were physically ready after giving birth (38% vs. 24%) and to report changing jobs (34% vs. 18%) or reducing their hours (29% vs. 22%). Mental health challenges are also common, with 54% of women who have given birth in the past 20 years reporting depression, anxiety or another mental health challenge during pregnancy or the 12 months after giving birth. Among those women, 57% sought care, but just 29% described that care as very helpful.

Similarly, menopause-related challenges have an impact. More than one in four women who have experienced menopause symptoms (28%) say menopause-related physical or mental health challenges limited how much effort they could give at work, while 21% took more frequent or longer breaks during the workday and 19% made changes or accommodations to their work environment. Fifteen percent decided not to pursue a promotion or leadership position, and 10% took an extended leave from work or did not return to work. Another 22% say menopause-related health challenges caused them to step back from involvement in their community.

Work-related effects also vary by income and race. More than half of women in households earning less than \$50,000 (54%) report at least one health-related impact on their work or career, compared with 33% of women in households earning \$100,000 or more. Black women (49%) and Hispanic women (45%) are more likely than White women (40%) to report a work or career impact.

"What stands out in these data is how far the effects of women's health extend beyond the doctor's office," said Stephanie Marken, senior partner at Gallup. "Women who struggle to get the care they need are telling us that these challenges don't stop with their symptoms, or even treatment experiences; they affect what women can do at work, how they participate in family life and the role they can play in their communities."

Americans Prioritize Improving Women's Health

Six in 10 Americans say improving women's health should be a high or top priority for state governments (61%) and the federal government (60%). Majorities also prioritize specific goals, including ensuring safe, healthy pregnancy and birth (82%), access to quality healthcare (81%), access to contraception (70%) and comprehensive, affordable and science-backed menopause care (66%).

About Pivotal

Founded by Melinda French Gates in 2015, [Pivotal](#) is a group of organizations working to accelerate the pace of social progress for women and young people in the U.S. and around the world. We use philanthropy, investments, advocacy and partnerships to drive momentum where we see the biggest opportunities for impact. Pivotal includes Pivotal Philanthropies, Pivotal Initiatives Fund and Pivotal Ventures.

About Gallup

[Gallup](#) delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining 90 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.