



34 Million Americans Know of Family Member or Friend Who Died in the Last 5 Years After Being Unable to Afford Treatment

New West Health-Gallup survey finds Americans see firsthand the impact of high healthcare costs, and don't believe political leaders are doing enough to fix it

WASHINGTON, D.C. and SAN DIEGO, CA – More than 13% of Americans – about 34 million people – have a friend or family member who died sometime in the last five years after not receiving needed medical treatment because they were unable to pay for it, according to a new national survey released today by the nonprofit West Health and Gallup.

The survey of 1,099 adults across the U.S., conducted between Sept. 16 and 30, found non-whites, those in lower income households, those under 45, and political independents and Democrats were all more likely to know someone whose death was associated with their inability to pay for care.

Non-whites reported firsthand knowledge of a death by a two to one margin compared to whites (20% vs. 10%), and nearly one in five (19%) with annual household incomes under \$40,000 know someone who died after not receiving at least part of their needed treatment.

Adults 65 and older were least likely to report knowledge of deaths (7%), relative to those under 45 (17%) and those 45 to 64 (12%), which is consistent with nationwide data on the ability to pay for prescription drugs and uninsured rates overall.

“It’s outrageous in the United States that so many people have lost a family member or friend simply because the cost of healthcare is so high,” said [Tim Lash](#), chief strategy officer for West Health. “It is a tragic statement on the state of healthcare in America. How many more Americans must die before elected officials and policymakers take bold action to rein in runaway costs? The time for smart reform is now.”

In a separate survey earlier this year, [West Health and Gallup found that Americans collectively borrowed an estimated \\$88 billion to pay for healthcare in the past year](#), and that 77% of Americans are concerned rising costs will significantly damage the U.S. economy.

The trend appears to continue in this latest survey in West Health and Gallup’s ongoing collaboration to measure the impact of healthcare costs, which found nearly one in four U.S. adults – about 58 million people – were unable to pay for prescribed medicine in the last 12 months. Moreover, if faced with a \$500 medical bill they needed to pay today, 60% would have to draw on accounts not meant to be used for medical bills. Nearly half (48%) of adults in homes with under \$40,000 in annual income would need to use a credit card or loan to pay for such a bill, compared to 31% of all adults. This rate of “medication insecurity” – being unable to pay for

prescribed drugs at least once in the last 12 months – has climbed four percentage points since last measured in early 2019, rising from 18.9% to 22.9%.

“A significant part of the purpose of the ongoing collaboration between West Health and Gallup is to quantify in practical terms the extent to which Americans are suffering from the high and rising costs of healthcare,” said [Dan Witters](#), Research Director of the Gallup National Health and Well-Being Index. “Gallup’s long history of global measurement of public health, basic access and wellbeing compliments this objective and brings an unbiased lens to its assessment.”

Americans identify certain political groups as more responsible than others for the lack of healthcare affordability. About half (49%) say the Republican Party is least focused on lowering their healthcare costs, with the Democratic Party trailing at 28%. It is common for self-identified members of each political party to identify the other party as to blame – but independents name Republicans more than twice as often as they do Democrats (47% vs. 21%, respectively).

Prescription drug prices

The overwhelming majority (89%) of U.S. adults report that drug prices are either “much higher” or “somewhat higher” than what consumers should be paying for them, and Americans do not see solutions coming from the White House: two in three (66%) say President Donald Trump’s administration has made little to no progress on limiting the rising costs of prescription drugs.

Americans are clearly eager for solutions – more than a third (35%) consider lowering drug costs to be either the most or among the most important issues determining their vote in the 2020 elections. Tellingly, 85% favor federal legislation that would lower the cost of prescription drugs at the expense of pharmaceutical industry profits.

Other key survey findings include:

Prescription drug unaffordability

- 28% of women vs. 18% of men have been unable to pay for prescription drugs.
- Nonwhites suffer medication insecurity at twice the rate of whites (34% to 17%).
- Medication insecurity skyrockets to 42% among those with annual household incomes of under \$40,000.

Attitudes about political parties’ focus

- Among those who approve of the job President Trump is doing as president, 53% cite Democrats as paying the least attention to lowering healthcare costs.
- More educated Americans are more likely to identify Republicans as not focusing enough on lowering healthcare costs. Thirty-eight percent of those with a high school education name Republicans, compared with 60% of college graduates and 64% of those with post-graduate degrees.

Trump Administration’s progress on limiting prescription drug prices

- While 96% of Democrats report little to no progress, this drops to 66% among Independents and 31% among Republicans.

- Most Americans who approve of the job President Trump is doing as president report “a great deal” or “a fair amount” of progress (56%), compared to just 8% of those who disapprove of the president’s performance.
- About one in three whites (32%) report that “a great deal” or “a fair amount” of progress has been made – roughly twice as high as the rate among nonwhites.

Federal legislation to lower the cost of prescription drugs at expense of profits

- Solid majorities of all subgroups support legislation that would do this.
- Women (90%) are somewhat more supportive than men (80%).
- Democrats (90%) are a bit more supportive than independents (85%) and Republicans (79%), though large majorities are found among all political groups.

Importance of drug costs in determining vote in 2020

- Nearly half (47%) of Democrats and over one-third (37%) of Independents place high importance on drug costs as an influencing factor of who they vote for in 2020, compared to 18% of Republicans.
- Over half (52%) of those with annual household incomes of under \$40,000 place high importance on how lowering drug costs will influence their votes, compared to just 19% of those in households earning \$100,000 or more.
- Those living in the Eastern U.S. report the highest importance, while those in the Western U.S. report the lowest (41% and 29%, respectively).

Please visit [Gallup.com](https://www.gallup.com) to download topline results from this survey.

West Health and Gallup have committed to measuring public opinion on a wide array of issues relevant to healthcare costs on an ongoing basis, providing stakeholders and policymakers the information they need to gauge whether progress is being made on the most critical healthcare issues.

Methodology

Results are based on telephone interviews conducted September 16-30, 2019 with a random sample of 1,099 adults, ages 18+, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. Surveys were conducted in both English and Spanish. Samples are weighted to correct for unequal selection probability, non-response, and double coverage of landline and cell users in the two sampling frames. They are also weighted to match the national demographics of gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education, region, population density, and phone status (cell phone-only/landline only/both and cell phone mostly). For results based on the entire sample of national adults, the margin of sampling error is ± 3.7 percentage points at the 95% confidence level for responses near 50%, and ± 2.0 percentage points for responses near 10% or 90%, design effect included. For most reported subgroups the margin of error will be closer to ± 7 and ± 4 percentage points, respectively.

About Gallup

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 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.

About West Health

Solely funded by philanthropists Gary and Mary West, [West Health](#) is a family of nonprofit and nonpartisan organizations including the [Gary and Mary West Foundation](#) and [Gary and Mary West Health Institute](#) in San Diego, and the [Gary and Mary West Health Policy Center](#) in Washington, D.C. West Health is dedicated to [lowering healthcare costs](#) to enable seniors to [successfully age](#) in place with access to high-quality, affordable health and support services that preserve and protect their dignity, quality of life and independence. Learn more at westhealth.org and follow [@westhealth](#).

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