



Contact: Leslie Bennett
Email: leslie@nohla.org
Phone: (206) 325-6464
ext. 409

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

November 17, 2022

MAJORITY OF WASHINGTON RESIDENTS CONCERNED ABOUT HEALTH CARE COSTS

New survey shows strong support for state action to reduce health care costs.

SEATTLE, WA—Many Washington residents say they worry about being able to afford health care and are looking to lawmakers to address the health care cost crisis, according to survey [results](#) presented at yesterday’s meeting of the Washington State Health Care Cost and Transparency Board.

The [survey](#) of more than 1,300 Washingtonians across the state shows that **81%** report being worried about affording health care, **62%** have had *at least* one healthcare affordability burden over the last year, and **56%** delayed or went without health care because of cost. When asked what they believe is the reason for high health care costs, most respondents say it is unfair prices charged by drug companies (**76%**), hospitals (**68%**), and insurance companies (**68%**).

“Unchecked hospital and pharmaceutical company prices are driving up our health care costs. It’s time to hold health care players accountable when their pricing behavior is out of line,” says Sam Hatzenbeler, Senior Policy Associate at the [Economic Opportunity Institute](#). “The U.S. spends more money than any other country on health care—double what our peer countries spend. But we’re at the bottom when it comes to access, outcomes, and efficiency. Until we regulate what companies are allowed to charge, we can expect more of the same.” Of those surveyed, **82%** expressed support for setting limits on growth in health care spending and penalizing payers or providers that fail to comply.

[Prescription drugs](#) are of particular concern, as **27%** of those surveyed reported that they had cut pills in half, skipped a dose of medication, or not filled a prescription in the last year because of cost. “Clearly, patients are suffering,” says Jim Freeburg, Executive Director of the Patient Coalition of Washington. “Too many people are being forced to jeopardize their own health because of the high cost of their prescription medications.” Most respondents (**91%**) said they support the government setting standard prices for drugs to make them affordable.

The public is not alone in their belief that the legislature needs to make health care costs a top priority. Businesses are responsible for providing healthcare to more than half of the public through employer-sponsored health plans. "Most of the executives I talk to say the cost of health care will become unsustainable over the next 5 to 10 years and we need policy interventions to control costs," says Bill Kramer, Senior Advisor of Health Policy at the [Purchaser Business Group on Health](#). When asked what issues the government should address in the upcoming year, respondents named health care as their top priority, followed by the economy/joblessness, and housing. Many respondents (**87%**) said the government should strengthen policies to drive more competition to improve health care choice and access.

The survey shows stark differences in the number of people with medical debt depending on population. More than **60%** of people in a household with a person with a disability, **56%** of Black/African-American, and **54%** Hispanic/Latinx respondents reported going into debt, depleting savings, or going without other needs due to medical bills, compared to **36%** of white respondents. "Sadly, it is no surprise that people of color and those with disabilities have higher rates of medical debt and that is exactly why we need to work on equity in health care, especially for those who are hardest hit," says Emily Brice, Senior Attorney and Policy Advisor at [Northwest Health Law Advocates](#).

Of those surveyed, **73%** said they believe the U.S. health care system needs to change. One critical factor to doing that is to involve patients more, according to Joelle Craft, a member of [Washington CAN](#) who testified at the Health Care Cost Transparency Board meeting about being forced into bankruptcy due to medical costs resulting from a chronic condition. "We need a fundamental shift in how our state approaches health care, and this Board can be an important part of that effort. The only way we are going to get the change we need is for patients to be at the core of every decision that impacts them."

The survey by [Altarum](#), a nonprofit organization working to advance health through research, and its [Healthcare Value Hub](#), was conducted between August 6, 2022 and August 13, 2022 and was 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 policy solutions.

####