

The U.S. Healthcare Cost Crisis

Executive Summary

The high cost of healthcare in the United States is a significant source of apprehension and fear for millions of Americans, according to a new national survey by West Health and Gallup.

Relative to the quality of the care they receive, Americans overwhelmingly agree they pay too much, and receive too little, and few have confidence that elected officials can solve the problem.

Americans in large numbers are borrowing money, skipping treatments and cutting back on household expenses because of high costs, and a large percentage fear a major health event could bankrupt them. More than three-quarters of Americans are also concerned that high healthcare costs could cause significant and lasting damage to the U.S. economy.

Despite the financial burden and fears caused by high healthcare costs, partisan filters lead to divergent views of the healthcare system at large: By a wide margin, more Republicans than Democrats consider the quality of care in the U.S. to be the best or among the best in the world — all while the U.S. significantly outspends other advanced economies on healthcare with dismal outcomes on basic health indicators such as infant mortality and heart attack mortality.

Republicans and Democrats are about as likely to resort to drastic measures, from deferring care to cutting back on other expenses including groceries, clothing, and gas and electricity. And many do not see the situation improving. In fact, most believe costs will only increase. When given the choice between a freeze in healthcare costs for the next five years or a 10% increase in household income, 61% of Americans report that their preference is a freeze in costs.

West Health and Gallup's major study included interviews with members of [Gallup's National Panel of Households](#) and healthcare industry experts as well as a nationally representative survey of more than 3,537 randomly selected adults.

KEY FINDINGS:

- 1 Americans express great concern about the individual and collective impact of healthcare costs.**
 - + 45% of Americans are concerned a major health event will leave them bankrupt.
 - + 77% are concerned rising healthcare costs will cause significant and lasting damage to the U.S. economy.
- 2 Healthcare costs lack transparency.**
 - + 47% of Americans never know what a visit to the emergency room will cost before receiving care.
 - + 41% report forgoing a visit to an emergency room due to cost in the past 12 months.
- 3 Despite poor outcomes, many Americans insist on the supremacy of U.S. healthcare.**
 - + 48% of Americans believe the quality of care found in the U.S. is either the “best in the world” or “among the best.”
 - + The U.S. ranks 31st out of 36 other developed nations in infant mortality.
- 4 Americans’ perceptions of quality diverge along partisan lines, but individual experiences and pessimism around bipartisan solutions are aligned.**
 - + 67% of Republicans consider the quality of care in the U.S. to be the best or among the best in the world; just 38% of Democrats share this sentiment.
 - + 27% of Democrats and 21% of Republicans deferred care due to cost in the past 12 months.
 - + More than two-thirds of Republicans and Democrats are not at all confident that elected Republicans and Democrats will be able to achieve bipartisan legislation to reduce costs.
- 5 Americans can’t afford to make good health a priority.**
 - + Americans borrowed an estimated \$88 billion in the past 12 months to pay for healthcare.
 - + 65 million adults had a health issue but did not seek treatment due to costs in the past 12 months.

Given the serious implications of these findings, West Health and Gallup have committed to measuring public opinion around the cost of healthcare and its impact on the U.S. for the next few years. The research, launched in this report, aims to elevate a wide array of issues relevant to stakeholders and policymakers and will track opinion over time on several key metrics to determine if progress is being made to lower the high costs of healthcare.