



DATA BRIEF NO. 86 | OCTOBER 2020

## How COVID-19 Has Shaped Residents' Broader Attitudes Toward the Health System

### KEY FINDINGS

A survey of adults (ages 18+) in four states (Connecticut, Kentucky, Mississippi and New Jersey) found that:

- More than half of adults in each state are worried about affording tests and treatment for COVID-19.
- Out of 12 possible responses, people were most worried about “*becoming ill from the coronavirus*,” exceeding other worries by a wide margin.
- Respondents supported a broad range of strategies to address their COVID-19 concerns, with significant variation within and across states in terms of which policies are the most important to implement. Overall, the top priorities were:
  - Improved public health emergency preparedness;
  - Additional federal stimulus payments;
  - More financial help for small businesses; and
  - Universal health coverage for all
- Despite broad, bipartisan support for “*Universal health coverage for all*” as a means to improve healthcare affordability, the concept was polarizing in the context of COVID-19. A significant percentage of Republicans, though still less than half, did not support this strategy, while a large majority of Democrats (and a slimmer majority of independents) supported it.

Prior to the emergence of COVID-19, Altarum’s Healthcare Value Hub deployed the *Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey* (CHESS) to better understand state residents’ views on a wide range of healthcare issues, including confidence using the health system, financial burden and support for policy solutions.

To better understand how the health and financial crisis associated with the pandemic has affected resident attitudes, we conducted several state surveys that included additional questions about COVID-19 (also known as the coronavirus)—assessing state residents’ worries and support for policies to address their concerns. In addition, we re-surveyed two states (Connecticut and Kentucky) to gauge how responses to the broader set of survey questions may have been influenced by COVID-19.

### WORRIES RELATED TO COVID-19/CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

With affordability and the high cost of healthcare being the top consumer concern pre-COVID-19,<sup>1</sup> we wanted to understand how worried residents are about affording treatment for the disease. As Table 1 shows, more than half of adults in each of the four states surveyed reported being worried about affording treatment for COVID-19 if they need it.

**Table 1****Percent Somewhat or Very Worried about Affording Treatment for COVID-19, by State**

CONNECTICUT	KENTUCKY	MISSISSIPPI	NEW JERSEY
SURVEYED: MAY 8 - MAY 18, 2020	SURVEYED: MAY 8 - MAY 26, 2020	SURVEYED: MAY 7 - JUNE 9, 2020	SURVEYED: MAY 7 - MAY 12, 2020
54%	59%	60%	60%

Source: 2020 Polls of Connecticut, Kentucky, Mississippi and New Jersey Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub's Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

To understand how concern about affording COVID-19 treatment ranked among other worries, respondents were asked to pick their top three COVID-related worries out of twelve possible responses. The most commonly selected worries were largely consistent across the four states (see Table 2A).

**Table 2-A****Top Ranked COVID-19 Worries, by State**

SELECTED SURVEY STATEMENTS	RANKED			
	CONNECTICUT	KENTUCKY	MISSISSIPPI*	NEW JERSEY
	SURVEYED: MAY 8 - MAY 18, 2020	SURVEYED: MAY 8 - MAY 26, 2020	SURVEYED: MAY 7 - JUNE 9, 2020	SURVEYED: MAY 7 - MAY 12, 2020
YOU OR A FAMILY MEMBER BECOMING ILL FROM THE CORONAVIRUS	1	1	1	1
JOB LOSS AND RESULTING LACK OF WAGES	2	2	3	3
DECREASED VALUE OF RETIREMENT SAVINGS	3	3	6	2
INABILITY TO GET TREATMENT FOR OTHER HEALTH PROBLEMS	4	4	3	5
SAFETY AT WORK; NOT GETTING THE VIRUS AT WORK	5	5	5	4

Source: 2020 Polls of Connecticut, Kentucky, Mississippi and New Jersey Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub's Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

\* The percentage of time that "job loss and resulting lack of wages" and "inability to get treatment for other health problems" was identified at a "top 3" concern was equal in Mississippi. As a result, these worries tied for third place. Mississippi's second most frequently selected concern was "affording treatment if someone in your family gets the virus." This worry ranked 6th, 8th and 9th in other states, thus it was not included in this table.

"You or a family member becoming ill from the virus" consistently ranked as the top worry among the choices and exceeded other worries by a wide margin, garnering about twice as many "votes" as the next most common worry in each state.

The most commonly selected worries, and the percent of the time that each worry was identified as a "top 3" concern, is displayed in Table 2B. (For full table, see Appendix 1).

**Table 2-B****Top Ranked COVID-19 Worries, by State (Percentage)**

	ALL FOUR STATES	CONNECTICUT	KENTUCKY	MISSISSIPPI	NEW JERSEY
<b>SELECTED SURVEY STATEMENTS</b>		SURVEYED: MAY 8 - MAY 18, 2020	SURVEYED: MAY 8 - MAY 26, 2020	SURVEYED: MAY 7 - JUNE 9, 2020	SURVEYED: MAY 7 - MAY 12, 2020
YOU OR A FAMILY MEMBER BECOMING ILL FROM THE CORONAVIRUS	21%	23%	21%	19%	23%
JOB LOSS AND RESULTING LACK OF WAGES	10%	10%	11%	9%	11%
DECREASED VALUE OF RETIREMENT SAVINGS	10%	9%	9%	8%	12%
INABILITY TO GET TREATMENT FOR OTHER HEALTH PROBLEMS	9%	9%	9%	9%	8%
SAFETY AT WORK; NOT GETTING THE VIRUS AT WORK	8%	9%	8%	8%	9%

Source: 2020 Polls of Connecticut, Kentucky, Mississippi and New Jersey Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub's Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

**SUPPORT FOR POLICIES TO ADDRESS COVID-19 CONCERNS**

Additionally, respondents' views were fairly consistent when they were asked about support for and against policies related to the COVID-19 crisis. While there were some differences in the rank order, minimal differences in the percentage of the time that a policy was identified as a "top 3" policy supported indicated that the policies are viewed similarly.

Top-ranked COVID policies and the percent of the time each policy was identified as a "top 3" policy supported is displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3****Top Ranked COVID-19 Policies, by State**

	ALL FOUR STATES	CONNECTICUT	KENTUCKY	MISSISSIPPI	NEW JERSEY
<b>SELECTED SURVEY STATEMENTS</b>		SURVEYED: MAY 8 - MAY 18, 2020	SURVEYED: MAY 8 - MAY 26, 2020	SURVEYED: MAY 7 - JUNE 9, 2020	SURVEYED: MAY 7 - MAY 12, 2020
IMPROVED PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS	13%	15%	12%	12%	15%
ADDITIONAL FEDERAL STIMULUS PAYMENTS	13%	12%	14%	13%	12%
MORE FINANCIAL HELP FOR SMALL BUSINESSES	12%	14%	12%	12%	12%
UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE FOR ALL	11%	11%	12%	10%	11%
PRICE LIMITS ON NEEDED VACCINES TO ENSURE AVAILABILITY TO ALL	10%	10%	10%	9%	10%

Source: 2020 Polls of Connecticut, Kentucky, Mississippi and New Jersey Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub's Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

Of the eleven policy options provided, "More financial help for large businesses" received the fewest number of "votes" in each state surveyed. Additionally, this policy was selected most frequently when we reversed the query, asking respondents about the policies they do NOT support.

When asked about the policies they do NOT support, respondents were given the option of selecting “I support all of the policies listed.” This was the most common answer for this section of the survey in Connecticut, Mississippi and New Jersey, and was the second most common answer in Kentucky.

One of the more interesting findings was the diversity of opinions on “Universal health coverage for all.” While this was the 4<sup>th</sup> most common policy selected when respondents were asked to identify the top 3 policies they SUPPORT, it also received a significant number of selections when respondents were asked to identify the top 3 policies they do NOT support. Republicans were far more likely to NOT support “Universal health coverage for all” as a means to address COVID-19 concerns compared to Democrats and those not affiliated with either party (see Table 4). It is important to note, however, that when asked generally about “Expanding health insurance options so that everyone can afford quality coverage,” more than 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this policy as a means of improving healthcare affordability.

**Table 4**  
**Support for COVID Policy: Universal Health Coverage for All**

GENERALLY SPEAKING, DO YOU THINK OF YOURSELF AS A...	SELECTED UNIVERSAL COVERAGE AS ONE OF THE TOP 3 POLICIES SUPPORTED				SELECTED UNIVERSAL COVERAGE AS ONE OF THE TOP 3 POLICIES NOT SUPPORTED			
	CT	KY	MS	NJ	CT	KY	MS	NJ
REPUBLICAN	17%	17%	17%	17%	42%	43%	42%	43%
DEMOCRAT	43%	51%	43%	43%	1%	12%	1%	1%
NEITHER	29%	34%	29%	32%	22%	23%	19%	20%

Source: 2020 Polls of Connecticut, Kentucky, Mississippi and New Jersey Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub's Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to a portion of respondents NOT selecting universal coverage as one of the top 3 policies they support or do NOT support.

## CHANGES IN GENERAL ATTITUDES ABOUT THE HEALTH SYSTEM

While methodological differences preclude making assumptions about changes across years, we found a striking increase in satisfaction with the health system in Connecticut and Kentucky from 2018 to 2020 (see Table 5).

We speculate that the widespread support for “healthcare heroes” serving on the front lines of our COVID-19 response may have improved attitudes toward the health system more generally.

Despite the increase, only a minority of respondents expressed satisfaction with the health system. Moreover, respondents continued to support policy changes in high numbers and across party lines (see Table 6).

For state-specific information on the remaining policies and support across party lines, please see the 2020 Data Briefs for Connecticut and Kentucky, available at: <https://www.healthcarevaluehub.org/CHES>.

**Table 5**

**Percent Who Agree/Strongly Agree with the Statement “We Have A Great Healthcare System in the U.S.,” By State**

	CONNECTICUT	KENTUCKY
2018	18%	19%
2020	30%	27%

Source: 2020 Polls of Connecticut and Kentucky Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub’s Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

**Table 6**

**Percent Who Agree/Strongly Agree with Selected Policies, by State**

	CONNECTICUT		KENTUCKY	
	2018	2020	2018	2020
MAKE IT EASY TO SWITCH INSURERS IF A HEALTH PLAN DROPS YOUR DOCTOR	94%	91%	94%	89%
SHOW WHAT A FAIR PRICE WOULD BE FOR SPECIFIC PROCEDURES	95%	89%	93%	90%
REQUIRE INSURERS TO PROVIDE UPFRONT COST ESTIMATES TO CONSUMERS	94%	89%	93%	90%

Source: 2020 Polls of Connecticut and Kentucky Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub’s Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

**NOTE**

1. Pre-COVID CHES results for numerous states can be found here: <https://www.healthcarevaluehub.org/CHES>

**METHODOLOGY**

Altarum’s Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey (CHES) is 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 fixes that might be needed.

The survey used a web panel from Dynata with a demographically balanced sample of approximately 1,000 respondents per state. CHES is conducted only in English and restricted to adults ages 18 and older. Respondents who finished the survey in less than half the median time were excluded from the final sample. For more details and the demographic composition of respondents, please see the Data Briefs for each state, available at: <https://www.healthcarevaluehub.org/CHES>.



**ABOUT ALTARUM’S HEALTHCARE VALUE HUB**

With support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Healthcare Value Hub provides free, timely information about the policies and practices that address high healthcare costs and poor quality, bringing better value to consumers. The Hub is part of Altarum, a nonprofit organization with the mission of creating a better, more sustainable future for all Americans by applying research-based and field-tested solutions that transform our systems of health and healthcare.

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## Appendix 1

## Top Ranked COVID-19 Worries, by State (Percentage)

	ALL FOUR STATES	CONNECTICUT	KENTUCKY	MISSISSIPPI	NEW JERSEY
<b>SELECTED SURVEY STATEMENTS</b>		SURVEYED: MAY 8 - MAY 18, 2020	SURVEYED: MAY 8 - MAY 26, 2020	SURVEYED: MAY 7 - JUNE 9, 2020	SURVEYED: MAY 7 - MAY 12, 2020
YOU OR A FAMILY MEMBER BECOMING ILL FROM THE CORONAVIRUS	21%	23%	21%	19%	23%
JOB LOSS AND RESULTING LACK OF WAGES	10%	10%	11%	9%	11%
DECREASED VALUE OF RETIREMENT SAVINGS	10%	9%	9%	8%	12%
INABILITY TO GET TREATMENT FOR OTHER HEALTH PROBLEMS	9%	9%	9%	9%	8%
SAFETY AT WORK; GETTING THE VIRUS AT WORK	8%	9%	8%	8%	9%
STRUGGLING WITH ANXIETY/DEPRESSION/ OTHER MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES	7%	8%	7%	7%	6%
JOB LOSS AND RESULTING LOSS OF HEALTH COVERAGE	7%	6%	7%	7%	6%
AFFORDING TREATMENT IF SOMEONE IN YOUR FAMILY GETS THE VIRUS GET THE CORONAVIRUS	7%	5%	8%	10%	6%
CHILDREN MISSING SCHOOL/CHILD CARE	6%	6%	6%	7%	5%
COVID TREATMENT ISN'T AVAILABLE IN MY AREA IF I OR A FAMILY MEMBER GET SICK	6%	5%	5%	6%	6%
SOMETHING ELSE	5%	5%	5%	6%	5%
ABILITY TO VOTE SAFELY	4%	4%	4%	5%	4%

Source: 2020 Polls of Connecticut, Kentucky, Mississippi and New Jersey Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub's Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey