



DATA BRIEF NO. 104 | OCTOBER 2021

Metro-Atlanta Region of Georgia: 64% of Adults Experienced Healthcare Affordability Burdens in the Past Year



According to a survey of Georgia adults conducted from April 12, 2021 to May 3, 2021, residents of Georgia's Metro-Atlanta region have experienced high levels of healthcare affordability burdens in the prior 12 months.

Over 3 in 5 (64% of) Metro-Atlanta region adults reported one or more of the following burdens:

- 1) BEING UNINSURED DUE TO HIGH PREMIUM COSTS¹**
- 2) DELAYING OR FORGOING HEALTHCARE DUE TO COST**

More than half (57%) of Metro-Atlanta region adults who needed healthcare during the prior 12 months encountered one or more cost related barriers to getting that care. In descending order of frequency, they reported:

- 34%—Delayed going to the doctor or having a procedure done
- 33%—Skipped a recommended medical test or treatment
- 31%—Skipped needed dental care
- 29%—Avoided going to the doctor or having a procedure done altogether
- 27%—Had problems getting mental healthcare and/or addiction treatment
- 22%—Cut pills in half or skipped doses of medicine
- 22%—Did not fill a prescription

Moreover, cost was by far the most frequently cited reason for not getting needed medical care, exceeding a host of other barriers like transportation, difficulty getting an appointment, lack of childcare and other reasons.

3) STRUGGLING TO PAY MEDICAL BILLS

In the prior 12 months, nearly half (44%) of the Metro-Atlanta region adults experienced one or more of these struggles to pay their medical bills:

- 18%—Borrowed money, got a loan or another mortgage on their home
- 17%—Were unable to pay for basic necessities like food, heat or housing
- 15%—Contacted by a collection agency
- 14%—Used up all or most of their savings
- 11%—Racked up large amounts of credit card debt
- 10%—Placed on a long-term payment plan

HIGH LEVELS OF WORRY ABOUT AFFORDING HEALTHCARE IN THE FUTURE

Metro-Atlanta region residents reported high levels of worry about affording healthcare in the future. Nearly 4 out of 5 (79% of) respondents reported being “worried” or “very worried” about one or more of the following topics: affording nursing home and home care services (59%); health insurance becoming too expensive (59%); cost of a serious illness or accident (58%); costs when elderly (55%); cost of needed dental care (54%); prescription drug costs (50%); and losing health insurance (44%).

DISSATISFACTION WITH THE HEALTH SYSTEM AND SUPPORT FOR CHANGE

Metro-Atlanta region residents were generally dissatisfied with the health system. Forty percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “We have a great healthcare system in the U.S.,” sixty-one percent agreed or strongly agreed that “the system needs to change.”

Respondents see a role for themselves in solving problems. They reported actions they have already taken, like researching the cost of a drug beforehand (64%), as well as actions they should be taking—72% believed that taking better care of their personal health is one of the top things they can do personally to address affordability.

But, in far greater numbers, respondents saw a role for their elected representatives. Examples of strategies that received support across party lines included:

Table 1
Percent Who Agreed/Strongly Agreed, by Political Affiliation

SELECTED SURVEY QUESTIONS/STATEMENTS	TOTAL	GENERALLY SPEAKING, DO YOU THINK OF YOURSELF AS...		
		REPUBLICAN	DEMOCRAT	NEITHER
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD MAKE IT EASIER TO SWITCH INSURERS IF A HEALTH PLAN DROPS YOUR DOCTOR	88%	86%	88%	88%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD REQUIRE INSURERS TO PROVIDE UP-FRONT COST ESTIMATES TO CONSUMERS	85%	84%	83%	90%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD AUTHORIZE THE ATTORNEY GENERAL TO TAKE LEGAL ACTION TO PREVENT PRICE GOUGING OR UNFAIR PRESCRIPTION DRUG PRICE HIKES	85%	74%	87%	89%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD EXPAND HEALTH INSURANCE OPTIONS SO EVERYONE CAN AFFORD QUALITY COVERAGE	81%	67%	85%	86%

Source: 2021 Poll of Georgia Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub's Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

The high burden of healthcare affordability, along with high levels of support for change, suggest that elected leaders and other stakeholders need to make addressing the cost of healthcare a top priority. Moreover, the current COVID crisis is leading state residents to take a hard look at how well health and public health systems are working for them, with strong support for a wide variety of actions. Annual surveys can help assess whether or not progress is being made.

NOTES

1. We received too few responses at the regional level to provide a reliable estimate for this statistic, however these respondents are represented in the overall “burdened” population.

For survey methodology and state-wide data, see <https://www.healthcarevaluehub.org/Georgia-State-Survey/>



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With support from Arnold Ventures, 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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