



DATA BRIEF NO. 106 | OCTOBER 2021

Southwest Region of Georgia: 71% 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 the Southwest region have experienced high levels of healthcare affordability burdens in the prior 12 months. In fact, residents of the East and Southwest regions reported the highest healthcare affordability burdens in the state.

Over 7 in 10 (71% of) Southwest 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 1 in 2 (55% of) Southwest 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:

- 36%—Skipped a recommended medical test or treatment
- 35%—Avoided going to the doctor or having a procedure done altogether
- 34%—Delayed going to the doctor or having a procedure done
- 32%—Skipped needed dental care
- 31%—Did not fill a prescription
- 27%—Had problems getting mental healthcare and/or addiction treatment
- 26%—Cut pills in half or skipped doses of medicine

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, over half (55%) of the Southwest region adults experienced one or more of these struggles to pay their medical bills:

- 20%—Contacted by a collection agency
- 19%—Used up all or most of their savings
- 18%—Were unable to pay for basic necessities like food, heat, or housing
- 17%—Borrowed money, got a loan or another mortgage on their home
- 14%—Racked up large amounts of credit card debt
- 8%—Placed on a long-term payment plan

HIGH LEVELS OF WORRY ABOUT AFFORDING HEALTHCARE IN THE FUTURE

Southwest region residents reported high levels of worry about affording healthcare in the future. Four out of five (81% of) respondents reported being “worried” or “very worried” about one or more of the following topics: cost of a serious illness or accident (66%); costs when elderly (64%); health insurance becoming too expensive (61%); affording nursing home and home care services (60%); prescription drug costs (52%); cost of needed dental care (51%); and losing health insurance (44%).

DISSATISFACTION WITH THE HEALTH SYSTEM AND SUPPORT FOR CHANGE

Southwest region residents were generally dissatisfied with the health system. Forty-one percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “*We have a great healthcare system in the U.S.*,” sixty 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 (68%), as well as actions they should be taking—65% believed that taking better care of their personal health is one of the top things they can do personally to address affordability.

But, in 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 SHOW WHAT A FAIR PRICE WOULD BE FOR SPECIFIC PROCEDURE	87%	93%	85%	84%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD MAKE IT EASIER TO SWITCH INSURERS IF A HEALTH PLAN DROPS YOUR DOCTOR	85%	87%	83%	86%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD REQUIRE HOSPITALS AND DOCTORS TO PROVIDE UP-FRONT COST ESTIMATES TO CONSUMERS	85%	92%	80%	83%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD EXPAND HEALTH INSURANCE OPTIONS SO EVERYONE CAN AFFORD QUALITY COVERAGE	79%	78%	80%	80%

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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