



DATA BRIEF NO. 98 | SEPTEMBER 2021

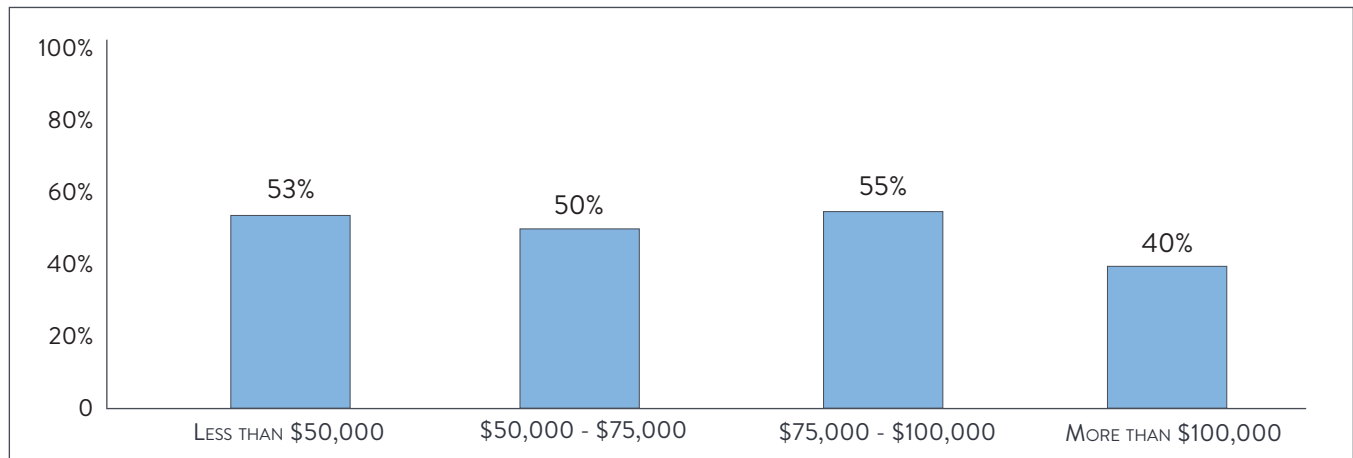
Massachusetts Residents Worried about High Drug Costs; Support a Range of Government Solutions

According to a survey of over 1,150 Massachusetts adults conducted from May 7, 2021 to May 25, 2021, residents are concerned about prescription drug costs and express a strong desire to enact solutions.

Almost half of all survey respondents (47%) reported being either “somewhat worried” or “very worried” about affording the cost of prescription drugs. Worry varied by race/ethnicity, household income and region—Hispanic/Latino and Black/African American residents, people earning less than \$100,000 and residents of the Boston region reporting the greatest concern of all (see Figures 1-3).

Figure 1

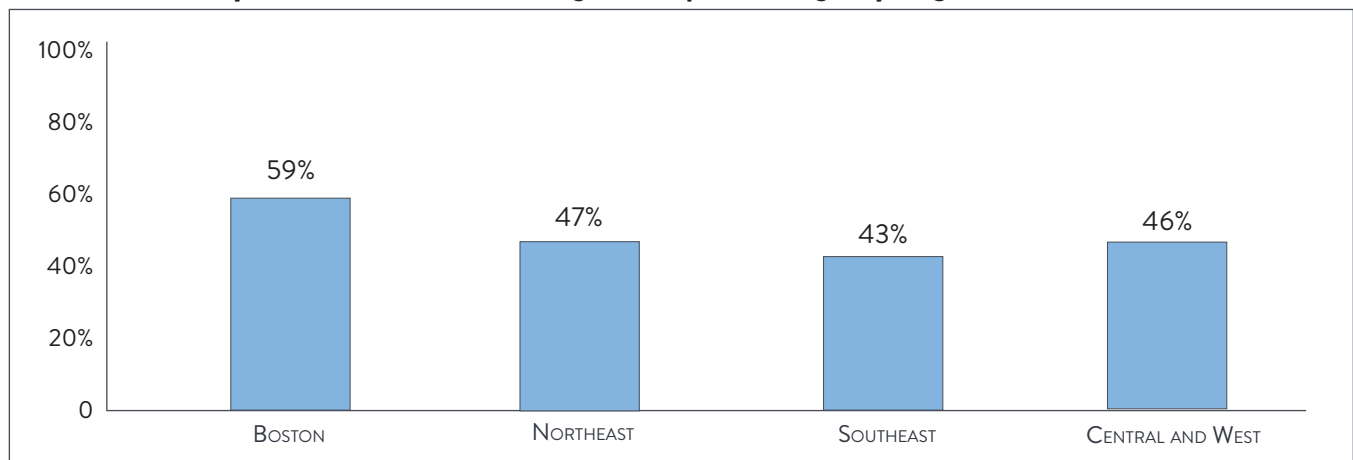
Somewhat or Very Worried About Affording Prescription Drugs, by Income Group



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

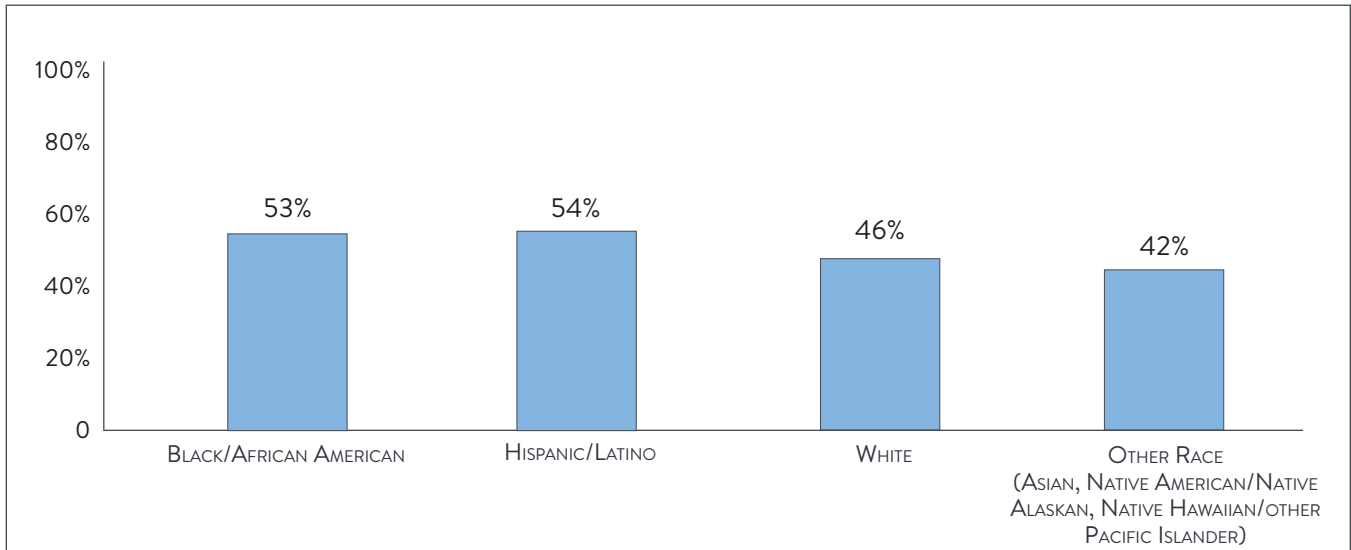
Figure 2

Somewhat or Very Worried About Affording Prescription Drugs, by Region



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

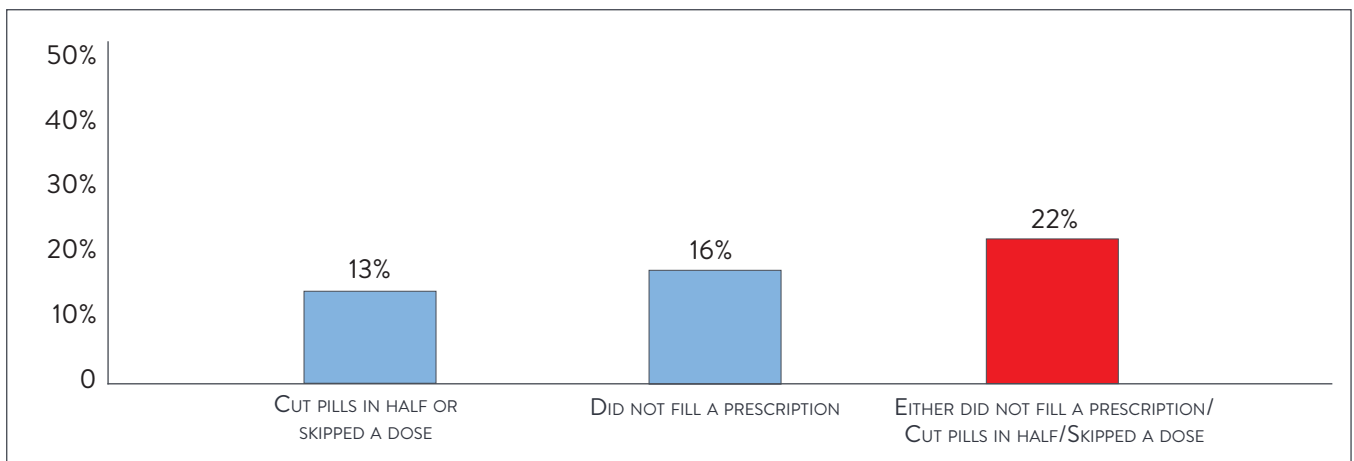
Figure 3
Somewhat or Very Worried About Affording Prescription Drugs, by Race/Ethnicity



Source: 2021 Poll of Massachusetts Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub's Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey
 Note: Respondents from the Asian, American Indian/Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander racial groups have been combined due to low response rates. We regret that we were not able to provide reliable estimates for each group to better represent the diverse communities of Massachusetts.

In addition to worrying about prescription drug affordability in the future, many Massachusetts residents experienced hardship due to the cost of prescription drugs in the prior 12 months. Cost concerns led nearly 1 in 4 Massachusetts residents (22%) to not fill a prescriptions, cut pills in half or skip a dose of medicine (see Figure 4).

Figure 4
Did not Fill a Prescription, Cut Pills in Half or Skipped a Dose Due to Concerns About Cost



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

These hardships impact certain groups of Massachusetts residents more than others. As Table 1 shows, people in households earning less than \$50,000¹ per year are more likely to have rationed their prescription medicines than people in households making more than \$100,000 per year. Rationing medication due to cost is alarmingly prevalent in middle income households, as well.

Similarly, Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino residents are more likely to cut pills in half or skip a dose of medication due to cost (25% and 22%, respectively) than residents of other races/ethnicities. Both of these groups are also more likely than other races/ethnicities to not fill a prescription due to cost—24% of Black/African American respondents and 23% of Hispanic/Latino respondents reported taking this action. Overall, 36% of Black/African American respondents and 33% of Hispanic/Latino respondents report rationing their medication in at least one of these ways (see Table 1). While these groups are more likely than other races/ethnicities to report rationing medication due to cost, 19% of White respondents and 17% of respondents identifying with the Other Race group report this behavior, as well.

Table 1**Percent of Adults with Drug Affordability Issues, by Race/Ethnicity, Income and Region**

RACE/ETHNICITY	CUT PILLS IN HALF OR SKIPPED A DOSE	DID NOT FILL A PRESCRIPTION	EITHER DID NOT FILL A PRESCRIPTION, CUT PILLS IN HALF OR SKIPPED A DOSE
BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN	25%	24%	36%
HISPANIC/LATINO	22%	23%	33%
WHITE	11%	14%	19%
OTHER RACE (ASIAN, NATIVE AMERICAN/NATIVE ALASKAN, NATIVE HAWAIIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER)	9%	13%	17%
INCOME			
LESS THAN \$50,000	16%	21%	26%
\$50,000 - \$75,000	10%	18%	19%
\$75,000 - \$100,000	15%	16%	22%
MORE THAN \$100,000	12%	13%	19%
REGION			
BOSTON	17%	26%	34%
NORTHEAST	9%	13%	16%
SOUTHEAST	15%	16%	23%
CENTRAL AND WEST	15%	18%	22%

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

When given more than 20 options, the option cited most frequently as being a “major reason” for high healthcare costs was “drug companies charging too much money.”

- 70%—Drug companies charging too much money
- 66%—Insurance companies charging too much money
- 65%—Hospitals charging too much money

When it comes to tackling high drug costs, Massachusetts adults endorsed a number of strategies:

- 89%—Require drug companies to provide advanced notice of price increases and information to justify those increases
- 88%—Set standard prices for drugs to make them affordable
- 87%—Create a Prescription Drug Affordability Board to examine the evidence and establish acceptable costs for drugs
- 85%—Prohibit drug companies from charging more in the U.S. than abroad

Moreover, there is remarkably high support for government action on drug costs regardless of respondents’ political affiliation (see Table 2).

Table 2
Percent Who Agree/Strongly Agree, by Political Affiliation

SELECTED SURVEY QUESTIONS/STATEMENTS	TOTAL	GENERALLY SPEAKING, DO YOU THINK OF YOURSELF AS...		
		REPUBLICAN	DEMOCRAT	NEITHER
MAJOR REASON FOR RISING HEALTHCARE COSTS: DRUG COMPANIES CHARGING TOO MUCH MONEY	70%	65%	74%	68%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD REQUIRE DRUG COMPANIES TO PROVIDE ADVANCED NOTICE OF PRICE INCREASES AND INFORMATION TO JUSTIFY THOSE INCREASES	89%	88%	90%	88%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD PROHIBIT DRUG COMPANIES FROM CHARGING MORE IN THE U.S. THAN ABROAD	85%	81%	89%	83%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD CREATE A PRESCRIPTION DRUG AFFORDABILITY BOARD TO EXAMINE THE EVIDENCE AND ESTABLISH ACCEPTABLE COSTS FOR DRUGS	87%	81%	90%	85%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD SET STANDARD PRICES FOR DRUGS TO MAKE THEM AFFORDABLE	88%	83%	93%	85%

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

While Massachusetts residents are united in calling for the government to address high drug costs, they also see a role for themselves:

- 73% would switch from a brand name to an equivalent generic drug if given a chance
- 51% have tried to find out the cost of a drug beforehand

The high burden of healthcare and prescription drug affordability, along with high levels of support for change, suggest that elected leaders and other stakeholders need to make addressing this consumer burden a top priority.² 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. Median household income in Massachusetts was \$81,215 (2015-2019). U.S. Census, *Quick Facts*. Retrieved from: [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Massachusetts](#)
2. For more detailed information about healthcare affordability burdens facing Massachusetts residents, see: Healthcare Value Hub, *Massachusetts Residents Struggle to Afford High Healthcare Costs; Worry About Affording Care, Leading to Support for Government Actions to Address High Healthcare Costs*, Data Brief No. 103.

Methodology

Altarum’s Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey (CHESS) 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 1,250 respondents who live in Massachusetts. The survey was conducted in English or Spanish 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, leaving 1,158 cases for analysis. After those exclusions, the demographic composition of respondents was as follows, although not all demographic information has complete response rates:

Demographic Composition of Survey Respondents

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTIC	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTIC	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
HOUSEHOLD INCOME			GENDER		
Under \$20K	145	13%	MALE	437	38%
\$20K - \$30K	103	9%	FEMALE	721	62%
\$30K - \$40K	112	10%	INSURANCE STATUS		
\$40K - \$50K	100	9%	HEALTH INSURANCE THROUGH EMPLOYER OR FAMILY MEMBER’S EMPLOYER	489	42%
\$50K - \$60K	111	10%	HEALTH INSURANCE I BUY ON MY OWN	93	8%
\$60K - \$75K	119	10%	MEDICARE	290	25%
\$75K - \$100K	172	15%	MEDICAID (MASSHEALTH)	216	19%
\$100K - \$150K	191	16%	TRICARE/MILITARY HEALTH SYSTEM	14	1%
\$150K+	105	9%	DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA) HEALTH CARE	13	1%
PARTY AFFILIATION			NO COVERAGE OF ANY TYPE	19	2%
REPUBLICAN	185	16%	I DON’T KNOW	24	2%
DEMOCRAT	497	43%	RACE/ETHNICITY		
NEITHER	476	41%	AMERICAN INDIAN OR NATIVE ALASKAN	25	2%
AGE			ASIAN	81	7%
18-24	226	20%	BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN	127	11%
25-34	201	18%	NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER	15	1%
35-44	155	14%	WHITE	879	76%
45-54	156	14%	PREFER NOT TO ANSWER	40	3%
55-64	209	18%	TWO OR MORE RACES	32	3%
65+	196	17%	HEALTH STATUS		
HEALTH STATUS			EXCELLENT	158	14%
EXCELLENT	158	14%	VERY GOOD	421	36%
VERY GOOD	421	36%	GOOD	414	36%
GOOD	414	36%	FAIR	135	12%
FAIR	135	12%	POOR	30	3%
POOR	30	3%	HISPANIC OR LATINO ORIGIN – YES		
			HISPANIC OR LATINO ORIGIN - NO		
			204		
			954		
			18%		
			82%		

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

Note: Percentages in the body of the brief are based on weighted values, while the data presented in the demographic table is unweighted, except for race/ethnicity data.



ABOUT ALTARUM’S HEALTHCARE VALUE HUB

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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