



DATA BRIEF NO. 8 | MAY 2018

## **Eastern Kentucky: 80% of Residents Experienced Health Affordability Burdens in the Past Year**



Residents of eastern Kentucky experienced healthcare affordability burdens at rates that exceeded the other regions of Kentucky. These affordability burdens take many forms.

### **BEING UNINSURED DUE TO HIGH PREMIUM COSTS**

- 6% of eastern Kentucky adults were uninsured for the prior 12 months
- 64% of them cite “too expensive” as the major reason for not having coverage

### **DELAYING OR FOREGOING HEALTHCARE DUE TO COST**

More than half (59%) of eastern Kentucky adults who needed healthcare during the year encountered one or more cost related barriers to getting that care. In descending order of frequency, they report:

- 45%—Delayed going to the doctor or having a procedure done
- 40%—Avoiding going altogether to the doctor or having a procedure done
- 36%—Skipped a recommended medical test or treatment
- 31%—Did not fill a prescription
- 29%—Cut pills in half or skipped doses of medicine
- 16%—Problems getting mental healthcare

Moreover, cost was far and away 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.

Of the various types of medical bills, the ones most frequently associated with an affordability barrier were dental care, doctor bills and prescription drugs, likely reflecting the frequency with which adults in eastern Kentucky seek these services—or, in the case of dental, lower rates of coverage for these services.

### **MANY WHO RECEIVED CARE STRUGGLE TO PAY THE RESULTING MEDICAL BILLS**

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of adults in eastern Kentucky experienced one or more of these struggles to pay their medical bills:

- 32%—Contacted by a collection agency
- 20%—Used up all or most of their savings
- 17%—Placed on a long-term payment plan
- 14%—Were unable to pay for basic necessities like food, heat, or housing
- 10%—Racked up large amounts of credit card debt
- 7%—Borrowed money or got a loan or another mortgage on their home

## HIGH LEVELS OF WORRY ABOUT AFFORDING HEALTHCARE IN THE FUTURE

Residents of eastern Kentucky also exhibit high levels of worry about affording healthcare in the future. In descending order respondents were “worried” or “very worried” about: the cost of a serious illness or accident (77%); affording care when elderly (74%); prescription drug costs (71%); health insurance becoming too expensive (67%); affording nursing home and home care services (67%); and losing health insurance (52%).

## DISSATISFACTION WITH THE HEALTH SYSTEM AND SUPPORT FOR CHANGE

Eastern Kentucky residents are extremely dissatisfied with the health system: Just 18% agree or strongly agree with the statement “We have a great healthcare system in the U.S.,” while 75% agree or strongly agree “the system needs to change.”

Respondents endorsed a wide range of strategies to tackle healthcare affordability. They identified personal actions they could take, including:

- 60% believe taking better care of their personal health is one of the top three actions that would be most effective in addressing affordability.
- 67% have tried to find out the cost of a drug beforehand

But in far greater numbers they see a role for their elected representatives. Strategies typically received bipartisan support, including (Total/Republican/Democrat/Neither):

- Require insurers to provide upfront cost estimates to consumers (90%/91%/92%/87%)
- Show what a fair price would be for specific procedures (92%/93%/94%/90%)
- Authorize the Attorney General to take legal action to prevent price gouging or unfair prescription drug price hikes (91%/88%/95%/91%)

The high burden of healthcare affordability along with high levels of support for change suggest that elected leaders and other stakeholders should make addressing this need a top priority. Annual surveys can help assess whether or not progress is being made.

**Note:** For survey methodology and state-wide data, see *Kentucky Residents Struggle to Afford High Healthcare Costs: Express Bipartisan Support for a Range of Government Solutions*, Data Brief No. 7 (May 2018). Available at [www.HealthcareValueHub.org/KY-2018-Healthcare-Poll](http://www.HealthcareValueHub.org/KY-2018-Healthcare-Poll).



### 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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