



DATA BRIEF NO. 73 | AUGUST 2020

Kentucky Residents Struggle to Afford High Healthcare Costs; COVID-19 Fears Add to Support for a Range of Government Solutions Across Party Lines

KEY FINDINGS

A survey of 1,140 Kentucky adults, conducted from May 8, 2020 to May 26, 2020, found that:

- More than half (58%) experienced healthcare affordability burdens in the past year;
- Over three-quarters (77%) are worried about affording healthcare in the future;
- High numbers are worried about becoming ill from COVID; and
- Across party lines, they express strong support for government-led solutions.

A RANGE OF HEALTHCARE AFFORDABILITY BURDENS

Like many Americans, Kentucky adults currently experience hardship due to high healthcare costs. All told, 58% of Kentucky adults experienced one or more of the following healthcare affordability burdens in the prior 12 months:

1) BEING UNINSURED DUE TO HIGH PREMIUM COSTS

- 18% of adult respondents were uninsured for all or part of the prior 12 months.
- 39% of uninsured adults cited “*too expensive*” as the major reason for not having coverage, far exceeding other reasons, like “*don't need it*” and “*didn't qualify for open enrollment on the exchange.*”

2) DELAYING OR FORGOING HEALTHCARE DUE TO COST

Fifty-one percent of Kentuckians encountered one or more cost-related barriers to getting healthcare during the prior 12 months:

- 30%—Delayed going to the doctor or having a procedure done
- 29%—Skipped needed dental care
- 24%—Skipped a recommended medical test or treatment
- 24%—Avoided going to the doctor or having a procedure done altogether
- 23%—Did not fill a prescription
- 20%—Cut pills in half or skipped doses of medicine
- 12%—Had problems getting mental healthcare

At lower rates, respondents also reported trouble getting addiction treatment. 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 and lack of childcare.

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

3) STRUGGLING TO PAY MEDICAL BILLS

Other times, Kentuckians got the care they needed but struggled to pay the resulting bill. One out of three Kentucky adults (32%) experienced one or more of these struggles to pay their medical bills:

- 14%—Contacted by a collection agency
- 9%—Used up all or most of their savings
- 8%—Unable to pay for basic necessities like food, heat or housing
- 8%—Borrowed money, got a loan or another mortgage on their home
- 7%—Racked up large amounts of credit card debt
- 7%—Placed on a long-term payment plan

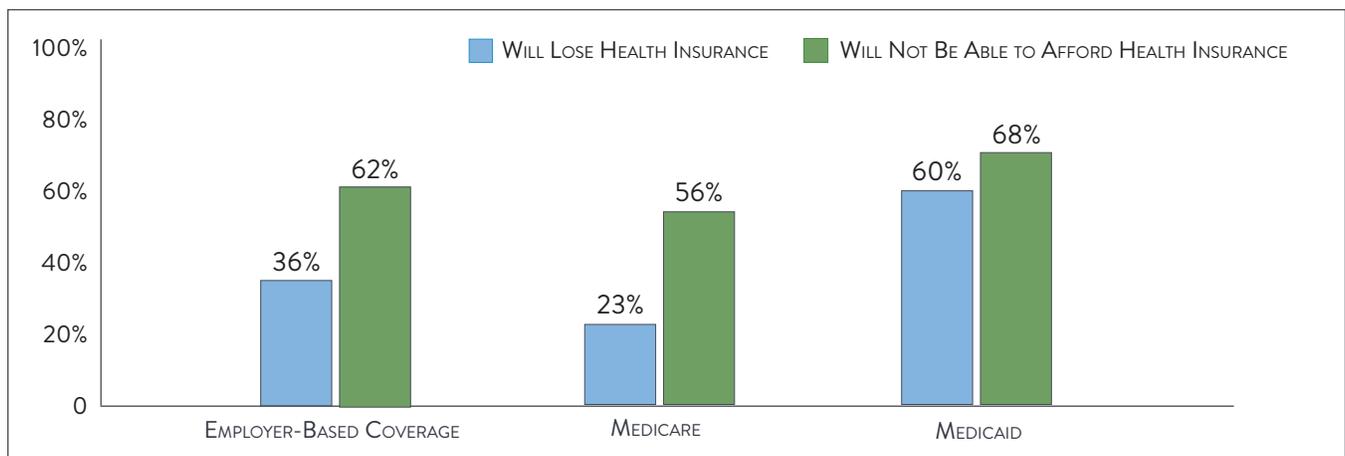
HIGH LEVELS OF WORRY ABOUT AFFORDING HEALTHCARE IN THE FUTURE

In even greater numbers, Kentucky adults worry about affording healthcare in the future. Overall, more than three-fourths (77%) reported being “worried” or “very worried” about affording some aspect of healthcare in the future, including:

- 65%—Cost of nursing home and home care services
- 61%—Medical costs when elderly
- 59%—Cost of a serious illness or accident
- 53%—Cost of prescription drugs
- 51%—Cost of dental care

In addition, 61% of respondents are “worried” or “very worried” about not being able to afford health insurance in the future. These concerns vary by type of insurance coverage, with those on Medicaid being most concerned about losing their coverage. Most Kentuckians are concerned about affording health insurance in the future, regardless of their coverage type (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Worry about Health Insurance, by Coverage Type



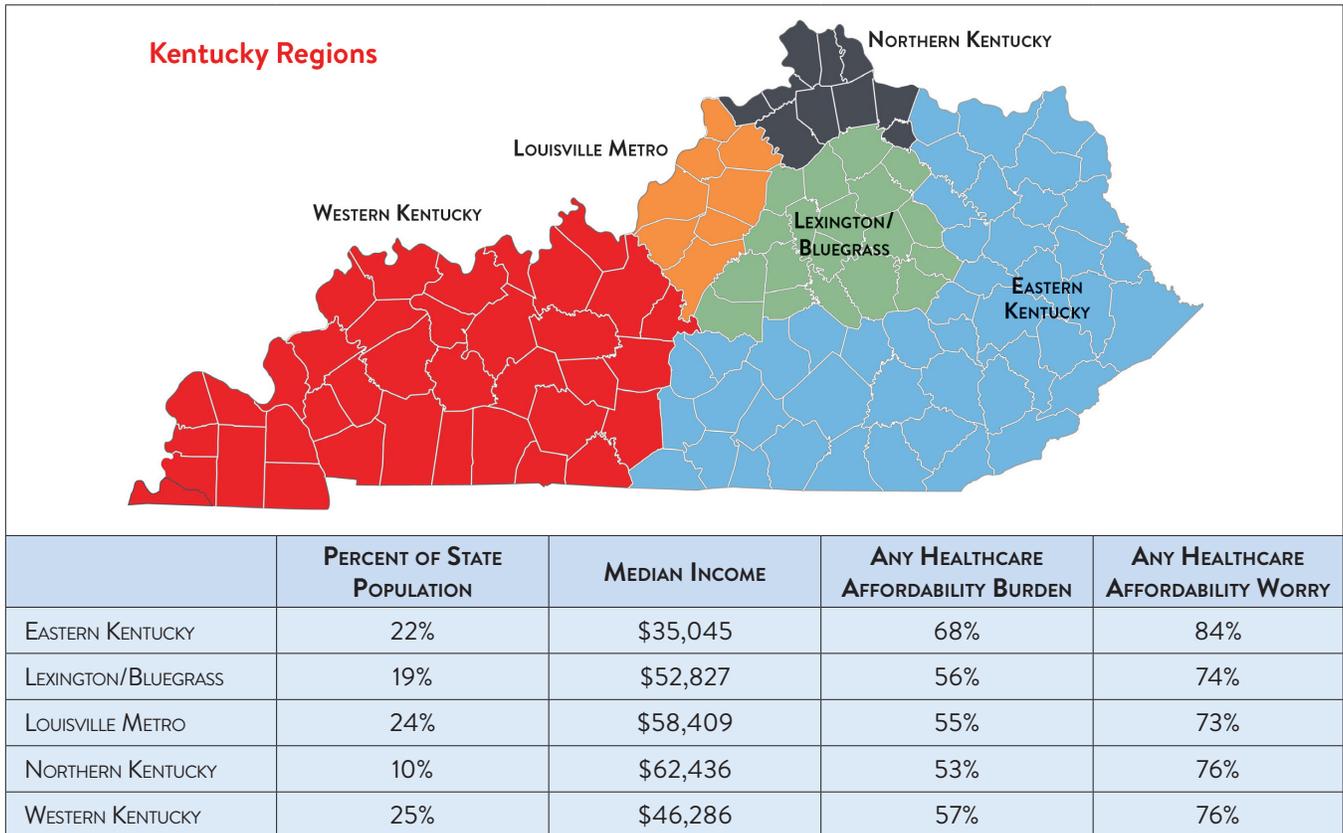
Source: 2020 Poll of Kentucky Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub’s Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

Note: Responses from people who individually purchased insurance and those covered by military insurance numbered fewer than 100, the threshold to produce a reliable result. Therefore, these insurance types are not included in this figure.

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN HEALTHCARE AFFORDABILITY BURDENS

The survey also revealed some regional differences in how Kentuckians experience healthcare affordability burdens. Responses were grouped into the five regions shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2
Regional Healthcare Burden Differences in Kentucky



Sources: Population and income from U.S. Census Bureau (regional income is a weighted average of median income by county); Affordability burden and worry are from 2020 Poll of Kentucky Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub's Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

The Eastern Kentucky region reported the greatest rate of healthcare affordability burdens—68% of adults had one or more of the three categories of burdens described above. This is consistent with this region having the lowest median income. In the other four regions, more than half of respondents reported trouble affording healthcare (see Figure 2).

Perhaps reflecting this high rate of healthcare affordability burdens, residents of Eastern Kentucky also reported starkly higher levels of worry:

- Worry about affording prescription drugs spiked at 63% for Eastern Kentucky, compared to 50% for the remaining regions.
- Worry about affording the costs of a serious illness or accident was 71% for Eastern Kentucky, compared to 56% for remaining regions.
- Overall worry of affording any healthcare burden was highest in Eastern Kentucky at 84%, compared to lower levels in the rest of the state.

More detail is available in the 2020 regional Kentucky reports, which can be found at: www.healthcarevaluehub.org/advocate-resources/kentucky-healthcare-survey

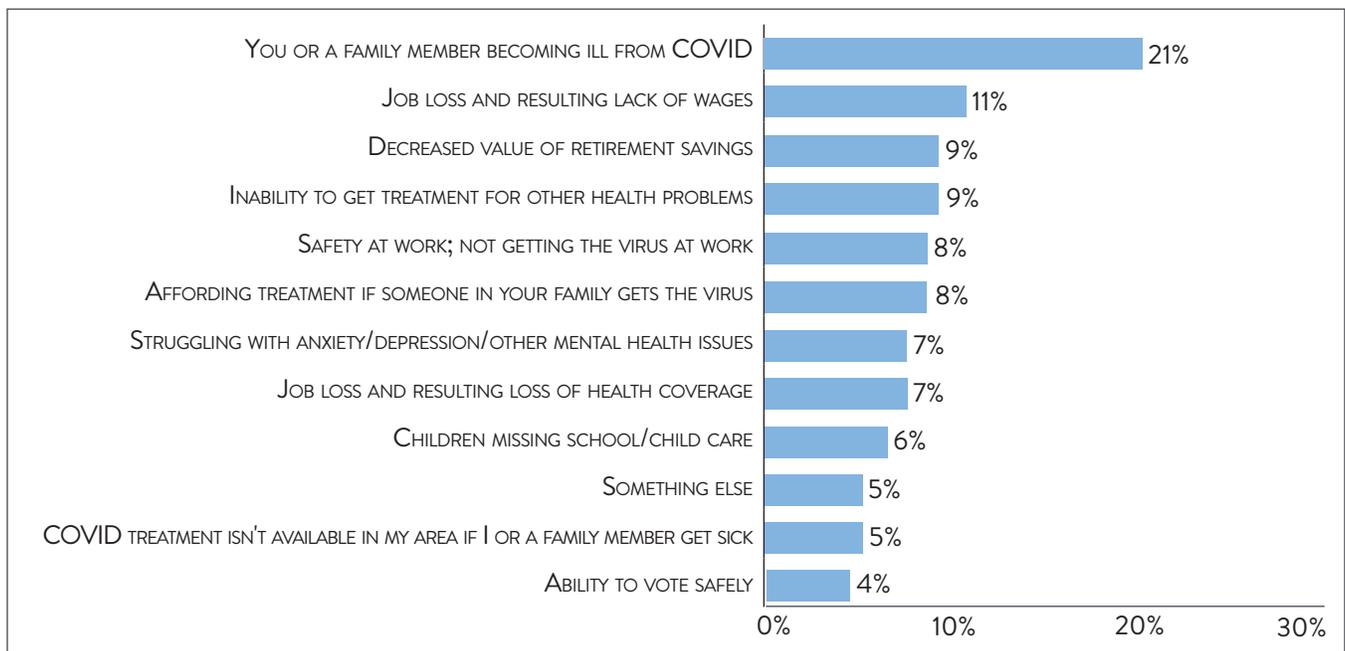
COVID-19 WORRIES

In addition to affordability worries, new questions were asked about respondents' top worries related to the COVID crisis.¹ When asked if worried about “affording treatment of coronavirus/COVID-19 if you need it,” 59% of respondents were “worried” or “very worried.”

Separately, out of twelve possible responses, respondents were asked to pick the top three things they were most worried about (see Figure 3). “Becoming ill from the virus,” not only ranked as the top worry among the choices, but it exceeded other worries by a wide margin, garnering almost twice as many “votes” as the next most common worry, “Job loss and resulting lack of wages.”

Figure 3

Percent of the Time That Worry Was Identified as a “Top 3” Concern



Source: 2020 Poll of Kentucky Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub's Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

DISSATISFACTION WITH THE HEALTH SYSTEM AND SUPPORT FOR CHANGE

In light of these healthcare affordability and COVID concerns, it is not surprising that Kentuckians were extremely dissatisfied with the health system. Statewide:

- Just 27% agreed or strongly agreed that “we have a great healthcare system in the U.S.”
- While 71% agreed or strongly agreed that “the system needs to change.”

The survey asked about both personal and governmental actions to address health system problems.

PERSONAL ACTIONS

Kentucky adults do see a role for themselves in addressing healthcare affordability. When asked to rank the three personal actions that would be most effective in addressing the affordability of healthcare (out of ten options), top vote getters were:

- 70%—Taking better care of my personal health
- 37%—Research treatments myself, before going to the doctor
- 36%—Write or call my STATE representative asking them to take action
- 32%—Write or call my FEDERAL representative asking them to take action

They also reported specific actions they have already taken, like researching the cost of a drug beforehand (59%), as well as action they should be taking—80% said they would switch from a brand to a generic drug if given a chance.

GOVERNMENT ACTIONS

Additionally, Kentucky residents see government as the key stakeholder that needs to act to address health system problems. Moreover, addressing healthcare problems trumps other issues that Kentuckians want their elected representatives to work on.

At the beginning of the survey, respondents were asked what issues the government should address in the upcoming year. The top vote getters were:

- 69%—Healthcare
- 67%—Economy/Joblessness
- 34%—Taxes

The economic woes brought on by the COVID crisis likely contributed to “*Economy/Joblessness*” as a primary concern, but healthcare remained the top issue that Kentucky adults want their elected representatives to work on.

When asked about the top three *healthcare* priorities the government should work on, top vote getters were:

- 55%—Address high healthcare costs, including prescription drugs
- 33%—Preserve consumer protections like: you can't be denied coverage or charged more if you have a pre-existing medical condition
- 31%—Get health insurance to those who cannot afford coverage

Of more than 20 options, Kentuckians believe the reason for high healthcare costs is unfair prices charged by powerful industry stakeholders:

- 74%—Drug companies charging too much money
- 69%—Hospitals charging too much money
- 65%—Insurance companies charging too much money
- 54%—Some well-known or large hospitals or doctor groups using their influence to get higher payments from insurance companies

When it comes to tackling costs, respondents endorsed a number of strategies, including:

- 91%—Expand health insurance options so that everyone can afford quality coverage
- 90%—Require insurers to provide up-front cost estimates to consumers
- 90%—Show what a fair price would be for specific procedures
- 89%—Make it easy to switch insurers if a health plan drops your doctor
- 89%—Ensure the cost of widely needed vaccines are affordable for all
- 89%—Require hospitals and doctors to provide up-front cost estimates to consumers
- 89%—Authorize the Attorney General to take legal action to prevent price gouging or unfair prescription drug hikes
- 89%—Ensure patients can't be charged out-of-network prices if they encounter an out-of-network provider through no fault of their own
- 88%—Prohibit drug companies from charging more in the U.S. than abroad
- 88%—Require drug companies to provide advanced notice of price increases and information to justify those increases

SUPPORT FOR ACTION ACROSS PARTY LINES

What is remarkable about the findings is high support for change regardless of respondents' political affiliation (see Table 1).

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
WE HAVE A GREAT HEALTHCARE SYSTEM IN THE U.S.	27%	38%	17%	23%
THE U.S. HEALTHCARE SYSTEM NEEDS TO CHANGE	71%	63%	81%	71%
MAJOR REASON FOR RISING HEALTHCARE COSTS: <i>DRUG COMPANIES CHARGING TOO MUCH MONEY</i>	74%	71%	83%	69%
MAJOR REASON FOR RISING HEALTHCARE COSTS: <i>HOSPITALS CHARGING TOO MUCH MONEY</i>	69%	65%	75%	66%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD EXPAND HEALTH INSURANCE OPTIONS SO THAT EVERYONE CAN AFFORD QUALITY COVERAGE	91%	89%	95%	90%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD AUTHORIZE THE ATTORNEY GENERAL TO TAKE LEGAL ACTION TO PREVENT PRICE GOUGING OR UNFAIR PRESCRIPTION DRUG PRICE HIKES	89%	90%	90%	86%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD REQUIRE DRUG COMPANIES TO PROVIDE ADVANCED NOTICE OF PRICE INCREASES AND INFORMATION TO JUSTIFY THOSE INCREASES	88%	91%	88%	86%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD SET STANDARD PRICES FOR DRUGS TO MAKE THEM AFFORDABLE	86%	84%	90%	84%

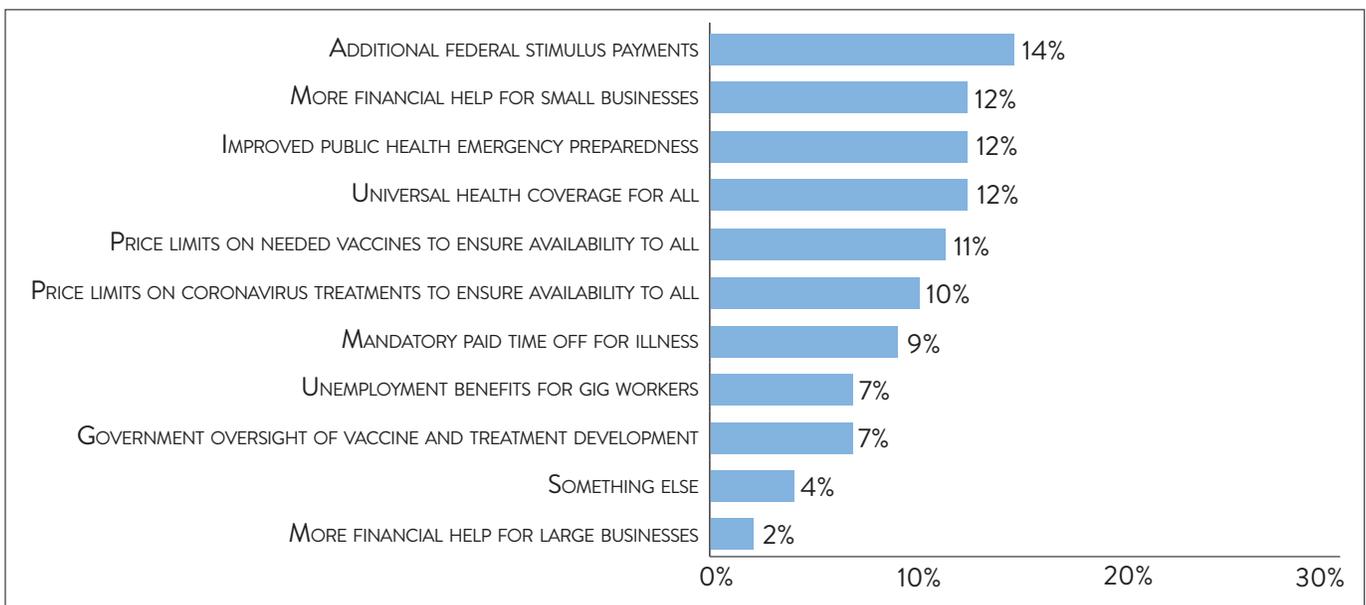
Source: 2020 Poll of Kentucky Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub's Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

POLICIES TO ADDRESS COVID-19 CONCERNS

In addition to residents' views on the policies and approaches above, new questions were asked about support for and against policies related to the COVID crisis. Out of eleven possible responses, respondents were asked to pick the **top three** policies that would help address COVID-related problems. There was significant diversity in the policies supported, with the front runner, “*Additional federal stimulus payments*,” closely followed by four almost equally ranked options: “*More financial help for small businesses*,” “*Improved public health emergency preparedness*,” “*Universal health coverage for all*,” and “*Price limits on needed vaccines*” (see Figure 4). The least supported policy was “*More financial help for large businesses*.”

Figure 4

Percent of the Time That Policy Was Identified as a “Top 3” Policy Supported



Source: 2020 Poll of Kentucky Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub's Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

Far fewer respondents answered when asked about policies they did NOT support. Among the responses we received, **23%** indicated that they did not support “*More financial help for large businesses*.” Trailing behind that (with **17%** of the votes) was “*Universal health coverage for all*,” although more votes were cast overall in support. In this area, there was a lack of agreement across party lines, with Republicans far more likely to NOT support “*Universal health coverage for all*” as a means to address COVID concerns, compared to Democrats and those not affiliated with either party (see Table 2). It is important to note, however, that when asked generically about “*Expanding health insurance options so that everyone can afford quality coverage*,” **91%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this policy as a means of improving affordability.

When asked about the policies they did NOT support, respondents were given the option of selecting “*I support all of the policies listed*.” Nineteen percent of respondents selected this option.

Table 2**Support for COVID-19 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
REPUBLICAN	17%	43%
DEMOCRAT	51%	12%
NEITHER	34%	23%

Source: 2020 Poll of Kentucky 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.

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 this consumer burden 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.

Comparing 2020 Results to the 2018 CHES Survey

We caution readers against drawing strong conclusions about changes observed between the 2018 and 2020 CHES surveys. While the findings from the two surveys are remarkably consistent, small differences in the weighting approach and in the instrument itself (most significantly the addition of the COVID questions) indicate that direct comparisons should not be made. For more information on the Kentucky state surveys, go to www.healthcarevaluehub.org/kentucky-healthcare-survey.

Note

1. COVID-19 is the disease caused by the Coronavirus, which was characterized as a pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020. For a comparison of how respondents from Kentucky and three other states answered our COVID questions, please see Healthcare Value Hub, *How COVID Has Shaped Residents' Broader Attitudes Towards the Health System*, Data Brief No. 86.

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 1,217 respondents who live in Kentucky. The survey was 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, leaving 1,140 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
HOUSEHOLD INCOME		
Under \$20K	210	18%
\$20K - \$30K	128	11%
\$30K - \$40K	113	10%
\$40K - \$50K	106	9%
\$50K - \$60K	109	10%
\$60K - \$75K	119	10%
\$75K - \$100K	138	12%
\$100K - \$150K	147	13%
\$150K+	70	6%
GENDER		
MALE	447	39%
FEMALE	693	61%
AGE		
18-24	151	13%
25-34	159	14%
35-44	197	17%
45-54	141	12%
55-64	208	18%
65+	273	24%

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTIC	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
PARTY AFFILIATION		
REPUBLICAN	454	40%
DEMOCRAT	373	33%
NEITHER	313	27%
INSURANCE STATUS		
HEALTH INSURANCE THROUGH EMPLOYER OR FAMILY MEMBER’S EMPLOYER	463	41%
HEALTH INSURANCE I BUY ON MY OWN	70	6%
MEDICARE	303	27%
MEDICAID	204	18%
TRICARE/MILITARY HEALTH SYSTEM	22	2%
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA) HEALTH CARE	11	<1%
NO COVERAGE OF ANY TYPE	39	3%
I DON’T KNOW	28	2%
HEALTH STATUS		
EXCELLENT	137	12%
VERY GOOD	368	32%
GOOD	425	37%
FAIR	168	15%
POOR	42	4%

Source: 2020 Poll of Kentucky 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.



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.

Contact the Hub: 2000 M Street, NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20036
 (202) 828-5100 | www.HealthcareValueHub.org | [@HealthValueHub](https://twitter.com/HealthValueHub)