



DATA BRIEF NO. 62 | MARCH 2020

Southeast Wisconsin: Half of Adults Experienced Healthcare Affordability Burdens in the Past Year



According to a survey of Wisconsin adults conducted from Oct. 29, 2019 to Nov. 6, 2019, residents of the Southeast region experienced high levels of healthcare affordability burdens. Half (51%) of Southeast region adults experienced one or more of the following healthcare affordability burdens in the prior 12 months.

1) BEING UNINSURED DUE TO HIGH PREMIUM COSTS

- We received too few responses at the regional level to provide a reliable estimate for this statistic.

2) DELAYING OR FORGOING HEALTHCARE DUE TO COST

Two out of five (41%) Southeast region adults encountered one or more cost related barriers to getting healthcare during the prior 12 months, including:

- 26%—Skipped needed dental care
- 21%—Delayed going to the doctor or having a procedure done
- 20%—Skipped a recommended medical test or treatment
- 19%—Avoided going to the doctor or having a procedure done
- 16%—Did not fill a prescription
- 14%—Cut pills in half or skipped doses of medicine.
- 8%—Had problems getting mental healthcare

Smaller numbers reported difficulty 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, lack of childcare, and other reasons.

3) STRUGGLING TO PAY MEDICAL BILLS

In the prior 12 months, about a third (29%) of Southeast region adults experienced one or more of these struggles to pay their medical bills:

- 9%—Contacted by a collection agency
- 9%—Used up all or most of their savings
- 8%—Placed on a long-term payment plan
- 6%—Were unable to pay for basic necessities like food, heat, or housing
- 5%—Borrowed money or got a loan or another mortgage on their home
- 5%—Racked up large amounts of credit card debt

HIGH LEVELS OF WORRY ABOUT AFFORDING HEALTHCARE IN THE FUTURE

Residents of the Southeast region also reported high levels of worry about affording healthcare in the future. Eight in ten (80%) of respondents reported being "worried" or "very worried" about one or more of these topics: affording nursing home and home care services (71%); costs when elderly (69%); health insurance becoming too expensive (65%); cost of a serious illness or accident (64%); cost of needed dental care (54%); prescription drug costs (53%); and losing health insurance (30%).

DISSATISFACTION WITH THE HEALTH SYSTEM AND SUPPORT FOR CHANGE

Residents in the Southeast region of Wisconsin were extremely dissatisfied with the health system. Just 25% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "We have a great health care system in the U.S.," while 77% agreed or strongly agreed with "the system needs to change."

Respondents do see a role for themselves in solving problems. They reported actions they have already taken, like researching the cost of a drug beforehand (56%), as well as actions they should be taking—62% believe 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 they saw a role for their elected representatives. Examples of strategies that received support across party lines included (Total/Republican/Democrat/Neither):

- Require hospitals and doctors to provide up front patient cost estimates—(94%/97%/95%/89%)
- Require insurers to provide upfront cost estimates to patients—(91%/97%/94%/85%)
- Show what a fair price would be for specific procedures—(90%/97%/92%/84%)
- Prohibit drug companies from charging more in the US than abroad—(90%/95%/94%/84%)

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. Annual surveys can help assess whether or not progress is being made.

Note: For survey methodology and state-wide data, see <https://www.healthcarevaluehub.org/Wisconsin-2019-Healthcare-Survey>



ABOUT ALTARUM'S HEALTHCARE VALUE HUB

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