



DATA BRIEF NO. 87 | JANUARY 2021

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

### KEY FINDINGS

A survey of more than 1,070 Minnesota adults, conducted from Oct. 30, 2020 to Nov. 27, 2020, found that:

- More than half (51%) experienced healthcare affordability burdens in the past year;
- Even more are worried about affording healthcare in the future;
- High numbers are worried about becoming ill from the coronavirus; and
- Across party lines, they express strong support for government-led solutions.

**Survey context:** During the survey period, Minnesota residents were under Executive Orders that restricted social gatherings and dialed back certain activities to slow the spread of COVID-19. The survey was conducted during Minnesota's deadliest month of the pandemic to date. Additionally, there were 48,754 unemployment insurance claims in October 2020, compared to 14,191 in October 2019.<sup>1</sup>

### A RANGE OF HEALTHCARE AFFORDABILITY BURDENS

Like many Americans, Minnesota adults currently experience hardship due to high healthcare costs. All told, 51% of Minnesota adults experienced one or more of the following healthcare affordability burdens in the prior 12 months:

#### 1) BEING UNINSURED DUE TO HIGH PREMIUM COSTS

With Minnesota's relatively low uninsurance rate of 4.8%,<sup>2</sup> we received too few responses to provide a reliable estimate for this statistic. However, these respondents are included in the overall "burdened" population.<sup>3</sup>

#### 2) DELAYING OR FORGOING HEALTHCARE DUE TO COST

Almost half of Minnesota adults (45%) encountered one or more cost-related barriers to getting healthcare during the prior 12 months, including:

- 26%—Skipped needed dental care
- 25%—Delayed going to the doctor or having a procedure done
- 22%—Skipped a recommended medical test or treatment
- 21%—Avoided going to the doctor or having a procedure done altogether
- 21%—Cut pills in half, skipped doses of medicine or did not fill a prescription<sup>4</sup>
- 14%—Had problems getting mental healthcare

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 Minnesota 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, Minnesota adults got the care they needed but struggled to pay the resulting bill. More than a quarter of Minnesota adults (27%) experienced one or more of these struggles to pay their medical bills:

- 10%—Contacted by a collection agency
- 10%—Unable to pay for basic necessities like food, heat or housing
- 9%—Used up all or most of their savings
- 7%—Placed on a long-term payment plan
- 7%—Racked up large amounts of credit card debt
- 5%—Borrowed money, got a loan or another mortgage on their home

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

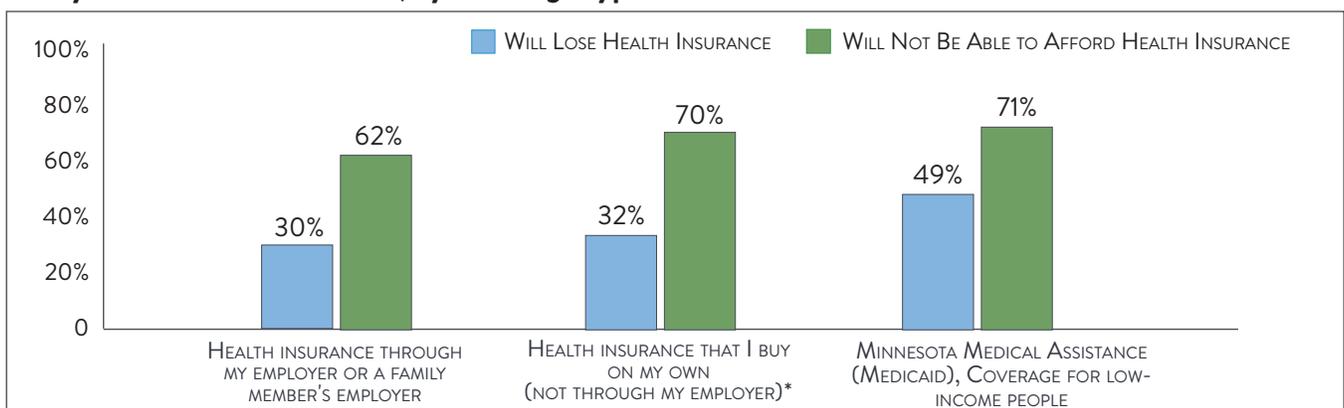
Minnesota adults also exhibit high levels of worry about affording healthcare in the future. Overall, 3 in 4 adults (76%) reported being “worried” or “very worried” about affording some aspect of healthcare in the future, including:

- 65%—Nursing home or caregiving services
- 60%—Medical costs when elderly
- 55%—Cost of a serious illness or accident

In addition, 60% 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. Concerns about affording health insurance exceeded fears about losing coverage across all insurance types (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

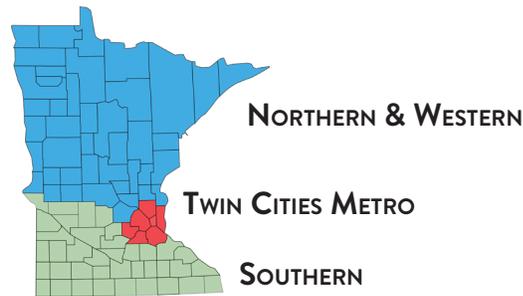
#### Worry about Health Insurance, by Coverage Type



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

\*Note: Responses from people who individually purchased health insurance numbered fewer than 100, the threshold to produce a reliable result. Use this estimate with caution.

## REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN HEALTHCARE AFFORDABILITY BURDENS

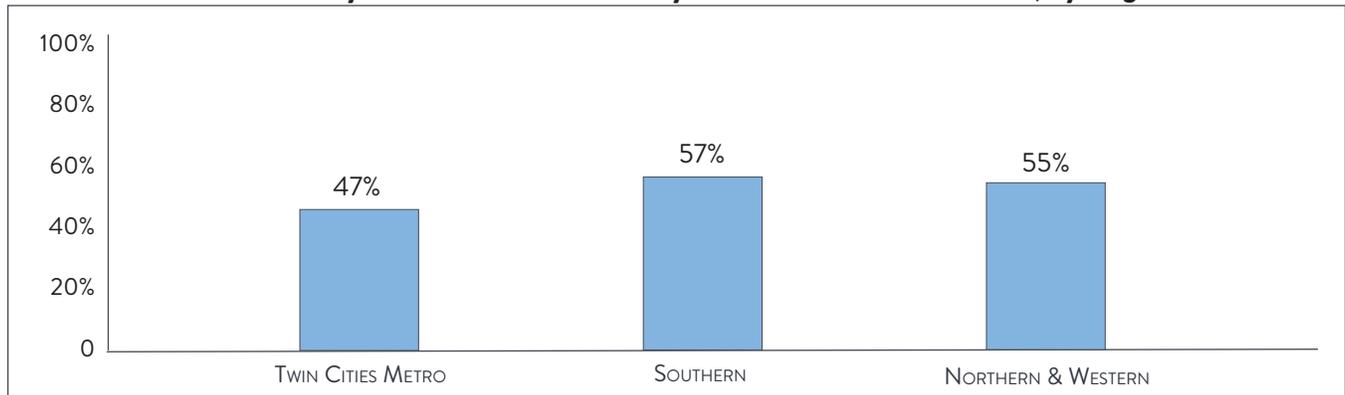


The survey also revealed regional differences in how Minnesota adults experience healthcare affordability burdens.

Affordability burdens affect families in every region of Minnesota, with 57% of residents in the Southern region facing healthcare affordability burdens—the highest in the state (see Figure 2). Additionally, a staggering 51% of Southern region adults reported skipping a recommended medical test or treatment due to cost, compared to 41% of Twin Cities Metro area residents and 49% of those who live in the Northern & Western region.

Worries about affording healthcare in the future are also high throughout the state. Though residents in the Southern region reported the highest levels of worry, the vast majority of adults in the Twin Cities Metro area and Northern & Western regions report being worried, as well (see Table 1).

**Figure 2**  
**Percent of Adults with Any Healthcare Affordability Burden in Prior 12 Months, by Region**



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

**Table 1**  
**Percent Worried or Very Worried, by Region**

WORRY	TWIN CITIES METRO	SOUTHERN	NORTHERN & WESTERN
AFFORDING HEALTH INSURANCE IN THE FUTURE	58%	68%	59%
AFFORDING THE COSTS OF SERIOUS ILLNESS OR ACCIDENT	54%	56%	55%
AFFORDING MEDICAL CARE WHEN ELDERLY	58%	68%	60%
ANY HEALTHCARE AFFORDABILITY WORRY	73%	81%	79%

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

## COVID WORRIES

In addition to affordability worries, Minnesota adults were asked about their top worries related to the COVID crisis.<sup>5</sup> When asked about “affording treatment of coronavirus/COVID-19 if you need it,” 57% 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 Table 2). “Becoming ill from the virus” was not only the most frequently selected by respondents, but it exceeded other worries by a wide margin. Sixty-three percent of respondents selected “Becoming ill from the virus” as one of their top three concerns, while 26% of respondents selected the next most common worry, “Inability to get treatment for other health problems,” as a top three concern.

**Table 2**

### Worries Related to COVID-19/Coronavirus Pandemic

WORRY	PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS WHO SELECTED WORRY AS ONE OF THEIR “TOP 3” CONCERNS
YOU OR A FAMILY MEMBER BECOMING ILL FROM THE CORONAVIRUS	63%
INABILITY TO GET TREATMENT FOR OTHER HEALTH PROBLEMS	26%
STRUGGLING WITH ANXIETY/DEPRESSION/OTHER MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES	26%
CHILDREN MISSING SCHOOL/CHILDCARE	22%
JOB LOSS AND RESULTING LACK OF WAGES	21%
DECREASED VALUE OF RETIREMENT SAVINGS	21%

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

In smaller numbers, Minnesota adults worried about many other issues, including: affording treatment if they or someone in their family gets the virus (20%), safety at work—not getting the virus at work (18%), job loss and resulting loss of health coverage (16%), unavailability of COVID treatment if they or a family member gets sick (16%) and something else (16%).

## DISSATISFACTION WITH THE HEALTH SYSTEM AND SUPPORT FOR CHANGE

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

- Just 34% agreed or strongly agreed that “we have a great healthcare system in the U.S.,”
- While 65% 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

Minnesota 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:

- 67%—Take better care of my personal health
- 37%—Write or call my STATE representative asking them to take action

- 36%—Research treatments myself, before going to the doctor
- 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 (49%), as well as action they should be taking—78% said they would switch from a brand to a less expensive generic drug if given a chance.

## GOVERNMENT ACTIONS

But far and away, Minnesota residents see government as the key stakeholder that needs to act to address health system problems. Moreover, addressing healthcare problems was a higher priority than other issues that Minnesota residents 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
- 63%—Economy/Joblessness
- 39%—Taxes

The economic woes brought on by the COVID crisis likely contributed to “*Economy/Joblessness*” as a primary concern, but addressing healthcare remained the top issue that Minnesota 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:

- 53%—Address high healthcare costs, including prescription drugs<sup>6</sup>
- 42%—Preserve consumer protections, like: you can’t be denied coverage or charged more if you have a pre-existing medical condition
- 32%—Get health insurance to those who cannot afford coverage

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

- 70%—Drug companies charging too much money
- 61%—Insurance companies charging too much money
- 56%—Hospitals charging too much money

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
- 91%—Show what a fair price would be for specific procedures
- 90%—Make it easy to switch insurers if a health plan drops your doctor
- 89%—Require insurers to provide up-front cost estimates to consumers
- 88%—Ensure the cost of widely needed vaccines are affordable for all
- 86%—Require hospitals and doctors to provide up-front cost estimates to consumers
- 85%—Set standard payments to hospitals for specific procedures

For the most part, support for policy solutions was high and consistent across regions. For example, 91% of adults in all three regions supported expanding health insurance options so that everyone can

afford quality coverage. However, while 90% of Southern region adults endorsed setting standard payment to hospitals for specific procedures, 84% of Twin Cities Metro region adults and 85% of Western and Northern region adults supported the policy—indicating small regional variation in support for certain policy strategies.

### SUPPORT FOR ACTION ACROSS PARTY LINES

What is remarkable about the findings is high support for change regardless of respondents' political affiliation (see Table 3).

**Table 3**  
**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.	34%	49%	26%	29%
THE U.S. HEALTHCARE SYSTEM NEEDS TO CHANGE	65%	55%	74%	63%
MAJOR REASON FOR RISING HEALTHCARE COSTS: <i>DRUG COMPANIES CHARGING TOO MUCH MONEY</i>	70%	61%	73%	76%
MAJOR REASON FOR RISING HEALTHCARE COSTS: <i>INSURERS CHARGING TOO MUCH MONEY</i>	61%	53%	66%	63%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD EXPAND HEALTH INSURANCE OPTIONS SO THAT EVERYONE CAN AFFORD QUALITY COVERAGE	91%	86%	94%	93%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD SHOW WHAT A FAIR PRICE WOULD BE FOR SPECIFIC PROCEDURES	91%	92%	90%	93%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD MAKE IT EASY TO SWITCH INSURERS IF A HEALTH PLAN DROPS YOUR DOCTOR	90%	88%	91%	90%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD REQUIRE INSURERS TO PROVIDE UP-FRONT COST ESTIMATES TO CONSUMERS	89%	87%	90%	89%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD ENSURE THE COST OF WIDELY NEEDED VACCINES ARE AFFORDABLE FOR ALL	88%	85%	90%	89%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD CREATE A PRESCRIPTION DRUG AFFORDABILITY BOARD TO EXAMINE THE EVIDENCE AND ESTABLISH ACCEPTABLE COSTS FOR DRUGS	87%	81%	91%	89%

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

### POLICIES TO ADDRESS COVID 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 highest percentages of respondents selecting "Additional Federal stimulus" and "More financial help for small businesses" as a top 3 priority. The next most supported policies received nearly equal levels of support (see Table 4). "More financial help for large businesses" received the least support, as it was a priority for only a small percentage of respondents.

**Table 4**  
**Support for Policies to Address COVID Concerns**

POLICY	PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS WHO SELECTED POLICY AS ONE OF THEIR "TOP 3" POLICIES SUPPORTED
ADDITIONAL FEDERAL STIMULUS PAYMENTS	44%
MORE FINANCIAL HELP FOR SMALL BUSINESSES	40%
UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE FOR ALL	31%
IMPROVED PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS	28%
PRICE LIMITS ON NEEDED VACCINES TO ENSURE AVAILABILITY TO ALL	28%
PRICE LIMITS ON CORONAVIRUS TREATMENTS TO ENSURE AVAILABILITY TO ALL	26%
GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT OF VACCINE AND TREATMENT DEVELOPMENT	24%
MANDATORY PAID TIME OFF FOR ILLNESS	21%
UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FOR GIG WORKERS	19%
SOMETHING ELSE	10%
MORE FINANCIAL HELP FOR LARGE BUSINESSES	8%

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

When respondents were asked about which policies they did NOT support, 33% indicated that they did not support “More financial help for large businesses.” Trailing behind that (with 27% of respondents selecting) was “Universal health coverage for all,” although a higher percentage of respondents indicated 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-19 concerns, compared to Democrats and those not affiliated with either party (see Table 5). 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, with high levels of support across party lines (see Table 3).

**Table 5**  
**Support for COVID Policy: Universal Health Coverage for All**

GENERALLY SPEAKING, DO YOU THINK OF YOURSELF AS A...	PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS WHO SELECTED UNIVERSAL COVERAGE AS ONE OF THEIR "TOP 3" POLICIES SUPPORTED	PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS WHO SELECTED UNIVERSAL COVERAGE AS ONE OF THEIR "TOP 3" POLICIES NOT SUPPORTED
REPUBLICAN	13%	50%
DEMOCRAT	47%	9%
NEITHER	32%	25%

Source: 2020 Poll of Minnesota 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.

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

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 2019 CHES Survey

We caution readers against drawing strong conclusions about changes observed between the 2019 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 Minnesota state surveys, go to [www.healthcarevaluehub.org/minnesota-state-survey](http://www.healthcarevaluehub.org/minnesota-state-survey).

## Notes

1. Employment and Economic Development, Unemployment Insurance Statistics Monthly Claims Visualization Tool, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://mn.gov/deed/data/data-tools/unemployment-insurance-statistics/uimonthly.jsp>
2. Kaiser Family Foundation, *Health Insurance Coverage of the Total Population, 2019*. Retrieved from: <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/total-population/?currentTimeframe=0&selectedRows=%7B%22states%22:%7B%22minnesota%22:%7B%7D%7D%7D&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>
3. In the 2019 CHES survey, 43% of uninsured adults in Minnesota cited “too expensive” as the major reason for not having coverage, far exceeding reasons like “don’t need it,” “don’t know how to get it” and other reasons. For more information, see: <https://www.healthcarevaluehub.org/advocate-resources/publications/minnesota-residents-struggle-afford-high-healthcare-costs-support-range-government-solutions-across-party-lines>
4. Of the current 45% of Minnesota adults who encountered one or more cost-related barriers to getting healthcare during the prior 12 months, 15% did not fill a prescription, while 16% cut pills in half or skipped doses of medicine due to cost.
5. 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 Connecticut, Kentucky, Mississippi and New Jersey answered our COVID questions, please see Healthcare Value Hub, *How COVID Has Shaped Residents’ Broader Attitudes Towards the Health System*, Data Brief No. 86.
6. To learn more about Minnesota adults’ worries and support for solutions to address high prescription drug costs, see Healthcare Value Hub, *Minnesota Residents Worried about High Drug Costs; Support a Range of Government Solutions*, Data Brief No. 88.

## 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 1,000 respondents who live in Minnesota. The survey was conducted only in English and Spanish and was 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 1,077 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
<b>HOUSEHOLD INCOME</b>		
Under \$20K	154	14%
\$20K - \$30K	97	9%
\$30K - \$40K	89	8%
\$40K - \$50K	105	10%
\$50K - \$60K	94	9%
\$60K - \$75K	129	12%
\$75K - \$100K	183	17%
\$100K - \$150K	149	14%
\$150K+	77	7%
<b>PARTY AFFILIATION</b>		
REPUBLICAN	324	30%
DEMOCRAT	405	38%
NEITHER	348	32%
<b>AGE</b>		
18-24	114	11%
25-34	113	11%
35-44	85	8%
45-54	140	13%
55-64	348	33%
65+	266	25%

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTIC	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
<b>GENDER</b>		
MALE	414	38%
FEMALE	663	62%
<b>INSURANCE STATUS</b>		
HEALTH INSURANCE THROUGH EMPLOYER OR FAMILY MEMBER’S EMPLOYER	349	32%
HEALTH INSURANCE I BUY ON MY OWN	86	8%
MEDICARE	417	39%
MEDICAID	146	14%
TRICARE/MILITARY HEALTH SYSTEM	12	1%
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA) HEALTH CARE	10	1%
NO COVERAGE OF ANY TYPE	36	3%
I DON’T KNOW	21	2%
<b>HEALTH STATUS</b>		
EXCELLENT	124	12%
VERY GOOD	395	37%
GOOD	375	35%
FAIR	154	14%
POOR	29	3%

Source: 2020 Poll of Minnesota 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.

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