



DATA BRIEF NO. 100 | SEPTEMBER 2021

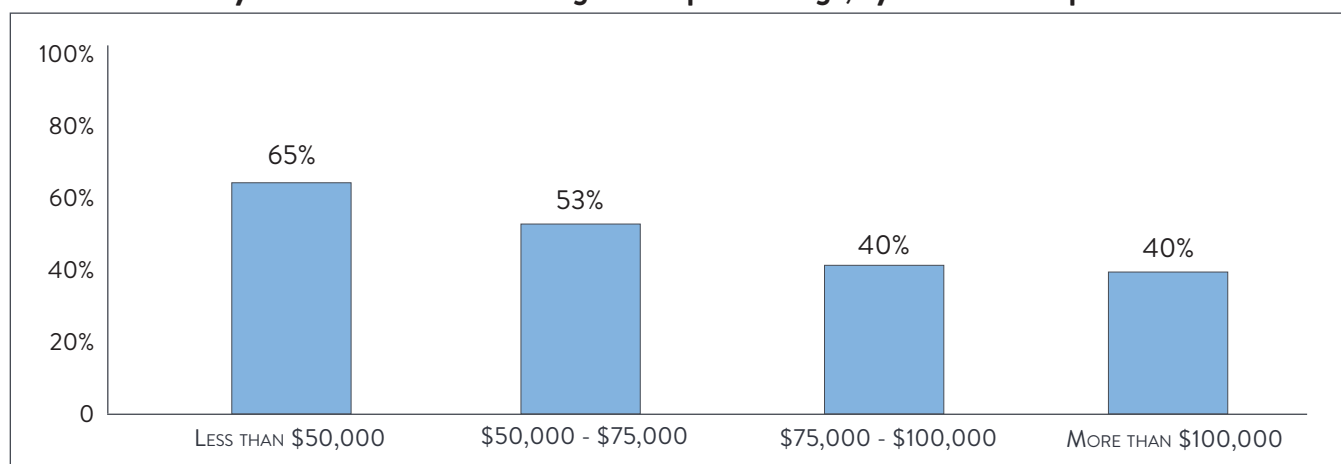
North Carolina Residents Worried about High Drug Costs; Support a Range of Government Solutions

According to a survey of more than 950 North Carolina adults, conducted from April 29, 2021 to May 25, 2021, residents are concerned about prescription drug costs and express a strong desire to enact solutions.

Over half of all survey respondents (54%) report being somewhat or very worried about affording the cost of prescription drugs. Worry varies substantially by income group, with residents in households making less than \$50,000 per year experiencing the most worry (see Figure 1). However, it is important to note that a large percentage of households making \$100,000 per year or more also worry about affording prescription drugs.

Figure 1

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



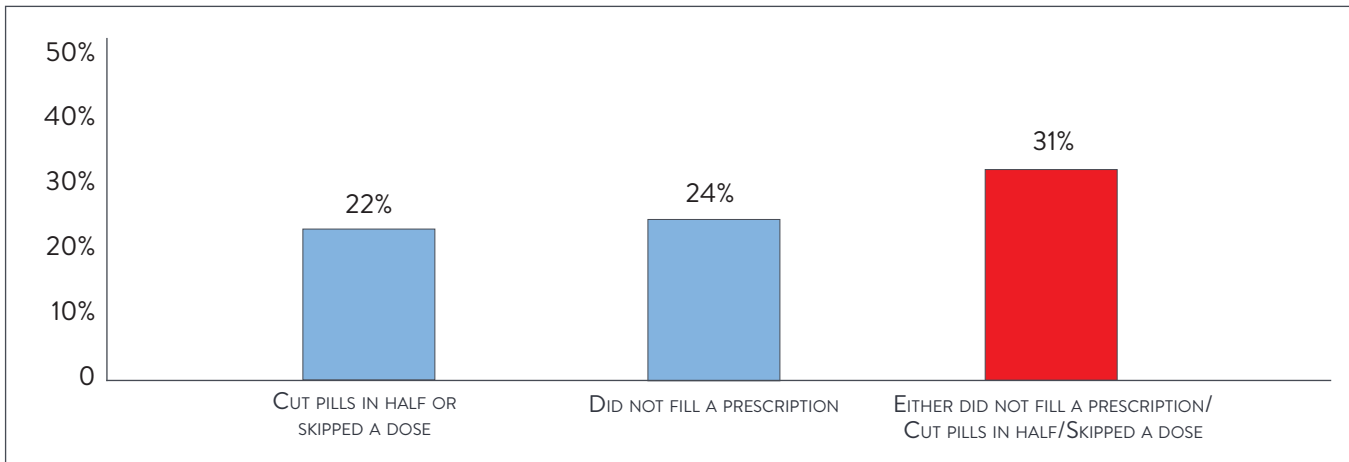
Source: 2021 Poll of North Carolina Adults, Ages 18+, Altarum Healthcare Value Hub's Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey

In addition to being worried about prescription drug affordability in the future, many North Carolina residents have experienced hardship in the prior 12 months due to the cost of prescription drugs. Indeed, cost concerns led nearly 1 in 3 North Carolina adults (31%) to not fill a prescription, cut pills in half or skip a dose of medicine (see Figure 2).

These hardships disproportionately impact people in lower income households. As Table 1 shows, people in households earning less than \$50,000 per year¹ are more likely to have rationed their prescription medicines (by not filling a prescription, cutting pills in half or skipping a dose of medicine) than people in households making more than \$100,000 per year. These hardships are alarmingly prevalent in middle income households, as well.

Figure 2

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



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

Table 1

North Carolina Adults with Drug Affordability Issues, by Income

INCOME	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
LESS THAN \$50,000	26%	32%	39%
\$50,000 - \$75,000	20%	20%	29%
\$75,000 - \$100,000	19%	16%	22%
MORE THAN \$100,000	18%	15%	23%

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

In light of these prescription drug cost concerns—as well as concerns about high healthcare costs generally²—it is not surprising that North Carolina adults are generally dissatisfied with the health system:

- Just **30%** agreed or strongly agreed that “we have a great healthcare system in the U.S.,”
- While **66%** agreed or strongly agreed that “the system needs to change.”

When given more than 20 options, those cited most frequently as being a “major reason” for high healthcare costs were:

- **63%**—Drug companies charging too much money
- **63%**—Hospitals charging too much money
- **60%**—Insurance companies charging too much money

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

- **87%**—Ensure the cost of widely needed vaccines are affordable for all
- **86%**—Require drug companies to provide advanced notice of price increases and information to justify those increases

- 86%—Authorize the Attorney General to take legal action to prevent price gouging or unfair prescription drug price hikes
- 85%—Set standard prices for drugs to make them affordable
- 84%—Prohibit drug companies from charging more in the U.S. than abroad
- 81%—Create a Prescription Drug Affordability Board to examine the evidence and establish acceptable costs for drugs

Moreover, there is substantial support for government action on drug costs regardless of the 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	63%	62%	64%	62%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD ENSURE THE COST OF WIDELY NEEDED VACCINES ARE AFFORDABLE FOR ALL	87%	90%	87%	85%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD AUTHORIZE THE ATTORNEY GENERAL TO TAKE LEGAL ACTION TO PREVENT PRICE GOUGING OR UNFAIR PRESCRIPTION DRUG PRICE HIKES	86%	87%	87%	84%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD REQUIRE DRUG COMPANIES TO PROVIDE ADVANCED NOTICE OF PRICE INCREASES AND INFORMATION TO JUSTIFY THOSE INCREASES	86%	88%	84%	85%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD SET STANDARD PRICES FOR DRUGS TO MAKE THEM AFFORDABLE	85%	83%	86%	85%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD PROHIBIT DRUG COMPANIES FROM CHARGING MORE IN U.S. THAN ABROAD	84%	86%	85%	82%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD CREATE A PRESCRIPTION DRUG AFFORDABILITY BOARD TO EXAMINE THE EVIDENCE AND ESTABLISH ACCEPTABLE COSTS FOR DRUGS	81%	78%	84%	80%

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

While North Carolina 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
- 62% have tried to find out the cost of a drug beforehand

Conclusion

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. 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 North Carolina was \$54,602 (2015-2019). U.S. Census, *Quick Facts*. Retrieved from: [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: North Carolina](#)
2. For more detailed information about healthcare affordability burdens facing North Carolina residents, please see Healthcare Value Hub, [North Carolina Residents Struggle to Afford High Healthcare Costs; COVID Fears Add to Support for a Range of Government Solutions Across Party Lines](#), Data Brief No. 99.

Methodology

Altarum’s Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey (CHES) 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 North Carolina. 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 981 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	173	18%	MALE	418	43%
\$20K - \$30K	117	12%	FEMALE	563	57%
\$30K - \$40K	107	11%	INSURANCE STATUS		
\$40K - \$50K	94	10%	HEALTH INSURANCE THROUGH EMPLOYER OR FAMILY MEMBER’S EMPLOYER	324	33%
\$50K - \$60K	82	8%	HEALTH INSURANCE I BUY ON MY OWN	100	10%
\$60K - \$75K	113	12%	MEDICARE	290	30%
\$75K - \$100K	131	13%	MEDICAID	118	12%
\$100K - \$150K	102	10%	TRICARE/MILITARY HEALTH SYSTEM	34	3%
\$150K+	62	6%	DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA) HEALTH CARE	15	2%
PARTY AFFILIATION			NO COVERAGE OF ANY TYPE	70	7%
REPUBLICAN	185	16%	I DON’T KNOW	30	3%
DEMOCRAT	497	43%	HEALTH STATUS		
NEITHER	476	41%	EXCELLENT	124	13%
AGE			VERY GOOD	317	32%
18-24	202	21%	GOOD	341	35%
25-34	150	16%	FAIR	152	15%
35-44	127	13%	POOR	30	5%
45-54	130	14%			
55-64	186	19%			
65+	165	17%			

Source: 2021 Poll of North Carolina 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 re-search-based and field-tested solutions that transform our systems of health and healthcare.

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