



# TRACKING HEALTHCARE AFFORDABILITY AND VALUE

The West Health-Gallup Healthcare Affordability Index and Healthcare Value Index



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# West Health-Gallup Healthcare Affordability and Value Indices — 2021-2024

West Health and Gallup developed two indices to track the healthcare cost crisis in America.



## The West Health-Gallup Healthcare Affordability Index

gauges the impact of high healthcare prices and access to care on adults in the U.S.



## The West Health-Gallup Healthcare Value Index

measures the perceived value of the care received — is it worth the cost?

The latest **West Health-Gallup Healthcare Affordability and Value Indices** reveal several troubling trends and few bright spots for healthcare in America. Since 2022, the percentage of Americans classified as **Cost Secure** — being able to readily access and afford basic healthcare and prescribed medicines — is down six points to 55%, a new low. Among older adults, the percentage of **Cost Secure** is higher, at 71%, but this is still down eight points from 2022. Meanwhile, according to the **West Health-Gallup Healthcare Value Index**, 36% of Americans are categorized as having **Poor Perceived Value** — nine percentage points fewer than what was reported in 2021 — the one positive trend uncovered by the indices.



# The Healthcare Affordability Index: Cost Security Reaches New Low

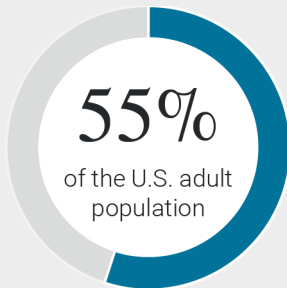
The Healthcare Affordability Index evaluates three key factors in determining the ability of Americans to afford healthcare:

- 1) **Care avoidance:** Has there been a time in the last three months when you or a member of your household had a health problem but did not seek treatment due to cost?
- 2) **Skipped treatments:** Has there been a time in the last three months when you or a member of your household was unable to pay for medicine that a doctor prescribed because you did not have enough money to pay for it?
- 3) **Difficulty today:** If you needed access to quality healthcare today, would you be able to afford it?



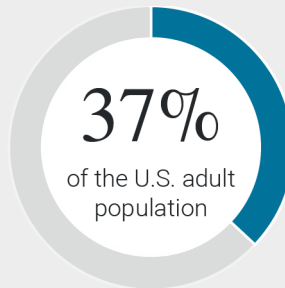
Based on these metrics, Americans fall into three categories in the West Health-Gallup Healthcare Affordability Index:

## Cost Secure



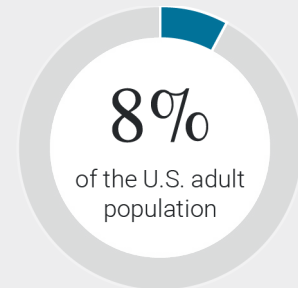
These persons report no recent occurrences of being unable to afford care or prescribed medicine in their household and have access to quality care if it were needed today. Cost is only moderately important when considering a recommended procedure or medicine from a doctor.

## Cost Insecure



These persons report recent occurrences of being unable to pay for care or medicine or lack easy access to quality care. Prior West Health-Gallup research has shown that they are three to four times more likely to have cut back on basic household spending and to have forgone a recommended medical procedure due to the expense than are their Cost Secure counterparts.<sup>1</sup>

## Cost Desperate



These persons report recent occurrences of being unable to pay for household care, being unable to pay for prescribed medicine and feeling that they would not have access to affordable quality care if needed today. Prior West Health-Gallup research has shown that nearly half are “extremely concerned” about being able to pay for prescribed medicine and over half are “extremely concerned” about being able to pay for healthcare in the next 12 months.

<sup>1</sup> Witters, D. (2022, March 31). Benchmarking Healthcare Affordability and Perceived Value. Gallup Blog. <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/390425/benchmarking-healthcare-affordability-perceived-value.aspx>

**Cost security among U.S. adults has dipped to its lowest level in 2024, down six points since 2022 to just 55%.**

This decline is driven primarily by adults aged 50 to 64 (down eight points to 55%) and 65 and older (down eight points to 71%). Younger adults under the age of 50, after ticking up in 2022 to 52%, have slid to 47%. For all three age groups, these levels represent recorded low points for cost security.

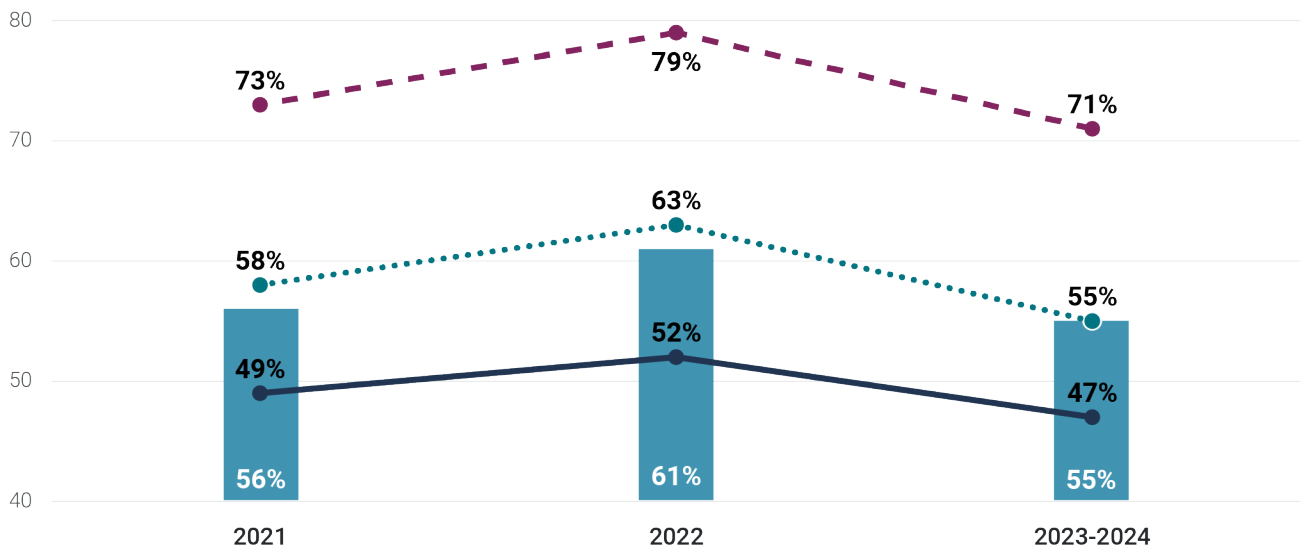
**CHART 1**

West Health-Gallup Affordability Index, trended 2021-2024

The percentage of American adults categorized as Cost Secure has dropped to a new low of 55%, led by an eight-point drop among Americans aged 65 and older to 71%.

% Cost Secure

■ All adults — 18 to 49 ..... 50 to 64 - - - 65 and older



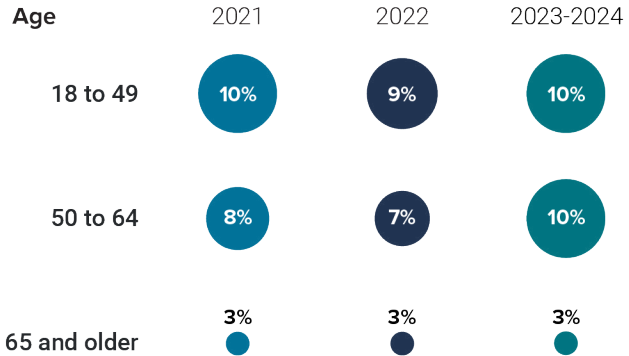
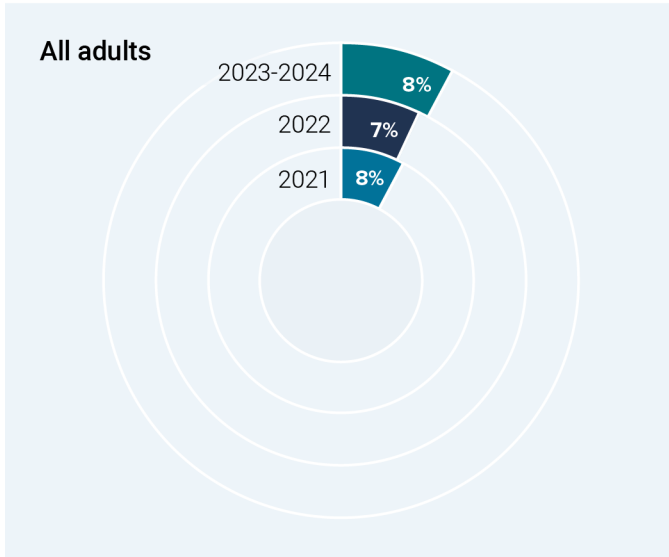
The remaining 45% of American adults are classified as either Cost Insecure or Cost Desperate. Adults under the age of 65 are more than three times as likely to be Cost Desperate as those aged 65 and older (10% to 3%). The percentage of those Cost Desperate aged 50 to 64 has ticked up to 10%, the highest level measured for this group thus far.

Other important factors are associated with the likelihood of being Cost Desperate:

- It is closely aligned with household income – those living in households earning under \$48,000 per year are eight times more likely to be Cost Desperate than those living in households earning \$90,000 or more per year (16% to 2%, respectively).
- A racial and ethnic divide also exists, with Black (11%) and Hispanic (14%) adults considerably more likely to be Cost Desperate than their White counterparts (7%).
- Women are now nearly twice as likely as men to be Cost Desperate, a widening divide between genders.

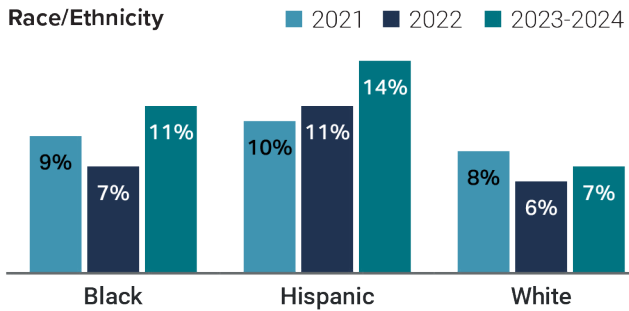
# Who are the Cost Desperate Americans?

Percentage of U.S. adults classified as Cost Desperate

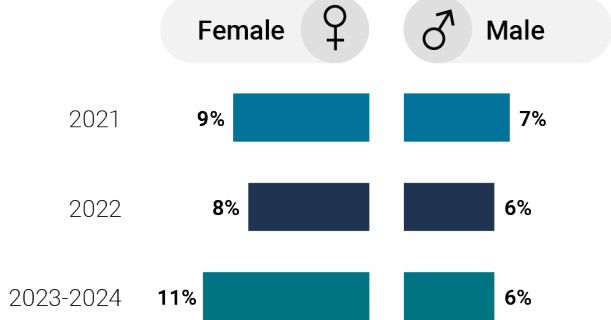


### Annual household income

	2021	2022	2023-2024
Less than \$24,000	14%	11%	15%
\$24,000 to less than \$48,000	13%	14%	16%
\$48,000 to less than \$90,000	11%	9%	10%
\$90,000 to less than \$120,000	4%	5%	2%
\$120,000 to less than \$180,000	3%	3%	3%
\$180,000 or more	2%	2%	2%



### Gender



**Being Cost Desperate in America may lead to serious consequences.**

Based on prior West Health-Gallup research, one out of every seven people (14%) classified as Cost Desperate say they know a friend or have a family member who has died in the last 12 months after not receiving treatment due to an inability to pay for it — double the rate of Cost Insecure individuals and seven times greater than Cost Secure individuals. One-third (35%) report that they have cut back on utilities, and half have cut back on food in the past 12 months to pay for needed healthcare, rates that are 10 times greater than their Cost Secure counterparts.





# Americans' Views on the Overall Value of Healthcare Remain Low

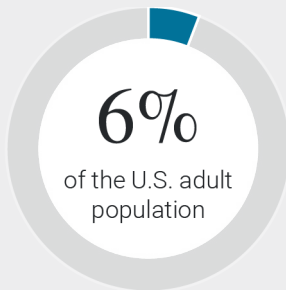
The Healthcare Value Index comprises three key perceptions that determine the healthcare system's value:

- 1) Systemwide quality of care relative to its cost:** Do you think Americans pay too much, too little or about the right amount for the quality of healthcare they receive?
- 2) Individual quality of care relative to its cost:** Do you think your household pays too much, too little or about the right amount for the quality of healthcare you receive?
- 3) Value of most recent interaction with the healthcare system:** Thinking of the most recent time that you received medical care either in-person or remotely, was your experience worth the cost?

Few Americans believe that they receive good value when the quality of their care is weighed against the amount they pay for it. For example, 88% of respondents agree that people across the country are paying too much for the quality of care received, and 66% agree that their own household pays too much for the quality of healthcare received. When asked to evaluate their most recent healthcare experience, 42% agree that it was not worth the cost, rising to 52% among those under the age of 30.

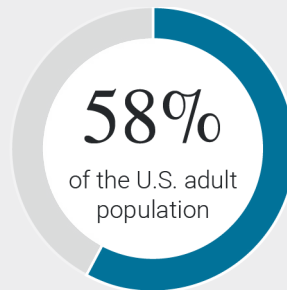
Based on these metrics, the West Health-Gallup Healthcare Value Index classifies Americans into three categories:

## High Perceived Value



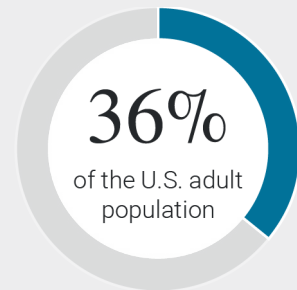
These persons report that both their household and Americans generally are paying the right amount (or too little) relative to the quality of care they receive and that their most recent care experience was worth the cost. They are more optimistic that healthcare costs will remain the same over the next year and are much more likely to believe that the cost of care in the U.S. is about right.

## Inconsistent Perceived Value



These persons report that either their household or Americans generally are paying too much for the quality of the care that they receive or that their most recent care experience was not worth the cost. Based on prior West Health-Gallup research, nearly half (45%) believe that their household pays about the right amount for the care household members receive.

## Poor Perceived Value



These persons report that both their household and Americans generally are paying too much for the quality of the care that they receive and that their most recent care experience was not worth the cost. They are considerably less likely than others to believe that their most recent care experience significantly improved their health.

The low percentage of Americans classified as observing High Perceived Value has remained steady since 2021 and is currently just 6% in 2024. While Americans aged 65 and older are more likely to be in this category than their younger counterparts, even this group barely reaches double digits (12%), underscoring the perceived value deficit found among the American public.

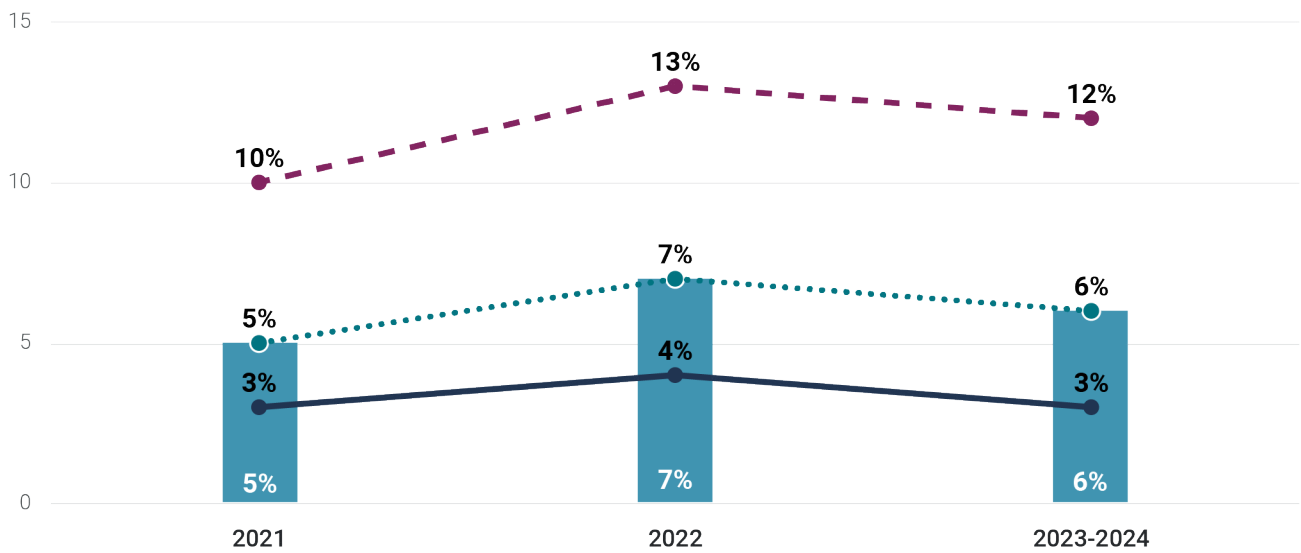
**CHART 2**

**West Health-Gallup Value Index, trended 2021-2024**

The percentage of American adults categorized as perceiving “high value” in the U.S. healthcare system has remained low and flat since 2021.

% High Perceived Value

■ All adults — 18 to 49 ..... 50 to 64 - - - 65 and older



**The percentage of Americans categorized as having Poor Perceived Value has declined since 2021.**

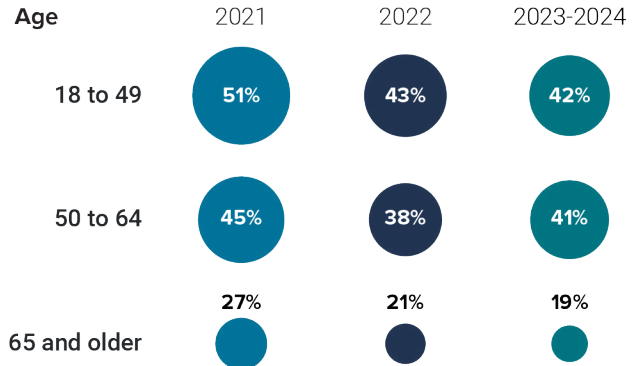
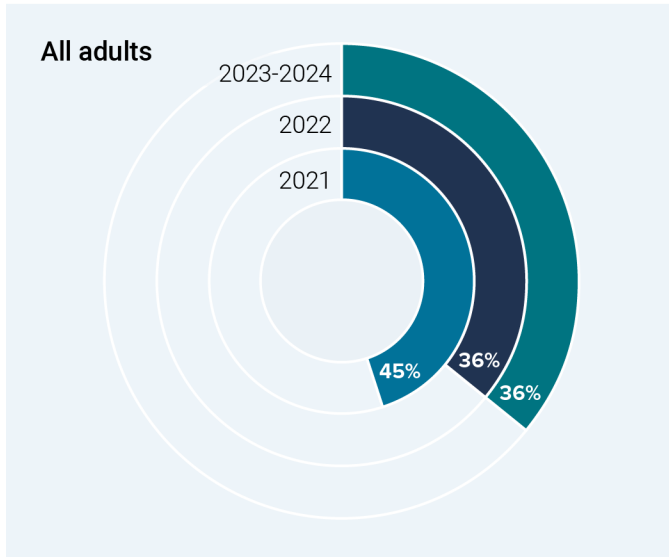
At that time, the COVID-19 pandemic still played a major role in the lives of the public, including a heavy new reliance on telehealth and other remote forms of healthcare that may have harmed the value that people identified. The rate has remained stable since 2022 and is significantly higher among those under the age of 65 (41%) compared with those at or above it (19%). So, while Medicare enrollment improves the value that is observed in the U.S. healthcare system, it does so only partially.

Unlike affordability, there is no gender gap in Poor Perceived Value. Furthermore, low annual household income — which is associated with very elevated Cost Desperate levels — is also associated with lower levels of Poor Perceived Value. Among those in households earning under \$24,000 per year — the group most likely to be on Medicaid — this rate has dropped from 40% in 2021 to 27% today, matching the decline found in the \$24,000 to less than \$48,000 income band. Americans in higher income bands, in turn, are more likely to be categorized as having Poor Perceived Value.



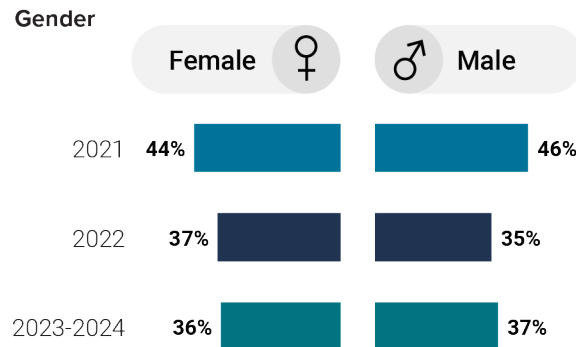
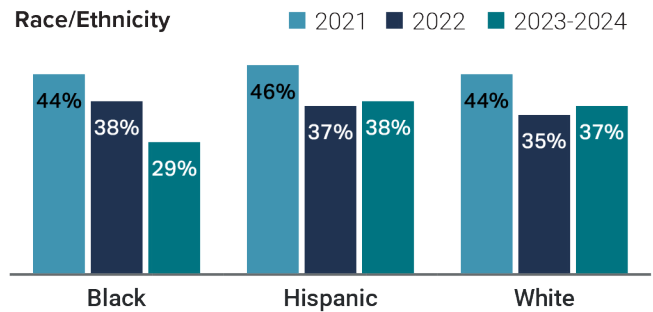
# What type of Americans are most likely to perceive poor value?

Percentage of U.S. adults categorized as having Poor Perceived Value



### Annual household income

	2021	2022	2023-2024
Less than \$24,000	40%	36%	27%
\$24,000 to less than \$48,000	46%	36%	33%
\$48,000 to less than \$90,000	46%	37%	39%
\$90,000 to less than \$120,000	45%	42%	38%
\$120,000 to less than \$180,000	46%	33%	44%
\$180,000 or more	40%	33%	36%



**The perception of value influences how individuals think about voting and access to quality care.**

Based on prior West Health-Gallup research, most in the Poor Perceived Value group (61%) report a political candidate's position on reducing healthcare costs is a major priority in their voting preference. Nearly one-third (30%) report a household member who has had a health problem worsen after postponing care, triple the rate of High Perceived Value respondents.

# Final Comments

## As a nation, fewer Americans are Cost Secure now than at any point since measurement began in 2021.

The daunting cost of healthcare in the U.S. creates a financial burden for tens of millions of Americans, with nearly half categorized as Cost Insecure or in a desperate state when it comes to affording care.

These challenges are particularly acute for those under the age of 65, women, Black and Hispanic adults, and those in households earning under \$48,000 per year, exposing inequities in access to affordable, quality care in the U.S.

Perceptions of poor value, which have marginally improved since 2021, are nevertheless substantial, outweighing perceptions of high value by a six-to-one ratio and leaving an estimated 96 million American adults who observe poor value in the U.S. healthcare system.



# Methodology

Results are based on a survey conducted by both mail (focused on older Americans) and web from Nov. 13, 2023, to Jan. 8, 2024, with 5,149 adults aged 18 and older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia as a part of the [Gallup Panel](#). For results based on these monthly samples of national adults, the margin of sampling error at the 95% confidence level is  $\pm 1.7$  percentage points for response percentages around 50% and is  $\pm 1$  percentage point for response percentages around 10% or 90%, design effect included. For reported age subgroups, the margin of error will be larger, typically ranging from  $\pm 3$  to  $\pm 5$  percentage points.

Gallup weighted the obtained samples to correct for nonresponse. Nonresponse adjustments were made by adjusting the sample to match the national demographics of gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education and region. Demographic weighting targets were based on the most recent Current Population Survey figures for the aged 18 and older U.S. population.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

Learn more about how the [Gallup Panel](#) works.





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