

# Chronic pain ranks well below drug addiction as a major health problem in new poll

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A new national public opinion poll commissioned by Research!America shows only 18% of respondents believe chronic pain is a major health problem, even though a majority of Americans (63%) say they know someone who experienced pain so severe that they sought prescription medicines to treat it. Chronic pain conditions affect about 100 million U.S. adults at a cost of approximately \$600 billion annually in direct medical treatment costs and lost productivity.

Most Americans are concerned about the misuse of pain medication to treat chronic pain. A high percentage (82%) believes that taking [prescription painkillers](#) for long-term, chronic pain could result in addiction, which nearly 50% of Americans describe as a major health problem. An overwhelming majority (85%) are very concerned or somewhat concerned that prescription pain medication can be abused or misused. Indeed, 40% believe that prescription medication abuse and addiction is a major problem in their community.

According to the National Institutes of Health, an estimated 1.9 million people are addicted to [prescription pain relievers](#). The number of unintentional [overdose deaths](#) from prescription pain relievers has quadrupled since 1999, outnumbering those from heroin and cocaine combined. As drug addiction becomes more prevalent, most Americans are split on whether addiction and chronic pain are getting the attention they deserve by medical researchers, elected officials and media.

"We need to better understand addiction," said Research!America

President and CEO Mary Woolley. "We shouldn't shy away from research on new pain treatments based on fears of abuse. The suffering is simply too great. More robust investment in research and the engagement and support of policy makers and [health care providers](#) are essential to developing effective strategies to reduce the prevalence of addiction."

Two-thirds of those polled (66%) were unaware that tamper- and abuse-resistant formulations for some prescription pain medications are now available. These formulations of medications have physical and chemical properties that make them more difficult to abuse; for example, making pills harder to crush to inject or snort.

Other poll highlights:

- 60% say chronic pain tends to be dismissed by doctors and the public.
- More than half (54%) say doctors are not discussing the possibility of developing dependence or addiction to pain medication enough with their patients.
- 52% believe doctors should have limits on the amount and dosage of pain medication they are allowed to prescribe.
- Based on their experience or what they have heard, respondents say they would use the following treatments to try to relieve chronic pain: physical therapy (64%), over-the-counter pain medication (55%), diet or lifestyle change (54%), chiropractor (49%), prescription pain medication (47%), herbal remedies (38%), and acupuncture (36%).
- When asked what percentage of drug overdose deaths involve physician-prescribed pain medication or [prescription medication](#) obtained illegally, responses varied widely. In fact, 75% of pharmaceutical overdose deaths involve an opioid [pain](#)

[medication.](#)

- Only 4% say it's the responsibility of law enforcement to address the prescription drug abuse problem.

The national public opinion poll was conducted online in March 2013 by Zogby Analytics for Research!America. The poll had a sample size of 1,016 with a theoretical sampling error of +/- 3.1%.

**More information:** To view the poll, visit:

[www.researchamerica.org/upload...013painaddiction.pdf](http://www.researchamerica.org/upload...013painaddiction.pdf)

Provided by Research!America

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