

US seniors' health poorest, global survey shows

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(HealthDay)— Seniors in America have more chronic health problems and take more medications than seniors in 10 other industrialized countries do, according to a new global survey. The United States also stood out among the 11 nations surveyed by The Commonwealth Fund for having more seniors struggling to get and afford the health care they need.

For the survey, the researchers collected responses from 15,617 older adults in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Most all of the other countries have some form of universal health insurance, and American seniors have Medicare. Eighty-seven percent of U.S. adults who are 65 and older suffer from at least

one chronic illness, and 68 percent have at least two illnesses, which were the highest rates found. Also, 53 percent of older Americans take at least four medications, another record high, and 21 percent spend at least \$2,000 in yearly out-of-pocket [health care](#) costs, which was second only to Switzerland.

Although the U.S. senior group was the youngest of all the countries in the report, they were also among the sickest: 25 percent of older Americans saw at least four doctors in the past year, second only to Germany at 39 percent. In addition, more Americans (19 percent) said they skipped essential health care because they could not afford it, and 11 percent said they had trouble paying their [medical bills](#). In France, only 3 percent of seniors said they skipped health care because of cost, and in Norway only 1 percent said they had trouble paying medical bills.

"The retirement of baby boomers means pressure on Medicare will intensify," David Blumenthal, M.D., president of The Commonwealth Fund, said during a news briefing Tuesday to announce the study findings, which were published online Nov. 19 in *Health Affairs*. Despite the moderating of [health care costs](#) in recent years, Blumenthal added that "costs are still going up too fast to be sustainable over the long term, and this will be exacerbated by increasing numbers of elderly individuals."

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