

West Virginians say Opioid epidemic most important health issue in the state

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The opioid epidemic is the most important health issue in West Virginia, above obesity, cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and dental disease, according to a state-based public opinion survey commissioned by Research!America. A strong majority of West Virginians (84%) say prescription pain medication abuse and addiction is a major problem in their community, and more than two-thirds (71%) say they know someone who experienced pain so severe they sought prescription medicines to treat it.

When asked about barriers to effectively combating the opioid epidemic, respondents said overprescribing of opioids (70%), lack of coordination between state and federal governments to address the epidemic (49%), lack of access to treatment (45%) and lack of funding for [research](#) and prevention (41%). As for potential solutions, nearly two-thirds (63%) agree that a White House declaration that the opioid epidemic is a national emergency will support local efforts to address the crisis. A federal emergency declaration could expedite access to resources. More than three-quarters of respondents (77%) support increased federal funding for research to better understand and combat the opioid addiction.

A significant percentage of West Virginians (86%) also say it is important for medical records to prominently state whether a patient is recovering from addiction to prevent overprescribing of opioids in the same way they are marked if a patient is allergic to penicillin. And 54% agree that opioid deaths in the state can be reduced by increasing access

to opioid overdose reversal drugs in the state's schools and public facilities such as libraries.

"West Virginia is grappling with a public [health](#) crisis that requires increased support for research and innovative solutions to save lives and revitalize communities hit hard by the epidemic," said Mary Woolley, president and CEO, Research!America. "Both the public and private sector play critical roles in preventing and treating opioid use disorders in the state and nationally."

Currently, the U.S. spends about 5 cents of each health dollar on research to prevent, cure and treat disease and disability. Sixty-one percent of West Virginians say it is not enough, a significantly higher percentage than the U.S. general population (40%). And in terms of jobs and incomes, a majority of West Virginians say spending money on medical research is important to the state's economy (78%). A strong majority agree that it is important for the federal government to support incentives for private sector investment in new treatments and cures (82%), as well as state government support for legislation to encourage private investments in medical research (82%).

West Virginians also agree that federal taxpayer funds should be used to support scientific research at public universities (77%), in addition to state taxpayer funds supporting such research (73%). Respondents also expressed strong support for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education and careers in those fields, with 85% in agreement that the state and federal government should assign a higher priority to improving STEM education and careers.

"West Virginians value a statewide education system that stimulates interest in science and technology to support a 21st Century economy," said Dr. Mary J.C. Hendrix, president, Shepherd University. "With stronger investments in research, we can re-invigorate West Virginia's

workforce and overcome health challenges associated with debilitating diseases in Appalachia and across the state."

Rural health research is important to West Virginians with an overwhelming majority (86%) in support of increased funding for research that focuses on issues important to the delivery of rural medical services, the viability of rural health care facilities, and the health of individuals in rural areas. Similarly, a strong majority (87%) say it is important to conduct research to eliminate health disparities, 14% higher than the U.S. general population, and support for basic scientific research supported by the [federal government](#) that advances the frontiers of knowledge, even if it brings no immediate benefits, is strong - 81% compared to 63% of the U.S. general population. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of the U.S. general population are willing to share personal health information, assuming that the appropriate privacy protections are in place, so public health officials can better track disease, disability and the causes, compared to 50% of West Virginians.

A strong majority (87%) of West Virginians say they value clinical research, often referred to as clinical trials, but only 13% say they or anyone in their family has ever participated in clinical trials. Among the factors that influence West Virginians' decision to participate as a volunteer in a clinical trial: whether they would have medical bills covered if they had an injury from the study (92%); understanding potential risks and benefits (91%); improving their own health (91%); and the opportunity to improve the health of others (91%). Opinions are split as to whether health care services they personally receive are based on the best and most recent research available - 43% said yes, 34% said no and 23% said not sure.

Among other findings:

- A strong majority of West Virginians (89%) say it is important

that the U.S. maintain its role as a world leader in medical research.

- 78% say it is important for the state to be a leader in medical and health research.
- 69% of respondents believe the U.S. government should help fund prevention research to help people make behavioral changes that can help them overcome health threats such as substance abuse, obesity, smoking, hypertension and diabetes.
- 66% say it is important to increase funding for social sciences research to understand aspects of human behavior and the functioning of society, including topics ranging from causes of unemployment to the best ways to help people quit smoking or lose weight.

The survey of 403 West Virginians was conducted by Zogby Analytics for Research!America in September 2017. The margin of error is +/- 4.9 percentage points. To view survey results click [here](#).

Provided by Research!America

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