

# Over 15 million U.S. adults under 65 went without medication in 2021 due to high drug costs, study shows

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An estimated 15.5 million adults under 65 and 2.3 million seniors were unable to pay for at least one doctor-prescribed medication in their

household, according to a new study from West Health and Gallup analyzing the impact of high drug prices on consumers. While affordability of prescription drugs is an issue for all age groups, in a survey conducted in June, younger adults report not filling needed prescriptions at double the rate of the nation's seniors in the prior three months (8% vs. 4%). When asked about skipping pills to cut costs, the divide between age groups held similarly (13% vs. 6%).

The West Health/Gallup study on prescription drug prices is based on findings from four nationally representative polls conducted separately in January, March, April, and June. This comes as federal lawmakers craft a \$3.5 trillion budget package that is expected to include legislation empowering Medicare to negotiate lower drug prices for its beneficiaries, as well as for the more than 150 million Americans enrolled in private plans.

"Regardless of age or insurance type, Americans need help at the pharmacy counter and enabling Medicare to negotiate drug prices is just what the doctor ordered. It is an essential and long overdue policy change that would level the playing field between giant pharmaceutical companies and everyday Americans," said Tim Lash, Chief Strategy Officer for West Health, a family of nonprofit, nonpartisan organizations dedicated to successful aging and lowering healthcare costs.

Overall, 7% of [survey respondents](#) in a June survey said they couldn't afford to fill at least one prescription in their household in the prior three months, unchanged from the 6% measured in March 2021. However, among respondents in lower-income households, the rate nearly doubled from 10% in March to 19% in June, a statistically significant increase. People with [chronic conditions](#) such as diabetes (12%), COPD (12%), and those who are immune compromised (15%) also couldn't afford their prescriptions at almost twice the rate of Americans generally.

Studies have shown that when people living with chronic disease do not maintain their medication regimen, it can lead to a worsening of disease, higher cost care, and premature death.

These experiences likely contribute to why most respondents overwhelmingly support the [federal government](#) taking a bigger role in lowering healthcare costs regardless of [political affiliation](#), racial background, or type of insurance. Nine in 10 Americans believe drug pricing needs to undergo major reform when weighed against maintaining the status quo, and another 82% report that the government is not doing enough to ensure [prescriptions](#) drugs are affordable. And, even when evaluating the impact of lower drug costs on the pharmaceutical industry, by a 4-to-1 margin, Americans show little concern that lower [drug](#) prices will mean less competition and innovation.

"Prescription drugs don't work if you cannot afford them," said Dan Witters, Gallup senior researcher. "Across multiple studies, we are measuring adults from all age, race and ethnic groups, political parties, and income levels are reporting that they are struggling to afford medications. And amidst these reports are strong and consistent sentiment for more government action to rein in costs."

## Methodology

Results are based on four independent surveys conducted by web Jan. 25-31, 2021 (n=4,098), Mar. 15-21, 2021, (n=3,905), Apr. 19-25 (n=3,731), and June 14-20 (n=4,843) with adults, ages 18+, 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 +2.2 percentage points for response percentages around 50% and is +1.3 percentage points for response percentages around 10% or 90%, design effect included. For

reported sub-groups, the margin of error will be larger, typically ranging from  $\pm 3$  to  $\pm 4$  percentage points.

**More information:** To access the survey findings please visit [here](#).

Provided by West Health Institute

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