

Poll: Surprise medical bills pose significant financial burden

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Nearly half (49%) of U.S. adults say worrying about an unexpected medical bill keeps them from seeking care, and a similar proportion (44%) say if they received an unexpected medical bill for \$1,000 they would not have the money to pay for it, according to the findings of a public opinion survey conducted by The Harris Poll on behalf of the American Heart Association, the leading voluntary organization focused on heart and brain health.

These findings reveal that amid the coronavirus pandemic, receiving surprise [medical bills](#) poses a significant financial burden for more than two-thirds (68%) of adults nationwide. The survey also reflects the financial disruption surprise bills cause to those who receive them: Two-thirds (68%) of U.S. adults with [private health insurance](#) have received an unexpected medical [bill](#), and of those, one in three (33%) were not able to pay the bill with money immediately available to them. Among those with private insurance who did not have money available, nearly one in four (23%) say they have yet to pay the bill.

Perhaps as a result, the survey found, a strong majority (81%) of U.S. adults support Congress passing legislation to end surprise medical billing. More than three-quarters (76%) – including 82% of Democrats and 70% of Republicans—say if they knew an elected official worked to end unexpected medical bills, they would be more likely to vote for that elected official.

"Surprise medical bills are a major driver of financial anxiety and disruption for families nationwide that are already straining under the weight of an ongoing pandemic," said Mitchell S. V. Elkind, M.D., M.S., FAAN, FAHA, president of the American Heart Association and professor of neurology and epidemiology at Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons. "For more than a year, Congress has been considering bipartisan legislation to ensure patients aren't stuck with financially devastating bills after seeking care. It is long past time for lawmakers to stop surprise medical bills."

Patients may get a surprise medical bill after unknowingly receiving care from a [health care provider](#), hospital or medical transport company that is outside their insurer's coverage network. The coronavirus pandemic has deepened concerns that patients are receiving care from out-of-network hospitals and providers because of overcrowding at in-network facilities, being surprise billed for COVID-19 tests and treatment, and struggling under the weight of financial pressures during the pandemic's resulting economic crisis.

Surprise medical bills can be in the hundreds, thousands or even tens of thousands of dollars. The American Heart Association is conducting a grassroots advocacy campaign urging patients nationwide to share their experiences with surprise bills, using the hashtag #IWasBilled. The Association also is mobilizing advocates through its nationwide You're the Cure grassroots network to call and email their members of Congress about the

urgent need to stop surprise medical bills.

"A patient facing a medical emergency such as cardiac arrest or stroke should have to focus only on their immediate medical needs—not on whether they'll be able to afford care not covered by insurance," said Nancy Brown, CEO of the American Heart Association. "Americans want Congress to put an end to surprise medical bills, and they need lawmakers to act now."

The Harris Poll conducted the survey online within the United States from Oct. 12-14, 2020 among 2,045 U.S. adults ages 18 and older. Of those, 1,318 had previously received an unexpected medical bill and 977 had private insurance. A summary of the polling results is here.

More information:

[cms.ipressroom.com.s3.amazonaws.com/...
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Provided by American Heart Association

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