

**Contact:** Roy Mitchell, Mississippi Health Advocacy Program, Executive Director  
[roym@mhap.org](mailto:roym@mhap.org)  
Tamara Taylor, Mississippi Health Advocacy Program, Communication Assistant  
[ttaylor@mhap.org](mailto:ttaylor@mhap.org)

## **Majority of Mississippi Residents Struggle to Pay for Healthcare During COVID-19 Pandemic and Believe Elected Officials Should Address the Problems**

Jackson, Miss (December 14, 2020)—Sixty-eight percent of Mississippi adults experienced healthcare affordability problems in the past year, and more than half are worried about affording prescription drugs, according to a new survey by [Altarum’s Healthcare Value Hub](#) in partnership with the [Mississippi Health Advocacy Program](#) and [Health Help Mississippi](#). On top of general healthcare affordability concerns, 60 percent of residents are “worried” or “very worried” about being able to afford treatment for COVID-19 should they or someone in their family contract the virus. Worry about becoming ill from the virus and associated affordability concerns tops other concerns like the decreased value of retirement savings and job loss.

Mississippians strongly support legislative or government action to rein in high and rising healthcare costs during the COVID-19 pandemic—regardless of their political affiliation. Nearly two out of three state residents said healthcare, including skyrocketing drug prices, is the top issue they want their elected leaders to address—surpassing other issues like the economy and taxes.

“Amidst the COVID-19 crisis, Mississippi residents are critically concerned about healthcare affordability and believe their elected officials should act to address these problems. We found that even when respondents got the care they needed, two out of five Mississippi adults (42%) struggled to pay the resulting bill,” said Sabah Bhatnagar, co-deputy director of Altarum’s Healthcare Value Hub. “Solutions received widespread support across party lines.”

The findings come from [Altarum’s Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey](#) (CHESS), which has been fielded in several states to understand consumer concerns on a wide range of health system issues, including confidence using the health system, healthcare financial burdens and health system reforms. The web panel survey elicited responses from 945 residents age 18 and older from May 7 to June 9.

The survey reveals the healthcare affordability burdens of Mississippians, with 36 percent of uninsured respondents stating “too expensive” as the reason for not having coverage, 58 percent encountering one or more cost-related barriers to getting healthcare, and 42 percent struggling to pay their medical bills.

The cost of prescription drugs is also a top concern for Mississippians, according to the survey. More than half reported being “somewhat worried” or “very worried” about affording drugs.

Unsurprisingly, households making less than \$50,000 per year were almost twice as worried about the cost of medications than those making more than \$100,000 a year, though these concerns were prevalent at all income levels.

Many Mississippi residents also reported that the cost of prescription drugs was a financial hardship, with 33 percent reporting that they (or someone in their household) have taken actions such as not filling a prescription, cutting pills in half, or skipping doses of medicine to save money. Sixty-eight percent stated that high healthcare costs are due to drug companies charging too much.

Mississippi residents reported high levels of worry about affording healthcare in the future, with 78 percent being “worried” or “very worried,” particularly regarding the cost of health insurance. While residents from all Mississippi regions were “worried” or “very worried” about affording healthcare in the future, the Delta and Central regions of Mississippi reported the most significant levels of worry, at approximately 80 percent compared to 75 percent in the Southeast and 77 percent in the Northeast.

Dissatisfaction with the health system is widespread and bipartisan. The survey showed that a large majority of Mississippians (62 percent) feel the system needs to change. Respondents across the political spectrum see the government as a key driver in addressing healthcare affordability, with 47 percent stating that government should address high healthcare costs, including prescription drug costs. Residents endorsed several strategies to tackle healthcare costs—84 percent supported expanding health insurance options so that everyone can afford quality coverage.

In addition to expanding health insurance options, an overwhelming majority of respondents indicated support for the following strategies to tackle the cost: ensuring the cost of needed vaccines are affordable for all; showing what a fair price would be for specific procedures; and making it easy to switch insurers if a health plan drops your doctor.

“Thousands of Mississippians struggle with diabetes, hypertension, and other chronic diseases and are not getting the treatment they desperately need because they are unable to access affordable health insurance,” said Roy Mitchell, executive director of MHAP. “This survey underscores what we already know about the healthcare needs and concerns of people in communities across our state. No family should have to choose between putting food on the table and seeking medical care. Our state’s future depends on Mississippi leaders stepping up and making the necessary policy changes to make health care more accessible for all people in our state.”

The complete data briefs can be found here: [www.healthhelpms.org/chesreport](http://www.healthhelpms.org/chesreport).

### **About the Mississippi Health Advocacy Program**

The Mississippi Health Advocacy Program (MHAP) has been a convener or integral part of all major consumer health policies in Mississippi since its inception over 28 years ago. By working



within partnerships and building consensus about health policy issues, MHAP continues to shape the debate on issues that affect low-income families in Mississippi, with a specific focus on Medicaid education and advocacy. To learn more about our work, read our history and issues pages.

### **About Health Help Mississippi**

Health Help Mississippi (HHM) is a non-profit consumer assistance program, a part of the Mississippi Health Advocacy Program. Health Help is committed to providing assistance, resources, and health education to individuals and families. HHM is designed to serve those who need assistance with healthcare coverage through enrollment in Medicaid, CHIP, and the Health Insurance Marketplace, claims, denials, and disputes. Those needing help can call the statewide toll-free number, 1-877-314-3843 or visit [healthhelpms.org](http://healthhelpms.org) for more information.

### **About Altarum's Healthcare Value Hub**

With support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Healthcare Value Hub provides free, timely information about the policies and practices that address high healthcare costs and poor quality, bringing better value to consumers. The Hub is part of Altarum, a nonprofit organization that creates and implements solutions to advance health among vulnerable and publicly insured populations. More information at: [www.healthcarevaluehub.org](http://www.healthcarevaluehub.org).

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