

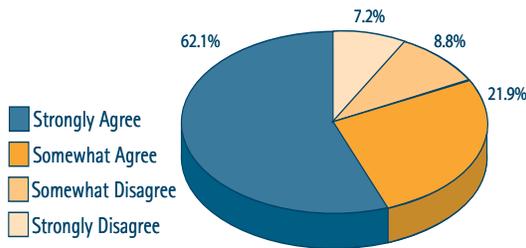


HealthVoices

Georgians Speak Out on Health Care Coverage and Prevention

Fall 2003

Everyone Should Have the Same Amount and Same Quality of Health Care



"The great majority of Georgians believe that, regardless of income, job or insurance status, the same amount and same quality of health care should be available, accessible and affordable to all Georgians."

Four out of five Georgians support the principle that everyone should have access to the same amount and same quality of health care. However, over one million Georgians have no health insurance, and there is no consensus on how to provide coverage for Georgians who are uninsured.¹

In its role as a catalyst for better health and health care, Healthcare Georgia Foundation recently conducted a statewide poll to learn Georgians' views on their health insurance and preventive services. The findings reveal gaps between Georgians' aspirations and current realities, and point to potential solutions.

The findings from our Survey of 1,200 Georgia residents indicate that those without health care coverage, or who have little or no resources to buy coverage, receive fewer preventive and diagnostic services. Nearly half of those without health insurance have family incomes of \$25,000 or less.

Georgians without health care coverage are more likely to be severely ill when diagnosed and they are also more likely to experience a greater burden of anxiety and frequent mental distress.

These findings, summarized below, highlight the need for Georgia's community leaders and concerned citizens to work together to increase access to affordable, quality health care and build healthier communities for all Georgians.

Findings

Access to Health Care

Q. What percent of Georgia residents have health care coverage?

About 88.2% of Georgians interviewed said they have health care insurance. However, 7.7% indicated that their coverage did not extend to everyone in the household.

This means that, every day, over one million Georgians are uninsured – a number that exceeds the combined populations of the cities of Savannah, Augusta, Macon,

Athens, Albany and Rome.

Of those without health insurance, 236,000 (23.9%) lost their coverage in the past six months. Over 22% of uninsured Georgians have been without coverage for five or more years. These results are consistent with the findings of the Georgia State Planning Grant for the Uninsured.²



A Statewide Poll of Georgians

Q. What are the main reasons for not having health care coverage?

Low income appears to be the most persistent factor. Among those without health care coverage, 44.7% (about 442,000 Georgians) have family incomes of less than \$25,000. Furthermore, the three top reasons given for being uninsured were: “can’t afford premiums” (31.5%); “lost job or changed employer” (27.7%); “employer didn’t offer or stopped coverage” (12.3%).

Q. Are insured Georgians satisfied with their coverage?

Among the insured, 82.4% report being satisfied. Those dissatisfied say that their current coverage is: “too expensive” (31.5%); “wanted a more comprehensive plan” (11.8%); or “treatment needed not covered” (10.1%).

Q. What do Georgians think about the idea of making health care available to everyone?

The great majority of Georgians believe that the same amount and same quality of health care should be available and accessible to all Georgia residents (84% “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree” that everyone, regardless of income, job, or insurance status, has the right to health care). Furthermore, 81.4% also agree that government should take steps to assure that all residents have basic health insurance and 82.5% believe that employers should be required to provide health insurance.

Prevention

Q. In the context of health care coverage, what do Georgians have to say about prevention?

When asked to weigh the balance of money spent for care of the sick vs. providing preventive services, nearly one-half of those polled (48.3%) indicated that the balance was not right. When asked how to correct this imbalance, over half of Georgians (53.2%) said that a greater share of community health resources should be spent preventing illness and promoting health. Almost 90% “strongly support” or “somewhat support” the need to expand neighborhood health clinics and community health centers.

Quality of Life

Q. Are there any differences in health and quality of life between those with or without health care insurance?

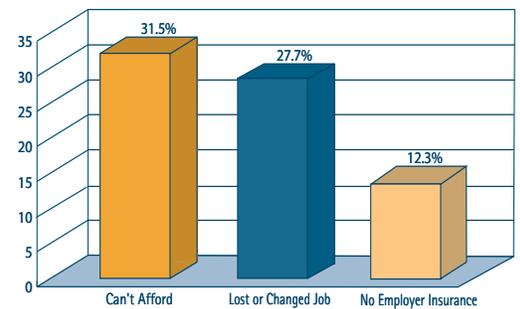
Respondents were asked about their quality of life, as measured by the number of days in the past month they perceived to be “not good” for either physical or mental health reasons. Georgians without coverage were twice as likely to report having 14 or more mental health days in the previous month that were “not good” than those with health insurance. Studies show that “frequent mental distress” is associated with several factors which impair quality of life including being unable to work and being at increased risk of disease and disability.

Race/Ethnicity and Income

Q. Is race/ethnicity associated with health care coverage?

Yes, 17.4% of non-Whites do not have health care coverage, compared with 9.9% of White respondents in this poll. Other surveys, including the 2002 Current Population Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau, have shown that Hispanics are

Why Georgians Are Uninsured



less likely than non-Hispanic Whites to be covered by health insurance.³ Since income is a critical factor in whether one has health care coverage, disparity in income for different racial/ethnic groups is an important factor in differences in health care coverage.

Q. Income was a factor in health care coverage; is it also related to quality of life?

The poll results confirm what other studies have consistently demonstrated: as income diminishes, so does perceived quality of life. Among Georgians who have experienced 14 or more physical health days in the past month that were “not good,” 37.4% report incomes of less than \$25,000. Among those who indicated having 14 or more mental health days in the past month that were “not good,” 34.0% reported having incomes of less than \$25,000.

Healthy Communities

Q. Do findings from the poll reveal other factors that influence the quality of life of Georgians?

Yes. The results clearly support the concept that health and quality of life



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are influenced by Georgians' perceived sense of community. Those who perceived their communities to be either "excellent" or "good" places to raise a family, to get a good job, to live safely (free of crime), and promote health and well-being of residents, consistently reported higher levels of quality of life as indicated by the number of physical and mental health days that were good.

Conversely, for respondents who perceived their communities to be a "fair" or "poor" place to raise a family, 63% experienced 8 to 30 physical health days that were "not good" during the previous 30 days compared with only 24.2% of those who perceived their communities to be either "excellent" or "good" places to raise a family.

Financing

Q. What are Georgians' opinions about raising revenue to meet health needs?

Most Georgians favor increasing state taxes on tobacco products (78%) and alcoholic beverages (76.6%) as a means to support improvements in community health programs. This perspective holds true for respondents regardless of age, ethnicity, sex, income, level of education, or whether they live in rural or urban areas.

By contrast, 54.8% of Georgians oppose an increase in sales tax and 77.1% oppose increasing local taxes on residential or business property to enhance community health programs.

Conclusions

Healthcare Georgia Foundation conducted this poll to inform the development of health policies and programs grounded in the experiences and values of Georgia residents. The findings highlight three conclusions:

- Georgians strongly believe that everyone should have access to the same amount and same quality of health care and that government should take steps to assure that all Georgia residents have basic health insurance.
- Georgians believe that there should be a greater investment in prevention and are willing to increase taxes on tobacco and alcohol products to support expanded community health programs.
- Living in a community that is safe, provides good jobs, promotes health and is a good place to raise a family makes a difference in the health and quality of life for Georgians.

These findings mean that business as usual is no longer an option. Policymakers, business leaders, the philanthropic community, health professionals, health advocates and community leaders have an obligation to come together to expand access to health care and advance the health of all Georgians. With the involvement of an informed citizenry, community leaders can develop viable options for providing access to affordable, quality health care for all Georgians, as well as increasing Georgia's investment in prevention and building communities that enhance good health.

1 2003 Access to Coverage and Prevention Survey, available at www.healthcaregeorgia.org, Healthcare Georgia Foundation, October 2003.

2 Georgia State Planning Grant for the Uninsured, available at www.insuringgeorgia.org. Georgia Health Policy Center, Georgia State University, 2003.

3 Mills, R.J., and Bhandari, S., Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2002, Current Population Reports, U.S. Census Bureau, Department of Commerce, September 2003.

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The Survey

The Survey Research Center at the University of Georgia conducted the 2003 Access to Coverage and Prevention Survey with a grant from Healthcare Georgia Foundation. Data were generated from a telephone interview of a RDD (Random Digit Dial) probability sample of 1,200 Georgia residents, 18 years or older, conducted between March 6th and May 16th, 2003. The purpose of the survey was to assess perceptions of Georgia residents about selected issues regarding access to health care and prevention. Estimates based on a sample of this size are subject to a sampling margin of error of +/- 2.8% at the 95% confidence interval. Sampling error is the probable difference in results between interviewing a sample of the population of adult Georgians versus interviewing the entire population of adults in Georgia. Sample surveys are subject to other sources of error such as non-response error and error associated with the wording of questionnaire items. The response rate for the study was 42.4% of those invited to participate. The questionnaire and survey results can be found at www.healthcaregeorgia.org.

Healthcare Georgia Foundation is a statewide, private independent foundation whose mission is to advance the health of all Georgians and to expand access to affordable, quality healthcare for underserved individuals and communities.

Healthcare Georgia Foundation is a catalyst for better health and health care in Georgia. Through strategic grantmaking, Healthcare Georgia Foundation supports organizations that drive positive change; promotes programs that improve health and health care among underserved individuals and communities; and connects people, partners, and resources across Georgia.

HealthVoices is published periodically by Healthcare Georgia Foundation as an educational service to Georgians interested in health policy.

HealthVoices is available online at www.healthcaregeorgia.org. For further information, please contact Martha Katz, Director of Health Policy, 404.653.0990 or mkatz@healthcaregeorgia.org.

