

# KAISER PUBLIC OPINION SPOTLIGHT

*Kaiser Public Opinion Spotlights provide in-depth analysis of public opinion on a variety of health care and health policy topics. Each Spotlight uses public opinion data from Kaiser surveys and other sources to examine current views and trends.*

*Updated: June 2004*

## **Americans' Views of Disability**

A large majority of the public (82%) believes that life has gotten better for people with disabilities in the last fifty years. However, six in ten adults say that people with disabilities have too little influence in our society today, compared with about a third (34%) who say these people have the right amount of influence, and 3% who say they have too much influence. In addition, about two-thirds (65%) say there is a lot or some discrimination against people with disabilities in this country today, and four in ten say that our health care system very or somewhat often treats people unfairly based on physical disability.

The public is generally supportive of policy measures to help people with disabilities, but these reforms are not usually at the top of the list of competing health priorities. More than nine in ten say they would strongly or somewhat support various health reforms related to funding for people with disabilities, including government funding for long-term care insurance and volunteer organizations that help those who need ongoing care, and tax breaks for people who provide unpaid care to disabled family members. Three-quarters say that helping families with the cost of long-term care for elderly or disabled family members is a very important issue for the President and Congress to deal with. However, when asked to choose the most important priority from a list of health care issues, about one in ten (11%) choose this as the most important, ranking behind lowering the cost of health insurance (25%), increasing the number of Americans covered by insurance (21%), and lowering the cost of prescription drugs (15%).

## **Health Care Experiences of Non-elderly People With Disabilities**

Not surprisingly, people with disabilities report fairly heavy use of health care services. Nine in ten non-elderly adults with disabilities say that they have been to a doctor's office or clinic at least once in the last six months, including about one in five (19%) who report more than ten doctor visits. In addition, one-third (33%) say they have been to an emergency room at least once in the last six months, and nearly nine in ten (88%) say they are currently taking prescription drugs.

Many non-elderly adults with disabilities report having trouble accessing and paying for health care. A quarter say that they have had trouble finding a doctor who understands their disability in the last year; one in six say that a doctor would not accept their health insurance; and significant minorities say they have had serious problems paying for certain health care services in the past year, including prescription drugs (30%), dental care (29%), doctor visits (22%), hospital care

(15%), medical equipment (12%), home care services (12%), and mental health care (11%).

Large majorities of non-elderly people with disabilities say that a variety of potential policy priorities are very important for the government to work on. When asked to choose the most important policy priority, four in ten (41%) say that improving prescription drug coverage for people with disabilities is the most important, followed by about a quarter (26%) who say the most important priority should be making it easier for people with disabilities to work and keep their health and disability benefits.

Note: while this last section includes a brief summary of survey data that show some of the experiences of the people with disabilities, it is not a comprehensive analysis of the problems people with disabilities face in accessing care. For more resources from the Medicare Policy Project, see the following reports:

The Role of Health Coverage for People with Disabilities, December 2003

<http://www.kff.org/medicare/121203package.cfm>

Medicaid's Role for People with Disabilities, October 2003

<http://www.kff.org/medicaid/4027.cfm>

Kaiser/NewsHour Survey on Nursing Homes, October 2001

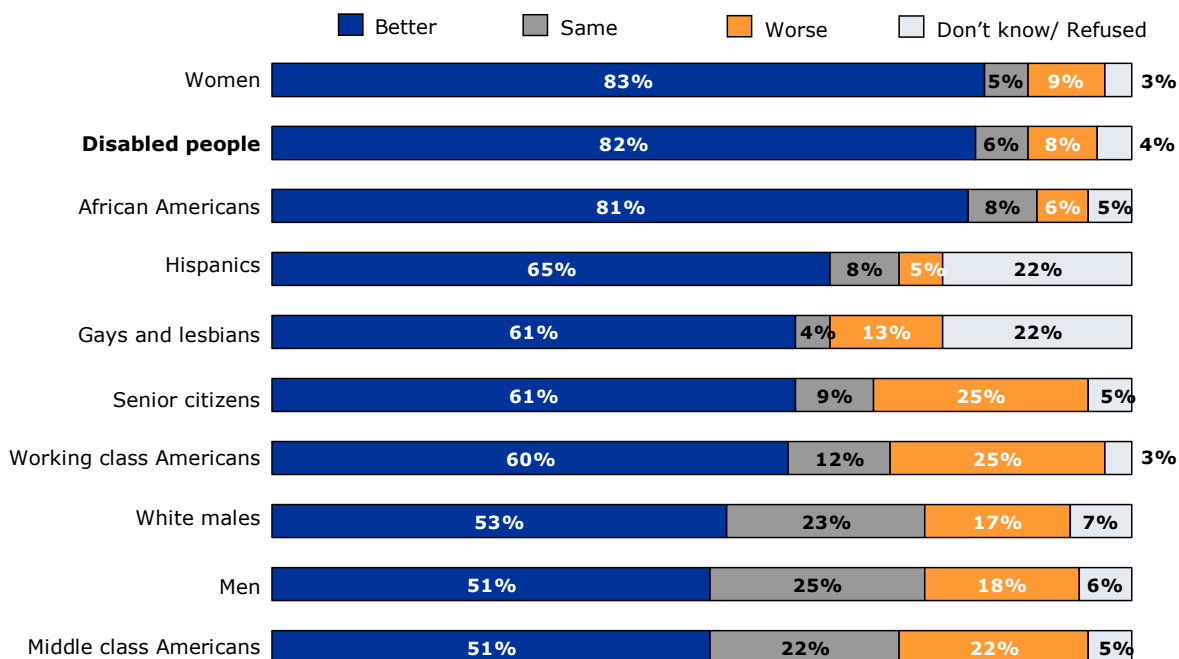
<http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/103101pkg.cfm>

## 1. Perceived Change in Quality of Life for People With Disabilities in the Last 50 Years

More than eight in ten adults (82%) think that life has gotten better for people with disabilities since around 1950, while around one in twenty (6%) say it is about the same, and 8% say it has gotten worse. While majorities think that life has gotten better for a variety of groups of Americans in the last 50 years, the share who say life has gotten better for people with disabilities, women, and African Americans is higher than the share who say their have been improvements for other demographic groups.

### Change in Perceived Quality of Life of People With Disabilities in the Last 50 Years

Now I'm going to read a list of some groups of Americans. For each one, please tell me whether life has gotten better or worse since around 1950?



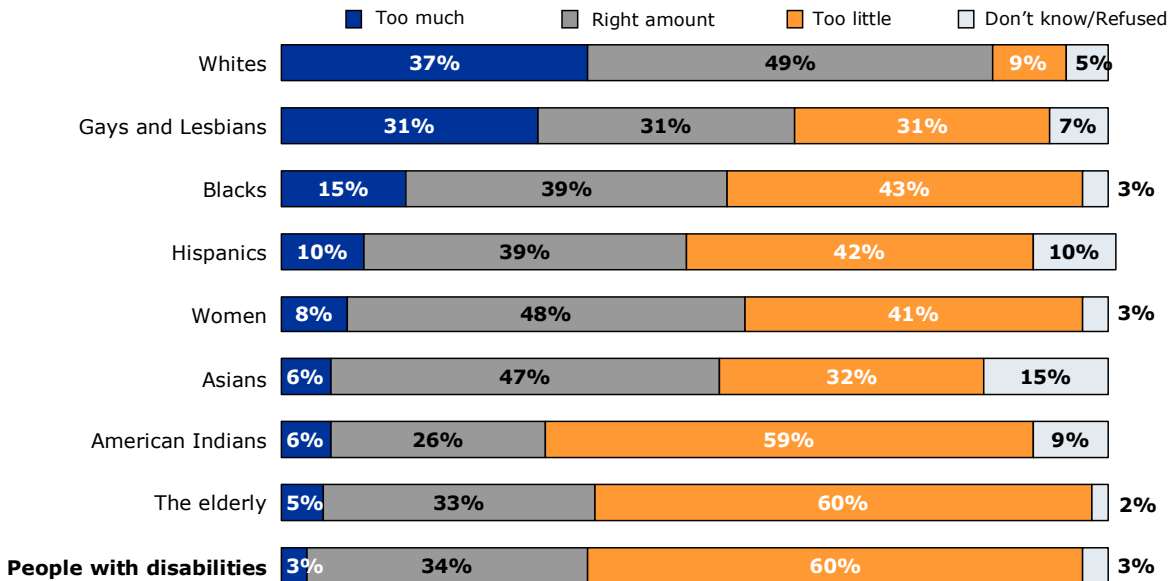
Source: Pew Research Center, *People & The Press 1999 Millennium Survey* (conducted Apr. 6- May 6, 1999)

## 2. Influence of People with Disabilities

Six in ten adults say that people with disabilities have too little influence in our society today, compared with about a third (34%) who say these people have the right amount of influence, and 3% who say they have too much influence. Among a list of different racial and other demographic groups, the public is most likely to say that people with disabilities, the elderly, and American Indians have too little influence.

### Influence of People With Disabilities

Do you feel that the following groups have too much influence, too little influence, or the right amount of influence in our society today?



Source: National Conference for Community and Justice *Taking America's Pulse II Survey* (conducted Jan 20-Mar 19, 2000)

### 3. Perception of Discrimination Based on Disability

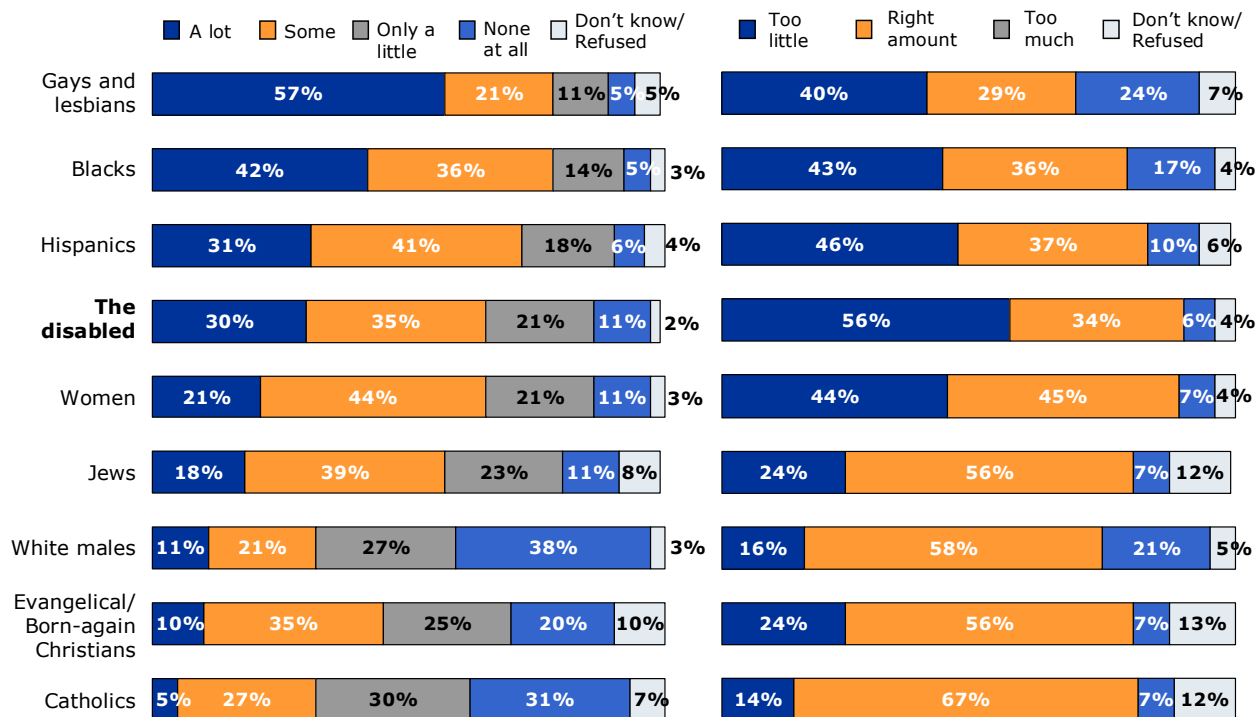
Three in ten adults say they think there is a lot of discrimination against people with disabilities in the U.S., and an additional 35% say there is some discrimination. This is lower than the share who say there is a lot of discrimination against gays and lesbians, blacks, and Hispanics, but higher than the share who say there is a lot of discrimination against women, white males, and various religious groups.

A majority (56%) say that the government now does too little to protect the disabled from discrimination, while about a third (34%) say the government is doing the right amount. Just 6% say they think the government now does too much to protect the disabled from discrimination.

#### Perception of Discrimination Based on Disability

How much prejudice and discrimination do you think there is against each of the following groups -- a lot, some, only a little or none at all?

Do you think the government is doing too much, too little, or about the right amount to protect each of these groups from prejudice and discrimination?



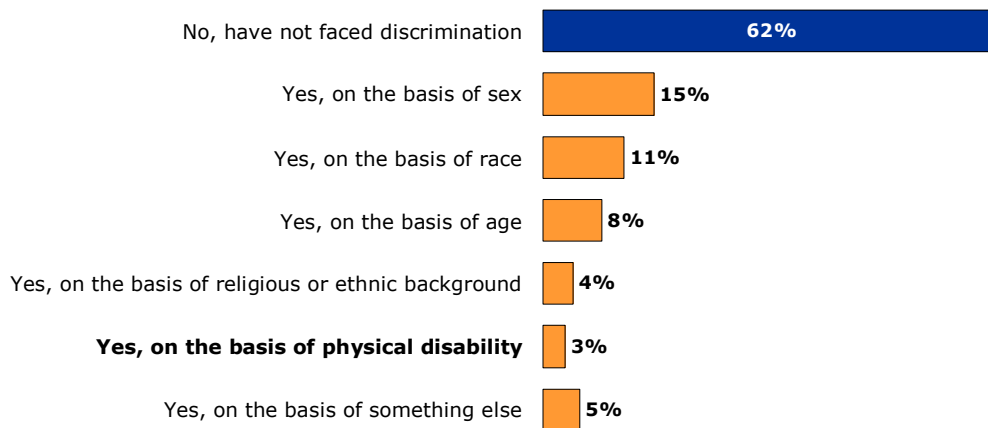
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Views on Issues and Policies Related to Sexual Orientation Survey* (conducted Feb 7-Sep 4, 2000)

## 4. Reported Personal Experience With Discrimination Based on Disability

Nearly four in ten adults (38%) say they have personally faced some kind of discrimination in the job market, and most of those who report discrimination say that it was on the basis of sex (15%), race (11%), or age (8%). Fewer say they have faced job-related discrimination on the basis of religious or ethnic background (4%) or a physical disability (3%).

### Reported Personal Experience With Discrimination Based on Disability

Have you personally faced discrimination in the job market? (If yes, ask:) Was that discrimination based on sex, race, age, religious or ethnic background, physical disability, or something else?\*



\*Note: Adds to more than 100% due to multiple responses

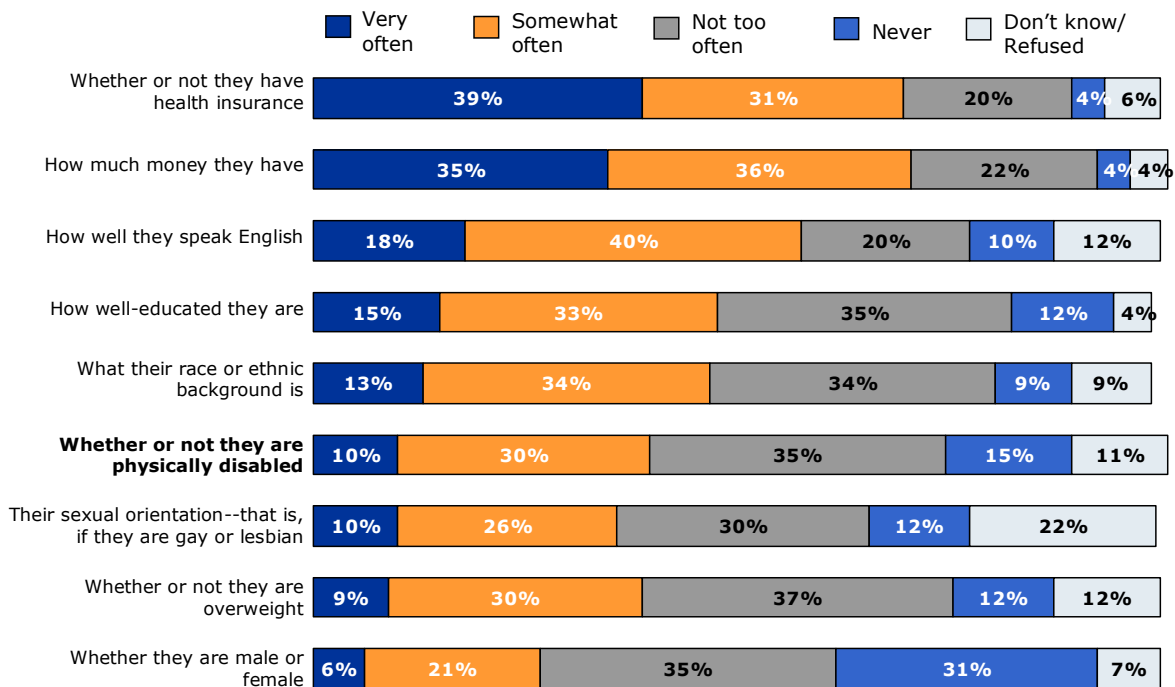
Source: NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll (conducted June 14-18, 2000)

## 5. Perceived Treatment of People with Disabilities in the Health Care System

Four in ten (40%) say that our health care system very or somewhat often treats people unfairly based on whether or not they are physically disabled. The public is more likely to think that people are unfairly treated by the health care system based on whether or not they have insurance (70% say very or somewhat often), their income (71%), their English ability (58%), education (48%), and race (47%).

### Perceived Treatment of People With Disabilities in the Health Care System

Generally speaking, how often do you think our health care system treats people unfairly based on...?



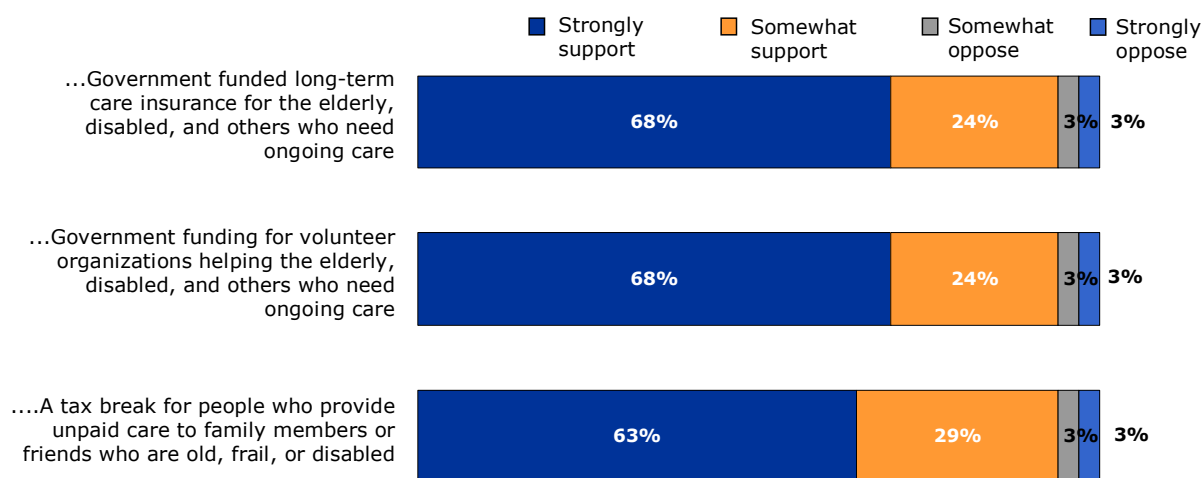
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Race, Ethnicity and Medical Care Survey* (conducted Jul. 7- Sep. 19, 1999)

## 6. Support for Government Health Reforms Related to People With Disabilities

Large majorities say they would support various health reforms related to funding for people with disabilities, including about two-thirds who say they would strongly support such measures. These measures include government funding for long-term care insurance (68% strongly support, 24% somewhat support), government funding for volunteer organizations that help those who need ongoing care (68% strongly support, 24% somewhat support), and tax breaks for people who provide unpaid care to disabled family members (63% strongly support, 29% somewhat support).

### Support for Government Health Care Reforms Related to People With Disabilities

I'm going to read a list of proposed health reforms that might be passed by Congress. For each, please indicate if you would strongly support it, somewhat support it, somewhat oppose it, or strongly oppose it...



Note: Don't know responses not shown

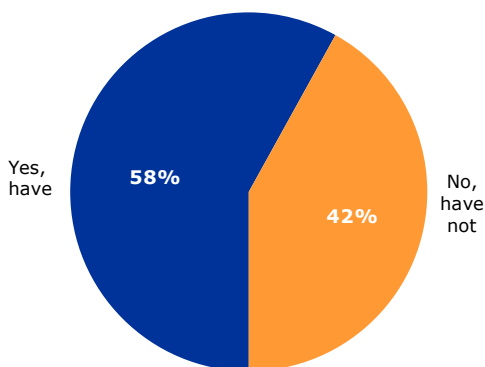
Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Johns Hopkins University Partnership, *Chronic Illness and Caregiving Survey* (conducted Mar. 17-Nov. 22, 2000)

## 7. Knowledge of the Americans with Disabilities Act

Over half the public (58%) say they have heard, seen, or read anything about the Americans with Disabilities Act. When read different provisions of the act, large majorities say they support each one.

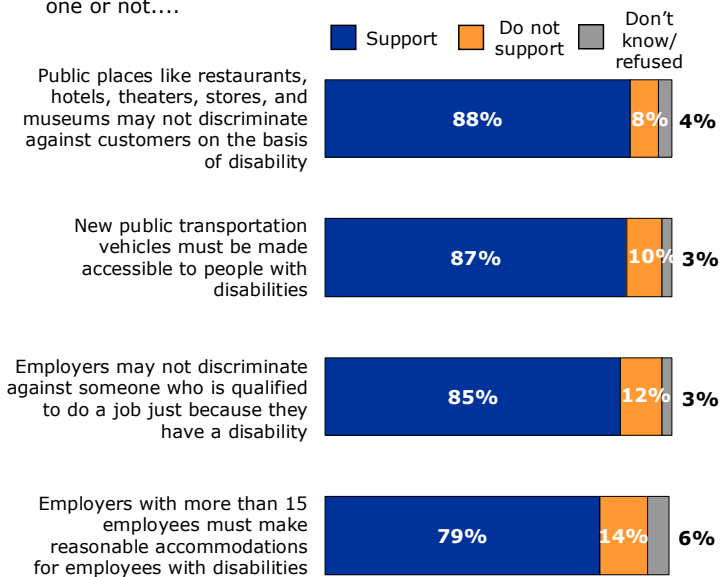
### Knowledge About the Americans With Disabilities Act

Have you seen, read or heard anything about a law called the Americans with Disabilities Act, which helps, supports and protects people with disabilities, or not?



Source: Harris Poll (conducted Jun 10-15, 2003)

Let me read you some key provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act and let me know whether you support each one or not....



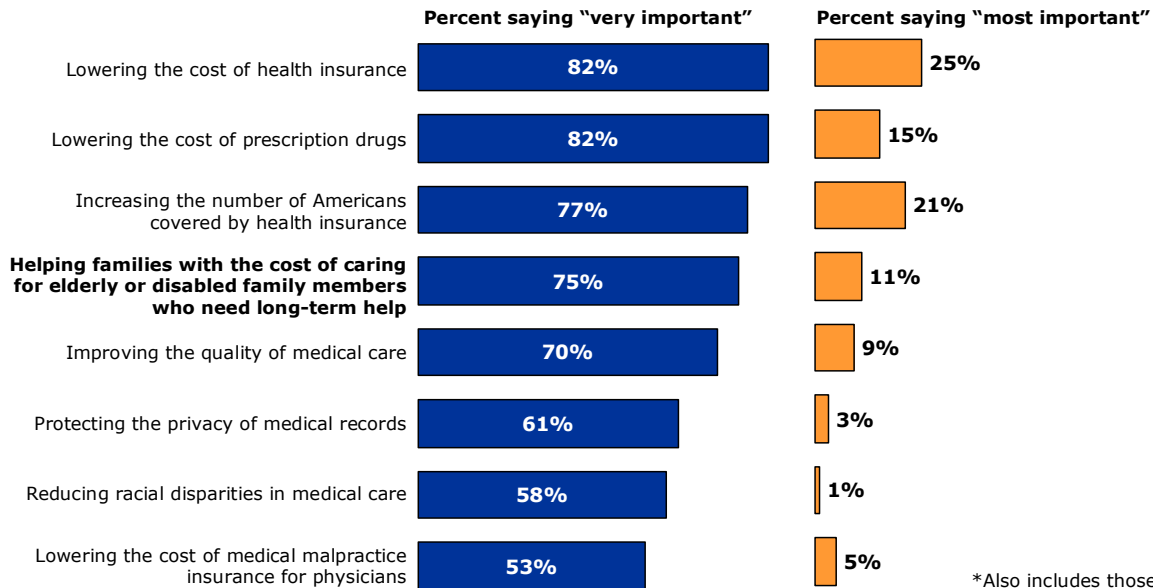
## 8. Ranking of Long-Term Care for People with Disabilities As a Priority for Government

Three-quarters of the public say that helping families with the cost of long-term care for elderly or disabled family members is a very important issue for the President and Congress to deal with. However, when asked to choose the most important priority from a list of health care issues, about one in ten (11%) choose this as the most important, ranking behind lowering the cost of health insurance (25%), increasing the number of Americans covered by insurance (21%), and lowering the cost of prescription drugs (15%).

### Ranking of Long-term Care for People With Disabilities As a Priority for Government

Now, I'm going to read you some different health care issues. As I read each one, please tell me how important you think it is for the President and Congress to deal with this issue – very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not important at all.

When forced to choose... Which of the following issues you say are very important do you think is **most** important?\*



\*Also includes those who named only one issue as "very important"

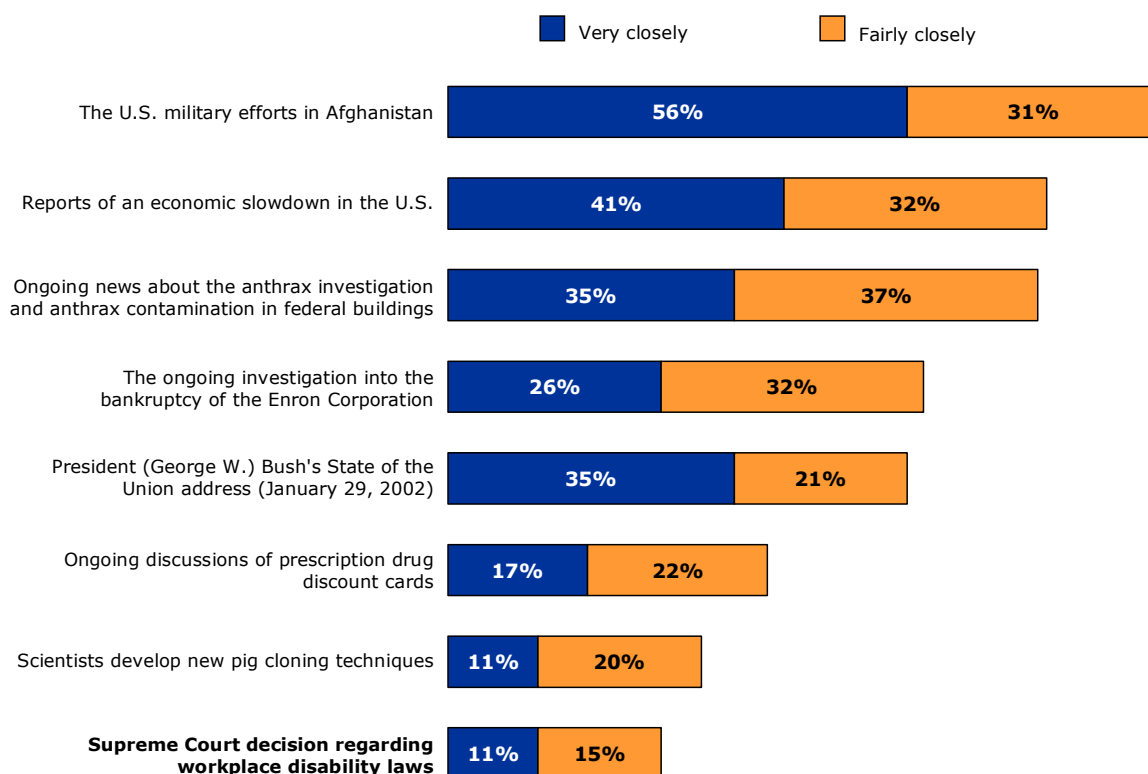
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted Feb. 5-8, 2004)

## 9. Attention to News About Workplace Disability Laws

In January 2002, a Supreme Court decision regarding workplace disability laws was in the news. About one in ten adults (11%) said they followed this story very closely, and another 15% said they followed it somewhat closely. Among a list of breaking health news stories that month, the story about workplace disability laws was followed closely by the smallest share of the public.

### Attention to News About Workplace Disability Laws

Tell me if you happened to follow this news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely...



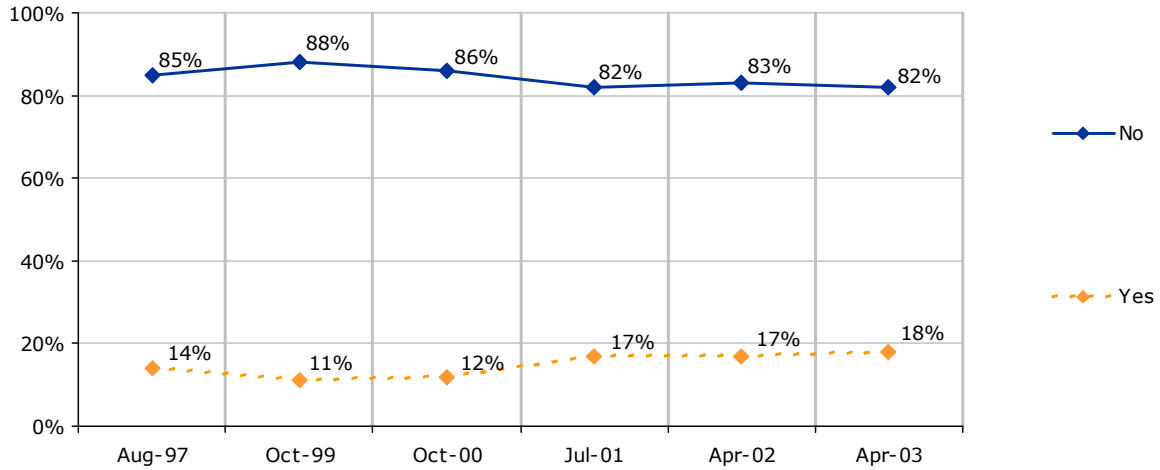
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health *Health News Index* (conducted Jan 31- Feb 3, 2002)

## 10. Reported Personal Experience with Disability

About one in six adults say that some disability, handicap, or chronic disease keeps them from participating fully in school, housework, or other activities.

### Reported Personal Experience With Disability

Does any disability, handicap, or chronic disease keep you from participating fully in work, school, housework, or other activities, or not?



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report*

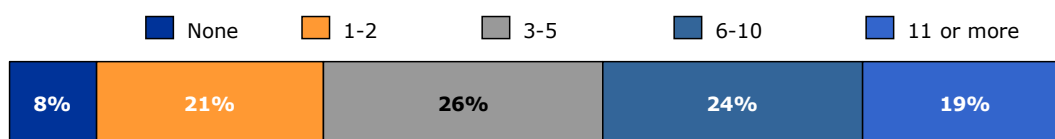
## SELECTED FINDINGS AMONG NON-ELDERLY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

### 11. Utilization of Selected Health Services Among Non-Elderly People with Disabilities

Not surprisingly, people with disabilities report fairly heavy use of health care services. Nine in ten non-elderly adults with disabilities say that they have been to a doctor's office or clinic at least once in the last six months, including about one in five (19%) who report more than ten doctor visits. In addition, fully one-third (33%) say they have been to an emergency room at least once in the last six months, and nearly nine in ten (88%) say they are currently taking prescription drugs.

#### Utilization of Selected Health Services Among Non-Elderly People with Disabilities

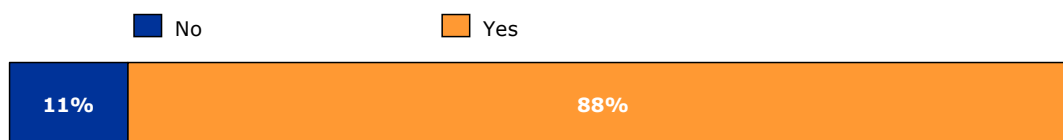
During the last 6 months, how many times have you been to a doctor's office or clinic for your own medical care not including a hospital emergency room?



During the last 6 months, how many times have you been to an emergency room at a hospital for your own medical care?



Do you currently take any prescription drugs?



Note: Don't know responses not shown

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Survey of People with Disabilities* (conducted Jan. 9, 2002 – Feb. 11, 2003 among non-elderly adults ages 18-64 with permanent physical and/or mental disabilities)

## 12. Reported Problems Accessing Health Care Among Non-Elderly People with Disabilities

A quarter of non-elderly adults with disabilities report that they have had trouble finding a doctor who understands their disability in the last year, and another one in six (17%) say that a doctor would not accept their health insurance.

### Reported Problems Accessing Care Among Non-elderly People With Disabilities

During the last 12 months, was there a time when you had problems finding a doctor who understands your disability or how to treat it?



During the last 12 months, was there a time when you were told that a doctor wouldn't take your health insurance?



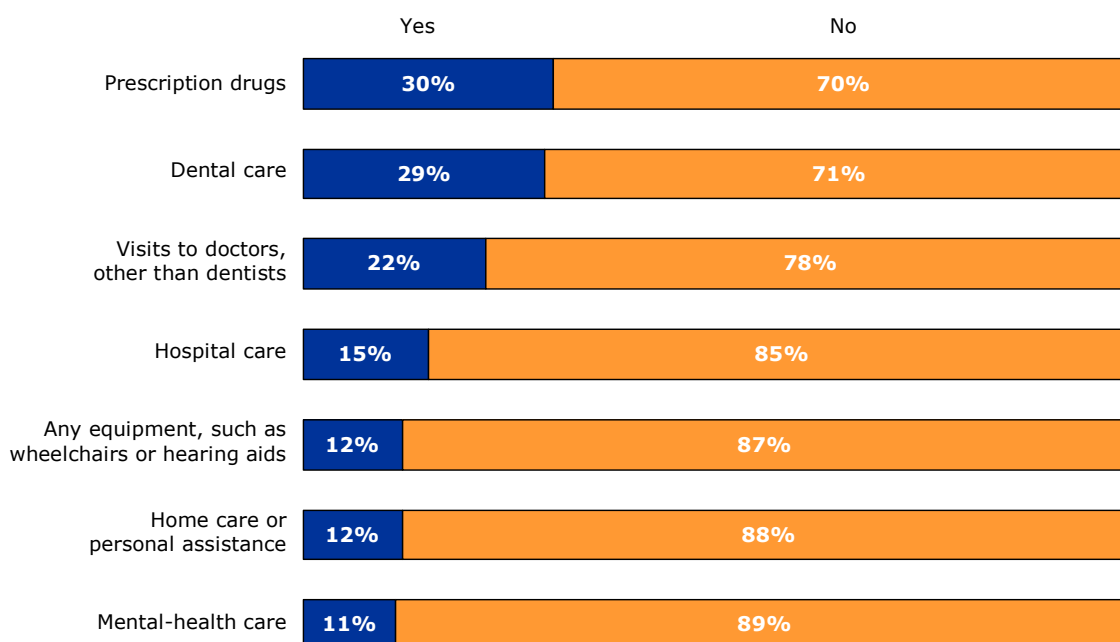
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Survey of People with Disabilities* (conducted Jan. 9, 2002 – Feb. 11, 2003 among non-elderly adults ages 18-64 with permanent physical and/or mental disabilities)

### 13. Reported Problems Paying for Selected Health Care Services Among Non-elderly People With Disabilities

Significant minorities of non-elderly adults with disabilities say they have had serious problems paying for certain health care services in the past year, including prescription drugs (30%), dental care (29%), doctor visits (22%), hospital care (15%), medical equipment (12%), home care services (12%), and mental health care (11%).

#### Reported Problems Paying for Selected Health Care Services Among Non-elderly People With Disabilities

In the past 12 months, have you had a SERIOUS problem paying for (INSERT ITEM) that you felt you needed?



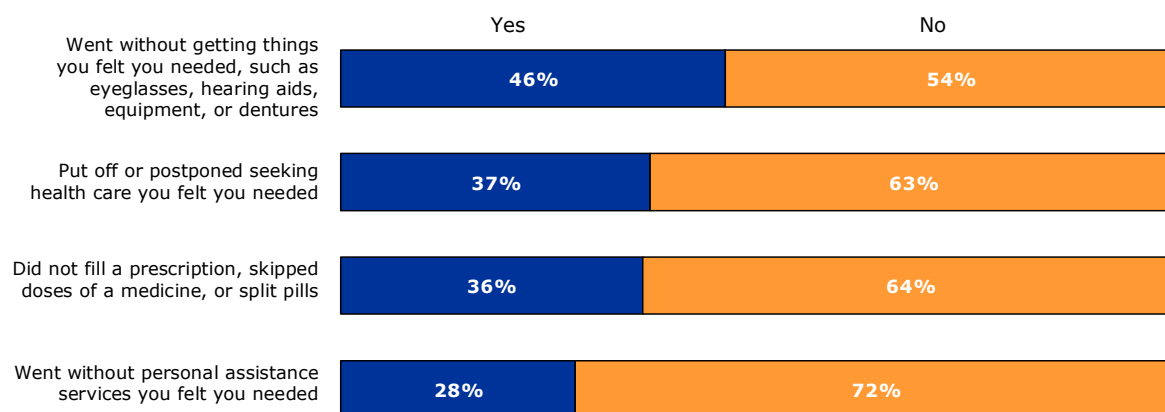
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Survey of People with Disabilities* (conducted Jan. 9, 2002 – Feb. 11, 2003 among non-elderly adults ages 18-64 with permanent physical and/or mental disabilities)

## 14. Cost-related Barriers to Care Among Non-elderly People With Disabilities

Many non-elderly adults with disabilities report going without needed health care in the past year. Nearly half (46%) say they have gone without getting medical equipment they needed because of the cost; nearly four in ten say they have postponed seeking care (37%), skipped doses or didn't fill a prescription (36%); and nearly three in ten (28%) say they went without personal assistance services in the past year because of the cost. More than a third (36%) say that in the last year, they or someone in their household has spent less on food, heat, or other basic needs in order to pay for health care.

### Cost-related Barriers to Care Among Non-elderly People With Disabilities

During the last 12 months, was there a time when you (INSERT ITEM) because of cost concerns?



In the last 12 months, have you and others in the household EVER spent less on food, heat, or other basic needs so that you would have enough money to pay for your health-care needs?



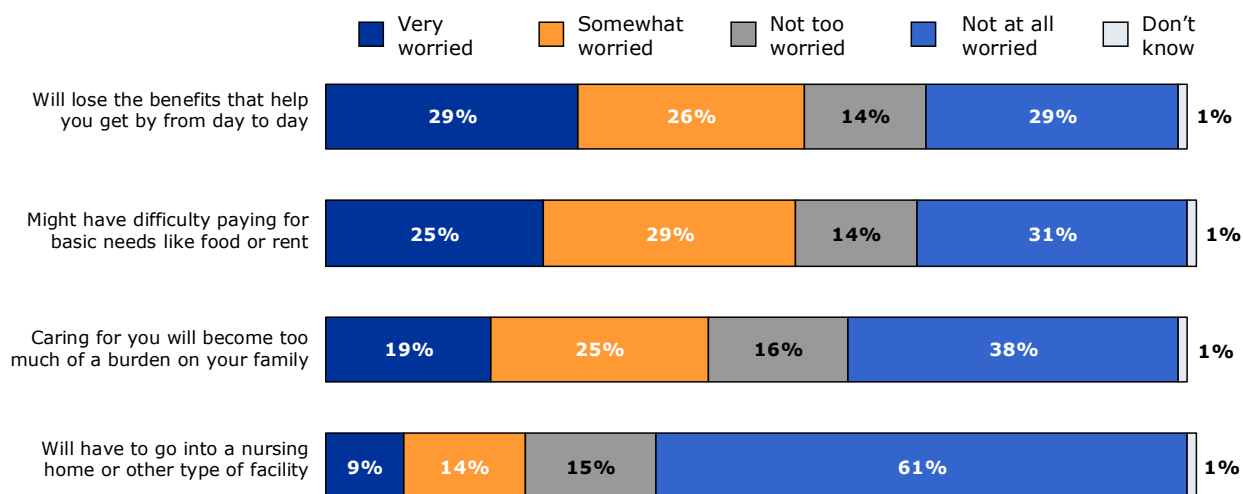
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Survey of People with Disabilities* (conducted Jan. 9, 2002 – Feb. 11, 2003 among non-elderly adults ages 18-64 with permanent physical and/or mental disabilities)

## 15. Worries Among Non-elderly People With Disabilities

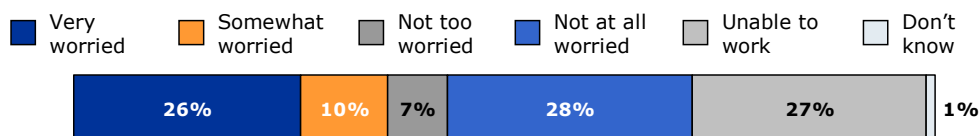
More than half of non-elderly people with disabilities say they are very or somewhat worried that they will lose the benefits that help them get by (55%) and that they might have difficulty paying for basic needs (54%). Somewhat fewer say they are very or somewhat worried that they will become a burden to their families (44%) and that they will have to go into a nursing home or other facility (23%). Among non-elderly people with disabilities who are unemployed, more than a third (36%) say they are very or somewhat worried that getting a job would mean losing their health insurance.

### Worries Among Non-elderly People With Disabilities

How worried are you that (INSERT ITEM) sometime in the next year?



Would you say you are very worried, somewhat worried, not too worried, or not at all worried that getting a job would mean losing your health insurance? (Among those who are unemployed and have health insurance)



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Survey of People with Disabilities* (conducted Jan. 9, 2002 – Feb. 11, 2003 among non-elderly adults ages 18-64 with permanent physical and/or mental disabilities)

## 16. Disability-Related Policy Priorities Among Non-Elderly People with Disabilities

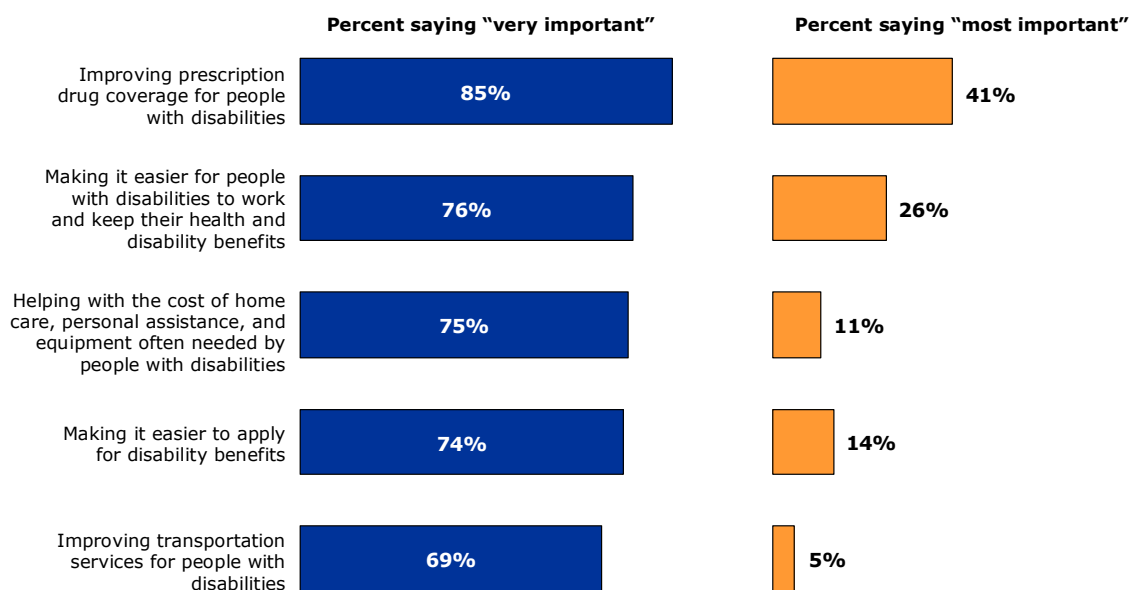
Large majorities of non-elderly people with disabilities say that a variety of potential policy priorities are very important for the government to work on. When asked to choose the most important policy priority, four in ten (41%) say that improving prescription drug coverage for people with disabilities is the most important, followed by about a quarter (26%) who say the most important priority should be making it easier for people with disabilities to work and keep their health and disability benefits. [Note: this survey was conducted before the December 2003 passage of the Medicare prescription drug law, which includes some help with prescription drug costs for seniors and people with disabilities who are covered by Medicare.]

### Disability-related Policy Priorities Among Non-elderly People With Disabilities

Thinking about what the government could do to improve quality of life for people with disabilities, is it very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important to you that the government work on each of the following?

When forced to choose...

Which of these would you say is the MOST IMPORTANT issue for government to address?



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Survey of People with Disabilities* (conducted Jan. 9, 2002 – Feb. 11, 2003 among non-elderly adults ages 18-64 with permanent physical and/or mental disabilities)