

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. All Spotlights available at www.kff.org/spotlight

Updated: April 2008

This Kaiser Public Opinion Spotlight focuses on the public's views and experiences with prescription drugs, and their opinions of the pharmaceutical industry. A separate Spotlight focusing on the public's and physicians' views of direct-to-consumer prescription drug advertising is available [here](#).

Views On Prescription Drugs And The Pharmaceutical Industry

Prescription drugs play a role in the daily life of more than half of all Americans, and most agree that these medications have had a positive impact on their life. Over half (54%) of adults say they currently take prescription medicine and one in five (19%) say they take four or more medications a day. On the whole, a majority of Americans agree that prescription drugs developed in the past 20 years have improved the lives of people in the US in general (73%) as well as their own and their family members' lives (63%).

Although the public has a positive impression of the value of prescription drugs to society on the whole, they have much more mixed views of pharmaceutical companies themselves. While a plurality (47%) of adults have a favorable impression of pharmaceutical companies overall, a significant minority (44%) say their impression of these companies is unfavorable.

Perceptions about the cost of prescription drugs and pharmaceutical company profits seem to be driving negative views of the pharmaceutical industry. Seven in ten adults say pharmaceutical companies are too focused on profits and not enough on helping people. Nearly eight in ten (79%) believe that high profits are a major factor in the price of prescription drugs, and the same proportion feels that drug prices are unreasonable. These opinions about prescription drug prices may be driven, at least in part, by people's real-life struggles paying for drugs. Four in ten adults report some serious problem paying for medication (either that it is a serious problem for their family to pay for drugs they need, not filling a prescription or skipping doses because of cost).

On the other hand, a majority of Americans believe that prescription drugs lower overall health care costs by reducing the need for expensive medical procedures and hospitalization, and by preventing illnesses.

When it comes to prescription drug safety, a large majority of the public (78%) feels at least somewhat confident in the safety of prescription drugs sold in the United States, though just 27 percent are very confident. In addition, while majorities feel that pharmaceutical companies do enough to test and monitor the safety of their drugs, and that they conduct these tests in an ethical way, significant minorities hold negative views in these areas.

On other prescription drug policy questions, there is an appetite among the public for increased regulation of prescription drug prices; nearly two-thirds of the public feels that there is not as much government regulation of prescription drug prices as there should be.

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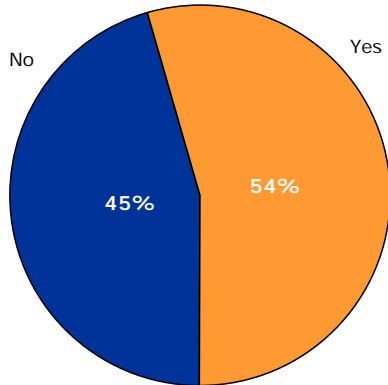
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Prescription Drug Use

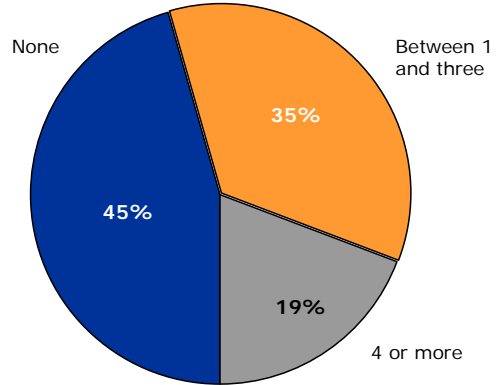
Prescription drugs play a part in daily life for half of adults; 54% say they take at least one prescription medication, and 19% take 4 or more different medications.

Prescription Drug Use

Do you currently take any prescription medicine or not?



How many different prescription drugs do you take?



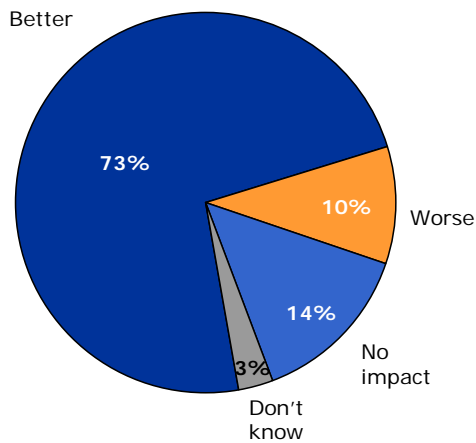
Source: USA Today/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health, *The Public on Prescription Drugs and Pharmaceutical Companies*, January 3-23 2008

Perceived Value Of Prescription Drugs

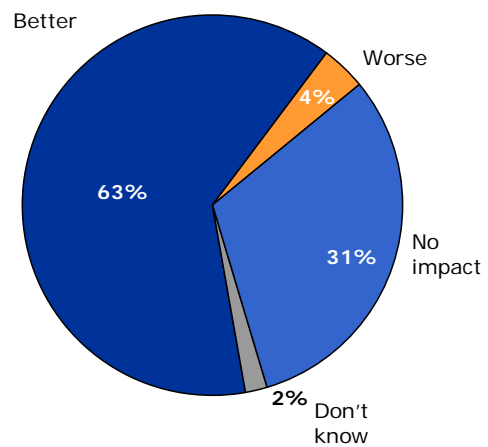
Most people believe that prescription drugs developed over the past 20 years have a positive value to society: more than seven in ten (73%) say that prescription drugs have made the lives of people in the U.S. better and more than six in ten (63%) say that prescription drugs have made their own lives and the lives of their family members better. In comparison, just one in ten (10%) say prescription drugs have generally made Americans' lives worse, and 4% say prescription drugs have made their own life worse.

Perceived Value Of Prescription Drugs

Do you think prescription drugs developed over the past 20 years have generally made the lives of people in the US better, worse, or haven't they made much difference?



Do you think prescription drugs developed over the past 20 years have generally made your own life and your family members' lives better, worse, or haven't they made much difference?



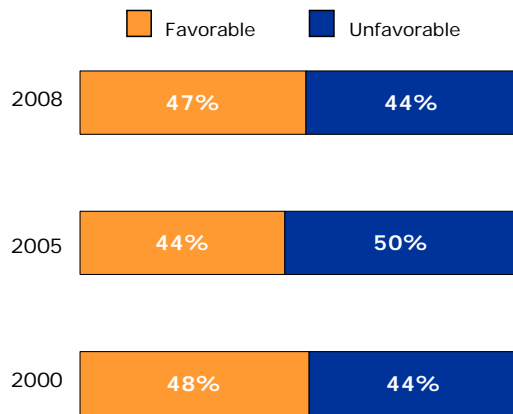
Source: USA Today/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health, *The Public on Prescription Drugs and Pharmaceutical Companies*, January 3-23, 2008

Views Of Pharmaceutical Companies

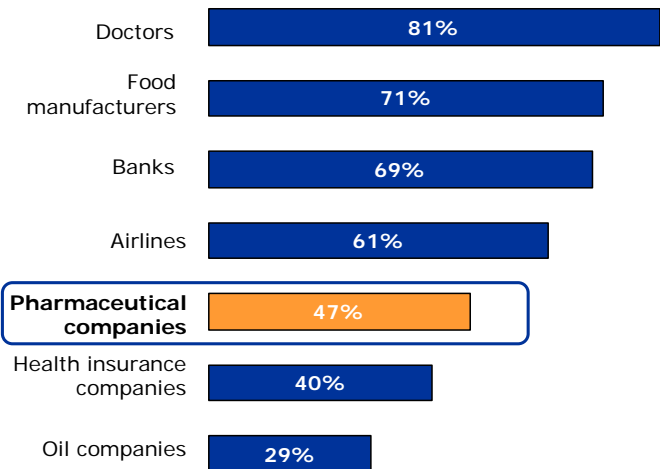
Although the public is generally positive about the value of prescription drugs to society, they have much more mixed views of pharmaceutical companies themselves. Nearly half (47%) say they have a favorable opinion of drug companies, while over one in four (44%) have an unfavorable view. This mixed view of drug companies in general has been fairly consistent since 2000. When compared with other industries and groups, drug companies rank ahead of oil companies (29% have a favorable opinion) and health insurance companies (40%), but behind many other groups. At the top of the list, large majorities say they have a favorable opinion of doctors (81%), food manufacturers (71%) and banks (69%).

Views Of Pharmaceutical Companies

Opinions of pharmaceutical or drug companies over time: *



Please tell me if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of each of the following... (Jan 2008)



*Don't know responses not shown

Sources: USA Today/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health: *The Public On Prescription Drugs and Pharmaceutical Companies*, January 3-23, 2008; Kaiser Family Foundation, *Health Poll Report Survey*, February 3-6, 2005; *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health *National Survey on Prescription Drugs*, July 26 - September 5, 2000

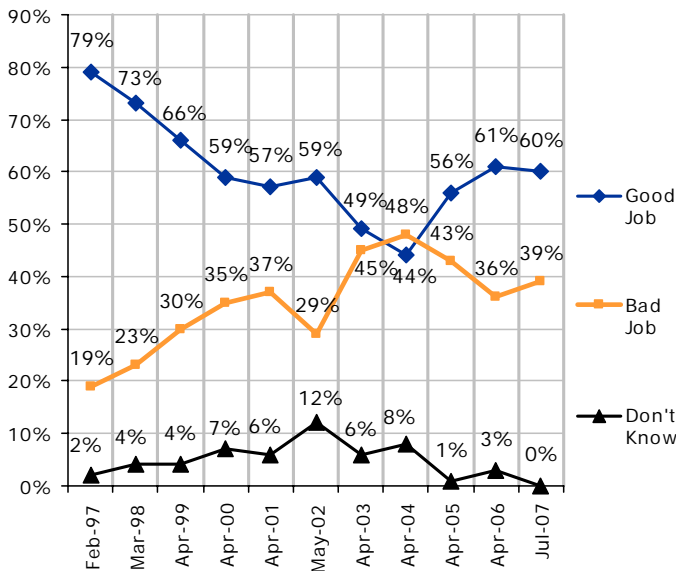
Views of Pharmaceutical Companies and Customer Service

According to trend data from Harris Interactive, ratings of pharmaceutical companies' customer service have generally declined since 1997 but have increased again in recent years. The percentage of Americans who say that pharmaceutical companies do a "good job" of serving their consumers decreased from a high of 79% in 1997 to a low of 44% in 2004, then increased again to about six in ten in 2005 through 2007.

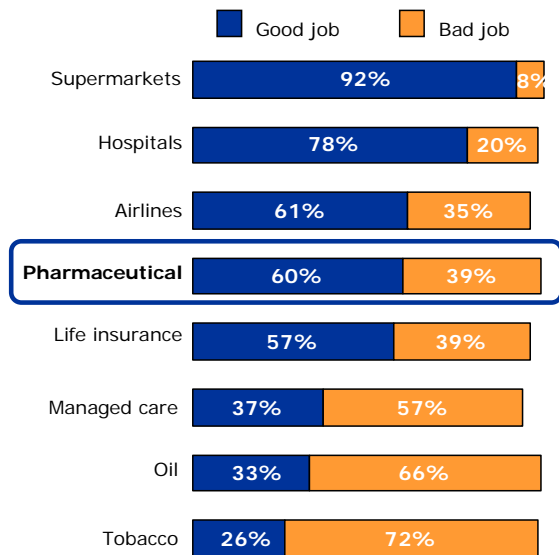
Compared with other industries, the share of people who say pharmaceutical companies do a "good job" serving customers (60%) is about the same as the share who say life insurance companies (57%) and airlines (61%) do a good job. The share who say pharmaceutical companies do a good job is higher than for managed care companies (37%), oil companies (33%), and tobacco companies (26%), but lower than the share who say hospitals (78%) and supermarkets (92%) are doing a "good job" serving consumers.

Views of Pharmaceutical Companies and Customer Service

Do you think pharmaceutical and drug companies generally do a good job or bad job serving their consumers?



Ratings of customer service in other industries... (Jul 07)*



*Don't know responses not shown

Source: Harris Interactive Polls

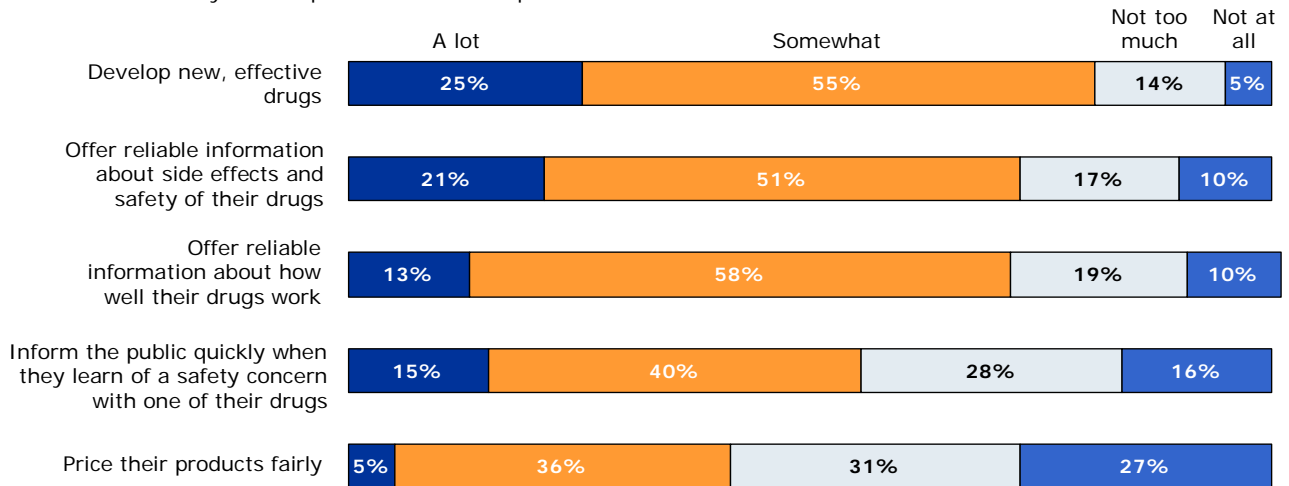
Trust in Pharmaceutical Companies in Different Areas

Most people say that they trust pharmaceutical companies at least “somewhat” when it comes to developing new, effective drugs (80%), and when it comes to providing reliable information about drug safety and side effects (72%) and drug effectiveness (71%). More than half (55%) also trust these companies at least somewhat to inform the public quickly when they learn of a safety concern with one of their drugs.

However, the public is much less trusting in drug companies when it comes to drug pricing; nearly six in ten (58%) say they trust pharmaceutical companies “not too much” or “not at all” to price their products fairly.

Trust in Pharmaceutical Companies

How much do you trust pharmaceutical companies to...*



*Don't know responses not shown

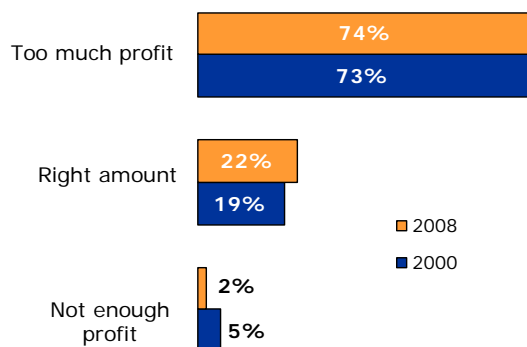
Source: USA Today/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health: *The Public On Prescription Drugs and Pharmaceutical Companies*, January 3-23, 2008

Negative Views of Pharmaceutical Companies' Profits

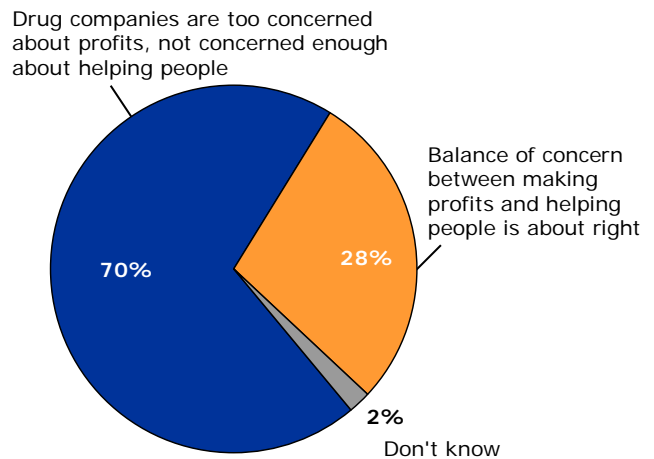
The public's lack of trust in pharmaceutical companies to price their products fairly is also reflected in their view of drug company profits. Almost three-quarters (74%) feel that drug companies are make too much profit, and this number has been fairly consistent over time. Seven in ten believe that drug companies are too concerned with profits and not concerned enough about helping people.

Negative Views of Pharmaceutical Companies' Profits

In general, do you think pharmaceutical or drug companies make too much profit, not enough profit, or about the right amount of profit?*



Which statement comes closer to your view? (Jan 2008)



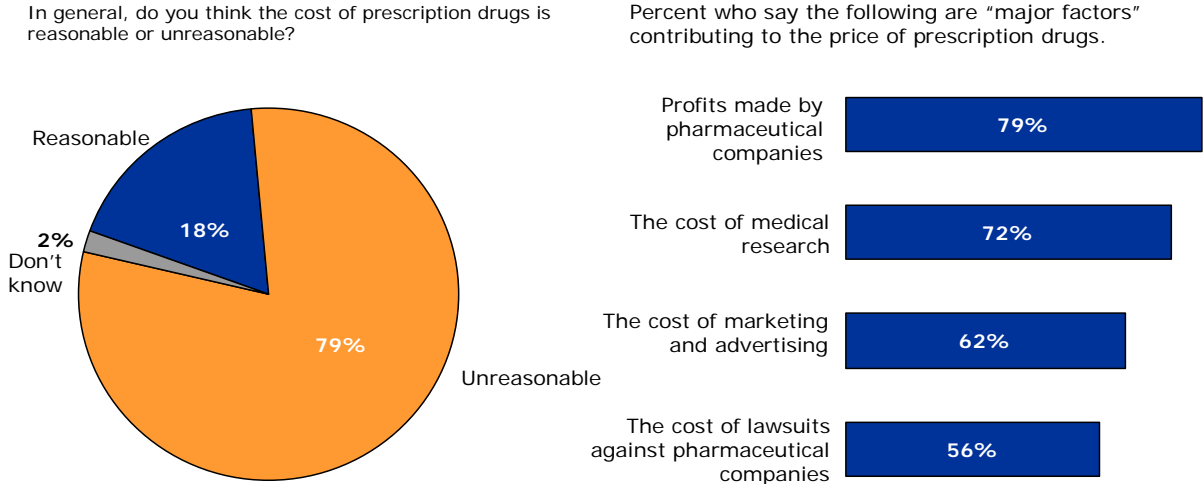
*Don't know responses not shown.

Sources: USA Today/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health: *The Public On Prescription Drugs and Pharmaceutical Companies*, January 3-23, 2008; *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health *National Survey on Prescription Drugs*, July 26 - September 5, 2000

Beliefs About Prescription Drug Costs

Most Americans believe that the cost of prescription drugs is unreasonable (79%). Further, people tend to blame profits earned by pharmaceutical companies as primarily responsible for what they see as high prices (79% say this is a major factor). Majorities also identify the cost of medical research (72%), drug advertising (62%) and the cost of lawsuits (56%) as important contributors to the price of prescription drugs.

Beliefs About Prescription Drug Costs



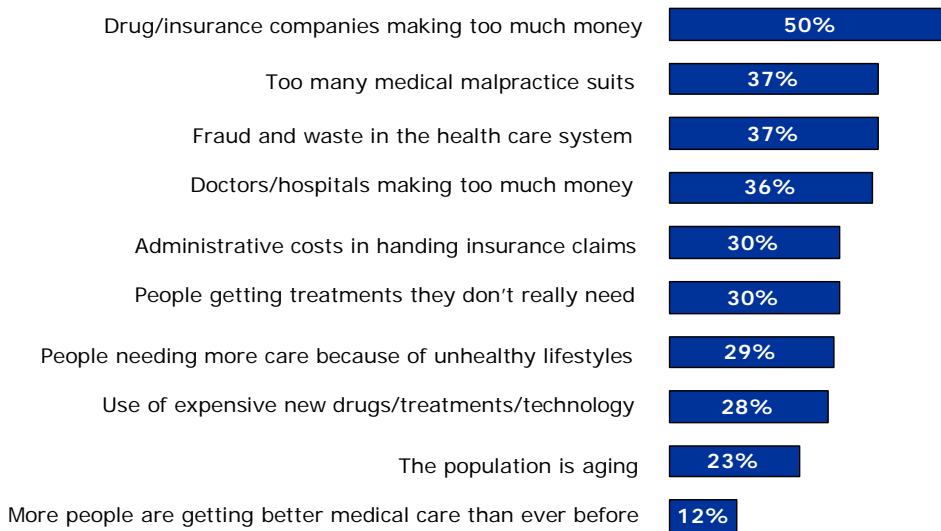
Source: USA Today/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health, *The Public on Prescription Drugs and Pharmaceutical Companies*, January 3-23, 2008

Pharmaceutical Companies And Rising Health Care Costs

In addition to feeling that drug prices are too high, Americans see drug company profits as a big contributor to health care costs overall. When asked about potential reasons for rising health care costs, drug and insurance company profits top the list, with half of all adults naming profits as one of the single biggest factors in rising health care costs. Just below that, more than a third blame too many medical malpractice suits (37%), fraud and waste in the health care system (37%), and doctors and hospitals making too much money (36%) for rising health care costs.

Factors in Rising Health Care Costs

Percent saying each is "one of the single biggest factors in rising health care costs":



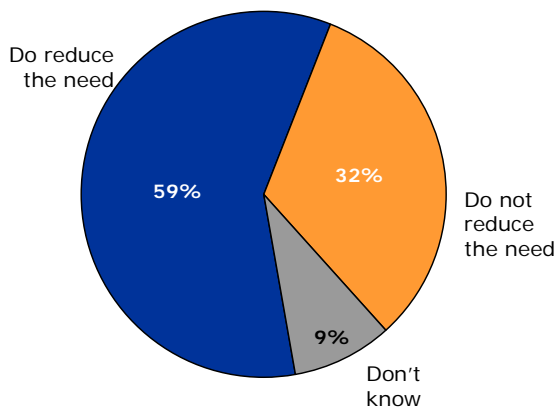
Source: ABC News/Kaiser Family Foundation/USA Today *Health Care in America Survey*, September 7-12, 2006

Prescription Drugs And Overall Medical Costs

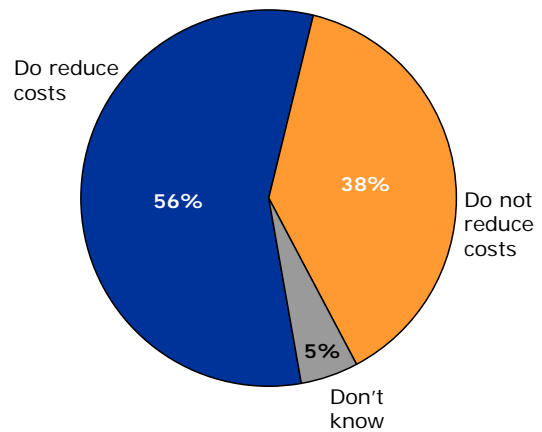
Despite the negative views of prescription drug prices overall, a majority of the public recognizes a role for prescription drugs in keeping down the overall cost of health care. Six in ten adults (59%) say that prescription drugs reduce health care costs by reducing the need for expensive medical procedures and hospitalization, and nearly as many (56%) say prescription drugs reduce health care costs by preventing illnesses.

Prescription Drugs And Overall Medical Costs

Do you think prescription drugs do or do not reduce the need for expensive medical procedures and hospitalization?



Do you think prescription drugs do or do not reduce health care costs by preventing illnesses?



Source: USA Today/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health, *The Public on Prescription Drugs and Pharmaceutical Companies*, January 3-23, 2008

Difficulty Paying for Prescription Drugs

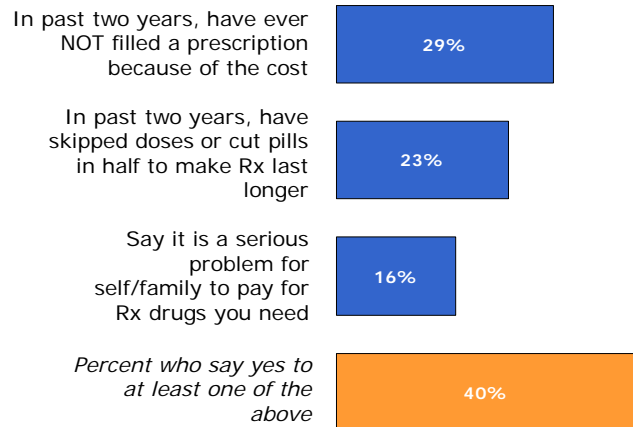
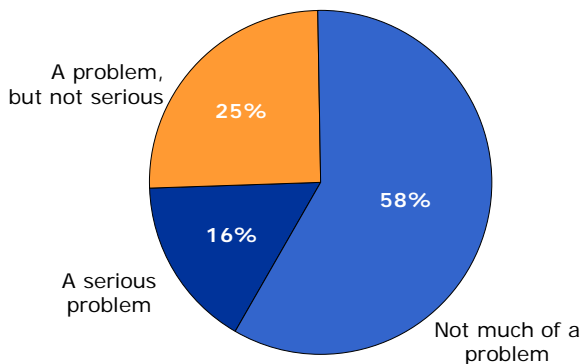
Negative views about drug company profits and prices may be driven, at least in part, by people's real-world experiences paying for prescription drugs.

Significant shares of the public report difficulty paying for prescription drugs, and many say they have not filled prescriptions, skipped doses or cut pills in half as a result. Four in ten adults (41%) say it is at least somewhat of a problem for their family to pay for prescription drugs they need, and 16% say it is a serious problem. Three in ten adults (29%) say they have not filled a prescription because of the cost in the last two years, and nearly a quarter (23%) say they have cut pills in half or skipped doses in order to make a medication last longer. Four in ten (40%) report at least one of these problems, either a serious problem paying for drugs, not filling a prescription or skipping doses.

Problems paying for prescription drugs are even more common among those who take larger numbers of medications or are in lower income brackets. While 16% of the public overall says it is a serious problem for them or their family to pay for the prescription drugs they need, over a quarter (27%) of those who take four or more medications, and nearly three in ten (29%) of those with an annual income of less than \$25,000 report this problem.

Difficulty Paying for Prescription Drugs

How much of a problem is it for you or your family to pay for prescription medicines that you need?



Source: USA Today/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health, *The Public on Prescription Drugs and Pharmaceutical Companies*, January 3-23, 2008

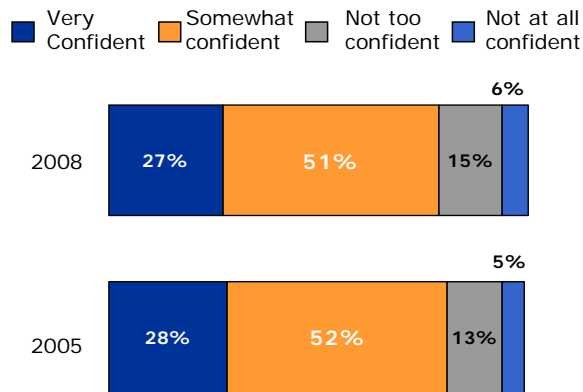
Views On Prescription Drug Safety

Despite recent media attention on prescription drug safety, a large majority (78%) of the public feels at least “somewhat” confident about the safety of prescription drugs sold in the United States, though just 27% say they are “very” confident. This trend has been fairly consistent since 2005.

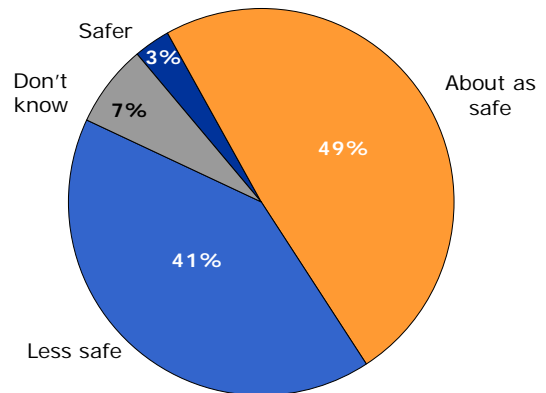
Half (52%) of the public believes that drugs manufactured in other countries are about as safe (49%) or safer (3%) than those manufactured in the U.S., but a substantial minority (41%) think they are less safe.

Views On Prescription Drug Safety

Overall, how confident are you that prescription drugs sold in the United States are safe?*



Some drugs sold in the United States are actually manufactured in other countries. Do you think these drugs are safer, about as safe, or less safe than those manufactured in the U.S.? (Jan 2008)



*Note: Question wording in 2005 was “how confident are you in the safety of prescription drugs sold in the United States?” Don't know responses not shown.

Source: USA Today/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health, *The Public on Prescription Drugs and Pharmaceutical Companies*. January 3-23, 2008; Kaiser Family Foundation, *Health Poll Report Survey*, February 3-6, 2005

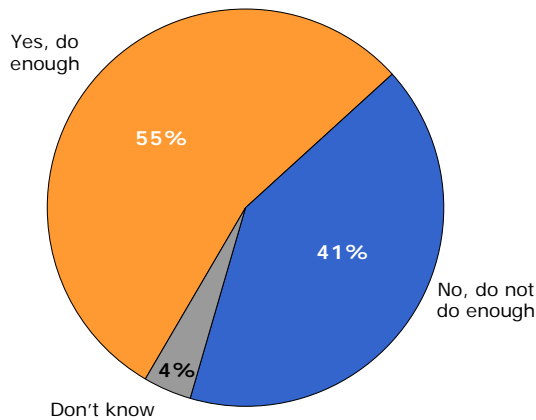
Views On Drug Company Safety Testing

Despite recent controversies, more than half of the public (55%) thinks that drug companies do enough to test and monitor the safety of their drugs, and the same share say they trust pharmaceutical companies to notify the public quickly when safety concerns arise (data not shown). Majorities also think drug companies act in an ethical way when testing their products on people (62%) and on animals (56%).

However, substantial minorities have negative views in these areas. Four in ten (41%) adults believe that drug companies *do not* do enough to test and monitor the safety of their products, 44% do not trust drug companies to notify the public quickly about safety concerns, and about three in ten *do not* believe pharmaceutical companies act in an ethical way when testing their drugs on people (28%) and animals (30%).

Views On Prescription Drug Company Safety Testing

Do you think pharmaceutical companies do enough to test and monitor the safety of their drugs, or not?



Do you think most pharmaceutical companies act in an ethical way when researching and testing new drugs on people or do you think most engage in testing practices that are unethical and put people at risk?



Do you think most pharmaceutical companies act in an ethical way when researching and testing new drugs on animals or do you think most engage in animal testing practices that are unethical?



Source: USA Today/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health, *The Public on Prescription Drugs and Pharmaceutical Companies*, January 3-23, 2008

Views Of The Drug Review And Approval Process

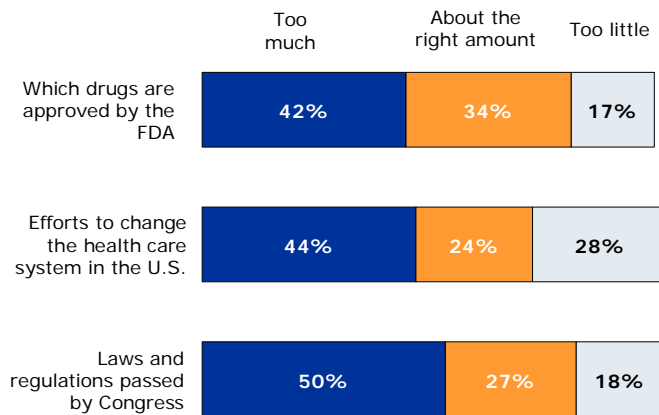
When it comes to the drug review and approval process, most people do not think pharmaceutical companies have too much influence over the FDA, and a majority would like to see the government move more quickly when approving new drugs.

About half the public (51%) says that pharmaceutical companies have too little or the right amount of influence on which drugs are approved by the FDA, compared with about four in ten (42%) who say these companies have too much influence. Similarly, more than half (52%) say that drug companies have too little or the right amount of influence on efforts to change the U.S. health care system, compared with 44% who say they have too much influence. By contrast, half (50%) think drug companies have too much influence on laws and regulations passed by Congress, while 45% think their influence is too little or about right.

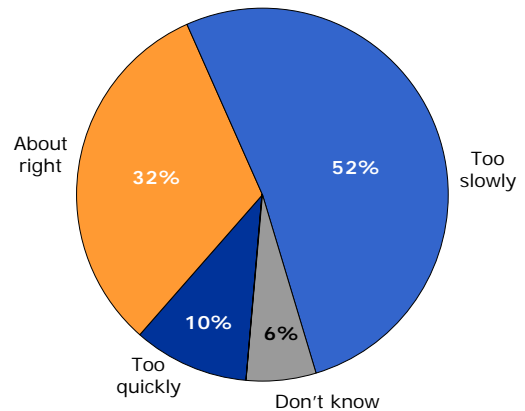
More than half (52%) say the government moves too slowly when reviewing and approving new drugs, while just one in ten think the government moves too quickly, and about a third (32%) say they take about the right amount of time.

Views Of The Drug Review And Approval Process

Do you think pharmaceutical companies have too much, too little or about the right amount of influence on...*



In general, do you think the government moves too quickly or too slowly to review and approve new prescription drugs, or do you think they take about the right amount of time?



* Don't know responses not shown

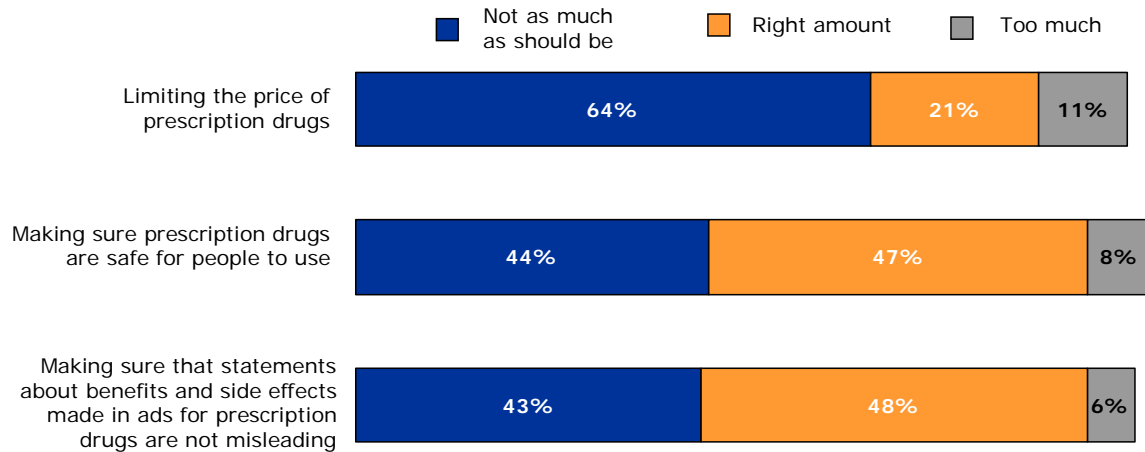
Source: USA Today/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health, *The Public on Prescription Drugs and Pharmaceutical Companies*, January 3–23, 2008

Attitudes About Government Regulation Of Prescription Drugs

In terms of government regulation of the pharmaceutical industry, the public is most interested in increasing regulation of prescription drug prices. Almost two thirds (64%) say there is not enough government regulation in limiting the price of prescription drugs, while one fifth (21%) say there is the right amount of regulation and one in nine (11%) say there's too much. By contrast, pluralities say there is the right amount of regulation when it comes to drug advertising (48%) and drug safety (47%). Still, more than four in ten would like to see more regulation in these areas (43% for advertising, 44% for safety).

Attitudes About Government Regulation Of Drugs

For each of the following areas, is there currently too much government regulation, not as much as there should be, or about the right amount of regulation?*



*Don't know responses not shown

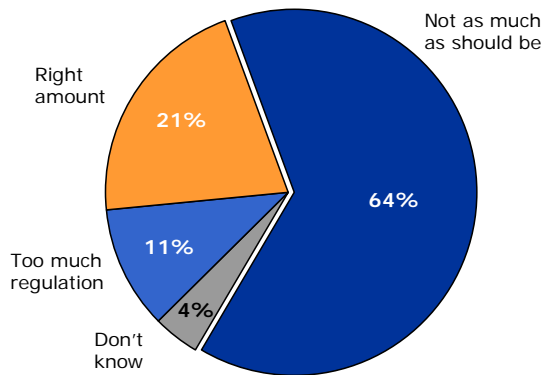
Source: USA Today/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health, *The Public on Prescription Drugs and Pharmaceutical Companies*, January 3-23 2008

Government Regulation Of Drug Prices

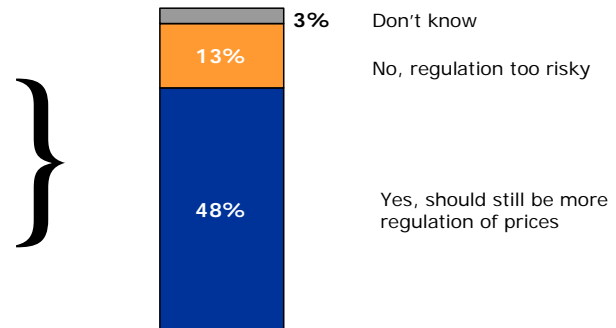
Nearly two-thirds of (64%) of adults believe that there is *not enough* regulation when it comes to limiting the price of prescription drugs. Even when presented with the argument that price regulation could lead to less research and development on new drugs, nearly half (48%) say there should be more regulation of prices. Results were similar in a 2000 survey by the Lehrer Newshour, Kaiser Family Foundation and Harvard School of Public Health, when six in ten said there was not enough regulation of drug prices and 42% thought there should still be more regulation, even after being presented with the argument that it might lead to less research and development (data not shown).

Government Regulation Of Drug Prices

Is there currently too much government regulation, not as much as there should be, or about the right amount of regulation around limiting the price of prescription drugs?



Asked of the 64% who said there is not as much government regulation of drug prices as there should be: What if you heard that limiting the prices of prescription drugs might lead to LESS research and development of new drugs since drug companies would be making smaller profits. Would you still think there should be more regulation of the prices charged for prescription drugs?



Source: USA Today/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health, *The Public on Prescription Drugs and Pharmaceutical Companies*, January 3-23, 2008

Buying Prescription Drugs From Canada

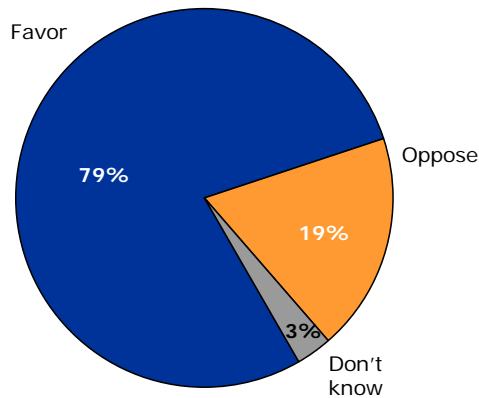
One change to national policies regarding prescription drugs that has been discussed is to allow people to purchase drugs imported from Canada. In 2006, nearly eight in ten (79%) adults supported the idea of Congress allowing Americans to buy prescription drugs imported from Canada; under two in ten (19%) opposed this proposal.

In 2005, seven in ten (70%) saw importation as a way to make medicines more affordable without sacrificing quality, while just under a quarter (24%) disagreed with this view. Nearly two thirds (65%) did not think importing drugs from Canada would expose Americans to unsafe medications, although three in ten (30%) believed imported drugs could pose a safety risk.

The argument that importing drugs from Canada will lead drug companies to do less research and development does not resonate with most Americans (70% disagreed with this argument, while one-quarter (26%) agreed).

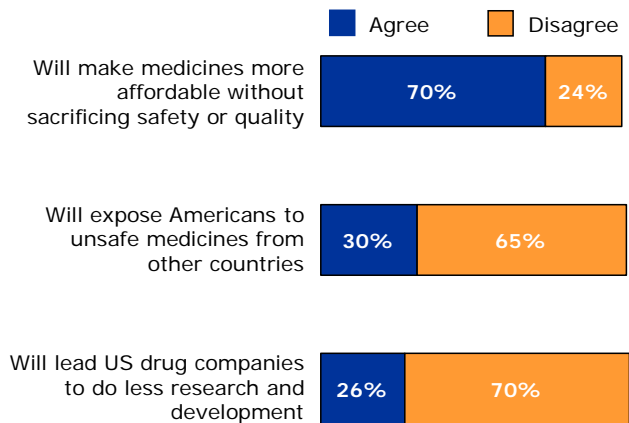
Buying Prescription Drugs From Canada

Do you favor or oppose Congress changing the law to allow Americans to buy prescription drugs imported from Canada if they think they can get a lower price? (Nov 06)



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health *The Public's Health Care Agenda For The New Congress and Presidential Campaign*, November 9-19, 2006

Percent saying they agree/disagree that allowing Americans to buy prescription drugs imported from Canada (Mar 05)...*



*Don't know responses not shown

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health *Health Poll Report*, March 31-3, 2005

Government Negotiating With Drug Companies

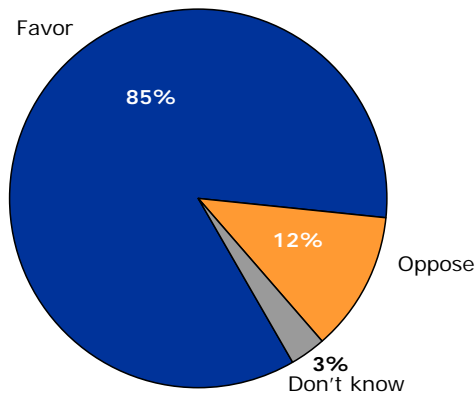
In 2006, more than eight in ten (85%) adults supported the idea of Congress allowing the federal government to use its buying power to negotiate with drug companies for lower prices on prescription drugs for people on Medicare. Fewer than one in seven (12%) opposed this idea.

More than eight in ten (81%) see government negotiation of prices as a way to make medicines more affordable for people on Medicare and a similar share (80%) said this plan makes sense because the government already negotiates prices for other groups such as the Defense Department and Veteran's Administration. Six in ten also agreed that such negotiation would mean government price controls; while a third (34%) disagreed.

The argument that allowing the government to negotiate drug prices will lead drug companies to do less research and development does not seem to resonate with most Americans: nearly two-thirds (64%) disagreed while about three in ten (31%) agreed.

Government Negotiating With Drug Companies

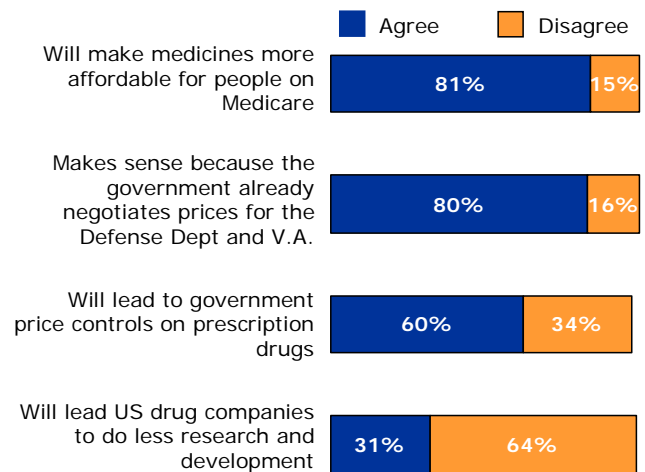
Do you favor or oppose allowing the federal government to use its buying power to negotiate with drug companies to try to get a lower price for Medicare prescription drugs?



*Don't know responses not shown

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health *The Public's Health Care Agenda For The New Congress and Presidential Campaign*, November 9- 19, 2006

Percent saying they agree/disagree that allowing the federal government to negotiate with drug companies to try to get a lower price for Medicare prescription drugs...*



Perceived Impact Of Importation And Negotiation

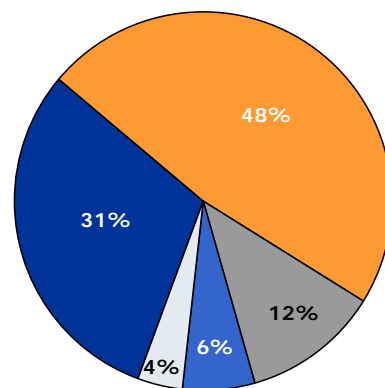
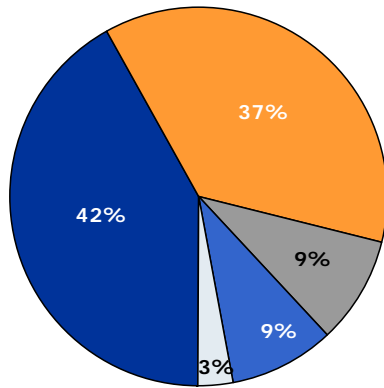
Behind the strong support for measures such as prescription drug importation and government price negotiation is the belief that these policies would lower drug costs in the U.S. In 2005, around eight in ten said that importing prescription drugs from Canada (79%) and allowing the federal government to negotiate prices with drug companies (79%) would help to reduce prescription drug costs “a lot” or “some”. Fewer than two in ten disagreed with these views, saying importation (18%) and negotiation (18%) would reduce costs “not much” or “not at all”.

Perceived Impact Of Importation And Negotiation

If Congress changed the law to allow Americans to buy prescription drugs imported from Canada, how much do you think this would help in reducing prescription drug costs in the U.S.?

If Congress changed the law to allow the federal government to negotiate with drug companies, how much do you think this would help in reducing prescription drug costs in the U.S.?

■ A lot
 ■ Some
 ■ Not much
 ■ Not at all
 ■ Don't know



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Poll*, March 31- April 3, 2005.