Public opinion on the use and abuse of prescription opioids

Poll findings from Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Polls and the 2016 The Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation Survey of Long-Term Prescription Opioid Users
57% of the public say they are closely following news about the prescription opioid addiction epidemic in the U.S.

SOURCE: Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 15-21, 2016)
Two-thirds of Americans say Rx opioid abuse is a very serious problem

- Alcohol Abuse: 52%
- Obesity: 63%
- Rx Opioid Abuse: 66%
- Diabetes: 68%
- Heart Disease: 70%
- Heroin Abuse: 72%
- Cancer: 82%

SOURCE: Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 15-21, 2016)
40% are aware that drug overdose is the leading cause of accidental deaths in the U.S.

But some think it’s car accidents (50%) or falls (6%)

SOURCE: Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 10-17, 2015)
Large shares of Americans blame doctors, users, and drug companies for Rx painkiller epidemic

- Doctors who prescribe painkillers: 69%
- People who use painkillers: 68%
- Drug companies: 60%
- The government: 44%
- Hospitals: 43%
- Law enforcement: 28%
- Pharmacies and pharmacists: 28%

SOURCE: Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 15-21, 2016)
Americans believe various policy actions would be effective in addressing the epidemic

- Increasing pain management training for doctors: 89%
- Public education: 86%
- Increasing access to addiction treatment programs: 85%
- Increasing research about pain and pain management: 85%
- Monitoring doctors' prescribing habits: 83%
- Encouraging disposal of extra painkillers: 68%
- Reducing social stigma around addiction: 62%
- Putting addiction warning labels on Rx drug bottles: 52%
- Government limits on drug production: 47%

SOURCE: Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 15-21, 2016)
58% say prescription painkiller abuse makes a person *more likely* to use heroin or other illegal drugs.

60% say prescription painkillers are *about equally addictive* as heroin.

*Source:* Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 15-21, 2016)
For some, the issue hits closer to home...

44% of Americans say they know someone who’s been addicted to Rx painkillers

26% say it’s an acquaintance
21% say it’s a close friend
19% say it’s a family member
3% say it’s themselves

SOURCE: Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 8-13, 2017)
Many across demographic groups report knowing someone who has been **addicted** to Rx painkillers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 30-49</td>
<td>49%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age 50-64</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural residency</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban residency</td>
<td>46%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age 18-29</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College graduate</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>43%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban residency</td>
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<td>High school graduate or less</td>
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<td>Black</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age 65+</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 8-13, 2017)
Some know people who have overdosed...

20% of Americans say they know someone who has died from a Rx painkiller overdose

13% say it’s an acquaintance

8% say it’s a close friend

6% say it’s a family member

SOURCE: Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 8-13, 2017)
Risks V. Benefits of Using Rx Painkillers to Treat Pain

- **44%** say benefits of pain relief outweigh risk of addiction.
- **47%** say risk of addiction outweighs benefits of pain relief.
- **9%** Don’t know/Refused.

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 15-21, 2016)
1 in 20 Americans are long-term users of strong Rx painkillers

Most long-term users report using to relieve pain, but some use for other reasons as well

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relieve physical pain</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relax or relieve tension</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deal with day-to-day stress</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get high or for fun</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: The Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation Survey of Long-Term Prescription Painkiller Users and Their Household Members (conducted October 3-November 9, 2016)
Many long-term prescription painkiller users report being **sick** and **disabled**

- 70% say they have **a chronic disability**
- 57% say they take **4+ Rx drugs**
- 42% say their **physical health** is only fair or poor
- 28% say their **mental health** is only fair or poor

**SOURCE:** The Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation Survey of Long-Term Prescription Painkiller Users and Their Household Members (conducted October 3-November 9, 2016)
Long-term users and public agree it is easy to get prescription painkillers without a Rx

The public: 71%

Long-term users: 60%

SOURCE: The Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation Survey of Long-Term Prescription Painkiller Users and Their Household Members (conducted October 3-November 9, 2016) and Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 15-21, 2016)
There’s less agreement on if it is easy to get prescription painkillers for medical purposes

- **The public**: 62%
- **Long-term users**: 36%

**SOURCE**: The Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation Survey of Long-Term Prescription Painkiller Users and Their Household Members (conducted October 3-November 9, 2016) and Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll (conducted November 15-21, 2016)
34% of long-term users say they are addicted or dependent

17% of long-term users have taken painkillers not prescribed to them

14% of long-term users have given painkillers to others

20% of long-term users have known or suspected someone was using, taking, or selling their painkillers

SOURCE: The Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation Survey of Long-Term Prescription Painkiller Users and Their Household Members (conducted October 3-November 9, 2016)
Filling the need for trusted information on national health issues, the Kaiser Family Foundation is a nonprofit organization based in Menlo Park, California.

For more information, please visit www.kff.org

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