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# Public Opinion on Prescription Drugs and Their Prices

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KFF research has consistently found prescription drug costs to be an important health policy area of public interest and concern. Our polls find that most people take at least one prescription drug and most see their benefits to society, yet majorities see these drugs as too expensive and three in ten struggle to afford their medicines. The public has historically supported many different approaches to lowering prescription drug costs, including allowing Medicare to negotiate prices, a core component of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) passed in 2022. However, more than two years after passage of the IRA, majorities of the public remain unaware of the drug pricing provisions that were part of the law.

Below are some key findings on the public's experience with and perceptions of prescription drugs and their prices.

Prescription drugs touch the lives of most people in the U.S. in some way. About six in ten adults say they are currently taking at least one prescription drug, and a quarter say they currently take four or more prescription medications.

Figure 1

# Six in Ten Adults Report Currently Taking at Least One Prescription Medicine; One Quarter Say They Take Four or More

Percent who say they take the following number of prescription drugs:

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Currently taking prescription medicine | 61% |
| Take 1 prescription medicine           | 13% |
| Take 2 prescription medicines          | 11% |
| Take 3 prescription medicines          | 10% |
| Take 4 or more prescription medicines  | 27% |

Note: See topline for full question wording.

Source: [KFF Health Tracking Poll \(July 11-19, 2023\)](#) • [Get the data](#) • [Download PNG](#)

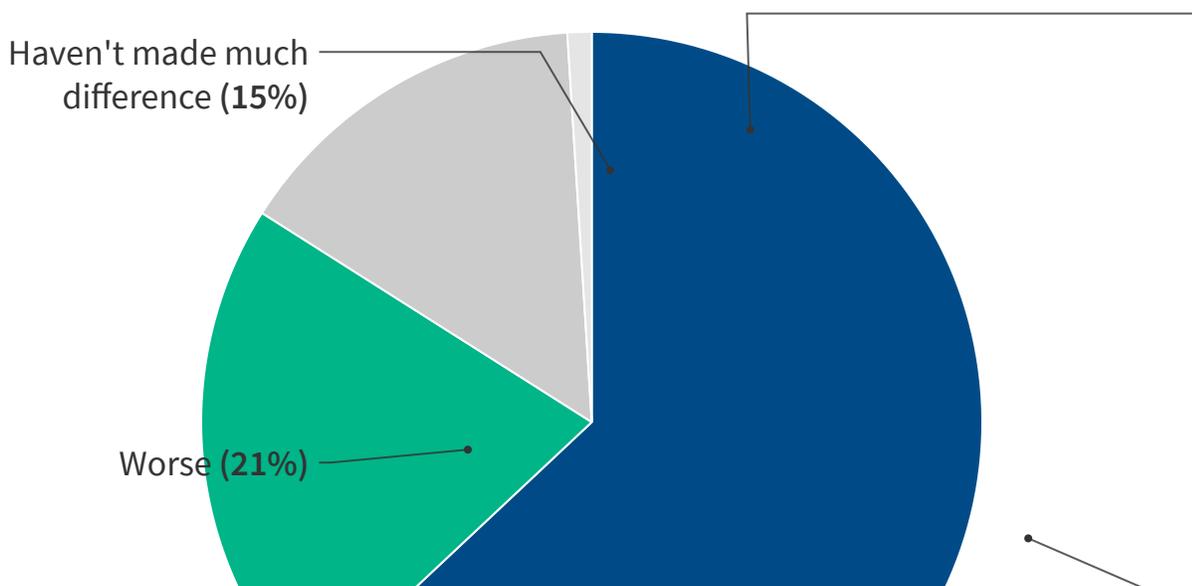


In addition to taking prescription drugs themselves, the public generally sees the benefits of these medicines. About six in ten (63%) adults believe prescription drugs developed over the past 20 years have generally made the lives of people in the U.S. better while a much smaller share (21%) say they've made them worse.

Figure 2

## Six in Ten Say That Prescription Drugs Developed Over the Past 20 Years Have Made the Lives of People in the U.S. Better

Do you think prescription drugs developed over the past 20 years have generally made the lives of people in the U.S....?





Note: See topline for full question wording.

Source: [KFF Health Tracking Poll \(July 11-19, 2023\)](#) • [Get the data](#) • [Download PNG](#)

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Despite seeing their general benefits to society, about eight in ten adults (82%) say the cost of prescription drugs is **unreasonable** (<https://www.kff.org/health-costs/poll-finding/kff-health-tracking-poll-july-2023-the-publics-views-of-new-prescription-weight-loss-drugs-and-prescription-drug-costs/>), and the public sees profits made by pharmaceutical companies as the largest factor contributing to these prices. About eight in ten adults or more across partisans say profits made by pharmaceutical companies are a “major factor” in the price of prescription drugs. This is followed by more than half who say the cost of research and development is a “major factor” contributing to the price, and about half saying the same about the cost of marketing and advertising.

Figure 3

## About Eight in Ten Across Parties Say Drug Company Profits Are a Major Contributing Factor to Prescription Drug Costs

Percent who say each of the following is a **major factor** contributing to the price of prescription drugs:

|  | Total | Democrats | Independents | Republicans |
|--|-------|-----------|--------------|-------------|
| Profits made by pharmaceutical companies | 83%   | 84%       | 78%          | 89%         |
| The cost of research and development     | 54%   | 53%       | 56%          | 57%         |
| The cost of marketing and advertising    | 45%   | 47%       | 47%          | 43%         |

Note: See topline for full question wording.

Source: [KFF Health Tracking Poll \(July 11-19, 2023\)](#) • [Get the data](#) • [Download PNG](#)

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Just over half (55%) of adults are worried about being able to afford their family’s prescription drug costs, including a quarter (26%) who are “very” worried. Larger shares of Black and Hispanic adults report being worried about affording prescription drug costs (61%

and 69% respectively) compared with White adults, half of whom report being worried. A somewhat larger share of adults under the age of 65 without insurance (67%) report being worried about affording prescription drug costs, but still more than half (54%) of those who have insurance say they worry about these costs.

Figure 4

## Majorities Are Worried About Affording Prescription Drug Costs, With Larger Shares of Black, Hispanic Adults and Uninsured Adults Reporting Concern

How worried, if at all, are you about being able to afford prescription drug costs for you and your family?

|                         | Very worried | Somewhat worried | Not too worried | Not at all worried |     |     |
|-------------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----|-----|
| Total                   |              | 26%              | 29%             | 25%                | 20% |     |
| <b>Race/Ethnicity</b>   |              |                  |                 |                    |     |     |
| Black adults            |              | 32%              | 29%             | 21%                | 18% |     |
| Hispanic adults         |              | 35%              | 34%             | 19%                | 12% |     |
| White adults            |              | 23%              | 27%             | 28%                | 22% |     |
| <b>Insurance status</b> |              |                  |                 |                    |     |     |
| Insured under age 65    |              | 26%              | 28%             | 26%                | 20% |     |
| Uninsured under age 65  |              | 43%              | 24%             | 50%                | 19% | 15% |

Note: See topline for full question wording.

Source: [KFF Health Tracking Poll \(Jan. 30-Feb. 7, 2024\)](#) • [Get the data](#) • [Download PNG](#)

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While about two-thirds (65%) of adults overall say it is very or somewhat easy to afford their **prescription drug costs** (<https://www.kff.org/health-costs/poll-finding/kff-health-tracking-poll-july-2023-the-publics-views-of-new-prescription-weight-loss-drugs-and-prescription-drug-costs/>), affordability is a bigger issue for those who are currently taking four or more prescription medicines. Nearly four in ten (37%) of those taking four or more prescription drugs say they have difficulty affording their prescriptions, compared with one in five (18%) adults who currently take

three or fewer prescription medications. Adults with an annual household income of less than \$40,000 are also more likely than adults with higher incomes to report difficulty affording their prescription medications.

Figure 5

## One Quarter of Adults Have Difficulty Affording Prescription Drugs, Including Larger Shares of Those Who Take More Medications

Percent who say it is **somewhat or very difficult** to afford the cost of their prescription drugs:

**Total** 28%

### Number of medications taking

1 to 3 18%

4 or more **37%**

### Age

18-29 years 33%

30-49 years 27%

50-64 years 27%

65 years and older 25%

### Household income

Less than \$40,000 **40%**

\$40,000-\$89,999 29%

\$90,000 or more 11%

Note: See topline for full question wording.

Source: [KFF Health Tracking Poll \(July 11-19, 2023\)](#) • [Get the data](#) • [Download PNG](#)

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About three in ten adults report not taking their medicines as prescribed at some point in the past year because of the cost. This includes about one in five who say they have not filled a prescription (21%) or took an over-the-counter drug instead (21%), and 12% who say they have cut pills in half or skipped a dose because of the cost.

The share who report not filling a prescription, taking an over-the-counter drug instead, or cutting pills in half or skipping doses increases to about four in ten among adult ages 18-29 (40%), Hispanic adults (39%), those taking four or more prescription drugs (37%), and those living in households with an annual income of less than \$40,000 (37%).

Figure 6

## About Three in Ten Say They Haven't Taken Their Medicine As Prescribed Due to Costs

Percent who say they have done the following in the past 12 months because of the cost:

Not filled a prescription for a medicine

21%

Taken an over-the-counter drug instead of getting a prescription filled

21%

Cut pills in half or skipped doses

12%

**Did at least one of the above**

**31%**

Note: See topline for full question wording.

Source: [KFF Health Tracking Poll \(July 11-19, 2023\)](#) • [Get the data](#) • [Download PNG](#)

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The July 2023 KFF Tracking Poll finds three in four adults saying there is “not as much regulation as there should be” when it comes to limiting the price of prescription drugs. While partisans often disagree on how much government regulation there should be in other areas, majorities across partisans, including eight in ten Democrats (82%), and about two-thirds of Republicans (68%) and independents (67%) say there is “not as much regulation as there should be” when it comes to limiting the price of prescription drugs.

Figure 7

## Majorities Across Partisanship Say There Is Not Enough Government Regulation When It Comes to Limiting the Price of Prescription Drugs

Percent who say there is not as much regulation as there should be when it comes to...

|                 | Making sure prescription drugs are safe for people to use | Limiting the price of prescription drugs |
|-----------------|---|--|
| Total           | 47%   | 73%                                      |
| <b>Party ID</b> |   |  |
| Democrats       | 49%   | 82%                                      |
| Independen      | 43%   | 67%                                      |
| Republicans     | 46%   | 68%                                      |

Note: See topline or full question wording.

Source: [KFF Health Tracking Poll \(July 11-19, 2023\)](#) • [Get the data](#) • [Download PNG](#)

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For decades, lawmakers have debated drug pricing legislation, with the Inflation Reduction Act, or IRA, marking the first major piece of recent legislation aimed at lowering prescription drug prices. Before the IRA was passed in 2022, majorities across partisans supported a wide range of proposals including allowing the federal government to negotiate with drug companies to get a lower price on medications for people with Medicare, a major feature of the IRA. Historically, majorities have also favored increasing taxes on drug companies that refuse to negotiate the price of their drugs with the government, limiting how much drug companies can increase the price of drugs based on annual inflation rates, allowing Americans to buy drugs imported from Canada, placing an annual limit on out-of-pocket drug costs for people with Medicare, and making it easier for generic drugs to come to market.

Figure 8

## Before the Inflation Reduction Act, There Was Broad Support to Many Approaches to Lowering Drug Costs

Percent who favor each of the following actions that would keep prescription drug costs down:

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Making it easier for generic drugs to come to market (Feb. 2019)   | 88% |
| Limiting how much drug companies can increase the price for prescription drugs each year to no more than the rate of inflation (Oct. 2021) | 88% |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Allowing the federal government to negotiate with drug companies to get a lower price on medications for people on Medicare (Oct. 2019) | 88% |
| Allowing Americans to buy drugs imported from Canada (Oct. 2019)  | 78% |
| Increasing taxes on drug companies that refuse to negotiate the price of Rx drugs with the gov't (Oct. 2019)                            | 72% |
| Increasing taxes on drug companies whose prices are too high (Feb. 2019)  | 63% |
| Lowering what Medicare pays based on amounts in other countries (Oct. 2019)   | 62% |
| Ending the tax break given to drug companies for their advertising spending (Feb. 2019)   | 57% |
| Allowing Medicare plans to put more restrictions on use of certain drugs (Feb. 2019)  | 53% |
| Allowing Medicare drug plans to exclude more drugs (Feb. 2019)  | 25% |

Note: See topline for full question wording.

Source: KFF Health Tracking Polls • [Get the data](#) • [Download PNG](#)

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As of September 2024, most voters continue to be unaware of the Medicare drug pricing provisions in the IRA, that was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Biden in 2022, though awareness of some of the provisions is higher among older voters – the group most impacted by the provisions.

Four in ten voters are aware there is a federal law in place that caps the cost of insulin for people with Medicare at \$35 per month, while about a third (35%) are aware of the law that requires the federal government to negotiate the price of some prescription drugs for people

with Medicare. About a quarter of voters (27%) are aware of the federal law that places an annual limit on out-of-pocket prescription drug costs for people with Medicare, and one in eight (12%) are aware that there is a law in place that penalizes drug companies for increasing prices faster than the rate of inflation for people with Medicare. Compared to younger voters, larger shares of voters ages 65 and older are aware of some of these drug pricing provisions of the IRA, most notably the \$35 out-of-pocket cap on insulin, which 61% of older voters are aware is part of current law.

Figure 9

## Voters Ages 65 and Older Are More Likely to Know That Federal Law Caps the Cost of Insulin for People With Medicare

Percent who say, as far as they know, there is a federal law in place that does each of the following:

|  | Total voters | Voters ages 65+ |
|--|--------------|-----------------|
| Caps the cost of insulin for people with Medicare at \$35 per month  | 40%          | 61%             |
| Requires the federal government to negotiate the price of some prescription drugs for people with Medicare | 35%          | 38%             |
| Places an annual limit on out-of-pocket prescription drug costs for people with Medicare                   | 27%          | 34%             |
| Penalizes drug companies for increasing prices faster than the rate of inflation for people with Medicare  | 12%          | 8%              |

Note: Among registered voters. See topline for full question wording.

Source: [KFF Health Tracking Poll \(Aug. 26-Sept. 4, 2024\)](#) • [Get the data](#) • [Download PNG](#)

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Overall, almost nine in ten (85%) voters support authorizing the federal government to negotiate drug prices for people with Medicare as the IRA does, while one in seven (14%) oppose. This provision is supported by 92% of Democratic voters, 89% of independent voters, and 77% of Republican voters.

Figure 10

## Majorities Across Partisanship Support Portion of the Inflation Reduction Act That Authorizes the Federal Government to Negotiate the Price of Prescription Medication

Do you support or oppose authorizing the federal government to negotiate the price of some prescription drugs for people with Medicare?

|                        | Support | Oppose |
|------------------------|---------|--------|
| Total voters           | 85%     | 14%    |
| <b>Party ID</b>        |         |        |
| Democrats              | 92%     | 8%     |
| Independents           | 89%     | 10%    |
| Republicans            | 77%     | 23%    |
| <b>Voters ages 65+</b> |         |        |
| Total voters 65+       | 88%     | 11%    |
| Democrats              | 96%     | 4%     |
| Republicans            | 83%     | 16%    |

Note: Among registered voters. Voters ages 65 and older by party ID includes independents who lean toward either party. See topline for full question wording.

Source: [KFF Health Tracking Poll \(Aug. 26-Sept. 4, 2024\)](#) • [Get the data](#) • [Download PNG](#)

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Majorities of voters, overall and across partisanship, support two proposals that would build on the IRA by extending some of its provisions beyond those covered by Medicare. About three-quarters (77%) of voters support a proposal to expand the \$35 cap on out-of-pocket costs for insulin beyond those with Medicare, including majorities of Democratic voters (84%), independent voters (79%), and Republican voters (70%). About seven in ten (69%) voters support a proposal to expand the \$2,000 annual limit on out-of-pocket prescription drug costs beyond those with Medicare, including 83% of Democrats, 70% of independents, and 58% of Republicans.

Figure 11

## Majorities of Voters Across Partisanship Support Proposals to Expand IRA Provisions Beyond Those With Medicare

Percent who say they **support** each of the following:

|   | Total voters | Democrats | Independents | Republicans |
|---|--------------|-----------|--------------|-------------|
| Expanding the \$35 cap on monthly out-of-pocket costs for insulin <u>beyond people with Medicare</u>          | 77%          | 84%       | 79%          | 70%         |
| Expanding the \$2000 annual limit on out-of-pocket prescription drug costs <u>beyond people with Medicare</u> | 69%          | 83%       | 70%          | 58%         |

Note: Among registered voters. See topline for full question wording.

Source: [KFF Health Tracking Poll \(Aug. 26-Sept. 4, 2024\)](#) • [Get the data](#) • [Download PNG](#)



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