

# THE PUBLIC'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE UNITED STATES PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM

Confidential – under embargo until 12:01 AM (EST)  
on May 13, 2021

May 2021

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation



**HARVARD**  
**T.H. CHAN**  
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

# **REPORT SUMMARY**

## **Survey Background**

Public health is a broad field, encompassing the protection and promotion of the public's health domestically and globally. In the United States, over the past several decades, the field of public health has moved away from focusing on infectious disease control and now encompasses a much wider range of issues such as the environment and climate change, injury prevention, racism, healthy housing, and reducing drug and alcohol abuse. However, the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 has once again brought infectious diseases back into the forefront of the American consciousness.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health conducted this poll in February and March of 2021 to inform leaders about public views on the public health system in the United States during the Covid-19 era. This survey focuses on public views about the nation's public health system at the federal, state, and local levels. It examines trust in key groups in health and healthcare, ratings of the job performance of public health agencies, trust in information from public health departments, understanding of different health and social issues that fall within the purview of public health, and public views on the biggest health problems facing the nation.

This report uses data from an original survey conducted February 11 – March 15, 2021, among a nationally representative, probability-based sample of 1,305 adults ages 18 or older. It also includes summaries of related polling data from other organizations, where comparisons and trends are relevant.

## Report Highlights

As the U.S. government has led a large-scale response to the Covid-19 pandemic, it has brought infectious disease control back to the forefront of the American consciousness. Most Americans are now familiar with the term *public health* and assign public health agencies broad responsibility over many issues, including chronic and infectious disease prevention, mental health, health care, and drug abuse.

This survey finds that the public broadly believes the activities of public health agencies are important to the health of the United States and supports substantial increases in spending on public health programs, but has serious concerns about how the system functions now. The public lacks the high level of trust in key public health institutions necessary to address today's and future challenges.

Despite a broad awareness and recognition for the important role public health agencies play in protecting and promoting the health of the general public and vulnerable groups, this survey also shows the American public has higher trust in healthcare professionals than public health institutions and agencies, people give mixed ratings on the job performance of public health agencies, and a substantial minority of the public does not trust health information shared by their state and local public health departments.

These findings raise notable concerns for leaders working to shape the future of the United States public health system in the post-Covid-19 era of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If this important field is to move ahead, it has to address the concerns of lack of trust and inadequate performance ratings for major public health institutions and agencies.

## Key Findings

- There is broad public support for substantially increasing federal spending on public health. About seven in ten adults (71%) favor substantially increasing federal spending on improving the nation's public health programs, while 27% are opposed.
- A large majority of the public (72%) believes the activities of public health agencies are extremely or very important to the health of the nation.
- The public's rating of the nation's public health system and medical system have changed over time, with positive ratings of the public health system declining from 43% to 34% from 2009 to 2021, and positive ratings of the medical system increasing from 36% to 51% from 2009 to 2020.
- In terms of overall trust in the recommendations made to improve health, in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, the public currently trusts nurses, healthcare workers, and doctors more than public health institutions and agencies.
- In both 2009 and 2021, the public rated the job performance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) higher than the nation's public health system overall. In 2021, 54% of the public gave the CDC positive job performance ratings (excellent or good), while 59% did in 2009.

## **Additional Findings**

- When it comes to rating the job performance of public health agencies in the federal government, the public is divided over positive ratings of the CDC (54%), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) (48%), and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) (47%).
- When rating the job performance of their own state and local health departments, the public is also divided, where a slight majority of adults (53%) rate their local health department as doing an excellent or good job and about half of adults (49%) rate their state health department as doing an excellent or good job at protecting the public from health threats and preventing illness, including responding to the Covid-19 outbreak.
- When it comes to the reliability of information at the state level, about two-thirds of adults (65%) say that on balance, they think the information provided by their state health department about the health of people in their state is reliable, leaving about one-third of adults (32%) who say they think the information is unreliable.
- When it comes to the reliability of information at the local level, about three-quarters of adults (74%) say that on balance, they think the information provided by their local health department about the health of people in their local community is reliable, leaving more than one in five adults (23%) who say they think the information is unreliable.
- When asked an open-ended question about the top two biggest health problems facing the nation, the most-cited health problems are Covid-19 (59%), cancer (19%), obesity (19%), health care access (15%), and mental illness (10%). In addition, heart disease (9%), diabetes (8%), health care costs (7%), and drug addiction/abuse (7%) are mentioned among the biggest health problems facing the nation.
- In addition, public views of the issues that fall under the responsibility of public health agencies are more limited than views of public health experts. Importantly, unlike public health experts, a majority of the public does not currently identify three major problems facing society — climate change, gun violence, and racism — as main responsibilities for public health agencies to handle.

# INTRODUCTION

This report, *The Public's Perspective on the United States Public Health System*, summarizes the results of a 2021 poll conducted for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. It examines ratings of the job performance of public health agencies, familiarity with the public health system, trust in public health leadership groups and information from public health departments, understanding of different health and social issues that fall within the purview of public health, and views on the biggest health problems facing the nation.

## Table of Contents

### SECTION I. TRUST AND PERFORMANCE

I.	Trust in Key Groups.....	5
II.	Views on the U.S. Public Health System.....	6
III.	Familiarity and Reliability of Public Health Information .....	9

### SECTION II. WHAT IS PUBLIC HEALTH?

IV.	Understanding of Public Health Issues .....	11
V.	Views on the Biggest Local and National Health Problems .....	14

### SECTION III. SUBGROUP FINDINGS

VI.	Differences by Race/Ethnicity.....	15
VII.	Differences by Geographic Location .....	17
VIII.	Differences by Political Party Affiliation.....	18

### SECTION IV. METHODS

IX.	Methodology.....	20
-----	------------------	----

This report uses data from an original survey conducted February 11 – March 15, 2021, among a nationally representative, probability-based sample of 1,305 adults ages 18 or older living in the U.S. Race/ethnicity is categorized as non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic Black, and Hispanic/Latino (self-reported). The margin of error at the 95% confidence interval is  $\pm 3.6$  percentage points. This report also includes summaries of related polling data from other organizations, where comparisons and trends are relevant. Other polling data includes Harris 1996 (n=1004), HSPH/RWJF 2009 (n=1109), Gallup 2009 (n=1011), Gallup 2019 (n=1015), HSPH/RWJF/NPR 2020 (n=1885), and Gallup 2020 (n=1226).

## I. Trust in Key Groups

### Nurses, healthcare workers, and doctors are the most-trusted groups for recommendations made to improve health

When it comes to public trust in the recommendations made by different groups to improve health, in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, the public currently trusts nurses, healthcare workers, and doctors more than the nation's public health institutions and agencies (see Table 1). At least two-thirds of the public report trusting nurses (71%), healthcare workers they know (70%), and doctors (67%) a great deal or quite a lot when it comes to recommendations made to improve health.

**Table 1. Public Trust in Key Groups in Health and Healthcare (in Percent)**

Q5. In terms of recommendations made to improve health, how much do you trust the recommendations of each of the following groups? Do you trust them a great deal, quite a lot, somewhat, not very much, or not at all for recommendations they make to improve health?

	Great deal/Quite a lot	Somewhat	Not very much/Not at all	DK/Ref
Nurses	71	22	5	2
Healthcare workers you know	70	24	5	1
Doctors	67	24	7	2
The American Cancer Society	56	31	11	2
The CDC	52	25	20	3
The American Red Cross	48	30	16	6
Your local health department	44	36	18	2
Your state health department	41	36	21	2
The Surgeon General	40	37	19	4
Your friends or family	40	37	20	3
The NIH	37	29	19	15
The FDA	37	38	24	1
The National Academy of Medicine	34	35	16	15
The federal Department of Health and Human Services	33	37	28	2

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, *The Public's Perspective on the United States Public Health System*, 2/11/21 – 3/15/21. Q5. Questions asked of randomized half-samples of adults ages 18+ (n=655 and n=650). DK/Ref = don't know or refused response. CDC = Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. NIH = National Institutes of Health; FDA = Food and Drug Administration.

A slight majority of the public also reports having a great deal or quite a lot of trust in the American Cancer Society (56%) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (52%). At least four in ten adults report having high trust in the American Red Cross (48%), their local health department (44%), their state health department (41%), the Surgeon General (40%), and their friends or family (40%).

Notably, less than half the public has high trust (“a great deal” or “quite a lot”) in the nation's public health institutions and agencies, with the exception of the CDC. Fewer than four in ten adults report having a great deal or quite a lot of trust in the National Institutes of Health (37%), the Food and Drug Administration (37%), the National Academy of Medicine (34%), and the federal Department of Health and Human Services (33%), when it comes to recommendations made to improve health.

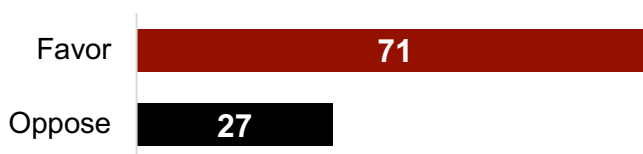
## II. Views on the U.S. Public Health System

### **Majority of adults favor substantially increasing federal spending to improve the nation's public health programs**

There is broad public support for increasing federal spending on public health in the U.S. (see Figure 1). About seven in ten adults (71%) favor substantially increasing federal spending on improving the nation's public health programs, while 27% are opposed.

**Figure 1. Public Support for Substantially Increasing Federal Spending on Improving U.S. Public Health Programs (in Percent)**

*Q11. Do you favor or oppose substantially increasing federal spending on improving the nation's public health programs?*



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, *The Public's Perspective on the United States Public Health System*, 2/11/21 – 3/15/21. Q11. Asked of a randomized half-sample of n=650 adults ages 18+. 2% of adults provided don't know responses or refused to answer the question.

### **Majority of adults believe the activities of public health agencies are extremely or very important to the health of the nation**

In addition, when it comes to rating the importance of public health agencies, a large majority of the public (72%) believes the activities of public health agencies in the United States are extremely or very important to the health of the United States (40% “extremely,” 32% “very”). One in five adults (20%) say the activities of public health agencies are somewhat important to the health of the United States, while 4% say they are not too important, and an additional 4% say they are not important at all.

### **During the Covid-19 pandemic, the public rates the nation's medical system higher than the public health system**

Despite the recognized importance of public health agencies and broad public support for increased funding, a larger share of the public gives positive ratings to the nation's medical system (51% express a great deal or quite a lot of confidence) than it does to the nation's public health system (34% give excellent or good ratings) during the Covid-19 pandemic (see Table 2). Public confidence in the nation's medical system has increased during the Covid-19 pandemic (see *Gallup 2020*), with about half of adults (51%) giving it a positive rating in 2020 compared with pre-pandemic measures in both 2009 (36%) and 2019 (36%).<sup>1</sup>

By contrast, only about one-third of adults (34%) adults give positive ratings to the nation's system for protecting the public from health threats and preventing illness, with nearly two-thirds of adults (65%) rating the nation's public health system as fair or poor. These ratings are lower than roughly a decade ago, when this question was previously asked in 2009 and 43% of the public rated the nation's public health system as excellent or good.

**Table 2. Public Ratings of the Nation's Public Health vs. Medical Systems, 2009 and 2020/2021**

	Positive Rating (%)	
	2009	2020-2021
<b>Nation's medical system <sup>a</sup></b>	<b>36</b>	<b>51*</b>
<b>Nation's public health system <sup>b</sup></b>	<b>43</b>	<b>34*</b>

<sup>a</sup> Gallup 6/14-6/17/09 (n=1011) and Gallup 6/8-7/24/20 (n=1226), Q: Please tell me how much confidence you, yourself, have in each one – a great deal, quite a lot, some or very little? The medical system. A great deal/quite a lot reported as positive ratings. <sup>b</sup> 2009 data from the HSPH/RWJF *Health Priorities Survey*, 6/24-6/28/09 (n=556 adults). Q: How would you rate the nation's system for protecting the public from health threats and preventing illness? Excellent/good reported as positive ratings. 2021 data from HSPH/RWJF, *The Public's Perspective on the United States Public Health System*, 2/11/21 – 3/15/21 (n=1,305 adults ages 18+). \*Statistically significant difference from 2009 to 2020/2021 at p<0.05.

<sup>1</sup> See [Gallup](#) 2009 Jun 14-17 (n=1011 adults); 2019 Jun 3-16 (n=1015 adults); 2020 Jun 8-Jul 24 (n=1226 adults).

### Public divisions on the job performance rating of the CDC, FDA, and NIH

When it comes to rating the job performance of public health agencies in the federal government, the public is split in its ratings of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) (see Table 3). A slight majority of adults (54%) rate the CDC as doing an excellent or good job, while 45% rate it as doing a fair or poor job. Nearly half of adults (48%) rate the FDA as doing an excellent or good job, while 51% rate it as doing a fair or poor job. The public is also split on the performance of the NIH, as 47% rate it as doing an excellent or good job, while 44% rate it as doing a fair or poor job.

Of note, the CDC is rated higher than the nation's public health system overall in both 2009 (59% positive ratings) and 2021 (54% positive ratings). Ratings of state health departments, the FDA, and the NIH remained relatively steady over this time period.

**Table 3. Public Ratings of Public Health Departments and Agencies, 2009 and 2021**

	Excellent/Good Rating (%)	
	2009	2021
<b>The CDC</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Local health department</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>State health department</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>The FDA</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>The NIH</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Nation's public health system</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>34*</b>

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, *The Public's Perspective on the United States Public Health System*, 2/11/21 – 3/15/21. Q8/Q9/Q15/Q16/Q21/Q22. Federal questions asked of n=1,305 adults ages 18+. State (n=650) and local (n=655) health department questions were asked of randomized half-samples of adults. 2021 state/local health department ratings are composites of Q15-16 (state) and Q21-22 (local). CDC = Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. NIH = National Institutes of Health; FDA = Food and Drug Administration. Local health departments were not rated in 2009. \*indicates statistically significant difference from 2009 to 2021 at p<0.05. 2009 data come from the HSPH/RWJF *Health Priorities Survey*, 6/24-6/28/09 (n=1,109 adults, some questions asked of half-samples).

### Public divisions on rating the job performance of their state and local health departments

When it comes to rating the job performance of their own state and local health departments, the public is also divided. About half of adults (49%) say their state health department is doing an excellent or good job at protecting the public from health threats and preventing illness, including responding to the Covid-19 outbreak, while 51% say it is doing a fair or poor job. Similarly, a slight majority of adults (53%) say their local health department is doing an excellent or good job at protecting the public from health threats and preventing illness, including responding to the Covid-19 outbreak, while 46% say it is doing a fair or poor job.

### III. Familiarity and Reliability of Public Health Information

#### Three-quarters of adults are familiar with the work of their state health department

When it comes to their state health department, three-quarters of adults (75%) say they are familiar with the activities of their state health department, including 20% who are very familiar and 55% who are somewhat familiar. One-quarter of adults (25%) report being unfamiliar with the activities of their state health department, including 18% who are not too familiar and 7% who are not at all familiar.

#### Two-thirds of adults are familiar with the work of their local health department

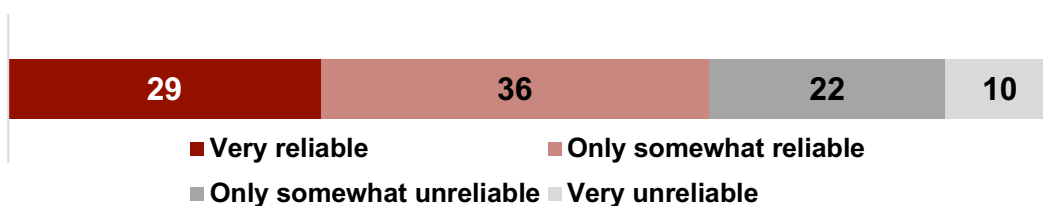
When it comes to their local health department, about two-thirds of adults (66%) say they are familiar with the activities of their local health department, including 17% who are very familiar and 49% who are somewhat familiar. One-third of adults (33%) report being unfamiliar with the activities of their local health department, including 23% who are not too familiar and 10% who are not at all familiar.

#### About two-thirds of adults believe the information provided by their state health department is reliable, while about one-third do not

About two-thirds of adults (65%) say that on balance, they think the information provided by their state health department about the health of people in their state is reliable, leaving about one-third of adults (32%) who say they think the information is unreliable. See Figure 2 below for details.

**Figure 2. Views on the Reliability of Information Provided by Your State Health Department (in Percent)**

Q17-18. On balance, do you think the information provided by your state health department about the health of people in your state is reliable, or not? And would you say it is very or only somewhat [reliable/unreliable]?



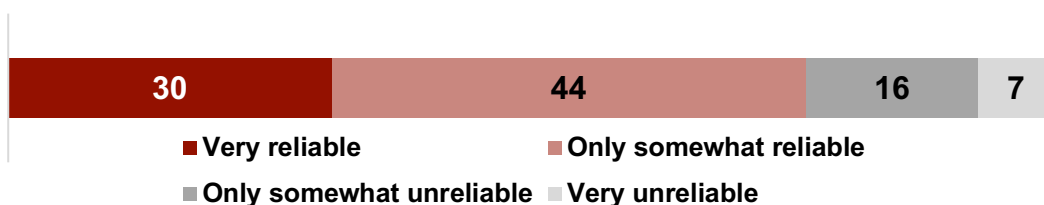
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, *The Public's Perspective on the United States Public Health System*, 2/11/21 – 3/15/21. Q17-18. Questions were asked of a randomized half-sample of n=650 adults ages 18+. 3% of adults provided don't know responses or refused to answer the question.

**About three-quarters of adults believe the information provided by their local health department is reliable, while more than one in five do not**

About three-quarters of adults (74%) say that on balance, they think the information provided by their local health department about the health of people in their local community is reliable, leaving more than one in five adults (23%) who say they think the information is unreliable. See Figure 3 below for details.

**Figure 3. Views on the Reliability of Information Provided by Your Local Health Department (in Percent)**

Q23-24. On balance, do you think the information provided by your local health department about the health of people in your local community is reliable, or not? And would you say it is very or only somewhat [reliable/unreliable]?



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, *The Public's Perspective on the United States Public Health System*, 2/11/21 – 3/15/21. Q23-24. Questions were asked of a randomized half-sample of n=655 adults ages 18+. 3% of adults provided don't know responses or refused to answer the question.

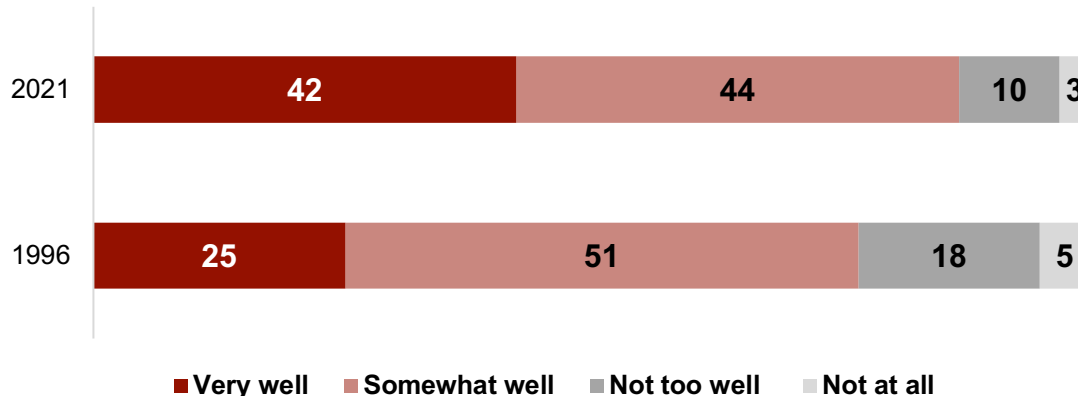
## IV. Understanding of Public Health Issues

### **Most of the public believes they have a general understanding of what is meant by “public health”**

When it comes to understanding public health, about four in ten adults (42%) say they understand what is meant by the words “public health” very well, while 44% say they understand it somewhat well (Figure 4). Public understanding of the term “public health” has increased since it was measured in 1996 by Harris,<sup>2</sup> when 25% of the public said they understand the term very well and 51% said they understood it somewhat well.

**Figure 4. Growing Public Understanding of “Public Health” (in Percent)**

Q6. If you read or hear somebody talking about public health, how well do you feel that you understand what they mean by those two words “public health”?



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, *The Public's Perspective on the United States Public Health System*, 2/11/21 – 3/15/21. Q6. N=1,305 adults ages 18+. Harris Poll, 12/12-12/16/1996 (n=1004).

### **Public views of what issues are included in public health are more limited than the issues considered by public health experts**

When given a list of 33 issues that are widely considered by public health experts to be within the domain of public health, there are different levels of public understanding over which issues are the main responsibilities for public health agencies to handle. At least half of the public cited 28 issues as being what they consider main responsibilities for public health agencies (see Table 4).

<sup>2</sup> See the [Harris Poll](#), conducted 12/12/1996-12/16/1996 (n=1004 adults).

**Table 4. Issues Considered by the Public to be Main Responsibilities for Public Health Agencies**

Q26-29. When you think of the following issues, would you consider each of the following to be one of the main responsibilities for public health agencies, or not? You can select multiple issues as being main responsibilities for public health agencies. How about \_\_\_\_?

	%
Providing vaccines to prevent the spread of COVID-19	92
Controlling the spread of new infectious diseases like Ebola, Zika, or COVID-19	91
Providing vaccines to prevent illnesses like the yearly flu, measles, and mumps	90
Enforcing standards for safe drinking water	90
Reducing causes of food poisoning, such as salmonella or E. coli	88
Preventing and treating mental illness	87
Reducing infant mortality and preterm birth	80
Preventing chronic diseases like heart disease, cancer, and diabetes	80
Preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS	79
Reducing shortages of health professionals, hospitals, and community health centers	76
Reducing health care costs	75
Reducing prescription painkiller abuse and addiction	75
Preparing the public in advance to handle health problems or injuries resulting from emergency events, such as bombings or terrorist attacks	74
Improving air and water quality	72
Reducing illegal drug abuse and addiction	70
Reducing the gaps in health and health care between whites and minorities	67
Providing health insurance for those who don't have it	67
Responding to natural disasters, like wildfires, major hurricanes or floods	67
Providing family planning services	66
Safely disposing of garbage	66
Reducing the gaps in health care between men and women	65
Reducing alcohol abuse	61
Cleaning up the environment	60
Improving diet and physical activity	60
Reducing smoking and tobacco use	59
Reducing sexual violence	58
Reducing domestic violence	56
Increasing the availability of healthy, affordable housing	50
Reducing eviction and homelessness	49
Reducing racism	43
Preventing violence and deaths from guns	40
Preventing injuries caused by motor vehicle crashes	39
Reducing climate change	33

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, *The Public's Perspective on the United States Public Health System*, 2/11/21–3/15/21. Q26-29. Questions were asked of randomized half-samples of n=655 and n=650 adults ages 18+.

At the top of the list, most adults say that infectious disease issues fall within the domain of public health, as well as mental illness, chronic diseases, and maintaining safe air and water. This includes 92% of the public who say providing vaccines to prevent the spread of Covid-19 is one of the main responsibilities for public health agencies, as is controlling the spread of new infectious diseases like Ebola, Zika, or Covid-19 (91%), providing vaccines to prevent illnesses like the yearly flu, measles, and mumps (90%), enforcing safe standards for drinking water (90%), reducing causes of food poisoning such as salmonella or E. coli (88%), and preventing and treating mental illness (87%).

Between seven and eight in ten adults say the following issues are main responsibilities of public health agencies: reducing infant mortality and preterm birth (80%), preventing chronic diseases like heart disease, cancer, and diabetes (80%), preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS (79%), reducing shortages of health professionals, hospitals, and community health centers (76%), reducing health care costs (75%), reducing prescription painkiller abuse and addiction (75%), preparing the public in advance to handle health problems or injuries resulting from emergency events, such as bombings or terrorist attacks (74%), improving air and water quality (72%), and reducing illegal drug abuse and addiction (70%).

Between half and two-thirds of adults say the following issues are main responsibilities of public health agencies: reducing the gaps in health and healthcare between whites and minorities (67%), providing health insurance for those who don't have it (67%), responding to natural disasters, like wildfires, major hurricanes, or floods (67%), providing family planning services (66%), safely disposing of garbage (66%), reducing the gaps in health care between men and women (65%), reducing alcohol abuse (61%), cleaning up the environment (60%), improving diet and physical activity (60%), reducing smoking and tobacco use (59%), reducing sexual violence (58%), reducing domestic violence (56%), and increasing the availability of healthy, affordable housing (50%).

Fewer than half of adults say the following issues are main responsibilities of public health agencies: reducing eviction and homelessness (49%), reducing racism (43%), preventing violence and death from guns (40%), preventing injuries caused by motor vehicle crashes (39%), and reducing climate change (33%).

Of note, responses to this question do not necessarily indicate lack of public concern about these issues. For example, the public has shown wide concern about racism, gun violence, and climate change recently in other polling.<sup>3</sup> In addition, this question was asked after the American Medical Association (AMA) declared racism to be a public health threat in November 2020,<sup>4</sup> but before the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) declared racism to be a serious public health threat in April 2021.<sup>5</sup> Other issues, including climate change<sup>6</sup> and gun violence,<sup>7</sup> have also been prominently discussed as public health issues by national and international experts in recent years.

Responses to this question indicate that while many issues are of wide public concern, the public does not see these issues as falling within the field of public health, and they do not believe they are main responsibilities for public health agencies to tackle. This is intended to be used for public health agencies and leadership organizations, to understand which top issues are “owned” by the field in the public consciousness.

Notably, when examining the differences in views between adults who say they understand what the term “public health” means very well compared to those who do not, there were few differences in views on the main responsibilities of public health agencies.

---

<sup>3</sup> See [Pew Research Center 2020](#); [Kaiser Family Foundation/Washington Post 2019](#); [Pew Research Center 2019](#).

<sup>4</sup> See [AMA: Racism is a threat to public health](#), November 16, 2020. <sup>5</sup> See [CDC media statement on racism and health](#), April 8, 2021. <sup>6</sup> Watts N et al. Health and climate change: policy responses to protect public health. *Lancet*. 2015;386(10006):1861–1914. <sup>7</sup> Institute of Medicine and National Research Council. 2013. *Priorities for Research to Reduce the Threat of Firearm-Related Violence*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

## V. Views on the Biggest Local and National Health Problems

### Covid-19, cancer, obesity, and healthcare access cited as biggest national health problems

When asked an open-ended question about the top two biggest health problems facing the nation, the most-cited health problems are Covid-19 (59%), cancer (19%), obesity (19%), health care access (15%), and mental illness (10%) (see Table 5). In addition, heart disease (9%), diabetes (8%), health care costs (7%), and drug addiction/abuse (7%) are mentioned among the biggest health problems facing the nation.

When asked an open-ended question about the top two biggest health problems facing their own local communities, adults' views are similar to concerns nationally (see Table 5). The most-cited health problems are Covid-19 (57%), obesity (12%), and drug addiction/abuse (10%), along with cancer (9%), health care access (9%), mental illness (9%), heart disease (9%), and diabetes (9%).

**Table 5. Top 2 Biggest National and Community Health Problems (in Percent)**

Q1-4. What would you say is the biggest health problem facing [the United States / your local community]? And beyond the biggest health problem, what would you say is the second biggest health problem facing [the United States / your local community]? [Open-ended]

	United States (National)	Local Community
Coronavirus/COVID-19	59	57
Cancer	19	9
Obesity	19	12
Health care access	15	9
Mental illness	10	9
Heart disease	9	9
Diabetes	8	9
Health care costs	7	4
Drug addiction/abuse	7	10

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, *The Public's Perspective on the United States Public Health System*, 2/11/21 – 3/15/21. Q1-4. Questions were asked of randomized half-samples of n=650 (national) and n=655 (local community) adults ages 18+. Categories ranked by overall highest % among all respondents for national problems. No other problems were mentioned by more than 5% of adults.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, when prior polling asked adults about the biggest health problem in their local communities in 2019, the top five answers given were drug and opioid addiction or abuse (19%), access to healthcare (11%), obesity (9%), cancer (8%), and healthcare costs (6%).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See [Life Experiences and Income Inequality in the United States](#), NPR/Harvard/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, conducted 7/17/19-8/18/19, Q21 (n=1885).

## VI. Differences by Race/Ethnicity

Latino/Hispanic adults (who comprise approximately 16% of the U.S. adult population) and African American/Black adults (who comprise approximately 12% of the U.S. adult population) often have distinct perspectives compared with non-Hispanic whites. Below, key findings from this report are highlighted, by race/ethnicity.

- Latino adults have distinct views compared to non-Hispanic white adults when it comes to having a great deal or quite a lot of trust in recommendations made to improve health by several key groups in health and healthcare (see Table 6). In particular, Latino adults have higher levels of trust in their local health departments (57% to 38%), the FDA (51% to 35%), their friends and family (49% to 39%), and the National Academy of Medicine (47% to 29%) when it comes to recommendations made to improve health.
- There are not statistically significant differences between Black adults and non-Hispanic white adults when it comes to reporting a great deal or quite a lot of trust in recommendations made to improve health by these groups (see Table 6).

**Table 6. Public Trust in Key Groups in Health and Healthcare, By Race/Ethnicity**

Q5. In terms of recommendations made to improve health, how much do you trust the recommendations of each of the following groups? Do you trust them a great deal, quite a lot, somewhat, not very much, or not at all for recommendations they make to improve health?

	A Great Deal/Quite a Lot of Trust (%)		
	White	Latino	Black
Nurses	75	66	67
Healthcare workers you know	73	71	66
Doctors	68	63	67
The American Cancer Society	55	64	51
The CDC	51	49	60
The American Red Cross	47	54	50
Your local health department	38	57*	44
Your state health department	39	48	44
The Surgeon General	40	44	39
Your friends or family	39	49*	39
The NIH	36	33	43
The FDA	35	51*	34
The National Academy of Medicine	29	47*	30
The federal Department of Health and Human services	32	39	29

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, *The Public's Perspective on the United States Public Health System*, 2/11/21 – 3/15/21. Q5. Questions asked of randomized half-samples of adults ages 18+ (n=655 and n=650). CDC = Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. NIH = National Institutes of Health; FDA = Food and Drug Administration. \*indicates statistically significant difference between Latino and NH white at p<0.05. Items rank-ordered by highest % overall.

- When it comes to rating the job performance of public health departments and agencies, a larger share of Latino adults give positive ratings at all levels compared to non-Hispanic white adults (see Table 7). In addition, a higher share of Black adults give the CDC, FDA, NIH, and their state health departments positive job performance ratings compared to non-Hispanic white adults (see Table 7).

**Table 7. Public Ratings of Public Health Departments and Agencies (2021), By Race/Ethnicity**

	Excellent/Good Rating (%)		
	White	Latino	Black
The CDC	52	60*	63*
Local health department	52	60*	58
State health department	45	61*	56*
The FDA	45	56*	57*
The NIH	44	58*	54*
Nation's public health system	33	45*	39

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, *The Public's Perspective on the United States Public Health System*, 2/11/21 – 3/15/21. Q8/Q9/Q15/Q16/Q21/Q22. N=1,305 adults ages 18+. Some questions asked of randomized half-samples of adults. State/local health department responses are composites of Q15-16 (state) and Q21-22 (local). CDC = Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. NIH = National Institutes of Health; FDA = Food and Drug Administration. \*indicates statistically significant difference between Black v. non-Hispanic white or Latino v. non-Hispanic white at  $p < 0.05$ . Items rank-ordered by highest % overall.

- When given a list of 33 issues that are widely considered by public health experts to be within the domain of public health, majorities of all three racial/ethnic groups identified 27 issues as being what they consider main responsibilities for public health agencies.
- On the six remaining issues, public opinion differs substantially by racial/ethnic identity (see Table 8). On these issues, half or more Black adults identified each as main responsibilities for public health agencies to handle, while a majority of Latino adults identified four out of the six issues as main responsibilities for public health agencies. On all six issues, the majority of whites do not see these as main responsibilities for public health agencies to handle.

**Table 8. Issues Considered by the Public to be Main Responsibilities for Public Health Agencies, by Race/Ethnicity (in Percent)**

Q26-29. When you think of the following issues, would you consider each of the following to be one of the main responsibilities for public health agencies, or not? You can select multiple issues as being main responsibilities for public health agencies. How about \_\_\_\_?

	White	Black	Latino
Increasing the availability of healthy, affordable housing	41	63*	72*
Reducing eviction and homelessness	42	74*	56*
Reducing racism	36	61*	58*
Preventing violence and deaths from guns	35	59*	54*
Preventing injuries caused by motor vehicle crashes	35	50*	41
Reducing climate change	29	50*	40*

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, *The Public's Perspective on the United States Public Health System*, 2/11/21–3/15/21. Q26-29. Questions asked of randomized half-samples of adults ages 18+ (n=655 and n=650).

\*indicates statistically significant difference between Black v. non-Hispanic white or Latino v. non-Hispanic white at  $p < 0.05$ .

## VII. Differences by Geographic Location

This poll also examined potential differences in views across urban, suburban, and rural geographies of the United States. Public ratings of the nation's public health system, as well as state and local health departments, are shown below.

- When it comes to rating the job performance of the nation's public health system and state and local health departments, there are few differences in adults' views by geographic location (Table 9). Ratings of the nation's public health system and state health departments show consistent ratings across geographies, while a higher share of suburban adults (59%) give positive job performance ratings to their local health departments compared to urban adults (46%).

**Table 9. Public Ratings of The Public Health System and Health Departments (2021), By Geographic Location**

	Excellent/Good Rating (%)		
	Urban	Suburban	Rural
State health department	51	48	47
Local health department	46	59*	51
Nation's public health system	33	37	31

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, *The Public's Perspective on the United States Public Health System*, 2/11/21 – 3/15/21. Q8/Q9/Q15/Q16/Q21/Q22. N=1,305 adults ages 18+. State and local health department questions were asked of randomized half-samples of adults and are composites of Q15-16 (state) and Q21-22 (local). \*indicates statistically significant difference between suburban and urban adults at  $p < 0.05$ . Items rank-ordered by highest % reported among urban adults.

## VIII. Differences by Political Party Affiliation

Many views held by the public differ substantially by political party affiliation. Highlights of major differences in views between adults in the general public who identify themselves as Democrats and Republicans are included below.

- When it comes to trusting the recommendations of different groups to improve health, there are major differences in views between Democrats and Republicans (see Table 10).

**Table 10. Public Trust in Key Groups in Health and Healthcare, By Political Party Affiliation**

Q5. In terms of recommendations made to improve health, how much do you trust the recommendations of each of the following groups? Do you trust them a great deal, quite a lot, somewhat, not very much, or not at all for recommendations they make to improve health?

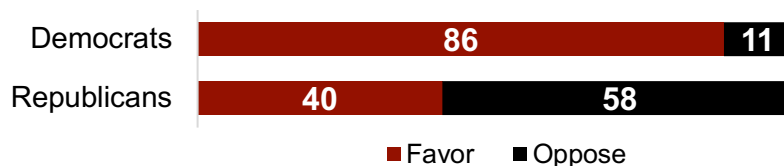
	A Great Deal/Quite a Lot of Trust (%)	
	Democrats	Republicans
Doctors	80*	52
Healthcare workers you know	78	70
The CDC	76*	27
Nurses	75	68
The American Cancer Society	61	50
The NIH	61*	21
The American Red Cross	60*	40
Your state health department	59*	22
Your local health department	53*	38
The Surgeon General	50*	24
The FDA	47*	26
The National Academy of Medicine	47*	17
The federal Department of Health and Human services	43*	22
Your friends or family	35	46

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, *The Public's Perspective on the United States Public Health System*, 2/11/21 – 3/15/21. Q5. Questions asked of randomized half-samples of adults ages 18+ (n=655 and n=650). CDC = Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. NIH = National Institutes of Health; FDA = Food and Drug Administration. \*indicates statistically significant difference between Democrats and Republicans at p<0.05. Items rank-ordered by highest % reported among Democrats.

- In addition, most Democrats (86%) favor substantially increasing federal spending on improving the nation's public health programs, compared to four in ten Republicans (40%) (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Public Support for Substantially Increasing Federal Spending on Improving U.S. Public Health Programs, by Political Party Affiliation (in Percent)**

Q11. Do you favor or oppose substantially increasing federal spending on improving the nation's public health programs?



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, *The Public's Perspective on the United States Public Health System*, 2/11/21 – 3/15/21. Q11. Asked of a randomized half-sample of n=650 adults ages 18+.

- When it comes to rating the job performance of public health departments and agencies, a substantially higher share of Democrats adults give positive job performance ratings to public health departments and agencies compared to Republicans (see Table 11).

**Table 11. Public Ratings of Public Health Departments and Agencies (2021),  
By Political Party Affiliation**

	Excellent/Good Rating (%)	
	Democrats	Republicans
The CDC	74*	32
The NIH	66*	28
Local health department	64*	40
The FDA	58*	34
State health department	56*	39
Nation's public health system	40*	30

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, *The Public's Perspective on the United States Public Health System*, 2/11/21 – 3/15/21. Q8/Q9/Q15/Q16/Q21/Q22. N=1,305 adults ages 18. Some questions asked of randomized half-samples of adults. State/local health department responses are composites of Q15-16 (state) and Q21-22 (local). CDC = Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. NIH = National Institutes of Health; FDA = Food and Drug Administration. \*indicates statistically significant difference between Democrats and Republicans at  $p < 0.05$ . Items rank-ordered by highest % reported among Democrats.

- When it comes to the reliability of information at the state level, Republicans are more likely than Democrats (47% to 19%) to say that on balance, they think the information provided by their state health department about the health of people in their state is unreliable. At the local level, Republicans are also more likely than Democrats (34% to 11%) to say that on balance, they think the information provided by their local health department about the health of people in their local community is unreliable.
- When it comes to understanding the main responsibilities of public health agencies, Republican have a more limited view of public health issues than Democrats on 28 out of 33 issues examined. Of note, there are six issues where Republicans and Democrats are more than 30 percentage points different in their views: providing health insurance for those who don't have it (48% to 84%); providing family planning services (44% to 87%); reducing racism (24% to 58%); preventing violence and deaths from guns (20% to 57%); reducing the gaps in health care between men and women (46% to 78%); and reducing the gaps in health and healthcare between whites and minorities (43% to 90%).
- The items least likely to be seen by Democrats as main responsibilities of public health agencies are preventing injuries caused by motor vehicle crashes (47%) and reducing climate change (47%).
- The items least likely to be seen by Republicans as main responsibilities of public health agencies are preventing violence and death from guns (20%) and reducing climate change (19%).

## IX. Methodology

This poll is part of an on-going series of surveys developed by researchers at the Harvard Opinion Research Program (HORP) at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health in partnership with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The research team consists of the following members at each institution.

**Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health:** Robert J. Blendon, Professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis, Emeritus, and Executive Director of HORP; John M. Benson, Senior Research Scientist and Managing Director of HORP; Mary G. Findling, Assistant Director of HORP; Chelsea Whitton Pearsall, Research Coordinator.

**Robert Wood Johnson Foundation:** Carolyn Miller, Senior Program Officer, Research-Evaluation-Learning; Jordan Reese, Director of Media Relations; Martina Todaro, Research Associate, Research-Evaluation-Learning.

Interviews were conducted by SSRS of Glen Mills (PA) via telephone (including both landline and cell phone) using random-digit dialing, February 11 – March 15, 2021, among a nationally representative probability-based sample of 1,305 U.S. adults age 18 or older. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. The margin of error for total respondents is +/-3.6 percentage points, at the 95% confidence level.

Possible sources of non-sampling error include non-response bias, as well as question wording and ordering effects. Non-response in telephone surveys produces some known biases in survey-derived estimates because participation tends to vary for different subgroups of the population. To compensate for these known biases and for variations in probability of selection within and across households, sample data are weighted by cell phone/landline use and demographics (sex, age, race/ethnicity, education, and Census region), as well as party identification, to reflect the true population. Other techniques, including random-digit dialing, replicate subsamples, and systematic respondent selection within households, are used to ensure that the sample is representative.

### Characteristics of Population Subgroups

	Group's weighted % of total sample	Number of interviews (unweighted)		Margin of error at the 95% confidence level (percentage points)	
		Total sample	Half samples*	Total sample	Half samples
Total adults	100	1305	653	+/-3.6	+/-5.1
By race/ethnicity					
White (non-Latino)	62	580	290	+/-5.0	+/-7.0
Black (non-Latino)	12	301	151	+/-7.6	+/-10.7
Latino	16	326	163	+/-6.9	+/-9.7
By geography/metro status					
Urban	40	547	274	+/-5.6	+/-7.9
Suburban	46	602	301	+/-5.4	+/-7.6
Rural	14	156	78	+/-9.9	+/-14.0
By party identification**					
Republican	25	230	115	+/-7.9	+/-11.2
Democrat	31	517	259	+/-6.0	+/-8.4

Note: \*Half-samples vary slightly in size. Average number per half-sample. \*\*Because Black and Latino adults were oversampled, the unweighted sample sizes for party identification contain more interviews with those two racial/ethnic groups, which identify more as Democrats and less as Republicans than the overall adult population does. However, the weighted percentages (25% R, 31% D) reflect the actual distribution of Democrats and Republicans in the U.S. adult population, so the overall results are representative of the total U.S. adult population.

**ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION  
HARVARD T.H. CHAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

---

**THE PUBLIC'S PERSPECTIVE ON  
THE UNITED STATES PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM**

This survey was conducted for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, via telephone (landline and cell phone) by SSRS, an independent research company. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish, **February 11– March 15, 2021**, among a nationally representative, probability-based sample of 1,305 adults age 18 or older living in the U.S. The margin of error for total respondents is +/-3.6 percentage points, at the 95% confidence level.

**Table of Contents**

	Page #
I. Public Health Priorities and Views on Leadership	2
II. Views on the Nation's Public Health System	11
III. Views on State Public Health Systems	13
IV. Views on Local Public Health Systems	15
V. Views on Public Health Issue Domains	17
VI. Special Demographics	23
VII. Demographics	25

## I. Public Health Priorities and Views on Leadership

(Asked of half-sample A; n=655)

Q1. What would you say is the biggest HEALTH PROBLEM facing your LOCAL COMMUNITY?

First choice	%
Coronavirus/COVID-19	52
Obesity	5
Mental illness	4
Access to care	4
Diabetes	4
Drug addiction/abuse (NET)	4
<i>Opioid addiction/abuse (painkillers, Rx painkillers, OxyContin, Vicodin, Percocet, or fentanyl)</i>	1
<i>Other drug addiction/abuse</i>	3
Vaccinations	2
Cancer	2
Cost	2
Heart disease/heart attack/heart failure	2
Flu/influenza	1
High blood pressure	1
Environmental factors	1
Poor diet/Nutrition	1
Poverty/economy/unemployment	1
Other	6
None/No health problems facing your local community	3
Don't know/Refused	5

**(Asked of half-sample A; n=655)**

Q1. What would you say is the biggest HEALTH PROBLEM facing your LOCAL COMMUNITY?

**(If mentioned a health problem facing their local community)**

Q2. And beyond the biggest health problem, what would you say is the SECOND biggest health problem facing your LOCAL COMMUNITY?

**Q1/Q2 Combo Table – Top Two Biggest Health Problems Facing Your Local Community**

**Base: Half-sample A respondents; n=655**

<b>Combined first and second choices</b>	<b>%</b>
Coronavirus/COVID-19	57
Obesity	12
Drug addiction/abuse (NET)	10
<i>Opioid addiction/abuse (painkillers, Rx painkillers, OxyContin, Vicodin, Percocet, or fentanyl)</i>	2
<i>Other drug addiction/abuse</i>	8
Access to care	9
Cancer	9
Mental illness	9
Heart disease/heart attack/heart failure	9
Diabetes	9
Diseases (Alzheimer's, STDs, other disease mentions)	4
Environmental factors	4
Cost	4
Flu/influenza	3
High blood pressure	3
Poor diet/Nutrition	3
Vaccinations	3
Homelessness	2
Poor health choices/Not living healthy lifestyle	2
Poverty/economy/unemployment	2
Alcohol abuse	1
Smoking	1
Aging population/the elderly (care/services)	1
Government/politics/politicians	1
Discrimination/health disparity	1
Other	8
None/No health problems facing your local community	3
Don't know/Refused	5

**(Asked of half-sample B; n=650)**

Q3. What would you say is the biggest HEALTH PROBLEM facing THE UNITED STATES?

First choice	%
Coronavirus/COVID-19	53
Access to care	8
Obesity	7
Cancer	5
Mental illness	4
Cost	3
Heart disease/heart attack/heart failure	3
Drug addiction/abuse (NET)	3
<i>Opioid addiction/abuse (painkillers, Rx painkillers, OxyContin, Vicodin, Percocet, or fentanyl)</i>	1
<i>Other drug addiction/abuse</i>	2
Poor diet/Nutrition	2
Diabetes	1
Government interference	1
Poor health choices/Not living healthy lifestyle	1
Diseases (Alzheimer's, STDs, other disease mentions)	1
Government/politics/politicians	1
Discrimination/health disparity	1
Other	3
None/No health problems facing the United States	1
Don't know/Refused	2

**(Asked of half-sample B; n=650)**

Q3. What would you say is the biggest HEALTH PROBLEM facing THE UNITED STATES?

**(If mentioned a health problem facing the United States)**

Q4. And beyond the biggest health problem, what would you say is the SECOND biggest health problem facing THE UNITED STATES?

**Q3/Q4 Combo Table – Top Two Biggest Health Problems Facing the United States**

**Base: Half-sample B respondents; n=650**

<b>Combined first and second choices</b>	<b>%</b>
Coronavirus/COVID-19	59
Cancer	19
Obesity	19
Access to care	15
Mental illness	10
Heart disease/heart attack/heart failure	9
Diabetes	8
Cost	7
Drug addiction/abuse (NET)	7
<i>Opioid addiction/abuse (painkillers, Rx painkillers, OxyContin, Vicodin, Percocet, or fentanyl)</i>	4
<i>Other drug addiction/abuse</i>	3
Poor diet/Nutrition	4
Poor health choices/Not living healthy lifestyle	3
Flu/influenza	3
Government interference	2
Diseases (Alzheimer's, STDs, other disease mentions)	2
Government/politics/politicians	2
Discrimination/health disparity	2
High blood pressure	1
HIV/AIDS	1
Environmental factors	1
Smoking	1
Vaccinations	1
Poverty/economy/unemployment	1
Other	7
None/No health problems facing the United States	1
Don't know/Refused	2

Q5. In terms of recommendations made to improve health, how much do you trust the recommendations of each of the following groups? What about (INSERT ITEM)? Do you trust them a great deal, quite a lot, somewhat, not very much, or not at all for recommendations they make to improve health?

**(Asked of half-sample C; n=655)**

a. The CDC, or Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

	%
A great deal	26
Quite a lot	26
Somewhat	25
Not very much	8
Not at all	12
Don't know/Refused	3

**(Asked of half-sample C; n=655)**

b. Your state health department

	%
A great deal	19
Quite a lot	22
Somewhat	36
Not very much	11
Not at all	10
Don't know/Refused	2

**(Asked of half-sample C; n=655)**

c. Nurses

	%
A great deal	36
Quite a lot	35
Somewhat	22
Not very much	3
Not at all	2
Don't know/Refused	2

**(Asked of half-sample C; n=655)**

d. The NIH, or National Institutes of Health

	%
A great deal	19
Quite a lot	18
Somewhat	29
Not very much	8
Not at all	11
Don't know/Refused	15

**(Asked of half-sample C; n=655)**

e. Doctors

	%
A great deal	37
Quite a lot	30
Somewhat	24
Not very much	5
Not at all	2
Don't know/Refused	2

**(Asked of half-sample C; n=655)**

f. Your friends or family

	%
A great deal	20
Quite a lot	20
Somewhat	37
Not very much	13
Not at all	7
Don't know/Refused	3

**(Asked of half-sample C; n=655)**

g. The American Red Cross

	%
A great deal	22
Quite a lot	26
Somewhat	30
Not very much	9
Not at all	7
Don't know/Refused	6

**(Asked of half-sample D; n=650)**

h. The FDA, or Food and Drug Administration

	%
A great deal	13
Quite a lot	24
Somewhat	38
Not very much	14
Not at all	10
Don't know/Refused	1

**(Asked of half-sample D; n=650)**

- i. Your local health department

	%
A great deal	18
Quite a lot	26
Somewhat	36
Not very much	11
Not at all	7
Don't know/Refused	2

**(Asked of half-sample D; n=650)**

- j. The federal Department of Health and Human Services

	%
A great deal	13
Quite a lot	20
Somewhat	37
Not very much	15
Not at all	13
Don't know/Refused	2

**(Asked of half-sample D; n=650)**

- k. The Surgeon General

	%
A great deal	18
Quite a lot	22
Somewhat	37
Not very much	11
Not at all	8
Don't know/Refused	4

**(Asked of half-sample D; n=650)**

- l. Healthcare workers you know

	%
A great deal	34
Quite a lot	36
Somewhat	24
Not very much	4
Not at all	1
Don't know any healthcare workers (vol)	1
Don't know/Refused	*

**(Asked of half-sample D; n=650)**

m. The National Academy of Medicine

	%
A great deal	16
Quite a lot	18
Somewhat	35
Not very much	8
Not at all	8
Don't know/Refused	15

**(Asked of half-sample D; n=650)**

n. The American Cancer Society

	%
A great deal	26
Quite a lot	30
Somewhat	31
Not very much	7
Not at all	4
Don't know/Refused	2

**Q5 Summary Table**

	Great deal/ Quite a lot	Somewhat	Not very much/ Not at all	Don't know/ Refused
Nurses <sup>c</sup>	71	22	5	2
Healthcare workers you know <sup>d</sup>	70	24	5	1
Doctors <sup>c</sup>	67	24	7	2
The American Cancer Society <sup>d</sup>	56	31	11	2
The CDC, or Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <sup>c</sup>	52	25	20	3
The American Red Cross <sup>c</sup>	48	30	16	6
Your local health department <sup>d</sup>	44	36	18	2
Your state health department <sup>c</sup>	41	36	21	2
The Surgeon General <sup>d</sup>	40	37	19	4
Your friends or family <sup>c</sup>	40	37	20	3
The NIH, or National Institutes of Health <sup>c</sup>	37	29	19	15
The FDA, or Food and Drug Administration <sup>c</sup>	37	38	24	1
The National Academy of Medicine <sup>d</sup>	34	35	16	15
The federal Department of Health and Human Services <sup>d</sup>	33	37	28	2

<sup>c</sup> Asked of half-sample C; n=655.<sup>d</sup> Asked of half-sample D; n=650.

Q6. If you read or hear somebody talking about public health, how well do you feel that you understand what they mean by those two words “public health”?

	%
Very well	42
Somewhat well	44
Not too well	10
Not at all	3
Don't know/Refused	1

Q7. How important do you think the activities of public health agencies are to the health of the United States?

	%
Extremely important	40
Very important	32
Somewhat important	20
Not too important	4
Not at all	4
Don't know/Refused	*

## II. Views on the Nation's Public Health System

Q8. How would you rate the **nation's system for protecting the public from health threats and preventing illness**? Would you rate it as:

	%
Excellent	6
Good	28
Fair	36
Poor	29
Don't know/Refused	1

Q9. Now I'm going to read you a list of agencies in the **FEDERAL** government. For each one, please tell me how good a job you think it is doing. How about (INSERT ITEM)? Do you think it is doing an excellent, good, fair, or poor job?

a. The CDC, or Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

	%
Excellent	17
Good	37
Fair	27
Poor	18
Don't know/Refused	1

b. The FDA, or Food and Drug Administration

	%
Excellent	12
Good	36
Fair	35
Poor	16
Don't know/Refused	1

c. The NIH, or National Institutes of Health

	%
Excellent	11
Good	36
Fair	31
Poor	13
Don't know/Refused	9

**(Asked of half-sample C; n=655)**

Q10. Do you favor or oppose substantially increasing federal spending on preventing the spread of infectious diseases like COVID-19?

	%
Favor	71
Oppose	28
Don't know/Refused	1

**(Asked of half-sample D; n=650)**

Q11. Do you favor or oppose substantially increasing federal spending on improving the nation's public health programs?

	%
Favor	71
Oppose	27
Don't know/Refused	2

Q12. Do you generally approve or disapprove of the decisions that have been made by the federal Department of Health and Human Services about COVID-19 since the start of the outbreak?

	%
Approve	49
Disapprove	47
Don't know/Refused	4

### III. Views on State Public Health Systems

**(Asked of half-sample B; n=650)**

Q13. How familiar are you with the activities of your state's health department? Would you say you are not at all familiar, not too familiar, somewhat familiar, or very familiar with the activities of your state's health department?

	%
Very familiar	20
Somewhat familiar	55
Not too familiar	18
Not at all familiar	7
Don't know/Refused	-

**(Asked of half-sample B; n=650)**

Q14. Do you generally approve or disapprove of the decisions that have been made by YOUR STATE'S HEALTH DEPARTMENT about COVID-19 since the start of the outbreak?

	%
Approve	59
Disapprove	38
Don't know/Refused	3

**(Asked of half-sample B; n=650)**

Q15. When it comes to the COVID-19 outbreak specifically, do you think YOUR STATE'S HEALTH DEPARTMENT is doing an excellent, good, fair or poor job at responding to the COVID-19 outbreak?

	%
Excellent	16
Good	33
Fair	32
Poor	19
Don't know/Refused	*

**(Asked of half-sample B; n=650)**

Q16. And more generally beyond COVID-19, do you think YOUR STATE'S HEALTH DEPARTMENT is doing an excellent, good, fair or poor job at protecting the public from health threats and preventing illness?

	%
Excellent	12
Good	36
Fair	37
Poor	14
Don't know/Refused	1

**(Asked of half-sample B; n=650)**

Q17. On balance, do you think the information provided by YOUR STATE HEALTH DEPARTMENT about the health of people in your state is reliable, or not?

**(Asked of half-sample B respondents who said the information provided by their state health department about the health of people in their state is reliable; n=455)**

Q18. And would you say it is very reliable, or only somewhat reliable?

**(Asked of half-sample B respondents who said the information provided by their state health department about the health of people in their state is unreliable; n=181)**

Q18. And would you say it is very unreliable, or only somewhat unreliable?

**Q17/Q18 Combo Table**

**Base: Half-sample B respondents; n=650**

	<b>%</b>
<b>Reliable (NET)</b>	<b>65</b>
Very reliable	29
Somewhat reliable	36
<b>Unreliable (NET)</b>	<b>32</b>
Somewhat unreliable	22
Very unreliable	10
Don't know/Refused	3

#### IV. Views on Local Public Health Systems

**(Asked of half-sample A; n=655)**

Q19. How familiar are you with the activities of your LOCAL health department? Would you say you are not at all familiar, not too familiar, somewhat familiar, or very familiar with the activities of your LOCAL health department?

	%
Very familiar	17
Somewhat familiar	49
Not too familiar	23
Not at all familiar	10
Don't know/Refused	1

**(Asked of half-sample A; n=655)**

Q20. Do you generally approve or disapprove of the decisions that have been made by YOUR LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT about COVID-19 since the start of the outbreak?

	%
Approve	66
Disapprove	28
Don't know/Refused	6

**(Asked of half-sample A; n=655)**

Q21. When it comes to the COVID-19 outbreak specifically, do you think YOUR LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT is doing an excellent, good, fair or poor job at responding to the COVID-19 outbreak?

	%
Excellent	16
Good	35
Fair	33
Poor	15
Don't know/Refused	1

**(Asked of half-sample A; n=655)**

Q22. And more generally beyond COVID-19, do you think YOUR LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT is doing an excellent, good, fair or poor job at protecting the public from health threats and preventing illness?

	%
Excellent	14
Good	40
Fair	34
Poor	10
Don't know/Refused	2

**(Asked of half-sample A; n=655)**

Q23. On balance, do you think the information provided by YOUR LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT about the health of people in your local community is reliable, or not?

**(Asked of half-sample A respondents who said the information provided by their local health department about the health of people in their local community is reliable; n=493)**

Q24. And would you say it is very reliable, or only somewhat reliable?

**(Asked of half-sample A respondents who said the information provided by their local health department about the health of people in their local community is unreliable; n=139)**

Q24. And would you say it is very unreliable, or only somewhat unreliable?

**Q23/Q24 Combo Table**

**Based on Half-sample A respondents; n=655**

	<b>%</b>
<b>Reliable (NET)</b>	<b>74</b>
Very reliable	30
Somewhat reliable	44
<b>Unreliable (NET)</b>	<b>23</b>
Somewhat unreliable	16
Very unreliable	7
Don't know/Refused	3

Q25. How closely do you follow news about health issues in your state?

	<b>%</b>
Very closely	36
Somewhat closely	48
Not too closely	10
Not closely at all	5
Don't know/Refused	1

## V. Views on Public Health Issue Domains

(Asked of half-sample C; n=655)

Q26. When you think of the following issues, would you consider each of the following to be one of the **main responsibilities** for **public health agencies**, or not? You can select multiple issues as being main responsibilities for public health agencies. How about (INSERT ITEM)?

- a. Controlling the spread of new infectious diseases like Ebola, Zika, or COVID-19

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	91
No, not one of the main responsibilities	9
Don't know/Refused	*

- b. Responding to natural disasters, like wildfires, major hurricanes or floods

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	67
No, not one of the main responsibilities	32
Don't know/Refused	1

- c. Providing vaccines to prevent illnesses like the yearly flu, measles, and mumps

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	90
No, not one of the main responsibilities	9
Don't know/Refused	1

- d. Preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	79
No, not one of the main responsibilities	19
Don't know/Refused	2

- e. Preventing chronic diseases like heart disease, cancer, and diabetes

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	80
No, not one of the main responsibilities	19
Don't know/Refused	1

- f. Reducing smoking and tobacco use

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	59
No, not one of the main responsibilities	40
Don't know/Refused	1

g. Reducing alcohol abuse

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	61
No, not one of the main responsibilities	38
Don't know/Refused	1

h. Reducing illegal drug abuse and addiction

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	70
No, not one of the main responsibilities	29
Don't know/Refused	1

**(Asked of half-sample C; n=655)**

Q27. When you think of the following issues, would you consider each of the following to be one of the **main responsibilities** for **public health agencies**, or not? You can select multiple issues as being main responsibilities for public health agencies. How about (INSERT ITEM)?

a. Preventing injuries caused by motor vehicle crashes

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	39
No, not one of the main responsibilities	60
Don't know/Refused	1

b. Preventing violence and deaths from guns

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	40
No, not one of the main responsibilities	59
Don't know/Refused	1

c. Reducing climate change

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	33
No, not one of the main responsibilities	65
Don't know/Refused	2

d. Reducing domestic violence

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	56
No, not one of the main responsibilities	42
Don't know/Refused	2

e. Providing health insurance for those who don't have it

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	67
No, not one of the main responsibilities	31
Don't know/Refused	2

f. Reducing the gaps in health and health care between whites and minorities

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	67
No, not one of the main responsibilities	30
Don't know/Refused	3

g. Providing family planning services

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	66
No, not one of the main responsibilities	32
Don't know/Refused	2

h. Reducing eviction and homelessness

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	49
No, not one of the main responsibilities	51
Don't know/Refused	*

**(Asked of half-sample D; n=650)**

Q28. When you think of the following issues, would you consider each of the following to be one of the **main responsibilities** for **public health agencies**, or not? You can select multiple issues as being main responsibilities for public health agencies. How about (INSERT ITEM)?

a. Preparing the public in advance to handle health problems or injuries resulting from emergency events, such as bombings or terrorist attacks

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	74
No, not one of the main responsibilities	25
Don't know/Refused	1

b. Improving diet and physical activity

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	60
No, not one of the main responsibilities	39
Don't know/Refused	1

c. Reducing infant mortality and preterm birth

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	80
No, not one of the main responsibilities	17
Don't know/Refused	3

d. Preventing and treating mental illness

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	87
No, not one of the main responsibilities	12
Don't know/Refused	1

e. Reducing health care costs

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	75
No, not one of the main responsibilities	23
Don't know/Refused	2

f. Reducing the gaps in health care between men and women

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	65
No, not one of the main responsibilities	33
Don't know/Refused	2

g. Reducing shortages of health professionals, hospitals, and community health centers

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	76
No, not one of the main responsibilities	22
Don't know/Refused	2

h. Improving air and water quality

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	72
No, not one of the main responsibilities	26
Don't know/Refused	2

**(Asked of half-sample D; n=650)**

Q29. When you think of the following issues, would you consider each of the following to be one of the **main responsibilities** for **public health agencies**, or not? You can select multiple issues as being main responsibilities for public health agencies. How about (INSERT ITEM)?

a. Cleaning up the environment

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	60
No, not one of the main responsibilities	38
Don't know/Refused	2

b. Enforcing standards for safe drinking water

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	90
No, not one of the main responsibilities	10
Don't know/Refused	*

c. Safely disposing of garbage

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	66
No, not one of the main responsibilities	33
Don't know/Refused	1

d. Reducing causes of food poisoning, such as salmonella or E. coli

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	88
No, not one of the main responsibilities	12
Don't know/Refused	*

e. Increasing the availability of healthy, affordable housing

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	50
No, not one of the main responsibilities	48
Don't know/Refused	2

f. Reducing sexual violence

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	58
No, not one of the main responsibilities	40
Don't know/Refused	2

g. Reducing racism

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	43
No, not one of the main responsibilities	55
Don't know/Refused	2

h. Reducing prescription painkiller abuse and addiction

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	75
No, not one of the main responsibilities	23
Don't know/Refused	2

i. Providing vaccines to prevent the spread of COVID-19

	%
Yes, one of the main responsibilities	92
No, not one of the main responsibilities	8
Don't know/Refused	*

## Q26/Q27/Q28/Q29 Yes, one of the main responsibilities Summary

	%
Providing vaccines to prevent the spread of COVID-19 <sup>d</sup>	92
Controlling the spread of new infectious diseases like Ebola, Zika, or COVID-19 <sup>c</sup>	91
Providing vaccines to prevent illnesses like the yearly flu, measles, and mumps <sup>c</sup>	90
Enforcing standards for safe drinking water <sup>d</sup>	90
Reducing causes of food poisoning, such as salmonella or e coli <sup>d</sup>	88
Preventing and treating mental illness <sup>d</sup>	87
Reducing infant mortality and preterm birth <sup>d</sup>	80
Preventing chronic diseases like heart disease, cancer, and diabetes <sup>c</sup>	80
Preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS <sup>c</sup>	79
Reducing shortages of health professionals, hospitals, and community health centers <sup>d</sup>	76
Reducing health care costs <sup>d</sup>	75
Reducing prescription painkiller abuse and addiction <sup>d</sup>	75
Preparing the public in advance to handle health problems or injuries resulting from emergency events, such as bombings or terrorist attacks <sup>d</sup>	74
Improving air and water quality <sup>d</sup>	72
Reducing illegal drug abuse and addiction <sup>c</sup>	70
Reducing the gaps in health and health care between whites and minorities <sup>c</sup>	67
Providing health insurance for those who don't have it <sup>c</sup>	67
Responding to natural disasters, like wildfires, major hurricanes or floods <sup>c</sup>	67
Providing family planning services <sup>c</sup>	66
Safely disposing of garbage <sup>d</sup>	66
Reducing the gaps in health care between men and women <sup>d</sup>	65
Reducing alcohol abuse <sup>c</sup>	61
Cleaning up the environment <sup>d</sup>	60
Improving diet and physical activity <sup>d</sup>	60
Reducing smoking and tobacco use <sup>c</sup>	59
Reducing sexual violence <sup>d</sup>	58
Reducing domestic violence <sup>c</sup>	56
Increasing the availability of healthy, affordable housing <sup>d</sup>	50
Reducing eviction and homelessness <sup>c</sup>	49
Reducing racism <sup>d</sup>	43
Preventing violence and deaths from guns <sup>c</sup>	40
Preventing injuries caused by motor vehicle crashes <sup>c</sup>	39
Reducing climate change <sup>c</sup>	33

<sup>c</sup> Asked of half-sample C; n=655.

<sup>d</sup> Asked of half-sample D; n=650.

## VI. Special Demographics

Q30. Since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, have you or anyone else in your household lost their job, their business, been furloughed, had their wages or hours reduced, or taken mandatory unpaid leave, or not?

	%
Yes	45
No	55
Don't know/Refused	*

Q31. Does anyone living in your household receive any government assistance from SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or WIC, the Women, Infants, and Children Program, or not?

	%
Yes	15
No	84
Don't know/Refused	1

Q32. Are you, yourself, currently covered by any form of health insurance or health plan, or do you not have health insurance at this time?

**(Asked of respondents who are who are covered by health insurance; n=1,106)**

Q33. Which of the following is your main source of health insurance coverage?

**(Asked of respondents with Medicaid or Medicare; n=479)**

Q34. Do you also have coverage from Medicare/Medicaid, or not?

### Q32/Q33/Q34 Combo Table

Based on total respondents

	%
Covered by health insurance	86
A plan through your or your spouse's employer or union	39
A plan you purchased yourself	8
Medicare (%)	21
Medicaid (%)	14
Medicare, not Medicaid	16
Medicaid, not Medicare	9
Medicare + Medicaid	5
The VA or Tricare	4
Indian Health Service (IHS)	-
Plan through your parent/mother/father	4
Some other form of insurance	1
Don't know/Refused what type of coverage	1
Not covered by health insurance	14
Don't know/Refused if covered by health insurance	*

D13. In general, how would you describe your own health?

	%
Excellent	19
Very good	29
Good	30
Fair	15
Poor	7
Don't know/Refused	-

Q35. Do you have any disability that keeps you from participating fully in work, school, housework, or other activities?

	%
Yes	21
No	79
Don't know/Refused	*

Q36. Has a doctor or other health care professional ever told you that you have a chronic illness, such as heart disease, lung disease, cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma or a mental health condition, or hasn't that happened?

	%
Yes	44
No	55
Don't know/Refused	1

Q37. Do you personally know anyone, such as a close friend or family member, who has died due to complications from COVID-19?

	%
Yes	35
No	65
Don't know/Refused	*

## VII. Demographics

D1. Are you registered to vote at your present address, or not?

Yes	No	Don't know/ Refused
78	21	1

D2. Just to confirm: What is your current age?

D2a. Could you please tell me if you are...?

18 to 29	30 to 49	50 to 64	65 or older
20	33	25	22

D3. Were you born in the United States, on the island of Puerto Rico, or in another country?

	%
U.S.	83
Puerto Rico	*
Another country	16
Don't know/Refused	1

D4. What is the last grade or class that you completed in school?

	%
<b>High School or less (NET)</b>	<b>39</b>
Less than high school (grades 1-11, grade 12 but no diploma)	9
High school graduate or equivalent (e.g. GED)	30
Some college but no degree (incl. 2 year occupational or vocational programs)	29
<b>College or post-graduate (NET)</b>	<b>32</b>
College graduate (e.g. BA, AB, BS)	20
Postgraduate (e.g. MA, MS, MEng, Med, MSW, MBA, MD, DDs, PhD, JD, LLB, DVM)	12
Don't know/Refused	*

D5. Are you currently married, living with a partner, divorced, separated, widowed or have you never been married?

	%
Married	50
Living with partner	6
Divorced	8
Separated	3
Widowed	7
Never been married	24
Refused	2

PARTY. In politics today, do you consider yourself a (Republican), (Democrat), an Independent, or what?

Republican	Democrat	Independent	Other/None	Don't know/ Refused
25	31	29	11	4

PARTY. In politics today, do you consider yourself a (Republican), (Democrat), an Independent, or what?

**(Asked of those who consider themselves independent, other party, Don't know/Refused or refused to say; n=558)**

PARTYLEAN. Do you LEAN more towards the (Republican) Party or the (Democratic) Party?

**Party/Partylean Combo Table**  
**Based on total respondents**

	%
Republican/Republican leaners	36
Democrat/Democratic leaners	46
Independent	12
Other party	1
Don't know/refused	5

D6. Last year, that is in 2020, what was your % annual household income from all sources, BEFORE taxes? Just stop me when I get to the right category.

D6a. Could you tell me if your % annual household income is less than 50 thousand, 50 thousand but less than 100 thousand, or over 100 thousand dollars?

D6b. Is that 100 to under 150 thousand, 150 to under 200 thousand, 200 to under 250 thousand, or 250 thousand dollars or more?

	%
<b>Less than \$50,000 (NET)</b>	<b>44</b>
Under \$15,000	11
\$15,000 to under \$20,000	8
\$20,000 to under \$25,000	6
\$25,000 to under \$35,000	9
\$35,000 to under \$50,000	9
Less than \$50,000 unspecified	1
<b>\$50,000 but less than \$100,000 (NET)</b>	<b>25</b>
\$50,000 to under \$75,000	13
\$75,000 to under \$100,000	11
\$50,000 but less than \$100,000 unspecified	1
<b>Over \$100,000 (NET)</b>	<b>24</b>
\$100,000 to under \$150,000	12
\$150,000 to under \$200,000	7
\$200,000 to under \$250,000	2
\$250,000 or more	2
Over \$100,000 unspecified	*
Don't know	3
Refused	4

D10. Are you, yourself, of Latino or Hispanic origin or descent, such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or some other Latin American background?

D11. (And besides being Latino,) What is your race? Are you white, black or African American, Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, or Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander?

**(Asked of respondents who are Hispanic and American Indian/Alaskan Native; n=17)**

D12. With which do you identify more? Hispanic or Latino, or American Indian or Alaska Native?

### **Race Table**

#### **Based on total respondents**

	<b>%</b>
Hispanic	16
Non-Hispanic White	62
Non-Hispanic Black	12
Non-Hispanic Asian	4
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2
Non-Hispanic Else	2
Non-Hispanic Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1
Non-Hispanic No Answer	1

RSEX. Are you male or female?

	%
Male	49
Female	51
Other (vol)	*
Don't know/Refused	-

D7. Do you consider yourself to be...?

**LGBQ Identity Table**  
Based on total respondents

	%
Straight/Heterosexual	88
<b>LGBQ (NET)</b>	<b>6</b>
Gay/Lesbian	2
Bisexual	3
Queer/Other	1
Don't know/Refused	6

D8. Some people describe themselves as transgender when they experience a different gender identity from their sex at birth. For example, a person who was raised male, but who identifies as female. Some people who do not identify as either male or female might also call themselves transgender. Do you consider yourself to be transgender?

Transgender	Genderqueer or gender non-conforming	No	Don't know/Refused
1	*	96	3

**LGBTQ Identity Table**  
Based on total respondents

	%
LGBTQ	7
Cis and Straight	86
Don't know/Refused	7

HH1. How many adults 18 or older live in your household? Please include yourself and all the adults who live with you.

	%
1	22
2	49
3	19
4	7
5	1
6	1
7 or more	1
Don't know/Refused	*

D15. How many children under 18 are currently living in your household?

	%
<b>One or more children &lt;18 (NET)</b>	<b>34</b>
1	15
2	12
3	5
4	2
5 or more	*
No children under 18 living in household	65
Don't know/Refused	1