

Public Concerns: Caring for People with Chronic Conditions

A chronic health condition is a condition that is likely to last more than a year, limits what one can do, and requires ongoing medical attention. Chronic health conditions are a growing concern for Americans and have a significant and increasing impact on the country's health care financing and delivery system.

Methodology

Partnership for Solutions commissioned a Harris Interactive survey to learn more about public perceptions of care for chronic conditions and information about the health care experiences of people with chronic conditions. A total of 1,663 adult Americans were surveyed from March 2000 to November 2000. Of the 1,663 people surveyed, 983 people either had a chronic condition or cared for someone who had a chronic condition.

Chronic Conditions Are Increasingly Prevalent

- An estimated 125 million Americans have a chronic condition.
- By 2020, this number is expected to rise to 157 million.
- Sixty million people have multiple chronic conditions.
- By 2020, 81 million people, more than half of all individuals with chronic conditions, will have multiple chronic conditions (see Figure 1).

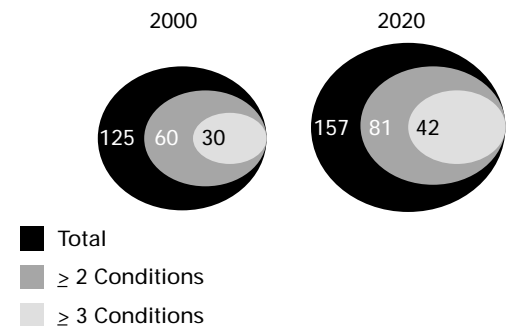
Major Worries

When Americans think about chronic conditions, their three greatest concerns are:

- Not being able to afford needed medical care,
- Losing independence, and
- Being a burden to family or friends.

Figure 1

*Population with Chronic Conditions
(in millions)*



Source: RAND Corporation, 2000.

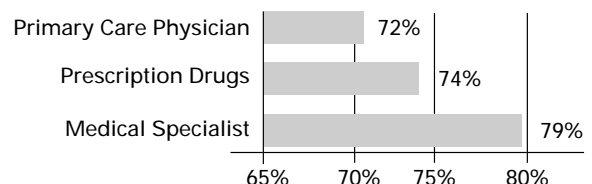
Access to Care is a Problem for Many

- Seventy-two percent of the population believe it is difficult for people with chronic conditions to get necessary care.
- Eight out of 10 people (79 percent) with a chronic condition report difficulty in obtaining needed care from a medical specialist.

As Figure 2 shows, the majority of people with chronic conditions have difficulty obtaining the care they need.

Figure 2

*Percent of Population with Chronic Conditions
Who Have Difficulty Obtaining Medical Care*



Coordination of Care is Lacking For People With Chronic Conditions

- Seventy-one percent of people with chronic conditions report having no help in coordinating their care.
- Of the 21 percent that do receive help, half of them report that this help came from relatives.

Family caregivers responding to the survey reported that the people they care for received medical care from an average of six different physicians during the year. Respondents also reported problems with drug interactions, contradictory information, and varied diagnoses for the same set of symptoms.

Problems Resulting From Lack of Coordinated Care	Percent of Respondents With Chronic Conditions Who Have Encountered This Problem
Received Contradictory Information From Health Professionals	17%
Warned by Pharmacists About Possible Dangerous Drug Interactions	16%
Received Differing Diagnoses From Different Physicians for Same Set of Symptoms	14%

Paying for Care is Difficult for People With Chronic Conditions

Chronic conditions impose significant and varied financial burdens on families, from access to insurance to the costs of uncovered services, even when they have coverage. The survey assessed the public's perceptions of these cost burdens and found:

- Eighty-nine percent of respondents with chronic conditions have difficulty obtaining adequate health insurance to meet their needs.
- Twenty-eight percent of respondents spend more than \$1,000 out of pocket to treat chronic conditions.
- Twenty-two percent of respondents with chronic conditions said that their health insurance does not cover all the types of care that they need.

Conclusion

Americans are accustomed to thinking about medical care as treatment for acute conditions as they occur. However, as medical advances allow more people to survive these acute episodes, such as heart attacks or stroke, more and more Americans will be living with long-term chronic conditions that must be well managed in order to have high-quality, productive lives. The American public believes that the health care financing and delivery system is not yet oriented to this new reality. Those who are looking to improve the health care system may want to consider changes to these systems that will better address the growing needs—and concerns—of people with chronic conditions.

About Partnership for Solutions

Partnership for Solutions, led by Johns Hopkins University and The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, is an initiative to improve the care and quality of life for the estimated 125 million Americans with chronic health conditions. The Partnership is engaged in three major activities: conducting original research and identifying existing research that clarifies the nature of the problem; communicating these research findings to policymakers, business leaders, health professionals, advocates, and others; and working with public and private programs to identify promising solutions to the problems faced by people with chronic conditions.