

Survey finds African Americans hit hard by high health care costs

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Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Economic stability, racial equality, and health status are intertwined, according to a recent poll that confirmed African Americans, hardest hit by the high cost of health care, worry even when they are employed and have health insurance.

The poll, sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) in partnership with National Public Radio and Harvard School of Public Health, also revealed that one in four respondents encountered problems paying for necessary prescription drugs. Half of those surveyed who are employed expressed fears that they could not afford medical bills if confronted with a major illness.

Findings also revealed that unemployment, financial stability and health care access are pivotal concerns for African Americans who disproportionately suffer from chronic diseases including hypertension, stroke and diabetes. Without adequate financial resources or health insurance, respondents are often fearful to seek medical treatment.

"To make living easier for our diverse society, we need to acknowledge that health starts where we live, work, learn and play," said RWJF President and CEO Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, MD. "If we're going to create a national culture of health, we need to focus as much on factors such as education and employment as we do on providing affordable and equal access to high-quality, high-value care."

RWJF is the nation's largest philanthropy dedicated to health. The survey comes as the nation turns to the next phase of the Affordable Care Act which will provide coverage to millions of uninsured Americans through health exchanges. The poll is part of a survey on African American lives sponsored by the Foundation.

Nearly half of the respondents surveyed in the national poll are concerned that they or a member of their household might be unemployed within the next year. Inability to afford treatment for major illnesses and the sting of racism are common fears identified by those surveyed. More than one-third of those surveyed (36 percent) reported experiences with racism.

Health care access and paying for medical expenses are also dominant concerns expressed by the respondents. In the last year, three in 10 African Americans reported that they or family members had trouble paying for medical expenses. Twenty-four percent experienced difficulties

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obtaining health care.

The respondents were almost split on describing their finances as poor or good. The vast majority of those surveyed, 86 percent, expressed satisfaction with their lives and the communities in which they live.

The sample consisted of 1,081 African American people ages 18 and older.

Complete poll results can be found at www.rwjf.org , www.hsph.harvard.edu , and www.NPR.org

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