

TEXAS RESIDENTS' VIEWS ON STATE HEALTH POLICY PRIORITIES

Selected Findings from the Episcopal Health Foundation
2020 Texas Health Policy Survey

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Texas has the unique challenge of addressing the health care needs for a large population who is diverse in terms of urbanicity, income, race and ethnicity. Texas also has more uninsured residents than any other U.S. state. Together, these factors pose a serious challenge to policymakers across Texas. These challenges become even greater as the state seeks to address the needs of Texans during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the **2020 Texas Health Policy survey**, Episcopal Health Foundation (EHF) and SSRS report Texans' opinions on a variety of state health policy issues. The present report is the third iteration of a public opinion study that was previously conducted by EHF and SSRS in early 2019 and by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and EHF in 2018.

The 2020 survey shows that an overwhelming majority of Texans believe that the state government should have a role in making sure the health care system works well (89%). Additionally, the majority say the state legislature should increase spending on health care programs (57%). The only issue ranking higher as a spending priority for Texans is public education for which two-thirds would like to see the state legislature increase spending (67%).

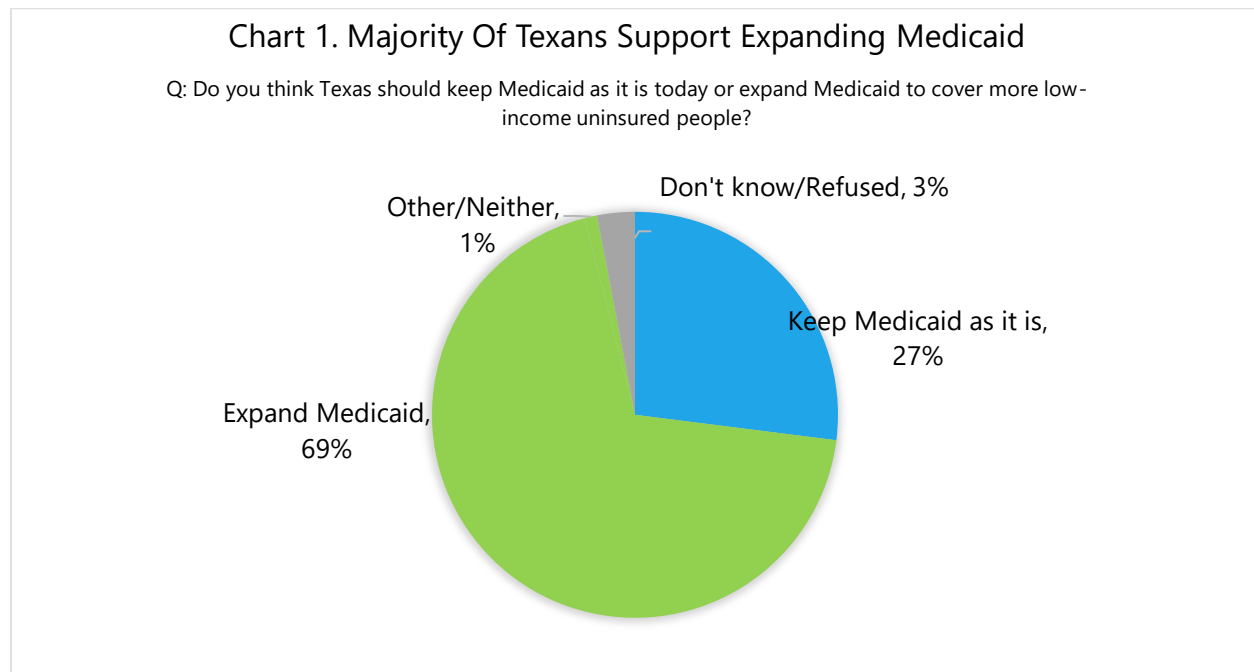
When it comes to health priorities for the state legislature, the majority of Texans identify lowering the cost of prescription drugs (63%), lowering the amount Texans spend on health care (60%), increasing access to health insurance (57%), increasing access to hospitals for people in rural areas (54%), and reducing maternal mortality (58%) as top priorities. Texans are evenly split on whether expanding the state's Medicaid program should be a top priority (51%). However, when asked whether the state should expand Medicaid or keep the program as it is today, a large majority (69%) supported expansion. The level of support for Medicaid expansion in the 2020 survey is higher than was observed in the 2019 survey.

Texans are divided across party lines in their views of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). While 49 percent favor the health care law over all, more than three quarters of Democrats have favorable opinions of it (79%) while only 11 percent of Republicans view it favorably. Support for Medicaid is higher across the state with nearly seven in 10 Texans (69%) viewing the program favorably and the majority (67%) percent reporting a connection to the program. Similar to prior surveys, a majority of Texans (59%) say the state is not doing enough to make sure low-income adults are getting the health care they need.

MAJORITY SUPPORT MEDICAID EXPANSION IN TEXAS

The majority of Texans (53%) believe that the current Medicaid program is working well for most low-income people covered by the program in the state. A third (33%) say it is not working well, and 13 percent do not know enough to say. Many of the same groups that hold favorable opinions of Medicaid also say the current Medicaid program is working well, including Hispanics (64%), those with incomes under 250 percent FPL (59%). Additionally, those who report ever being covered by the program are also more likely to say the program is working well (63%). There are also political divides on views of the current Medicaid program. While 60 percent of Republicans say the current program is working well, only 44 percent of Democrats say the same.

Most Texans are not aware that their state is one of only 12 states not to expand Medicaid. Less than half, (41%) correctly said the state had not expanded Medicaid. Sixteen percent incorrectly thought the state has expanded the program and 43 percent said they were unsure. However, once made aware that the state has not expanded the program and that the federal government pays at least 90 percent of the costs for expansion, the majority support expanding Medicaid to cover more low-income adults (69%). Almost one in three say the program should be kept as it is today (27%) (Chart 1). These findings show a statistically significant increase in support for Medicaid expansion in comparison to the 2019 survey when 64 percent supported expanding Medicaid to cover more low-income adults.



Those who think the current program is working well tend to oppose Medicaid expansion in the state. Among those who say the program should not be expanded, 70 percent say the program is working well. In comparison, among those who think the program should be expanded, only 48 percent say the program is working well.

Those who say the program should remain the same are more likely to be Republican or view the program unfavorably. Nonelderly Texans currently covered by health insurance are also more likely to say they think the program should stay the same (29%) compared to the nonelderly uninsured (19%).

Proponents of expansion tend to be Democrats (86%), those with only fair or poor health (82%), those with a connection to the program (72%), Texans under age 65 (72%), and those with incomes below 250 percent FPL (82%). (Table 1).

Table 1: Views on Medicaid Expansion by Key Demographic Groups

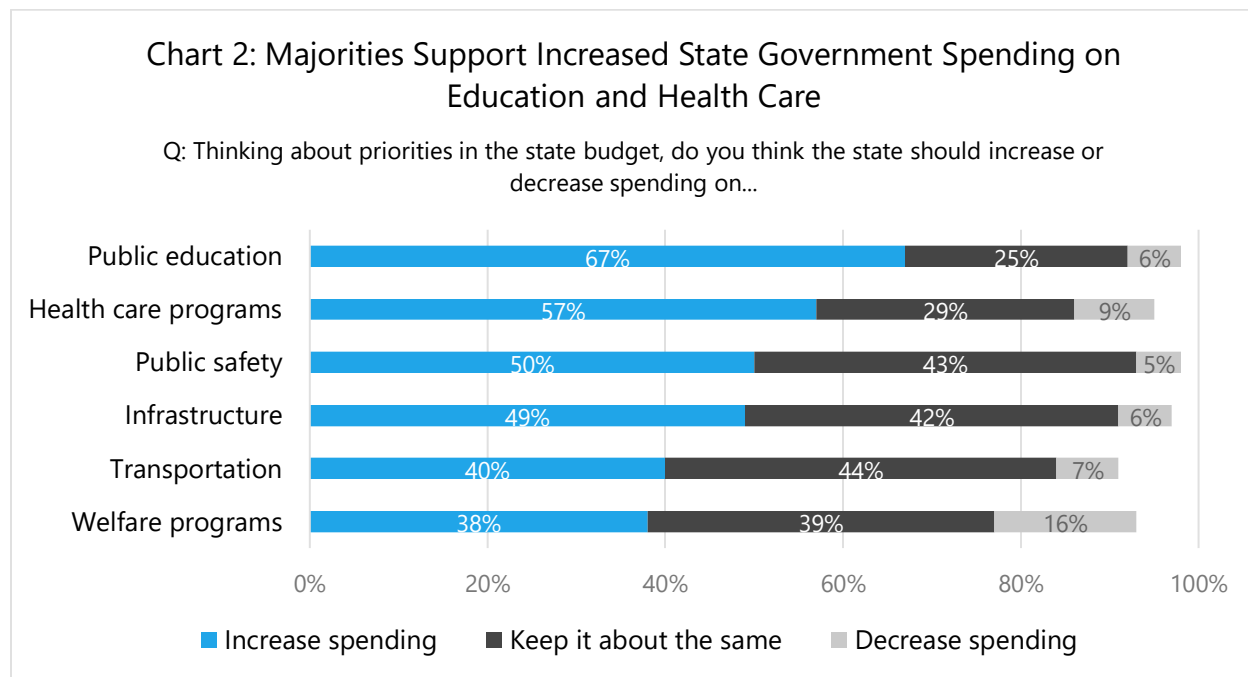
	Expand Medicaid	Keep Medicaid as is
Democrat	86%	12%
Independent	75%	22%
Republican	39%	57%
White	55%	41%
Black	84%	15%
Hispanic	82%	16%
Income <250% FPL	82%	17%
Income 250%+ FPL	58%	38%
18-64	72%	25%
65+	57%	38%
Excellent/Very Good/Good Health	65%	31%
Fair/Poor Health	82%	17%
Nonelderly Insured	67%	28%
Nonelderly Uninsured	80%	19%
Medicaid Connection	72%	25%
No Medicaid Connection	64%	32%

Note: Don't know/Refused responses are not shown.

HEALTH CARE SPENDING IS A PRIORITY FOR TEXANS

The Texas state government has many competing fiscal priorities to consider since being sworn into office in January 2021. This includes health care, public education, infrastructure, welfare programs, and public safety all while also addressing the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic. When asked how the state government should prioritize its spending, more than half of Texans (57%) say the state government should increase its spending on health care programs. Only 9 percent say the state should decrease its spending on health care programs and about one in three (29%) think state funding of health care programs should

be kept at its current level. The share of Texans who want increased state spending on health care is higher than the share supporting a spending increase for public safety (50%), infrastructure (49%), transportation (40%), and welfare programs (38%). However, significantly more think the state should increase funding of public education (67%) (Chart 2).



Note: Some items asked of half sample. Don't know/Refused responses are not shown.

Current findings are similar to public sentiment on these issues in the 2019 survey. Increased funding for education and health care programs are still supported by a majority of Texans. In fact, support for increased spending on health care programs has increased slightly in 2020 from the 54 percent who supported this in 2019. While this increase is not statistically significant, this difference does signal a directional shift on opinions about health care. Additionally, public education continues to be the top funding priority with 69 percent of residents wanting to see an increase in 2019 and 67 percent wanting to see an increase in 2020.

Black Texans are more likely than White and Hispanic Texans to support increased state spending on health care programs. Democrats are also more likely to support an increase in spending on health care programs in comparison to Independents and Republicans. Generally, most residents are opposed to the idea of reducing spending on health care. As was the case in the 2019 survey, those over 65, white adults, and Republicans are more likely to be in favor of keeping state spending on health care programs at current levels (Table 2).

Table 2: Views on State Spending for Health Care by Key Demographics

	AGE				RACE/ETHNICITY			PARTY ID		
	18- 29	30-49	50-64	65+	Wht.	Black	Hisp.	Dem	Ind	Rep
Increase	62%	58%	58%	49%	52%	78%	58%	73%	62%	38%
Keep the same	27%	25%	28%	41%	33%	16%	27%	18%	29%	44%
Decrease	8%	11%	8%	7%	8%	3%	12%	6%	5%	12%
DK/Refused*	3%	7%	5%	3%	7%	2%	3%	3%	4%	6%

*Don't know/Refused

Since the January 2019 survey, more Republicans support keeping the funding of health care programs the same (31% in 2019; 44% in 2020) and fewer support a decrease in spending (18% in 2019; 12% in 2020). Though these differences do not reach the level of statistical significance, these figures may illustrate a directional shift in opinion among Republicans about state spending on health care.

TEXANS' VIEWS ON HEALTH CARE PRIORITIES FOR STATE LEGISLATURE

Texans were asked about different priorities for the state legislature when it comes to health care in the Lone Star State. With the exception of the decrease in health care spending, the large majority of residents viewed all issues as important.

The health care issue rated as a top priority for the state legislature by the most Texans was lowering the cost of prescription drugs (63%). This was followed closely by lowering the amount individuals pay for health care. Sixty percent said this should be a top priority for the state legislature.

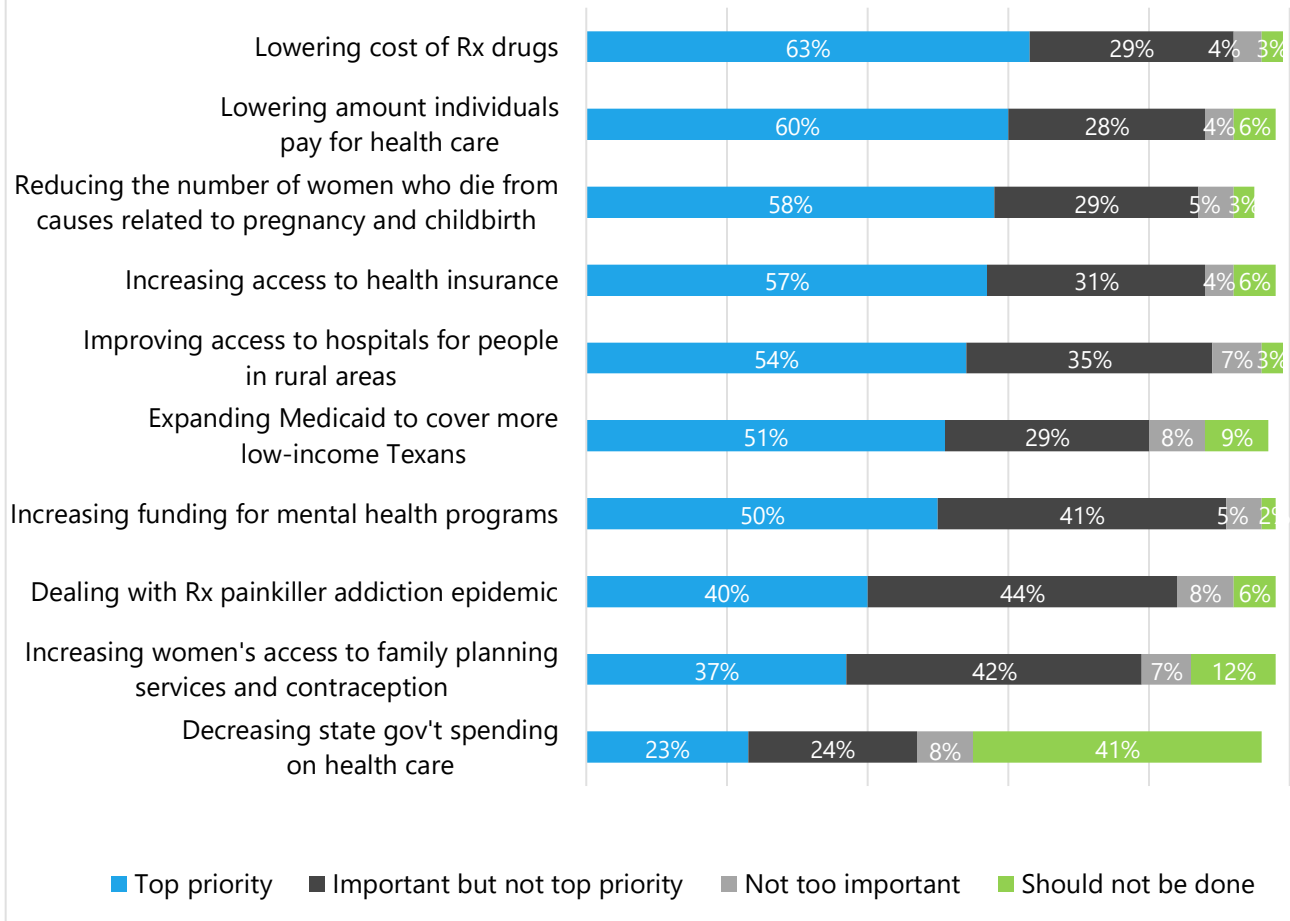
Access to health care and insurance are also important priorities to many Texans. A majority of Texans think increasing access to health insurance (57%), improving access to hospitals to people who live in rural areas (54%), and expanding Medicaid to cover more low-income adults (51%) should be top priorities.

Half say increasing funding for mental health programs should be a top priority (50%). Four in 10 Texans say dealing with the state's prescription drug addiction epidemic (40%) is a top priority. A slightly smaller amount say increasing access to family planning services and contraception is a top priority (37%). Finally, just 23 percent of Texans say that decreasing state spending on health care should be a top priority for the

state legislature. In contrast, 41 percent of Texans say the state should not decrease health care spending (Chart 3).

Chart 3: Lowering Costs is A Top Health Priority for Texans

Q: Should that be a top priority for the Texas legislature, important but not a top priority, not too important, or should it not be done?

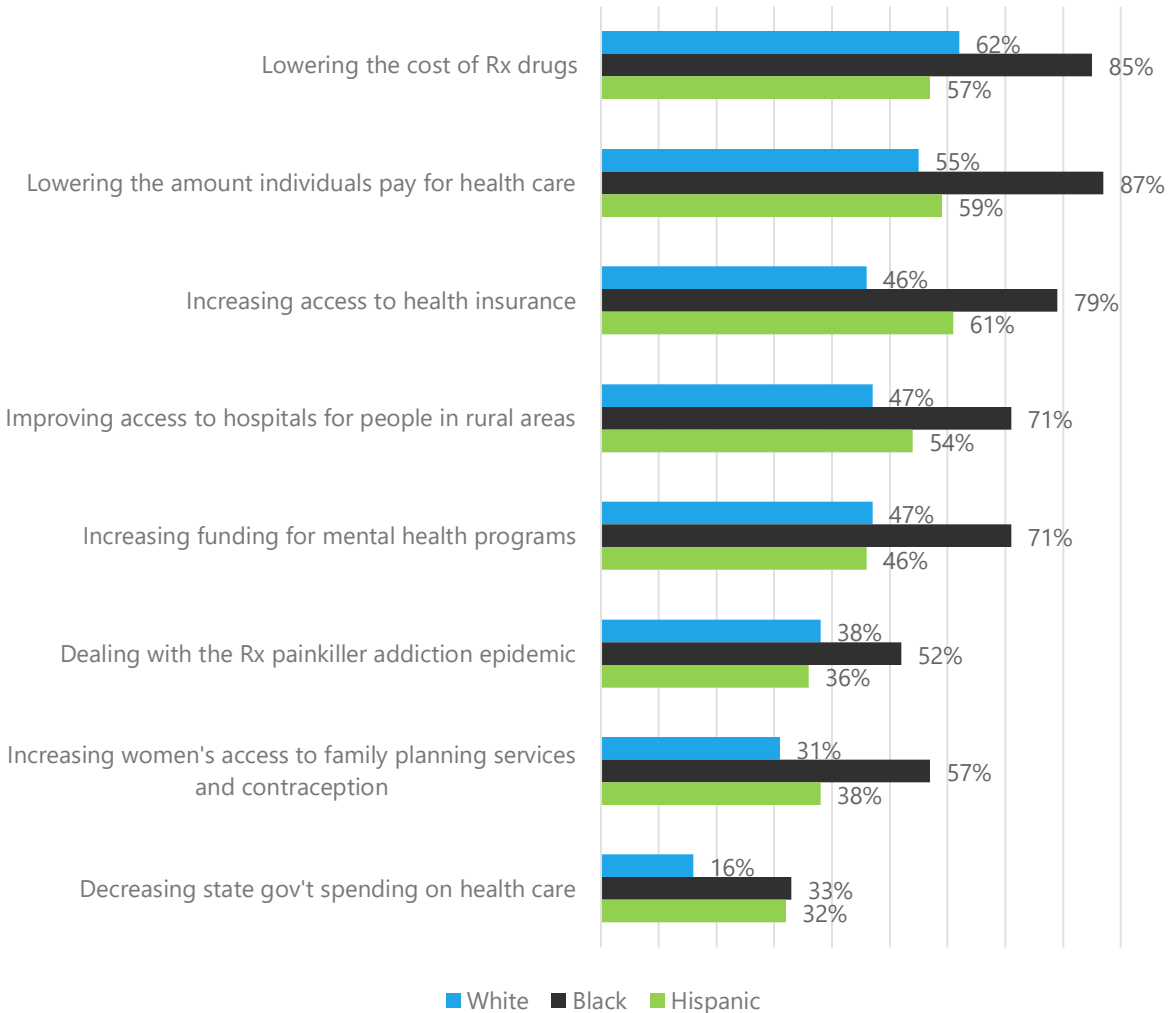


Note: Some items asked of half sample. Don't know/Refused responses are not shown. Question wording abbreviated. See topline for full question wording.

There are some notable differences across race and ethnicity that emerge among Texans about how they think the state legislature should prioritize prescription drug costs and the cost of health care. Black Texans were more likely to say lowering the amount individuals pay for health care (87%) should be a top priority in comparison to White (55%) and Hispanic Texans (59%). Similarly, Black Texans were also more likely to rate lowering the cost of prescription drugs as a top priority (85% Black; 62% White; 57% Hispanic) (Chart 4).

Chart 4. Differences in Top Health Care Priorities by Race and Ethnicity

Percent who say each is a top priority



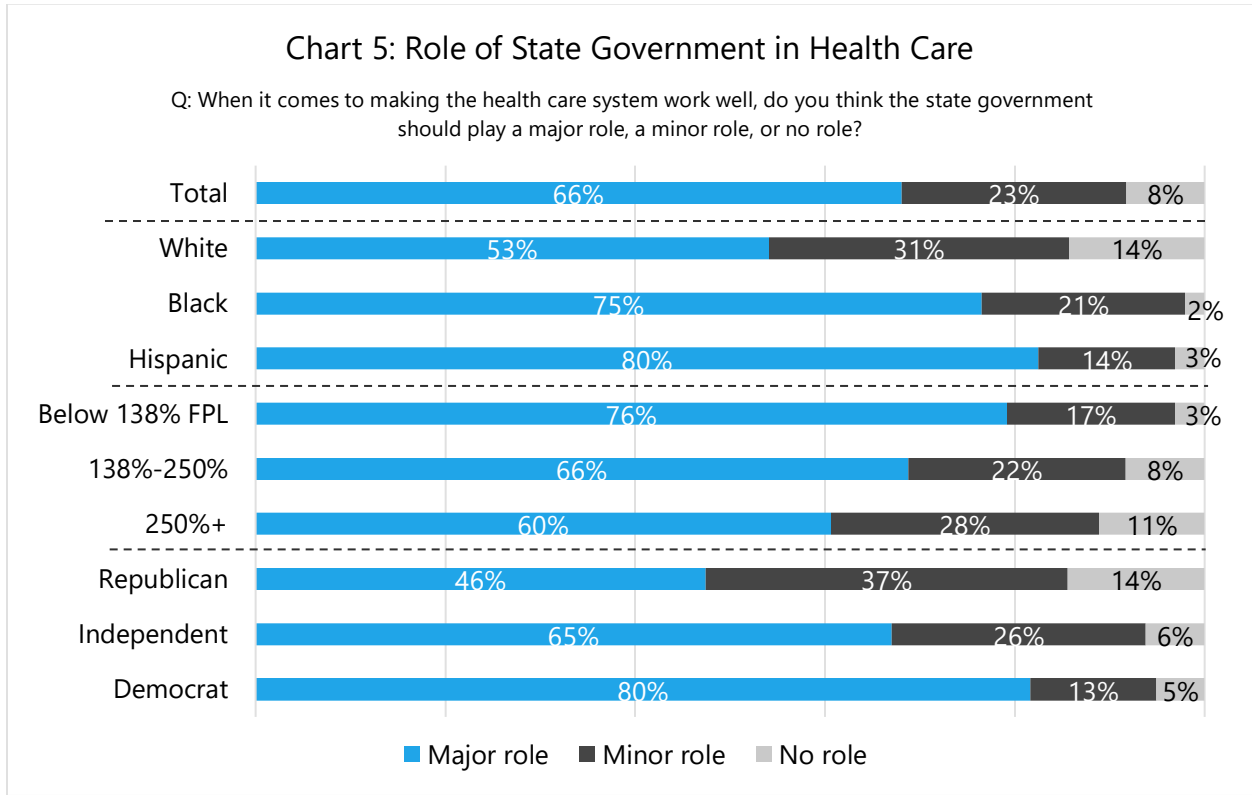
VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF STATE GOVERNMENT IN HEALTH CARE

Overall, a sizeable majority of Texans think the state government has a role to play in making the health care system work well. Nearly nine in 10 (89%) say the state government should play a role in making sure the health care system works in 2020. This is consistent with the 2019 survey.

Opinions on the role of government clearly correspond with partisanship. Republicans often believe government should have a reduced role, while Democrats are more often of the belief that government should have a larger role in meeting the needs of the public. When it comes to the state government and the health care system, the survey finds these partisan views are firmly in place. Eight in ten (80%) Democrats

say that state government should play a major role in making the health care system work well while less than half of Republicans say the same (46%) (Chart 4).

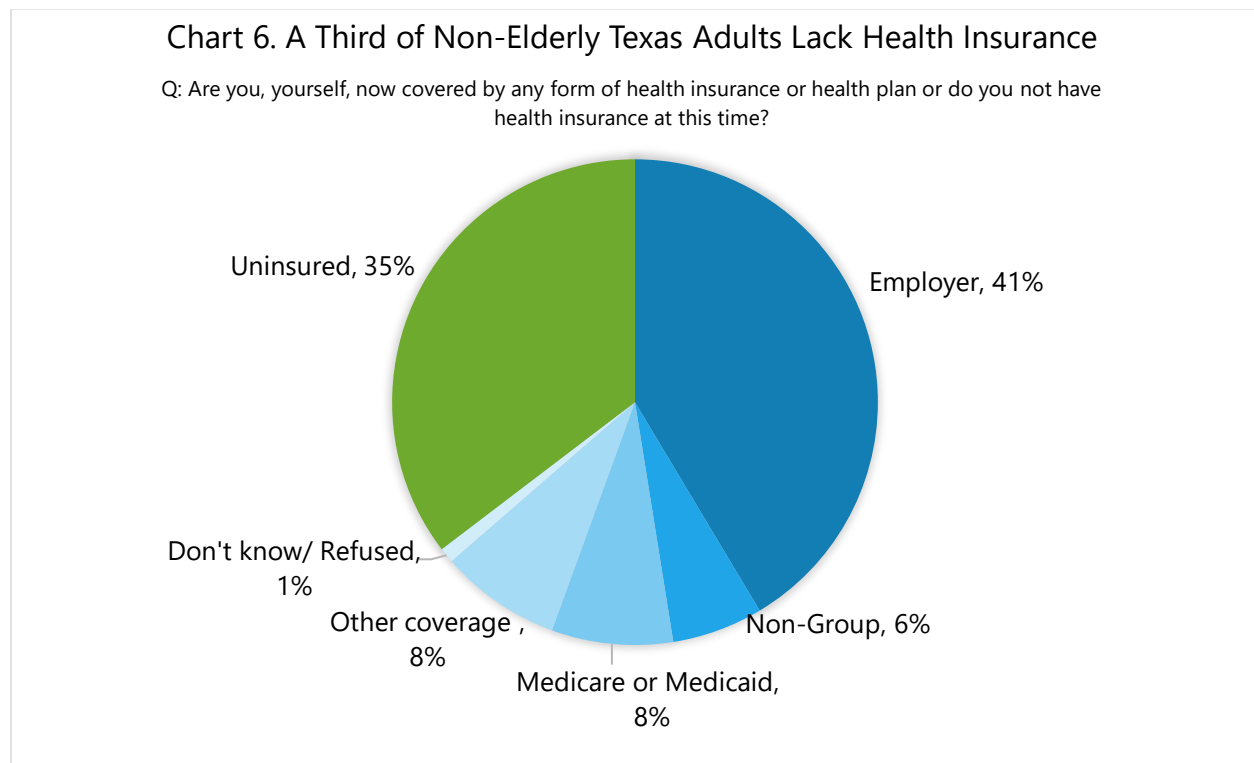
Beyond political party affiliation, Texans differ by race and ethnicity as well as income level when it comes to their views about government's responsibility related to the health care system. Black and Hispanic residents as well as those with lower incomes are more likely to believe the state should play a major role in the health care system (Chart 5).



Note: Don't know/Refused responses are not shown.

CARING FOR THE UNINSURED AND VULNERABLE POPULATIONS IN THE STATE

Texas has the largest population of nonelderly (under age 65) uninsured in the nation. Moreover, in 2020, seven percent of nonelderly residents lost health insurance at some point during the year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings from this survey show that 35 percent of adults under 65 are currently uninsured (Chart 6).¹ In contrast, 17 percent of US adults under 65 are without health insurance according to the December 2020 Health Tracking Poll conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation.²



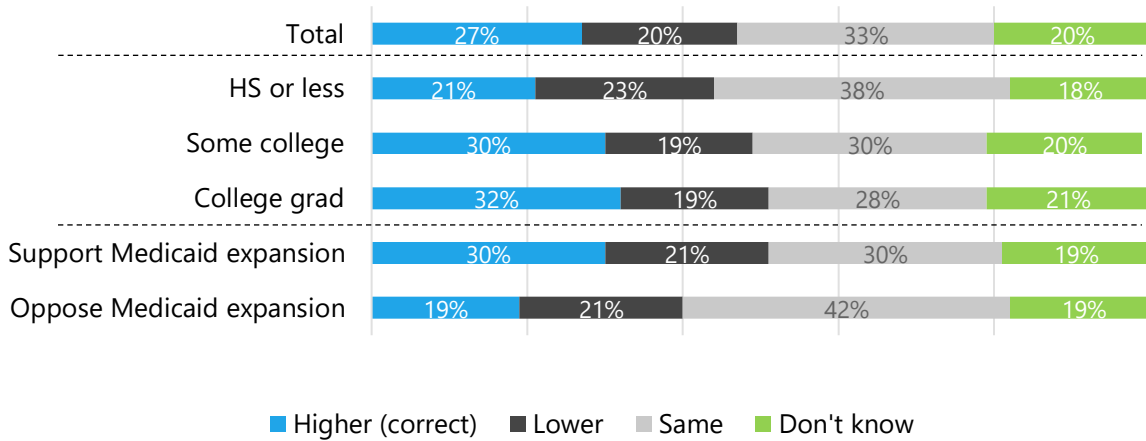
However, the majority of Texans are not aware of the high rate of uninsured in the state. Most residents said the share of uninsured residents in Texas was about the same as in other states (33%) or lower (20%). Only 27 percent correctly indicated that the share of uninsured in Texas is higher than in other states. While most residents are unaware that Texas has a proportionally higher share of uninsured than other states, college graduates (32%) and those who support Medicaid expansion in Texas (30%) are more likely than their counterparts to correctly identify that the state has a higher amount of uninsured than other states (Chart 7).

¹ The 2019 U.S. Census American Community Survey finds that 25 percent of Texans ages 19-64 were uninsured. In contrast, data from the current survey were collected in December 2020 and find that 35 percent of Texans ages 18-64 are uninsured. Retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/health-insurance/acs-hi.html>

² KFF Health Tracking Poll – December 2020: COVID-19 and Biden's Health Care Agenda. Retrieved from: <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/report/kff-health-tracking-poll-december-2020/>

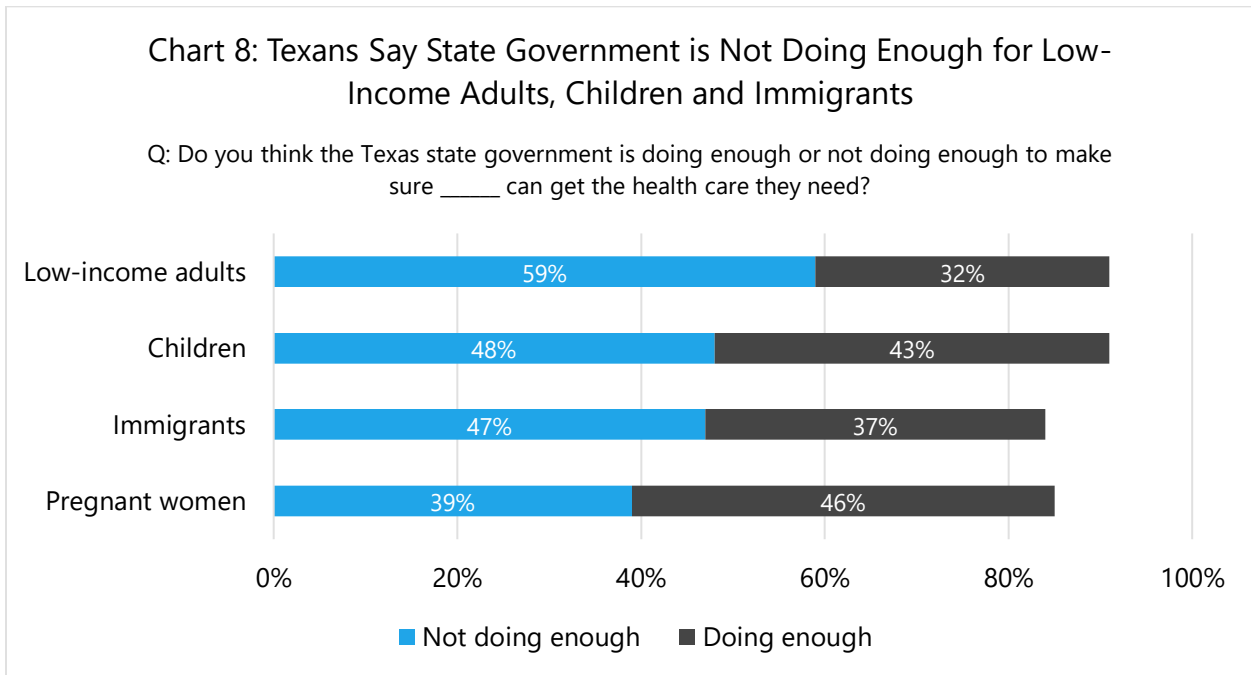
Chart 7: Most Texans are Unaware of the Percentage of Texas Uninsured is Higher than in Other States

Q: As far as you know, is the share of the population that does NOT have health insurance higher or lower in Texas compared to the average in other states,



Note: Refused responses are not shown.

Vulnerable groups such as low-income adults, children, pregnant women, and immigrants may be particularly impacted by the high rate of uninsured in the state. When asked whether the Texas state government was doing enough to make sure these vulnerable groups can get the care they need, the majority say that the Texas government is not doing enough for low-income adults (59%). This is almost twice as many (32%) as the amount who say the state is doing enough. Almost half also believe the state is not doing enough to make sure children (48%), and immigrants (47%) can get the health care they need. Fewer say the state government is not doing enough to ensure pregnant women receive adequate health care (39%) (Chart 8).



Note: "Doing too much" volunteered responses and Don't know/Refused responses are not shown.

There are differences in opinions about whether the state is doing enough to ensure vulnerable populations have access to health care. Across the board, Democrats are more likely than Republicans or Independents to say the state is not doing enough for these groups. Older Texans are more likely to think the state government is doing enough to make sure immigrants have the health care they need. Additionally, those with a high school education or less tend to think the state government is not doing enough for immigrants compared to those who have at least some college education. Black Texans are more likely to think the state government is not doing enough to ensure low-income adults, pregnant women and children get adequate health care than White and Hispanic Texans (Table 3).

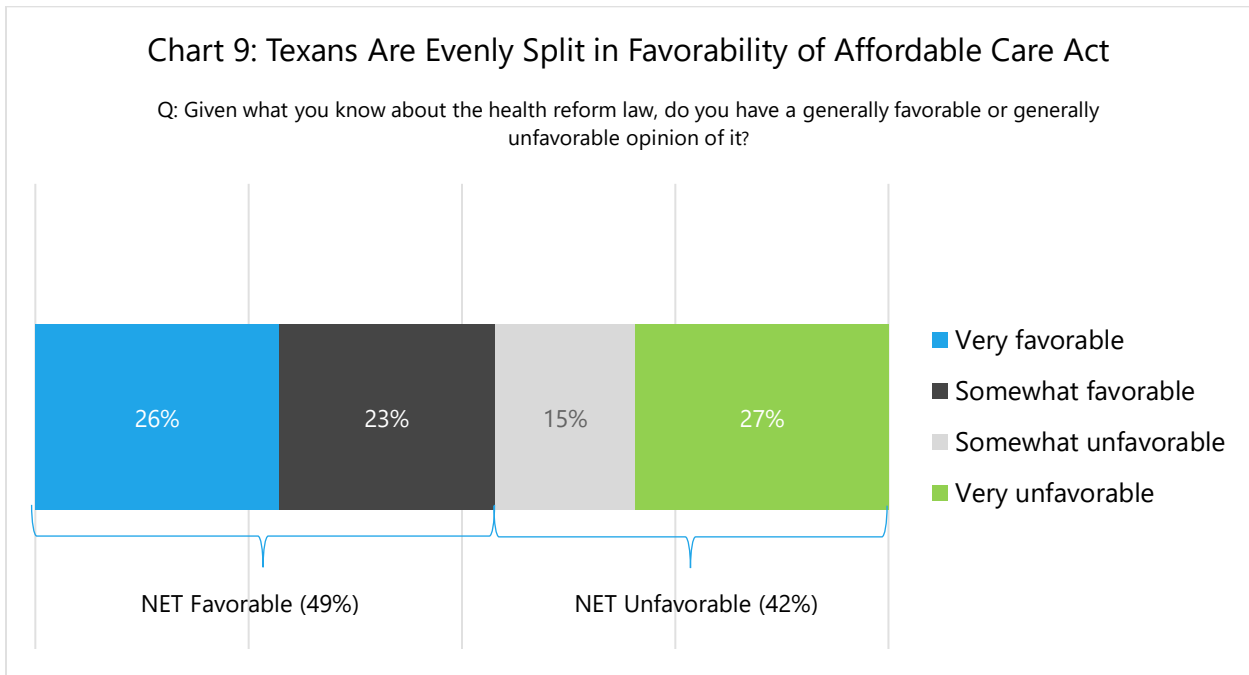
Table 3: Views on State Government's Performance in Getting Health Care to the Vulnerable

% who say state government is not doing enough for...	Low-income adults	Children	Immigrants	Pregnant Women
18-64	59%	48%	50%	39%
65+	56%	50%	31%	38%
White	54%	48%	38%	37%
Black	77%	67%	52%	56%
Hispanic	58%	44%	58%	35%
HS or less	56%	45%	55%	36%
Some College	64%	53%	43%	43%
College grad	57%	49%	40%	38%
Democrat	74%	61%	68%	55%
Independent	64%	53%	52%	45%
Republican	39%	34%	19%	20%
Favor Medicaid Expansion	72%	57%	60%	49%
Oppose Medicaid Expansion	27%	30%	17%	14%

TEXANS SHARPLY DIVIDED IN VIEWS OF AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Texans are split rather evenly on favorability of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The health reform bill which was signed into law in 2010 is seen favorably by 49 percent of residents (26% very; 23% somewhat) and unfavorably by 42 percent (15% very, 27% somewhat) (Chart 9). Texans are more evenly divided in their views than adults nationally. Nationally, more than one-half of U.S. adults have a favorable view of the health care law (53%) and 34 percent have an unfavorable view according to the December 2020 Health Tracking Poll conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation.³

³ KFF Health Tracking Poll – December 2020: COVID-19 and Biden's Health Care Agenda. Retrieved from: <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/report/kff-health-tracking-poll-december-2020/>



Note: Don't know/Refused responses are not shown.

Unsurprisingly, opinions about the ACA, often known as Obamacare, split sharply along party lines. Nearly eight in 10 (79%) Democrats have either a very favorable opinion (48%) or somewhat favorable opinion (31%) of the ACA. Republicans tend to hold strongly unfavorable views of the ACA, with 61 percent saying their opinion of the 2010 health care law is very unfavorable and 21 percent rating it somewhat unfavorable. Independents are more divided in their views but tend to view the ACA more favorably (51% favorable; 41% unfavorable).

EXPERIENCES WITH AND VIEWS ON MEDICAID

As one of 12 states that have not expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, low-income adults in Texas are eligible for Medicaid only if they meet certain requirements, such as people with disabilities, pregnant women, and parents with very low incomes. About 4.4 million Texans are covered by Medicaid with about three quarters being children (73%).⁴ According to analysis of Census data conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation, 57 percent of Medicaid recipients are Hispanic, 21 percent are White, and 16 percent are Black.⁵ Additionally, 61 percent are families with at least one full-time worker (working 35 hours or more per week).⁶

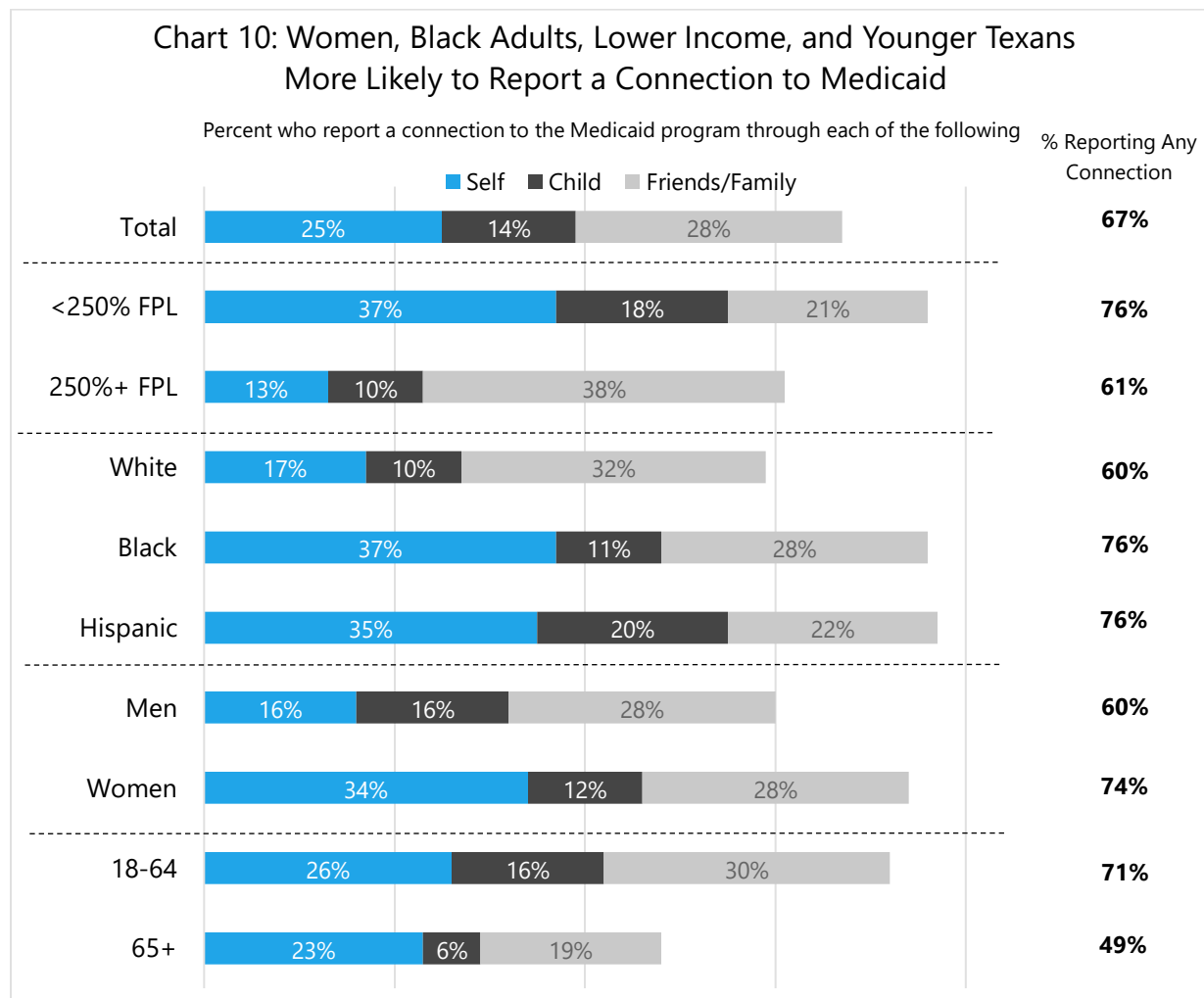
⁴ Texas Health and Human Services, Healthcare Statistics, data for September accessed December 7, 2020: <https://hhs.texas.gov/about-hhs/records-statistics/data-statistics/healthcare-statistics>

⁵ Kaiser Family Foundation's report "Distribution of the Nonelderly with Medicaid by Race/Ethnicity," estimates based on analysis of the 2019 American Community Survey <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/state-indicator/distribution-by-raceethnicity-4/>

⁶ Kaiser Family Foundation's report "Distribution of the Nonelderly with Medicaid by Family Work Status," estimates based on analysis of the 2019 American Community Survey <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/state-indicator/distribution-by-employment-status-4/>

In this year's Health Policy Survey, 25 percent report having ever been covered by Medicaid. Another 14 percent have had a child covered by Medicaid at some point. Twenty-two percent report that a family member or close friend has ever been covered by Medicaid. This equates to about two-thirds of Texas residents (67%) having a personal connection to Medicaid. Thirty-three percent have no connection to Medicaid or did not say.

Younger Texans, women, as well as Black and Hispanic Texans are more likely to report a connection to Medicaid. About a third of women (34%) report ever being personally covered by Medicaid compared to 16 percent of men. Residents 64 and younger are also more likely to have a connection with Medicaid than those 65 and older (71% v. 49%). While only 17 percent of White Texans have ever personally received Medicaid benefits, 37 percent of Black Texans have received these benefits. As expected, those with lower incomes are also more likely to have received Medicaid benefits for themselves or their children in comparison to those with higher incomes. Nevertheless, across income, gender, as well as race and ethnicity, the majority of respondents report some connection to the program (Chart 10).



Note: A personal connection to Medicaid is defined as: Self ever covered by Medicaid, Child ever covered by Medicaid, or Family or close friends ever covered by Medicaid.

Widespread connection to Medicaid may be a key driver for the overall favorable views of the program by most Texans. Nearly seven in 10 Texans (69%; 34% very favorable; 35% somewhat favorable) reported viewing the Medicaid favorably. This is similar to the results in the 2019 and 2018 surveys. Those who have any connection to Medicaid are more likely to have an overall favorable opinion of the program than those with no connection (71% v. 64%). However, not having a connection to Medicaid does not appear related to having unfavorable opinions of the program. Less than one quarter (21%) of those who reported no connection held unfavorable views of it. This is similar to the 23 percent with a connection who held unfavorable views. When examining the groups that are more likely to have very favorable views of the program, a larger share are those with incomes under 250 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL; 41%), Democrats (43%), those in fair or poor health (44%), Hispanics (42%), and Black Texans (61%) (Table 4).

Table 4: Views on Medicaid by Key Demographic Groups

	Total	PARTY ID			RACE/ETHNICITY			INCOME (% OF FPL)		MEDICAID CONNECTION	
		Dem	Ind	Rep	White	Black	Hisp.	<250%	250%+	Any connection	No connection
NET Favorable	69%	78%	69%	58%	62%	84%	75%	72%	65%	71%	64%
Very favorable	34%	43%	35%	19%	25%	61%	42%	41%	27%	37%	28%
Somewhat favorable	35%	35%	34%	39%	38%	23%	33%	32%	38%	34%	36%
NET Unfavorable	23%	15%	24%	33%	27%	14%	18%	20%	26%	23%	21%
Somewhat unfavorable	13%	10%	15%	18%	15%	8%	11%	13%	14%	13%	13%
Very unfavorable	9%	5%	9%	14%	12%	6%	7%	7%	11%	10%	8%

Note: Don't know/Refused responses are not shown.

Even though only a quarter of residents report ever being covered by Medicaid themselves, more than half say the program is important to them and their family (57%; 40% very important, 17% somewhat important). A smaller but still considerable share (42%) say the program is not important, including 29 percent who say it is not at all important for them and their family.

METHODOLOGY

SSRS conducted the third wave of the *Texas Health Policy Survey* on behalf of Episcopal Health Foundation (EHF) from November 30 through December 9, 2020. The goal of this survey was to understand the perspectives and experiences of Texas adults regarding their health care and health care policies in the state, with a comparison to similar studies completed in 2018⁷ and 2019⁸. For the 2020 Texas Health Policy Survey, SSRS interviewed a representative sample of 1,204 Texas adults (age 18 or older), reached via landline (n=296) and cell phone (n=908; including n= 747 who could not be reaching via landline) random digit dialing (RDD). Interviews were conducted by live professional telephone interviewers in English or Spanish based on the respondent's language preference.

Weighting is generally used in survey analysis to compensate for sample designs and patterns of non-response that might bias results. The survey data are weighted to balance the sample demographics to match estimates for the Texas adult population. The margin of sampling error for this study is +/- 3.5 percentage points for results based on the total sample.

ABOUT EHF

The [Episcopal Health Foundation \(EHF\)](#) is committed to transforming the health of our communities by going beyond the doctor's office. By providing millions of dollars in grants, working with congregations and community partners, and providing important research, we're supporting solutions that address the underlying causes of poor health in Texas. EHF was established in 2013, is based in Houston, and has more than \$1.2 billion in estimated assets. **#HealthNotJustHealthcare**

ABOUT SSRS

SSRS is a full-service market and survey research firm managed by a core of dedicated professionals with advanced degrees in the social sciences. Service offerings include the Omnibus Survey, Probability Panel and other Online Solutions as well as custom research programs – all driven by a central commitment to methodological rigor. The SSRS team is renowned for its multimodal approach, as well as its sophisticated and proprietary sample designs. Typical projects for the company include complex strategic, tactical and public opinion initiatives in the U.S. and in more than 40 countries worldwide. SSRS is research, refined. Visit www.ssrs.com for more information.

⁷ Hamel, L., Wu, B., Brodie, M., Sim, S., Marks, E. (2018). *Texas Residents' Views on State and National Health Policy Priorities*. Retrieved from: <https://www.episcopalhealth.org/research-reports/>

⁸ Sim, S., Mark, E., Ben-Porath, E., Hachey, E., Su, J. (2019). *Texas Residents' Views on State and National Health Policy Priorities*. Retrieved from: <https://www.episcopalhealth.org/research-reports/>