

# TEXANS' VIEWS ON STATE HEALTH POLICY

Findings from the Episcopal Health Foundation  
2022 Texas Health Tracking Survey

Prepared by:

Shao-Chee Sim | Episcopal Health Foundation

Jazmyne Sutton, Eran Ben-Porath | SSRS

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With a newly seated legislature and Governor Greg Abbott elected for a third term, the state of Texas faces a number of health policy priorities for 2023. As the state's population continues to increase and become more diverse in terms of urbanicity, income, race and ethnicity, the health care challenges also become greater. Texas remains one of only a handful of states that has yet to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act. Additionally, spikes in maternal mortality in recent years coupled with recent state laws banning abortion, place a greater burden on the state to provide health care resources to low-income women and pregnant people in the state. Finally, a lingering consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic has been a wave of mental health crises including issues with addiction and access to mental health resources. The **2022 Texas Health Care Tracking Poll** conducted by the Episcopal Health Foundation (EHF) and SSRS explored Texans' views on these and health care priorities in the state. This report provides analysis of these data along with an exploration of how these priorities have fluctuated over the past five years.

In the 2022 survey, almost two-thirds of Texans expressed support for an increase in spending on health care (63%). This is the highest level of support for health care program spending in five years. This is an almost ten-point increase since 2018 when it was at 54 percent. Support is highest among younger adults and those with a connection to Medicaid.

When asked about specific health care priorities for the state, issues around costs were rated as a top priority by most with 59 percent saying reducing the cost of health care should be a top priority, 58 percent saying reducing the cost of prescription drugs should be a top priority and 58 percent saying increased access to health insurance should be a top priority. Additionally, almost half say increased access to family-planning and contraception should be a top priority (49%). This has gained in importance over the last five years from only 36% saying it was a top priority in 2018.

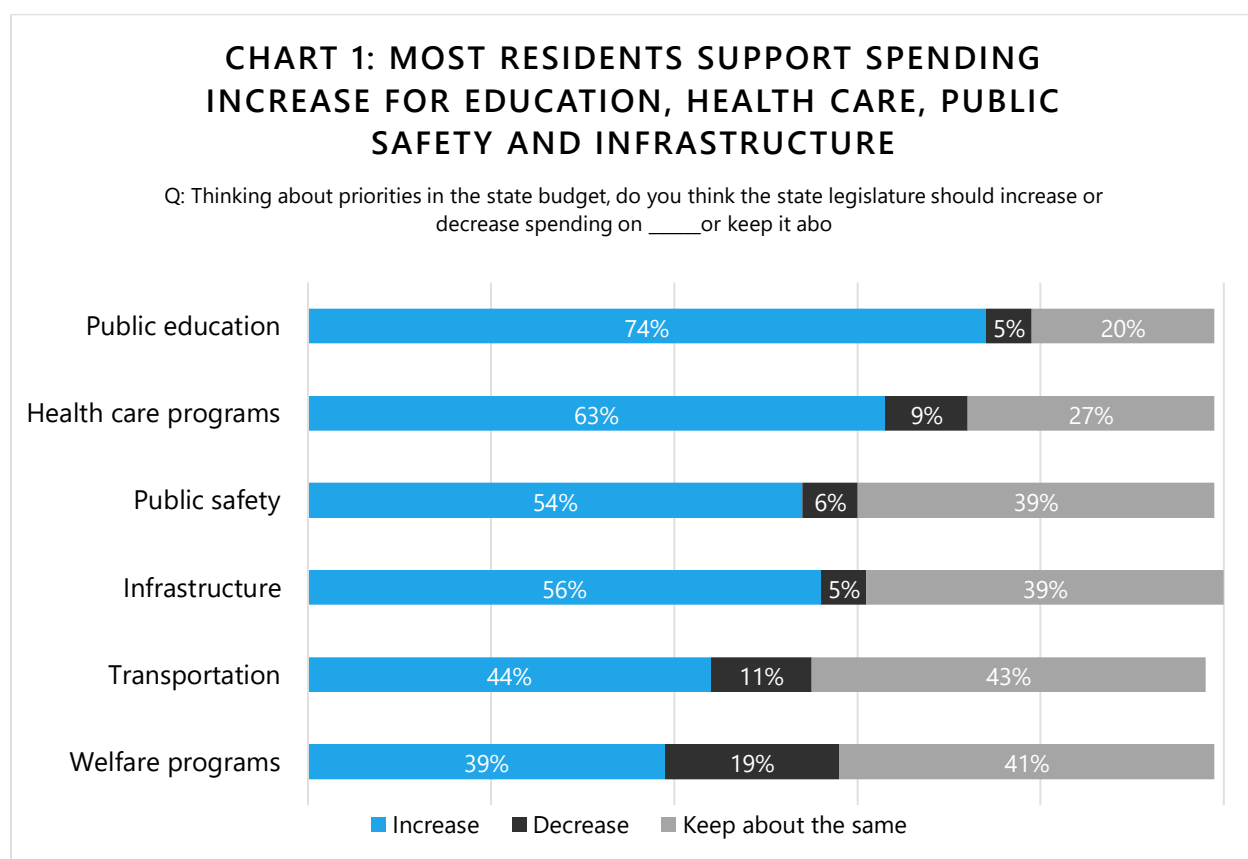
About half also view increased funding for mental health programs as a top priority (53%) and a third view dealing with the opioid crisis as a top priority (35%). About a quarter of Texans say they have had problems getting mental health care because of the cost in the past year (27%).

The proportion of Texans with an unfavorable view of the state's Medicaid program has significantly increased from 25 percent in 2021 to 31 percent in 2022. At the same time, support for expanding Medicaid to cover more low-income Texans has stayed consistently high with seven in ten supporting expansion for the past three years (69% in 2020; 69% in 2021; 72% in 2022).

This support for Medicaid expansion may be associated with the consistently high number of uninsured adults in the state. Estimates from this year's poll show that a quarter of adults under age 64 in the state are uninsured (26%) and nearly two-thirds of this group (64%) have been uninsured for more than two-years. This indicates that the issue with insurance coverage pre-dates the economic issues brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

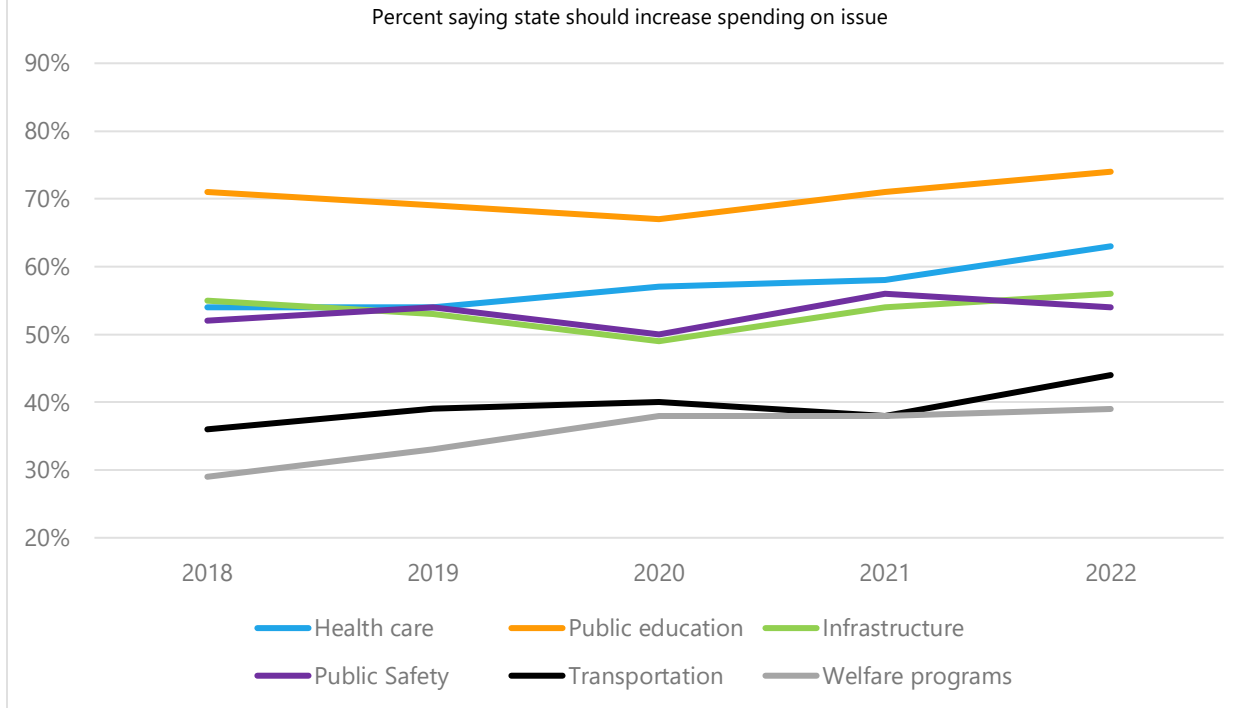
## HEALTH CARE FUNDING RISING IN IMPORTANCE FOR TEXANS

When asked about issues that should receive more funding by the state legislature, public education continues to receive a large amount of support for increased funding with three-quarters of residents supporting an increase in spending. The next most popular area for increased spending is health care programs. Almost two-thirds of Texans support an increase in spending on health care programs (63%) (chart 1). This number has experienced a significant increase over the years. Slightly over half (54%) supported increased health care program funding in 2018. Support for increased spending on infrastructure, public safety and welfare programs has stayed relatively consistent. There has also been a slight increase in support for spending on transportation (chart 2).



\*Don't know/Refused not shown

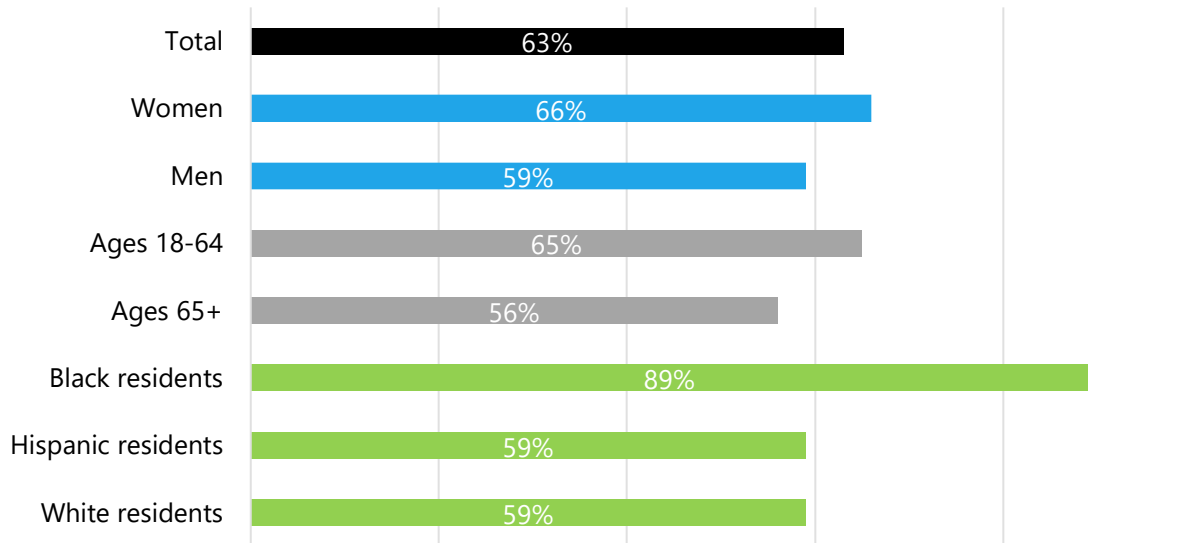
## CHART 2. SUPPORT FOR INCREASED HEALTH CARE SPENDING REACHES 5-YEAR HIGH



Younger adults, women, and Black Texans tend to have higher support for spending on both public education and health care programs (chart 3).

### CHART 3: WOMEN, BLACK ADULTS AND THOSE UNDER 65 MORE LIKELY TO SUPPORT INCREASED HEALTH CARE PROGRAM FUNDING

Q: Thinking about priorities in the state budget, do you think the state legislature should increase or decrease spending on **health care programs**

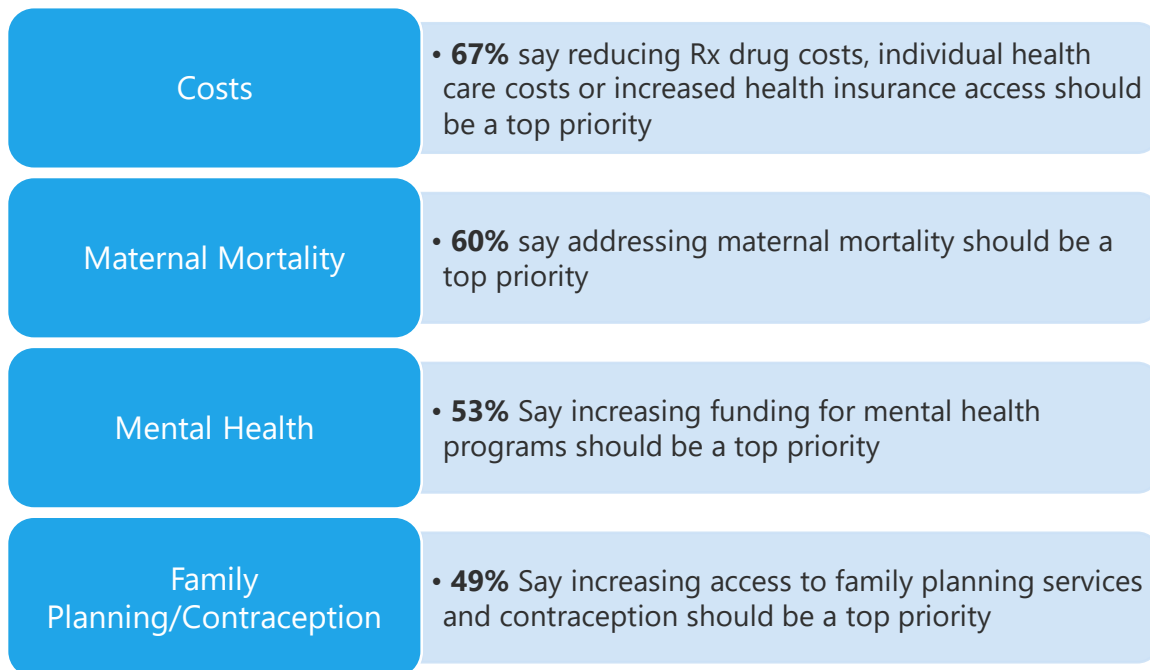


## TOP HEALTH CARE PRIORITIES

When asked about health care priorities specifically, issues involving cost and access tended to rank as top priorities. The majority say reducing the cost of prescription drugs (58%), reducing the amount individuals pay for health care (59%) and increasing access to health insurance (58%) should be top priorities. Overall, two thirds name one of these issues as a top priority (figure 1).

Maternal mortality is a top priority for a significant number of Texans. A full 60 percent say reducing the number of women who die from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth should be a top priority and 49 percent say increased access to family planning and contraception services should be a top priority. Additionally, about half say increased funding for mental health programs (53%) should be a top priority.

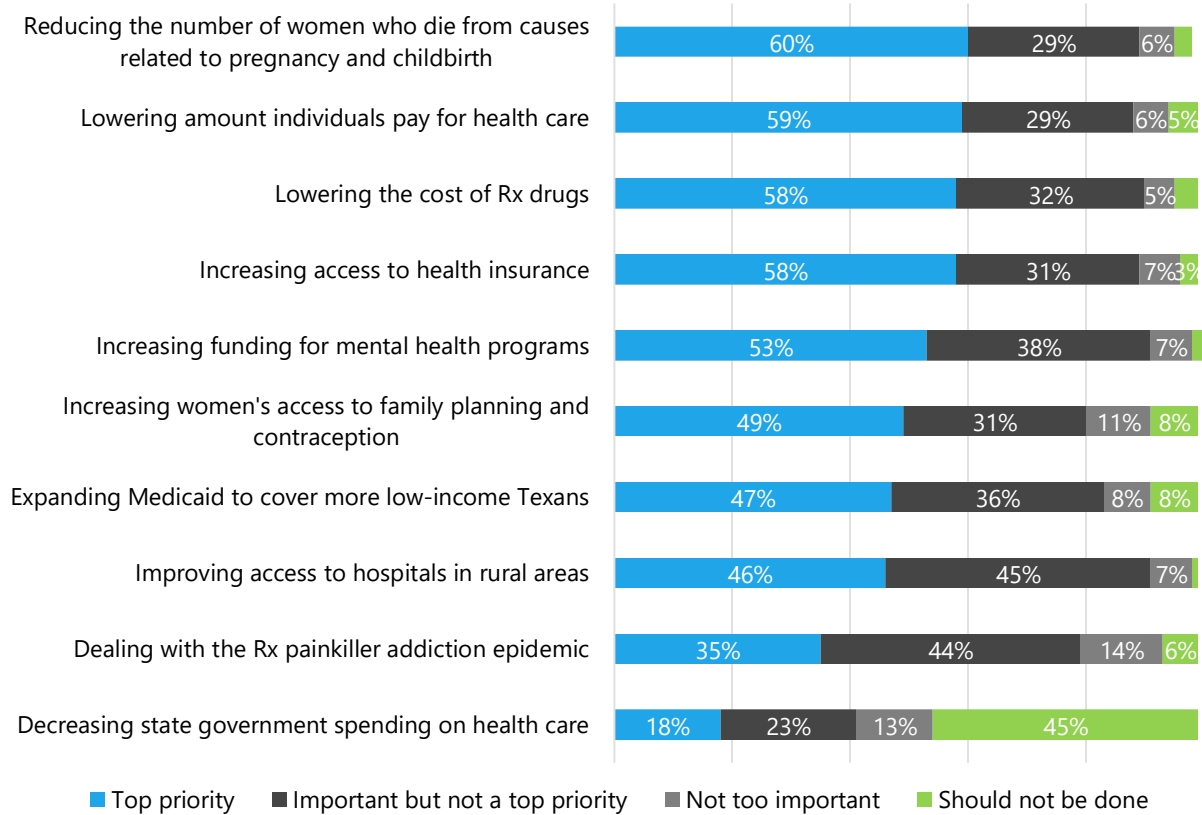
*Figure 1. Top Four Health Care Priorities for Texans*



Following these four priorities garnering the most support, 46 percent say improving access to hospitals in rural areas should be a top priority and about a third say dealing with the opioid crisis should be a top priority (35%). Finally, fewer than one in five say the state's top priority should be decreasing spending on health care (18%). In fact, 45 percent say this should not be done (Chart 4).

## CHART 4: COST AND MATERNAL MORTALITY RANK AS TOP HEALTH CARE PRIORITIES FOR MOST TEXANS

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



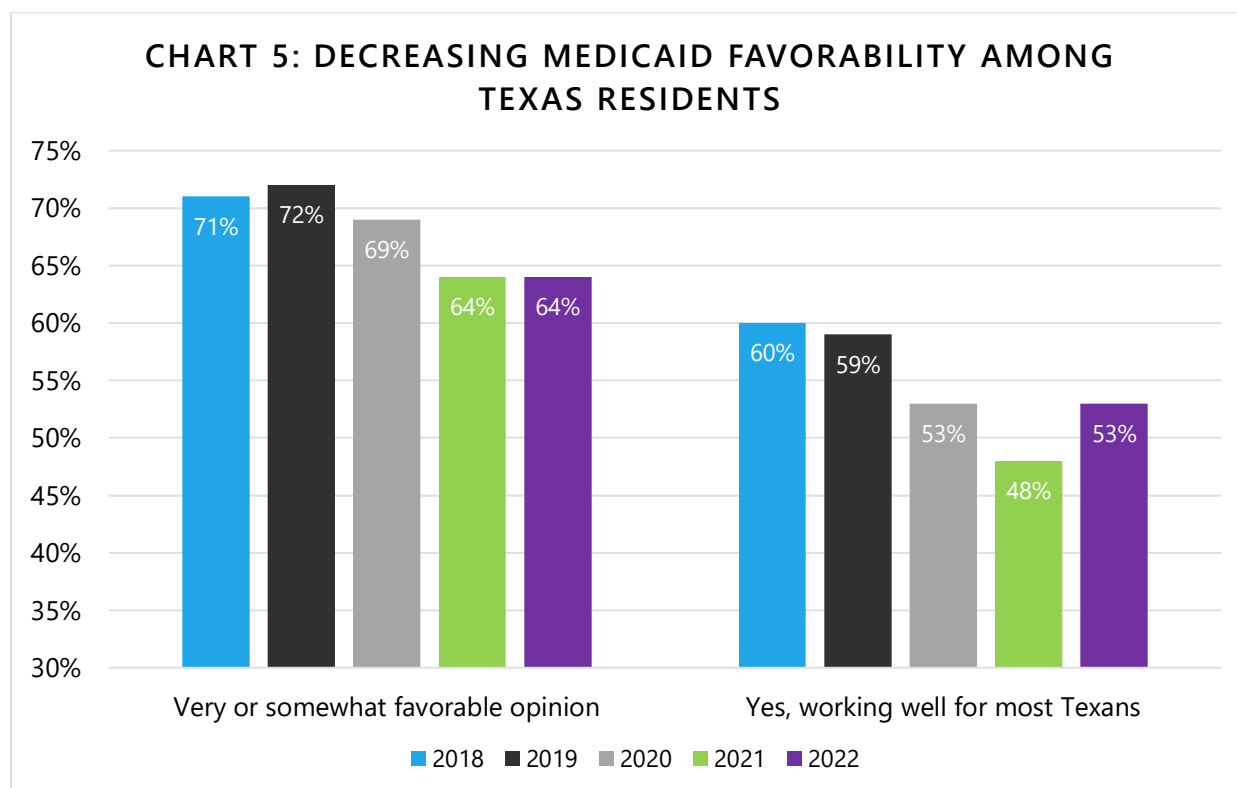
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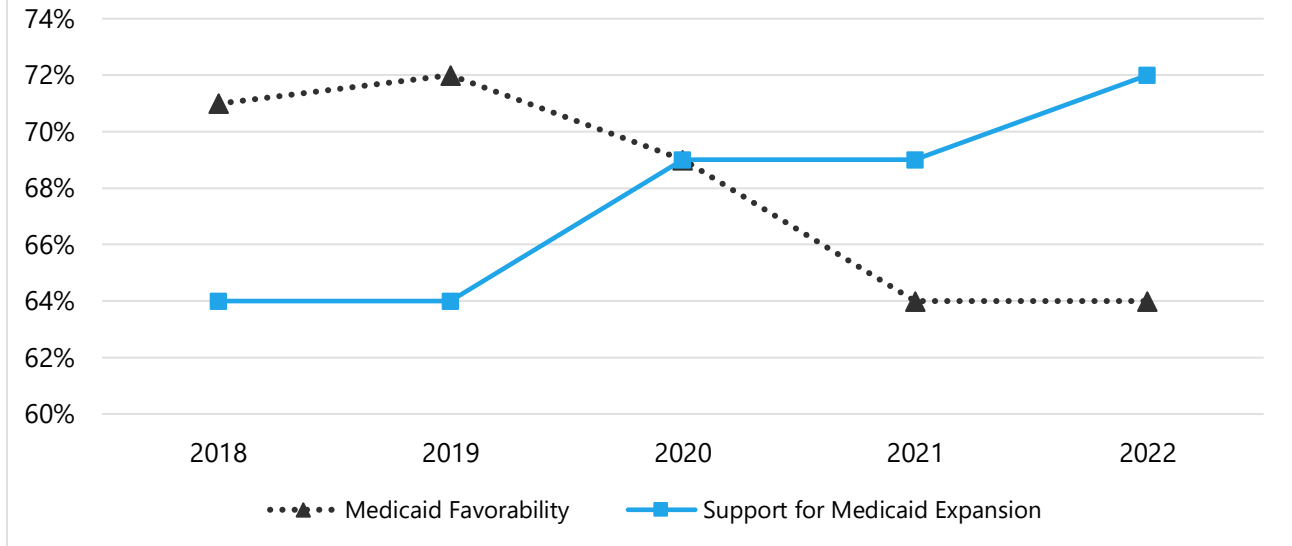
## MEDICAID EXPANSION: COVERAGE FOR LOW INCOME AND UNINSURED TEXANS

Two-thirds of Texans say the state government is not doing enough to make sure low-income adults can get the health care they need (65%). About half say the state is not doing enough for children (49%) and pregnant women (49%) and immigrants (47%). Furthermore, this year's poll indicates that a quarter of Texas adults under age 65 are uninsured (26%). While this number has experienced a slight decrease since 2020, Texas continues to have the highest rate of uninsured adults in the U.S. Those with household incomes under 250% of the federal poverty line (FPL) are also more likely to be uninsured (35%) compared to those with household incomes 250% or more of the FPL (7%).

Part of the issue with Texas's high rate of uninsured adults, is that Texas is one of only 12 states that has not expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act. While nearly two-thirds of Texas adults have a favorable view of Medicaid (64%), that number has seen a decline over the past five years. Seventy-one percent had a favorable opinion of Medicaid in 2018. Fewer also say that the program is working well for low-income people in the state (53% in 2022 vs. 60% in 2018). At the same time, support for expanding Medicaid to cover low-income people in the state has increased. In 2018, 64 percent support expansion compared to 72 percent this year (charts 5 & 6).

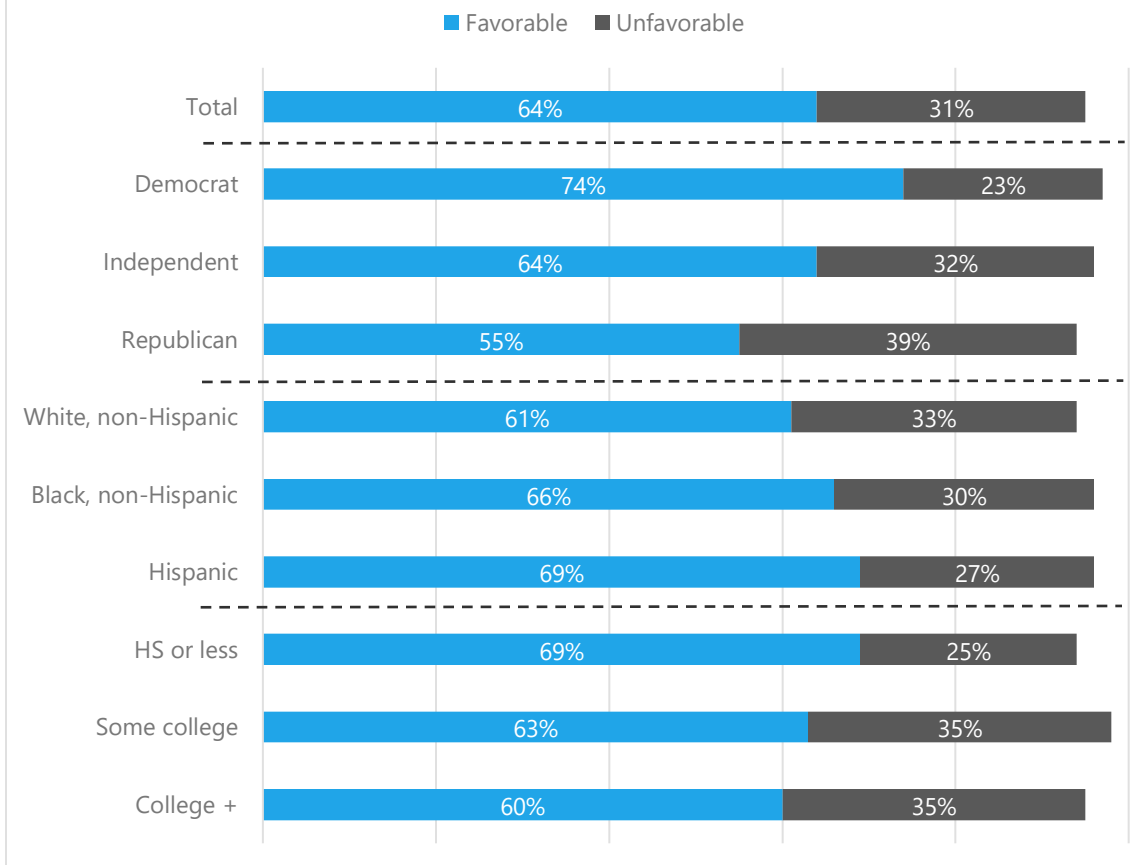


**CHART 6: DECLINE IN MEDICAID FAVORABILITY ASSOCIATED WITH RISE IN SUPPORT FOR MEDICAID EXPANSION OVER TIME**



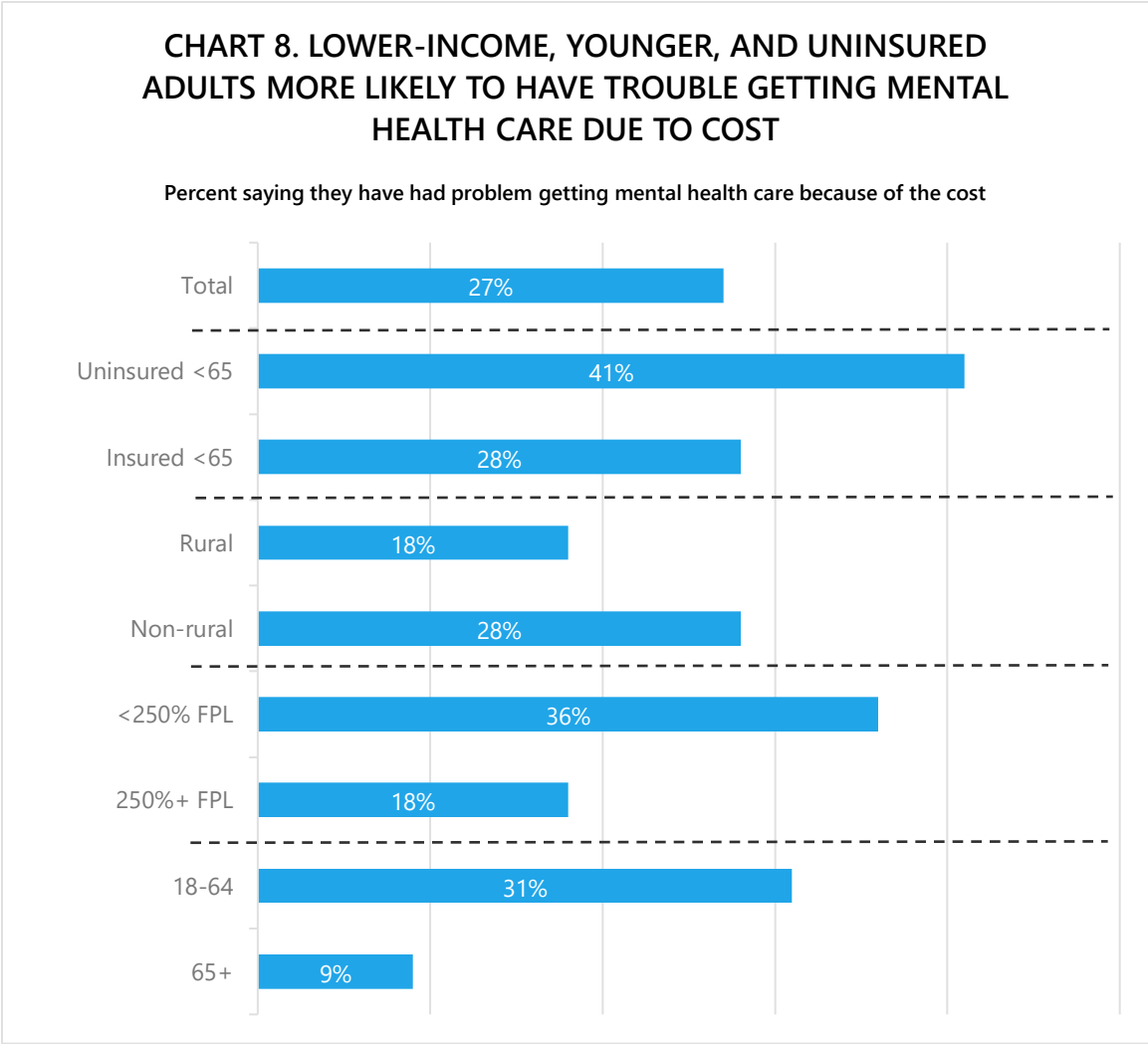
While rates of Medicaid favorability tend to be similar across age groups, and income levels, there are significant differences in favorability by political party identification. Democrats are more likely to have favorable opinions (74%) than Republicans (55%) and Independents (64%). There are also differences in favorability by race and ethnicity as well as education level (Chart 7).

**CHART 7. DEMOCRATS, HISPANIC ADULTS AND THOSE WITH HS DIPLOMA OR LESS MORE LIKELY TO HAVE FAVORABLE OPINION OF MEDICAID**

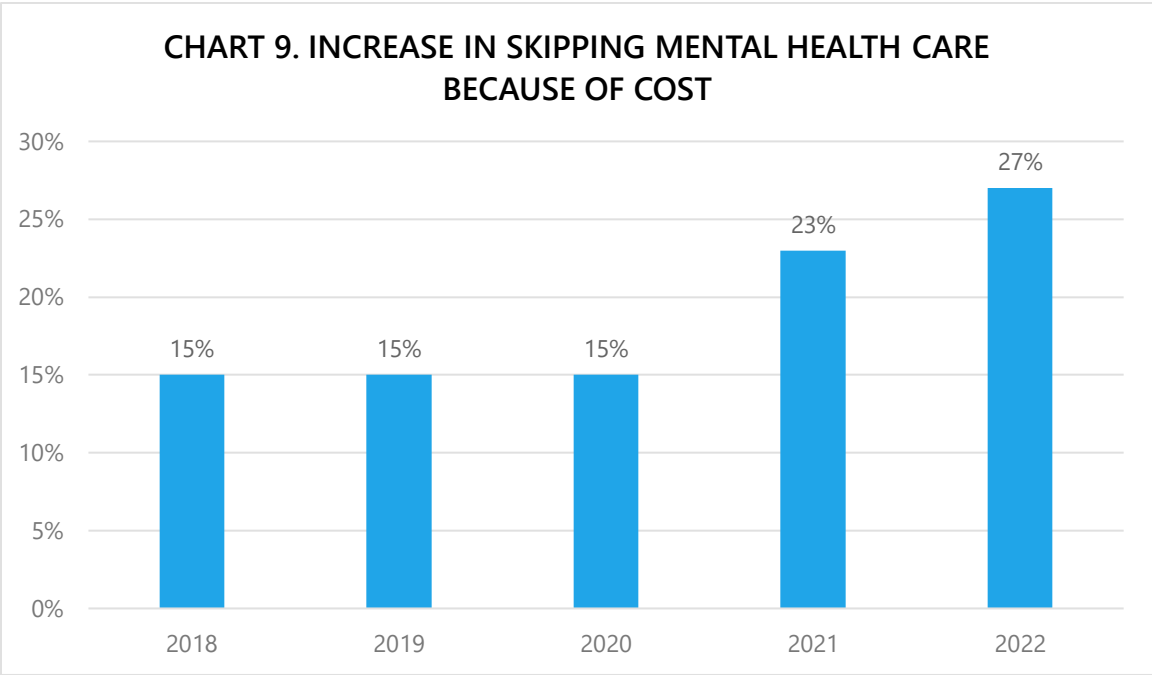


# ADDRESSING THE MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS IN TEXAS

A quarter of Texas adults (27%) say they or another member of their household has had problems getting mental health care because of the cost in the past 12 months. Those with incomes under 250% FPL, younger adults, and those who are uninsured are more likely to say this has been an issue for them (chart 8).



Additionally, demand for mental health services seems to be on the rise since the COVID-19 pandemic. From 2018 to 2020, only about 15 percent of Texans say they had trouble getting mental health services due to cost in the previous 12 months. In 2021, that number increased to 23 percent. This number has reached a five-year high of 27 percent in 2022 (chart 9).

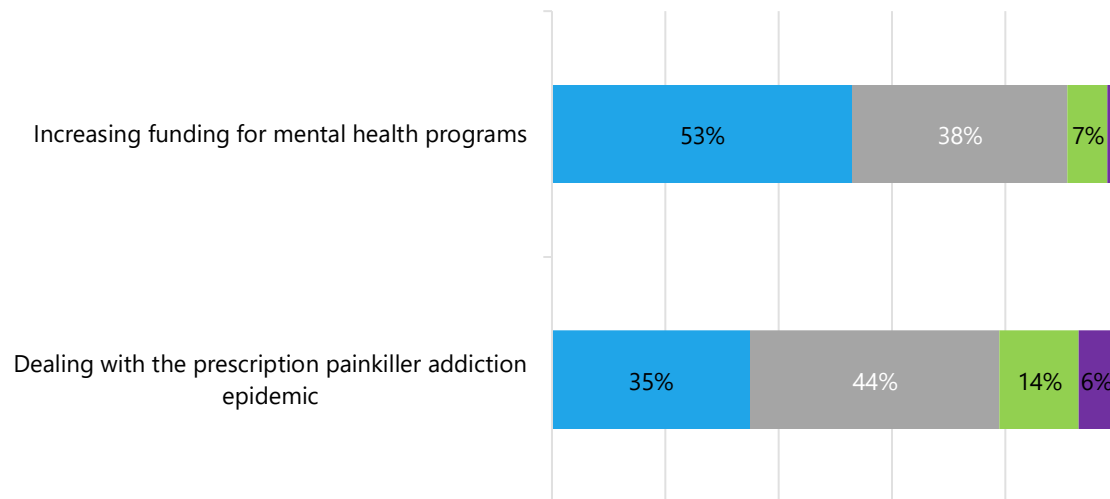


These issues with affording mental health care may be related to the more than half of adults who say increasing funding for mental health programs should be a top priority for the state legislature. Another third sees this as an important priority. Additionally, a third view dealing with the prescription drug addiction epidemic as a top priority (35%) and 44 percent say this is an important issue (chart 10).

## CHART 10. ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION IMPORTANT TO MOST TEXANS

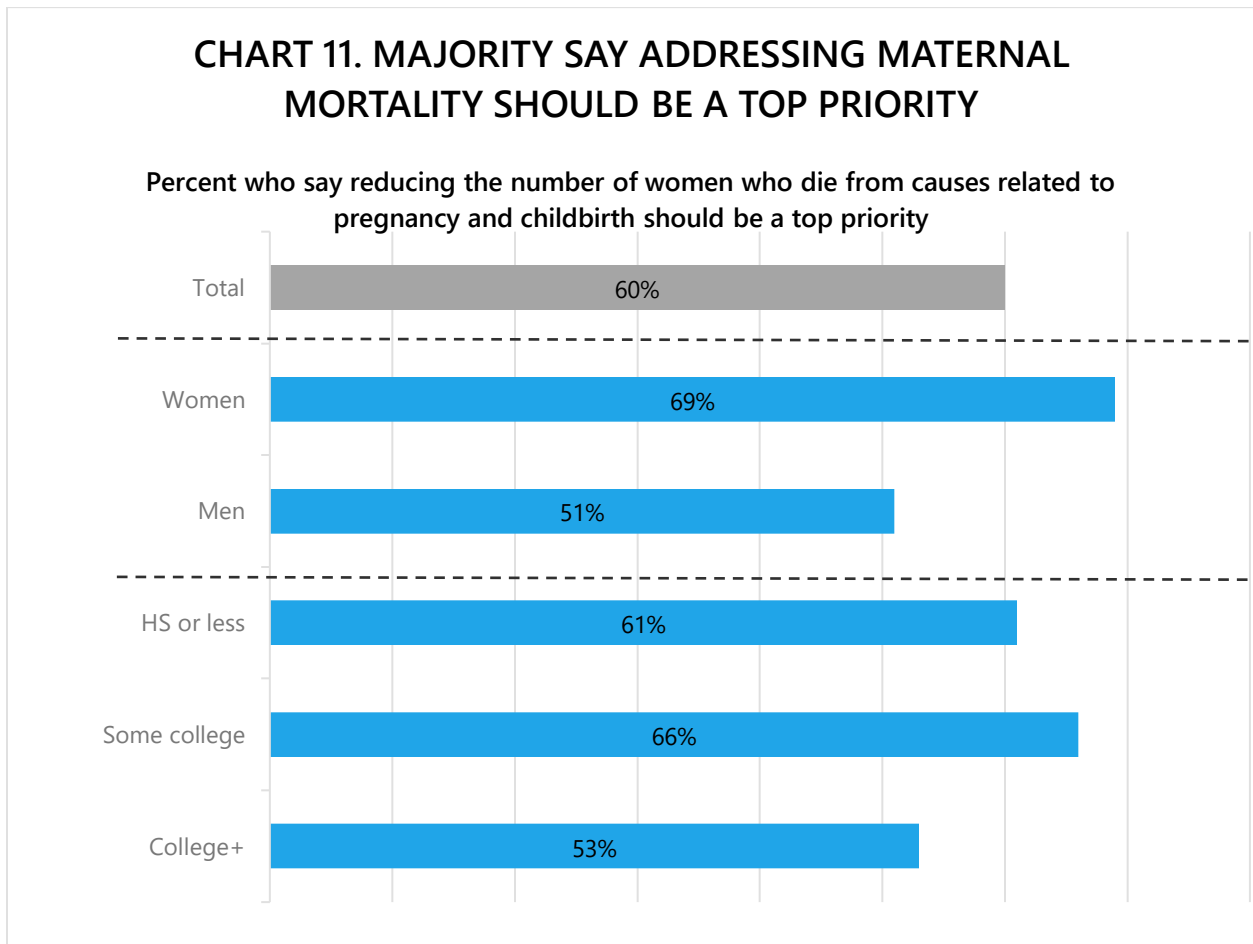
Q: Should that be a top priority for the Texas legislature, important but not a top priority, not too important, or should it not be done?

■ Top Priority ■ Important ■ Not too important ■ Should not be done



## TEXANS' VIEWS ON FUNDING FOR FAMILY PLANNING, MATERNAL HEALTH AND CONTRACEPTION

A 2019 report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) ranked Texas among the top ten states in the U.S. for highest maternal mortality rates<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, researchers estimate that laws banning abortion like the one recently passed in Texas could significantly increase the number of pregnancy-related deaths<sup>2</sup>. With the heightened attention to abortion and maternal mortality nationwide, it follows that the majority of Texans think reducing the number of women who die from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth should be a top priority (60%). This issue is of most important to women and those with at least some college education (chart 11).



<sup>1</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6818e1.htm?s\\_cid=mm6818e1\\_w](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6818e1.htm?s_cid=mm6818e1_w)

<sup>2</sup> <https://read.dukeupress.edu/demography/article/58/6/2019/265968/The-Pregnancy-Related-Mortality-Impact-of-a-Total>

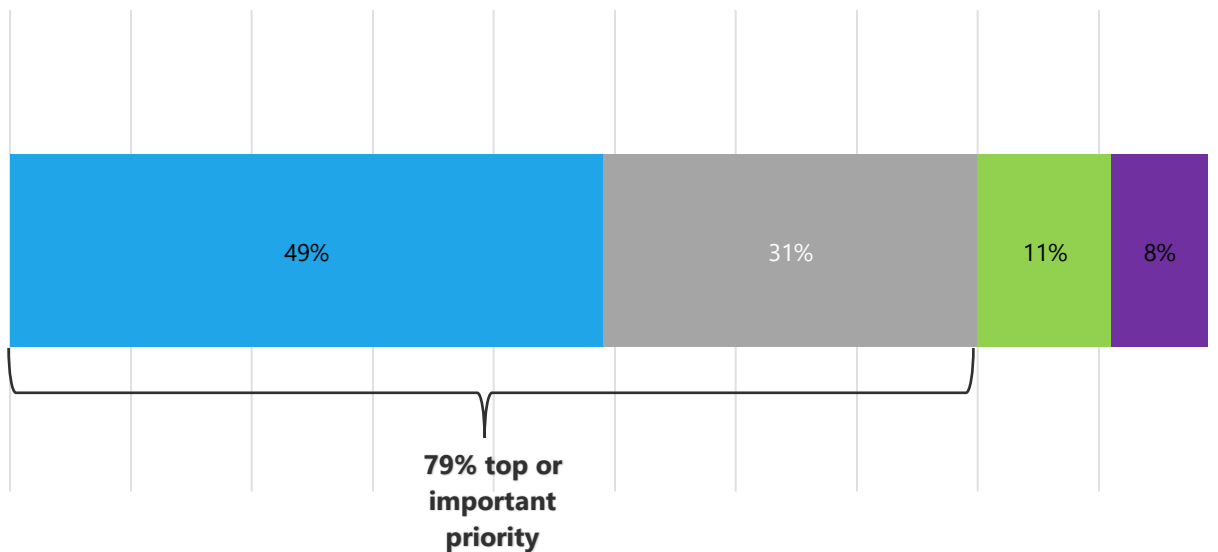
Similarly, about half of Texans say the state is not doing enough to ensure that pregnant women can get the health care they need (49%).

Additionally, about half of Texans see access to family planning services and contraception as a top priority for the Texas legislature. Another 31 percent say this should be an important, but not a top priority and only 20 percent say it is not too important or should not be done (11% not too important; 8% should not be done) (chart 12). Similar to support for reducing the maternal mortality rate, women and Black Texans are more likely to support increased access to family planning services and contraception.

### CHART 12. 8 IN 10 SAY ACCESS TO FAMILY PLANNING AND CONTRACEPTION SHOULD BE IMPORTANT OR TOP PRIORITY FOR THE STATE

Q: Should Increasing women's access to family planning services and contraception be a top priority for the Texas legislature, important

■ Top Priority ■ Important ■ Not too important ■ Should not be done





## METHODOLOGY

SSRS conducted the *2022 Texas Health Tracking Survey* on behalf of Episcopal Health Foundation (EHF) from September 27 through October 31, 2022. Similar studies have been fielded on behalf of EHF since 2018. The 2022 Texas Health Policy Survey, was conducted online and by telephone with a representative sample of 1,201 Texas adults (age 18 or older). Interviews were administered in English ( $n=1,102$ ) and Spanish ( $n=99$ ). The sample includes 601 Texas adults reached through the SSRS Opinion Panel<sup>[1]</sup> and another 600 reached from a random digit dial telephone sample of landline ( $n=169$ ) and cell phone ( $n=431$ ) numbers.

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 percentage points for results based on the total sample.

## ABOUT EHF

[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 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](http://www.ssrs.com) for more information.

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<sup>[1]</sup> <https://ssrs.com/opinion-panel/>