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Public Health Priorities and the Pathway Forward

Americans' views on
public health priorities,
progress, and trust in
sources of information

METHODOLOGY

Results in this report are based on self-administered web interviews conducted Dec. 2-15, 2024, with U.S. adults aged 18 and older who are members of Gallup's probability-based panel. For results based on the total sample of 2,121 adults, the margin of sampling error is ± 3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Sampling error varies for different survey items based on the total number of respondents who saw and responded to each item.

Survey sample weights were applied to all results to correct for unequal selection probability and nonresponse rates. Samples are weighted to match the national demographics along the following dimensions: gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, and region. All reported margins of sampling error include the computed design effects for weighting. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls. These sources of error were minimized through several iterations of survey design choices and by following Gallup's best practices for survey administration.

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Introduction

The public health challenges facing the United States are complex, varied, and growing. They span increasing chronic diseases, worsening effects of climate change, and escalating health care costs. There are also concerns about the opioid epidemic, gun violence, and mental health issues, which continue to touch communities of all types.

The state of the nation's public health and how to improve it are issues at the top of policymakers' minds, and they affect Americans' lives in important ways. To shed light on Americans' views on public health, Emory University's Rollins School of Public Health and Gallup partnered to conduct a survey on public health priorities, progress, and trust.

Americans are worried about public health in the U.S. and want the federal government to lead in addressing their concerns, according to the Rollins-Gallup Public Health Priorities Survey. The survey also reveals that Americans generally agree on the nation's most pressing public health priorities.

As the Trump administration and incoming public health leaders formulate new strategies, the findings from this report highlight bipartisan priorities and areas of opportunity for strengthening Americans' trust in public health.

Public Health Priorities

Americans Prioritize Health Care Access and Cost, Food and Water Safety, and Chronic Disease Reduction

Americans ranked improving health care access and affordability as the highest public health priority for government leaders to address out of 15 options.

One in four in the U.S. selected this issue as their highest priority and more than half (52%) rated it as their first, second, or third priority.

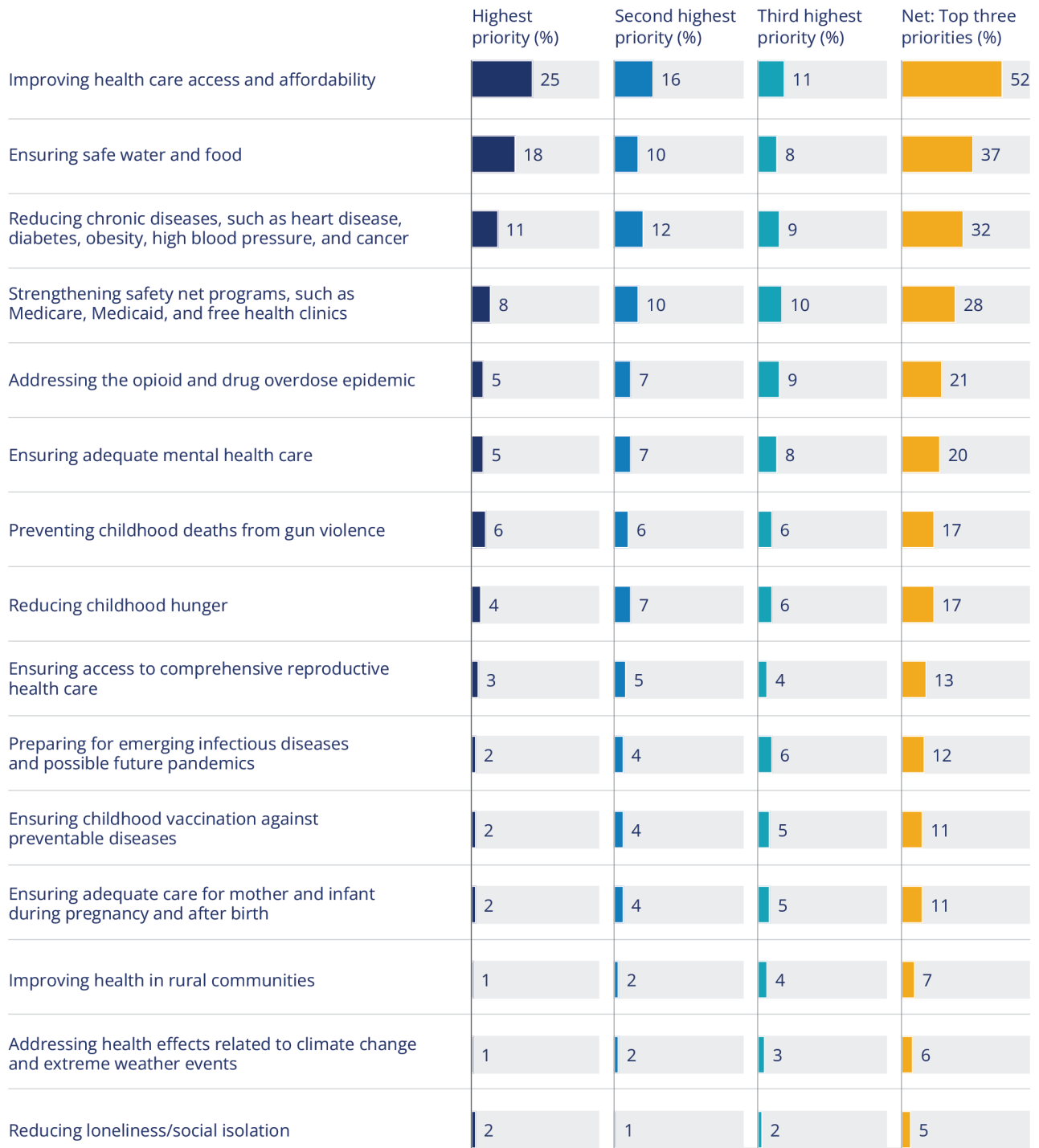
Ensuring the safety of food and water ranked second, with 18% choosing it as their highest priority for government leaders to address and 37% putting it in their top three.

Reducing chronic disease also emerged as a top priority, with 11% ranking it highest and 32% choosing it as first, second, or third.



Americans' Top Public Health Priorities

Please rank the public health issues that you think should be given the highest priority by government leaders at this time.



Note: First, second, and third highest priorities may sum to net top three priorities +/-1 due to rounding.

Agreement Across Most Groups on Health Care Access as a Priority

Americans across socioeconomic and demographic groups, including gender, age, education, and income, believe government leaders should prioritize health care access. However, the percentage of people in different subgroups who ranked this issue as their highest priority varied. For example, Non-Hispanic White Americans (26%) and Hispanic Americans (29%) were more likely than Non-Hispanic Black Americans (17%) to rate health care access as their highest priority.

Americans with higher incomes were more likely than those with lower incomes to rank health care access as their highest priority — 29% of those with an annual household income of \$90,000 or more made it their top priority, compared to 19% of those with an annual household income of less than \$48,000.

REPUBLICANS LEAN TOWARD FOOD AND WATER SAFETY AS HIGHEST PRIORITY

Twenty-four percent of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents (Republican/lean Republican) said ensuring safe water and food should be the highest priority for government leaders, while 19% selected health care access and affordability, and 16% chose reducing chronic disease. Among Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents (Democrat/lean Democratic), 32% rated health care access and affordability as their highest priority, followed by 13% who said ensuring safe water and food, and 12% who selected strengthening safety net programs.

Highest Priority Public Health Issues by Partisanship



DEMOCRATS/DEMOCRATIC LEANERS

32%

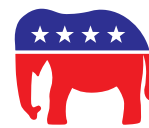
Improving health care access and affordability

13%

Ensuring safe water and food

12%

Strengthening safety net programs



REPUBLICANS/REPUBLICAN LEANERS

24%

Ensuring safe water and food

19%

Improving health care access and affordability

16%

Reducing chronic disease

Note: All other issues were rated highest priority by 11% or less of each group.

OPIOID EPIDEMIC, MENTAL HEALTH, GUN VIOLENCE, AND CHILDHOOD HUNGER ON THE RADAR FOR SOME

Between 17% and 21% of Americans selected the opioid and drug overdose crisis, mental health care, childhood deaths from gun violence, or reducing childhood hunger as one of their top three public health priorities.

Between 11% and 13% selected issues related to reproductive health, adequate maternal and infant care, childhood vaccination, or infectious disease prevention among their top three priorities.

Fewer Americans (between 5% and 7%) said improving health in rural communities, the health effects of climate change, and the loneliness epidemic should be among the top priorities.



Most Want the Federal Government to Play a Lead Role

The Rollins-Gallup Public Health Priorities Survey also asked respondents whether federal or state government could most effectively address their top three public health priorities.

With respect to most of their priority issues, a majority of respondents said the federal government could address the issue more effectively than state government.

For example, 75% of those identifying health care access and affordability as a top priority indicated that the federal government would be better than state government at addressing this issue.

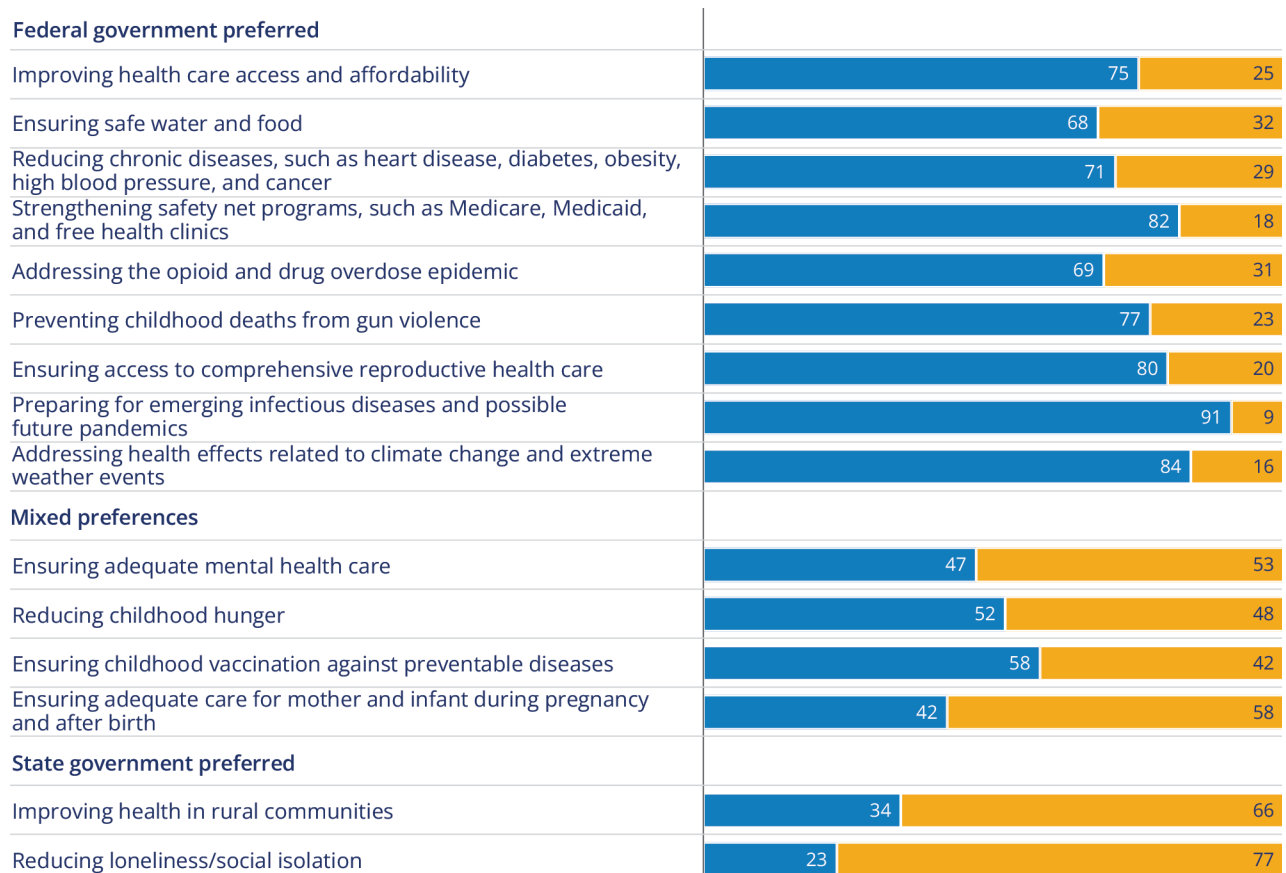
Those who identified preparing for emerging infectious diseases and future pandemics (91%), strengthening safety net programs (82%), and addressing the health effects of climate change (84%) as top priorities were especially likely to say the federal government — rather than state government — would better handle the issue. Only Americans who selected improving health in rural communities and reducing loneliness/social isolation within their top three priorities indicated that state government could more effectively address these issues.¹

¹ Note that total sample size varies for each of these items and is very small for some; only respondents who rated an issue as a top priority answered the question about the role of the federal versus state government in addressing that issue.

Perceived Effectiveness of Federal vs. State Government in Addressing Priority Issues

Do you think that each of the following issues would be most effectively addressed by the federal government or by state government? (Asked of those who rated the issue as a first, second, or third priority.)

■ % Federal government ■ % State government



Note: N sizes for each item vary and data is reported for respondents who selected each issue as a top priority. Percentages for each issue may not equal 100% due to question nonresponse.

REPUBLICANS AND DEMOCRATS CHOOSE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OVER STATE

Majorities of both Republicans and Republican leaners, and Democrats and Democratic leaners, chose the federal government over state government as the more effective force for addressing each of the issues that emerged as a top priority for them.

Republicans and Republican leaners were more likely to choose the federal government than state government for effectively addressing the issues ranked in their top three priorities,

with more than 60% of those who selected those issues saying the federal government could more effectively address them.

Democrats and Democratic leaners also said the federal government could more effectively address their top public health priorities: More than 75% of those who identified the issues as top priorities chose the federal government to address them most effectively.

Tracking Public Health Progress

Americans See Some Progress, a Lot of Lost Ground

The Rollins-Gallup Public Health Priorities Survey asked Americans to indicate whether they think the U.S. has made progress, lost ground, or not changed over the last 10 years on eight key areas of public health.

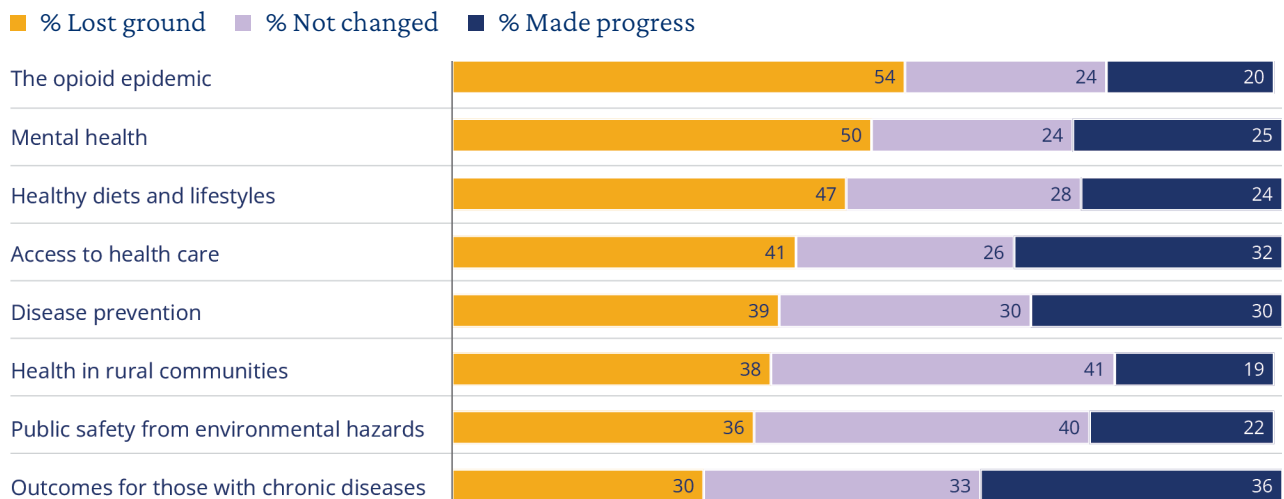
TOP AREAS OF LOST GROUND INCLUDE OPIOIDS, MENTAL HEALTH, AND HEALTHY DIETS

Americans were most likely to say the U.S. has lost ground on the opioid epidemic (54%), mental health (50%), and healthy diets and lifestyles (47%). About four in 10 Americans said the U.S. has lost ground on access to health care (41%), disease prevention (39%), health in rural communities (38%), and public safety from environmental hazards (36%).

Americans have slightly more positive views about outcomes for those with chronic diseases, with 36% saying the U.S. has made progress and 30% saying it has lost ground.

Tracking Views About Progress on Public Health Issues

Over the past 10 years, do you think the U.S. has made progress, has lost ground, or has not changed in each of the following areas?



Note: Percentages for each item may not equal 100% due to question nonresponse.

REPUBLICANS AMONG THOSE MOST CONCERNED ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH, OPIOIDS

Although Americans from various demographic groups share the opinion that the U.S. has lost ground on these issues, specific groups were particularly pessimistic. For example, Republicans and Republican leaners were more likely than any other group to say the U.S. has lost ground on mental health issues in the past decade (59%). Similarly, Republicans and Republican leaners were among the groups most likely to say the U.S. has lost ground on the opioid epidemic (69%).

DIFFERING VIEWS ON CHRONIC DISEASE PROGRESS

Older Americans (aged 65 or above) were particularly optimistic about progress with chronic disease outcomes — 47% said the U.S. has made progress. Republicans and Republican leaners, who ranked reducing chronic disease among their top priorities for the government to tackle, were not as optimistic, with 31% saying there has been progress. Meanwhile, 43% of Democrats and Democratic leaners said the same.

Trust in Public Health Information

Americans Trust Doctors, Nurses, Scientific Research, and CDC Most

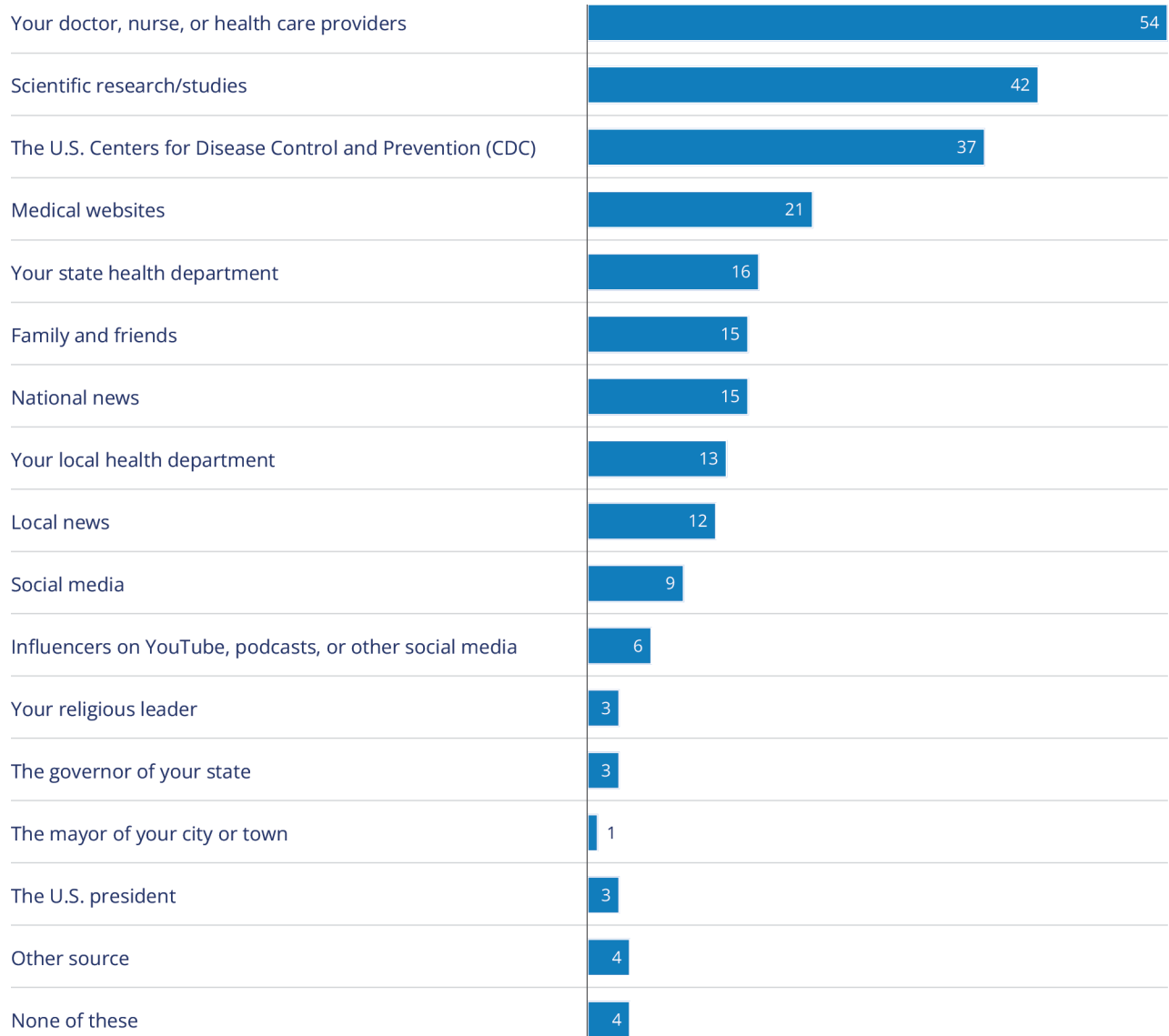
The Rollins-Gallup Public Health Priorities Survey also asked Americans to select their three most trusted sources of information on public health issues from a list of 15 options. The top three trusted sources Americans selected were:

- their doctor, nurse, or health care providers (54%)
- scientific research and studies (42%)
- the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (37%)

Rates of Trust in Sources of Public Health Information

What are your most trusted sources of information on public health issues? Select up to three.

% Selected

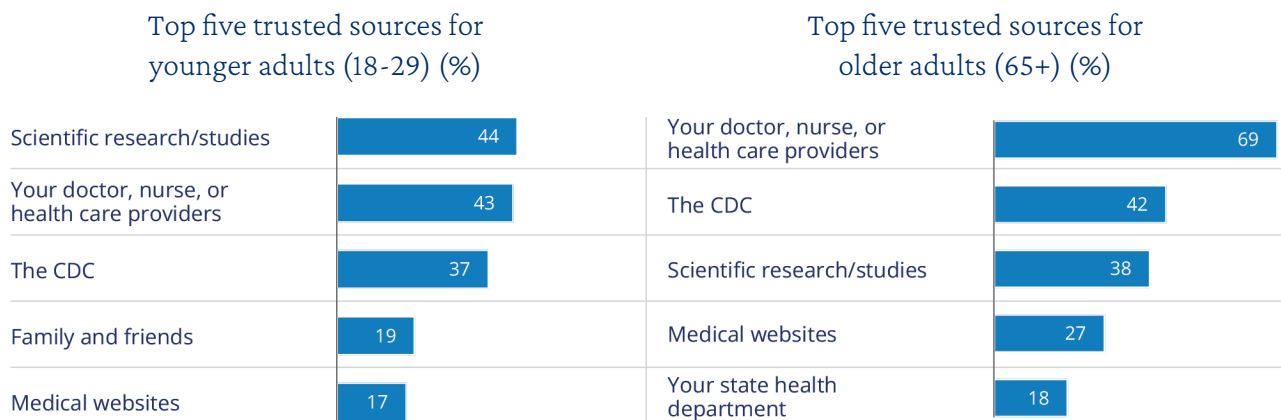


Other top trusted sources of public health information for Americans include medical websites, individual state health departments, national news, and family and friends. Fewer chose their local health department, local news, social media, and influencers on social media. Religious and political leaders were rarely selected as the top trusted sources of information for public health issues, chosen by 3% or fewer.

TRUSTED SOURCES DIFFER SLIGHTLY BY AGE AND EDUCATION LEVEL

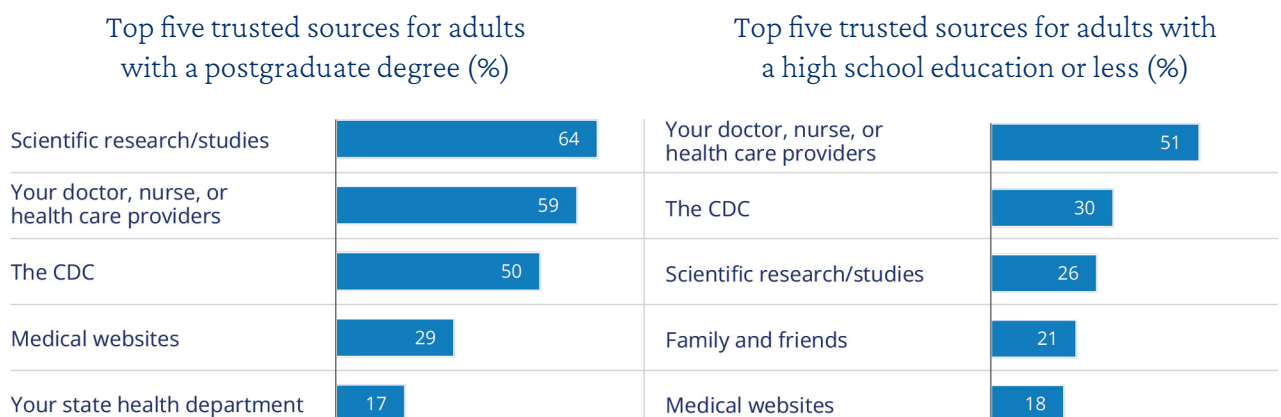
Although most Americans agreed on their top three most trusted sources for public health information — health care providers, scientific research and studies, and the CDC — these sources ranked differently across subgroups. For example, young adults aged 18 to 29 were about as likely to choose scientific research (44%) as their health care providers (43%), followed by the CDC (37%) as their most trusted sources for public health information. Those aged 65 and older were much more likely to choose their health care providers (69%) than the CDC (42%) or scientific research and studies (38%).

Top Trusted Sources for Younger and Older Americans



Americans with a postgraduate degree were more likely to rank scientific research as their number one trusted source for public health information (64%), followed by their health care providers (59%), while those with a high school education or less were more likely to trust their health care providers (51%) than the CDC (30%) or scientific research (26%).

Top Trusted Sources by Educational Attainment



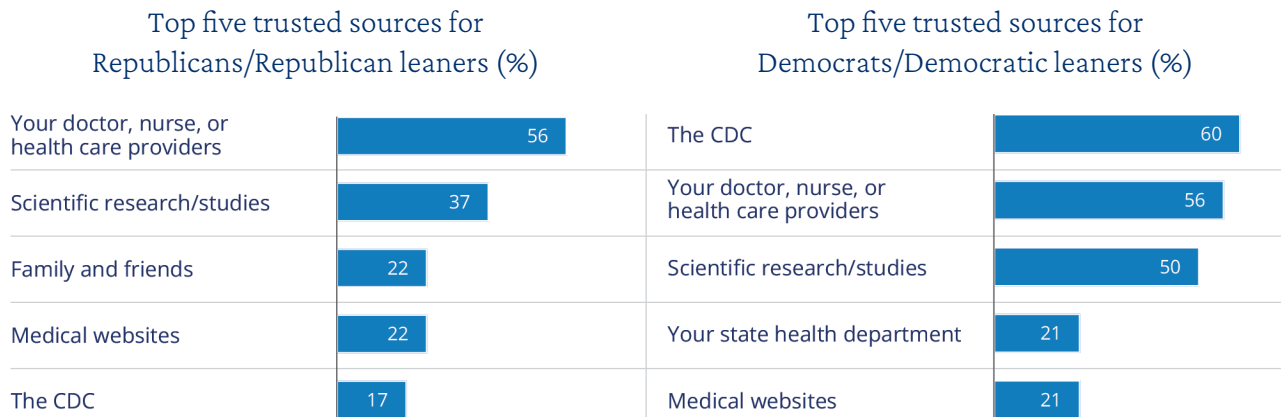
DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS DIVERGE ON TRUSTED SOURCES

Democrats and Democratic leaners identified the CDC (60%) and their health care providers (56%) as their top trusted sources, followed by scientific research (50%). The top three sources for Republicans and Republican leaners were health care providers (56%), scientific research (37%), and family and friends and medical websites (both 22%).

Republicans (including Republican leaners) were much more likely than Democrats (including Democratic leaners) to see family and friends as a top trusted source for public health information — at 22% versus 8%.

Republicans and Republican leaners were much less likely than Democrats and Democratic leaners to choose the CDC as a trusted source — at 17% versus 60%.

Top Trusted Sources by Partisanship



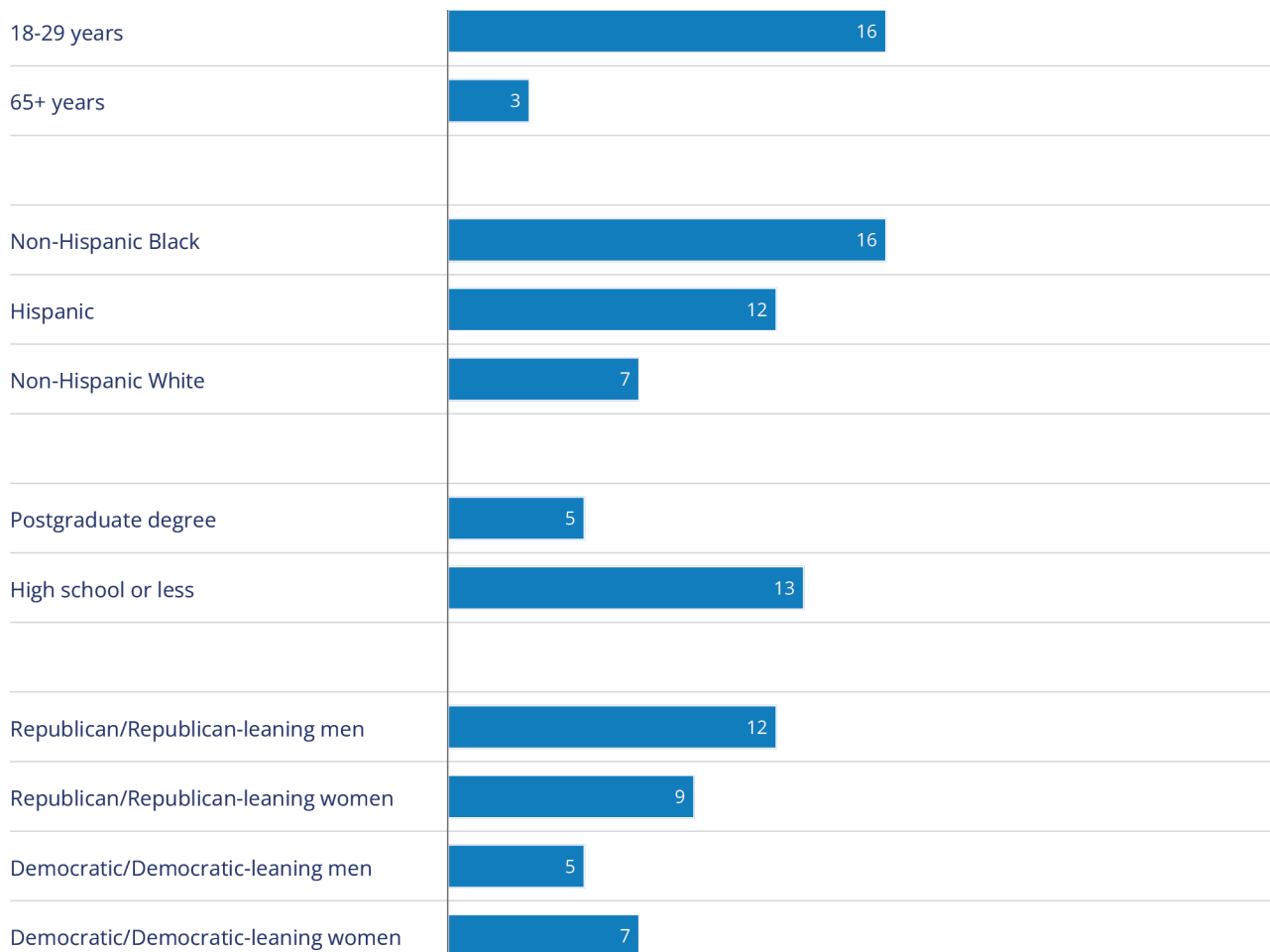
YOUNG ADULTS AND REPUBLICANS RELY MORE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The percentage of people who selected social media as a trusted source varied substantially among different groups. While 16% of adults aged 18 to 29 indicated social media as one of their top three trusted sources for public health information, only 3% of adults aged 65 and older said the same. Thirteen percent of those with a high school education or less also selected social media as a top source, while only 5% of those with a postgraduate degree did so.

Non-Hispanic Black Americans and Republican men (including Republican leaners) were also among the groups most likely to pick social media as a top trusted source for public health information — at 16% and 12%, respectively.

Subgroups Selecting Social Media as a Top Trusted Source

Ranking social media in top three trusted sources (%)



The Path Forward for Public Health

The Rollins-Gallup Public Health Priorities Survey provides insights into the American public's views about the top public health problems facing the nation and a path forward for the government to address these critical issues.

Americans believe the government should prioritize improving health care access and affordability, ensuring food and water safety, and reducing chronic disease. These findings can inform the new administration's public health strategy, highlighting areas to focus funding and efforts in tackling the challenges that matter most to Americans. Broad bipartisan support for the prioritization of these issues can empower public health officials to mobilize needed resources and work with stakeholders across party lines.

The public's expectation that the federal government, rather than state government, tackle these issues further positions the new administration to take a focused and targeted approach to supporting the public health system at the federal level.

An efficient and equitable public health system also requires the public's trust. Across various socioeconomic and demographic groups, Americans identified their own doctors and nurses as among their most trusted sources for public health information — confirming the role of personal and local relationships in public health messaging and the crucial place for health care providers. This finding emphasizes the need for community-level action to further bolster systems that support health care providers in delivering public health messages and mitigating potential misinformation from more polarizing sources, such as social media.

Americans' concerns about a lack of progress across key areas of public health — including the opioid epidemic, mental health, and healthy lifestyles — affirm that now is not the time to slow down, but rather accelerate and redouble public health efforts.

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