

Thomson Reuters Study Finds More Patients Postponing Medical Care Due to Cost

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Consumer Health Survey Shows Physician Visits Are First to Go When Money Gets Tight

ANN ARBOR, Mich., April 20 /PRNewswire/ -- More patients are postponing healthcare due to cost, according to a study released today by the Healthcare business of Thomson Reuters. A total of 20 percent of U.S. households postponed or cancelled care in the past year, a sharp increase from 2006. Among those who postponed or cancelled care, 24.1 percent of households cited cost as the primary reason.

These findings are based on a telephone survey of 12,000 households conducted from February 11 to March 15 -- a wave of the Thomson Reuters PULSE Healthcare Survey, the largest and longest running privately funded household survey on health behavior and utilization in the nation. Responses were then analyzed over a three-year period to chart long term trends in consumer healthcare utilization.

Following are the key findings of the analysis:

- More Patients Postpone Care Due to Cost: One in five U.S. households postponed or cancelled medical care over the past year, up from 15.9 percent in 2006 when the survey last addressed this issue. Among 2009 respondents who postponed or cancelled care, 24.1 percent said cost was the primary reason. In 2006, the primary reason cited was lack of time.
- Physician Visits Are First to Go: The majority of postponed services (54.7 percent) were for physician visits, followed by imaging (8 percent), non-elective procedures (6.3 percent), and lab or diagnostic tests (5.7 percent).
- Rising Ranks of Uninsured: The percentage of households with employer-sponsored insurance showed a notable decline since the start of the recession, declining from 59 percent in early 2008 to 54.6 percent in early 2009. The population of respondents covered by Medicaid increased from 11.9 percent to 14.5 percent during the same period.
- Pessimistic Regarding Future Care: One in five (21 percent) said they expect to have difficulty paying for health insurance or healthcare services in the next three months. Respondents said the most likely services to be deferred are elective procedures (28 percent) and treatment for minor injuries (16 percent).

"The results of this survey have serious implications for public health officials, hospital administrators, and healthcare consumers," said Gary Pickens, chief research officer for the Healthcare business of Thomson Reuters and lead author of the study. "We are seeing a positive correlation between Americans losing their access to employer-sponsored health insurance and deferral of healthcare."

"If this trend continues, it will ultimately have an impact on our collective wellbeing," Pickens added.

The study is available here: <http://provider.thomsonhealthcare.com/Articles/view/?id=2188> (one-time registration required). It is part of a series of research papers from the Healthcare business of Thomson Reuters analyzing the impact of the current recession on U.S. hospitals and healthcare using both public and proprietary data. Future reports will track hospital financial performance, healthcare outcomes, and additional consumer trends.

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