

A large green rectangular block is positioned in the top left corner. A smaller yellow square is located at the bottom right corner of this green block, where it meets a thin grey horizontal line that extends to the right.

# **Making Prescription Drugs More Affordable-Tough Choices: A Maryland AARP Member Survey**

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# **Making Prescription Drugs More Affordable-Tough Choices: A Maryland AARP Member Survey**

**Report Prepared by Erica Dinger, J.D.**

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AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization that helps people 50+-plus have independence, choice and control in ways that are beneficial and affordable to them and society as a whole. We produce *AARP The Magazine*, published bimonthly; *AARP Bulletin*, our monthly newspaper; *AARP Segunda Juventud*, our bimonthly magazine in Spanish and English; *NRTA Live & Learn*, our quarterly newsletter for 50-plus educators; and our website, [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org). AARP Foundation is our affiliated charity that provides security, protection, and empowerment to older persons in need with support from thousands of volunteers, donors, and sponsors. We have staffed offices in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

### **Acknowledgements**

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## Background

AARP Maryland is concerned about the impact of prescription drug costs on its members and on the state. In 2005, Maryland residents spent over 3 billion dollars on prescription drugs filled at pharmacies.<sup>1</sup> For the 50-plus population, prescription drugs are an essential part of therapeutic medicine. Yet, many persons find it difficult to afford the medications they need. *Making Prescription Drugs More Affordable-Tough Choices: A Maryland Member Survey* assesses members' concerns about and experiences with prescription drug affordability, particularly their out-of-pocket costs and the financial hardships associated with paying for prescriptions.

In addition, this report examines members' opinions on several legislative proposals. The proposals include the creation of a bulk purchasing pool to negotiate prices with prescription drug companies, creating a centralized source of information, publicizing prescription drug prices, and giving consumers information that compares drugs for their safety and effectiveness. What these proposals could do is lower prescription drug prices statewide and lower consumer prescription drug costs.

## Methodology

AARP commissioned Woelfel Research, Inc. to conduct a telephone survey from a list of randomly selected AARP members in Maryland. A total of 800 interviews were completed. The survey was conducted between December 11 and December 27, 2006.<sup>2</sup> The survey has a sampling error of plus or minus 3.5 percent.<sup>3</sup> Survey responses were weighted to reflect the distribution of the age segments in the member population of Maryland. As of December 2006, there were over 830,000 members in Maryland. Weighted responses to all survey questions are in the attached annotated questionnaire. Responses may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding. Also due to rounding, percents reported in the text may vary slightly from those in the annotation or in graphs.

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<sup>1</sup> Maryland: Total Retail Sales for Prescription Drugs Filled at Pharmacies, 2005. Retrieved December 22, 2006 at: <http://www.statehealthfacts.org/cgi-bin/healthfacts.cgi?action=profile&area=Maryland&category=Health+Costs+%26+Budgets&subcategory=Prescription+Drugs&topic=Total+Retail+Rx+Drugs>

<sup>2</sup> The response rate is 16 percent and the cooperation rate is 92 percent. The response rate is Response Rate 3 and the cooperation rate is Cooperation Rate 3 (AAPOR, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> This means that in 95 out of 100 samples of this size, the results obtained in the sample would fall in a range of +/-3.5 percentage points of what would have been obtained if every AARP member in Maryland had been surveyed.

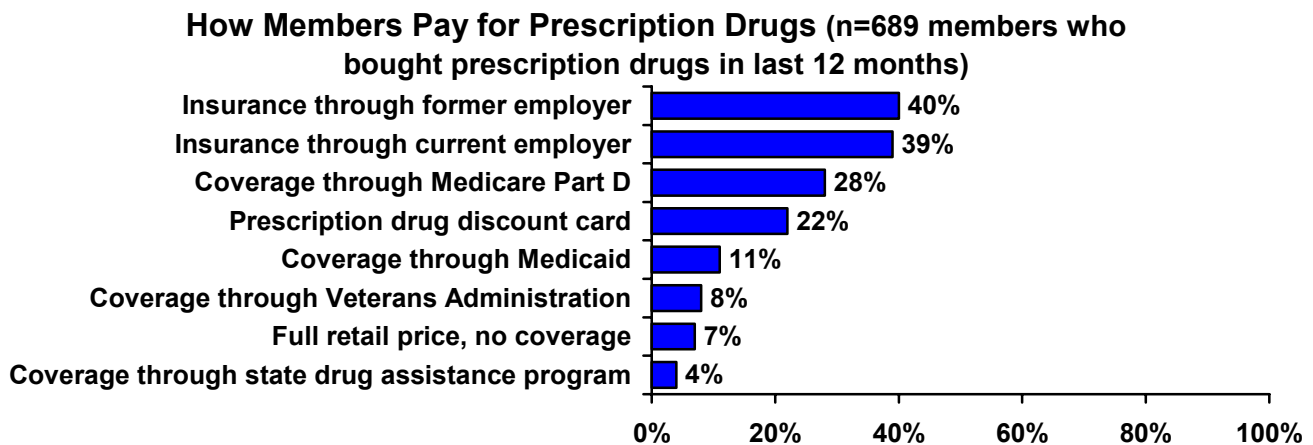
## Highlights

- Three in ten Maryland members who have bought a prescription drug in the last 12 months report that paying for their prescription drugs has been a major or minor problem for them. Over eight in ten report they have taken one or more actions to reduce the cost of their medications in the past 12 months. The most common actions are asking for and purchasing generic drugs when available; however, nearly one in ten have cut back on food, fuel, or electricity, taken less medicine than prescribed, or not filled or delayed filling a prescription.
- Over two in ten Maryland members who used prescription drugs in the past year paid \$100 or more per month in out-of-pocket costs for those medications.
- More than half of all members, including those not currently taking prescription drugs, are concerned about their ability to pay for prescription drugs in the future.
- Maryland members express a strong desire for access to information on prescription drugs and information about prescription drug costs.
  - Over eight in ten support legislation that provides them information comparing the safety and effectiveness of prescription drugs in order to help them and their physician choose the best drug for the best price.
  - Eight in ten support making Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBMs) and drug manufacturers disclose prescription drug price negotiations.
  - Eight in ten support the creation of a prescription drug bulk purchasing pool.

## Findings

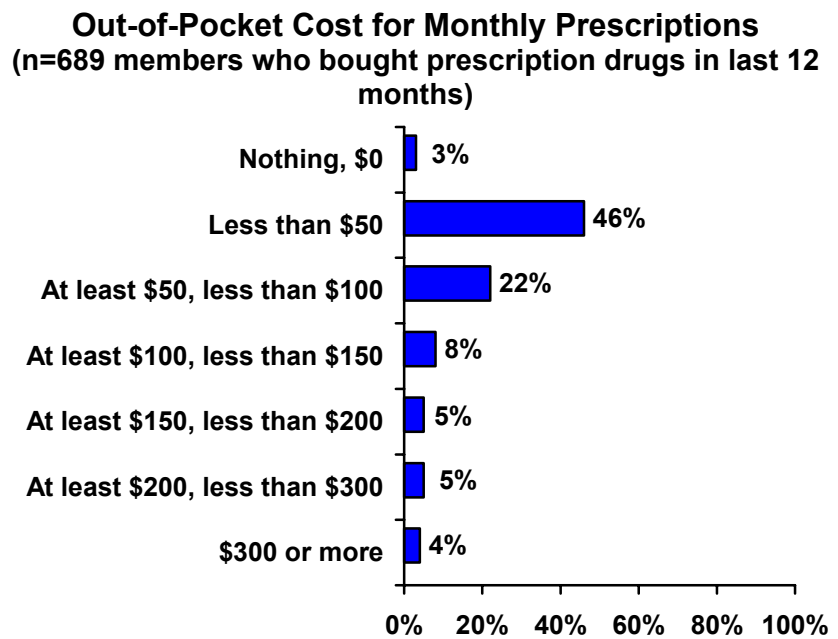
### Most Maryland members have bought a prescription drug within the last 12 months and receive some help paying for their prescription drugs.

For the 50-plus population, prescription drugs are an essential part of maintaining well-being. Over eight in ten (86%) members have bought a prescription drug within the last 12 months. Most members receive some form of help paying for their prescription drugs. In fact, nine in ten members rely on at least one source for prescription drug assistance. While about four in ten have coverage through their own or their spouse's current or former employer, three in ten have coverage through a Medicare Part D plan. It is noteworthy that seven percent have no coverage and pay full retail price for their prescriptions.



### Out-of-pocket expenses for prescriptions vary considerably among Maryland members.

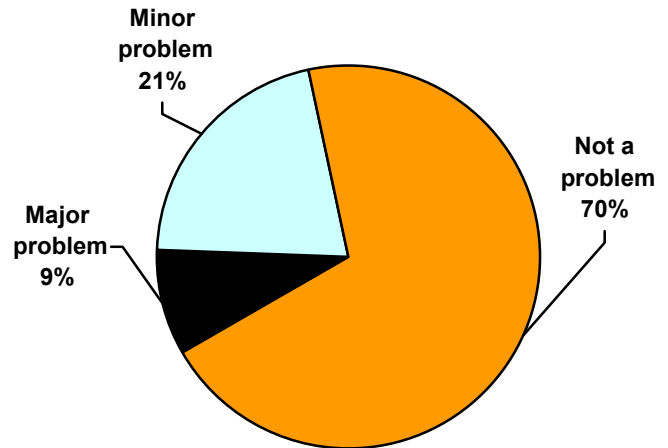
The amount of out-of-pocket expenses paid for prescriptions varies. Among members who have purchased a prescription drug within 12 months prior to the survey, almost half paid less than \$50 a month for their prescriptions; two in ten paid between \$50 and \$100; and 23 percent of members paid over \$100 per month. Three percent say they had no out-of-pocket expenses for prescription drugs.



## Three in ten Maryland members who purchased prescription drugs in the past year experienced problems paying for those prescriptions.

Within the 12 months prior to the survey, over eight in ten (86%) Maryland members have bought a prescription drug. Of those members who have purchased a prescription drug within the 12 months prior to the survey, one in ten report that paying for prescription drugs has been a major problem, while another one in five say paying has been a minor problem. Seven in ten report no problem paying.

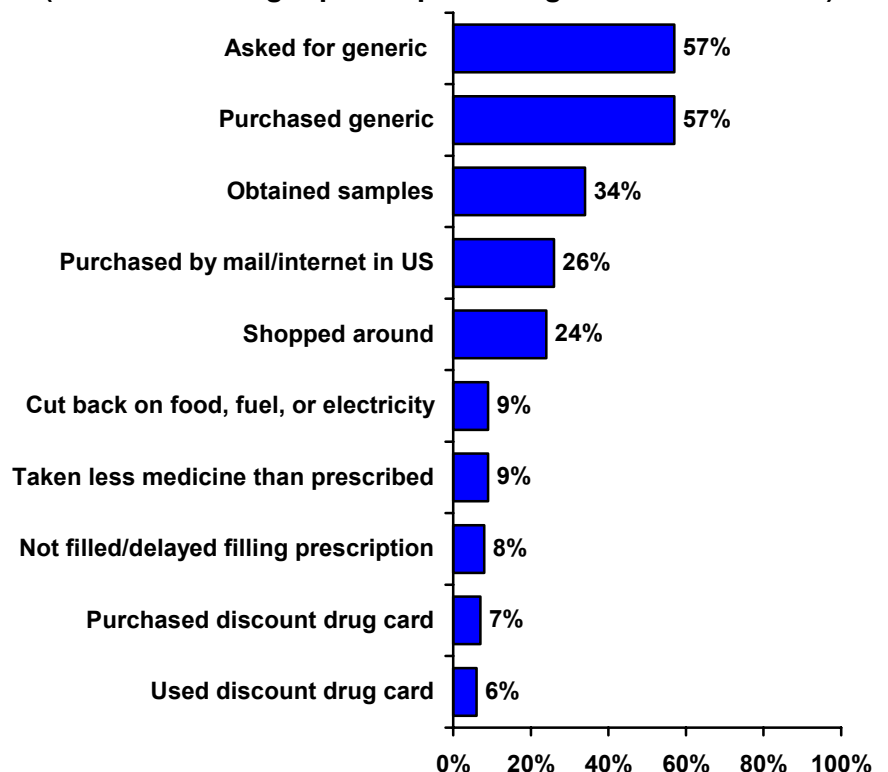
**Problem Paying for Prescription Drugs**  
(n=689 members who bought prescription drugs in last 12 months)



## More than eight in ten Maryland members have taken measures to reduce their prescription drug expenses.

Of the 86 percent of Maryland members who bought a prescription drug in the last 12 months, 81 percent have taken actions to reduce their out-of-pocket spending. The most direct action has been asking for and purchasing generic prescriptions to save money. More than half asked for generic drugs instead of name brands when available and the same percentage purchased generic drugs when available. Some members have taken more serious steps to be able to afford their prescription drugs. About one in ten have cut back on necessities to afford prescription drugs, taken less medicine than prescribed, or not filled or delayed filling a prescription.

**Actions to Reduce Out-of-Pocket Prescription Drug Costs**  
(n=689 who bought prescription drugs in last 12 months)

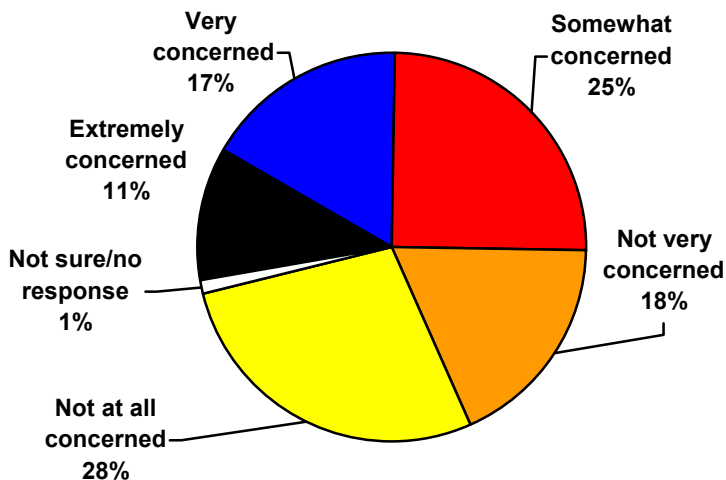


**Over half of all Maryland members are concerned about their ability to pay for prescription drugs in the future.**

While about three-fourths (75%) of members consider their health as good or very good, member concern about affording prescription drugs over the next two years is high: over half are extremely, very, or somewhat concerned.

Members with household incomes below \$35,000 a year are more likely to be concerned about being able to afford prescription drugs than those with higher incomes (66% versus 46%).

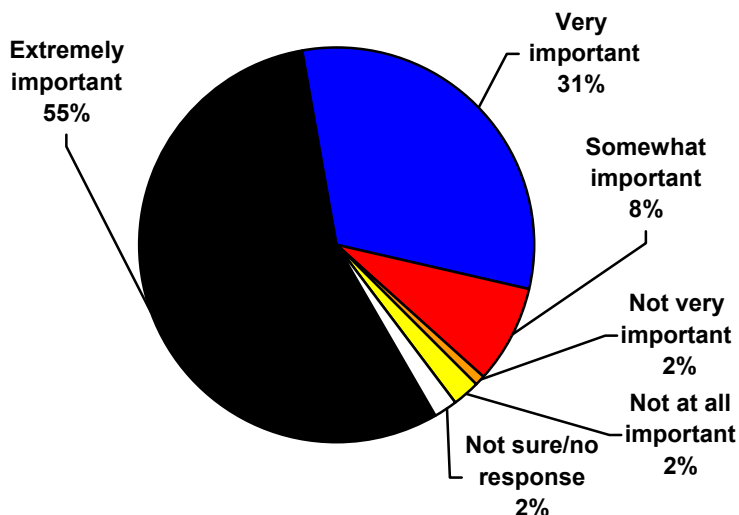
**Concern About Being Able to Afford Prescription Drugs Over the Next Two Years (N=800)**



**Nearly nine in ten Maryland members believe it is important for the state to work toward making prescription drug costs more affordable.**

Prescription drug affordability is important to Maryland members. Over eight in ten Maryland members, including those who do not take prescription drugs or receive state-funded prescription drug coverage, say it is extremely or very important for the state to work toward making prescription drug costs more affordable to Maryland residents.

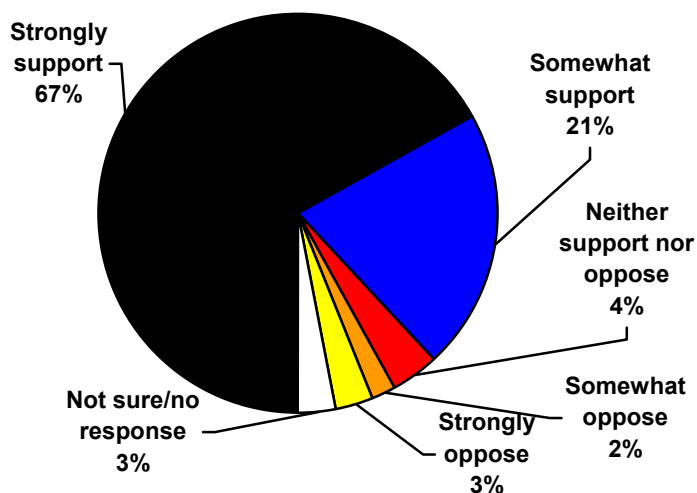
**Importance of State of Maryland Working Toward Making Prescription Drug Costs More Affordable (N=800)**



## Almost nine in ten of all members support legislation that would allow Maryland residents to reduce the cost of prescription drugs.

Currently, there is a proposal in the state of Maryland to allow middle and low-income individuals with no prescription drug coverage to purchase prescription drugs at the same price that Medicaid pays for prescription drugs. This program would have little cost to the state. Almost nine in ten (88%) members support offering this type of program.

**Support or Opposition to State Prescription Drug Discount Program for Middle and Low-Income Residents (N=800)**



## Most members support legislative proposals that provide them information about prescription drugs or disclose negotiations regarding the cost of prescription drugs.

There have been several legislative proposals addressing the cost of prescription drugs. Some proposals are focused on helping people find ways to save money on their prescription drugs and some are focused on ways to lower the price of prescription drugs. Members were asked about five legislative proposals; one was related to helping people save money on their prescription drugs and four were related to lowering the price of prescription drugs.

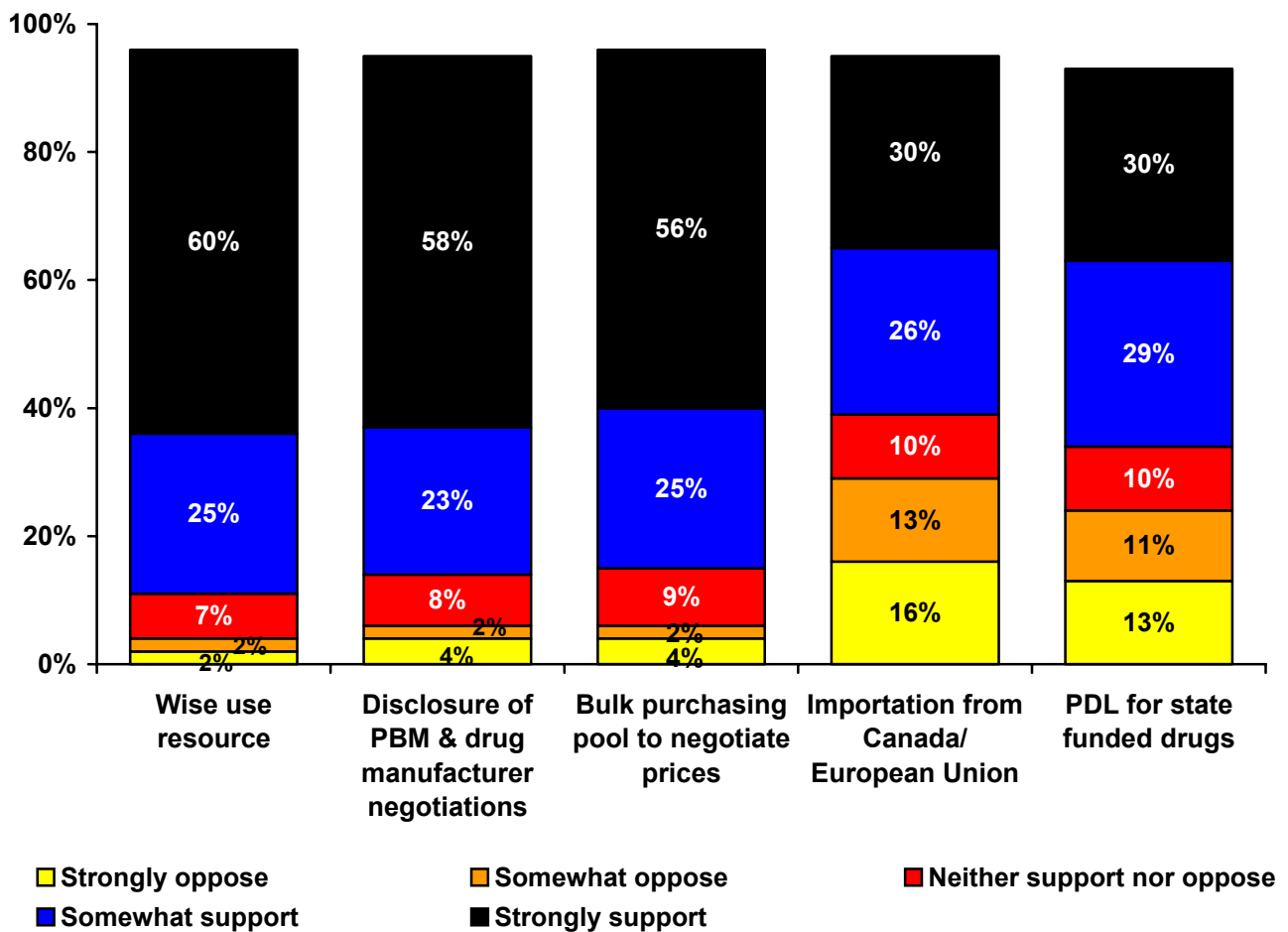
The proposal related to helping people save money involved the development of information comparing the safety and effectiveness of prescription drugs in order to help consumers wisely choose the best drug at the best price. The four proposals related to lowering the price of prescription drugs asked members about: preferred drug lists (PDLs), bulk purchasing pools, the legalization of importing prescription drugs from Canada or the European Union, and making Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBMs, the middlemen for government and employers who negotiate prices on prescription drugs) and drug manufacturers disclose negotiations on prescription drug prices. After being provided background information, members were asked how strongly they support or oppose each of the legislative proposals.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Refer to the annotation in the Appendix for the complete wording of the questions.

Members overwhelmingly support legislation that provides them information about prescription drug costs. More than eight in ten (85%) members strongly or somewhat support legislation that would provide them and their physicians with information to make informed decisions about the best prescription drugs at the best price. A similar amount (81%) support making Pharmacy Benefit Managers and drug manufacturers disclose prescription drug price negotiations. It is proposed that disclosing these negotiations will make Pharmacy Benefit Managers more accountable to consumers. Similarly, 80 percent support the creation of a prescription drug bulk purchasing pool.

Fewer members support legislation that would limit their prescription drug choices. More than five in ten support the adoption of a preferred drug list for state prescription drug assistance programs. Interestingly, members are divided on the importation issue. While 56 percent of all Maryland members surveyed say they support the importation of prescription drugs from Canada or the European Union, nearly three in ten (29%) say they oppose such importation.

**Support or Opposition to Prescription Drug Legislative Proposals**  
(N=800)



## Conclusions

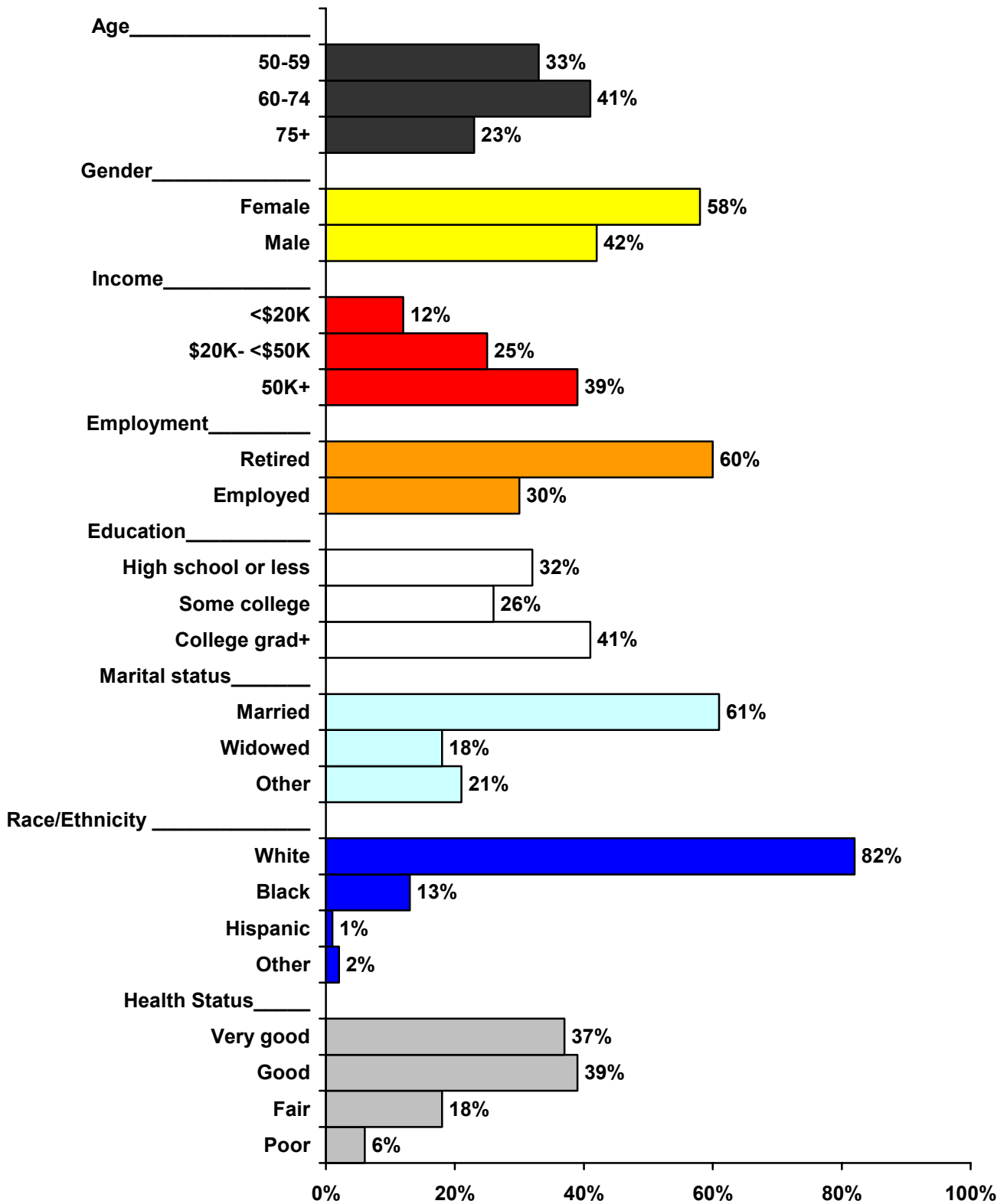
The cost of prescription drugs is a major concern for Maryland members. Nearly all report that they have purchased a prescription drug in the past twelve months. While most members have at least one source of prescription drug assistance, seven percent do not, and three in ten members who purchase prescription drugs indicate that paying for their medications has been a major or minor problem for them. More than half of all members are concerned about being able to pay for prescription drugs in the future. This is not surprising since twenty-three percent of members who have purchased prescription drugs spent \$100 or more per month out-of-pocket for their prescription drugs.

Over the past 12 months, more than eight in ten members have taken one or more steps to help them afford the cost of their medications. While some steps may represent appropriate cost saving actions such as asking for and purchasing generic drugs when available, nearly one in ten members have taken potentially risky actions such as cutting back on food, fuel, or electricity, taking less medication than prescribed, or delaying or not filling a prescription at all in order to afford the cost of their medications.

Members are supportive of strategies that could help them control their prescription drug costs and make informed decisions about medications. Members believe it is important for the state to work towards making prescription drug costs more affordable and support legislation that would allow middle and low-income residents to purchase prescription drugs at the same price Medicaid pays.

Given members' strong desire for more information on prescription drugs and ways to help them afford these medications, AARP Maryland should work on providing members with a source of information on prescription drug prices, safety, and effectiveness. In addition, AARP Maryland members would like to see information about the disclosure of negotiations for prescription drug prices between Pharmacy Benefit Managers and drug manufacturers. Maryland members would likely vote on legislation regarding prescription drug issues. More than nine in ten members say that they have always voted (78%) or sometimes missed one election (13%) in the last ten years.

## Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 800)



## **APPENDIX**

### **Annotated Questionnaire**

## 2006 Prescription Drug Survey

AARP Members Weighted N = 800; Response Rate = X%; Sampling Error = +/- X%  
(Percentages may add to more than 100% due to rounding)

### 1. Have you bought a prescription drug within the last 12 months or since last December?

<u>%</u>	
86	Yes
14	No

### 2. How do you pay for your prescription drugs when you need them? (n=689 Members who bought a prescription drug in the last 12 months)

<u>%</u>	
7	Pay full retail price, without any discount or insurance coverage
39	Have insurance through an employer or your spouse's employer that pays all or part of the cost
40	Have insurance through your former employer or your spouse's former employer that pays all or part of the cost
22	Have a prescription drug discount card from a pharmaceutical company or pharmacy
11	Have coverage through Medicaid
4	Have coverage through a state drug assistance program
28	Have coverage through a Medicare Part D plan
8	Have coverage through the Veterans Administration
15	Other

### 3. Thinking about all of the prescriptions you had filled in the last 12 months or since last December, on average, about how much have you spent each month out of your own pocket for your prescriptions – that is money you did not get reimbursed for? (n=689 Members who bought a prescription drug in the last 12 months)

<u>%</u>	
3	Nothing - \$0
46	Less than \$50 each month
22	At least \$50 but less than \$100 each month
8	At least \$100 but less than \$150 each month
5	At least \$150 but less than \$200 each month
5	At least \$200 but less than \$300 each month
4	\$300 or more each month
7	Not sure
<.5	Refused

**4. In the last 12 months, has paying for prescription drugs been a major problem, a minor problem, or not a problem for you? (n=689 Members who bought a prescription drug in the last 12 months)**

<u>%</u>	
9	A major problem
21	A minor problem
70	Not a problem
<.5	Not sure

**5. Many people face difficult decisions when buying prescription drugs. In the last 12 months, have you done any of the following? (n=689 Members who bought a prescription drug in the last 12 months)**

<u>%</u>	
8	a. Not filled or delayed getting a prescription filled because you didn't have enough money to pay for it
9	b. Taken less medicine than your doctor prescribed to make it last longer
9	c. Cut back on items such as food, fuel, electricity, or utilities to be able to afford a prescription drug
6	d. Purchased your prescription drugs by mail or internet from a company in the US because they cost less
7	e. Asked your doctor or pharmacist for generic prescription drugs instead of brand name drugs when generics are available?
4	f. Obtained samples from your physician in order to save money
7	g. Purchased a generic drug because it cost less
6	h. Used a discount program offered by a drug company
7	i. Purchased a drug discount card
4	j. Shopped around for the best price
NA	k. Purchased drugs on site in another country, such as Mexico, because they cost less

**6. How concerned are you about being able to afford the cost of needed prescription drugs over the next two years? Would you say you are....**

<u>%</u>	
11	Extremely concerned
17	Very concerned
25	Somewhat concerned
18	Not very concerned
28	Not at all concerned
1	Not sure
0	Refused

**7. Even if you have not taken prescription drugs in the past 12 months, how important is it to you that the state of Maryland work toward making prescription drug costs more affordable to Maryland residents? Would you say it is....**

<u>%</u>	
55	Extremely important
31	Very important
8	Somewhat important
2	Not very important
2	Not at all important
2	Not sure
<.5	Refused

**Now I would like to ask your opinion about some legislative proposals.**

**8. One proposal to make prescription drugs more affordable is for the state to create a prescription drug purchasing pool made up of state agencies, private businesses, and individual consumers who choose to enroll. Through bulk buying, this pool could then negotiate with drug companies for lower prices, and the savings would be passed on to the consumers, businesses, and agencies that enroll.**

**How strongly do you support or oppose Maryland creating a bulk purchasing pool to negotiate with prescription drug companies for lower prices? Do you....**

<u>%</u>	
56	Strongly support
25	Somewhat support
9	Neither support nor oppose
2	Somewhat oppose
4	Strongly oppose
5	Not sure
1	Refused

**9. Another proposal to make prescription drugs more affordable is to legalize purchasing prescription drugs from Canada or the European Union. Some say this proposal will enable many people to purchase their prescription drugs at lower prices. Others say that it will lead to ineffective or unsafe drugs being imported into the country.**

**After hearing these arguments, how strongly do you support or oppose allowing the legal importation of prescription drugs from Canada or the European Union? Do you....**

<u>%</u>	
30	Strongly support
26	Somewhat support
10	Neither support nor oppose
13	Somewhat oppose
16	Strongly oppose
4	Not sure
<.5	Refused

**10. Several states are developing information comparing the safety and effectiveness of prescription drugs in order to help consumers and doctors choose the best drug at the best price. This information can help consumers lower the price that they pay for their prescription drugs, find generic drug choices to use, and learn about safety information such as drug interactions and side effects.**

**How strongly do you support or oppose the use of this information as one way to help consumers and doctors choose the best prescription drugs at the best price? Do you....**

<u>%</u>	
60	Strongly support
25	Somewhat support
7	Neither support nor oppose
2	Somewhat oppose
2	Strongly oppose
4	Not sure
1	Refused

**11. Preferred drug lists are one method of controlling rising prescription drug costs in prescription drug assistance programs such as Medicaid. A state preferred drug list would include the safest and most effective prescription drugs. The state can negotiate lower prices for the drugs on the list because they purchase them in large quantities from pharmaceutical companies. If a patient wants a prescription drug that is not on the preferred drug list, doctors must seek approval to prescribe the medication.**

**How strongly do you support or oppose Maryland adopting a preferred drug list for use in state-funded prescription drug programs? Do you....**

<u>%</u>	
30	Strongly support
29	Somewhat support
10	Neither support nor oppose
11	Somewhat oppose
13	Strongly oppose
7	Not sure
1	Refused

**12. Pharmacy Benefit Managers act as middlemen for government and employers by negotiating prices on prescription drugs. Some states are attempting to make Benefit Managers more accountable to make sure that government, employers, and consumers obtain the best prices possible.**

**How strongly do you support or oppose disclosure of negotiations between Pharmacy Benefit Managers and drug manufacturers to reduce the price that consumers pay for prescription drugs? Do you....**

<u>%</u>	
58	Strongly support
23	Somewhat support
8	Neither support nor oppose
2	Somewhat oppose
4	Strongly oppose
5	Not sure
<.5	Refused

**13. There has been a proposal to allow persons with limited incomes and no prescription drug coverage to purchase drugs at the same price that Medicaid pays for prescription drugs. This program would have little cost to the state.**

**How strongly do you support or oppose Maryland offering this type of state prescription drug discount program for low and middle-income individuals without prescription drug coverage? Do you....**

<u>%</u>	
67	Strongly support
21	Somewhat support
4	Neither support nor oppose
2	Somewhat oppose
3	Strongly oppose
3	Not sure
<.5	Refused

## **Demographics**

**The following questions are for statistical classification purposes only and will be kept entirely confidential.**

### **D1. RECORD RESPONDENT'S GENDER**

<u>%</u>	
42	Male
58	Female

**D2. What is your age as of your last birthday? [IN YEARS] \_\_\_\_\_**

<u>%</u>	
1	Under 50
33	50-59
41	60-74
23	75+
2	Refused

**D3. What is your current marital status?**

<u>%</u>	
61	Currently married
1	Currently living with partner/significant other
18	Widowed
11	Divorced
2	Separated
5	Never married
1	Not sure

**D4. What is the highest level of education that you completed?**

<u>%</u>	
6	Less than high school
26	High school graduate or equivalent
26	Some college or technical training beyond high school
22	College graduate (4 years)
19	Post graduate or professional degree
1	Not sure
1	Refused

**D5. Which of the following best describes your current employment status?**

<u>%</u>	
23	Employed or self-employed full-time
7	Employed or self-employed part-time
60	Retired and not working
2	Unemployed and looking for work
3	Homemaker
4	Disabled
<.5	Something else (specify)
0	Not sure
1	Refused

**D6. Are you of Hispanic, Spanish, or Latino origin or descent?**

<u>%</u>	
1	Yes
98	No
<.5	Not sure
1	Refused

**D7. What is your race?**

<u>%</u>	
82	White / Caucasian
13	Black/African American
1	Native American
1	Other [Please Specify: _____]
<.5	Not sure
3	Refused

**D8. Thinking about your state elections for Governor and Legislators in the last ten years, which of the following best describes your voting behavior? Would you say you always vote, sometimes miss one, rarely vote, or never vote?**

<u>%</u>	
78	Always vote
13	Sometimes miss one
3	Rarely vote
5	Never vote
1	Not sure
1	Refused

**D9. For statistical purposes only, please stop me when I get to your household income level, before taxes, for 2005:**

<u>%</u>	
4	Less than \$10,000
8	\$10,000 to less than \$20,000
13	\$20,000 to less than \$35,000
12	\$35,000 to less than \$50,000
9	\$50,000 to less than \$60,000
5	\$60,000 to less than \$75,000
25	\$75,000 and above
4	Not sure
19	Refused

**D10. What is your 5-digit zip code?** \_\_\_\_\_

**D11. In what county do you live?** \_\_\_\_\_

**D12. In the last 12 months, have you accessed the Internet from your home or work, or from some other source such as your local library?**

<u>%</u>	
59	Yes, from home
20	Yes, from work
11	Yes, from some other source
36	No
0	Not sure
2	Refused

**D13. How would you describe your health?**

<u>%</u>	
37	Very good
39	Good
18	Fair
6	Poor
0	Not sure
1	Refused

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**(202) 434-6176 or [edinger@aarp.org](mailto:edinger@aarp.org)**