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# **Prescription Drug Affordability: An AARP Survey of Washington Voters**

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January 2005



# **Prescription Drug Affordability: An AARP Survey of Washington Voters**

**Report Prepared by Jennifer H. Sauer**

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## Background and Methodology

Research has shown that the cost of drugs and the lack of prescription drug coverage can influence a patient's decision to not fill a prescription or skip doses to make the medication last longer, as well as increase the risk of a decline in health.<sup>1 2</sup> While many Americans are frustrated by the escalating costs of their prescription drugs, undoubtedly lower-income persons could be among those most adversely affected. It is not surprising, then, that as one of the fastest growing components of health care, prescription drug costs have become a major focus for national and state level legislative consideration.

The purpose of this survey was to gauge favorability among Washington voters for legislative proposals aimed at helping the state's residents afford their prescription drugs, especially those with lower incomes who feel financially strained by paying for their medications. The interviewing for this random digit dial telephone survey took place between November 18 and December 1, 2004.<sup>3</sup> The average interview length was seven minutes. A total of 801 self-identified registered voters age 18 and older were interviewed. This sample yields a maximum statistical error of plus or minus 3.5 percent. Data were weighted based on registered voter statistics in Washington for age and gender.

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<sup>1</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, Trends and Indicators in the Changing Health Care Marketplace 2004 Update. *Prescription Drug Trends*, October 2004, [www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org).

<sup>2</sup> Heisler, M., et al. *The Health Effects of Restricting Prescription Medication Use Because of Cost*. *Medical Care*, Volume 42, Number 7, July 2004.

<sup>3</sup> The response rate (RR3 as defined by AAPOR) was 20 percent, and the cooperation rate (COOP3 as defined by AAPOR) was 95 percent.

## FINDINGS

**Most Washington voters express concern about the cost of prescription drugs over the next two years even though they get help paying for their drugs from health insurance or some other coverage plan.**

Eight in ten Washington voters say they are very or somewhat concerned about the cost of prescription drugs in the near future. This finding is especially noteworthy given that most (77%) say they have some type of health insurance or health care coverage that helps them pay for prescription drugs.

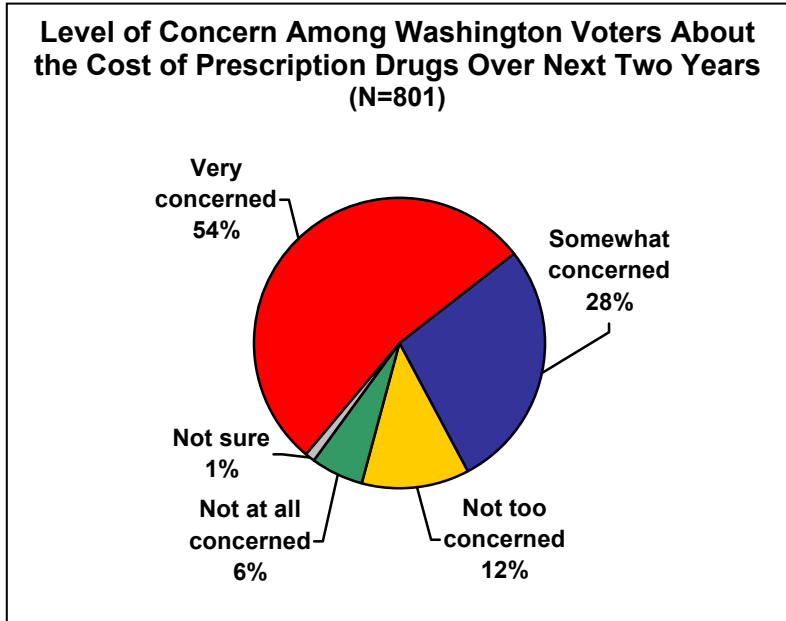
**Of Washington voters who have taken prescription drugs in the past 12 months, most are also taking them on a regular basis.**

Most respondents (74%) indicate they have taken prescription drugs in the past 12 months, and most of them are taking at least one drug on a regular basis: 27% are taking four or more drugs regularly, 28% are taking two to three drugs regularly, and 23% are taking only one drug regularly (see Appendix A, Annotated Questionnaire, Questions 3 and 4).

**Of those who have taken prescription drugs in the past 12 months, one-quarter spends at least \$100 out-of-pocket in an average month for them, and over half say that paying for prescription drugs presented a major or minor financial problem for them.**

Twenty-four percent of those voters who have taken prescription drugs over the past year say they spent \$100 or more out of their own pocket in an average month for prescription drugs – this includes one in ten (9%) who have spent at least \$200 or more in an average month for these medications. One in five (20%) say they spent \$50 to \$99 on prescription drugs in an average month, and just over one third (36%) spent up to \$49 in an average month (see Appendix A, Annotated Questionnaire, Question 6).

Over half of those who have taken prescription drugs in the past 12 months feel financially burdened by paying for prescription drugs: one in five (20%) say paying for them presents a major problem for them and nearly one-third (32%) say paying for them presents a minor problem. Forty-eight percent say paying for prescription drugs is not a problem at all for them.



**Of Washington voters who took prescription drugs in the past 12 months, one in five of them have engaged in two or more critical measures after a doctor wrote a prescription to afford their medication.**

The data show that of those Washington voters who have taken prescription medication in the past 12 months, twenty-one percent have taken two or more critical actions after their doctor has written them a prescription in order to afford their medication or make it last longer: nearly one-third delayed getting a prescription filled, one-quarter decided not to fill the prescription, another quarter skipped doses or cut pills, and one in six cut back on necessary items like fuel, food, or utilities.

However, those who have taken prescription medication in the past 12 months have also engaged in other less risky cost-reducing measures. Most of them have asked for the generic brand, and over half report seeking information on the safety and effectiveness of the drugs. About four in ten have shopped around for the best price, and two in ten have ordered their drugs from a U.S. company via the internet or mail. Only seven percent either ordered their medications by mail or internet from another country, or traveled to another country to purchase their prescriptions.

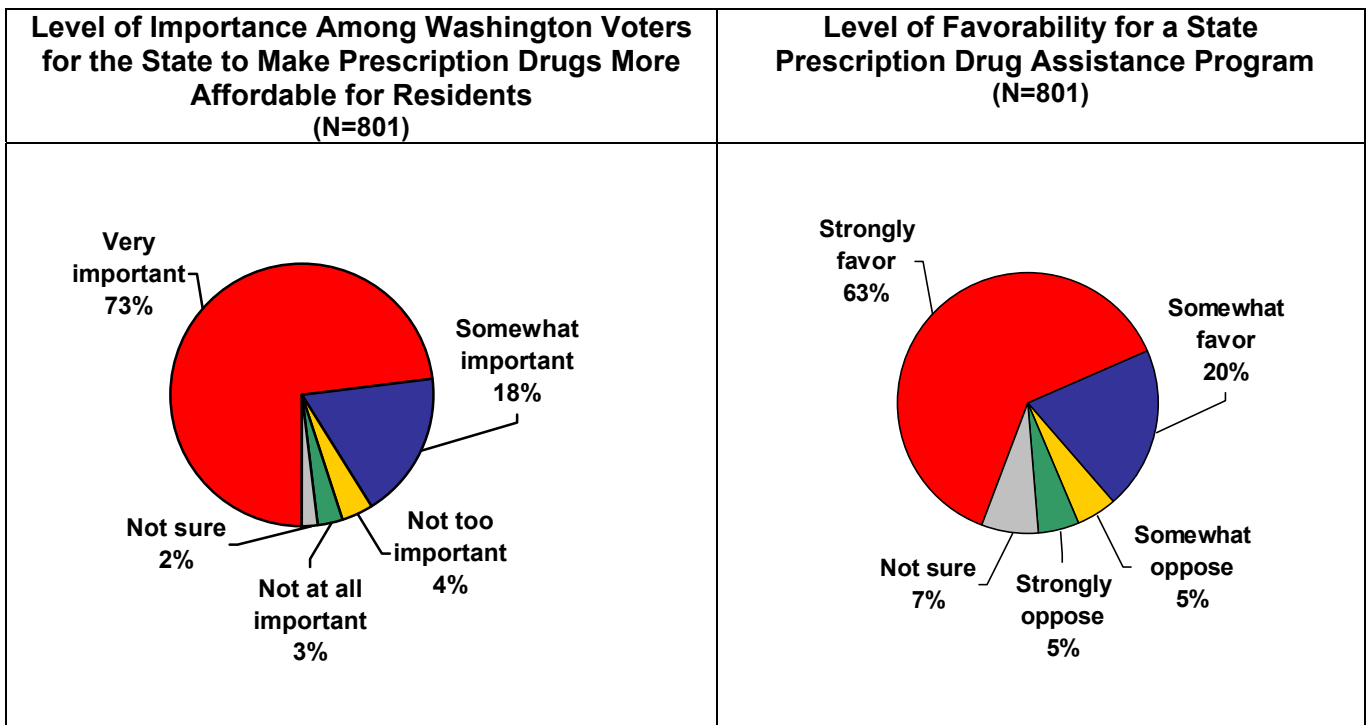
<b>Critical Measures Taken By Washington Voters to Afford Their Prescription Drugs (n=593)</b>	<b>Other Measures Taken by Washington Voters to Afford Their Prescription Drugs (n=593)</b>
31% Delayed getting prescription filled because you didn't have enough money to pay for it	75% Asked doctor or pharmacist for generic prescription drugs instead of brand name drugs when generics are available
25% Decided not to fill a prescription because of the cost of the drug	59% Tried to get information on safety and effectiveness of the prescription drug
24% Skipped doses or cut pills to make the medicine last longer	42% Shopped around for the best price
16% Cut back on items such as food, fuel, or electricity to be able to afford prescription drug	21% Ordered prescription drug by mail or internet from <i>U.S. company</i> because cost less
	7% Ordered prescription drug by mail or internet from <i>another</i> country because cost less
	7% Traveled to Canada, Mexico, or other country to purchase prescription drugs because cost less

**The majority (86%) of all Washington voters think it is very important for consumers to have information available that would allow them to compare the safety, effectiveness, and cost of prescription drugs.**

Not surprisingly, very few voters in Washington are opposed to consumer information on prescription drugs that would allow them to compare these drugs in terms of safety, effectiveness, and cost. Twelve percent think it is somewhat important, and only 2 percent think such information is not too or not at all important.

**The state of Washington making prescription drugs more affordable to residents is very important to most voters, and nearly two-thirds would strongly favor legislation creating a program for those with inadequate or no prescription drug coverage even if they may not be eligible for the programs benefits.**

Just under three-quarters of all Washington voters say that it is very important to them that the state help make prescription drugs more affordable to residents like themselves, and another one in five say such a state effort is somewhat important to them. Furthermore, over six in ten voters say they would strongly favor, and one in five would somewhat favor, legislation in the state to create a prescription drug assistance program for residents who do not have adequate or any drug coverage – even if they may not be able to participate in such a program. Very few voters feel that the states effort to make prescription drugs more affordable is *unimportant*, and very few would oppose legislation creating a prescription drug assistance program.



## Legislative Proposals To Help Washingtonians Afford Prescription Drugs

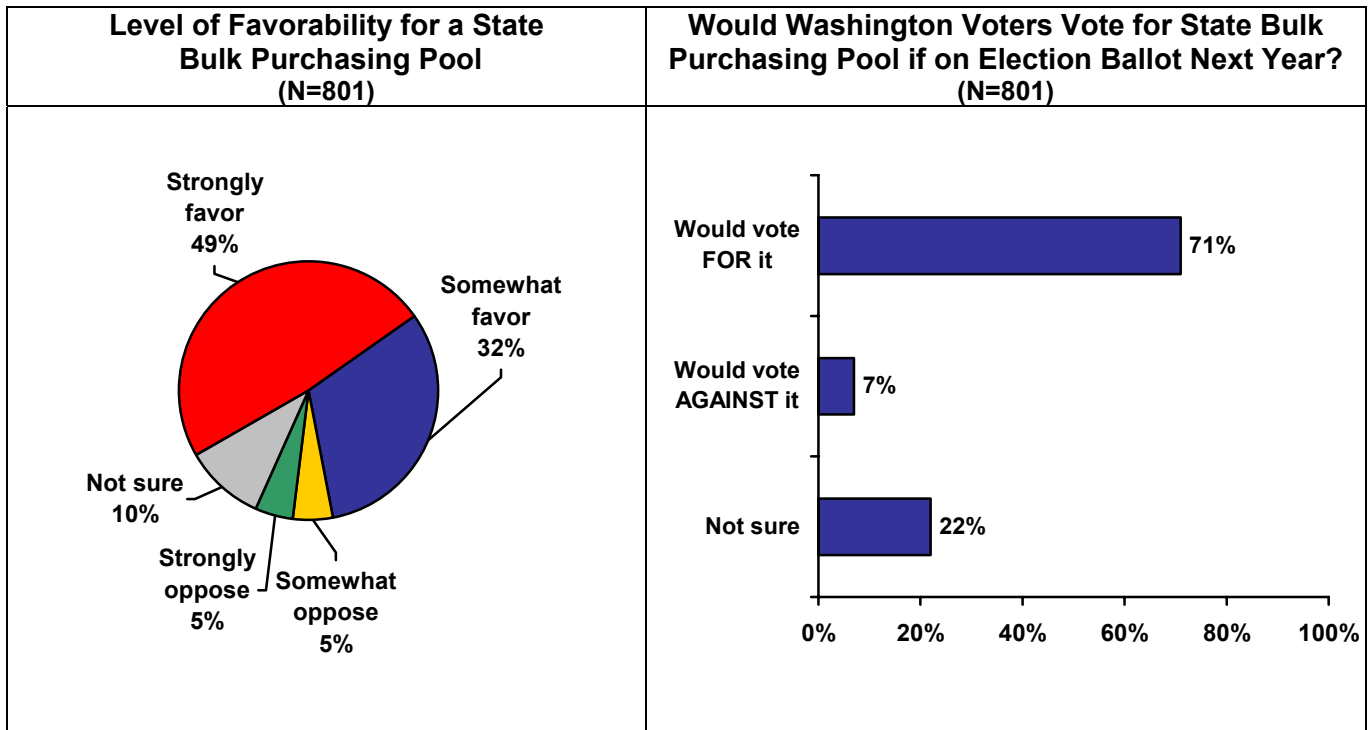
Washington voters were provided with brief descriptions of four proposals being introduced to the 2005 state legislature that many feel will help residents better afford their prescription drugs:

- The implementation of a bulk purchasing pool
- The implementation of a state pharmacy assistance program
- Federal and state legalization of purchasing prescription drugs from Canada
- State restriction of \$25 or less on gifts from pharmaceutical company representatives to prescribing health care professionals.

The following sections of the report describe voter opinion to these proposals.

**Eight in ten of all Washington voters strongly or somewhat favor the state creating prescription drug purchasing pool to negotiate with drug companies for lower drug prices, and most would vote for this proposal if it were on the election ballot next year as a ballot initiative.**

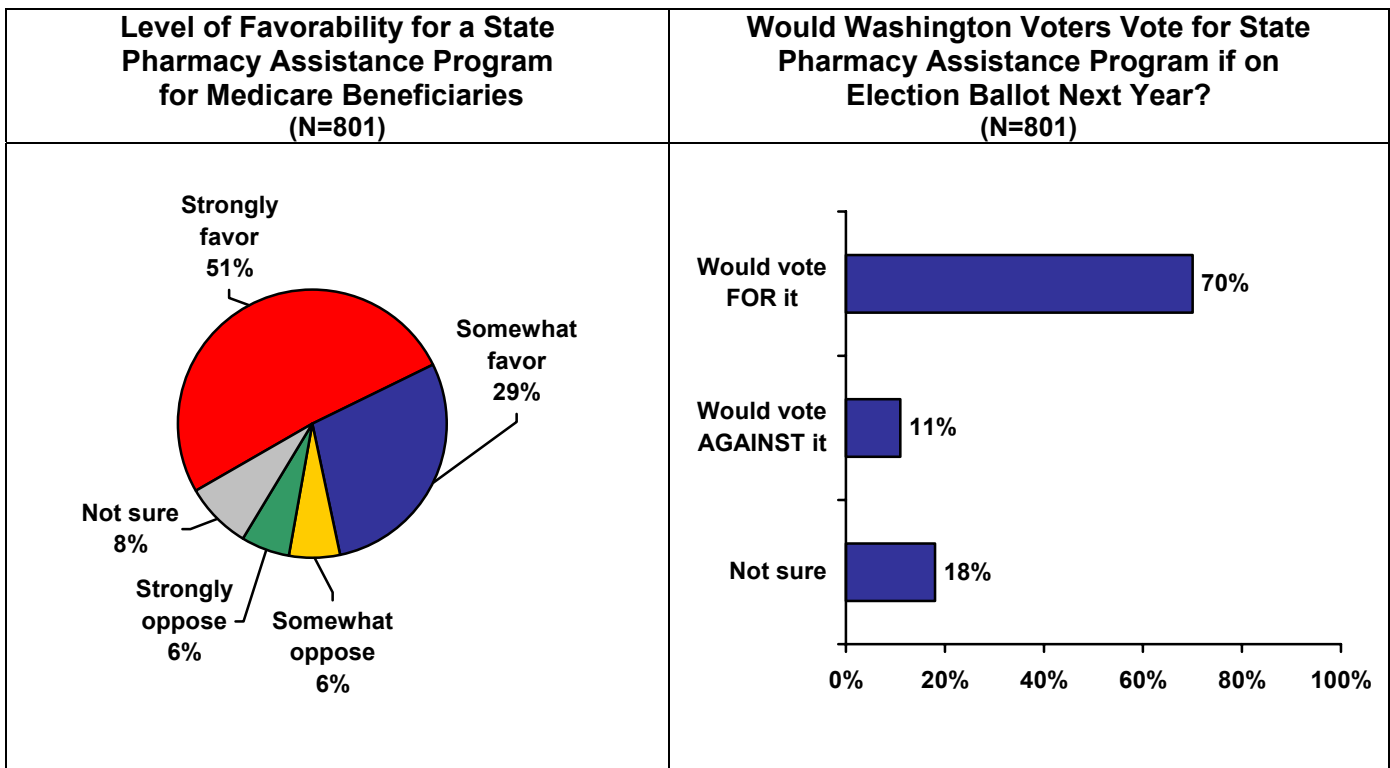
One proposal to make prescription drugs more affordable is for the state to create a prescription drug purchasing pool made up of state agencies, private businesses, and individual consumers. Then, through bulk buying, this pool of consumers could negotiate with drug companies for lower prices. When asked if they would favor or oppose this proposal, most say they favor it with half saying they strongly favor, and another third saying they somewhat favor, the state creating a bulk purchasing pool to negotiate lower drug prices for participating consumers. However, slightly more than one in five indicate they are not sure how they would vote for such an initiative if it were on the election ballot next year.





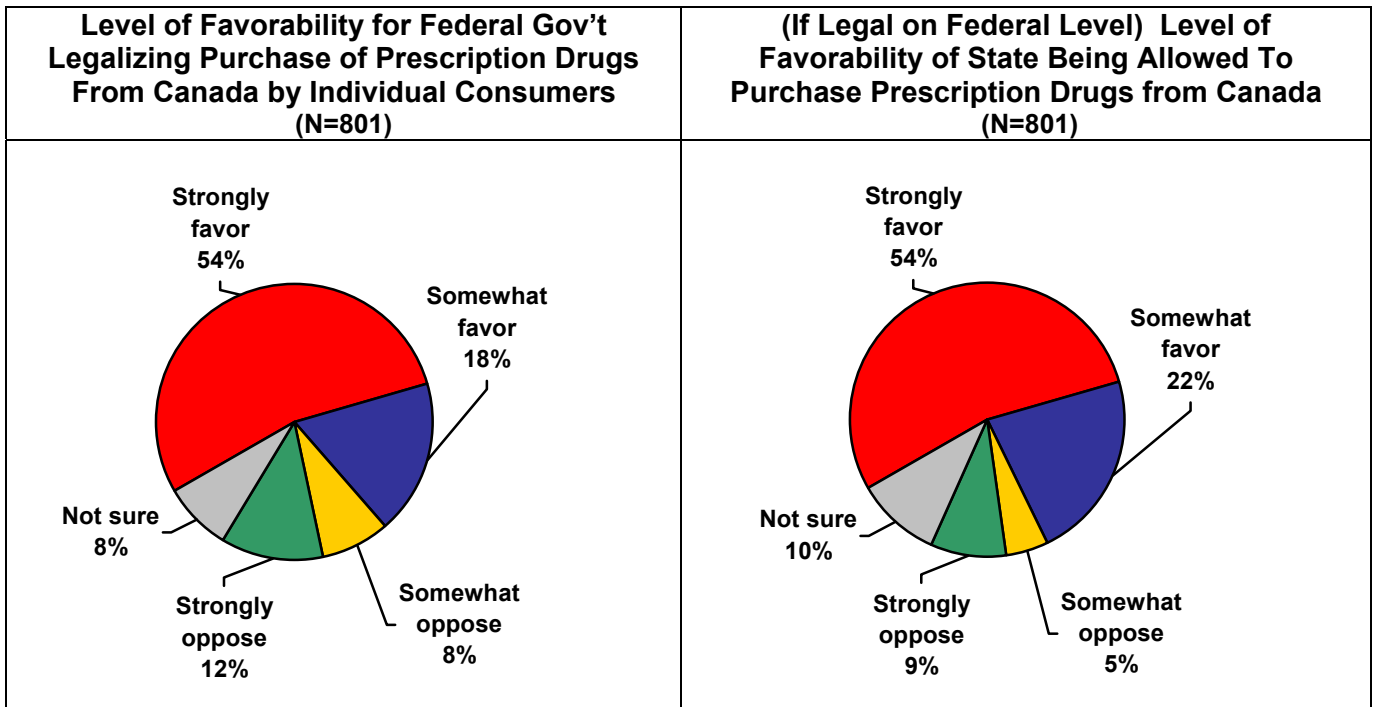
**Eight in ten Washington voters strongly or somewhat favor the state creating a pharmacy assistance program for low-income Medicare beneficiaries, and seven in ten would vote for this proposal if it were on the election ballot next year as a ballot initiative.**

Another proposal in Washington to help residents afford their prescription drugs would be the creation of state pharmacy assistance program for low income Medicare beneficiaries who need help paying for expenses not covered by the new Medicare prescription drug benefit, such as premiums or deductibles. When asked if they would favor or oppose this proposal, most say they would favor it, with half strongly favoring, and about three in ten somewhat favoring such a program. Again, when asked if they would vote for this proposal if it were on the election ballot next year as a ballot initiative, seventy percent say they would, and close to one in five are not sure how they would vote for this proposal.



**Most Washington voters strongly or somewhat favor both the federal government making it easier for people to buy prescription drugs from Canada as well as states being allowed to purchase drugs from Canada.**

A third proposal to help Washington residents afford their prescription medications is to make buying these drugs from other countries at lower costs easier. When asked how strongly they would favor or oppose the federal government making it easier for people to buy their prescription drugs from Canada, over half say they strongly favor, and another one in five say they would somewhat favor, this proposal. Moreover, when explained that if legalized on a federal level, laws could be passed to either allow or prohibit states from buying prescription drugs from Canada, over half say they would strongly favor the state of Washington being able to purchase these drugs from Canada, and another twenty-two percent say they would somewhat favor this.

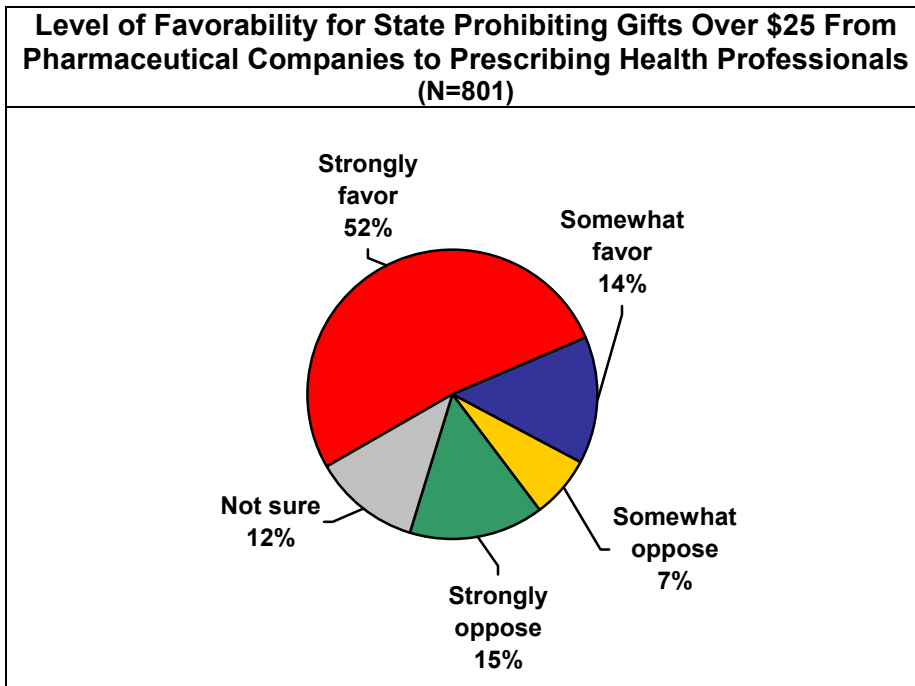


**Most Washington voters would favor a state website to inform consumers about purchasing their prescription drugs from Canada that would include information on the safety, effectiveness, and cost of those drugs.**

Two-thirds (65%) of all voters in Washington strongly favor, and one in five (19%) somewhat favor, a state website that would provide consumers with information on the safety, effectiveness, and cost of prescription drugs purchased in Canada. Very few voters would oppose this type of website: 4 percent somewhat oppose and 7 percent strongly oppose (see Question 15 in Annotated Questionnaire in Appendix A).

**Two-thirds of all Washington voters strongly or somewhat favor a limit of \$25 on all gifts or offerings from pharmaceutical companies to prescribing health professionals.**

A final prescription drug affordability proposal tested in this survey is to prohibit pharmaceutical companies from offering prescribing health professionals gifts over \$25. Over half strongly favor this proposal, and another one in seven say they would somewhat support it. Just under one in five oppose this proposal.



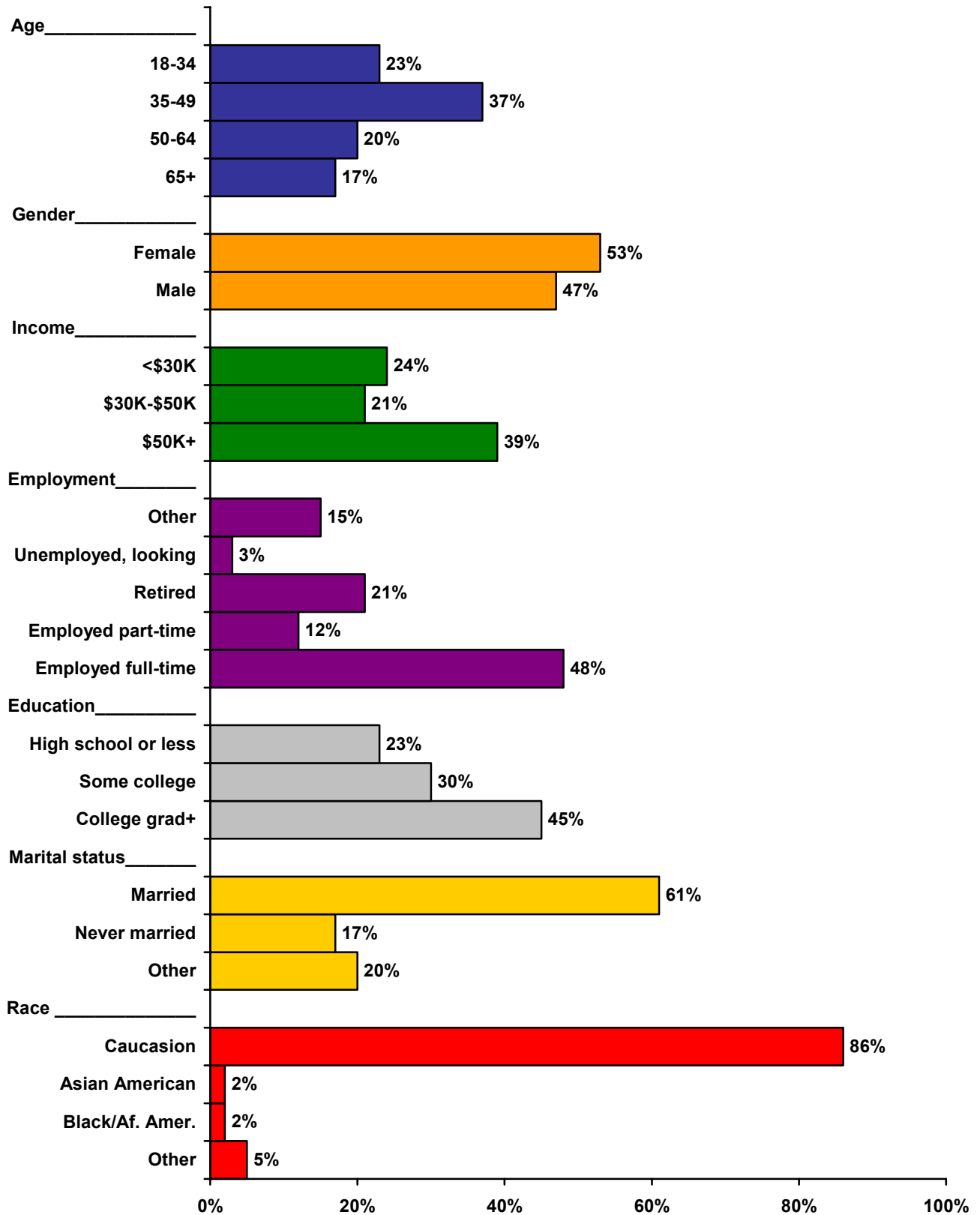
## Conclusions

The data from this survey clearly indicate that Washington voters view the issue of prescription drug affordability as a significant one – even though most get help paying for their prescription drugs from some sort of health coverage, over half of them express extreme concern about being able to afford the cost of their prescription drugs in the next two years. In addition, most say it is very important to them that the state make prescription drugs more affordable to residents, and most of them would support a state prescription drug program for residents, particularly to help the uninsured.

When asked their favorability toward specific proposals including bulk purchasing, a pharmacy assistance program, legalized purchasing from Canada and restrictions on gifts from pharmaceutical company representatives to prescribing health care professionals, roughly half indicate strong support for each as ways the state could help residents afford their prescription drugs. Even though voters are just as likely to vote for the bulk purchasing pool proposal as they are for the pharmacy assistance proposal, slightly more voters are inclined to strongly *and* somewhat favor the bulk purchasing pool proposal over the other proposals.

The extent of their support for a state prescription drug program and their concern about the cost of prescription drugs is better understood when considering the following: among Washington voters who reported taking prescription drugs over the past 12 months, over half take two or more different medications, one-quarter spend at least \$100 or more out of their own pocket in an average month on their drugs, and over half feel financially burdened by paying for those drugs. Perhaps most disconcerting is that among Washington voters who have taken prescription medication in the last 12 months, two in five report engaging in two or more cost saving measures that could be detrimental to their health.

## Respondent Demographics



# **Appendix A**

## **Annotated Questionnaire**

# 2004 Washington State AARP Survey: Prescription Drug Affordability

(Weighted N = 801; Response Rate = 18%; Statistical error = +/- 3.5%)

## **Introduction**

[INTRODUCTION:] Hello, this is \_\_\_\_\_ calling from Woelfel Research, Inc., a national opinion research firm. We are not telemarketers and are not trying to sell you anything. We would like to find out your opinions on proposed state prescription drug programs and legislation. Your views are important and we would greatly appreciate your participation. All of your responses are kept entirely confidential. The survey should take about 5 minutes of your time.

SA. Are you at least 18 years of age or older?

1. Yes
2. No [ASK TO SPEAK TO SOMEONE IN HH AGE 18 OR OLDER]

SB. Are you currently registered to vote in the state of Washington?

1. Yes
2. No [ASK TO SPEAK TO REGISTERED VOTER IN HH]

TERMINATE IF NO REGISTERED VOTERS AGE 18+ IN HH]

SC. [RECORD GENDER]

1. Male
2. Female

## **MAIN QUESTIONS**

**1. How concerned are you about the cost of prescription drugs over the next two years?**

*Would you say you are you very concerned, somewhat concerned, not too concerned, or not at all concerned?*

<u>%</u>	
54	Very concerned
28	Somewhat concerned
12	Not too concerned
6	Not at all concerned
1	Don't know (Do Not Read)
<1	Refused (Do Not Read)

**2. Do you get any help in paying for prescription drugs from health care insurance or any other health care coverage plan or program?**

<u>%</u>	
77	Yes
23	No
<1	Don't know (Do Not Read)
0	Refused (Do Not Read)

**3. Have you taken any prescription medication in the past 12 months?**

<u>%</u>	
74	Yes
25	No [SKIP TO Q. 8]
1	Don't know (Do Not Read) [SKIP TO Q. 8]
<1	Refused (Do Not Read) [SKIP TO Q. 8]

**4. How many prescription drugs are you currently taking on a regular basis – that is, prescription drugs you need to take daily, weekly, monthly for an extended period of time or perhaps the rest of your life? [INTERVIEWER DO NOT READ RESPONSES] (n=593)**

<u>%</u>	
22	None
23	1
28	2-3
14	4-5
13	6 or more
<1	Don't know (Do not read)
1	Refused (Do not read)

**5. Thinking about the past 12 months, has paying for prescription drugs been a major problem, a minor problem, or not a problem for you? (n=593)**

<u>%</u>	
20	A major problem
32	A minor problem
48	Not a problem
1	Don't know (Do Not Read)

**6. In an average month, about how much money do you have to pay out of your own pocket- that is money you do not get reimbursed for– for prescription drugs? [WAIT FOR VOLUNTEERED RESPONSE] THEN: *Would you say you spend between a dollar and fifty dollars?, between .....*] (n=593)**

<u>%</u>	
16	Nothing / \$0 (Do not read – VOLUNTEERED)
36	\$1 - \$49
20	\$50 - \$99
10	\$100 - \$149
5	\$150 - \$200
9	Over \$200
4	Don't know (Do not read)
<1	Refused (Do not read)



**7. Now, I am going to read a list of actions some people might take after their doctor has written them a prescription. Please tell me if YOU have taken any of these actions: (n=593)**

<b>In the past 12 months, have you ... [ROTATE LIST]:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<i>Not Sure</i>	<i>No Response</i>
a. Shopped around for the best price?	42%	58%	0	0
b. Asked your doctor or pharmacist for generic prescription drugs instead of brand name drugs when generics are available?	75%	25%	<1	0
c. Skipped doses or cut pills to make the medicine last longer?	24%	76%	<1	0
d. Delayed getting a prescription filled because you didn't have enough money to pay for it?	31%	69%	<1	0
e. Cut back on items such as food, fuel, or electricity to be able to afford a prescription drug?	16%	84%	0	0
f. Ordered your prescription drugs by mail or internet from a <u>another country</u> because they cost less?	7%	93%	<1	0
g. Ordered your prescription drugs by mail or internet from a <u>U.S. company</u> because they cost less?	21%	78%	<1	<1
h. Decided not to fill a prescription because of the cost of the drug?	25%	75%	<1	0
i. Traveled to Canada, Mexico or another country to purchase prescription drugs because they cost less?	7%	93%	<1	0
j. Tried to get information on the safety and effectiveness of the prescription drug	59%	41%	<1	0

**READ in brackets IF Q3= No or DK or Refuse**

**8. [Even if you are not taking any prescription drugs at this time], how important do you think it is for consumers to have information available that would allow them to compare the safety, effectiveness, and cost of prescription drugs? Would you say it is very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important?**

<u>%</u>	
86	Very important
12	Somewhat important
2	Not too important
1	Not at all important
1	Don't Know (Do not read)
0	Refused (Do not read)

**9. How important is it to you that the state of Washington helps make prescription drugs more affordable to residents like yourself? Would you say it's very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important to you?**

<u>%</u>	
73	Very important
18	Somewhat important
4	Not too important
3	Not at all important
2	Don't Know (Do not read)
<1	Refused (Do not read)

10. **Would you favor or oppose legislation in Washington State to create a prescription drug assistance program for residents who do not have adequate or any prescription drug coverage even if you may not be eligible to receive its benefits? *Is that strongly or somewhat favor/oppose?***

%

- 63 Strongly favor
- 20 Somewhat favor
- 5 Somewhat oppose
- 5 Strongly oppose
- 7 Don't know (Do Not Read)
- 0 Refused (Do Not Read)

*Now, I'd like to ask you about some state legislative proposals to help Washingtonians afford their prescription drugs.*

11. **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 of consumers could then negotiate with drug companies for lower drug prices. Would you favor or oppose Washington State creating a bulk purchasing pool to negotiate with prescription drug companies for lower prices? *Would you say you strongly or somewhat favor/oppose?***

%

- 49 Strongly favor
- 32 Somewhat favor
- 5 Somewhat oppose
- 5 Strongly oppose
- 10 Don't know (Do Not Read)
- <1 Refused (Do Not Read)

- 11a. **If this proposed state prescription drug program were on the election ballot next year, as a ballot initiative, would you vote for or against its passage?**

%

- 71 I would vote for it
- 7 I would vote against it
- 22 Not sure (Do not read)
- 0 Refused (Do not read)

12. **Another proposal is to create a state pharmacy assistance program for low income Medicare beneficiaries who need help paying for expenses not covered by the new Medicare prescription drug benefit, such as premiums, deductibles and other drug costs. Would you favor or oppose the state creating an assistance program to help low-income Medicare beneficiaries pay their additional drug costs? *Would you say you strongly or somewhat favor/oppose?***

%

- 51 Strongly favor
- 29 Somewhat favor
- 6 Somewhat oppose
- 6 Strongly oppose
- 8 Don't know (Do Not Read)
- <1 Refused (Do Not Read)

**12a. If *this* proposed state prescription drug program were on the election ballot next year, as a ballot initiative, would you vote for or against its passage?**

%  
70 I would vote for it  
11 I would vote against it  
18 Not sure (Do not read)  
<1 Refused (Do not read)

*Still another proposal that could help Washington residents is to make buying prescription drugs from other countries at lower cost easier.*

**13. Would you favor or oppose the federal government making it easier for people to buy prescription drugs from Canada? *Would you say you strongly or somewhat favor/oppose?***

%  
54 Strongly favor  
18 Somewhat favor  
8 Somewhat oppose  
12 Strongly oppose  
8 Don't know (Do Not Read)  
< Refused (Do Not Read)

**14. If the federal government were to make it legal for individual citizens to buy prescription drugs from Canada at lower costs, other laws could be passed to either allow or prohibit states from purchasing prescription medications this way.**

**If legal on a federal level, would you favor or oppose the state of Washington being able to purchase prescription drugs from Canada? *Would you say you strongly or somewhat favor/oppose?***

%  
54 Strongly favor  
22 Somewhat favor  
5 Somewhat oppose  
9 Strongly oppose  
10 Don't know (Do Not Read)  
<1 Refused (Do Not Read)

**15. Would you favor or oppose a state website to inform prescription drug consumers in Washington about purchasing their drugs from Canada that would include information on the safety, effectiveness, and cost of these drugs? *Would you say you strongly or somewhat favor/oppose this type of website?***

%  
65 Strongly favor  
19 Somewhat favor  
4 Somewhat oppose  
7 Strongly oppose  
5 Don't know (Do Not Read)  
<1 Refused (Do Not Read)

16. **Many businesses and government offices prohibit employees from receiving gifts from firms with which they do business. There is currently a proposal in Washington State to prohibit gifts over \$25 from pharmaceutical sales people to doctors or others who prescribe medication. Would you favor or oppose a limit of \$25 on all gifts or offerings from pharmaceutical companies to prescribing health professionals?**  
*Would you say you strongly or somewhat favor/oppose of a limit on gifts from drug companies to prescribing health professionals?*

<u>%</u>	
52	Strongly favor
14	Somewhat favor
7	Somewhat oppose
15	Strongly oppose
12	Don't know (Do Not Read)
1	Refused (Do Not Read)

## About You

*My last few questions are for classification purposes only!*

- D1. **What is your age as of your last birthday?**

<u>%</u>	
23	18-34
37	35-49
20	50-64
17	65 or older
3	Refused

- D2. **What is your current marital status? Are you currently...?**

<u>%</u>	
61	Married
2	Living as married (Volunteered)
6	Widowed
11	Divorced
1	Separated
17	Never married
2	Refused (Do Not Read)

- D3. **Are you or your spouse a member of A-A-R-P formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons? [IF NOT "MARRIED" ASK, "Are you a member..."]**

<u>%</u>	
22	Yes
76	No
1	DON'T KNOW / NOT SURE (Do Not Read)
1	REFUSED (Do Not Read)

**D4. Thinking about your state elections for Washington 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?**

%  
72 Always vote  
19 Sometimes miss one  
5 Rarely vote  
2 Never vote  
1 DON'T KNOW / NOT SURE (Do Not Read)

**D5. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent?**

%  
29 Republican  
29 Democrat  
31 Independent  
2 Other [Specify: \_\_\_\_\_] [VOLUNTEERED]  
3 DON'T KNOW / NOT SURE (Do Not Read)  
6 Refused (Do Not Read)

**D6. And also generally speaking, would you characterize your political views as being Conservative, Moderate, or Liberal?**

%  
31 Conservative  
40 Moderate  
20 Liberal  
1 Other [Specify: \_\_\_\_\_] [VOLUNTEERED]  
5 DON'T KNOW / NOT SURE (Do Not Read)  
3 Refused (Do Not Read)

**D7. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (READ)**

%  
3 Less than high school  
20 High school graduate or equivalent  
30 Some college or technical training beyond high school  
28 College graduate (4 years)  
17 Post-graduate or professional degree  
<1 DON'T KNOW / NOT SURE (Do Not Read)  
2 REFUSED (Do Not Read)

**D8. Which of the following best describes your current employment status? Are you currently.....**

%  
48 Employed or self-employed full-time  
12 Employed or self-employed part-time  
21 Retired and not working  
3 Unemployed and looking for work  
6 Other such as homemaker  
5 Disabled  
4 Student  
\* DON'T KNOW (Do Not Read)  
2 REFUSED (Do Not Read)

**D9. Now, for statistical purposes only, please stop me when I get to the category that includes your household's income before taxes in 2003. Was it... (READ)**

%

- 6 Less than \$10,000
- 7 \$10,000 but less than \$20,000
- 11 \$20,000 but less than \$30,000
- 12 \$30,000 but less than \$40,000
- 9 \$40,000 but less than \$50,000
- 17 \$50,000 but less than \$75,000
- 22 or was your income \$75,000 or more
- 3 DON'T KNOW (Do Not Read)
- 13 REFUSED (Do Not Read)

**D10. What is your race?**

%

- 86 White/Caucasian
- 2 Black/African American
- 1 Native American
- 2 Asian American
- 1 Hispanic, Spanish, or Latino decent
- 2 Other: (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- <1 DON'T KNOW/NOT SURE (Do Not Read)
- 5 REFUSED

**D11. Are you male or female?**

%

- 47% Male
- 53% Female

**D12. What is your 5-digit zip code? \_\_\_\_\_**

**D13. And, finally, may I verify that I reached you at: (\_\_\_\_\_)\_\_\_\_\_**

*Thank you for participating! Your Opinion Counts.*

**AARP**

**Knowledge Management**

**For more information contact Jennifer H. Sauer (202) 434-6207**