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# **Legislative Issue Priorities and Personal Concerns: A Survey of AARP California Members**

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September 2005



# **Legislative Issue Priorities and Personal Concerns: A Survey of AARP California Members**

**Report Prepared by  
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## About This Survey

This mail survey of AARP members in California explores their concerns, their view of state legislative priorities, and their experiences regarding prescription drugs and long-term care. This report is part of the larger survey and discusses members' priority rating of select legislative issues facing the state as well as their level of personal concern for these and other issues.

AARP conducted the AARP California Member Survey from July through August, 2005. A random sample of 2,000 AARP members in California, proportionally stratified by three age segments—50 to 59, 60 to 74, and 75+, was selected from AARP's membership database. Each sampled member was contacted about the survey in four ways: a pre-notification postcard, the survey itself, a reminder postcard, and a second survey. Forty-four percent of the sampled California members returned surveys by the cut-off date, providing 879 useable surveys for analysis. Thus, the survey has a sampling error of plus or minus 3.3 percent. Survey responses were weighted to reflect the distribution of the age segments in the member population of California. The weighted overall findings are discussed. Throughout the report, statistics representing member responses are reported in percentages. In some instances, percentages are small and may not seem to represent a significant proportion of members, yet when projected to the total California membership the actual number of people may be substantial. As of June 2005, the number of individual AARP members in California was 3,021,212. A full annotated questionnaire is included in Appendix A.

## Highlights

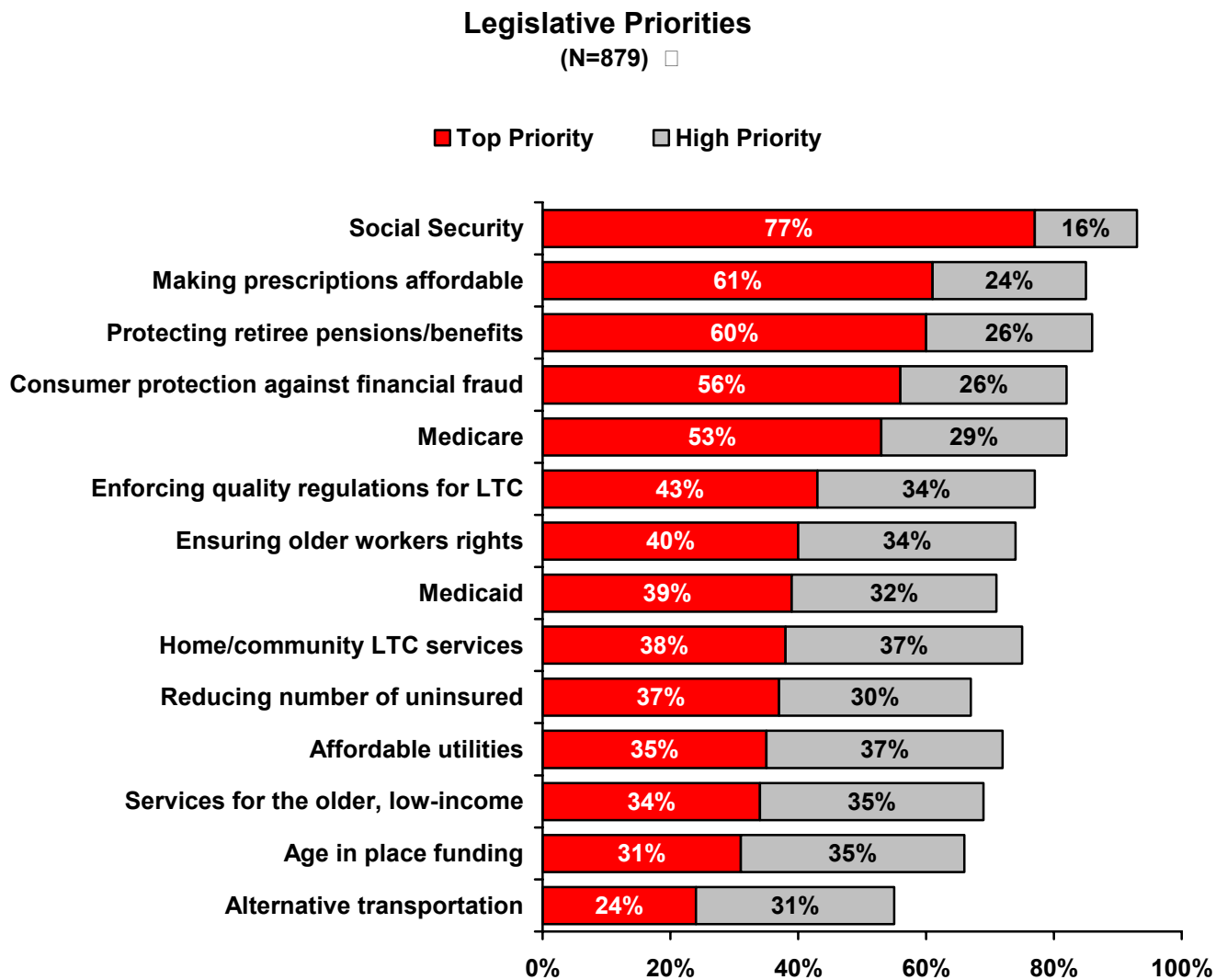
- According to members, ensuring that Social Security continues to provide a guaranteed base for retirement income (77%); making prescription drugs more affordable (61%); and protecting access to promised pensions and retiree health benefits (60%) should be the top legislative priorities for AARP California.
- More than half of all members say protecting consumers against fraudulent and deceptive business practices that can reduce their retirement savings and financial assets (56%) and strengthening Medicare as a base for retirement health coverage (53%) should be top legislative priorities for AARP California.
- At least six in ten members say that they are extremely concerned about assuring their pension benefits and retirement savings are safe (68%); and affording the cost of health care (63%) and health insurance (61%).

## Findings

### Ensuring that Social Security continues to provide a guaranteed base for retirement income is the top legislative priority for California members.

Out of 13 legislative issues, California members believe that AARP’s top legislative priorities should be ensuring that Social Security continues to provide a guaranteed base for retirement income, making prescription drugs more affordable, and protecting access to promised pensions and retiree health benefits.

At least six in ten members say 12 of the 13 issues covered in the survey should be top or high legislative priorities for AARP California. Five in ten members say the 13<sup>th</sup> issue, expanding funding for alternative transportation services for those unable to drive, should be a top or high priority.

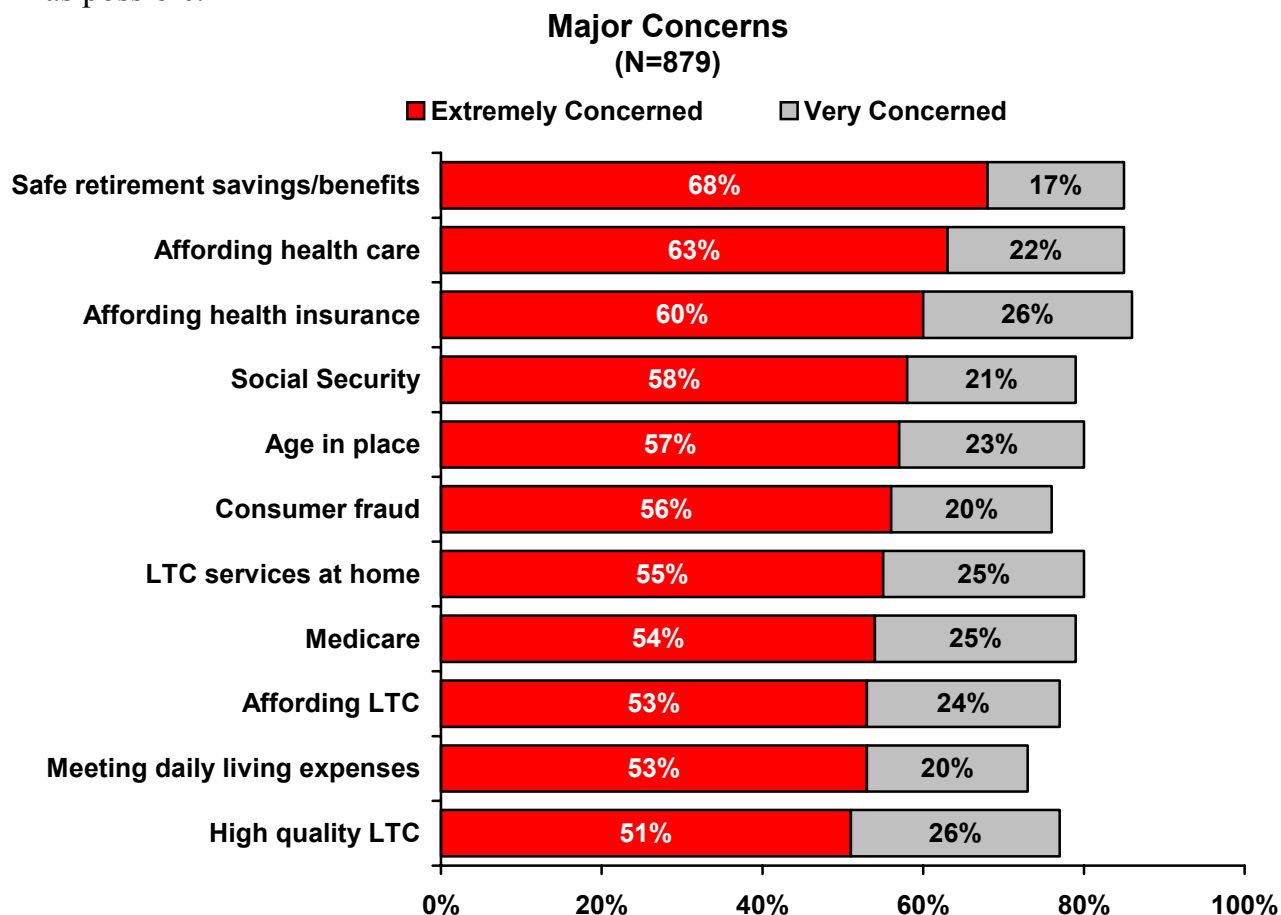


**Most members’ major concern revolves around protecting their financial well-being in retirement.**

When members were asked to rate issues based on their personal level of concern, protecting pension benefits and retirement savings is of foremost concern to members. Nearly nine in ten members (85%) say they are extremely or very concerned about the safety of their pension benefits and retirement savings. About eight in ten members (79%) are extremely or very concerned about having Social Security as a base for retirement income; and three in four (76%) are concerned about avoiding consumer fraud that could threaten their savings. Having financial stability in retirement is a major concern for most AARP California members.

In addition to financial stability, members are concerned about their health care options. While eighty-seven percent of California AARP members report being covered by some form of health insurance, six in members say they are extremely concerned about affording health care and health insurance, and over five in ten are extremely concerned about Medicare.

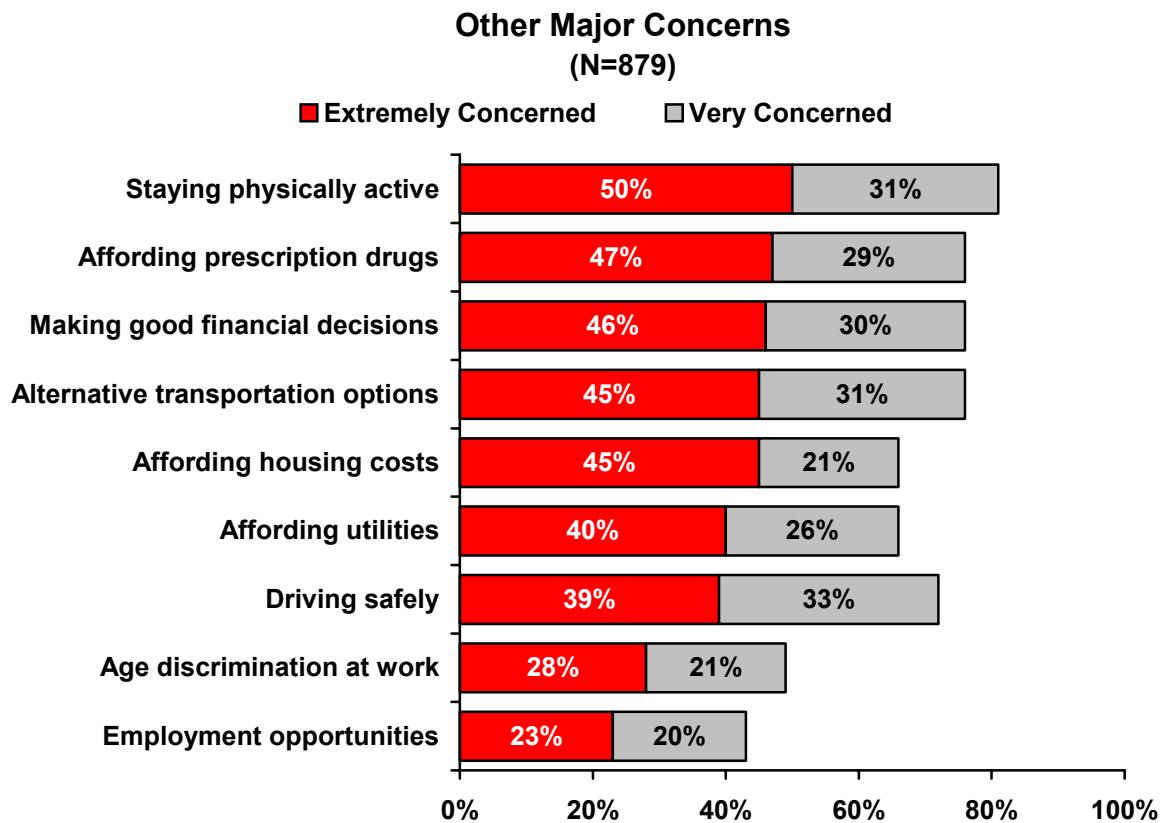
Additionally, more than half of all members are extremely concerned about having long-term care services that would allow them or their family member to stay at home as long as possible.



Other major concerns for members revolve around health and finances. Half of all members are extremely concerned about staying physically active, and at least six in ten members are extremely or very concerned about affording prescription drugs, housing costs, and utilities.

Since most members are retired or not working, most members were only mildly concerned about workplace issues. However, members who work were much more likely than members who do not work to say they are extremely or very concerned about facing age discrimination in employment (57% vs. 44%) and having good employment opportunities (55% vs. 34%).

Additionally, members age 50-59 were more likely than older members to be concerned about workplace issues. About six in ten members age 50-59 were concerned about facing age discrimination in employment (50-59: 58%, 60-74: 49%, 75+: 41%) and having good employment opportunities (50-59: 60%, 60-74: 42%, 75+: 29%).





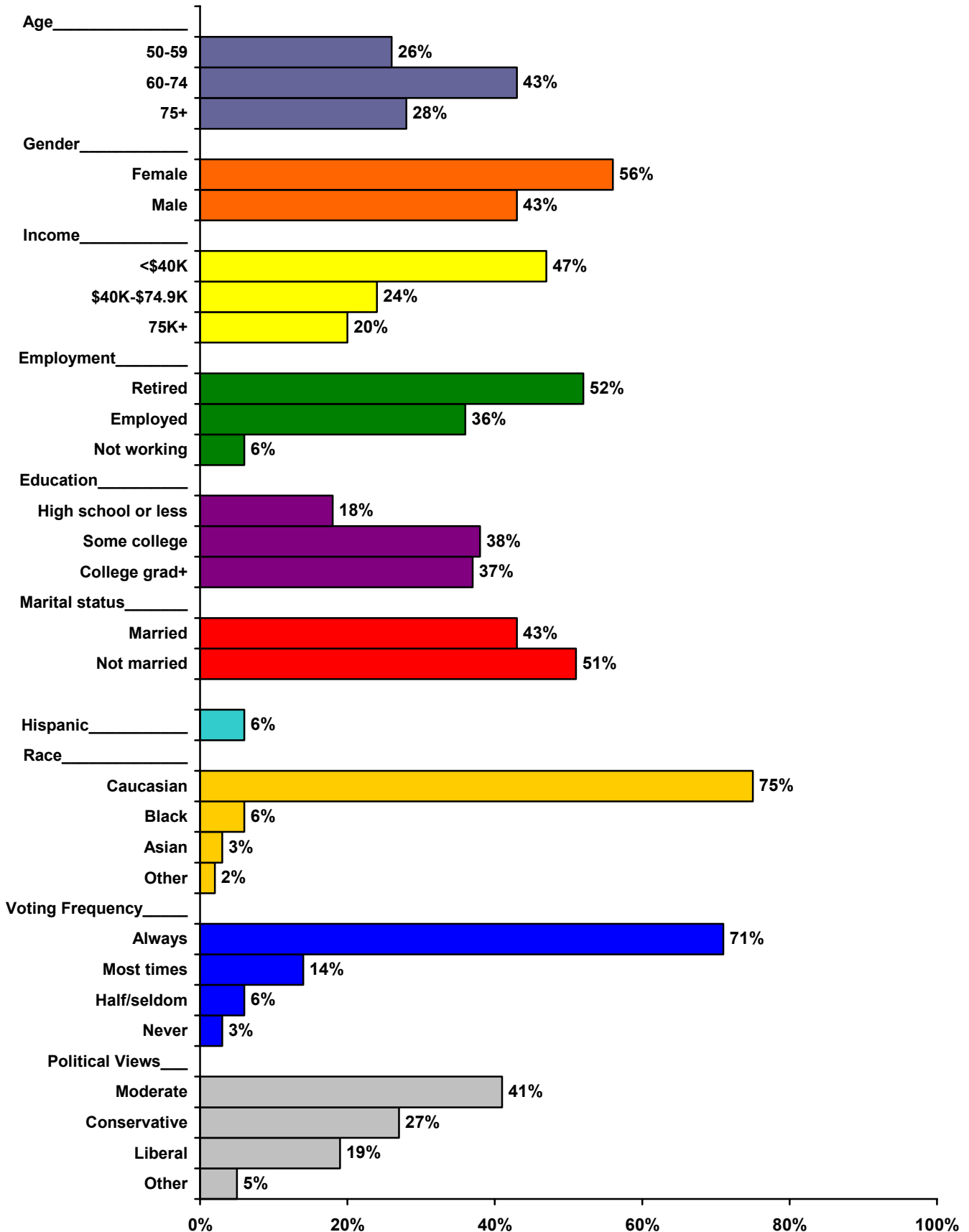
## Conclusions

Across 13 issues addressed that affect older Californians including economic security, health care, and independent living, no fewer than five in ten members say these issues should be top or high legislative priorities for AARP California. According to AARP California members, the top three legislative priorities for AARP California should be ensuring that Social Security continues to provide a guaranteed base for retirement income, making prescription drugs more affordable, and protecting access to promised pensions and retiree health benefits. Roughly half of all members see protecting consumers against fraudulent and deceptive business practices that can reduce their retirement savings and financial assets, and strengthening Medicare as a base for retirement health coverage as top legislative priorities for AARP California.

Member's major concerns revolve around issues related to financial stability in retirement and affording health care and health insurance. The top concern to members in this study is assuring their pension and retirement savings are safe. Members are also concerned about avoiding consumer fraud that could threaten their savings. Overall, members are least concerned about workplace related issues. However, a majority of working members do express concern about age discrimination and having good employment opportunities.

## **Respondent Demographics**

## Respondents Demographics (N= 879)



**APPENDIX A**  
**ANNOTATED QUESTIONNAIRE**

## 2005 AARP California Member Survey

(AARP Members Weighted N = 879; Response Rate = 44%; Sampling Error =  $\pm$  3.31%)  
 (Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding or multiple response.)

### State Legislative Issues

1. To be effective, AARP California wants to work on the most important issues facing California members. Keeping in mind what is most important to you, how much of a priority should it be for AARP to work on the following legislative issues in California?

	Top Priority ▼	High Priority ▼	Medium Priority ▼	Low Priority ▼	Not a Priority ▼	Not Sure ▼	No Response ▼
a. Protecting access to promised pensions and retiree health benefits.....	60%	26%	7%	2%	3%	1%	2%
b. Maintaining access to home and community based long-term care services .....	38%	37%	17%	3%	2%	1%	2%
c. Expanding funding for alternative transportation services for those unable to drive	24%	31%	31%	8%	3%	2%	2%
d. Ensuring that Social Security continues to provide a guaranteed base for retirement income.....	77%	16%	4%	*	2%	*	1%
e. Expanding health insurance coverage for the uninsured .....	37%	30%	18%	6%	4%	2%	3%
f. Ensuring that workers age 50 and older have equal access to jobs, promotions, and employee benefits.....	40%	34%	17%	5%	2%	1%	1%
g. Maintaining Medicaid, the government program that provides health and long-term care for low income people .....	39%	32%	17%	6%	3%	1%	1%
h. Protecting consumers against fraudulent and deceptive business practices that can reduce their retirement savings and financial assets .....	56%	26%	12%	3%	2%	*	1%

**1. (CONTINUED) To be effective, AARP California wants to work on the most important issues facing California members. Keeping in mind what is most important to you, how much of a priority should it be for AARP to work on the following legislative issues in California?**

	Top Priority ▼	High Priority ▼	Medium Priority ▼	Low Priority ▼	Not a Priority ▼	Not Sure ▼	No Response ▼
i. Maintaining funding for housing options that allow individuals to remain in their communities as they age .....	31%	35%	22%	4%	3%	1%	4%
j. Maintaining the affordability of utility services ..	35%	37%	18%	4%	2%	*	4%
k. Strengthening Medicare as a base for retirement health coverage .....	53%	29%	11%	2%	1%	1%	4%
l. Maintaining services for older, low-income state residents .....	34%	35%	19%	5%	2%	1%	4%
m. Making prescription drugs more affordable .....	61%	24%	9%	1%	1%	*	3%
n. Enforcing quality regulations for long-term care services .....	43%	34%	16%	3%	1%	1%	4%

## Prescription Drugs

**2. Are you, yourself, now covered by any form of health insurance, such as any private or employee health insurance plan or through programs like Medicare or Medicaid?**

	<u>%</u>
Yes	87
No	10
Not sure	1
No Response	3

**3. Do you get any help in paying for prescription drugs from insurance or other health coverage?**

	<u>%</u>
Yes	71
No	25
Not sure	2
No Response	3

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

	<u>%</u>
Extremely concerned	32
Very concerned	21
Somewhat concerned	21
Not very concerned	15
Not at all concerned	7
Not sure	1
No Response	3

**5. In the past 12 months, have you taken any prescription medications?**

		<u>%</u>
Yes		89
No	————→	8
Not sure	————→	3

**6. Are you currently taking prescription drugs on a regular basis, that is, daily, weekly, or monthly? (n=780)**

	<u>%</u>
Yes	93
No	7
No Response	1

**7. In the past 12 months, has paying for your prescription drugs been a major problem, a minor problem, or not a problem for you? (n=780)**

	<u>%</u>
A major problem	15
A minor problem	32
Not a problem	52
No Response	1

**8. In the past 12 months, approximately how much have you spent, EACH month, out of your own pocket for your prescription drugs? (n=780)**

	<u>%</u>
Less than \$10 per month	8
\$10 but less than \$50 per month	31
\$50 but less than \$100 per month	23
\$100 but less than \$200 per month	15
\$200 but less than \$500 per month	12
\$500 or more per month	2
I did NOT spend money out of my own pocket for my prescription drugs	4
Not sure	2
No Response	3

**9. Many people face difficult decisions when buying prescription drugs. In the past 12 months, have you done any of the following: (n=780)**

	Yes ▼	No ▼	No Response ▼
a. Delayed getting a prescription filled because you didn't have enough money to pay for it?.....	14%	83%	3%
b. Taken less medicine than your doctor prescribed to make it last longer?.....	17%	80%	4%
c. Cut back on items such as food, fuel, or electricity to be able to afford a prescription drug? .....	10%	87%	3%
d. Decided not to fill a prescription because of the cost of the drug?.....	17%	79%	4%
e. Ordered your prescription drugs by mail or Internet from a company <u>in the U.S.</u> because they cost less?.....	19%	77%	4%
f. Ordered your prescription drugs by mail or Internet from a company in <u>another country</u> because they cost less? .....	6%	91%	3%
g. Traveled to Mexico, Canada, or another country to purchase prescription drugs because they cost less? .....	5%	92%	3%
h. Shopped around for the best price? .....	29%	67%	4%
i. Asked your doctor or pharmacist for generic prescription drugs instead of brand name drugs when generics are available? .....	62%	35%	3%

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

	<u>%</u>
Extremely important	56
Very important	26
Somewhat important	9
Not very important	2
Not at all important	1
Not sure	1
No Response	5

**11. How strongly would you support or oppose a state prescription drug discount program in California for low-income persons even if you may not be eligible to receive its benefits?**

	<u>%</u>
Strongly support	60
Somewhat support	21
Neither support nor oppose	11
Somewhat oppose	2
Strongly oppose	2
Not sure	3
No Response	2



- 12. The state of California is considering ways to help make prescription drugs more affordable to residents. One option would be to ask pharmacies or drug manufacturers to enter into a rebate agreement with the state. This agreement would allow the state to buy large quantities of prescription drugs at prices below the average wholesale price, and sell them to the consumer for a discounted price. Enrollment in this program would be voluntary for individuals who earn \$32,000 or less or couples who earn \$43,000 or less each year and there would be no fee to join.**

**How strongly would you support or oppose putting a state prescription drug program like this into effect?**

	<u>%</u>
Strongly support	54
Somewhat support	21
Neither support nor oppose	10
Somewhat oppose	2
Strongly oppose	3
Not sure	8
No Response	3

- 13. How important is it to you that consumers like yourself have information available that would allow you to compare the safety, effectiveness, and cost of their prescription drugs?**

	<u>%</u>
Extremely important	52
Very important	32
Somewhat important	11
Not very important	2
Not at all important	1
Not sure	1
No Response	2

- 14. How strongly would you support or oppose the federal government making it easier for people to buy prescription drugs from Canada?**

	<u>%</u>
Strongly support	44
Somewhat support	23
Neither support nor oppose	19
Somewhat oppose	2
Strongly oppose	3
Not sure	7
No Response	3

**15. 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, how strongly would you support or oppose the state of California being able to purchase prescription drugs from Canada?**

	<u>%</u>
Strongly support	47
Somewhat support	21
Neither support nor oppose	14
Somewhat oppose	2
Strongly oppose	4
Not sure	9
No Response	3

## Caregiving

**16. A caregiver can be anyone who provides unpaid help to a relative or friend who is ill, disabled, or elderly. A caregiver could help that other person by providing financial assistance, running errands, doing household chores, or with personal care and grooming.**

**Are you currently providing this type of care to someone?**

	<u>%</u>
Yes	16
No $\longrightarrow$ SKIP TO QUESTION 22	80
No Response	4

**17. How many adults do you provide this type of care for? (n=142)**

	<u>%</u>
1	70
2	20
3 or more	7
No Response	4

**18. What is/are their relationship to you? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY) (n=142)**

<u>%</u>		<u>%</u>		<u>%</u>	
17	Spouse	5	Daughter	20	Friend/Neighbor
2	Partner	4	Mother-in-law	1	Grandmother
11	Father	2	Father-in-law	0	Grandfather
32	Mother	3	Brother	12	Other (specify): _____
4	Son	7	Sister	3	No Response

**19. Do they live in your household? (n=142)**

<u>%</u>		
35	Yes	
61	No	<b>19a. IF NO, do those you provide care for live: (n=87)</b>
4	No Response	42% within 5 miles of your home
		15% between 5 and 10 miles of your home
		9% between 11 and 15 miles of your home
		10% between 16 and 25 miles of your home
		19% more than 25 miles from your home
		5% No Response

**20. Do they receive paid help from: (n=142)**

	Yes ▼	No ▼	No Response ▼
An aide or nurse hired through an agency or service.....	15%	74%	11%
An aide or nurse hired independently or privately – <i>not</i> through an agency or service.....	14%	67%	19%
A housekeeper to clean or cook .....	21%	63%	17%

**21. As a caregiver, would you like to have more help or information on: (N=142)**

	Yes ▼	No ▼	No Response ▼
Keeping the person(s) I care for safe at home .....	58%	31%	12%
Easy activities I can do with the person(s) I care for.....	43%	41%	16%
Balancing my work and family responsibilities .....	40%	45%	15%
Finding time for myself.....	47%	38%	15%
Choosing an assisted living facility or nursing home .....	44%	41%	16%
Choosing a home care agency.....	45%	41%	15%
How to talk with doctors and other healthcare professionals .....	38%	45%	16%
Managing my emotional and physical stress .....	54%	35%	11%
Making end-of-life decisions .....	41%	44%	16%

## Nursing Home Care

22. How much of a priority do you think it should be for AARP California to work to improve the quality of nursing homes in California?

	<u>%</u>
Top priority	53
High priority	33
Medium priority	9
Low priority	1
Not a priority	1
Not sure	2
No Response	2

23. How strongly would you support or oppose legislation in California to strengthen the enforcement of state standards to protect the health, safety, and rights of nursing home residents?

	<u>%</u>
Strongly support	79
Somewhat support	14
Neither support nor oppose	3
Somewhat oppose	*
Strongly oppose	*
Not sure	2
No Response	1

24. California is considering legislation to improve the overall quality of nursing home care, patients' rights, access to care, and the accountability of those who do not comply with the proposed standards. Please indicate to what extent you would support or oppose each of the following features of this bill.

	Strongly Support	Somewhat Support	Neither Support nor Oppose	Somewhat Oppose	Strongly Oppose	Not Sure	No Response
	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼
a. Establish a state-wide complaint response system.....	65%	21%	6%	*	1%	2%	4%
b. Establish a "first come, first serve" standard to prevent discrimination against nursing home applicants on Medi-Cal.....	46%	26%	14%	2%	2%	6%	5%
c. Strengthen patient's rights.....	68%	21%	5%	*	*	1%	5%
d. Enforce safety and quality standards with citations, fines, or license revocation for nursing homes that violate those standards .....	79%	14%	2%	1%	*	1%	3%

**25. If a candidate for state office in California supported legislation that improves the quality of nursing home care and protecting residents' rights, how likely would you be to vote for that candidate?**

	<u>%</u>
Much more likely	56
Somewhat more likely	28
Would not make a difference	9
Somewhat less likely	*
Much less likely	*
Not sure	4
No Response	2

## Personal Concerns

**26. Below is a list of concerns that have been expressed by people age 50 and older. Please check the box that most closely matches your level of concern about each item.**

	Extremely concerned	Very concerned	Somewhat concerned	Not very concerned	Not at all concerned	No Response
	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼
a. Having Social Security as a base for retirement income.....	58%	21%	12%	3%	3%	3%
b. Affording the cost of prescription drugs.....	47%	29%	16%	4%	1%	3%
c. Continuing to drive safely.....	39%	33%	17%	4%	3%	4%
d. Staying physically active.....	50%	31%	11%	3%	1%	4%
e. Facing age discrimination in employment.....	28%	21%	22%	13%	12%	5%
f. Affording my housing costs.....	45%	21%	17%	8%	6%	5%
g. Having high quality long-term care for myself or a family member.....	51%	26%	14%	4%	3%	3%
h. Making good financial decisions.....	46%	30%	14%	4%	2%	3%
i. Being able to get to where I need and want to go if I could not drive.....	45%	31%	15%	4%	2%	3%
j. Having Medicare as a base for retirement health insurance.....	54%	25%	12%	3%	2%	4%
k. Affording the cost of my utility services.....	40%	26%	18%	9%	4%	4%
l. Having long-term care services that would allow me or my family member to stay at home as long as possible.....	55%	25%	11%	4%	2%	3%
m. Affording health insurance.....	61%	21%	10%	3%	2%	3%
n. Assuring my pension benefits and retirement savings are safe.....	68%	17%	8%	2%	2%	3%
o. Affording the cost of health care.....	63%	22%	7%	3%	1%	4%

	Extremely concerned	Very concerned	Somewhat concerned	Not very concerned	Not at all concerned	No Response
	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼
p. Having good employment opportunities .....	23%	20%	20%	14%	16%	6%
q. Being able to stay in my own home as I get older.....	57%	23%	9%	5%	3%	3%
r. Avoiding consumer fraud that could threaten my savings.....	56%	20%	12%	6%	2%	4%
s. Affording the cost of long-term care.....	53%	24%	14%	4%	3%	3%
t. Having enough money to meet daily living expenses .....	53%	20%	13%	8%	4%	3%

## About You

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

### D1. Were you registered to vote for the last state elections?

	<u>%</u>
Yes	88
No	7
No Response	6

### D2. Thinking about your state elections for California's Governor and Legislators in the last ten years, how often would you say you vote?

	<u>%</u>
Always	71
Most of the time	14
About half of the time	3
Seldom	3
Never	3
No Response	6

### D3. How would you characterize your political views?

	<u>%</u>
Conservative	27
Moderate	41
Liberal	19
None of the above	5
No Response	8

**D4. Do you consider yourself to be a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or something else?**

	<u>%</u>
Democrat	46
Republican	26
Independent	11
Other	4
Not sure	5
No Response	8

**D5. How interested are you in California's state government activities that affect residents age 50 and older?**

	<u>%</u>
Extremely interested	49
Very interested	33
Somewhat interested	9
Not very interested	1
Not at all interested	*
Not sure	1
No Response	6

**D6. Do you have access to a personal computer at home, at work, or some other place?**

	<u>%</u>
Yes	68
No	25
No Response	7

**D7. Have you applied for the new Medicare Prescription Discount Card?**

4% Yes  
 87% No  
 9% No Response



**D7a. If NO: Are you going to apply for this card? (n=766)**

16% Yes    30% No    40% Not sure    13% No Response

**D8. What is your current marital status?**

	<u>%</u>
Now married	43
Not married, living with partner	4
Widowed	23
Divorced	18
Separated	2
Never married	4
No Response	6

**D9. What is the highest level of education that you completed?**

	<u>%</u>
Less than high school	4
High school graduate or equivalent	14
Some college or technical training beyond high school	38
College graduate (4 years)	18
Post-graduate or professional degree	19
No Response	7

**D10. Which of the following best describes your current employment status?**

	<u>%</u>
Employed or self-employed <u>full-time</u>	24
Employed or self-employed <u>part-time</u>	12
Retired and not working	52
Other such as homemaker	3
Unemployed and looking for work	3
No Response	7

**D11. What is your race?**

	<u>%</u>
White or Caucasian	75
Black or African American	6
Hispanic, Spanish, Latino	6
Asian	3
Native American or Alaskan Native	1
Other: _____	1
No Response	9

**D12. What was your annual household income before taxes in 2004?**

	<u>%</u>
Less than \$10,000	6
\$10,000 to \$19,999	14
\$20,000 to \$29,999	15
\$30,000 to \$39,999	12
\$40,000 to \$49,999	10
\$50,000 to \$74,999	14
\$75,000 or more	20
No Response	9



**D13. What is your age as of your last birthday? \_\_\_\_\_ years**

	<u>%</u>
50-59	26
60-74	43
75+	28
No Response	3

**D14. Are you male or female?**

	<u>%</u>
Male	43
Female	56
No Response	1

**D15. What is your 5-digit zip code? WRITE IN YOUR ZIP CODE \_\_\_\_\_**

**D16. What county do you live in? \_\_\_\_\_**

**D17. Do you own or rent a home?**

	<u>%</u>
Own	74
Rent	18
Neither	6
No Response	3

*Thank you for completing this survey.*

**Please use the postage-paid envelope and return it no later than July 29, 2005 to State Member Research, AARP, 601 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20049.**

**AARP**  
**Knowledge Management**  
**For more information please contact**  
**Jennifer H. Sauer (202) 434-6207**