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**Direct-to-Consumer Advertising
of Prescription Drugs:
Exposure and Response**

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Direct-to-Consumer Advertising of Prescription Drugs: Exposure and Response

Report Prepared by
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KEY FINDINGS

- Most of the respondents (91%) have heard or seen a prescription drug advertisement.
- Most often, respondents say they have seen the prescription drug advertisement on television (78%), in magazines (31%), and on the Internet (19%).
- Few (10%) who have seen or heard a prescription drug advertisement have asked their doctor for the advertised drug.
- About two-thirds (68%) of those who have ever asked their physician either received a prescription (41%) for the advertised drug or received a free sample (27%).
- Although most of the respondents (71%) read the safety and side effect information that by law accompanies prescription drugs, over a quarter find the information frightening (15%) or confusing (13%).

BACKGROUND

In the not too distant past, marketing of prescription drugs was directed almost exclusively to health professionals. However, since the 1980s the practice of direct-to-consumer advertising (DTCA) of prescription drugs has become customary, with a concomitant upward and accelerating trend in spending on prescription drug DTCA.

Pharmaceutical companies use a variety of methods for DTCA of prescription drugs, including the broadcast airways of radio, and television; the print media, including magazines, newspapers, and brochures; outdoor billboards; and most recently, the Internet. The DTCA of prescription drugs may be commonplace, but it is not without controversy--having both advocates and critics.

On the one hand, proponents of DTCA of prescription drugs justify the practice in several ways. It is argued that the DTCA is consistent with the emerging role of increased patient involvement in medical decision-making and that it supports basic tenets of health care reform's patient-centered care. A claim that is also related to patient responsibility is that the ads have an educational value by helping consumers become more informed about diseases and prescription drug choices. Thus, a value of prescription drugs DTC is that patients are more likely upon hearing or seeing the advertisements to seek help and discuss their conditions with their doctors. This, in turn, will increase the likelihood of patients getting the treatments they need. In addition, proponents point to research that indicates that compared to the past, increasingly, physicians have positive views about patients inquiring about prescription drugs that they have seen or heard through DTCA.

On the other hand, opponents of DTCA of prescription drugs counter advocates by pointing out that the advertising practice is contributing to the exponential rise in health care costs. Noting that in 2005, pharmaceutical companies spent \$4.2 billion compared to \$1 billion in 1997 on DTCA, critics maintain that there is a direct correlation of higher drug prices with the amount of money pharmaceutical companies spend on ads. The implication is that pharmaceutical companies raise the price of their products in order to recover advertising costs. Also, in contrast to the view of proponents of DTCA, critics posit that advertising increases unjustified demand for brand name drugs when less costly generics would be equally effective.

Moreover, opponents argue that the advertising encourages patients to make unwarranted requests for prescriptions, while paradoxically, promoting unnecessary fear of side effects.

As the practice of prescription drug DTCA is believed to have become ubiquitous, the *AARP Bulletin* is interested in the consumer experience with this phenomenon. This paper reports the results of a survey to gain insight into consumer experiences with prescription drug DTCA, including:

- Their exposure to prescription drugs advertisements
- Where they see or hear prescription drug advertisements
- Their response to prescription drugs DTCA, and
- The response to prescription drug safety and side effect information

Methodology

The *AARP Bulletin* commissioned **SSRS**, an independent research company, to conduct a telephone survey of a national sample of Americans age 18 and older. This paper reports the results of interviews conducted from September 22-September 26, 2010 with a total 1,019 respondents *age 18 and older*. The margin of error for total respondents is +/-3.07% at the 95% confidence level.

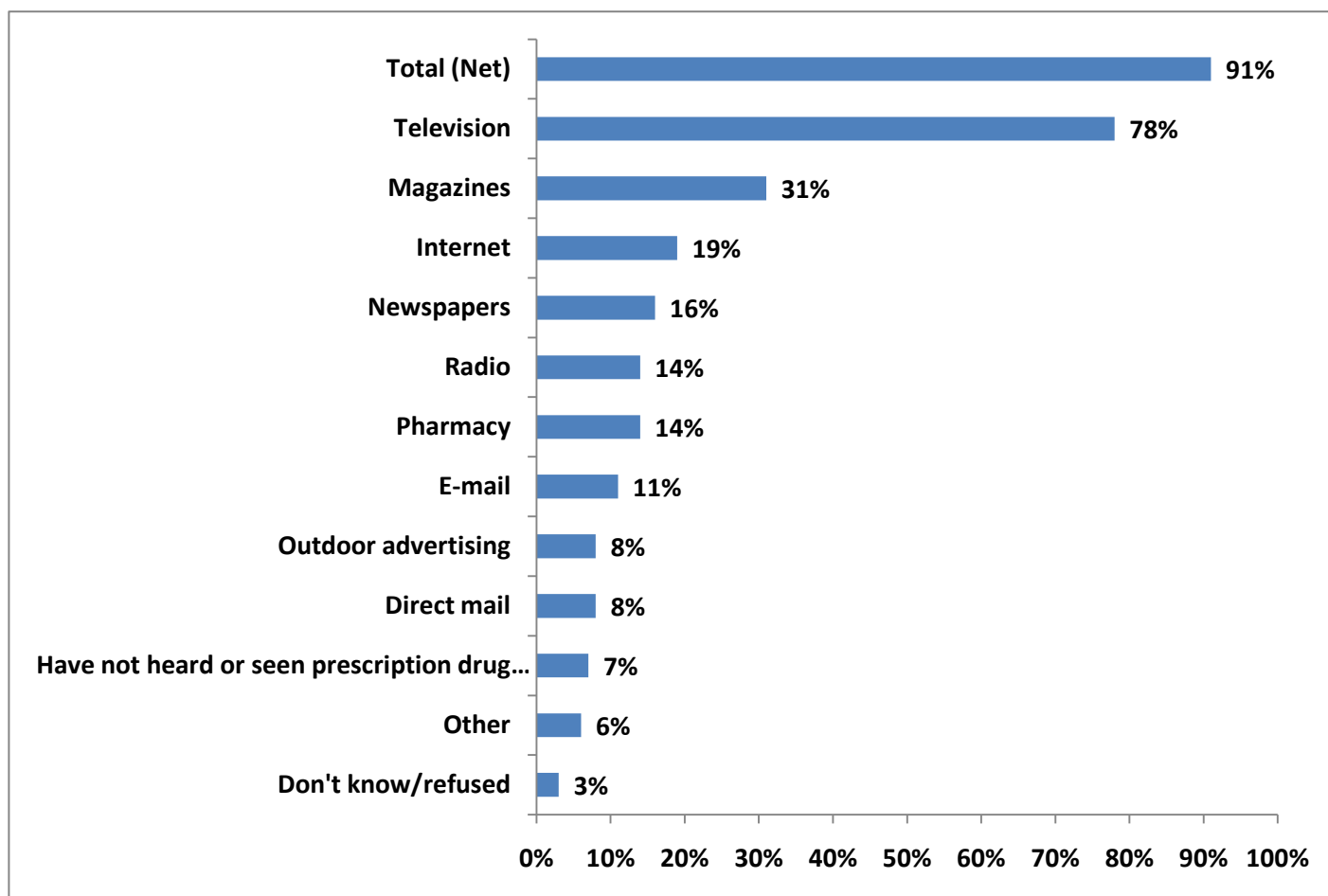
DETAILED FINDINGS

Exposure to Direct-to-Consumer Prescription Drug Advertising

To gauge the prevalence of consumer exposure to prescription drug advertising, the survey participants were asked (unaided) where they have seen or heard a prescription drug advertisement. As Exhibit 1 shows, while a large majority (91%) have seen or heard one or more prescription drug advertisements, 7 percent say they have not seen or heard any. Exhibit 1 also shows that most often, television (78%) and magazines (31%) are where the advertisements have been seen or heard. One in five have seen or heard prescription drug advertisements on the Internet (19%), and approximately one in seven have seen or heard advertisements in newspapers (16%), pharmacies (14%) and on the radio (14%).

Where advertisements have been seen or heard varies for socio-demographic subgroups. For example, college graduates are more likely to have seen prescription drugs advertised on the Internet (28%) than are high school graduates or those with less education, (15%) or those with some college, but not a degree (15%). Similarly, a higher percentage of college graduates (39%) have seen prescription drug advertisements in magazines than have high school graduates or those with less education (24%). While one in nine males has seen outdoor advertising (11%), the percentage is half that for females (5%).

Exhibit 1
Where have you heard or seen prescription drug advertisements?
(Base: Total respondents; n=1019)



Source: Direct-to-Consumer Advertising of Prescription Drugs: Exposure and Response. AARP, November 2010.

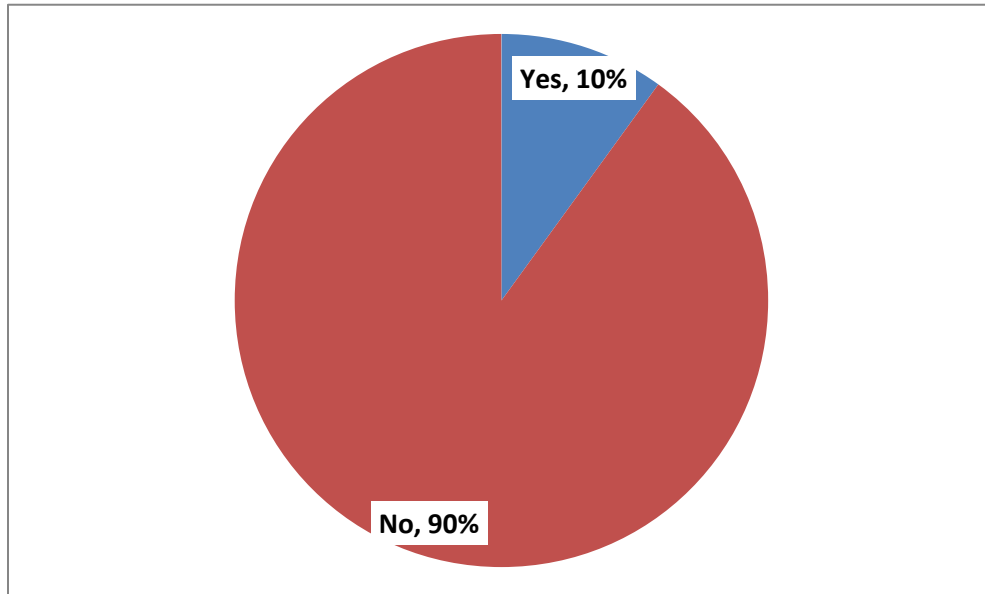
Prescription Request in Response to Exposure to DTCA

Respondents who have seen or heard prescription drug advertisements were asked if they have ever asked their doctor for a prescription drug that they saw advertised. Exhibit 2 shows that nine in ten (90%) respondents have never asked their doctor for a prescription for the advertised drug.

Exhibit 2

Have you ever asked your doctor for a prescription drug that you saw advertised?

(Base: Respondents who have heard or seen any prescription drug advertisements;
n=932)



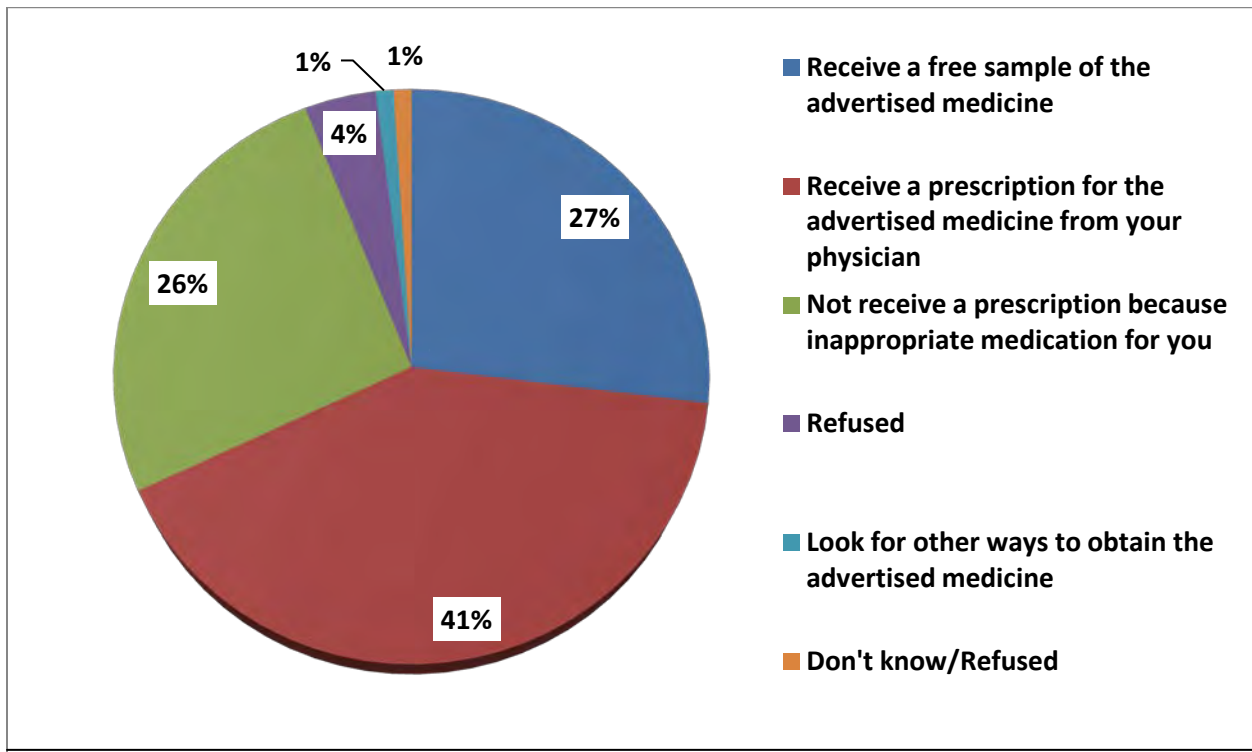
Source: Direct-to-Consumer Advertising of Prescription Drugs: Exposure and Response. AARP, November 2010.

Those respondents who had asked their doctor for a prescription they saw advertised were asked if the outcome was one of the following responses:

- They received a free sample of the advertised medicine
- They received a prescription for the advertised medicine from your physician
- They did not receive a prescription for the advertised medicine because it wasn't an appropriate medication for you
- Look for other ways to obtain the advertised medicine

Exhibit 3 shows that two in five respondents (41%) have received a prescription for an advertised drug from their physician. A quarter either have received a free sample of the advertised medicine (27%) or have not received a prescription because it was not an appropriate medication for them (26%).

Exhibit 3
Outcome of Asking Doctor for a Prescription Drug
 (Base: Respondents who have ever asked their doctor for a prescription drug they saw advertised; n= 89)



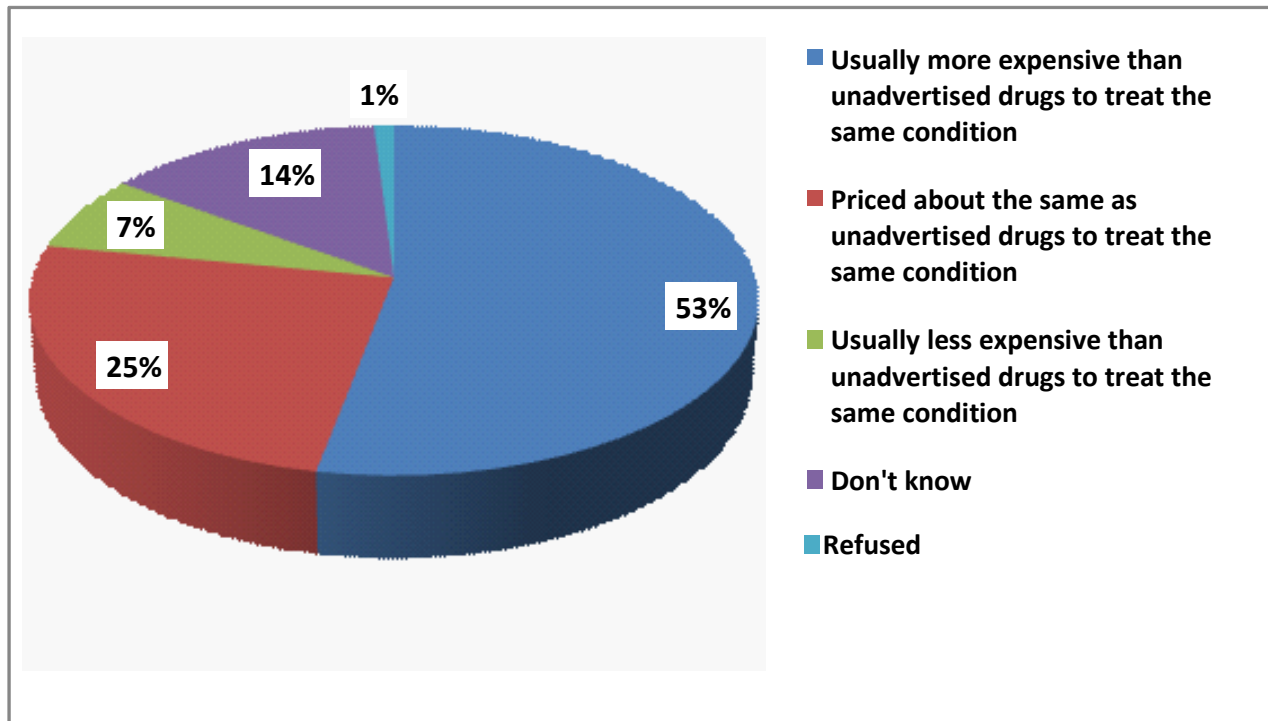
Source: Direct-to-Consumer Advertising of Prescription Drugs: Exposure and Response. AARP, November 2010.

While the numbers are small, of those who have ever asked their doctor for a prescription, AARP members (64%) are more likely than non-members (13%) to have received a free sample.

Perception of Cost of Advertised Drugs and Non-Advertised Drugs

Respondents were asked their thoughts about the price of advertised prescription and unadvertised prescription drugs to treat the same condition. Exhibit 4 shows that just over half of the respondents think that advertised prescription drugs are usually more expensive than unadvertised drugs to treat the same condition (53%), and a quarter think the advertised drugs are priced about the same as unadvertised drugs to treat the same condition (25%). Less than 1 in 10 think the advertised drugs are less expensive than unadvertised drugs to treat the same condition (7%). However, about one in seven (14%) indicate that do not know the answer to the questions about price.

Exhibit 4
Comparison of Price of Advertised to Non-Advertised Prescription Drugs
(Base: Total respondents; n= 1019)



Source: Direct-to-Consumer Advertising of Prescription Drugs: Exposure and Response. AARP, November 2010.

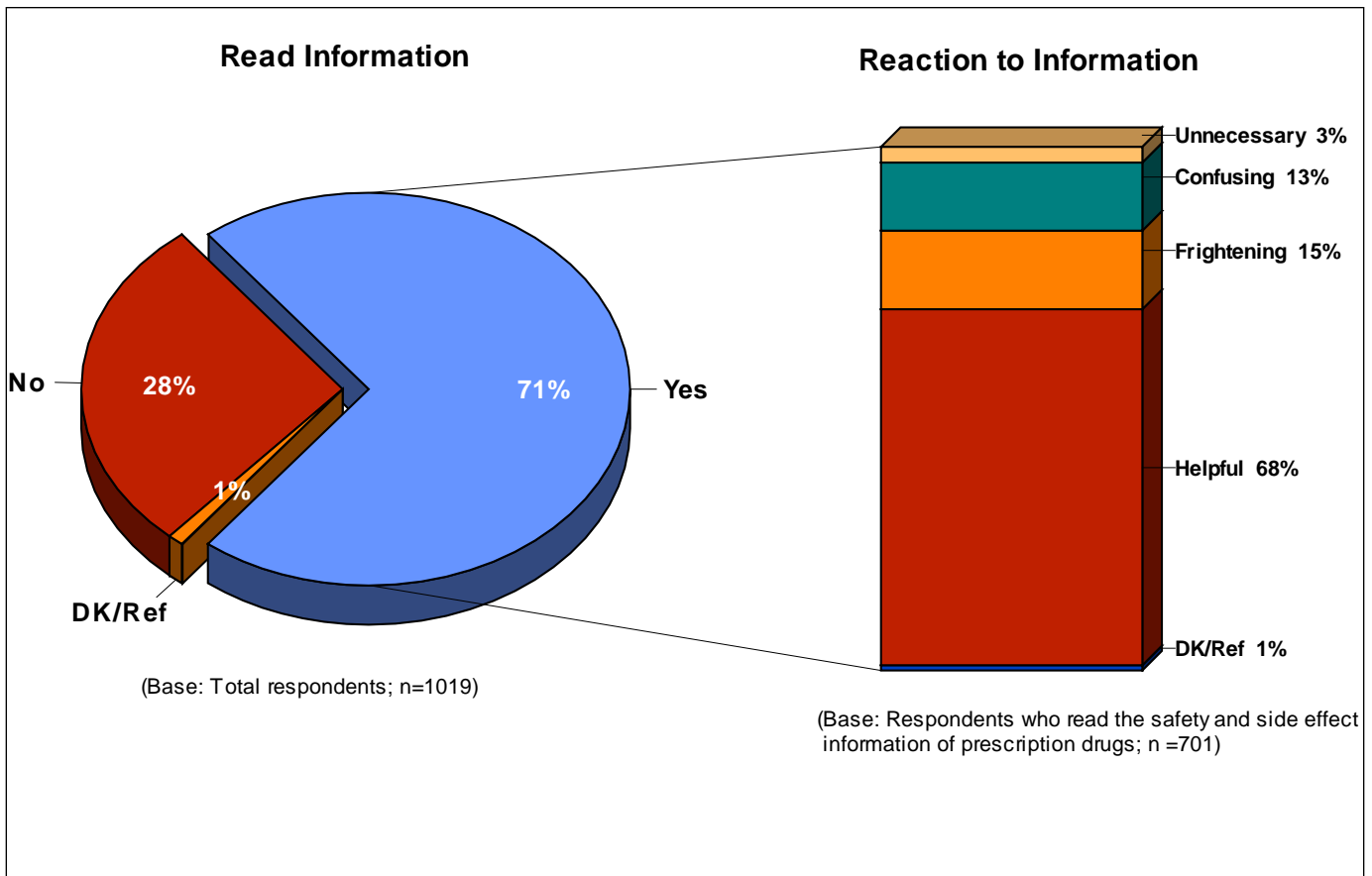
What survey participants think about the pricing of advertised and unadvertised drug prescriptions differs by education status. For example, those who have some college, but not a degree (31%) are more likely than those who are college graduates (21%) to think that advertised drugs are priced about the same as unadvertised prescription drugs to treat the same condition.

Safety and Side Effect Information

Respondents were told that, by law prescription drug advertising must include safety and side effect information and asked if they usually read this information. As shown in Exhibit 5, nearly three-quarters of the respondents (71%) say they usually read the safety and side effect information that the law requires to be included.

However, who reads the information is inversely related to educational status and income. For example, while three-quarters of those with a high school diploma or less education (75%) and those with some college, but not a degree (74%) say they read the safety and side effect information, this drops to two-thirds for those with a college degree or more (62%). Similarly, respondents at the less than \$25,000 income level (75%) and at the \$25,000 to \$49,999 income level (81%) are more likely to read the information than those at the \$50,000 to \$74,999 income level (61%) or the \$75,000 and above income level (63%).

Exhibit 5
Percentage Who Usually Read Safety and Side Effect Information
and Reaction of Those Who Read It



Source: Direct-to-Consumer Advertising of Prescription Drugs: Exposure and Response. AARP, November 2010.

Most of those who read the safety and side effect find the information helpful (68%). However, over a quarter of those who read this information (28%) find it either to be confusing (13%) or frightening (15%).

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this survey support that the vast majority of consumers have been exposed to prescription drug DTCA--most often on television and in magazines. Surprisingly, one in five have respondents encountered the advertisements on the Internet. Thus, one can conclude that the pharmaceutical companies have been successful in reaching consumers in prescription drug DTCA.

The survey findings also indicate that most respondents read the information that by law accompanies prescription drugs. However, two results of the research suggest that the pharmaceutical companies may need to improve this information. First, those most likely to read this information are respondents in lower income brackets and lower levels of education.

Direct-to-Consumer Advertising of Prescription Drugs: Exposure and Response. AARP, November 2010.

Second, while most find the information useful, a quarter of the respondents find it either confusing or frightening. Thus it may be concluded that pharmaceutical companies should seek ways to provide the required information so that it is easier for consumers who may have lower literacy levels to understand it.

Although the vast majority of respondents have been exposed to prescription drugs advertising, the finding, concomitantly, that most have never asked for a prescription drug they have heard or seen suggests that the response to prescription drugs DTCA is not great. Thus, if the cost of this type of advertising is pushing up the cost of prescription drugs for consumers, the pharmaceutical companies may want to revisit the practice of DTCA in helping to keep the cost of health care down.

Similarly, that more than half of those who have ever asked their doctor for a prescription either received a free sample or received a prescription for the advertised medicine from their physician may contribute to consumers not accepting generic drugs that may be less costly and that might be equally effective as those advertised. This potential cost factor is also supported by the finding that close to a third of the respondents either think advertised drugs are priced about the same as unadvertised ones to treat the same condition or think advertised ones are usually less expensive than unadvertised ones to treat the same condition.

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ANNOTATED QUESTIONNAIRE

Prescription Drug Advertising

This study was conducted via telephone by **SSRS**, an independent research company. Interviews were conducted from September 22 – September 26, 2010 among a nationally representative sample of 1,019 respondents age 18 and older. The margin of error for total respondents is + /-3.07% at the 95% confidence level. More information about **SSRS** can be obtained by visiting www.ssrs.com.

PD-1 Where have you heard or seen prescription drug advertisements?

	9/26/10
Direct mailings	8
E-mail	11
Internet	19
Magazines	31
Newspapers	16
Outdoor advertising	8
Pharmacy	14
Radio	14
Television	78
Other	6
Have not heard or seen prescription drug advertisements	7
Don't know	2
Refused	1

(Asked of total respondents who have heard or seen any prescription drug advertisements; n= 932)

PD-2 Have you ever asked your doctor for a prescription drug that you saw advertised?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Refused
9/26/10	10	90	*	*

PD-1/2 Combo Table

	9/26/10
Have heard or seen prescription drug advertising	91
Ever asked doctor for a prescription drug because of advertising seen	9
Never asked doctor for a prescription drug because of advertising seen	82
Haven't heard or seen prescription drug advertising	7
Don't know	2
Refused	1

(Asked of total respondents who have ever asked their doctor for a prescription drug they saw advertised; n= 89)

PD-3 Did you...?

	9/26/10
Receive a free sample of the advertised medicine	27
Receive a prescription for the advertised medicine from your	41

physician	
Not receive a prescription for the advertised medicine because it wasn't an appropriate medication for you	26
Look for other ways to obtain the advertised medicine	1
Don't know	1
Refused	4

PD-1/2/3 Combo Table

	9/26/10
Have heard or seen prescription drug advertisements	91
Ever asked doctor for a prescription drug because of hearing or seeing advertising	9
Receive a free sample of the advertised Medicine	2
Receive a prescription for the advertised medicine from your physician	4
Not receive a prescription for the advertised medicine because it wasn't an appropriate medication for you	2
Look for other ways to obtain the advertised medicine	*
Never asked doctor for a prescription drug because of hearing or seeing advertising	82
Have not seen prescription drug advertisements	7
Don't know	2
Refused	1

PD-4 Do you think advertised prescription drugs are...?

	9/26/10
Usually more expensive than unadvertised drugs to treat the same condition	53
Priced about the same as unadvertised drugs to treat the same condition	25
Usually less expensive than unadvertised drugs to treat the same condition	7
Don't know	14
Refused	1

PD-5 By law, prescription drug advertising must include safety and side effect information. Do you usually read this information?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Refused
9/26/10	71	28	1	1

(Asked of total respondents who read the safety and side effect information of prescription drug advertisements; n = 701)

PD-6 Do you find such information...?

	Helpful	Confusing	Frightening	Unnecessary	Don't know	Refused
9/26/10	68	13	15	3	1	*

PD-5/6 Combo Table

	9/26/10
Usually read safety/side effects information of prescription drug advertising	71

Find information helpful	48
Find information confusing	9
Find information confusing	11
Find information unnecessary	2
Do not usually read safety/side effects information of prescription drug advertising	28
Don't know	1
Refused	1

(Asked of total age 50+ ; n = 591)

AM-1 Are you or your spouse or partner currently a member of A-A-R-P?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Refused
9/26/10	42	57	1	--