



Views On Prescription Drugs And The Pharmaceutical Industry

This Featured Topic uses current and historical public opinion data from the Kaiser Family Foundation and other polling organizations to examine the public's attitudes towards prescription drugs and pharmaceutical companies.

Views On Prescription Drugs And Drug Safety

Prescription drugs play a part in half of all adults' daily lives, and most agree that these medications have a positive value to society. Majorities say that prescription drugs have had a positive impact on the health and quality of life of Americans in general (78%) and have made a "big difference" in the lives of people with chronic conditions such as heart disease (72%) and cancer (63%).

Despite recent news attention to prescription drug safety following the recall of the drug Vioxx, most Americans feel confident about the safety of prescription drugs sold in the United States (80%) and similar shares feel confident in the FDA's ability to ensure this safety (77%).

Views On The Pharmaceutical Industry

Understanding the public's views on the pharmaceutical industry is important because these views can influence policy preferences. Although the public is generally positive about the value of prescription drugs to society, they have much more mixed views of pharmaceutical companies themselves. One-half of adults have an unfavorable opinion of pharmaceutical companies with drug companies ranking ahead of oil and tobacco companies in favorability, but behind many other groups such as hospitals, airlines and banks.

And while nine in ten (91%) adults say that drug companies make an important contribution by researching and developing new drugs, beliefs about the motivation behind drug companies' work are less positive. Seven in ten (70%) agree that drug companies put profits ahead of people, while one-quarter (24%) agree that companies are more concerned with saving lives and improving quality of life than profits.

Ratings of pharmaceutical companies' customer service have been on a decline since 1997 when almost eight in ten (79%) people said drug companies generally do a "good job" serving consumers. In 2004, for first time, more people said drug companies generally do a "bad job" (48%) than a "good job" (44%) of serving consumers.

Views On Drug Costs

The public views pharmaceutical companies as major contributors to rising health care costs. In 2004, seven in ten (69%) adults say that high profits made by drug companies are a "very important" reason behind rising health care costs, and almost a quarter (24%) say drug company profits are the *most* important reason, ahead of malpractice lawsuits (20%) and greed and waste in the system (20%).

Furthermore, an argument sometimes put forth by the pharmaceutical industry that prescription drugs *decrease* overall medical costs by reducing the need for other services

does not resonate with the majority of adults: fewer than a quarter (23%) agree with this view, compared with six in ten (59%) who agree that prescription drugs *increase* overall medical costs (11% do not think prescription drugs affect the nation's medical costs).

Most of the public do not believe that research and development drive the cost of prescription drugs, instead three-quarters (74%) say drug company profit margins or marketing costs are the largest contributors to the price of prescription drugs and eight in ten (81%) say that drug costs are not justified because companies charge more for medications than necessary.

Prescription Drug Advertising

The vast majority of adults (90%) have seen or heard advertisements for prescription medications, but many are skeptical of the information provided. Fewer than two in ten (18%) say they can trust what pharmaceutical companies say in their ads "most of the time", a much smaller share than in 1997 when 33% said they could trust drug company ads "most of the time".

Despite this skepticism, many people are paying attention to these ads. Almost two-thirds (64%) of people who have seen prescription drug ads say that these advertisements generally provide useful information at least some of the time. One-quarter (26%) of people who have seen drug ads say they have talked to a doctor about a medication as a result of seeing an ad and more than half of these people said the doctor prescribed the particular medication.

Government Regulation of the Drug Industry

The public's concerns about prescription drug prices and drug company profits translate into support for many proposals to control drug costs. For example, in 2005, almost two-thirds (65%) of the public say there should be more government regulation of prescription drug prices, and 70% of these people (or 46% of all adults) continue to support more regulation of prices even if it leads to less research and development of new drugs.

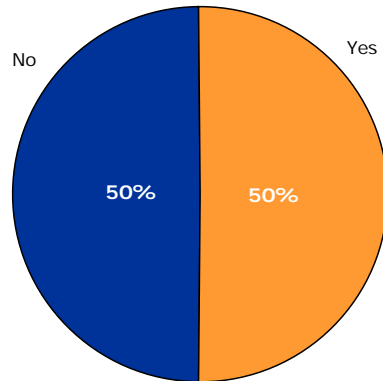
And, in November 2004, nearly three-quarters (73%) of adults supported the idea of allowing Americans to buy prescription drugs imported from Canada and eight in ten (80%) favored changing the law to allow the government to use its buying power to negotiate lower drug prices for people on Medicare. The argument that these policies would lead drug companies to do less research and development does not resonate with most Americans: 70% disagree that importing drugs and 64% disagree that negotiation would affect development of new medications.

Prescription Drug Use

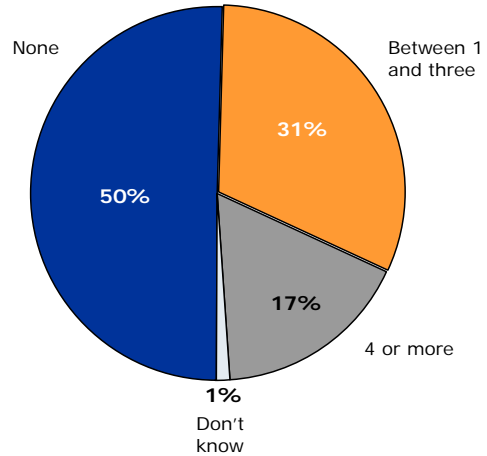
Prescription drugs play a part in daily life for half of adults; 50% say they take prescription medication every day. In December 2004, almost one-third (32%) said they took between 1 and 3 medications daily, and 17% took 4 or more.

Prescription Drug Use

Do you currently take any prescription medicine on a daily basis? (Feb 2005)



How many different prescription drugs do you take on a daily basis? (Dec 2004)



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey*

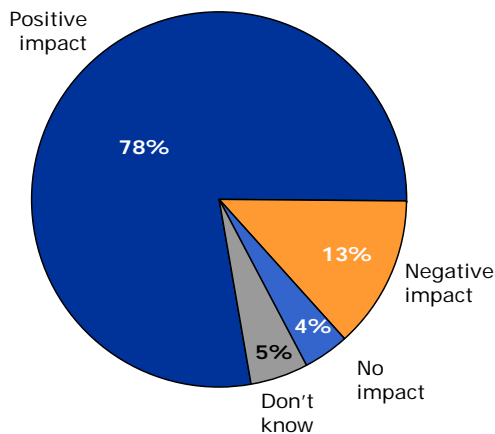
Perceived Value Of Prescription Drugs

Most people believe that prescription drugs developed over the past 20 years have a positive value to society: nearly eight in ten (78%) say that prescription drugs have had a positive impact on the lives of Americans in general and almost six in ten (58%) say that prescription drugs have made a “big difference” in the lives of average people. Just over one in ten (13%) say prescription drugs have had a negative impact on quality of life and 4% say they have had no impact.

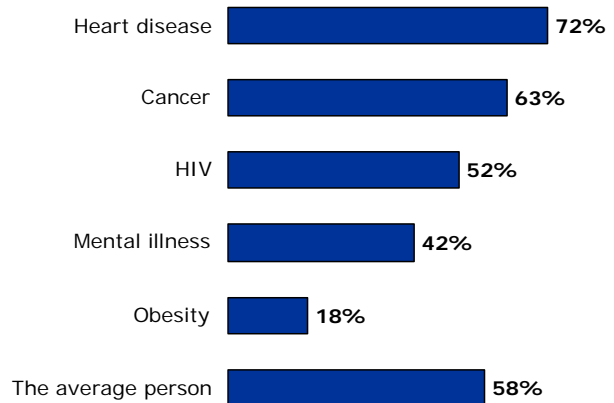
When asked about chronic health conditions, more than seven in ten (72%) say prescription medications have made a “big difference” in the lives of Americans with heart disease, followed by cancer (63%), HIV (52%) and mental illness (42%). Fewer people (18%) say prescription drugs have made a difference in the lives of obese people.

Perceived Value Of Prescription Drugs

What impact do you think new prescription drugs developed over the past 20 years have had on the health and quality of life of Americans in general?



Percent who say prescription drugs have made a “big difference” in the lives of people with...



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted Feb. 3-6, 2005)

Views On Prescription Drug Safety

Currently, over half (56%) of adults say they closely followed news stories about the potential health risks of pain medications such as Vioxx and Celebrex in the news, a somewhat smaller share than said they were closely following these stories in December (66%).

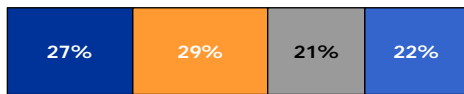
Despite this media attention on prescription drug safety, a large majority (80%) of the public feel at least "somewhat" confident about the safety of prescription drugs sold in the United States, with 28% saying they are "very" confident. About two in ten (18%) say they are "not too" or "not at all" confident in the safety of medications sold in the U.S.

Views On Prescription Drug Safety

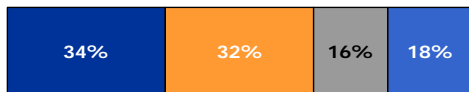
How closely did you follow this story...



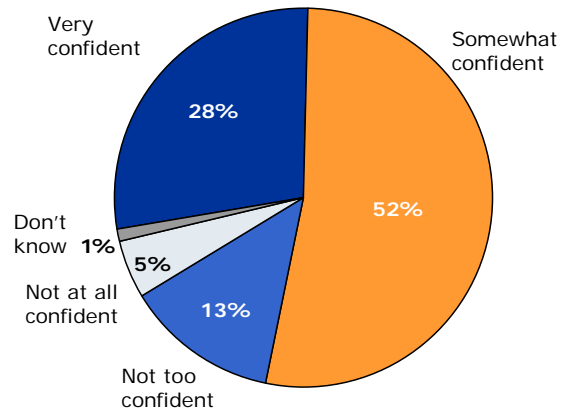
The ongoing discussions about the potential health risks of pain medications such as Vioxx and Celebrex (Feb 05)



Ongoing discussions about prescription drug safety following the recall of the drug Vioxx (Dec 04)



Overall, how confident are you in the safety of prescription drugs sold in the United States? (Feb 05)



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report* surveys

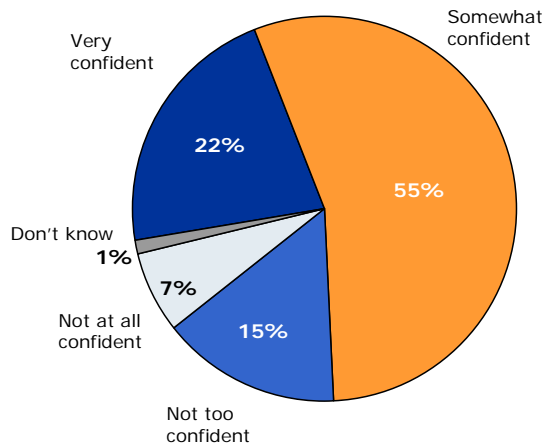
Views On Drug Safety And The FDA

About three-quarters (77%) of adults say they are confident in the FDA's ability to ensure the safety of prescription drugs in the U.S., though more of these people say they are "somewhat" confident (55%) than "very" confident (22%). Just over two in ten (22%) say they are "not too" or "not at all" confident in the FDA.

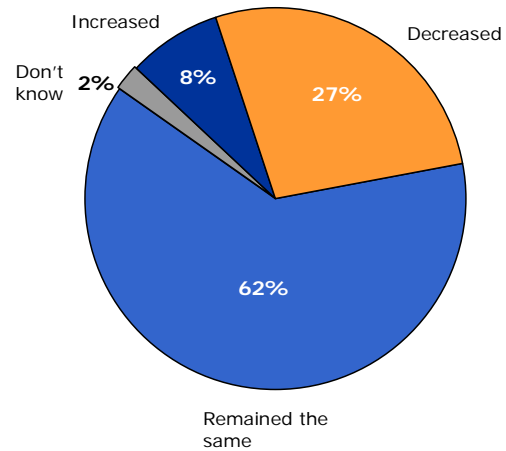
The recent news attention on drug safety following the recall of the drug Vioxx calls into question whether the public's view of the FDA has changed. When asked about the past few years, six in ten (62%) say that their confidence in the FDA's ability to ensure safety has "remained the same", although just over one-quarter (27%) say their confidence has decreased (8% say their confidence has increased).

Views On Drug Safety And The FDA

How confident are you in the Food and Drug Administration's ability to make sure prescription drugs for sale in the United States are safe?



In the past few years, has your confidence in the FDA's ability to ensure the safety of prescription drugs in the United States...



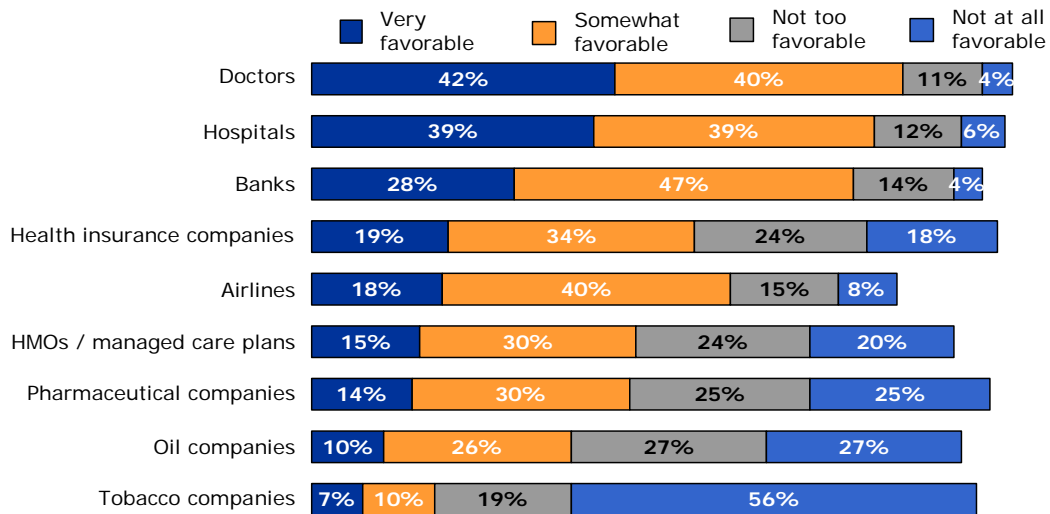
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted Feb. 3-6, 2005)

Views Of Pharmaceutical Companies

Although the public is generally positive about the value of prescription drugs to society, they have much more mixed views of pharmaceutical companies themselves. More than four in ten (44%) say they have a “very” (14%) or “somewhat” (30%) favorable opinion of drug companies, while one-half (50%) have an unfavorable view. When compared with other industries and groups, drug companies rank ahead of oil companies (36% have a “very” or “somewhat” favorable opinion) and tobacco companies (17%), but behind many other groups. At the top of the list, large majorities say they have a “very” or “somewhat” favorable opinion of doctors (82%), hospitals (78%) and banks (75%).

Views Of Pharmaceutical Companies

Please tell me if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of each of the following...*



* Don't know responses not shown

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted Feb. 3-6, 2005)

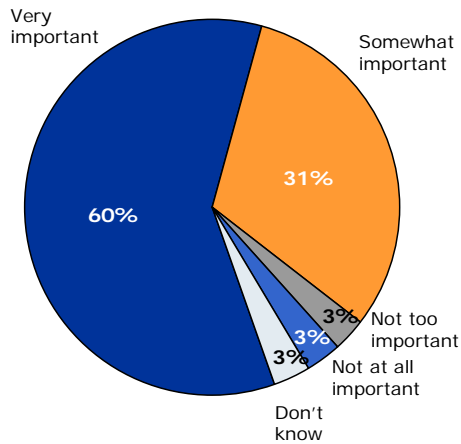
Pharmaceutical Companies' Role In Society

Despite mixed views on pharmaceutical companies in general, nine in ten (91%) adults say that drug companies make a "very" (60%) or "somewhat" (31%) important contribution by researching and developing new drugs. Just over one in twenty (6%) say this contribution is "not too" or "not at all" important.

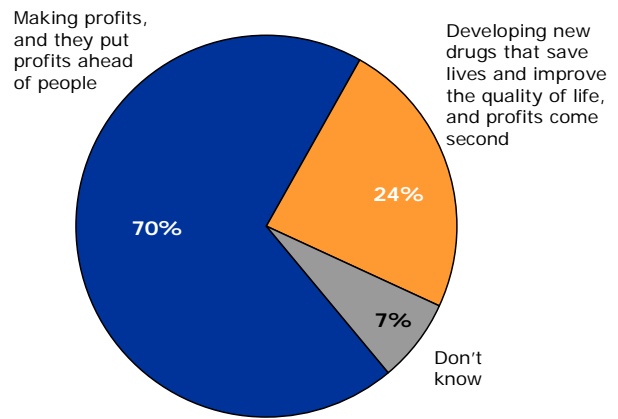
However, attitudes about the motivation behind drug companies' work are less positive. Seven in ten (70%) say drug companies put profits ahead of people, while about a quarter (24%) say that drug companies are most concerned with developing new drugs that save lives and improve quality of life and that profits come second.

Pharmaceutical Companies' Role In Society

How important a contribution do pharmaceutical companies make by researching and developing new drugs and treatments?



Which comes closer to your own view: Pharmaceutical companies are most concerned about...



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted Feb. 3-6, 2005)

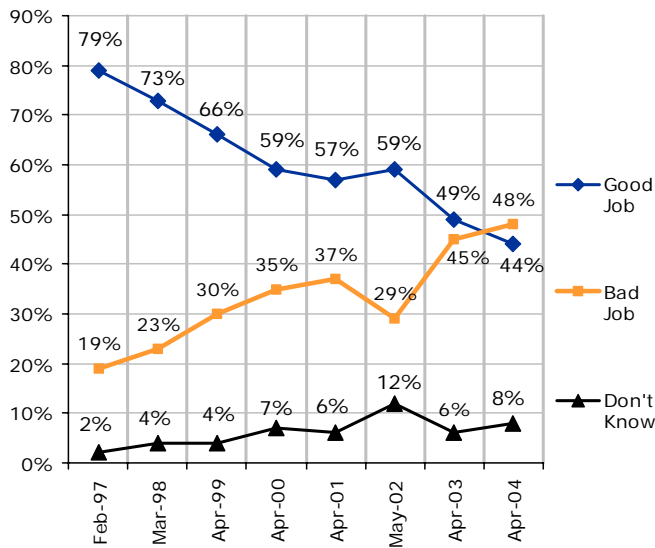
Views Of Pharmaceutical Companies And Customer Service

According to trend data from Harris Interactive, ratings of pharmaceutical companies' customer service have been on a decline since 1997. The percentage of Americans who say that pharmaceutical companies do a "good job" of serving their consumers has steadily decreased from a high of 79% in 1997 to a low of 44% in 2004. In 2004, for the first time in the 7-year period, more people said drug companies generally do a "bad job" (48%) than a "good job" (44%) of serving consumers.

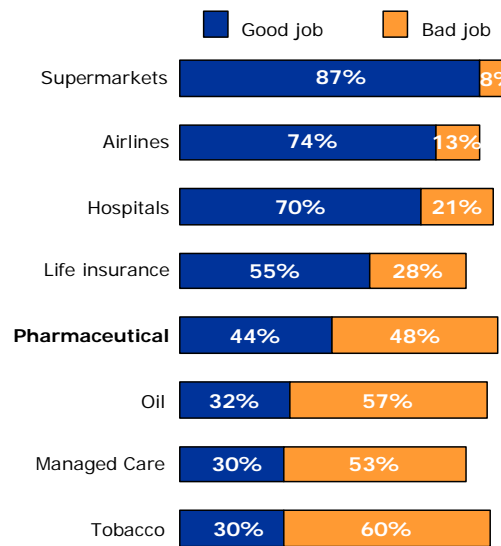
Compared with other industries, the share of people who say pharmaceutical companies do a "good job" serving customers (44%) is higher than for oil companies (32%), HMOs (30%), and tobacco companies (30%), but lower than the share who say life insurance companies (55%), hospitals (70%), airlines (74%) and supermarkets (87%) are doing a "good job" serving consumers.

Views of Pharmaceutical Companies and Customer Service

Do you think pharmaceutical and drug companies generally do a good job or bad job serving their consumers?



Ratings of customer service in other industries.. (Apr-04)*



*Don't know responses not shown

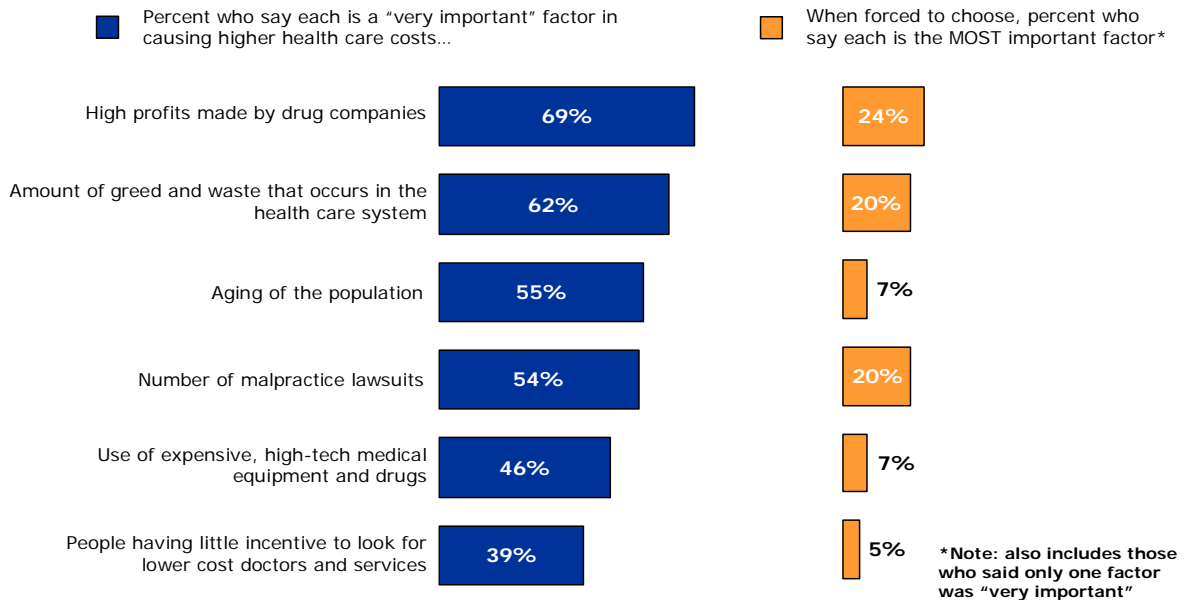
Source: Harris Interactive Polls

Pharmaceutical Companies And Rising Health Care Costs

When asked about potential reasons for rising health care costs, drug company profits top the list. Nearly seven in ten (69%) say high profits made by drug companies are a “very important” reason for higher health care costs, followed closely by the amount of greed and waste in the health care system (62%). More than half believe the aging of the population (55%) and the number of malpractice lawsuits (54%) are “very important” contributors to rising health care costs. Fewer than four in ten (39%) adults believe that people having little incentive to look for lower cost services is a “very” important factor in causing higher health care costs.

When asked to choose the most important factor, almost one-quarter (24%) say drug company profits are the most important reason behind rising health care costs.

Pharmaceutical Companies And Rising Health Care Costs



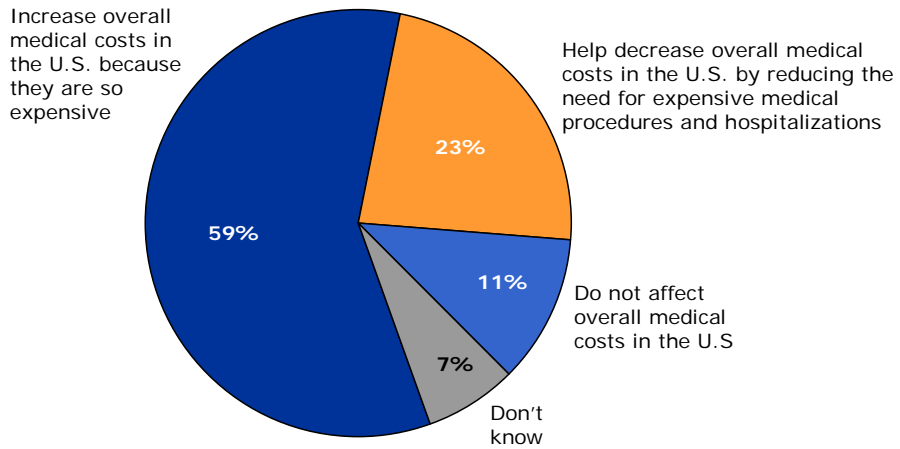
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted October 14 – 17, 2004)

Prescription Drugs And Overall Medical Costs

An argument sometimes put forth by the pharmaceutical industry that prescription drugs *decrease* overall medical costs by reducing the need for other services does not resonate with the majority of adults: fewer than a quarter (23%) agree with this view, compared with six in ten (59%) who agree that prescription drugs *increase* overall medical costs (11% do not think prescription drugs affect the nation's medical costs).

Prescription Drugs And Overall Medical Costs

Which statement comes closer to your opinion: Prescription drugs...



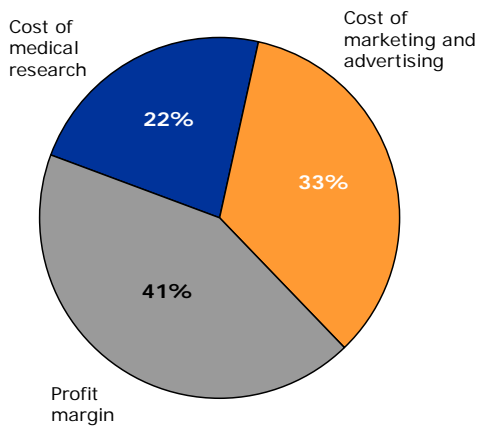
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted Feb. 3-6, 2005)

Beliefs About Prescription Drug Costs

Most Americans do not believe that research and development drive the cost of prescription drugs. About three quarters of Americans (74%) believe that drug company profit margins (41%) or marketing costs (33%) are the largest contributors to the price of prescription drugs. Just over two in ten (22%) say that the cost of medical research is the main contributor. Furthermore, eight in ten (81%) agree that drug costs are not justified because companies charge more for medications than necessary, while one in seven (14%) believe drug prices are justified to pay for research and development.

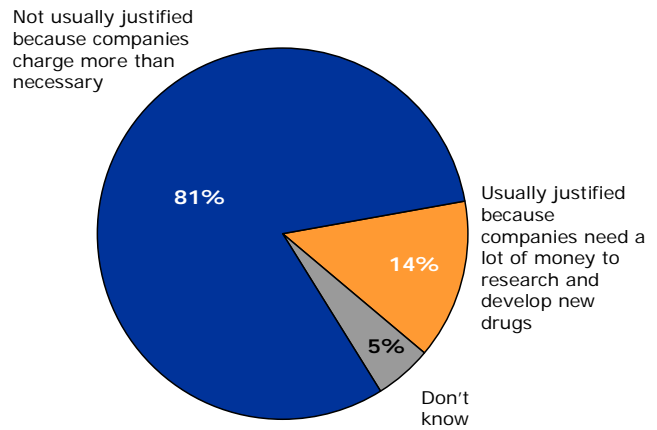
Beliefs About Prescription Drug Costs

Which of the following do you think contributes most to the price of prescription drugs?



Source: Harris Interactive (conducted August 10-15, 2004)

Which of these statements comes closer to your opinion: Prescription and over the counter drug costs are...



Source: CBS News (conducted September 20-22, 2004)

Are Prescription Drugs Worth The Cost?

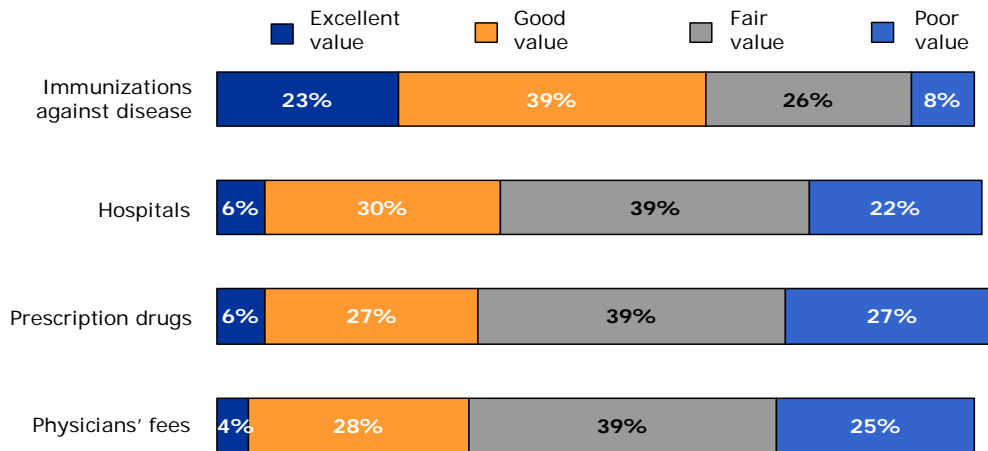
One-third of the public (33%) say that consumers get an “excellent” or “good” value for the dollar from prescription drugs, while two-thirds (66%) say consumers only get a “fair” or “poor” value for the dollar from prescription medications.

Views are similar for hospitalization and physicians’ fees: around one-third say these expenses are an “excellent” or “good” value (36% hospitalization, 32% doctors’ fees) and nearly two-thirds feel they are only a “fair” or “poor” value (hospitalization 61%, doctors’ fees 64%).

In contrast, nearly two-thirds (62%) say consumers get an “excellent” or “good” value on the dollar from immunizations against disease, while about one-third (34%) say immunizations give a “fair” or “poor” value.

Are Prescription Drugs Worth The Cost?

Percent who say consumers get excellent or good value for the dollar from each of the following...*



*Don't know responses not shown

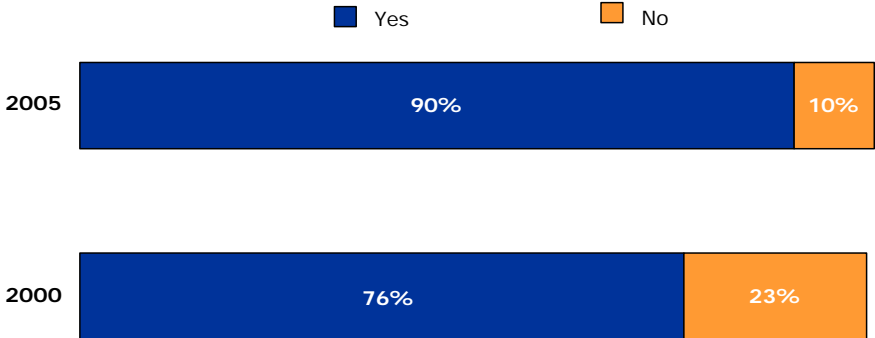
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted Feb. 3-6, 2005)

Prescription Drug Advertisements

In 2005, most adults (90%) have seen or heard advertisements for prescription medications, and this share has increased since 2000 when just over three-quarters (76%) said they had seen drug ads.

Prescription Drug Advertisements

Have you seen or heard any advertisements for prescription drugs?



2005 Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted Feb. 3-6, 2005)

2000 Source: Kaiser/AHRQ *Update on the Role of Quality Information Survey* (conducted Jul 31-Oct 9, 2000)

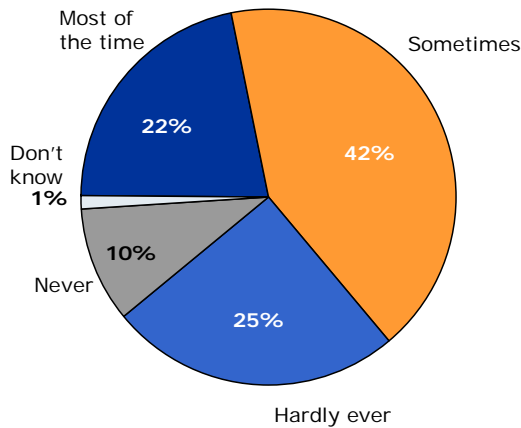
How Useful Are Prescription Drug Ads?

Almost two-thirds (64%) of people who have seen prescription drug ads say that these advertisements provide useful information “most” (22%) or “some” (42%) of the time. Just over one-third (35%) say the information in ads is “hardly ever” or “never” useful.

In 2000, views were mixed on how well television ads present specific information about prescription drugs. Almost six in ten (58%) said ads do an “excellent” or “good” job explaining the potential benefits of the drug, while four in ten (40%) said they do a “fair” or “poor” job. About half (51%) said ads do an “excellent” or “good” job explaining the condition the drug is designed to treat and slightly fewer said the same about ads’ explanation of potential side effects of the medication (45%).

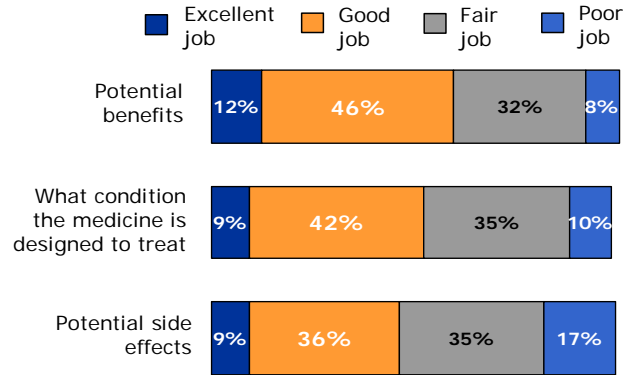
How Useful Are Prescription Drug Ads?

(Asked of 90% who have seen drug ads) Do you think advertisements by pharmaceutical companies provide useful information...



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted Feb. 3-6, 2005)

Please rate the job television ads for prescription medicines do in telling you about each of the following...*



*Don't know responses not shown

Source: Kaiser/Harvard/Lehrer *Prescription Drugs Survey* (conducted July 26-September 5, 2000)

Trust In Prescription Drug Ads

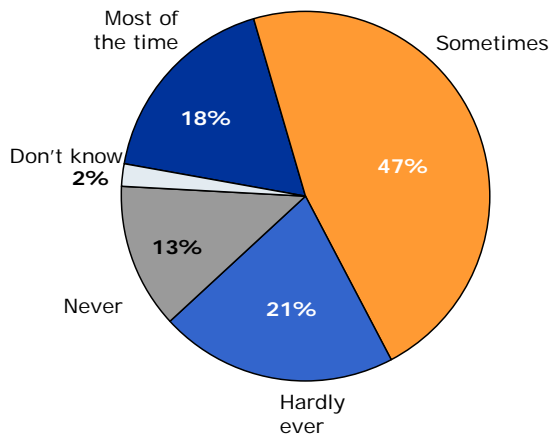
In 2005, just under two in ten (18%) adults say they can trust what pharmaceutical companies have to say in their advertisements “most of the time” and almost half (47%) say they can trust drug company ads “sometimes”. One third (34%) say they can “hardly ever” or “never” trust these ads.

Compared with other industries and groups, the share of the public who say they can trust pharmaceutical companies’ ads “most of the time” (18%) is about the same as for health insurance companies (17%) and HMOs (16%), but higher than the share who say they can trust lawyers’ (11%) and politicians’ (6%) ads “most of the time”. Larger shares say they can trust what doctors (45%) and hospitals (37%) say in their advertisements “most of the time”.

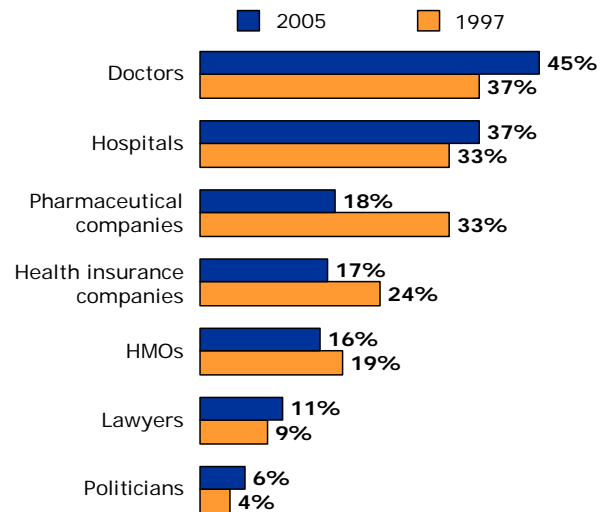
The percent of adults who say they can trust what drug companies say in their ads (18%) has decreased by almost half since 1997 when one-third (33%) said they could trust these ads “most of the time”. Trust has decreased slightly since 1997 for health insurance companies (24% in 1997 to 17% in 2005) and increased somewhat for doctors’ advertisements (37% in 1997 to 45% in 2005).

Trust In Prescription Drug Ads

How often do you think you can trust what pharmaceutical companies have to say in their advertisements? (Feb 2005)



Percent who say they can trust what the following groups have to say in their advertisements “most of the time”...



Sources: 2005: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted Feb. 3-6, 2005)
 1997: Kaiser/Harvard *Views on Managed Care Survey* (conducted Aug. 22-Sep. 23, 1997)

Outcome Of Talking To Doctor As Result Of Ads

Nearly one-quarter (23%) of adults say they have seen drug ads and talked to a doctor about a specific prescription medication as a result of an advertisement.

The most common outcomes of talking to a doctor about a specific drug are a recommendation for lifestyle change (57% of those who talked to a doctor as a result of a drug ad or 13% of the total population) and getting a prescription for the medication (52%, or 12% of total). Somewhat smaller shares say the doctor recommended a different prescription (44%, 10% of total) or an over-the-counter medicine (34%, 8% of total) and about a quarter (26%, 6% of total) say the doctor recommended no medication.

Outcome Of Talking To Doctor As Result Of Ads

Among the 23% who saw advertisements for prescription drugs and have talked to a doctor as a result of seeing an ad: Percent who said the doctor did one or more of the following...

Percent of total population who saw advertisements for prescription drugs, talked to a doctor as a result of seeing an ad and said the doctor did one or more of the following...



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted Feb. 3-6, 2005)

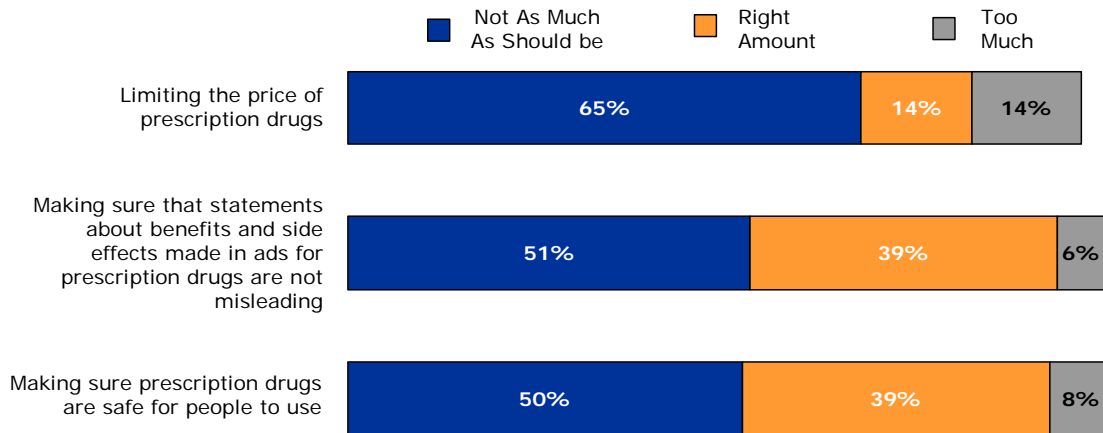
Attitudes About Government Regulation Of Drugs

In terms of government regulation of the pharmaceutical industry, almost two-thirds (65%) say there should be more regulation limiting the price of prescription drugs, and about half say there should be more regulation of drug advertising (51%) and drug safety (50%). These shares have increased since 2000 when just over one-third said there should be more regulation of drug advertising (37%) and drug safety (36%) (data not shown).

In comparison, 14% say there is currently the right amount of government regulation of prescription drug prices, but many more are satisfied with regulation of drug advertising (39% say "right amount") and drug safety (39%).

Attitudes About Government Regulation Of Drugs

For each of the following areas, is there currently too much government regulation, not as much as there should be, or about the right amount of regulation?



*Don't know responses not shown

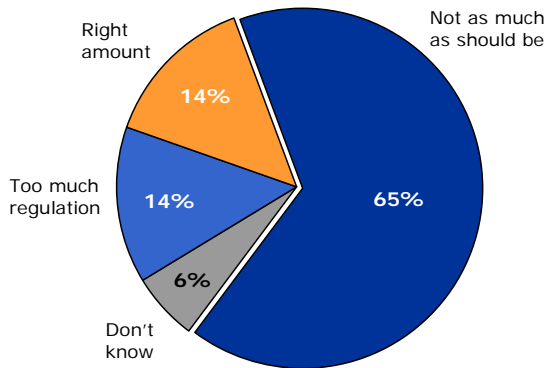
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted Feb. 3-6, 2005)

Government Regulation Of Drug Prices

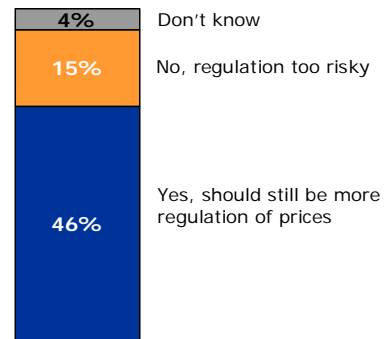
Among the group who say there should be more government regulation of drug prices, seven in ten (70% or 46% of all adults) said there should be more regulation even if it means pharmaceutical companies do less research and development of new drugs. In contrast, this argument swayed almost one-quarter (23% or 15% of the total) who say there should NOT be more government regulation of prices if it impacted future development of drugs.

Government Regulation Of Drug Prices

Is there currently too much government regulation, not as much as there should be, or about the right amount of regulation around limiting the price of prescription drugs?



Asked of the 65% who said there is not as much government regulation of drug prices as there should be: What if you heard that limiting the prices of prescription drugs might lead to LESS research and development of new drugs since drug companies would be making smaller profits. Would you still think there should be more regulation of the prices charged for prescription drugs?



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey* (conducted Feb. 3-6, 2005)

Buying Prescription Drugs From Canada

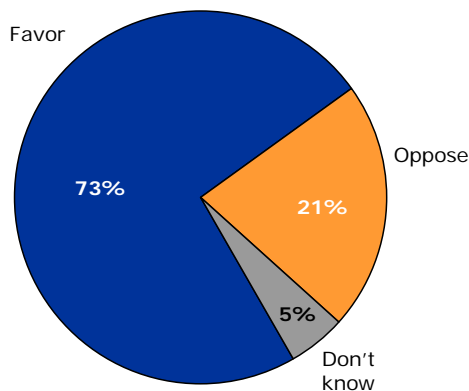
A majority (73%) of adults support the idea of Congress allowing Americans to buy prescription drugs imported from Canada; just over two in ten (21%) oppose this proposal.

Nearly seven in ten (69%) see importation as a way to make medicines more affordable without sacrificing quality, while just under a quarter (24%) disagree with this view. Almost six in ten (57%) do not think importing drugs from Canada will expose Americans to unsafe medications, although nearly four in ten (37%) believe imported drugs may pose a safety risk.

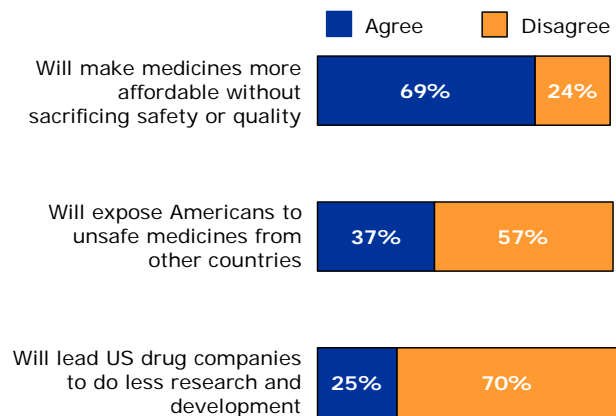
The argument that importing drugs from Canada will lead drug companies to do less research and development does not resonate with most Americans (70% disagree with this argument, while one-quarter (25%) agree).

Buying Prescription Drugs From Canada

Do you favor or oppose Congress changing the law to allow Americans to buy prescription drugs imported from Canada if they think they can get a lower price?



Percent saying they agree/disagree that allowing Americans to buy prescription drugs imported from Canada...



Source: Kaiser/Harvard *Health Care Agenda for the New Congress* (conducted November 4 – 28, 2004)

Government Negotiating With Drug Companies

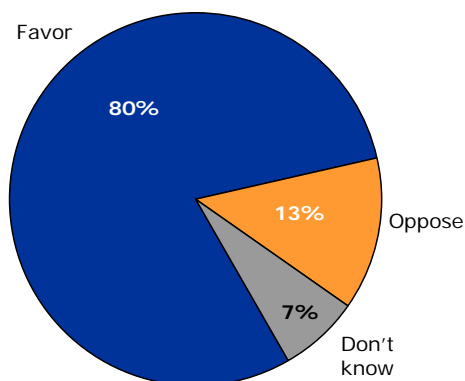
Eight in ten (80%) adults support the idea of Congress allowing the federal government to use its buying power to negotiate with drug companies for lower prices on prescription drugs for people on Medicare. Fewer than one in seven (13%) oppose this idea.

Nearly eight in ten (77%) see government negotiation of prices as a way to make medicines more affordable for people on Medicare and almost seven in ten (67%) say this plan makes sense because the government already negotiates prices for other groups such as the Defense Department and Veteran's Administration. The public is more mixed on whether such negotiation would mean government price controls: just over half (54%) agree that it would mean price controls, while four in ten (40%) disagree.

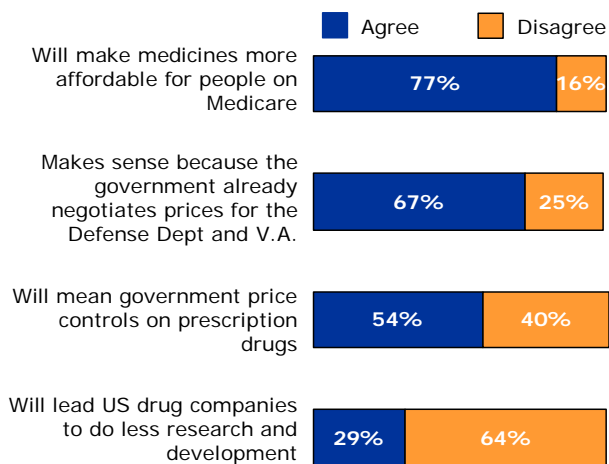
The argument that allowing the government to negotiate drug prices will lead drug companies to do less research and development does not seem to resonate with most Americans: nearly two-thirds (64%) disagree while fewer than three in ten (29%) agree.

Government Negotiating With Drug Companies

Do you favor or oppose Congress changing the law to allow the federal government to use its buying power to negotiate with drug companies to try to get a lower price for prescription drugs for people on Medicare?



Percent saying they agree/disagree that allowing the federal government to negotiate with drug companies for lower prices...



Source: Kaiser/Harvard *Health Care Agenda for the New Congress* (conducted November 4 – 28, 2004)

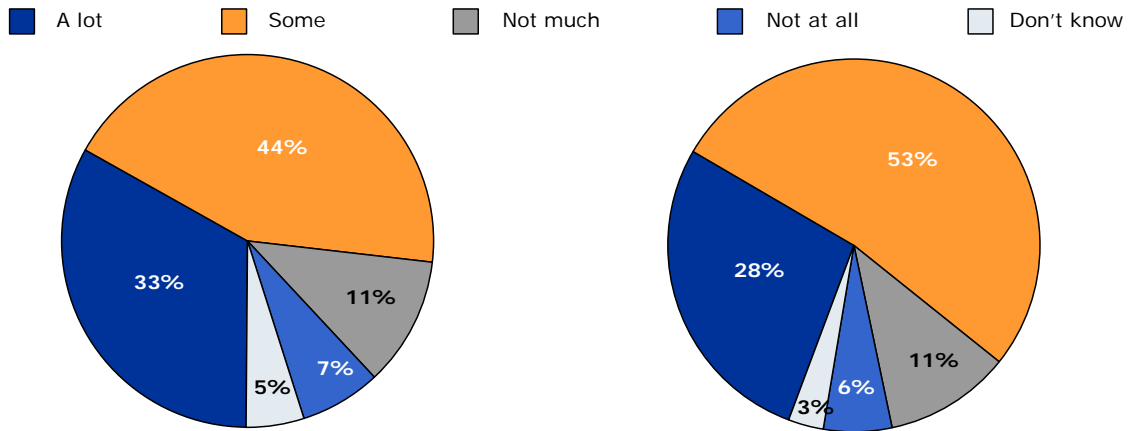
Perceived Impact Of Importation And Negotiation

Behind the strong support for measures such as prescription drug importation and government price negotiation is the belief that these policies would lower drug costs in the U.S. Around eight in ten say that importing prescription drugs from Canada (77%) and allowing the federal government to negotiate prices with drug companies (81%) would help to reduce prescription drug costs “a lot” or “some”. Fewer than two in ten disagree with these views, saying importation (18%) and negotiation (17%) would reduce costs “not much” or “not at all”.

Perceived Impact Of Importation And Negotiation

If Congress changed the law to allow Americans to buy prescription drugs imported from Canada, how much do you think this would help in reducing prescription drug costs in the U.S.?

If Congress changed the law to allow the federal government to negotiate with drug companies, how much do you think this would help in reducing prescription drug costs in the U.S.?



Source: Kaiser/Harvard *Health Care Agenda for the New Congress* (conducted November 4 – 28, 2004)