

A thought leadership and advisory company working at the intersection of healthcare strategy, economics, capital formation and transformation.

BURDA ON HEALTHCARE

The Healthcare Affordability Crisis Is No Hoax

By David Burda
January 13, 2026

As we start another new year, it's time again to ask whether healthcare has gotten more affordable for consumers. We'll let the numbers from several credible sources answer the question.



OUT-OF-POCKET HEALTHCARE SPENDING UP 7.2%

In December 2024, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) released its latest annual [report](#) on actual, or historic, national health expenditures. CMS said personal healthcare expenditures jumped 9.4% in 2023 to about \$4.1 trillion. That's nearly double the 4.9% increase in 2022. Meanwhile, out-of-pocket healthcare spending by

consumers rose 7.2% in 2023 to about \$505.7 billion. That's up from a 6.9% increase in out-of-pocket healthcare spending by consumers in 2022.

Is healthcare becoming more affordable for consumers? According to this CMS report, the answer is no.

62% HAD TO BORROW MONEY TO PAY MEDICAL BILLS

In March 2025, West Health-Gallup released the [results](#) of a survey of nearly 3,600 U.S. adults age 18 or older. Sixty-two percent — nearly two out of every three respondents — said they or a member of their household had to borrow money to pay for medical care in the previous 12 months. The total amount of money they said they had to borrow was about \$74 billion. Fourteen percent said they had to borrow \$5,000 or more. Fifty-eight percent said they were at least somewhat concerned that a major medical event could send them into debt.

Is healthcare becoming more affordable for consumers? According to this West Health-Gallup poll, the answer is no.



11% ARE 'COST DESPERATE' WHEN IT COMES TO MEDICAL CARE

In April 2025, West Health-Gallup released the [results](#) of a separate survey of nearly 6,300 U.S. adults age 18 or older. The percentage of respondents whom the survey defined as "cost desperate" when it comes to medical care hit 11% in 2024, up from 8% in 2023. The survey defined "cost desperate" as individuals who "lack access to quality, affordable care and have recently

been unable to pay for needed care and medicine." Further, 35% of the respondents said they would not be able to afford medical care if they needed it, up from 31% in 2023.

Is healthcare becoming more affordable for consumers? According to this separate West Health-Gallup poll, the answer is no.

42% GOT SICKER BY SKIPPING CARE BECAUSE OF COST

Also in April 2025, Imagine360, a health plan for self-funded employers, released the results of a [survey](#) of 2,500 U.S. adults ages 18 through 64. Thirty-eight percent of the survey respondents said they skipped or postponed necessary medical care or medications because of the cost. Of those, 42% said their medical condition got worse because of it.

Is healthcare becoming more affordable for consumers? According to this survey by Imagine360, the answer is no.



23% SKIPPED MEDICATION DOSE TO SAVE MONEY



In November 2025, West Health-Gallup released a [report](#) on consumers' experiences with the healthcare system in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The report is based on a survey of nearly 20,000 U.S. adults age 18 or older. Nationally, 30% of the respondents said they avoided a doctor-recommended procedure, lab test or evaluation over the previous 12 months because they couldn't afford the cost. Twenty-three percent said they or a family member skipped a dose or pill of prescription medication to save money over the previous 12 months. And 22% said healthcare costs were a major financial burden for their household.

Is healthcare becoming more affordable for consumers? According to this West Health-Gallup report, the answer is no.

MORE THAN 11% EXPERIENCING 'CATASTROPHIC' MEDICAL COST BURDEN

In December 2025, seven physicians, including several nationally known government-run, single-payer advocates, published a [study](#) in JAMA Internal Medicine. The study is based on a four-year longitudinal survey of nearly 13,000 patients. Over the four-year period, 24.7% of the patients reported experiencing a healthcare cost burden, and 11.2% reported experiencing a catastrophic healthcare cost burden. The researchers defined a healthcare cost burden as spending more than 10% of their family income on medical care. A catastrophic healthcare cost burden meant spending more than 40% of their family income on medical care. Further, 26.7% said they skipped medical care because of the cost or because of their family's cost burden.

Is healthcare becoming more affordable for consumers? According to this peer-reviewed study in JAMA Internal Medicine, the answer is no.

I could go on, but you get the point. The healthcare affordability crisis is no hoax despite the incessant lying by Cheeto Jesus and his healthcare flunkies. Just ask consumers. Any consumer.

Healthcare industry leaders know the truth. The question is whether they're brave enough to say so and actually do something about it.

It's well past time to build a better health system for consumers. Let's do this in 2026.



AUTHOR



David Burda began covering healthcare in 1983 and hasn't stopped since. Dave writes this monthly column "Burda on Healthcare," contributes weekly blog posts, manages our weekly newsletter 4sight Friday, and hosts our weekly Roundup podcast. Dave believes that healthcare is a business like any other business, and customers — patients — are king. If you do what's right for patients, good business results will follow.

Dave's personal experiences with the healthcare system both as a patient and family caregiver have shaped his point of view. It's also been shaped by covering the industry for 40 years as a reporter and editor. He worked at Modern Healthcare for 25 years, the last 11 as editor.

Prior to Modern Healthcare, he did stints at the American Medical Record Association (now AHIMA) and the American Hospital Association. After Modern Healthcare, he wrote a monthly column for Twin Cities Business explaining healthcare trends to a business audience, and he developed and executed content marketing plans for leading healthcare corporations as the editorial director for healthcare strategies at MSP Communications.

When he's not reading and writing about healthcare, Dave spends his time riding the trails of DuPage County, IL, on his bike, tending his vegetable garden and daydreaming about being a lobster fisherman in Maine. He lives in Wheaton, IL, with his lovely wife of 40 years and his three children, none of whom want to be journalists or lobster fishermen.

Visit 4sight.com/insights to read more from David Burda.