



GEORGIA

2020 HEALTH CARE LEGISLATIVE CANDIDATE GUIDE

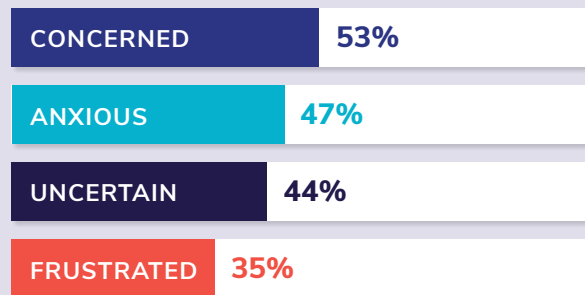


Health care remains one of the [most important problems facing America](#)ⁱ. [Voters are concerned about access to and the cost for health care and insurance](#)ⁱⁱ. See page 4 for Georgia-specific data.

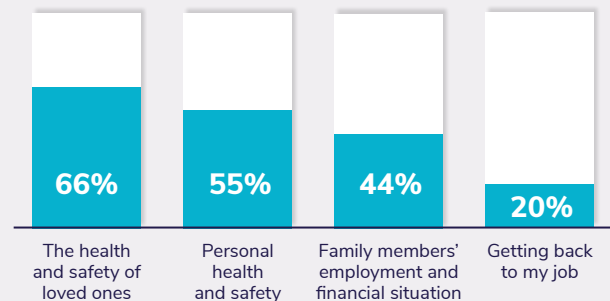
Health Care During the COVID Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated the need for effective solutions that address both the immediate challenges and the long-term gaps in our health care systems to ensure Georgians can access quality health care they can afford. Americans are feeling a **mix of emotions** related to the pandemic, and **those emotions are overwhelmingly negative**.*

Q: Which of the following words best describe your feelings when it comes to things going on in your life today?



Across the board, when asked to rank different concerns, the public is deeply concerned about their **health and financial wellbeing**, describing an interconnection of these parts of their life and broader society.



In addition, the pandemic has illuminated deficiencies of our health care system.

- ★ People feel that the **U.S. was caught unprepared** to handle the pandemic and our losses have been greater than those of other countries.
- ★ People **blame government for the inadequate pandemic response, not health care systems**.

*National survey conducted May 1-3, 2020, carries a confidence interval of 90%, with a margin of error between 2-4%. It included a sample size of 2,156 respondents, with oversamples for African American women, Republican-identified men and women, and Republican-identified high school-educated white men. Health status of respondents was not collected or oversampled. These findings have been compared with findings from our ongoing listening effort which began before the pandemic.



Key Messages for Candidates:

- Acknowledge the moment:** “Our country is at a pivotal moment. The pandemic, economic recession, and national discussion on race have created a renewed call for action. They have also magnified the critical problems that exist in our health care system.”
- Take an active stance:** “It is long past time to examine our systems and address gaps that have existed for decades. We must find solutions and common ground to build a health care system that serves everyone.”
- Commit to prioritize people’s needs:** “I will put people’s health care needs first and I’m already formalizing the ways I gather input and work with community and business leaders to put effective solutions in place.”
- Commit to both addressing disparities and finding common ground:** “The health care system, as it’s currently structured, isn’t working for far too many. I will work to address the lack of fairness and shared needs to build a health care system that works for all of us.”



About United States of Care

United States of Care is a nonpartisan nonprofit working to ensure every person in America has access to quality, affordable health care regardless of health status, social need or income. USofCare works with elected officials and other state partners across the country by connecting with our extensive [health care expert network](#) and other state leaders; providing technical policy assistance; and providing strategic communications and political support. Contact USofCare at help@usofcare.org

Promising State Policies to Respond to People's Health Care Needs

In the wake of COVID, policymakers have a critical opportunity to enact solutions to meet their constituents' short- and long-term health care needs. Shared needs and expectations are emerging in response to the pandemic, including the desire for solutions that:

→ Ensure individuals are able to provide for themselves and their loved ones, especially those worried about the financial impact of the pandemic.

- Create consumer assistance programs to help people facing disruptions in coverage navigate their health care options.
- Protect against high out-of-pocket costs.
- Ensure [insulin is affordable](#)ⁱⁱⁱ for people who may be at risk of losing their coverage and are at greater risk for serious COVID complications.

→ Ensure a reliable health care system that is fully resourced to support essential workers and available when it is needed, both now and after the pandemic.

- Ensure safe workplaces for front-line health care workers and essential workers and increase the capacity to maintain a quality health care workforce.
- Ensure that hospitals and health care providers, particularly in [rural](#)^{iv} or distressed areas, can sustainably care for their communities.

→ Ensure a health care system that cares for everyone, including people who are vulnerable and those who were already struggling before the pandemic hit.

- Adopt an integrated approach to people's overall health by coordinating people's physical health, behavioral health and social service needs.
- Establish coordinated data collection to quickly address needs and gaps in care, especially in vulnerable communities.

→ Provide accurate information and clear recommendations on the virus and how to stay healthy and safe.

- Build and maintain capacity for detailed and [effective testing and surveillance](#)^v of the virus.
- Resource and implement [contact tracing](#)^{vi} by utilizing existing programs in state health departments, pursuing public-private partnerships, or app-based solutions while also ensuring strong privacy protections.

Expand mental health services and community workforce to meet increased need.

- Enforce and strengthen mental health parity laws to ensure behavioral health care services are covered the same as other health care services.
- Require insurers to cover behavioral health and SUD care services without cost-sharing or referrals, encourage care integration for complex needs, and radically expand access to emergency overdose products.
- Expand distanced or mobile services staffed by mental health professionals (EX: counseling text lines, "Mobile Addiction Service Vans").
- Connect students with crisis and care hotlines, and fund remote supportive programming in students' native languages.
- Expand free mental health care resources, including tele-mental health, for those in jail or prison. Implement reentry programs that connect people leaving incarceration with medical coverage programs and social services.

For more detailed recommendations, see USofCare's:

- [Call to Action: State Legislative Recommendations to Address COVID-19](#)^{vii} and
- [Preparedness Handbook to Plan, Prevent and Prepare for COVID-19 Surges](#)^{viii}.





Georgia by the Numbers

The pandemic is showing different impacts for people across Georgia that point to larger challenges individuals and families are grappling.



As of June 26, 2020, a [disproportionate number of those infected](#) (66%) and those dying (55%) in Georgia are Black, Indigenous, and people of color, who make up only 48% of the state's population.^{ix}



Seniors are at greatest risk. [As of June 26, 2020 85% COVID deaths in Georgia were among patients aged 60 or older.](#)^{xiii}



[Access to health care in rural areas](#) has only become more challenging during the pandemic and will likely have lasting impacts on rural communities.^x For example, five counties in rural, southeast Georgia [depend](#)^{xi} on Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital in Albany, which has only 50 ICU beds. A recent [Georgia-based study](#)^{xii} stresses that the rural populations which depend on these sparse beds are at high-risk due to relatively higher age and lower income.



The economic fallout of the pandemic has caused [nearly 27 million Americans to lose their employer-based health insurance.](#)^{xiv} An estimated 12.7 million would be eligible for Medicaid; 8.4 million could qualify for subsidies on exchanges; leaving 5.7 million who would need to cover the cost of health insurance policies ([COBRA](#)^{xv} policies averaged \$7,188 for a single person to \$20,576 for a family of four) or remain uninsured.



HEALTH COVERAGE:

- Georgia has the second-highest uninsured rate in the United States ([14% in 2018](#)).^{xvi}
- Georgia's [unemployment rate jumped to 12.6% in April](#) on a seasonally adjusted basis. It was 7.6% in June, which likely has [severed tens of thousands of Georgians from their employer sponsored insurance.](#)^{xvii}
- The COVID pandemic is drastically impacting insurance coverage for Georgians -- [133,000 Georgians enrolled in Medicaid](#) in between May and April of 2020 alone.^{xviii}



COVID: Data about the virus changes on a daily basis. This is a collection of resources to inform ongoing responses to COVID-19.

- Georgia's first recorded case of COVID-19 was on [March 2, 2020](#).^{xix}
- Governor Kemp declared a public health emergency [March 14, 2020](#)^{xx} and [enacted measures](#)^{xxi} to control the spread of the virus and provide support to Georgians.
- Georgia's [COVID-19 Dashboard](#) tracks the state's infection, hospitalization, and death rates by age, sex, and race/ethnicity.^{xxii}
- [COVID Exit Strategy](#) tracks state progress toward a reduction in symptoms and cases, health system readiness, and increased testing.^{xxiii}
- The Georgia General Assembly has passed a bill to [protect nursing home residents](#)^{xxiv} and to [extend COVID-related unemployment benefits](#).^{xxv} However, long-term solutions for the state's recovery are needed.



BUDGET:

- In late April, it was [projected](#) that Georgia would face a \$4 billion deficit over the next 15 months.^{xxvi}

SOURCES:

- ⁱ https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2020-06/2020_reuters_tracking_-_core_political_presidential_approval_tracker_06_17_2020.pdf
- ⁱⁱ <https://www.kff.org/report-section/kff-health-tracking-poll-early-april-2020-the-impact-of-coronavirus-on-life-in-america-politics-findings/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ <https://unitedstatesofcare.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/USofCare-MEMO-%E2%80%93-State-Action-on-Insulin-Pricing.pdf>
- ^{iv} <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/reforming-rural-health-care-in-the-era-of-covid-19/>
- ^v <https://unitedstatesofcare.org/covid-19/state-covid-19-testing-landscape/>
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- ^{xix} <https://dph.georgia.gov/press-releases/2020-03-02/gov-kemp-officials-confirm-two-cases-covid-19-georgia>
- ^{xx} <https://gov.georgia.gov/press-releases/2020-03-16/kemp-public-health-emergency-georgia-effective-march-14-2020>
- ^{xxi} <https://dph.georgia.gov/preparing-and-responding-covid-19>
- ^{xxii} <https://dph.georgia.gov/covid-19-daily-status-report>
- ^{xxiii} <https://www.covidexitstrategy.org/>
- ^{xxiv} <http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20192020/HB/987>
- ^{xxv} <http://www.legis.ga.gov/Legislation/en-US/display/20192020/SB/408#:~:text=A%20BILL%20to%20be%20entitled,repeal%20conflicting%20laws%3B%20and%20for>
- ^{xxvi} <https://www.ajc.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/report-budget-shortfall-may-top-billion-over-next-months/bCh9sdsuYVJupfCivsTDbJ/>