



## GUIDE TO

# HUMANIZING THE HEALTH CARE DEBATE AND COVID-19 RESPONSE

The COVID-19 pandemic, economic recession, and national discussion on long-standing systemic inequities have illuminated the need for effective solutions addressing both the immediate challenges and the long-term gaps in our health care and safety-net systems. At United States of Care, we believe that solutions should address (1) inequities that are disproportionately impacting specific groups of people and (2) shared needs that are felt across demographics. To do this, our team of experts are **LISTENING** to the public by hosting one-on-one interviews and community conversations, regularly analyzing public opinion surveys, and commissioning national surveys<sup>1</sup>.

Health care policy has historically been polarized and politicized. However, we believe that **centering the conversation around shared and diverse needs** opens new avenues for more people to be part of the health care conversation and in designing new solutions.

**Our findings show that while we each have unique circumstances and different political viewpoints, many people share common experiences.** In several of our survey's open-ended questions, people gave similar responses across a variety of demographics (Republican and Democrat, rural and urban, African American and white).

If our country fails to meet people where they are and address their needs, our health care system and **our leaders will miss this important moment** in which we can develop new solutions that serve people, rather than the health care system itself.

At United States of Care our experts have already reflected the results from the findings in our recommendations to [federal](#) and [state](#) policymakers, which can be viewed at the [COVID-19 hub](#).

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<sup>1</sup>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.

The following are the latest findings from what we've been hearing in qualitative conversations and how they tested in our quantitative survey.

**WHAT WE SOUGHT TO UNDERSTAND:**

- ★ How people are doing; **their worries and concerns**; what brings them hope?
- ★ **What matters to them** in their personal lives and in their community right now?
- ★ **What they need from the health care system**; and how confident are they in the health care system?

**WHAT WE HEARD:**

“My family getting sick and me not having the funds to get them the care they need.”

– Male. 24-34. Very Conservative. High School Education. Black.

“Not being able to provide for my children or dying from this virus.”

– Female. 25-34. Apolitical. Vocational Technical School Education. White

“I just want to make sure that I make enough money to take care of my family.”

– Male. 35-44. Very Conservative. Vocational Technical College Education. White.

“I worry about my financial future.”

– Female. Lean Progressive. Postgraduate Education. Black.

“Protect my grandparents from the coronavirus.”

– Male. 35-44. Lean Conservative. High School Education. Hispanic.



## KEY FINDINGS:

In several of our survey's open-ended questions, responses were similar across a variety of demographics (Republican and Democrat, rural and urban, African American and White). This continues to exemplify a common—and in some cases heartbreaking—experience, even if we each have unique circumstances.

Americans are feeling a **mix of emotions** related to the pandemic, and those emotions are overwhelmingly **negative**.



**CONCERNED** 53%

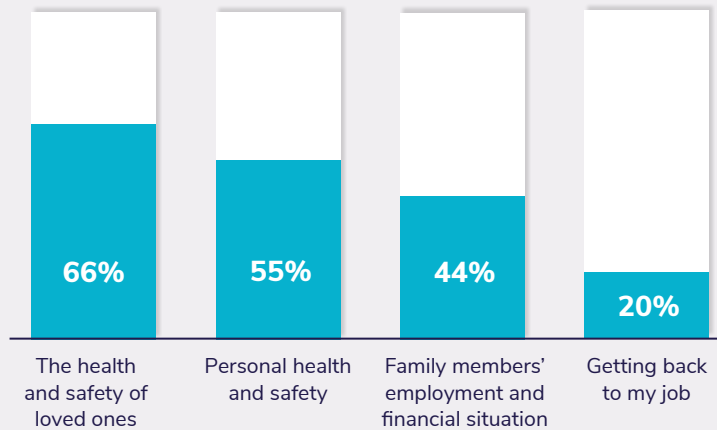
**ANXIOUS** 47%

**UNCERTAIN** 44%

**FRUSTRATED** 35%

33% of Americans are also finding hope in the midst of crisis—in religion, their families, and stories of people helping others.

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 open-ended responses, a significant number of respondents are putting **concerns about their loved ones ahead of themselves** and are concerned about their community and those on the frontlines.



We are also seeing **different WORRIES** acutely arise in specific demographics that also reflect existing disparities. In open-ended responses:

- ★ **African American women** are most worried about **money**.
- ★ **Republican high school-educated white men** are worried about the **economy**, which connects to their top concern of opening the economy.
- ★ **Republican men and women** in general are worried about **getting sick**.

## SHARED NEEDS AND THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM:



Across all demographics **shared needs** are emerging in response to the pandemic, including the desire for:

- **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.
- **A health care system that cares for everyone**, including people who are vulnerable and those who were already struggling before the pandemic hit.
- **Accurate information and clear recommendations** on the virus and how to stay healthy and safe.
- **Being able to provide for ourselves and our loved ones**, especially as we are worried about the financial impact of the pandemic.



As they relate to the **health care system**, Americans report the desire to see **support for essential workers** who are greatly respected and to ensure that the system is fully resourced.

- The pandemic has illuminated deficiencies of our health care system; many respondents reflect on the fact that the U.S. **was caught unprepared** to handle the pandemic and **our losses have been greater** than those of other countries.
- There is also a **pride and confidence** in the individual contribution to the response by essential workers, including doctors and nurses.
- When asked about how the health care system is handling the epidemic, many respondents focused on the government instead of the performance of the health care system.



**“I’m a disabled person. Disabled people are always the first to get screwed.”**

– Male, 45-54. Lean Conservative. University Education. White.

**“I am on disability and cannot work. Plus, I am on kidney dialysis and have diabetes.”**

– Male, 45-54. Lean Conservative. Vocational Education. White.



# Putting Findings Into Action

People everywhere are concerned about protecting and providing for themselves and their loved ones. This unprecedented moment provides leaders with the unique opportunity to ensure our health care system is responsive to the pandemic and address inequities while being accessible and affordable, now and into the future. **By elevating people's shared values, we hope to humanize the health care debate.** Centering the conversation around shared and diverse needs will open new avenues for more people to be part of the conversation and the solution.

United States of Care is working toward a world in which all people in the United States can access high quality health care in a way that meets their unique needs at a price they can afford and no person is turned away or deterred from seeking care due to cost concerns or lack of access.

We envision a future where people can easily navigate the health care system and can experience life's changes, including leaving or losing a job, without risking health care security for themselves or their loved ones.

- People have certainty that the cost for health care is manageable for their personal budget.
- People can get the care that they need, when and how they need it.
- People will have the security and freedom that dependable health care coverage provides as life changes.
- The health care system will be understandable, transparent, and easy to navigate for people.

**Leaders across the country should show **HOW** they are listening to the public by proposing durable, people-centered policy solutions.** These solutions should address not only the short-term challenges, but also be designed to remove the long-standing barriers in our current health care system. People need to feel heard and that the health care system is there to support them.

## **Recommendations for leaders who want to make a difference:**

- ☐ Acknowledge the moment
- ☐ Take an active stance on health care policy
- ☐ Commit to centering people's needs in the solutions you're prioritizing
- ☐ Commit to addressing both inequities and shared needs

To learn more about United States of Care or how we can support your COVID-19 response efforts, please contact us at: [help@usofcare.org](mailto:help@usofcare.org)

