



Trust for America's Health: Key Research Findings

SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research and Public Opinion Strategies conducted a research project on behalf of the Trust for America's Health and the Healthcare Georgia Foundation to examine public opinion about key public health issues. The project included 8 focus groups, conducted in May 2008 among various audiences in four locations. Two surveys were also conducted -- one among 426 registered voters in Georgia, the other among 1,026 registered national voters. The surveys were conducted June 1 - 8, 2008. The margin of error is +/- 4.6 percentage points for the Georgia sample and +/- 3.1 percentage points for the national sample at the 95 percent confidence level.

Key Findings

■ **Georgians show support for investment in prevention when it comes to health issues.**

Half of the state's population says that we should increase funding for initiatives, such as researching and preventing major diseases and health problems -- 30 percent say we should increase funding for these health issues by a lot. A slightly lower 44 percent support increasing funding for public health preparedness and safety issues.

▲ *Prevention is seen as a top reason to increase government funding for health issues.* Between two-thirds and four-fifths of Georgia voters believe that statements centered on prevention are convincing reasons to invest more government funding into health issues (please see Appendix A for full statements).

▲ *Prevention-centric solutions to the problem are seen as useful.* When given a list of 13 potential preventive measures to help combat America's obesity epidemic, nine of the measures were viewed as useful ideas by at least 65 percent of Georgians.

▲ *Investment in keeping people healthy and preventing disease is viewed as an effective measure for keeping health care costs down.*

As the table below shows, 64 percent believe that investing in helping people prevent disease and stay healthy will save money on long-term health care costs, against just 31 percent who believe that this type of investment is not worth the cost.

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**PREVENTING EPIDEMICS.
PROTECTING PEOPLE.**

TABLE 1: STATEMENT PAIRS; PERCENT AGREEING

Investment in Health Issues Seen as Important Priorities	
	1st Statement - 2nd Statement
Investing in helping people prevent disease and stay healthier now will save money on health care costs in the long run.	64
Investing in helping people prevent disease and stay healthier now will not help, because it will cost too much and too many people will continue to make poor health decisions anyway.	31
<i>Now let me read you some short statements about health problems and safety issues in the United States. Please tell me which statement comes closer to your own view.</i>	

■ **Accountability is critical.** People are unlikely to support increased funding for public health without assurance that the resources will be spent wisely. In Georgia, 72 percent say that a statement based on the notion that “We don’t need to spend more taxpayer dollars on being prepared for emergencies, we need to spend the money more wisely and efficiently” is a convincing reason to oppose more funding.

■ **Georgians are very concerned about major health issues, including obesity and food safety. Overall, they perceive large-scale public health disasters as likely to occur and important for the government to prepare for, but they are more focused on everyday health issues.** While people certainly care about terrorism, natural disasters, and pandemic disease, these types of catastrophic public health issues are not necessarily at the front of people’s minds every day. People feel these types of catastrophes are largely beyond their control, and they expect government to protect them from these threats. By contrast, issues like obesity and food safety hit closer to home on a daily basis.

▲ More than two-thirds of Georgians believe a natural disaster (96 percent), an outbreak of food-borne disease (77 percent), a pandemic disease (76 percent), or an act of terrorism (74 percent) is likely to occur in the United States within the next five or 10 years.

▲ However, issues such as obesity and the diseases it causes, as well as food safety, generate a significant level of concern about the nation’s health and safety.

• The importance of obesity is amplified in Georgia. Nationally, 63 percent say that “diseases related to obesity” is a very important issue for government to focus on (“very important” means they rated it between 8 and 10 on a scale from 0 to 10,

where 10 means the issue is extremely important for government to focus on). In Georgia, 68 percent indicate that this is a very important issue to focus on.

• Nearly half the state (49 percent) says that the fact that 23 million kids in the U.S. are overweight and that childhood obesity rates have tripled causes them to feel very concerned about the health of the country (81 percent say it makes them at least somewhat concerned). Similarly, the fact that two-thirds of Americans are obese or overweight, which is a factor in more than 20 diseases, makes 42 percent of Georgians very concerned, and 76 percent at least somewhat concerned.

• In Georgia, 88 percent say that the fact that approximately 60 percent of fresh fruits and vegetables and 75 percent of seafood consumed in the U.S. are imported, yet only one percent of imported foods is inspected, makes them concerned about the health of the country, with 70 percent responding that it makes them very concerned, more than any other issue tested in this research. This was also the top issue in the national survey.

■ **Most people believe government is doing what it can to protect them from major threats-however, there exists skepticism about the government’s capabilities.** Seventy-two percent of Georgians believe that the U.S. government is prepared to handle an outbreak of food-borne disease such as *salmonella* or *E. coli*. But as noted above, when they are presented with the lack of food safety inspection in our country, this confidence in government regulation is called into question.

■ **Georgians want solutions, and being forward-looking is important.** While it is important to make sure people are aware of the scope of the state’s health problems, it also is important to let people know what

can be done to address the problems. People want to be assured that their taxpayer dollars will be well-used to improve health in communities. Simply stating that problems exist, without offering a way to fix them, will not lead people to conclude that a greater investment will help.

- ▲ A series of nine advertisements on health issues were tested in the focus groups, with only one ad highlighting a more healthy future, rather than simply pointing out the problems. This forward-looking ad clearly elicited the most positive reaction.
- ▲ There is very positive reaction to the proposals to combat America’s obesity epidemic. As noted earlier, survey respondents were presented with 13 proposals, and at least 65 percent of Georgians say that nine of the 13 proposals would be very useful ideas.
- ▲ The top solutions to obesity featured school-based programs, such as healthier school lunches or expanded physical activity. This finding shows that messages centered on the health of America’s children were considered the most convincing reasons to increase funding for health issues, both in Georgia and nationally. The focus group discussion on obesity centered largely on children and

the increasing lack of exercise and poor nutrition among American kids. As one man in Augusta put it, “Obesity is a problem because look at the kids today. Instead of going out and play like we did in my generation, they are in front of the TV or game things or watching more soap operas, MTV and VH1.”

- **The Georgia public is willing to accept a limited government role in health issues.** It is important to emphasize the notion of shared responsibility. People expect government to keep them safe. However, they do not want government to dictate how they live their lives. People resist being told what to do when it comes to their health. They want to help themselves, and they look to government to provide the education and information to help them make healthy choices, while retaining their own ability to choose.
- ▲ The statements that “Government isn’t responsible for people’s health and we don’t need the government to tell us what to eat or when to exercise” and “There are too many other priorities that need government funding that are more important than trying to keep people healthy” each rate as convincing reasons to oppose more funding for health issues among 63 percent of the Georgia population.

APPENDIX A: HEALTH FUNDING MESSAGE TESTING

Top Reasons to Increase Health Funding Centered on Prevention		
	Very Convincing	Total Convincing
America’s future depends upon the health of our children, yet our kids are becoming less healthy every day, falling behind the rest of the world, and could be the first generation to live shorter, less healthy lives than their parents. We are failing our children, and it is time to make their health our top priority.	43	72
There is a clear connection between people’s living environment and their health—we need to make sure our communities are clean, healthy, and safe. When we invest in improving the health of our communities, we improve the health of the people who live and work there.	39	79
Major diseases and health problems are driving health care costs through the roof and bankrupting American businesses. If we invest now in preventing disease and staying healthy, people will have fewer illnesses and their health care costs will be lower, and families and businesses will have to spend less on health insurance and medical care, which will save us all money in the long run.	37	68
<i>Please tell me whether this is a very convincing, somewhat convincing, a little convincing or not at all convincing reason to increase government funding for health issues, like researching and preventing major diseases and health problems.</i>		