

Consumers' trust in healthcare providers is waning

Article



The news: Patients' [trust in doctors and hospitals](#) steadily declined throughout the pandemic, according to Trilliant Health's 2022 Trends Shaping the Health Economy report.

Trilliant's report cited survey data from Public Opinion Strategies, which assessed US consumers' levels of trust in receiving critical health information from entities such as

physicians, nurses, hospitals, the CDC, health insurers, and state and local public health officials. Patients' trust ratings were compared between April 2020 and December 2021.

Key survey nuggets include:

- **Consumers' trust in most healthcare companies eroded** between April 2020 and December 2021.
- **Doctors (-23%) and hospitals (-21%) were disproportionately impacted.** Trust in these provider groups progressively declined throughout the pandemic.
- **Insurance companies consistently rank as the least trustworthy** among all healthcare stakeholders, meaning there wasn't a big gap (-5%) between how consumers felt about them between April 2020 and December 2021.
- Trust in **nurses (-16%), the CDC (-14%), and state and local public health agencies (-13%)** all declined during this timeframe.

Why trust in providers is waning: The report doesn't delve into the reasons why consumer trust in providers has deteriorated—but we'll offer a few educated suggestions.

1. Lack of communication. Anxious and concerned patients turned to doctors for clarity during the pandemic. Yet most weren't satisfied with the frequency of responses:

- **53% of consumers** said they've lost confidence in their physicians due to **irregular COVID-19-related communication**, per SymphonyRM's May 2021 survey.

2. Cost uncertainty. More than half of patients said they've been hit with an unanticipated large medical bill, according to a November 2021 report from the US Department of Health and Human Services. These bills are putting consumers in debt. If providers can't show good-faith price estimates upfront, they'll continue losing patients' trust.

3. Inequitable access. Access to healthcare is easier for some populations than others.

- That could help explain why **white and wealthier people trust their physicians more than Black, Hispanic, and lower-income individuals**, per a May 2021 NORC at the University of Chicago survey.

Earning consumers' trust back: The provider-patient relationship was eroding before the pandemic, but COVID-19 added further tension around it.

Physicians can reestablish trust with patients by expressing compassion for their concerns around cost and access, and taking extra time to help them navigate a complex healthcare system.

- When patients were asked **what they want most from their providers** other than good care, most of the top responses were linked to their **doctors showing empathy and personal attention**, per a May 2021 PatientPop survey.

What Do US Adults Want Most* From a Healthcare Provider?

% of respondents, May 2021

A good listener

67.1%

A short wait

52.4%

A welcoming staff

49.7%

Prompt response to questions and concerns

46.9%

Available appointments when I need

46.4%

Digital access to my health record

40.2%

Flexible hours/late hours

37.6%

Option to book an appointment digitally

30.9%

Note: ages 18+; *besides quality care

Source: PatientPop, "2021 Patient Perspective" conducted by SurveyMonkey, June 28, 2021

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