

Access to Health Care for Alabamians: Good to Great for Most – Problematic for Some

- **Eighty-five percent of Alabamians report that they have health care insurance for themselves, and 79% of those with coverage describe their coverage as *excellent* (40%) or *good* (39%).**
- **Even though most Alabamians assess their coverage as *good to excellent*, two thirds of the respondents (66%) believe that a majority of Alabamians do not have access to the health and medical care they need, and 58% feel that the State leaders are not giving access to health care the attention it deserves.**
- **Almost half of the respondents (48%) report that they have had significant difficulty with their health insurance during the past year.**
- **Sixty-five percent believe that the overall quality of health care in their community is *excellent* (27%) or *good* (39%); and more than 80% of Alabamians feel that they are able to obtain health care or access to medical professionals when they need it at least *most of the time*.**

(Auburn, June 2005) The *Ask-Alabama* statewide Spring 2005 public opinion survey explored the experiences of Alabamians with their health care providers and insurance carriers¹. Eighty-five percent of Alabamians have some health insurance coverage, and 79% of those with coverage are pleased with their service and coverage.

State residents are concerned about the issue of access to health care in the State. They believe that the majority of Alabamians do not have adequate coverage (66%), and that State leaders are not giving this issue sufficient attention (58%).

Nearly half (48%) of Alabamians reported at least one problem with their health care provider during the past year. These problems range from difficulty in paying for services (32%), to avoiding obtaining medical assistance due to concerns over coverage (25%).

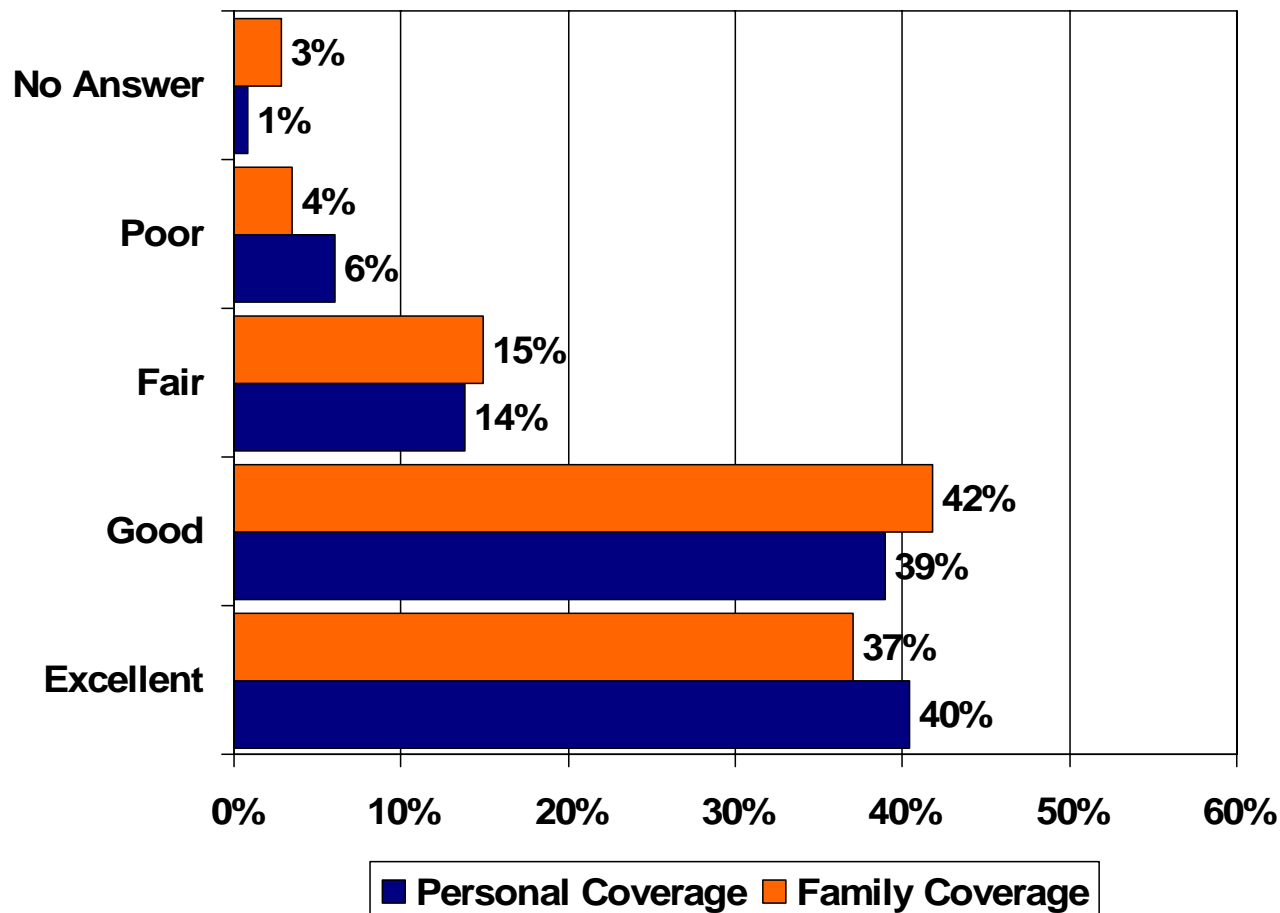
Over 80% of respondents were able to obtain health care or see a health professional when needed *always* or *most of the time*. Sixty-five percent also believe that the quality of health care in their community is *good* (39%) or *excellent* (27%). Only 12% characterize the quality of health care in the community as *poor*.

¹ The survey of a random telephone sample of 603 Alabamians was conducted from April 6 - 18, 2005. The average estimated margin of error is +/- 4%.

Public is Generally Satisfied with Their Health Care Coverage

Eighty-five percent of the respondents to the survey report that they have personal health care coverage, and 76% report that all of their immediate family members have health insurance as well. Of those with personal coverage, 79% rate the quality of their health insurance as *excellent* (40%) or *good* (39%). Similarly, respondents rate the quality of health care insurance for other immediate family members to be *excellent* (37%) or *good* (42%). Of those with personal health insurance, only 6% rate their coverage as *poor*, and 4% rate their family member coverage as *poor*.

Alabamians' Assessment of Health Insurance Coverage (2005)



Health Care Access is an Important Issue for Alabamians

Alabamians consistently rate the issue of health care access to be among the top three issues facing the state. Eighty-one percent of the sample believe health care access to be an *urgent* or *high priority* issue needing immediate attention. Interestingly, while 85% report having health insurance, two thirds (66%) of the respondents believe that most Alabamians lack access to the health and medical care they need.

Most Alabamians (58%) also believe that the State's elected leaders are not giving this issue enough attention. Only 2% believe that *too much attention* is given to improving access to good health care in the State, and 31% believe that the State's leadership is giving the issue *just enough attention*.

Attention Given by State Elected Leaders to the Issue of Access to Good Health Care (2005)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Too little attention	350	58.0	58.0	58.0
Just enough attention	186	30.8	30.8	88.9
Too much attention	13	2.2	2.2	91.0
Undecided	54	9.0	9.0	100.0
Total	603	100.0	100.0	

Alabamians' Experiences with Their Health Care Providers

Slightly over half (52%) of the respondents did not report any negative experiences with their health care provider during the past year, but 48% did report difficulties. Thirty-two percent had great difficulty paying for necessary medical care; 8% were dropped by their carrier during the year; and 13% experienced a refusal of payment by their health insurance company for necessary treatment.

More than one out of five Alabamians (22%) report that they are continuing to work at a job they do not like in order to keep their health insurance coverage, and 25% have deferred medical attention because of cost or lack of insurance coverage.

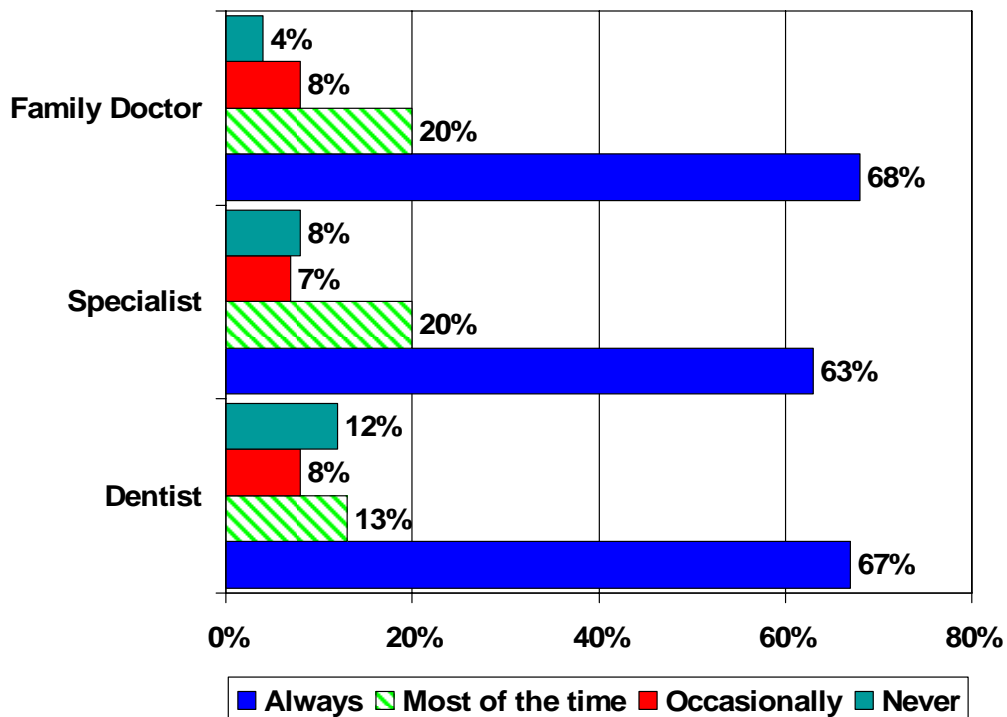
Recent Experiences of Alabamians with Health Insurance Coverage

Experienced During the Past Year	% Reporting Problem
Experienced Great Difficulty Paying for Necessary Medical Care	32%
Dropped from the Health Insurance Plan	8%
Insurance Company Refused Payment for Necessary Treatment	13%
Unable to Obtain Health Insurance Because of Medical History	10%
Remained in a Disagreeable Job Just to Keep Health Insurance	22%
Visited Emergency Room Because of Lack of Funds to Pay	15%
Deferred Medical Attention Because of Cost or Insurance Coverage	25%
One or More of the Above	48%

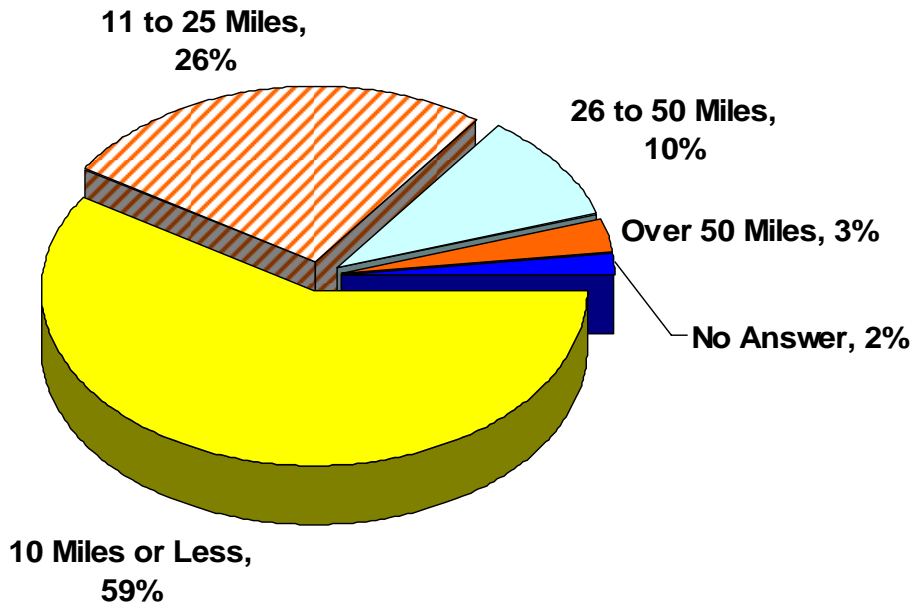
Availability of Health Care

Over 80% of State residents are able to obtain health care or visit a health care professional when they need it. Eighty-seven percent report success in seeing a family physician or pediatrician when needed. Eighty-three percent are able to see a medical specialist when needed, and 80% are able to visit a dentist when needed. Eighty-five percent typically drive 25 miles or less to visit the family doctor, and 59% travel 10 miles or less to see their physician.

Accessibility of Medical Professionals for Alabamians (2005)



Typical Driving Distance from Home to Family Doctor



Quality Assessment of Community Health Care

Alabamians are generally satisfied with the overall quality of health care in their communities, and two thirds of Alabamians (65%) rate the overall quality of health care as *good* (39%) or *excellent* (27%). Only 12% feel that their community's health care quality is *poor*. Among those who live in rural areas or towns under 5,000 population, the assessment of *good* to *excellent* health care quality drops to 54%, but among those living in larger cities, 72% rate their community health care quality to be *good* to *excellent*.

Assessment of Community Health Care Quality

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Excellent	161	26.7	26.7	26.7
Good	233	38.6	38.6	65.3
Fair	127	21.1	21.1	86.4
Poor	70	11.6	11.6	98.0
No Answer	12	2.0	2.0	100.0
Total	603	100.0	100.0	