

Opioid Painkillers Are in Medicine Chests across New Jersey Prescribing is Highest in South Jersey

A Large Majority of State Residents Want the New Governor and Legislature to Address the Addiction Problem

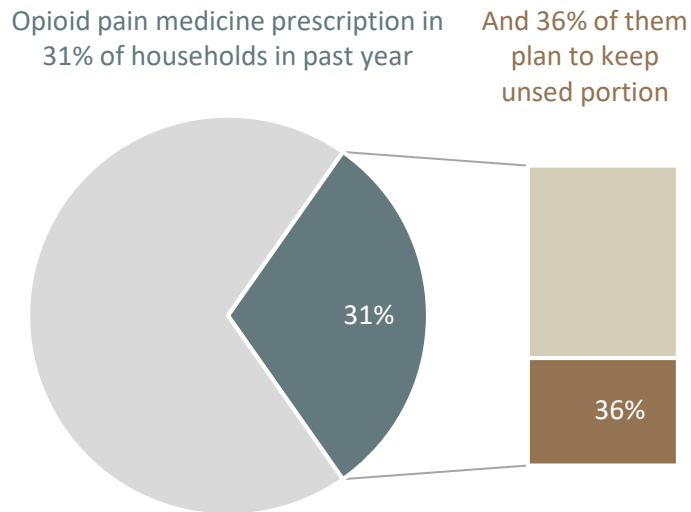
New Brunswick, NJ – Prescription opioid painkillers are in medicine chests of about one-in-three households in the Garden State, cutting across every demographic group. Thirty-one percent of NJ adults say they or a family member living with them have been prescribed an opioid in the past year (see Chart 1) according to the most recent New Jersey Health and Well-Being Poll, conducted by Rutgers Center for State Health Policy from October 12 to November 19, 2017, with a random sample of 1,052 adults.

Moreover, among those with an opioid prescription in the last year, more than one-in-three admit that they plan to keep leftover painkillers in case they are “needed in the future.” Overall, that amounts to over one-in-ten of the 3.1 million households in the state.

“Opioid pain drugs are prescribed extremely widely in New Jersey, and many families hold on to the drugs after their prescribed use,” according to Joel Cantor, lead poll investigator and Rutgers distinguished professor of public policy. “This estimate may well understate the share of families holding on to opioids, as many people know they are not supposed to keep leftover drugs and may be reticent to admit it to telephone interviewers.”

“We found that opioids are widely prescribed across all demographic groups,” Cantor continues. Notably, according to the poll, opioid prescriptions and intent to keep leftovers are *not lower* in families with children.

Chart 1: Nearly one-in-three poll respondents report that a family member living with them was prescribed opioid pain medicine in the prior year, and just over a third of them admit to keeping the drugs around after their prescribed use.

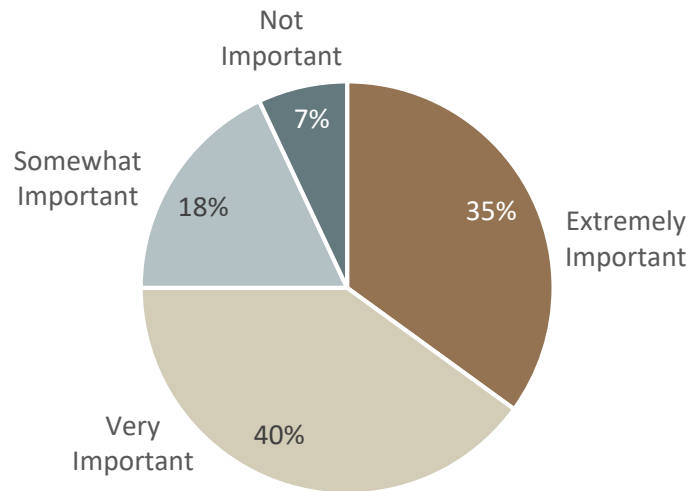


Thousands seek treatment. One indication that the poll might understate opioid problems is that only 1.5 percent say they or a family member living with them suffer from addiction to prescription pain relievers or heroin, while nearly six percent reported seeking opioid addiction treatment for a household member in the past year.

Most poll respondents seeking treatment reported little difficulty finding services, but about one-in-five found it “somewhat” or “very” hard to find treatment. “High rates of opioid prescribing shown in the poll and the worsening addiction epidemic are likely to make finding treatment harder over time,” according to Cantor. “Addressing treatment access barriers, including increasing the supply of outpatient and inpatient drug treatment, is likely to be needed.”

The New Jersey public wants government leaders to address addiction. Three-fourths of poll respondents say it is “extremely” (35%) or “very” (40%) important for the new governor and legislature to address the problem of drug addiction in New Jersey (see Chart 2). “The view that the incoming governor and legislature should act is consistent across nearly every demographic group and across all regions of the state,” according to Cantor.

Chart 2: A large majority of poll respondents say that the state’s new government leaders should address drug addiction.



Early this year the New Jersey legislature passed, and Governor Christie signed, a new law to stem over-prescribing of opioids and boost resources for treatment. While it is too early to assess the impact of the new law, the poll shows a strong desire by the public for continued policy focus on the problem.

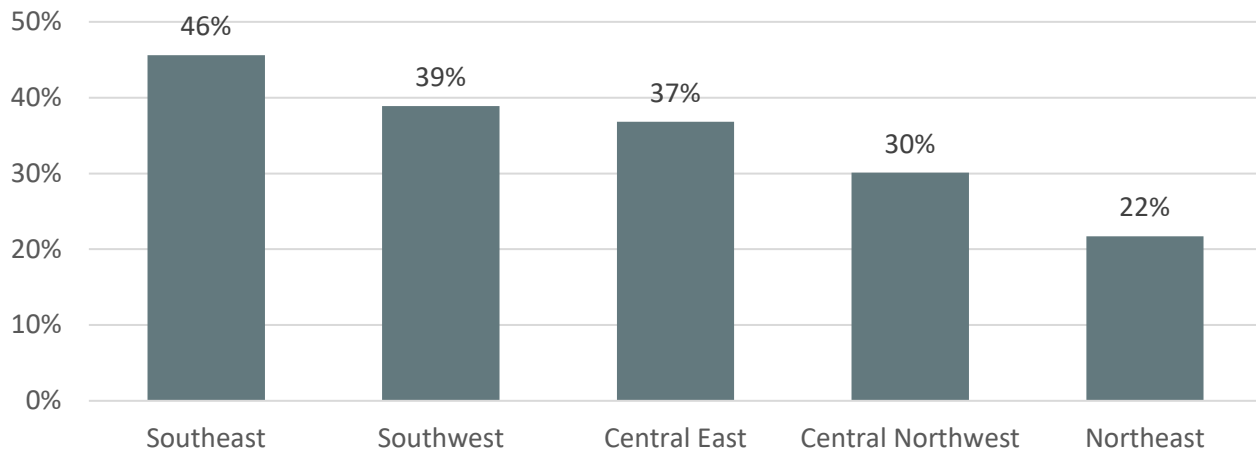
“Addressing the opioid epidemic has been a high priority for the Christie Administration, and the New Jersey public wants the incoming Murphy Administration to keep a strong focus on the epidemic,” says Cantor.

Significant Opportunities to Improve. “The commonplace nature of prescription opioids puts many thousands in New Jersey at risk of abuse, addiction, or worse,” according to Cantor. About 1,500 New Jersey residents died from overdoses of legal or illegal opioids in 2015, the most recent data available from the US Centers for Disease Control.¹ “And the problem is worsening.” The state’s age-adjusted opioid death rate rose 16.4 percent between 2014 and 2015.

The poll indicates that opioid prescribing varies across the state, with southern New Jersey having the highest prescribing rates.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/statedeaths.html>

Chart 3: Opioid prescribing varies widely across New Jersey regions.*



*Northeast includes Passaic, Bergen, Union, Essex, and Hudson; Central Northwest includes Mercer, Somerset, Morris, Hunterdon, Warren, and Sussex; Central East includes Ocean, Monmouth, and Middlesex; Southeast includes Cape May, Cumberland, Salem, and Atlantic; and Southwest includes Gloucester, Camden, and Burlington counties.

About the Health and Well-Being Poll. The 2017 New Jersey Health and Well-Being Poll was designed and analyzed by researchers at the Rutgers University Center for State Health Policy (www.cshp.rutgers.edu) with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (www.rwjf.org). The poll was conducted by Abt Associates, Inc., in English and Spanish from October 12 through November 19, 2017, with a sample of 1,052 respondents. The sample is designed to be representative of New Jersey adults. Interviews were conducted by landline (n=452) and cell phones (n=600). The data were weighted to match population demographic and telephone status parameters. The margin of sampling error for weighted estimates based on the full sample is plus or minus 3.7% (subgroup results have higher margins of error). Additional details about the survey method can be found in the methodology report (http://www.cshp.rutgers.edu/Downloads/2017_NJWellPoll_Methodology_Report.pdf).

Where to get information about opioids and drug addiction treatment.

For emergencies call or text 9-1-1. Other addiction information and help is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by calling 1-844-ReachNJ (844-732-2465) or going to <http://reachnj.gov/help.shtml>.

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POLL QUESTIONS AND TABLES START ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE

Questions and Tables

The questions covered in the release of December 14, 2017 are listed below. Column percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding. Respondents are New Jersey adults. Data presented are weighted. Statistical significance (p -values) of subgroup comparisons are shown in parentheses. In general, $p < 0.05$ is considered statistically significant; comparisons below that threshold are marked “ns” for not significant.

In the past year, have you or any family living with you had a prescription for a pain reliever such as OxyContin, Vicodin, Percocet, or codeine?

	N	Percent
Yes	319	31.1
No	706	68.9
Total Responses	1025	100.0
Don't know	23	
Refused	4	
Total N	1052	

	Age ($p=.017$)			Gender (ns)		Race ($p=.021$)			
	18-49	50-64	65+	Male	Female	White Non-Hispanic	Black Non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
Yes	30.2%	37.7%	25.9%	31.7%	30.6%	34.6%	29.4%	22.7%	28.0%
No	69.8%	62.3%	74.1%	68.3%	69.4%	65.4%	70.6%	77.3%	72.0%
N	560	257	205	486	539	602	126	172	125

	Marital Status (ns)			Children in Household (ns)		Education (ns)		
	Married, Living with Partner	Single, Never Married	Widowed, Divorced, Separated	No	Yes	Less than HS, HS grad, GED	Some college, vocational school	College grad or higher
Yes	33.0%	31.3%	25.9%	33.2%	29.7%	31.3%	32.8%	30.3%
No	67.0%	68.8%	74.1%	66.8%	70.3%	68.7%	67.2%	69.7%
N	572	272	174	554	421	396	268	356

	Income ($p=.017$)			Employment (ns)		Region of New Jersey ($p<.001$)				
	Low	Middle	High	Working, Looking for work	Retired, Other not working	Southeast	Southwest	Central East	Central Northwest	Northeast
Yes	28.2%	28.1%	36.8%	29.8%	33.4%	45.6%	38.9%	36.8%	30.1%	21.7%
No	71.8%	71.9%	63.3%	70.2%	66.6%	54.4%	61.1%	63.2%	69.9%	78.3%
N	195	302	400	719	296	79	131	258	196	360

Did you or your family member keep or plan to keep unused portions of this prescription in case you need it in the future?

	N	Percent
Yes	111	35.7
No	199	64.3
Total Responses	310	100.0
Don't know	9	
Refused	*	
Total N	742	

	Age (ns)			Gender (ns)		Race (p=.033)			
	18-49	50-64	65+	Male	Female	White Non-Hispanic	Black Non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
Yes	32.5%	40.6%	36.5%	34.9%	36.6%	34.7%	38.9%	21.6%	54.3%
No	67.5%	59.4%	63.5%	65.1%	63.4%	65.3%	61.1%	78.4%	45.7%
N	163	96	52	149	161	202	36	37	35

	Marital Status (ns)			Children in Household (ns)		Education (ns)		
	Married, Living with Partner	Single, Never Married	Widowed, Divorced, Separated	No	Yes	Less than HS, HS grad, GED	Some college, vocational school	College grad or higher
Yes	39.5%	33.8%	24.4%	38.7%	31.9%	40.2%	29.8%	35.6%
No	60.5%	66.3%	75.6%	61.3%	68.1%	59.8%	70.2%	64.4%
N	185	80	45	181	119	122	84	104

	Income (ns)			Employment (ns)		Region of New Jersey (ns)				
	Low	Middle	High	Working, Looking for work	Retired, Other not working	SE	SW	Central East	Central NW	Northeast
Yes	25.9%	44.0%	36.4%	35.4%	38.8%	41.2%	46.0%	27.7%	30.4%	39.5%
No	74.1%	56.0%	63.6%	64.6%	61.2%	58.8%	54.0%	72.3%	69.6%	60.5%
N	54	84	143	206	98	34	50	94	56	76

Do you or any family living with you currently use a pain reliever in a way not directed by a doctor?
(Cell sizes too small for cross-tabulations)

	N	Percent
Yes	26	2.5
No	1009	97.5
Total Responses	1035	100.0
Don't know	14	
Refused	4	
Total N	1052	

Are you or any family living with you addicted to pain relievers or heroin?
(Cell sizes too small for cross-tabulations)

	N	Percent
Yes	16	1.5
No	1031	98.5
Total Responses	1047	100.0
Don't know	1	
Refused	4	
Total N	1052	

**Did you or any family living with you seek care for addiction to pain relievers or heroin in the past year?
IF YES: How easy or hard was it to find those services?**

	N	Percent
No	987	94.2
Yes, very/somewhat easy	48	4.6
Yes, very/somewhat hard	13	1.2
Total Responses	1048	100.0
Don't know	*	
Refused	4	
Total N	1052	

	Age (ns)			Gender (ns)		Race (ns)			
	18-49	50-64	65+	Male	Female	White Non-Hispanic	Black Non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
No	94.4%	93.0%	94.8%	95.8%	92.8%	93.4%	95.3%	93.5%	97.6%
Yes, easy	4.7%	5.0%	4.3%	3.6%	5.5%	4.6%	4.7%	5.9%	2.4%
Yes, hard	.9%	1.9%	.9%	.6%	1.7%	2.0%	0.0%	.5%	0.0%
N	575	258	211	503	544	609	129	185	126

	Marital Status (ns)			Children in Household (ns)		Education (p=.005)		
	Married, Living with Partner	Single, Never Married	Widowed, Divorced, Separated	No	Yes	Less than HS, HS grad, GED	Some college, vocational school	College grad or higher
No	94.3%	94.2%	94.0%	93.8%	94.7%	90.8%	95.5%	96.9%
Yes, easy	4.6%	4.3%	4.9%	4.8%	4.9%	7.3%	3.7%	2.2%
Yes, hard	1.0%	1.4%	1.1%	1.4%	.5%	1.9%	.7%	.8%
N	581	278	182	564	432	413	269	360

	Income (p=.037)			Employment (ns)		Region of New Jersey (ns)				
	Low	Middle	High	Working Looking for work	Retired, Other not working	SE	SW	Central East	Central NW	NE
No	91.6%	94.7%	95.8%	93.5%	95.7%	98.8%	94.8%	92.3%	93.0%	94.9%
Yes, easy	5.4%	4.6%	3.0%	5.0%	3.6%	1.3%	4.5%	6.2%	4.5%	4.3%
Yes, hard	3.0%	.7%	1.2%	1.5%	.7%	0.0%	.7%	1.5%	2.5%	.8%
N	202	302	402	736	303	80	134	260	200	375

How important will it be for NJs new government leaders to address People addicted to drugs?

	N	Percent
Extremely important	366	35.3
Very important	413	39.8
Somewhat/Not important	258	24.9
Total Responses	1037	100.0
Don't know	10	
Refused	5	
Total	1052	

Importance	Age (ns)			Gender (ns)		Race (p=.027)			
	18-49	50-64	65+	Male	Female	White Non-Hispanic	Black Non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
Extremely	37.2%	32.4%	34.1%	33.9%	36.6%	34.2%	44.1%	35.9%	30.7%
Very	39.6%	39.1%	41.5%	38.3%	41.3%	40.0%	40.9%	41.4%	35.4%
Some/Not	23.2%	28.5%	24.4%	27.9%	22.1%	25.7%	15.0%	22.7%	33.9%
N	573	253	205	499	538	602	127	181	127

Importance	Marital Status (ns)			Children in Household (ns)		Education (ns)		
	Married, Living with Partner	Single, Never Married	Widowed, Divorced, Separated	No	Yes	Less than HS, HS grad, GED	Some college, vocational school	College grad or higher
Extremely	32.7%	41.1%	35.6%	35.1%	33.7%	34.7%	41.0%	31.8%
Very	42.7%	35.3%	38.9%	37.8%	43.9%	39.7%	37.2%	42.6%
Some/Not	24.5%	23.6%	25.6%	27.1%	22.4%	25.6%	21.8%	25.6%
N	571	275	180	564	419	406	266	359

Importance	Income (ns)			Employment (ns)		Region of New Jersey (ns)				
	Low	Middle	High	Working Looking for work	Retired, Other not working	SE	SW	Central East	Central NW	NE
Extremely	38.1%	36.6%	33.3%	34.6%	37.3%	43.2%	31.8%	34.9%	32.0%	36.9%
Very	42.6%	42.6%	38.1%	39.0%	42.3%	34.6%	37.1%	40.6%	41.2%	40.7%
Some/Not	19.3%	20.8%	28.6%	26.4%	20.3%	22.2%	31.1%	24.5%	26.8%	22.5%
N	197	298	402	726	300	81	132	261	194	369