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## Report Highlights

**The public rates childhood obesity as the top priority for presidential candidates to address.**

**Other high-ranking child health priorities for candidates to address in the public's view are bullying, drug abuse, and child abuse and neglect.**

**There were no differences in child health priorities by adults' political party affiliation or race/ethnicity.**

## Contact us

*A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases, and the University of Michigan Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Unit.*

## Public Wants Presidential Candidates to Address Childhood Obesity, Bullying

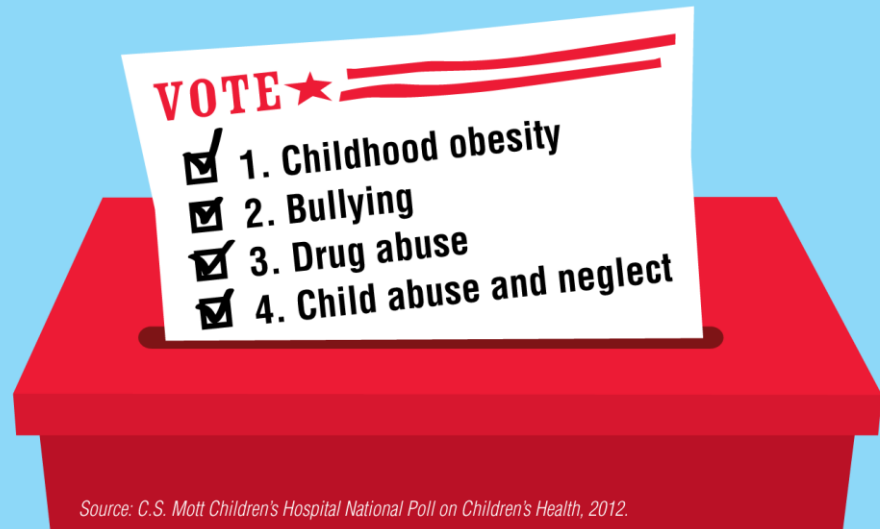
As the race for president in 2012 accelerates, candidates and their staffs have to make key decisions about priorities in their campaigns in the coming months. Healthcare reform is a major topic this year. So is the health of America's seniors, who depend on Medicare to help them pay for healthcare. In contrast, the health of children in the United States tends not to be the focus of political talk—perhaps because the opinions of the public about children's health and what political candidates should prioritize are not widely known.

Health and health-related behaviors during childhood are strongly related to health during adulthood. Despite the high costs of problems such as heart disease, diabetes, and depression that often have their beginnings in childhood and adolescence, there has been little dialogue among presidential candidates about how they will work to improve children's health issues. In May 2012, the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of adults to name the top child health priority that they believe the presidential candidates should address.

### Dear Candidates: Make These Child Health Problems Your Priorities

Adults selected the single most important child health issue for the next presidential candidate to address from a list of 24 common child health concerns. Overall, the public voted childhood obesity as number one priority that the presidential candidates should address, followed by bullying, drug abuse, and child abuse and neglect (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Top Child Health Priorities for Presidential Candidates to Address in 2012.



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2012.

*This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Knowledge Networks, Inc. (KN), for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital via a method used in many published studies. The survey was administered in May 2012 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults age 18 and older (n=2,144) from the KN standing panel that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 62% among panel members contacted to participate. The margin of error is ± 2 to 3 percentage points.*

While about 1 in 6 adults (17%) view childhood obesity as the top child health priority for the presidential candidates to focus on, 1 in 7 adults (15%) believe bullying should be the top child health issue. Meanwhile, 11% report drug abuse and 8% report child abuse and neglect as the top child health issues for the presidential candidates to address.

### **Child Health Priorities by Party Affiliation and Race/Ethnicity**

There were no differences in child health priorities for candidates related to adults' political party affiliations. In addition, there were no differences in child health priorities by respondents' race/ethnicity.

### **Implications**

About 40 million Americans of voting age believe that the top child health priority for presidential candidates to address is childhood obesity. This view is consistent with [the last several annual measurements in this Poll](#) of 'big health problems for children' perceived by adults regarding children in their communities – in which childhood obesity has held the top spot for the last 4 years. The federal government is currently responsible for many programs that may have an impact on childhood obesity, including school lunch, financing of public transportation projects, encouragement of physical activity, and subsidies for specific food items. The public is aware, however, that more may be needed. Many potential voters seem eager to hear from candidates about how they plan to address this pervasive problem that has effects on health during childhood and well into adulthood.

Together, the top 4 priorities for presidential candidates to address regarding child health represent the votes of one-half of Americans old enough to vote. As a group of issues, childhood obesity, bullying, drug abuse, and child abuse and neglect reflect public concerns about behavior-related health risks that may be difficult to address once they have been initiated.

The federal government has current, high-visibility programs regarding childhood obesity and drug abuse. From the public perspective, these programs may need renewed attention and investment. Meanwhile, the problems of bullying and child abuse and neglect have typically been addressed at the state or local level. For these interpersonal challenges, the public call for attention by presidential candidates indicates that the public wants more involvement at the national level.

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*Findings from the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health do not represent the opinions of the investigators or the opinions of the University of Michigan. The University of Michigan reserves all rights over this material.*