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C.S. Mott Children's Hospital

National Poll on Children's Health



Public Identifies Top Child Health Priorities for Presidential Candidates

Report Highlights

Child abuse and neglect was identified most frequently by the public as a child health priority for Presidential candidates.

Alcohol/smoking/drug use, as well as nutrition, hunger, and obesity, were also child health priority areas for at least half of U.S. adults.

Access to mental health services and the health effects of poverty were priorities for about one-third of U.S. adults.

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.

As the major political parties prepare for their nominating conventions this summer (Republican Party – July 18-21; Democratic Party – July 25-28), candidates and party leaders consider what themes to feature in their campaigns. Children's health has not been a major topic in the political primary season. However, we know from [past results of this Poll](#) that a majority of U.S. adults say that a candidate's position on child health issues can affect how they vote.

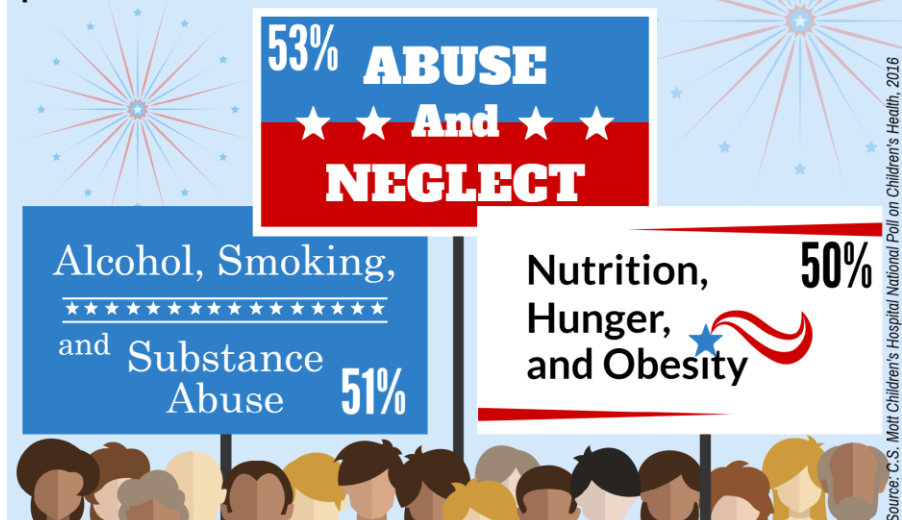
In May 2016, the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of over 2000 adults about child health priorities that could be addressed by candidates for President this year. The list of possible health priorities for the candidates was drawn from several prior *Reports* of the Poll, as well as the annual ["Top 10" lists of big child health problems](#) in the United States, as identified by the public.

@Candidates: Listen to These Public Priorities for Child Health

Adults who responded were asked to identify the top three child health priority areas that they would want the Presidential candidates to address. The choices from each respondent were then aggregated to come up with a rank order of all the possible priorities.

Three priority areas were clearly identified by adults more frequently than any others (Figure 1), with 50% or more for each: abuse and neglect; alcohol, smoking, and substance abuse; and nutrition, hunger, and obesity. Priority areas chosen frequently, but not as commonly, included access to mental health services for children (39%), health effects of poverty on children (30%), gun-related injuries among children (25%), teen pregnancy (22%), and research about childhood diseases (14%).

Figure 1. Top child health priorities the public wants the 2016 presidential candidates to address



This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by GfK Custom Research, LLC (GfK), for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital via a method used in many published studies. The survey was administered in May 2016 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults age 18 and older (n=2,100). Adults were selected from GfK's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® 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 63% among panel members contacted to participate. The margin of error is ± 2 to 4 percentage points.

Implications

Candidates for President are faced with many options for the policy positions they include in their campaigns. Children's health is a topic that a [majority of American adults say can affect their votes](#) in November. In addition, large proportions of U.S. adults perceive that [the health of children today is worse than when they were kids, themselves](#). For these reasons, focusing on child health priorities may resonate deeply with voters in the Presidential campaign in 2016. The policy priority areas identified by at least one-half of U.S. adults in this Poll are very consistent with areas of [concern about child health expressed by adults in past Polls](#). These priorities raise a key question: what can a President do about these concerns?

Child abuse and neglect is known to affect over half a million children in the U.S. every year. The negative effects of abuse/neglect on individuals' health in childhood and well into adulthood are increasingly clear. The federal government shares responsibility for addressing child abuse and neglect with state and local agencies. Policy options for the federal government include expanding and intensifying programs that support parents and teach parenting skills during children's early years (e.g., under age 3), including home visiting programs that begin during pregnancy.

Rates of underage alcohol use have been declining over recent years, although about one-fifth of high-school-age teens report alcohol use in the past month and binge drinking also remains a problem. Youth tobacco use has decreased to its lowest level in decades (about 10% of 12th-graders in the past 30 days), while electronic cigarette use is now more common than conventional cigarette smoking. Illicit drug use among youth has also decreased over recent years, except for marijuana use; nearly 40% of 12th-graders report any illicit drug use in the past year. The two main policy avenues for alcohol and tobacco are: (1) to raise use taxes, which are known to reduce underage use, and (2) to improve, innovate, and invest in novel messaging to help shape community norms to discourage underage use because of negative health effects. The Food and Drug Administration has also declared that it will regulate e-cigarettes as a tobacco product, which is consistent with public attitudes previously reported previously in this [Poll](#). For drug use, the leading policy options are to intensify messaging in schools and communities to discourage experimentation among youth, and to invest in and improve enforcement of existing drug laws to reduce access. The federal government may also issue prescribing restrictions for physicians in order to limit access to prescription drugs that can be misused.

The interrelated challenges of nutrition, hunger, and obesity have been the focus of increasing policy attention over the past two decades. Together, hunger and obesity may affect as many as one-third of all youth in the U.S. The leading federal policy options are to promote access to, interest in, and affordability of healthier foods, especially for low-income children families, including at farmers' markets. Encouraging physical activity and avoiding extended sedentary time is also essential for health, and ensuring that neighborhoods are safe is critical to promoting more active lifestyles for all generations.

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