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## Top public priorities for children's health research: cancer, diabetes, birth defects

### Report Highlights

**Childhood cancer is rated as the top priority for children's health research, with 76% of adults rating it as "very important" to improving children's health.**

**Diabetes (70%) is the 2<sup>nd</sup> priority, and birth defects & other genetic problems (68%) are 3<sup>rd</sup>.**

**Priorities for children's health research differ by parent status and by race/ethnicity of the respondent.**

### 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.

Government agencies, private foundations, and philanthropies support research to improve children's health. Such research costs billions of dollars annually to help children survive life-threatening diseases or prevent illness altogether. Over the last several decades, children's health research has led to major scientific discoveries and new programs that have helped children and adults live healthier lives.

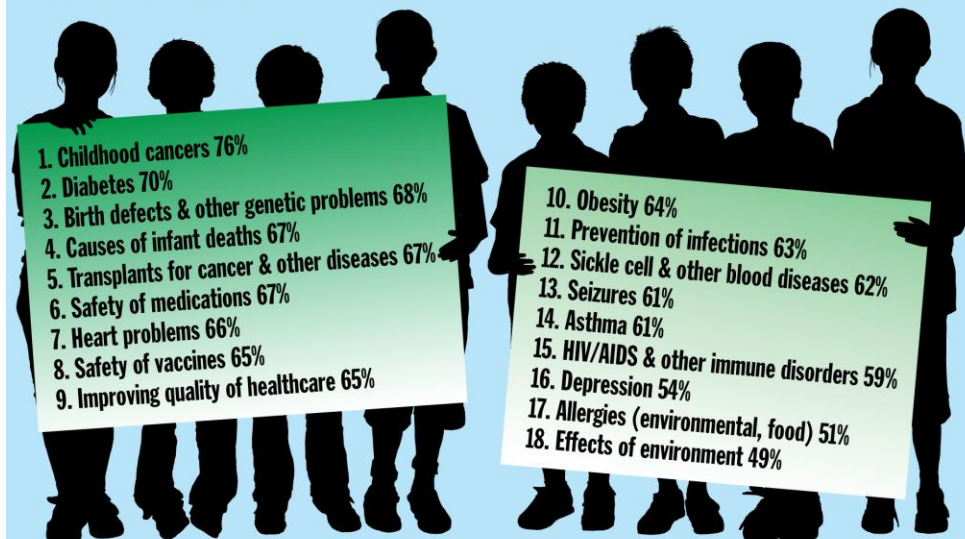
However, decisions about what types of children's health research to support are often made without public input. In times of funding pressures, it may be helpful for organizations to be aware of public perspectives on topics for children's health research that seem most important. This may be particularly true for government agencies, which are accountable for spending taxpayer dollars.

In an effort to bring the public voice to national dialogue on this issue, the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of adults about the importance of a variety of child health research areas.

### Children's Health Research Topics Rated "Very Important"

Adults across the U.S. were asked to rate the importance ("very important," "somewhat important" or "not important") of 18 different types of medical research for improving children's health. Childhood cancer was endorsed most frequently as "very important," followed by diabetes, and then birth defects & other genetic problems. The full list of children's health research topics and the proportion of adults who rated them as "very important" appear below (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Public Rating of Children's Health Research Topics as Very Important**



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2013.

*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 June 2013 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults age 18 and older (n=1,996) 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 58% among the panel members contacted to participate. The margin of error is ± 3 to 4 percentage points and higher among subgroups.*

## Views of Children's Health Research Topics, by Parent Status

Adults with at least one child ≤18 years old in the household have different priorities for children's health research than adults without children in the household:

Adults with at least one child ≤18 years old in the household	Adults without children in the household
1. Childhood cancer, 75%	1. Childhood cancers, 76%
2. Safety of medications, 68%	2. Diabetes, 72%
3. Causes of infant deaths, 68%	3. Birth defects & other genetic problems, 69%
4. Safety of vaccines, 67%	4. Transplants for cancer & other diseases, 67%
5. Transplants for cancer & other diseases, 67%	5. Causes of infant deaths, 67%

## Views of Children's Health Research Topics, by Race/Ethnicity of Respondent

Adults from different racial/ethnic groups also have different priorities for children's health research:

African Americans	Hispanics/Latinos	Non-Hispanic whites
1. Diabetes, 87%	1. Childhood cancers, 81%	1. Childhood cancers, 73%
2. Childhood cancers, 86%	2. Causes of infant deaths, 78%	2. Diabetes, 66%
3. Seizures, 84%	3. Diabetes, 78%	3. Birth defects & other genetic problems, 64%

## Implications

Measuring public research priorities for children's health likely illuminates a combination of influences on public perceptions – not only the positive impressions of research gains in the past, but also perceived threats to children's health today. Certainly, research accomplishments in therapies for cancer and diabetes over the last two generations have changed children's lives for the better, and more may still be to come. On the other hand, high research priorities about safety of medications and vaccines highlight parents' timeless concerns about young children.

Whether the public's research priorities for children's health will influence the actions of funding organizations remains to be seen. However, organizations that do take public priorities into account can rest assured that their funding decisions will correspond with public sentiment about the research that is most likely to make a difference in the lives of children. In an era of tight research budgets and an emphasis on transparency, public research priorities may provide particularly promising guidance for the research road ahead.

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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.*