



TO: LEGISLATORS AND POLICYMAKERS  
FROM: DOUG BADGER (QUINN THOMAS) AND  
JOHN HORVICK (DHM RESEARCH)  
DATE: JUNE 2, 2020  
RE: SURVEY REVEALS VOTER BUDGET PRIORITIES DURING  
CALIFORNIA COVID-19 RESPONSE

As California continues to manage the public health and state budget crisis caused by COVID-19, our two firms have been conducting timely public opinion research to provide insight into the challenges facing decision-makers at every level. This memo outlines the key findings of new public opinion research conducted in California from May 14-19, 2020 (margin of error +/- 4.3%).

## KEY FINDINGS

- In the wake of budget impacts from the COVID-19 recession, Californians favor protecting public health and Medi-Cal from budget cuts over other categories of spending.
- California households have experienced broad and negative economic impacts; 40% of survey respondents say they or somebody in their household has lost a job or faced reduced income due to fewer work hours.
- There remains substantial concern about seeking non-COVID medical care in hospital emergency rooms or through hospital in-patient / out-patient services.
- Californians continue to be concerned about the spread of COVID-19 in their community. A total of 76% say they are “very” or “somewhat” worried and only 23% say they are “not too” or “not at all” worried about the spread. Given this level of concern, it’s unlikely that Californians will withdraw support for safety measures any time soon.

## ECONOMIC IMPACT ON HOUSEHOLDS

The number of workers applying for unemployment benefits has been well-documented and our data bear this out. A full 26% of survey respondents report that they or someone in their household has lost a job due to COVID-19 restrictions. This number goes up to 40% when you include respondents who report either lost jobs or lower income due to fewer work hours. The impact of the COVID-19 restrictions is heavily concentrated in younger households (18-29), 46% of whom report they or someone in their household has lost a job.

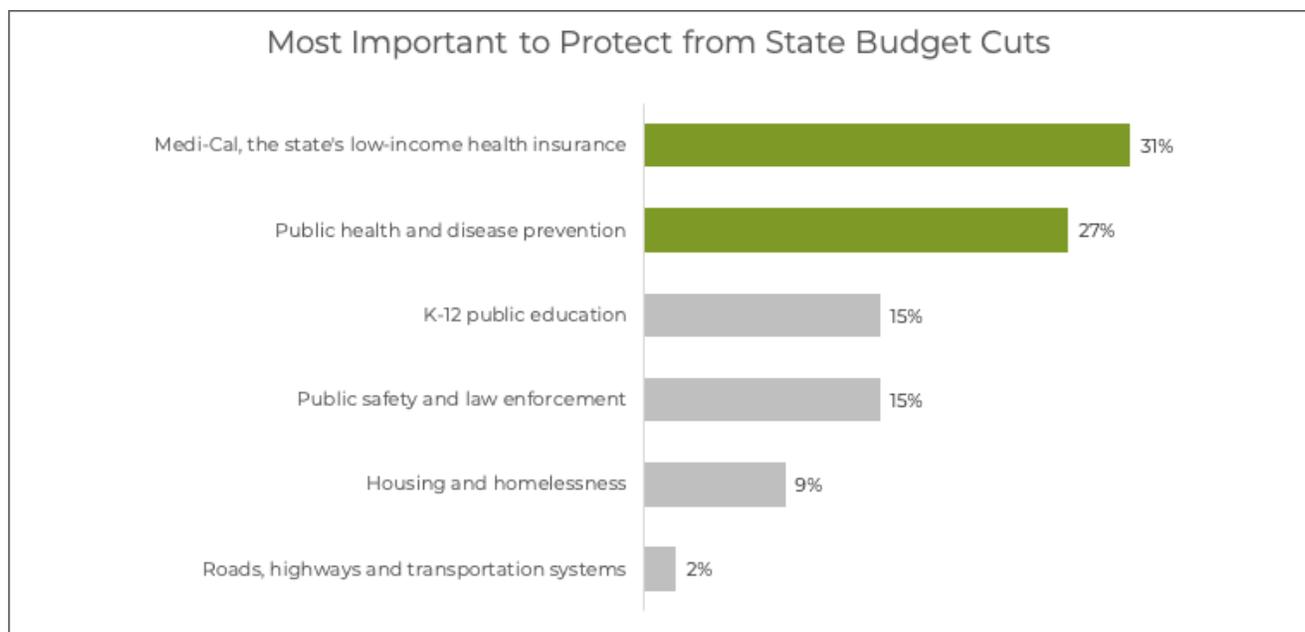
The impact on younger households goes up to 62% when you combine those who report lost jobs and lost income due to fewer work hours.

The impact of job losses has extended to loss of health insurance – 11% of respondents report they or somebody in their household has lost health insurance due to COVID-19. Any increase in the rate of uninsured will certainly put more strain on the state’s Medicaid budget.

## BUDGET PRIORITIES

State budgets have been hammered by the recession and this is forcing a difficult conversation about which programs lawmakers should protect from budget cuts. We sought some direction from Californians to collect insights about which programs they would protect.

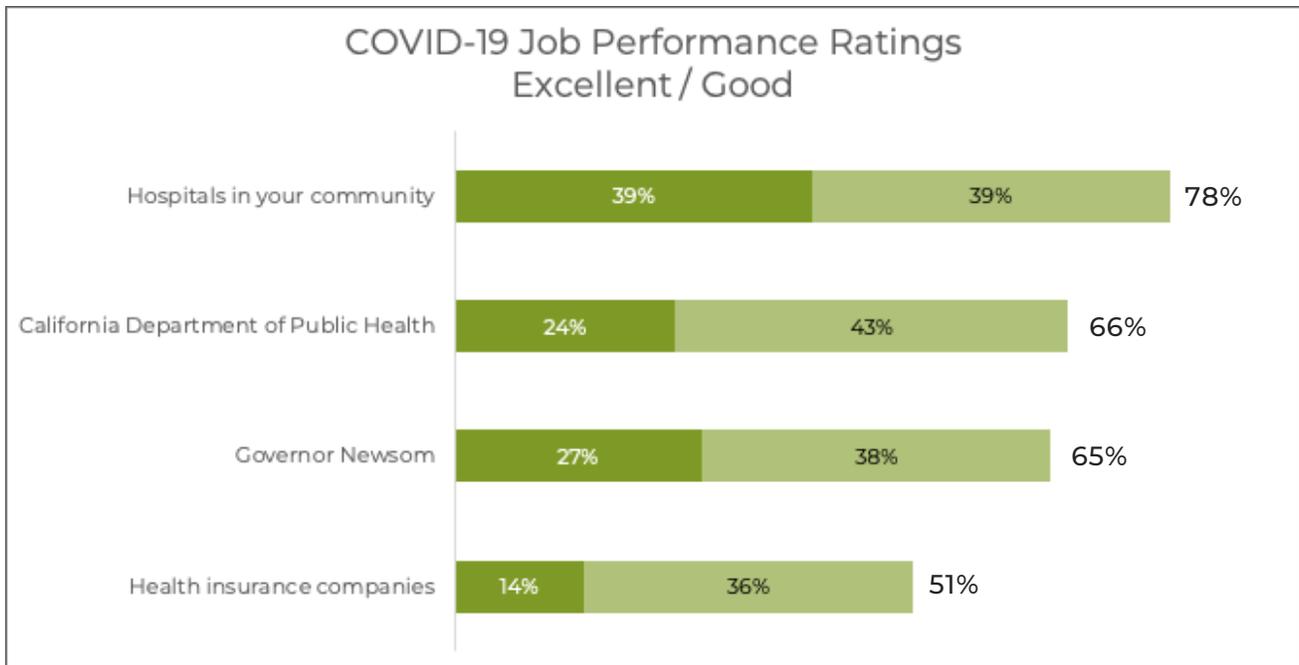
*Question: Because of the economic declines caused by COVID-19, the California state government is expected to need to make significant budget cuts. The following are major spending categories in the state budget. Rank them 1 to 6 where 1 is the most important to protect from budget cuts and 6 is the least important.*



The pandemic has clearly elevated Californians’ concern about investment in public health. It’s notable that public education was downgraded given the historic and broad support it typically receives in the budget process. Investments in housing and homelessness, a pervasive issue in many of California’s urban areas, was also downgraded. This is certainly an indication of the “snapshot in time” we’re currently experiencing, but it’s undeniable that voters are prioritizing investments in public health and access to healthcare.

## JOB PERFORMANCE

Gov. Gavin Newsom receives high marks for his leadership in combatting COVID-19 with 65% reporting he is doing an “excellent” or “good” job and only 27% describing his performance as “only fair” or “poor.” While you would expect a wide disparity in results based on party identification, it’s notable that there is higher-than-normal approval from opposition party voters – Democrats (82%), Republicans (55%), and Non-affiliated voters (61%).

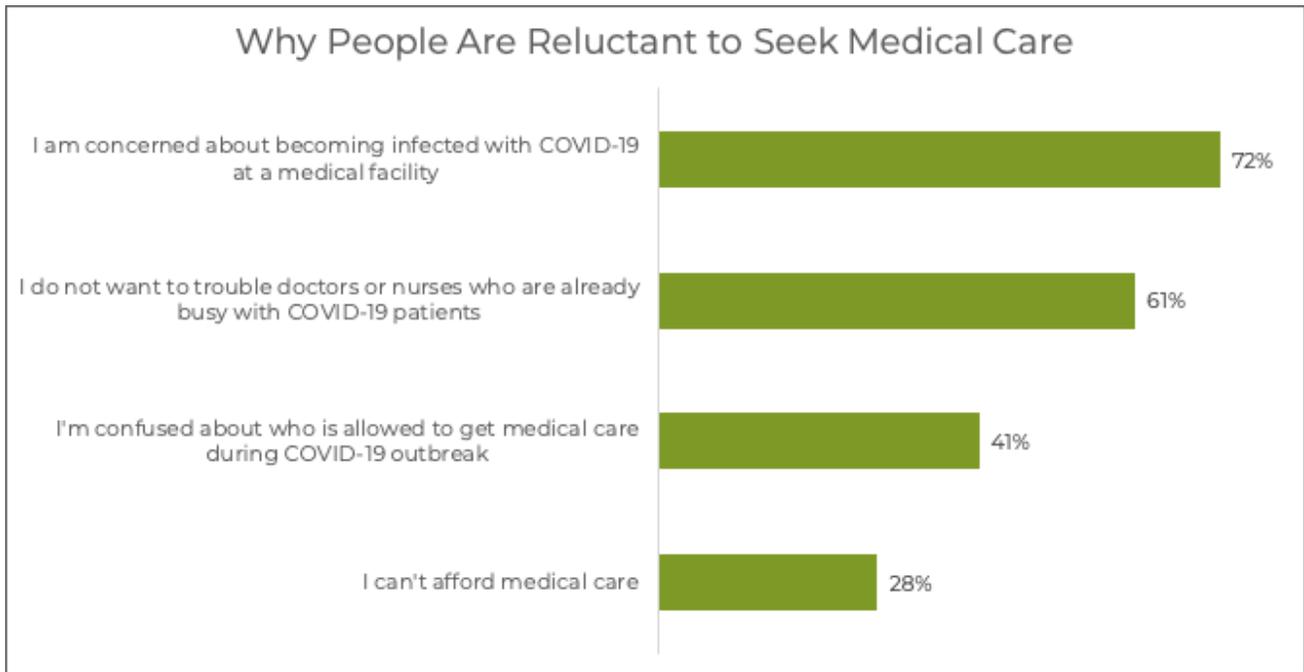


## WILLINGNESS TO SEEK HEALTHCARE

A key concern of public health officials is ensuring that people who need treatment for health issues are seeking that treatment. Our survey explored attitudes around seeking medical care in hospitals. While a majority indicated they’re still willing to seek care, a disturbing percentage of respondents indicated reservations.

For instance, 41% of respondents indicated they are “not too willing” or “not at all willing” to seek care in a hospital emergency room. This apprehension correlates with our question about whether respondents think it is safe to receive health services in an emergency room – 39% believe it is unsafe during the COVID-19 outbreak. On the question of in-patient and out-patient hospital services, 37% say they are “not too willing” or “not at all willing” to seek care at this time.

To understand this apprehension more deeply, we asked series of questions about why people may be reluctant to seek care.



With the exception of cost, these are barriers that can be overcome with clear communication about hospital readiness to safely and separately treat COVID-19 patients. But as hospitals reopen across the state, apprehension from patients to seek necessary care will continue to strain hospital budgets.

## CONCLUSION

Californians remain worried about the spread of COVID-19 in their communities and that belief is informing their opinions about other issues. In particular, they prefer to protect public health and Medi-Cal from budget cuts, and their concern about hospital safety is making many Californians apprehensive about seeking necessary medical care.

In the coming months, these concerns about the spread of COVID-19 will certainly clash with the economic needs of Californians, many of whom are experiencing significant loss of income.

## METHODOLOGY

The online survey consisted of 517 California residents ages 18+ and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Respondents were contacted using a professionally maintained online panel. In gathering responses, a variety of quality control measures were employed, including questionnaire pre-testing, validation, and real time monitoring of responses. To ensure a representative sample, demographic quotas were set and data weighted by gender, age, race, education level, and area of the state. The survey was available in both English and Spanish.

## ABOUT QUINN THOMAS and DHM RESEARCH

*Quinn Thomas and DHM Research frequently collaborate on projects designed to provide insights into major issues confronting business and community leaders, policymakers, and elected officials. Together, they have fielded several surveys in the Pacific Northwest over the last two months on issues related to COVID-19. This is their first California survey on the matter.*

*Quinn Thomas is an award-winning marketing communications agency founded in 2009 with offices in Portland and Seattle. DHM Research is an independent, non-partisan firm founded over 40 years ago. Both have deep experience in research and communications projects designed to support public policy development.*