



**The Politics of Medicare and Coronavirus: An eHealth Survey**  
*October 2020*

## Study Overview

This report examines Medicare beneficiaries' opinions on political issues related to the Medicare program and the coronavirus, with a focus on issues and proposals raised in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election. Findings are based on a nationwide survey of more than 2,100 Medicare beneficiaries who purchased Medicare insurance plans through eHealth. The survey was conducted on a voluntary basis between October 23 and 26, 2020.

- **A majority of Medicare beneficiaries support early buy-in to Medicare:** 60% of survey respondents say adults age 60 to 64 should be able to buy in to Medicare coverage earlier than the standard eligibility age of 65.
- **Medicare beneficiaries express increasing discomfort with any new coronavirus vaccine:** 47% say they are either “very” or “somewhat” uncomfortable receiving a coronavirus vaccine released in the near term, up from 37% in eHealth’s July 2020 survey. More Republican voters would feel “very comfortable” getting a vaccine than would Democratic voters (31% vs. 18%, respectively).
- **A strong majority of Medicare beneficiaries support mandatory mask rules:** 85% say masks should be required in public places where social distancing is difficult; 98% of likely Democratic voters favor mandatory mask rules, as do 69% of likely Republican voters.
- **Many Medicare beneficiaries want access to non-standard coronavirus treatments:** 40% want access to unproven or experimental treatments if they come down with the coronavirus, while 23% would not; 37% are unsure. College educated respondents are more likely to want access to non-standard treatments than those with only a high school education (45% vs. 33%, respectively).
- **Nearly two thirds of Medicare beneficiaries voted early but they differ on the safety of in-person voting:** 64% say they have already cast their vote for president; 67% of likely Republican voters say they would feel comfortable voting in person, compared to only 29% of likely Democratic voters.
- **Most Medicare beneficiaries feel the government should do more to lower the cost of drugs, but a \$200 check would help:** 63% say the government isn’t doing enough to lower the cost of prescription drugs; a similar figure (64%) say a \$200 check from the government would make a meaningful difference in their personal drug costs.

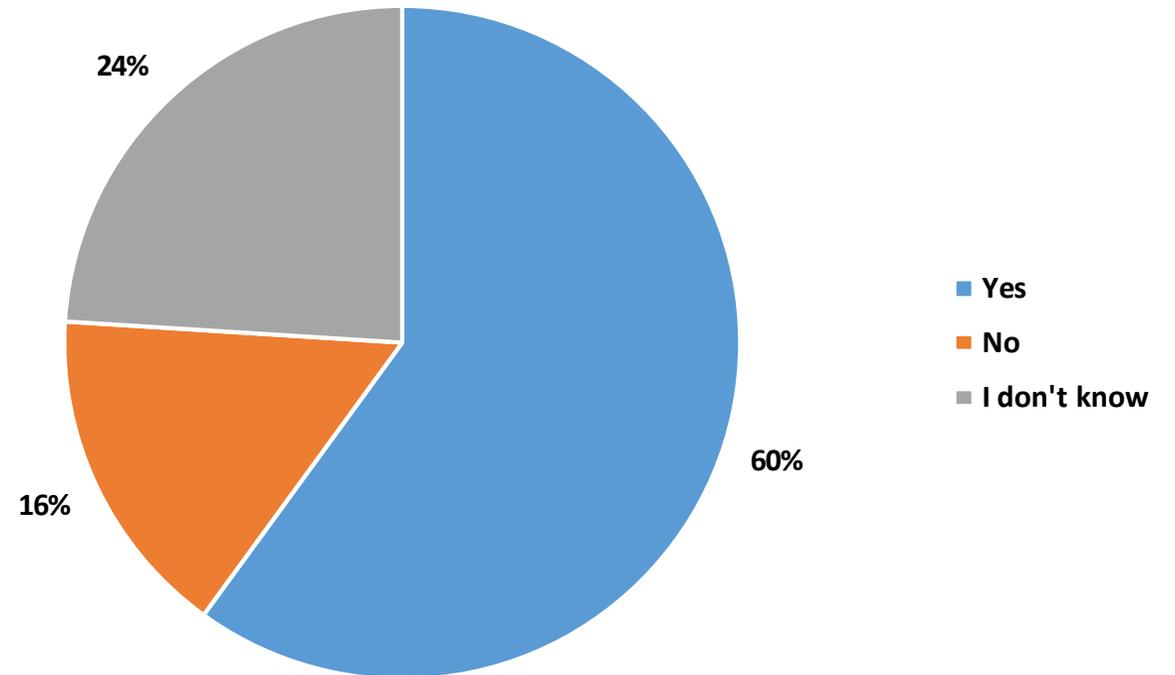
**Allowing people age 60+ to buy in to Medicare early is popular with beneficiaries**

- 60% of survey respondents say adults age 60 to 64 should have the option to buy in to Medicare coverage early.
- 16% do not favor allowing early buy-in to Medicare.
- 24% are undecided.

**Most reject lowering the standard Medicare eligibility age of 65:** Only 17% favor allowing people age 60 to 64 to enroll in Medicare without requiring them to buy in.

**Democrats and Republican differ on allowing early buy-in to Medicare:** 76% of likely Democratic voters favor allowing early buy-in to Medicare for people age 60 to 64, compared to 44% of likely Republican voters.

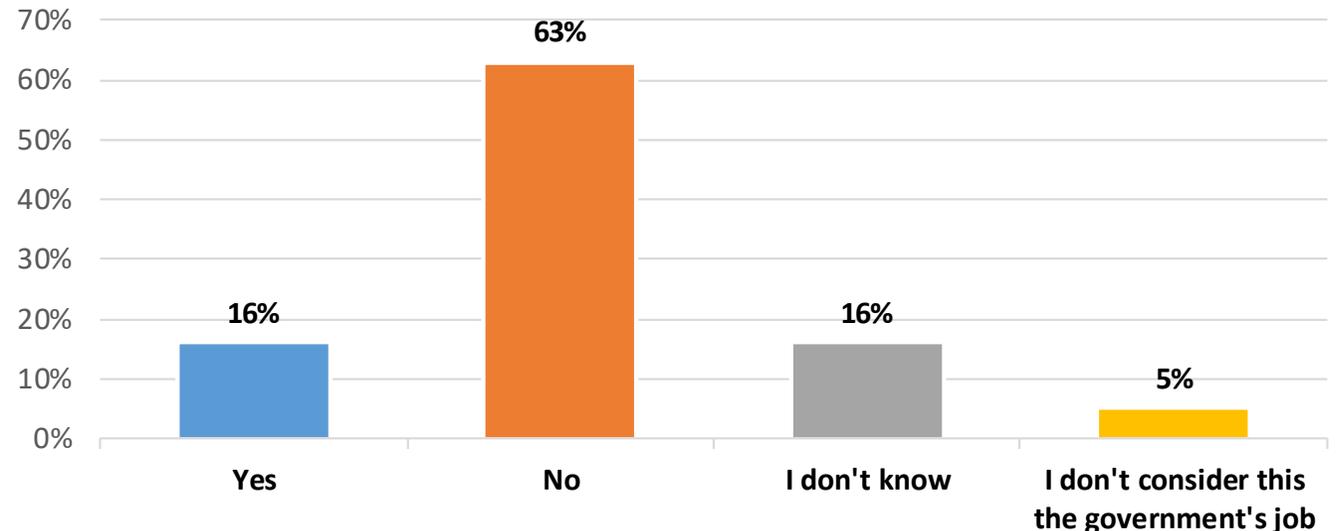
**Should people have the chance to buy in to Medicare early at age 60?**



### Six in ten Medicare beneficiaries feel that the government should do more to help lower the cost of prescription drugs

- 63% do not feel that the government is doing enough to reduce drug costs for consumers.
- 16% feel that the government is doing enough to reduce drug costs.
- 16% are unsure, while an additional 5% say they do not consider it the government's job to lower drug costs.

### Do you feel that the government is doing enough to help lower the cost of prescription drugs?

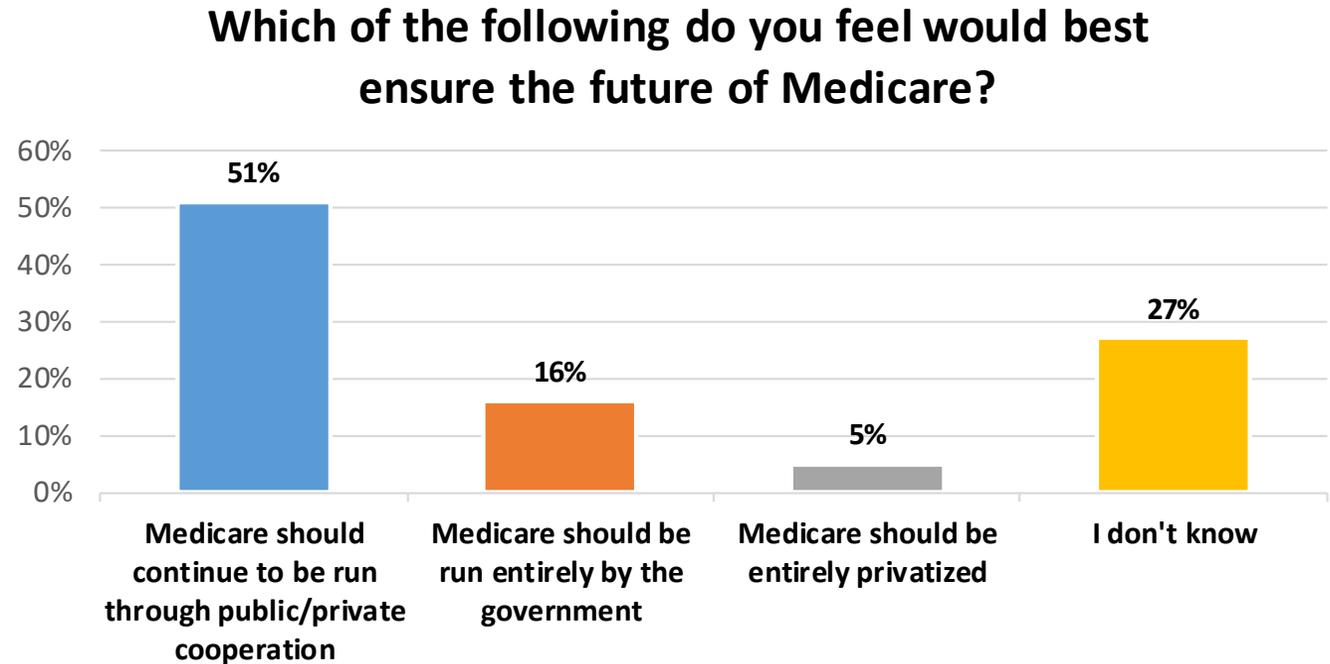


**Democrats and Republicans differ on the government's handling of drug costs:** 87% of likely Democratic voters say the government has not done enough to help lower the cost of prescription drugs, compared to 37% of likely Republican voters.

**Most would welcome a government check to help with drug costs:** Overall, 64% say a \$200 check (as proposed by the Trump administration) would make a meaningful difference to them in their prescription drug costs. More than 50% of survey respondents indicate they have an annual household income of \$50,000 or less.

### Most beneficiaries favor a continued public/private partnership in the administering of the Medicare program

- 51% feel that continued cooperation between government and private insurers is key to the future of the Medicare program.
- 16% feel it would be best for the Medicare program to be run entirely by the government.
- 5% feel that Medicare should be entirely privatized.
- 27% are unsure of their position.

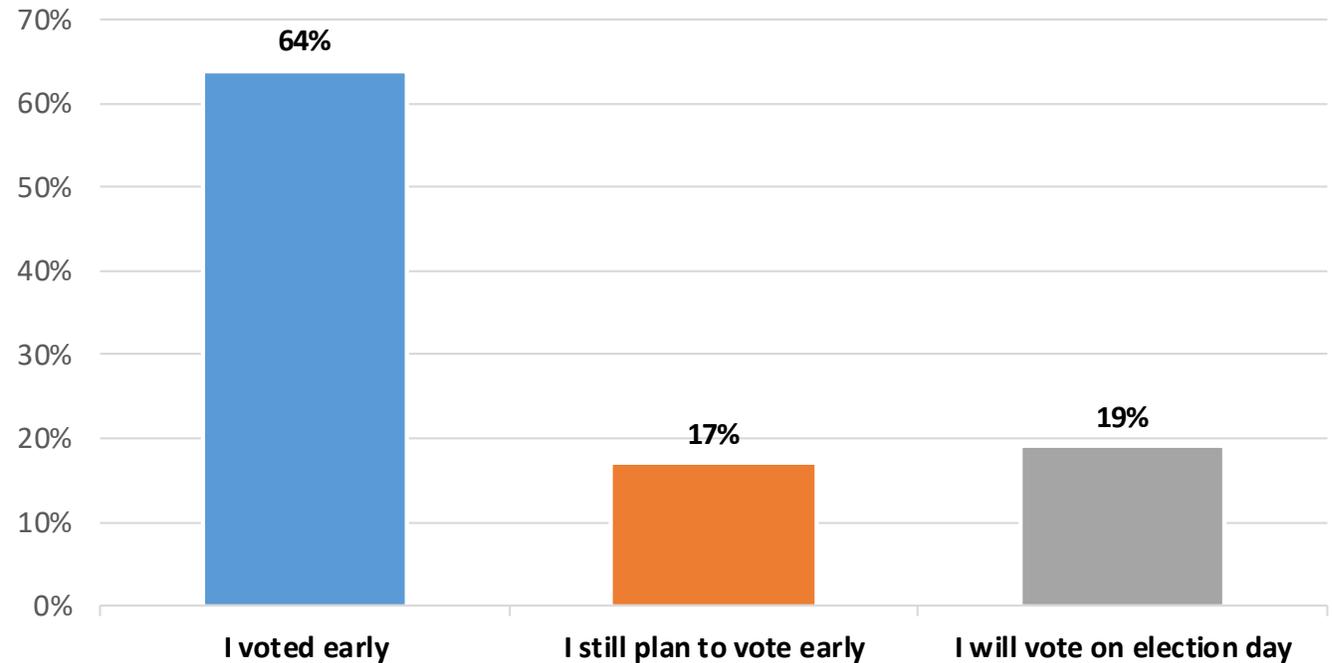


**Democrats and Republicans differ somewhat on how Medicare should be administered:** 64% of likely Republican voters feel Medicare should continue to be run through public/private cooperation, compared to 47% of likely Democratic voters. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of likely Democratic voters feel that the Medicare program should be run entirely by the government, compared to 7% of likely Republican voters.

### Nearly two thirds of Medicare beneficiaries have already voted in the presidential election\*

- 64% say they have already cast their votes for president. Of these, 77% say they did so by mail while 23% did so in person at a polling place.
- 17% say they have not yet voted but still plan to vote early before Election Day.
- 19% say they are planning to vote on Election Day itself.

### Are you casting your vote for the presidential election early or will you vote on Election Day?



**Democrats and Republicans differ on confidence in public voting during the pandemic:** 67% of likely Republican voters say they would feel comfortable voting in person, compared to 29% of likely Democratic voters.

\* Survey respondents who indicated they would not vote at all are excluded from these figures.

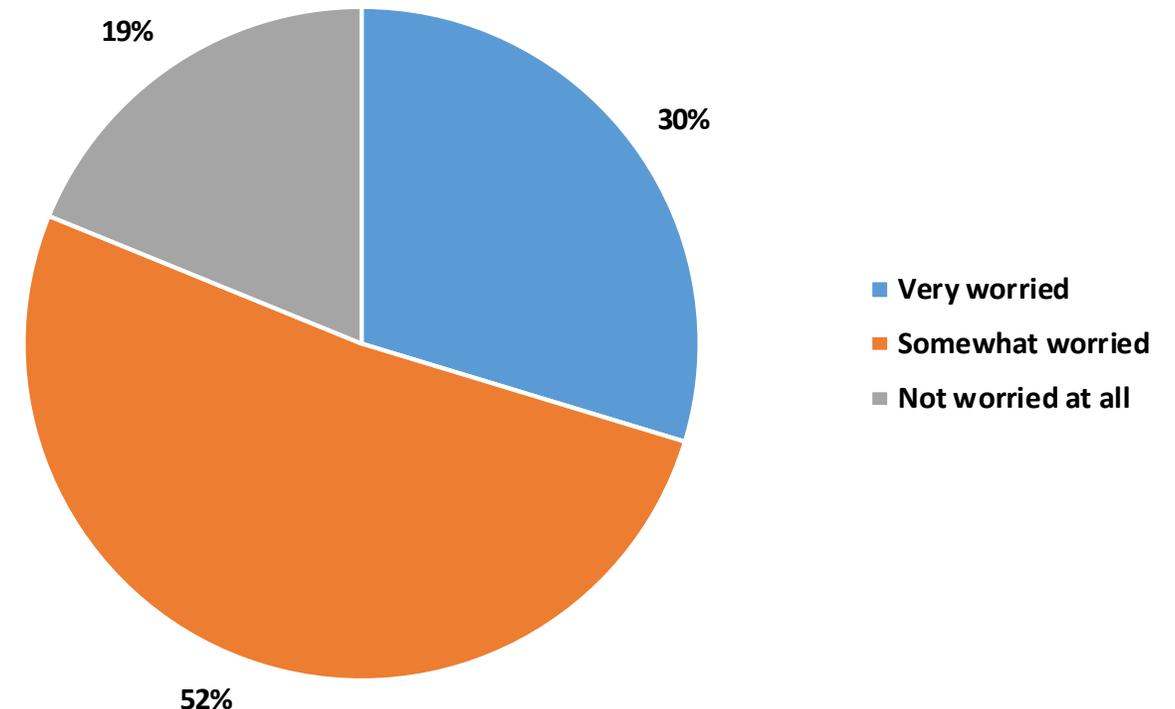
### Eight in ten Medicare beneficiaries are worried about exposure to the coronavirus

- 30% say they are “very worried” about being exposed to the virus.
- 52% say they are “somewhat worried” about exposure to the virus.
- 19% say they are “not worried at all” about exposure to the coronavirus.

**Democrats and Republicans differ on concerns over catching coronavirus:** 45% of likely Democratic voters are “very worried” about exposure to the disease, compared to 14% of likely Republican voters.

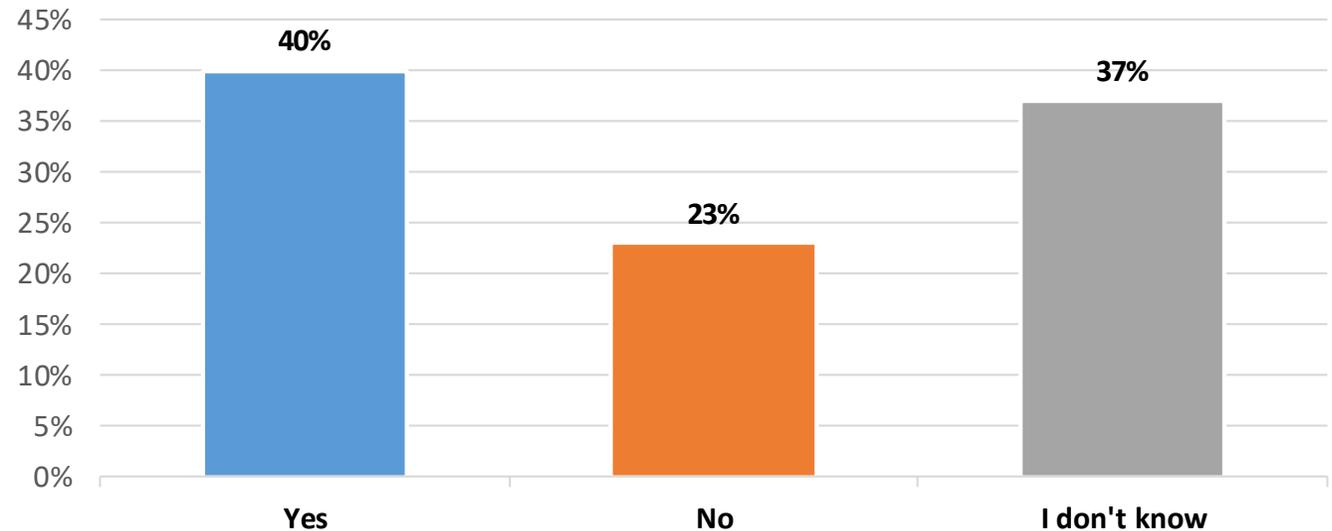
**More are concerned about being hospitalized if they come down with the virus:** Overall, 46% say they are “very worried” about being hospitalized if they get the coronavirus; 35% are “somewhat worried”; 18% are not worried about hospitalization at all.

### How worried are you about being exposed to the coronavirus?



**Medicare beneficiaries have mixed feelings about treatments for coronavirus that are not broadly endorsed by the medical community**

- 40% say they would like access to experimental or unproven treatments if they come down with the virus.
- 23% say they would not want access to such treatments.
- 37% are unsure.



**Democrats and Republicans differ on non-standard coronavirus treatments:** 49% of likely Republican voters would like access to experimental or unproven treatment methods, compared to 36% of likely Democratic voters.

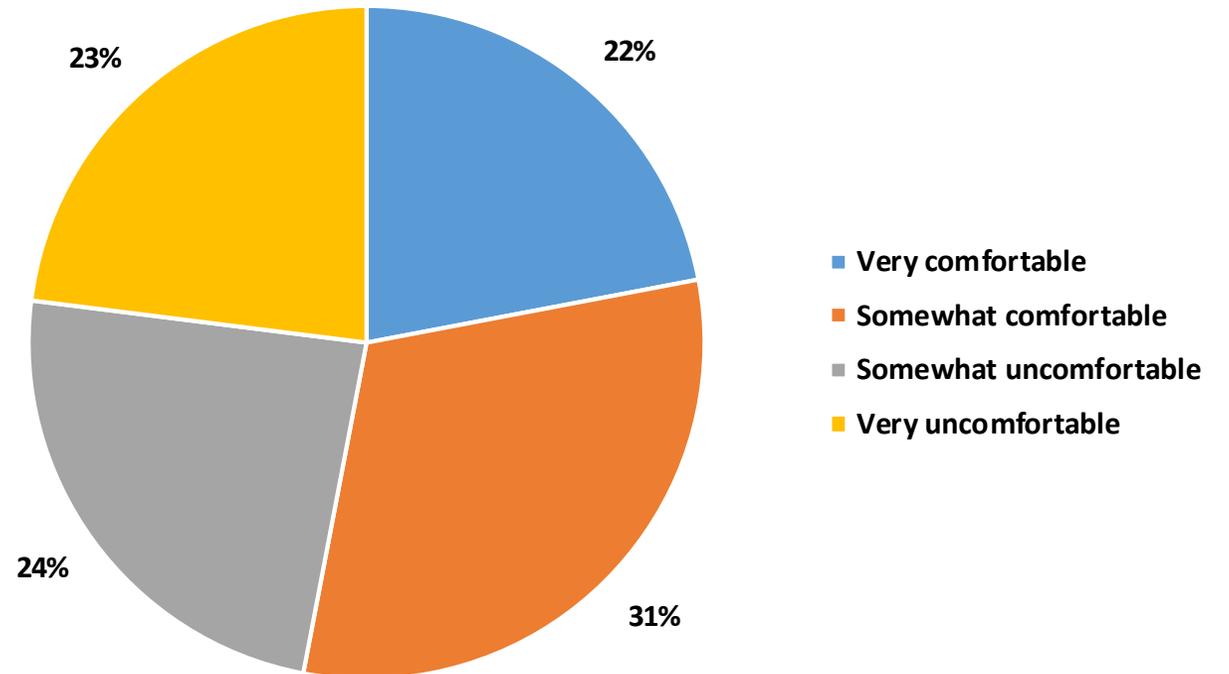
**The college educated are more likely to want access to experimental treatments:** 45% of those with a four-year college degree would like access to experimental or unproven treatments, compared to 33% of those with only a high school education.

**The percentage of Medicare beneficiaries expressing confidence in receiving a new vaccine has declined**

- 53% say they are either “very” or “somewhat” comfortable receiving a vaccine made available this winter; by comparison, 63% of respondents in eHealth’s July 2020 survey expressed comfort receiving a vaccine this year.
- 47% now express some level of discomfort with a new vaccine, compared to 37% in eHealth’s July survey.

**Democrats and Republicans differ on the safety of any newly developed vaccine:** 31% of likely Republican voters say they would feel “very comfortable” getting a new vaccine if one were released this winter, compared to 18% of likely Democratic voters.

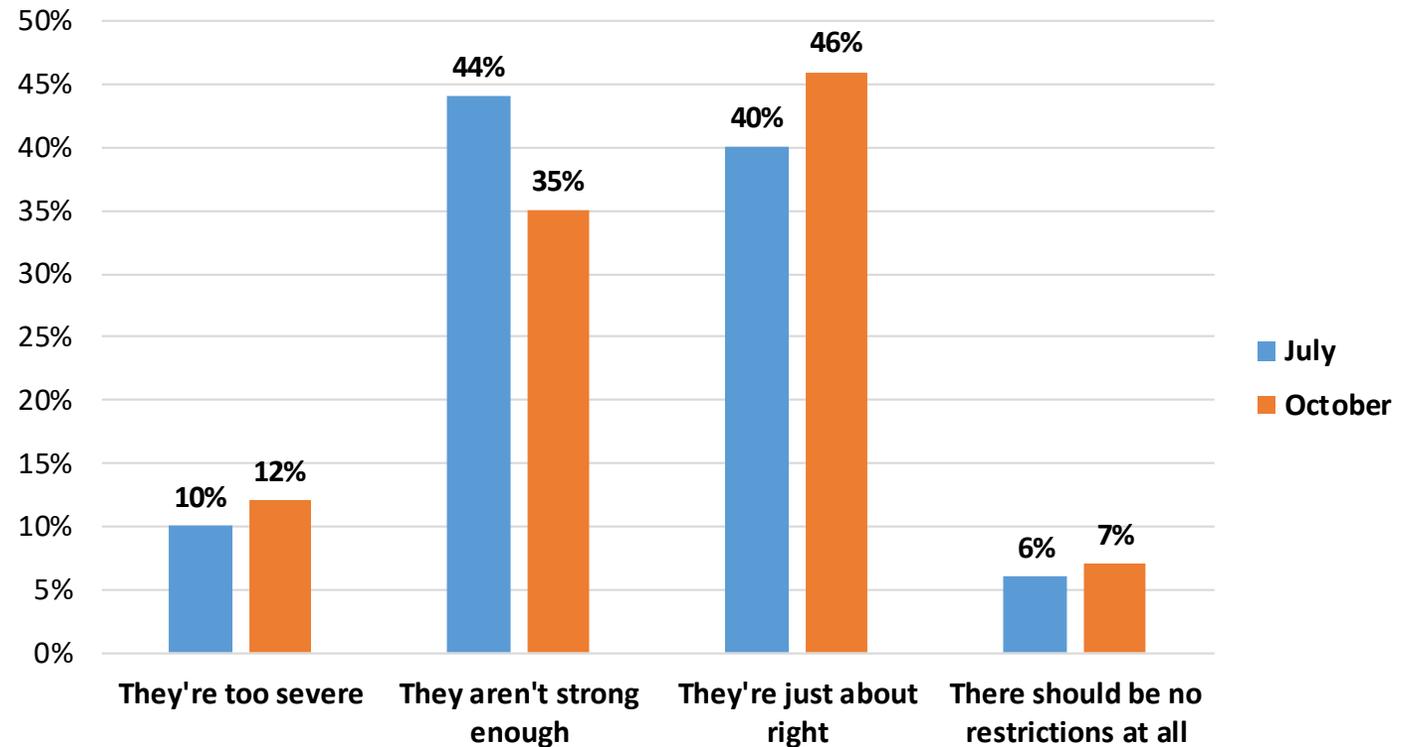
**If a vaccine is made available this winter, how comfortable would you feel getting it?**



**More Medicare beneficiaries feel that coronavirus-related restrictions on social life are finding the right balance**

- 12% say restrictions are too severe, compared to 10% in eHealth’s July 2020 survey.
- 35% say restrictions aren’t strong enough, compared to 44% in July.
- 46% say they are just about right, compared to 40% in July.
- 7% say there should be no restrictions at all, compared to 6% in July.

**Which best describes your feelings about coronavirus restrictions where you live?**



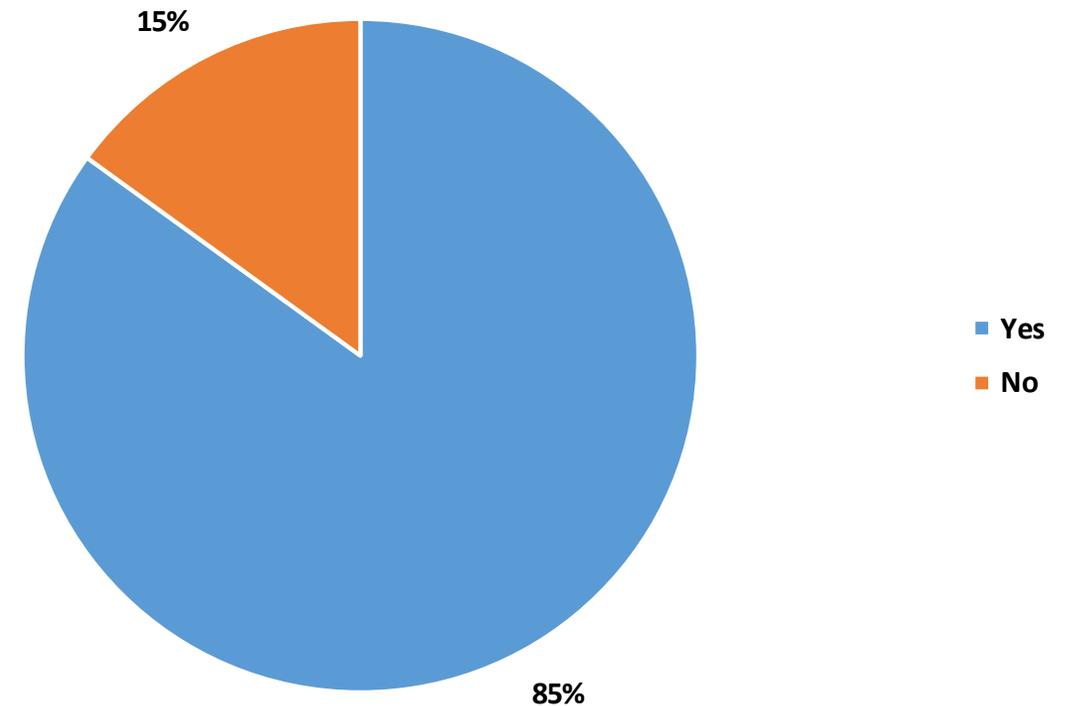
**Democrats and Republicans differ on restrictions:** 51% of likely Democratic voters feel that coronavirus-related restrictions are not strong enough, compared to 16% of likely Republican voters. Forty-nine percent (49%) of likely Republican voters feel that coronavirus-related restrictions are just about right, compared to 44% of likely Democratic voters.

**A strong majority of Medicare beneficiaries still feel that mask wearing should be mandatory when social distancing is not possible**

- 85% say that everyone should be required to wear a mask in public, a figure essentially unchanged since eHealth's July 2020 survey (86%).
- 15% say that masks should not be required.

**Majorities of both Democrats and Republicans endorse mandatory masks in public:** 98% of likely Democratic voters feel that masks should be required, compared to 69% of likely Republican voters. These figures are almost unchanged since eHealth's July survey.

**Should everyone be required to wear a mask in public when social distancing isn't possible?**



**Methodology Note**

Findings presented in this report are based on a voluntary survey of Medicare beneficiaries who purchased Medicare health insurance products from eHealth. The survey was conducted between October 23 and 26, 2020, and a total of 2,176 responses were collected. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest full percentage point. In some cases, total percentages may add to slightly more or less than 100% due to rounding. Prior surveys mentioned in this report may be found through eHealth's Media Center at <http://news.ehealthinsurance.com/>. For the purposes of this survey, voters identified themselves as more likely to vote for a specific party in any given election, and results do not necessarily reflect votes cast in the 2020 presidential election. Survey findings are intended to reflect the opinions of respondents only and do not imply endorsement of those opinions by eHealth.

## About eHealth<sup>®</sup>

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