

# The National Poll on Healthy Aging at Five Years

JUNE 2022



INSTITUTE FOR HEALTHCARE  
POLICY AND INNOVATION  
**NATIONAL POLL  
ON HEALTHY AGING**  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN



## History and partnership

In 2017, the leadership of the [University of Michigan Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation \(IHPI\)](#), with instrumental support from [AARP](#) and the [Michigan Medicine Department of Communications](#), developed and launched the [National Poll on Healthy Aging \(NPHA\)](#). The poll grew from an identified need for a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of older adults and their families to better inform health care research, policy, and practice, as well as the opportunity to build on the strong interest and expertise in aging-related topics among IHPI faculty members.

Today, the NPHA has evolved into a nimble instrument to gather, interpret, and disseminate time-sensitive data from a nationally representative sample of adults aged 50-80. The poll's widely cited findings inform policy and public interest questions related to the health and well-being of older adults.

As we celebrate the first five years of the poll, we reflect on the NPHA's extraordinary impact and look forward to continuing to elevate the voices of older adults in the years to come.

## IHPI and NPHA structure

Embedded within the University of Michigan (U-M), the nation's largest public research university, IHPI is uniquely positioned to direct the poll. Notably, since its founding in 2011, IHPI has played a vital role in supporting and advancing key health policy and health services research at U-M. IHPI draws on the strengths of U-M's top-ranked schools and colleges, uniting nearly **700 faculty experts** across diverse disciplines to tackle the toughest issues facing U.S. health care. More than **100 IHPI members** are part of IHPI's Aging Research Network, demonstrating the breadth of knowledge and interest in aging among IHPI's membership.

Over the past five years, the NPHA has been led by IHPI member and U-M Chief Health Officer [Preeti Malani, M.D., M.S., M.S.J.](#), with

associate directors [Jeff Kullgren, M.D., M.P.H., M.S.](#) and [Erica Solway, Ph.D., M.S.W., M.P.H.](#), and guided and supported by a dedicated and experienced [team](#) of IHPI staff who provide expertise in project management, data analysis, multimedia design, government and external relations, and communications. In addition, **more than 50 IHPI members** have contributed valuable content expertise as collaborators on poll modules and products. The poll team also receives strategic guidance from the [NPHA Advisory Board](#) which meets annually.

## Gathering and analyzing data

In partnership with AARP, the NPHA team develops poll questions to understand older adults' perspectives and experiences related to health and health care. NPHA surveys are **fielded twice per year** to a sample of approximately **2,000 respondents age 50–80** drawn from a nationally representative, probability-based panel of U.S. households from NORC's AmeriSpeak.

To date, **10 waves of data have been collected** and **six waves of data have been made publicly available to researchers** across the country through the [National Archive of Computerized Data on Aging's Open Aging Repository](#) located within U-M's Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR). These data have been **downloaded more than 1,750 times** by students and researchers from universities around the world. Several topics, including loneliness, patient portals, and telehealth, have been explored over several waves. These longitudinal data can be used to examine changes in perceptions, attitudes, and experiences over time.

## Translating and presenting findings

As of May 2022, the NPHA team has produced **46 reports** based on poll data, covering a diverse range of topics such as prescription drugs, oral health, brain health, sexual health, aging in place, saving for health care expenses, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on various aspects of well-being. Reports

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are **published and distributed approximately 10 times per year**.

In addition to poll reports, the NPHA team develops other related products that offer unique glimpses into the poll's rich data, including the "poll extra" concept launched in 2021. Poll extras make use of data from the NPHA surveys and from new, targeted polls using AARP's Foresight 50+ Omnibus panel, and connect these findings to current events through short, engaging articles. To date, **10 poll extras** have been developed and disseminated. Poll extras contain key data points that capture high-visibility, timely information on topics such as intentions around COVID-19 vaccination or missed health care due to the pandemic.

NPHA results have been disseminated via presentations and posters at events and meetings including those organized by the Alliance for Health Policy and the Economic Alliance for Michigan, the Healthy Aging Summit, and the annual conferences of the Gerontological Society of America (GSA), AcademyHealth, and American Public Health Association. Poll data have also been shared through presentations specifically for health journalists.

The [May 2022 webinar](#) on the NPHA attracted a national audience of over **520 registrants**, primarily experts and leaders in the field of health and aging. In the week following the event, the webinar recording had **1,200 views on YouTube and 500 views on Facebook**.

Thanks to collaborations with numerous U-M faculty members in the development of NPHA surveys and reports, data from the poll have also resulted in **27 peer-reviewed academic publications** in high-profile journals, including: *Annals of Internal Medicine*, the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, the *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, *JAMA Network Open*, and the *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*.

Because many of these journals have a large readership, are regularly covered by national media, and have a strong social media presence, they have proven to be another effective channel for disseminating poll results. For example, a [research letter on brain health](#) published in *JAMA Neurology* has an **Altmetric Attention Score over 600** (a measure of the amount and reach of the attention an item has received), placing it in the **top 5% of all research outputs** scored by Altmetric, and was named one of the **top 10 papers** in that journal in 2020.

In addition, the NPHA team and its collaborators have published **nine academic blog posts** for *JAMA Health Forum* and the *Health Affairs Blog* (now called *Health Affairs Insider*) as well as **one book chapter** focused on the patient perspective in a leading clinical geriatrics textbook.

## Spreading the word

Since its launch, the NPHA has grown in reach by leveraging a broad range of communication channels to connect with national

and global audiences through the multifaceted dissemination networks of U-M and AARP.

In total, NPHA data have been mentioned hundreds of times across major media sources and thousands of times on social media. The poll was **featured over 220 times in major national media outlets between May 2021 and May 2022**, including *The New York Times*, *US News & World Report*, *CNN*, *The Washington Post*, *HealthDay News*, *Reuters*, *NPR*, *Forbes*, *NBC News*, and *USA Today*. NPHA results have also been covered widely in more specialized professional publications such as *McKnight's Senior Living*, *Psychiatric Times*, *Pharmacy Today*, and *mHealth Intelligence*. Individual reporters who have expressed interest in the poll receive direct email pitches from the NPHA on poll reports about topics they cover.

In addition, the NPHA team has created **12 videos featuring poll findings** that collectively have **21,000+ views on YouTube**. And to further expand the dissemination of poll results, the team has also developed multiple "patient pages" for the Michigan Medicine community with actionable information that can be used by older adults and their families. NPHA data have also been used in other advice-oriented articles from Michigan Medicine.

NPHA reports and poll extras are distributed through a variety of U-M communications channels, reaching both academic and general public audiences including the [Michigan Health Lab](#) and [Michigan Health Blog](#) and through social media accounts. Another key dissemination strategy is via the [U-M Alumni Association Education Gateway](#), curated for **U-M's 640,000+ alumni** and accessible to the general public.

*Michigan Today*, an e-newsletter run by Michigan News, has distributed several report press releases to **300,000+ U-M alumni and donors**, including a [feature](#) highlighting the April 2022 poll on [aging in place](#). Nearly half of poll reports have been featured in the *University Record*, which is sent by email to **tens of thousands of U-M faculty, staff, and retirees**. In addition, the IHPI team maintains an active and growing targeted email distribution list for NPHA reports.

*AARP Bulletin* and *AARP Blog* have featured poll reports and AARP Research shares poll findings on its social media accounts. Given its extraordinary reach to millions of households through its networks, AARP's dissemination efforts have helped spread poll results even more widely.

## Shedding light on key issues

NPHA reports have shed light on topics that may not be getting the attention they deserve in academic publications or the mainstream media.

The report on [everyday ageism and health](#) from June 2020 is one example of how the NPHA has been used to gather new information by exploring experiences of ageism that older adults may encounter in their everyday lives. The report and two subsequent academic papers based on this module, including one on the [development of an everyday ageism scale](#) and the

other on [experiences of everyday ageism and the health of U.S. adults](#), demonstrated that everyday ageism is common, with more than four in five adults age 50-80 experiencing at least one form of ageism in their day-to-day lives, and those experiencing more forms of ageism were more likely to report poorer physical and mental health. This work found that positive views of aging are also common, and that those reporting more positive views had better health, suggesting that addressing everyday ageism and promoting positive views of aging may have far-reaching benefits for the health and well-being of older adults.

## Providing timely insights during the pandemic

When the COVID-19 pandemic took hold in the U.S., the NPHA team quickly turned its attention to assessing its potential impact on older adults and adapted the poll to uncover important insights relevant to the pandemic. For example, when all non-emergency health-related visits went virtual in 2020, the NPHA team developed a [telehealth module](#) to build on previously collected data and compare older adults' experiences with virtual care before and during the first months of the pandemic. The poll found that the percentage of older adults who had a telehealth visit in those first months rose sharply and concerns about telehealth visits decreased.

Other poll modules offered unique and important insights into older adults' experiences during the pandemic. A report from January 2021 explored older adults' [living environments during the pandemic](#) and found that one in five older adults who live with others did not have a place to safely isolate if infected with COVID-19, with notable disparities by race and ethnicity, income, dwelling type, and health status. This report also highlighted the importance of access to outdoor spaces for community engagement, physical activity, and sense of connection.

In addition, reports released in September 2020 and May 2021 explored the impact of the pandemic on [loneliness](#) and [mental health](#), respectively, and a report on [physical functioning and falls](#) showed the potential for long-term negative effects of reduced physical activity during the pandemic. And a report from December 2021/January 2022 explored [sources of joy and stress](#) for older adults during the pandemic and provided insights into coping and resilience during this challenging period.

Moreover, results from a [January 2021 poll extra](#) demonstrated that 45% of adults 65 and over did not have access to patient portals to communicate with their doctors, with differences in use based on income and education. This was key information for the early weeks of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout since many health systems relied on patient portals to communicate vaccine

availability to patients. And findings from a [February 2022 poll extra](#) showed that more than one in four older adults who had existing appointments experienced postponements or cancellations in dental visits, primary care visits, and visits for procedures or tests.

## Informing Policy

NPHA data have helped to inform policy in a variety of ways. Findings from the NPHA [health insurance decision-making](#) report from January/February 2019, developed in collaboration with IHPI member and NPHA board member [Renu Tipirneni, M.D., M.Sc.](#), were mentioned in a [press release](#) issued by U.S. Senators Stabenow, Brown, and Baldwin introducing the Medicare at 50 Act in both the 116th and 117th Congresses. This report found that more than a quarter of adults approaching retirement were not confident that they could afford health insurance over the next year, and roughly the same percentage said they had issues navigating health insurance options, coverage decisions, and out-of-pocket costs.

In September 2019, the NPHA team developed a report on [emergency preparedness](#) with faculty collaborator [Sue Anne Bell, Ph.D., FNP-BC, FAAN](#). This report found that while more than half of older adults believed they were prepared for a natural disaster or emergency in the coming year, many had not taken steps to be prepared. For example, nearly half of respondents either did not know if their community had an emergency alert system or had not signed up for notifications. Dr. Bell presented findings from this poll along with other research in her [oral](#) and [written testimony](#) before the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging in November 2021.

Members of the NPHA team have met with key bipartisan legislative staff from the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging and have presented twice to the [Wolverine Caucus](#), a network of U-M alumni working in state government in Lansing. In addition, Dr. Malani met with leaders at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regarding the July/August 2019 report on [safe storage of medication around grandchildren](#) which led to a [JAMA Patient Page](#) on this topic.

## Looking to the future

Over the past five years, the NPHA has established itself nationally as a trusted, reliable, accessible, and timely source of information about health and aging. Yet, with so many existing and emerging challenges facing our nation's growing older population, there is much more work to be done. The poll regularly reveals insightful evidence that can accelerate policy, public health, and health care innovations to support healthy aging and looks forward to continuing this important work well into the future.

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