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## 2007 Health Priorities

**To:** Trust for America's Health  
**From:** Al Quinlan and Missy Egelsky

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A new survey commissioned by the Trust for America's Health (TFAH) finds that Americans strongly favor increased federal funding to improve the nation's public health system.

- Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of Americans believe federal efforts to research and prevent disease should be increased.
- For the fourth consecutive year, cancer ranks as Americans' top health concern, followed by heart disease, chemical terrorism, obesity, and diabetes.
- Americans' concern about emergency health threats, including biological and chemical terrorism and food contamination, has grown dramatically in the past year.
- More than half (53 percent) of Americans feel the country is unprepared for a pandemic flu outbreak, and 45 percent of Americans believe the country is unprepared to respond to a biological terrorism attack.

The poll was conducted between January 18<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007 among 1,015 adults, ages 18 and older. These findings only include the subset of 856 registered voters responding to the survey.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This survey of 1015 adults is subject to a margin of error of +/- 3.1 percent. The margin of error for the 856 registered voters is +/- 3.4 percent.

## Nearly two-thirds of Americans believe efforts to research and prevent disease should be increased.

In 2005, the federal government spent 93 percent of health dollars on diagnosis and treatment of disease, and seven percent on researching causes and preventing disease.

Sixty-five percent of Americans believe that the federal government should increase disease research and prevention funding. Four-in-10 people feel the government should spend “much more” on these efforts. (See Appendix C for more details about different demographic group support for increased funding).

- **Sixty-eight percent of African Americans and 69 percent of Hispanics** believe the government should spend more money on prevention and research of disease. Fifty-three percent of African Americans and 51 percent of Hispanics feel the government needs to spend “much more.”
- **Majorities of Americans across the ideological spectrum want more government funding for disease research and prevention.** Seventy-seven percent of liberals, 72 percent of moderates, and 53 percent of conservatives believe that the federal government should be spending more on research and prevention of diseases.
- **Women are more likely to support spending more on research and prevention.** Seven-in-10 women express support for a bigger investment in researching and preventing diseases, compared to 59 percent of men.
- **Voters in the Northeast are most supportive of additional spending.**<sup>2</sup> Nearly three-quarters of Northeasterners (74 percent) support increased government funding, and at least 60 percent of citizens in the Central, Southern, and Western regions also support additional spending on research and prevention of diseases.

## Cancer, obesity-related chronic diseases, and chemical terrorism top list of health concerns

For the fourth year of conducting this poll, Americans rank cancer as the health risk they are most concerned about. Eighty-four percent of Americans list cancer as a health problem that concerns them, with 27 percent responding that it is their top concern. Heart disease was the second highest concern, with 80 percent responding that it is a serious concern and 14 percent citing it as their top concern. Sixty-eight percent list diabetes as a serious concern, with 8 percent ranking it as their top concern.

Overall, these rankings demonstrate that Americans continue to be most concerned about diseases that impact people’s daily lives.

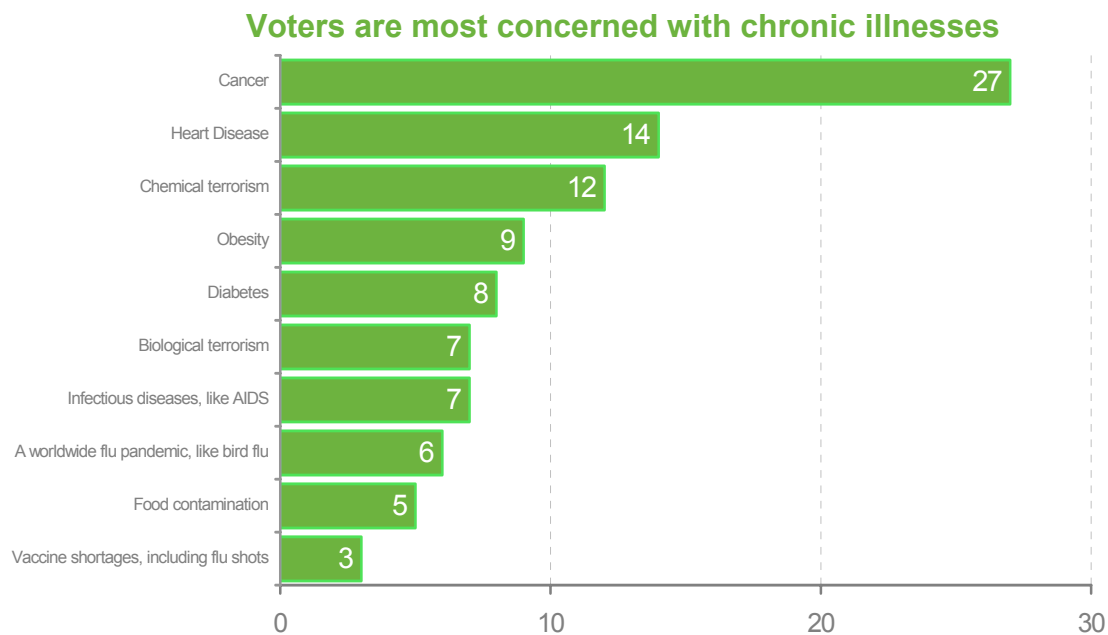
Among the respondents who indicated that government should spend more on research and prevention of disease, chronic illnesses topped their list of priorities. Three-quarters (75

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<sup>2</sup> Definitions of regions are available in Appendix B.

percent) of those who believe that government should be spending more on researching and preventing disease want more investment focused on cancer (with 52 percent responding they would support “much more” of an investment), and 72 percent expressed their support for increased investment in the research and prevention of chronic illnesses like heart disease and diabetes.

■ **Figure 1:** Biggest health concerns (% responding)



**Americans' concern about emergency health threats, including biological and chemical terrorism and food contamination, has grown dramatically in the past year.**

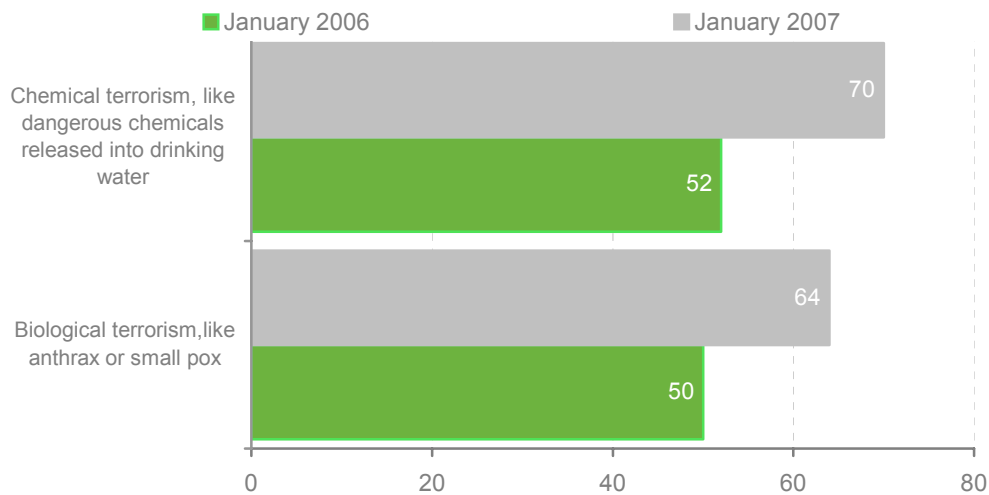
### *Biological and chemical terrorism*

In the past year, there has been a dramatic rise in concern about health risks related to a potential biological or chemical terrorist attack. Concern about a chemical attack, such as the release of dangerous chemicals into the drinking water supply, jumped 18 points from last year, with 70 percent of Americans ranking it as a top concern in 2007. The largest shift among demographic groups occurred within self-identified ideological conservatives, whose concern increased 19 percentage points (from 56 percent in 2006 to 75 percent in 2007).

Fears about a biological terrorist attack like anthrax or small pox jumped 14 points from last year to 64 percent in 2007. Among ideological conservatives, concern increased 17 percentage points (from 52 percent in 2006 to 69 percent in 2007) and among college-educated men there was a 22-point increase (from 37 percent in 2006 to 59 percent in 2007).

■ **Figure 2:** Concern about health risks and problems (% most/great deal/some)

### Increasing fears about health threats related to terrorism



While fear about the health crisis posed by a potential terrorist attack has grown dramatically, there is no sense among voters that the government's public health system is any more prepared to handle the situation. Forty-five percent believe the government is not prepared to respond to a bioterrorism attack.

### Food Contamination

Concern over food contamination grew 15 percentage points in the past year, from 51 percent of Americans expressing concern in 2006 to 67 percent expressing concern in 2007. In the past year, there was nationwide attention on an outbreak of E.coli in spinach, which is likely to have impacted public opinion. People who were most vulnerable to negative health consequences of food contamination, including individuals over the age of 50 and people with children, expressed the highest degrees of concern.

### Worldwide flu pandemic

Concerns over the possibility of a pandemic flu outbreak increased four percentage points in the past year, growing from 57 percent in 2006 to 61 percent in 2007.

A majority of respondents in the poll believe the government is unprepared to deal with a pandemic. Fifty-three percent feel that the government is not ready to handle a worldwide flu pandemic. More than a quarter (26 percent) of Americans feel the country is very unprepared for a worldwide flu outbreak.

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## Appendix A: Methodology

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, Inc. designed this telephone survey. Interviewing was conducted by professional interviewers. The survey reached 1,015 adults ages 18 and older. The survey was conducted January 18-22, 2007. The data were weighted by gender, age, race, education, region, and party identification to ensure an accurate reflection of the population. The sample size with these weights applied is 1015.

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## Appendix B: Regional Definitions

**Northeast:** Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont, Delaware, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania.

**Central:** Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska.

**South:** Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, District of Columbia, Kentucky, Maryland, Oklahoma, Tennessee, West Virginia.

**West:** Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming, Alaska, California, Oregon, Hawaii, Washington.

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**Appendix C: Support for Increased Funding by Key Demographic Groups**
**Support for Increased Funding, Percent  
Responding Spend More**

	<b>% Registered Voters</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>
White	64
African American	68
Hispanic	69
Men	59
Women	70
Ages 18-29	61
Ages 30-39	74
Ages 40-49	61
Ages 50-64	67
Ages 65+	62
High school or less	63
Some college/post h.s.	63
College graduate	68
Liberal	77
Moderate	72
Conservative	53
Democrat	78
Independent	62
Republican	53
Northeast	74
Central	60
South	63
West	65