

RHODE ISLAND RESIDENTS SPEAK OUT ON RESEARCH

A Public Opinion Study for Research!America

Winter 2001

Research!America has been gauging public opinion on people's attitudes toward medical, health and scientific research since 1992. Research!America's poll in Rhode Island brings the total number of states surveyed to more than thirty-five. Results show a high level of support and value for research both in the public and private sector, particularly as it impacts the state's health, education and economy. These poll responses indicate there is an overwhelming belief in Rhode Island that medical, health, science and engineering research are important and are a high priority for the citizens of this state.

RHODE ISLAND'S ROLE IN MEDICAL, HEALTH AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH IS A HIGH PRIORITY

Medical research is clearly a priority to Rhode Island residents, even when compared with several other national priorities (see figure 1). In fact, 97% say this is an important priority. Strengthening education programs for children also garners high importance ratings from 97%, and more money for science and engineering research ranks next with 93%. Solidifying Social Security and Medicare is a close fourth. Residents consider tax cuts to be a slightly lower priority with 84% saying they are an important national priority.

Similarly, 99% say it is important that the United States maintains its role as a world leader in medical and health research, with 89% saying this is very important (see figure 2). More than four-in-five Rhode Island residents also agree that even if it brings no immediate benefits, basic science research which advances the frontiers of knowledge is necessary and should be supported by the federal government. In fact, 51% strongly agree and 35% somewhat agree.

In terms of priorities for their state, 91% of Rhode Island residents say funding to train medical students and other health professionals is an important priority, and 88% say funding for science research and engineering is important.

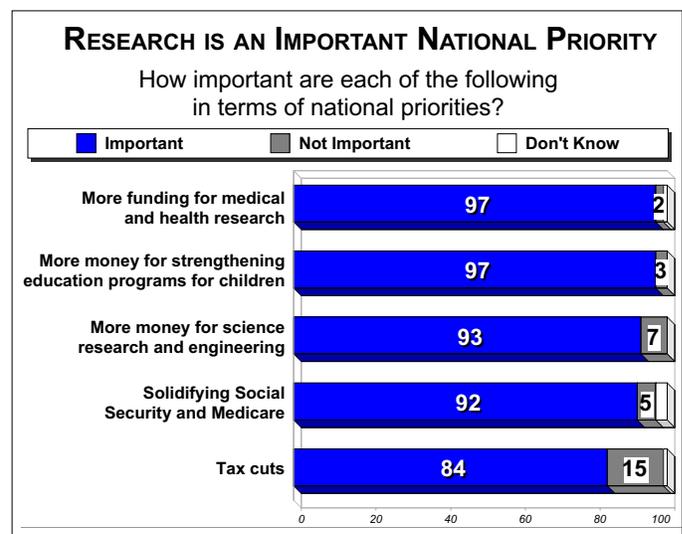


figure 1

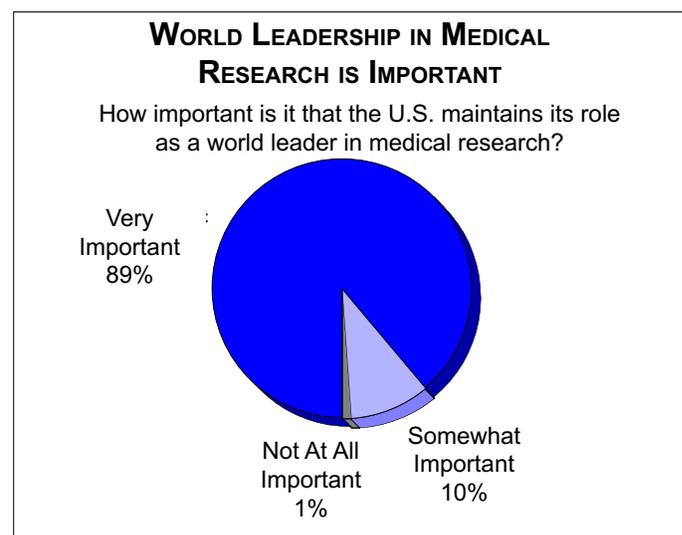


figure 2

LEADERSHIP IN MEDICAL RESEARCH IS IMPORTANT TO RHODE ISLAND

When asked if they feel the state of Rhode Island should be a leader in medical research, 69% say leadership is very important and 26% say it is somewhat important. However, while most feel Rhode Island should be a leader in medical and health research, only 40% say Rhode Island is very much a leader. Thirty-nine percent say the state is somewhat a leader, and 13% say the state is not a leader. Respondents ages 45 or older are more likely to believe Rhode Island currently is a leader in medical or health research.

Furthermore, a large majority of residents feel it is important for Rhode Island to be a leader in heart disease and stroke research. Ninety-three percent feel Rhode Island's leadership in heart disease and stroke research is important (62% very important, 31% somewhat important).

MEDICAL AND SCIENCE RESEARCH ARE IMPORTANT TO RHODE ISLAND'S ECONOMY

Thinking in terms of jobs, incomes, and quality of life, nine-in-ten Rhode Island residents feel that spending money on medical and health research is important to the state's economy. About half (49%) feel spending on medical and health research is very important to Rhode Island's economy, and another 41% feel it is somewhat important. Additionally, 88% say conducting medical and health research at public universities is important to Rhode Island's economy, with 45% saying this is very important and 43% saying it is somewhat important.

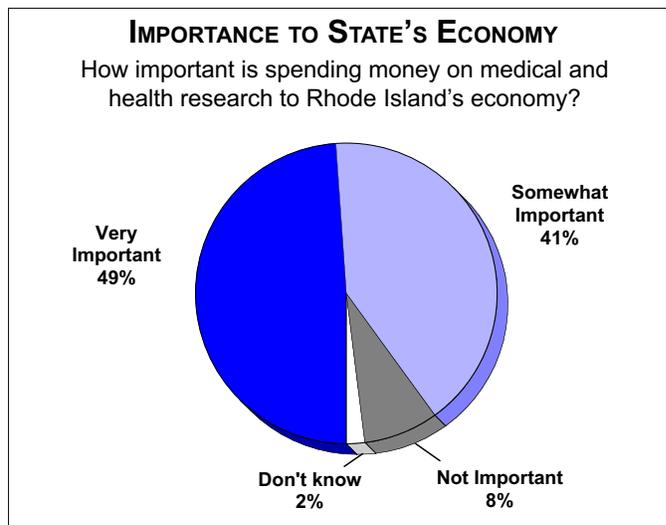


figure 3

RESIDENTS SUPPORT HEALTH PROMOTION AND DISEASE PREVENTION

Ninety-six percent of residents consider preventable diseases and injuries in this country today to be a health problem, with 62% saying they are a major health problem and 34% saying they are a minor health problem. However, they also believe that research and programs on health promotion and disease prevention have an impact on public health, both in Rhode Island and across the nation. In fact, 87% say health promotion and disease prevention *research* and *programs* have a great deal or some impact on our nation's health and 83% say they impact our nation's economy. Another 83% percent feel research and programs on these issues impact the health of Rhode Island residents, and 80% believe they impact Rhode Island's economy (see figure 4).

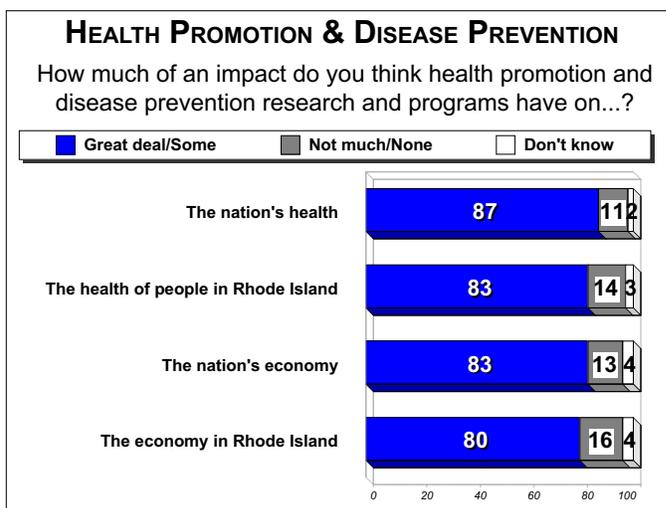


figure 4

Furthermore, a plurality believe that too little federal funding is spent on both health promotion and disease prevention *research* and health promotion and disease prevention *programs*. Forty-eight percent say too little federal funding is spent on the *research*, while 38% say the amount spent is about right and only 5% say we are spending too much. Likewise, 45% say too little is spent on the *programs*, while 41% say the amount spent is about right and 5% say it is too much.

RESIDENTS FAVOR ENHANCED SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR RESEARCH

Residents strongly support the state offering financial incentives to attract new scientific research, such as labs. In fact, 54% say they strongly approve of such incentives and an additional 30% say they somewhat approve. Additionally, 59% feel that too little funding is a major barrier to medical and health research in the nation, and 48% of residents believe that an excess of regulations is a major barrier to medical and health research.

Recognizing the value of all medical and health research, 72% of residents favor a proposal to double total national spending on government-sponsored medical and health research over the next five years (see figure 5).

In light of current events in the nation, Rhode Island residents are particularly supportive of scientific research that addresses biological and chemical threats. Nearly all residents (98%) believe the role of scientific research is important to the nation's efforts to prepare for and respond to such threats, and 60% say it is extremely important. Additionally, 90% favor increasing federal funding of scientific research that helps to prepare for and respond to biological and chemical terrorism (see figure 6).

Not only do residents approve of government spending on research, they are also willing to pay more for it (see figure 7). Over two-thirds say they would be willing to pay \$1 more per week in taxes for more health research.

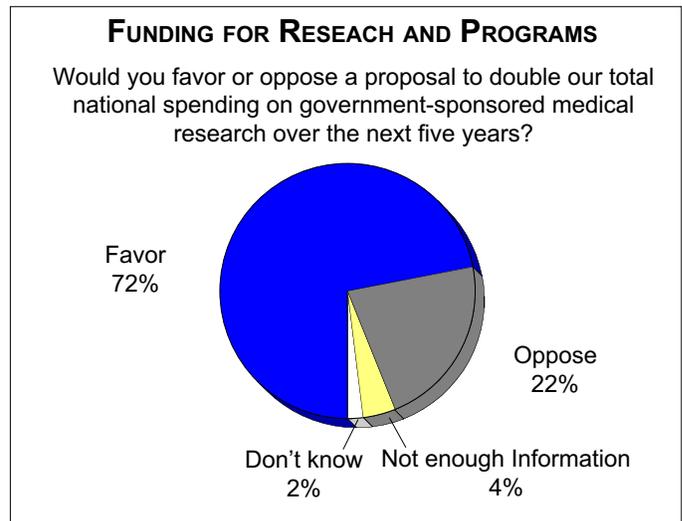


figure 5

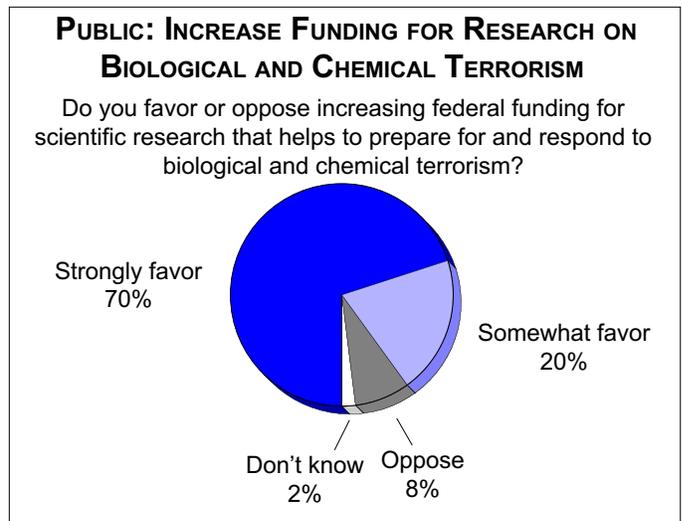


figure 6

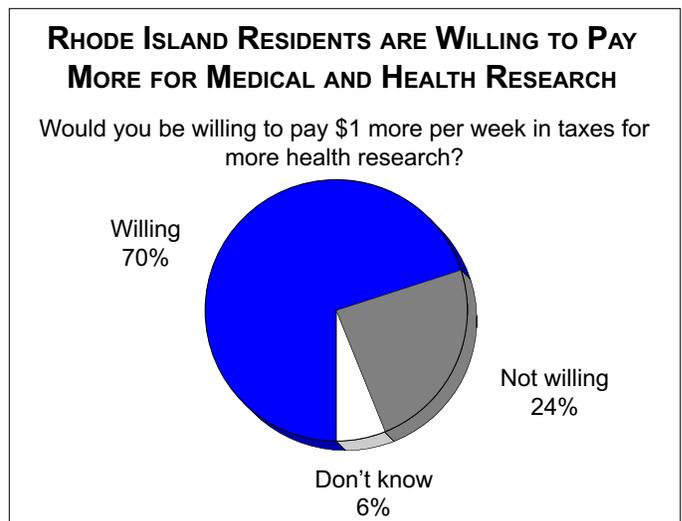


figure 7

RHODE ISLAND RESIDENTS PLACE A HIGH VALUE ON RESEARCH TO ELIMINATE HEALTH DISPARITIES

Rhode Island residents believe it is important to research diseases that disproportionately affect low income and minority citizens. Ninety-three percent say it is important to conduct research to end these differences. Specifically, 67% feel this is very important and 26% feel it is somewhat important (see figure 8). Additionally, 96% of Rhode Island residents support research that focuses on how well the nation's health delivery system is functioning and what could be done to make it function better. In fact, 73% believe this research to be very important.

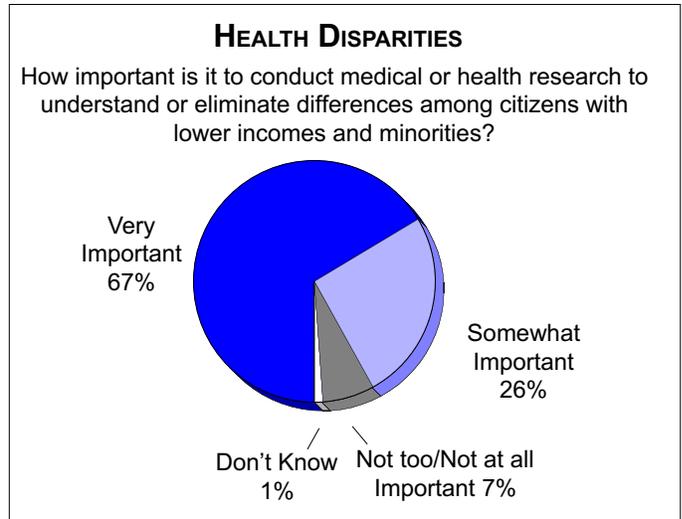


figure 8

PHYSICIANS, VOLUNTARY HEALTH AGENCIES, AND TEACHING HOSPITALS ARE MOST CREDIBLE SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON MEDICAL AND HEALTH RESEARCH

Residents consider their physicians to be the most trustworthy sources of information about medical and health research, with 95% saying they are very or somewhat credible. Nurses, medical schools and teaching hospitals, and voluntary health agencies such as the American Heart Association, are also highly credible, with 93% to 94% considering each of these sources very or somewhat credible. Dentists also rank high in credibility, with 80% finding them very or somewhat trustworthy. Pharmaceutical companies are considered credible by two-thirds, and HMOs are considered credible by 62%. The Internet is considered the least credible source of health information, with only 50% saying it is trustworthy (see figure 9).

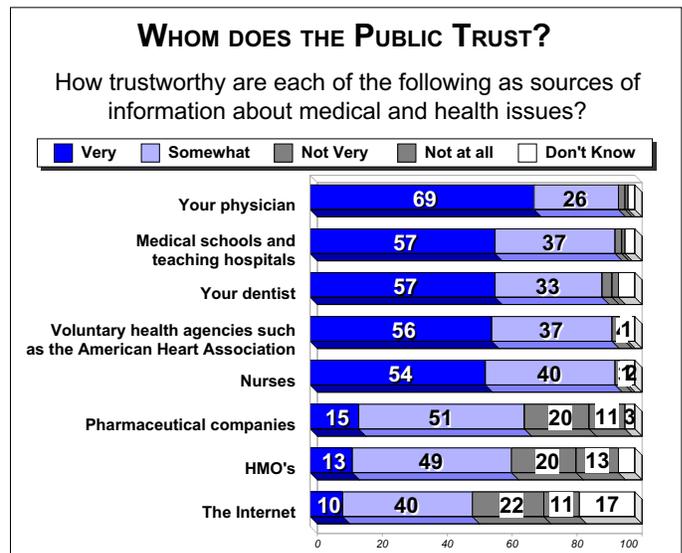


figure 9

TOBACCO SETTLEMENT MONEY SHOULD BE SPENT ON MEDICAL RESEARCH AND HEALTH EDUCATION

When asked how Rhode Island should spend the settlement money it will receive from various tobacco companies, 91% feel it should be spent on research into the prevention, treatment or cure of disease (see figure 10). More specifically, 62% of residents feel the Rhode Island government should spend a lot of money on research. Eighty-eight percent feel the state should spend money on health education to prevent children and teens from smoking, with 55% saying the state should spend a lot of money. Over two thirds (72%) support spending the settlement funds on programs to help smokers quit.

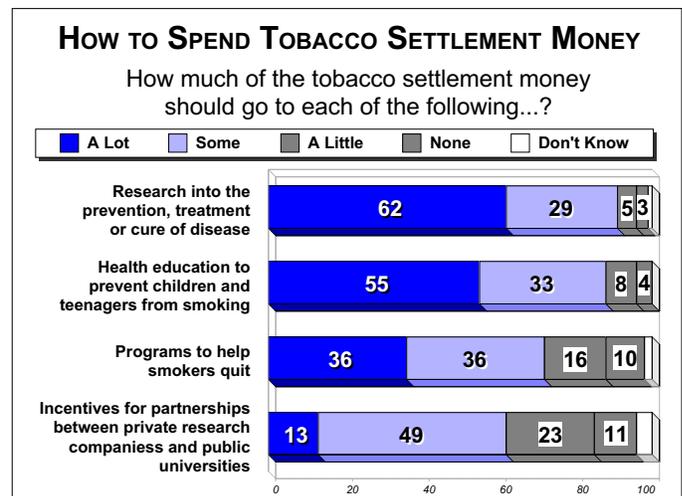


figure 10

NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH, NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION, AND CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION HAVE LOW PUBLIC RECOGNITION

Despite their willingness to support medical, health, science and engineering research efforts, Rhode Island residents generally do not know what agencies are responsible for spending their tax dollars on that research. Sixty-eight percent say they cannot name the government agency that funds most of the medical research paid for by taxpayers, and only six percent correctly identified the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Similarly, 76% say they cannot identify the government agency that funds most of the basic research and educational programming in the sciences, mathematics and engineering in this country. Only three percent correctly identified the National Science Foundation (NSF). Finally, while 52% say they do not know the name of the agency whose primary mission is disease prevention and health promotion, 28% correctly identified the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (see figure 11).

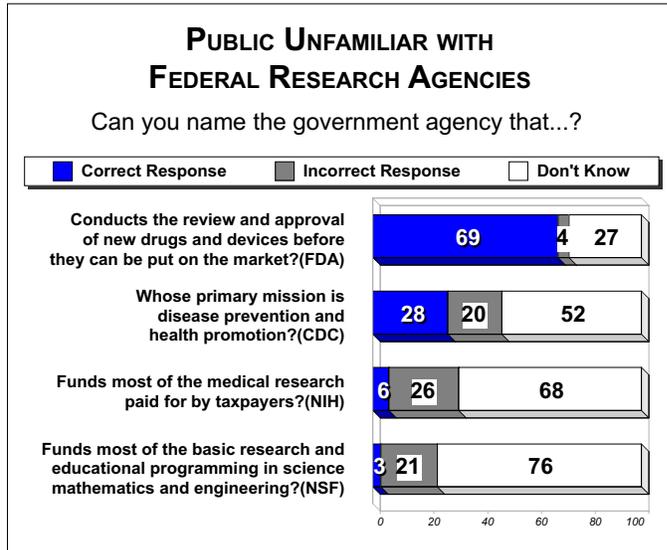


figure 11

In contrast, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) garners a high level of public recognition, with 69% correctly identifying the government agency which conducts the review and approval of new drugs and devices before they can be put on the market.

Forty-three percent of Rhode Island residents are unable to name an organization in the state where medical research is conducted. Of those mentioned, Brown University tops the list with 30%, followed by the University of Rhode Island (5%) and Roger Williams University (5%). All other organizations were cited by less than 5%.

ALSO OF NOTE...

Rhode Island residents strongly support proposals to protect research, training and health care as changes are made to Medicare. A majority of 94% believe it is important to ensure the ability of hospitals to provide health care to under-served communities, with 71% saying this is very important. Ninety-three percent believe it is important that changes to Medicare ensure the ability of teaching hospitals to train medical doctors and other health care professionals and 70% say this is very important. Additionally, 89% percent say changes to Medicare that ensure the ability of pharmaceutical, medical device and health care companies to conduct medical research are important (see figure 12).

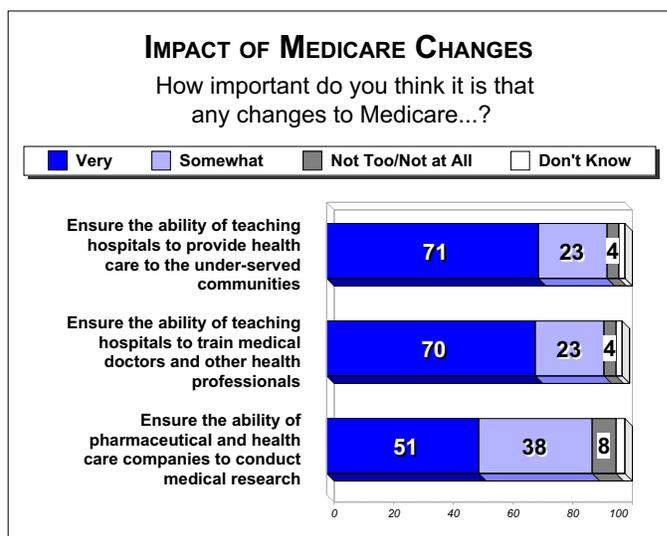


figure 12

Asked what concerns residents have about medical research, 28% cite no concerns. Of those who mentioned a concern, the need for more research was the most frequently cited (10%), while 9% mentioned wasting money. Another six percent mentioned the lack of funding. All other concerns were mentioned by fewer than five percent.

METHODOLOGY

Charlton Research Company conducted a telephone survey among 800 adults in Rhode Island. The entire sample was proportionate to the state's demographics, including geography, gender, voter registration and ethnicity. The survey, fielded November 6 through 14, 2001, has a theoretical sampling error of +/-3.5%. Please note that much of the question text in this report has been paraphrased.

This poll was commissioned by Research!America, a non-profit, membership-supported national alliance of groups and individuals dedicated to enhancing public education and advocacy for medical, health, and scientific research. For more information about the Rhode Island poll, including a list of sponsoring organizations, or for other questions about public attitudes towards scientific research, contact Research!America at: 908 King Street, Suite 400 East, Alexandria, Virginia 22314 · Telephone: 703/739-2577 · Fax: 703/739-2372 · e-mail: info@researchamerica.org · www.researchamerica.org.

