

# D.C.'s Health Check: Encouraging Signs of Progress, Shadows of Disparity

## Overview

This report explores health indicators for the District of Columbia (D.C.), drawing on findings from the 2024 AARP D.C. Health Disparities Survey, of adults aged 18 and older. The data provides a perspective into residents' experience with healthcare access, quality, and equity. Where relevant, data from a 2023 survey of D.C. residents aged 40 and older is referenced to provide supporting context, though comparisons should be interpreted cautiously due to differences in survey populations.

## Key findings

**A majority of D.C. adults report feeling healthy and able to access healthcare services in their communities.**

In the 2024 survey of adult residents aged 18 and above, more than half reported being in *excellent* or *very good* health and over 8 in 10 (83%) said they were able to access healthcare services they needed in their community. These findings may reflect local efforts over the past few years to improve health outcomes and community health access.

Of note, the 2024 figure for access to healthcare services is slightly higher than the 79% of D.C. adults aged 40-plus who reported having access in 2023. Moreover, 2023 data showed disparity between communities on either side of the Anacostia River. In that survey, residents living east of the river were twice as likely to report having fair or poor health and four times as likely to face barriers to accessing health care services than residents west of the river.



**Among D.C. adults aged 18+ in 2024,**

**55%** rated their health as *Excellent* or *Very Good*

**83%** said they could access the healthcare they needed

Q5. How would you rate your overall health? (n = 881)

Q2. Are you able to access the healthcare services you need in your community? (n = 881)

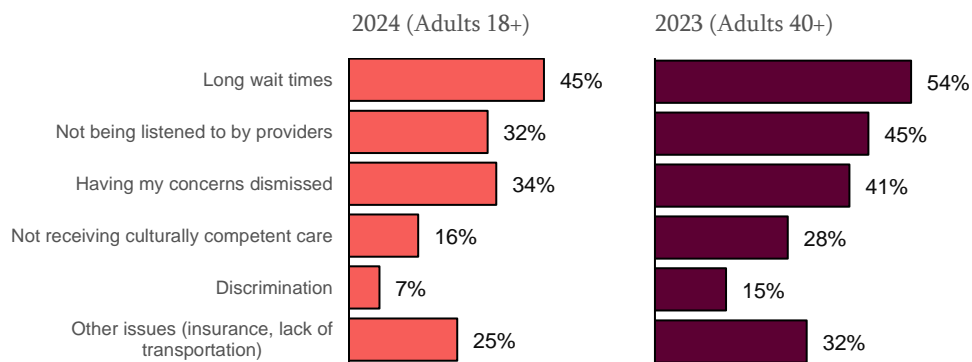
## One in five experience a problem with health care quality.

Most adults in D.C. report having positive experiences with the healthcare they received in the past year. In 2024, only 18% of D.C. residents age 18+ said they had encountered a problem with care quality, indicating that the vast majority (78%) were satisfied with their healthcare experiences.

Among those who did report issues, long wait times was most commonly cited (45%). Also commonly experienced by roughly one-third each was feeling unheard by providers (32%) or having their concerns dismissed (34%). Encountering culturally insensitive or discriminatory care was experienced by 16% and 7%, respectively. One in four offered another type of problem such as insurance or transportation problems.

These findings contrast with survey data collected in 2023 among adults aged 40-plus that showed larger shares experiencing problems across the board. This may suggest either that D.C.'s healthcare system is responding to past criticisms and working to create more inclusive, patient-centered environments or that older adults overall are more likely to experience poor quality healthcare than D.C.'s adult residents at large. In addition, findings from the 2023 survey showed that residents east of the Anacostia River faced disproportionate barriers to quality care, underscoring the need for targeted investments in these historically underserved communities.

Problems Experienced with Quality of Healthcare  
Among D.C. Residents  
(% of people who said Yes)



Q.4 You previously indicated you experienced problems with the quality of healthcare you received. Please select the problem(s) that you experienced?  
2023 (n = 494); 2024 (n = 881)

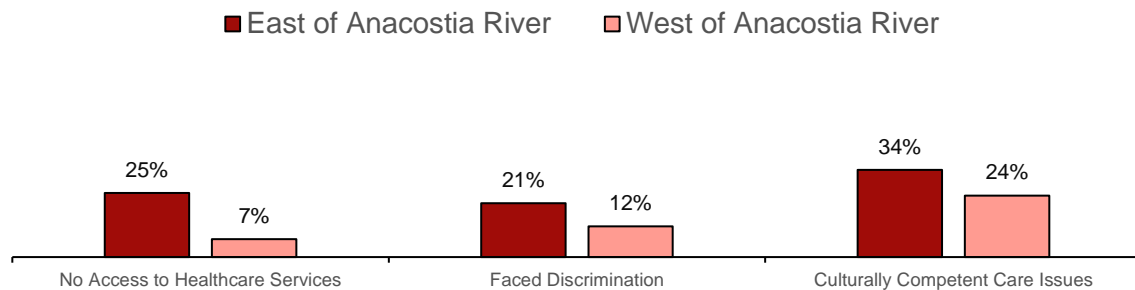
## Cultural competence remains a critical area for improvement.

A new question introduced in the 2024 study revealed that while 78% of the 18+ residents say their healthcare providers *usually* or *always* understand and respect their background, values and traditions, 21% – more than 1 in 5 – feel their providers only *sometimes*, *rarely*, or *never* demonstrate this understanding.

This gap is significant as culturally responsive care is essential in building trust between patients and providers. This directly influences the quality and effectiveness of healthcare.

According to the 2023 survey of adults 40 & older, gaps in culturally competent care were more pronounced in communities east of the Anacostia River, where residents not only faced greater structural barriers to healthcare – like transportation issues that led nearly 1 in 5 to miss care – but were also more likely to encounter providers lacking the training or resources to deliver culturally responsive services.

Comparison of Health Disparities  
East vs West of Anacostia River (2023)  
(% of people who said Yes)



Q.5 Are you able to access the healthcare services you need in your community?

Q.7 You previously indicated you experienced problems with the quality of healthcare you received. Please select the problem(s) that you experienced?

East (n = 152); West (n = 342)

## Implications

The 2024 survey findings offer a cautiously optimistic view of healthcare in the District of Columbia. A majority of adults self-reporting very good to excellent health is positive indicator overall, but some residents reporting issues with care quality suggest that ongoing efforts to enhance healthcare access—such as through policy, provider training, and community engagement—are still needed. Moreover, healthcare experiences may not be evenly distributed across the District. Structural inequities may contribute to poorer health outcomes and lower trust in the healthcare system, especially in historically marginalized communities east of the Anacostia River as observed in the 2023 survey. The latest data also reveal that over one in five adult residents feel their providers do not understand or respect their cultural background, underscoring the urgent need for more inclusive, responsive care models.

## Methodology

Interviews for the 2024 survey were conducted among a total of 881 D.C. residents aged 18 and older, 100% online, between April 10, 2024, and October 28, 2024. The 2023 survey included 494 D.C. residents aged 40 and older, and was conducted online between October 19, 2022, and May 30, 2023. Results are not weighted and should be interpreted with caution due to small sample sizes.

For more information about this study, please contact Aisha Bonner Cozad, Senior Research Advisor, at [abonner@aarp.org](mailto:abonner@aarp.org) and Humpreet Sahans, Graduate Research Intern, at [hsahans@aarp.org](mailto:hsahans@aarp.org).

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This report was created with the assistance of CoPilot and has been reviewed for accuracy and appropriateness.

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