

# Women's Attitudes Toward Headache & Migraine

SEPTEMBER 2018



An August 2018 attitudinal survey of more than 340 female migraine stakeholders from throughout the United States revealed clear opinions about the debilitating impact of migraine and headache disorders – and a lack of faith in health insurers and employers to properly meet the needs of people with the disease. Migraine affects roughly 39 million Americans, with migraine and headache disorders costing the United States about \$36 billion each year in health care costs and lost productivity.<sup>1</sup>

An overwhelming majority of women who responded agreed that migraine strains relationships, impacts family life and hurts people's careers. Yet only a minority believed that people with migraine are willing to tell their employers or that employers will respond appropriately when told. Respondents agreed overwhelmingly that patients and doctors should guide health care decisions but that health plans make it difficult to access treatment.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Impact

Migraine predominantly impacts females, causing a variety of symptoms that vary by patient. These may include intense pain, vision and hearing disturbances, and nausea or vomiting. Triggers for the onset of headache or migraine attacks can include stress, florescent lights, sounds, or certain foods.



93%

People with migraine are often dismissed as exaggerating their symptoms or not feeling severe pain.

82%

People trivialize migraine because it predominantly affects women.

97%

Migraine and headache disorders strain relationships and disturb family life.

94%

Migraine and headache disorders have a serious impact on communities and workplaces.

## Access to Treatment

In past years, patients have struggled with a lack of medications approved by the Food and Drug Administration to treat migraine – and not just its symptoms. The introduction of CGRP inhibitors, which prevent migraine attacks before they start, suggests a promising trend toward innovative treatments. But while survey respondents overwhelmingly agree that physicians and patients should drive treatment decisions, they acknowledge that health plans can make it difficult for patients to access treatment, especially when they require utilization management processes like step therapy and prior authorization.



70%

People with migraine and headache disorders have few options for treatment.

86%

Innovative medicine could revolutionize migraine treatment.

77%

Health plan designs make it difficult for patients to access treatments that are available.

90%

By requiring prior authorization or “fail first,” health plans prolong migraine and headache disorder patients’ pain.

79%

Migraine patients don’t understand the process of pursuing treatment if their insurer initially denies coverage.

97%

Physicians and their patients, not health plans, should decide which treatment is used to treat a migraine.



92%

Military veterans with migraine deserve access to innovative new treatments.

A strong majority of survey respondents agreed that military veterans in particular should be able to access innovative treatments for migraine. Between 2001 and 2007, the United States Armed Forces saw a 27 percent increase in migraine diagnoses, with 36 percent of servicemembers who were deployed to Iraq for a year or more experiencing migraine.<sup>3</sup>

# Migraine in the Workplace

Migraine attacks' intensity and unpredictability can affect patients' work life. In fact, migraine is the leading cause of neurological disability and the 10th leading cause of overall disability in the United States. Employers spend about \$84,000 per 1,000 employees annually in migraine-related costs.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, survey responses suggest that employers may not recognize migraine's impact and may not be prepared to respond to employees' needs with assistance and accommodations.



95%

Migraine and headache disorders disrupt and even end people's careers.

94%

Employers don't understand the burden of migraine on their employees.

39%

People with migraine are willing to tell their employer or immediate supervisor about their condition.

20%

After an employee discloses that he or she has migraine, his or her supervisor will respond with understanding, helpful assistance or accommodations.

79%

If migraine patients with employer-sponsored insurance struggle to access treatment, it affects their satisfaction with their employer.

## Survey Demographic Breakdown



Male (0%)  
Female (100%)

Under 21 (2%)  
21-35 (17%)  
36-49 (25%)  
50-64 (40%)  
65+ (16%)

Patient with migraine (97%)  
Caregiver or family member of someone with migraine (1%)  
Co-worker of someone with migraine (1%)  
Other (1%)

Northeast (23%)  
Midwest (26%)  
South (33%)  
West (18%)

## References

1. Migraine Research Foundation. "About Migraine." Available at: <https://migraineresearchfoundation.org/about-migraine/migraine-facts/>
2. Rosenberg J. "Migraine Has Impact on Both Healthcare Costs and Lost Productivity." The American Journal of Managed Care. June 19, 2018. Available at: <https://www.ajmc.com/newsroom/migraine-has-impact-on-both-healthcare-costs-and-lost-productivity>
3. VA Gov. "Veterans who are deployed are more likely to develop migraine." May 22, 2017. Available at: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/38022/veterans-who-deployed-are-more-likely-to-develop-migraines-or-headache-disorders/>



**The Headache and Migraine Policy Forum** advances public policies and practices that promote accelerated innovation and improved treatments for headache and migraine patients.



@headachepolicy



Headache and Migraine Policy Forum



[headachemigraineforum.org](https://headachemigraineforum.org)