



# Harris On Demand

## The Harris Poll

State Medical Boards Awareness Study

Prepared For:



**FEDERATION OF  
STATE MEDICAL BOARDS**



## INTRODUCTION

Our aim in conducting the *State Medical Boards Awareness Study* was to measure national awareness of state medical boards, as well as gain insights on Americans' experiences with, and responses to physicians who act inappropriately.

The results show that a majority of Americans lack awareness about the responsibilities of state medical boards and when to contact them, with knowledge deficiency highest among younger adults. Furthermore, among those who have experienced a physician acting inappropriately, few have reported it, perhaps because they did not know how. It's likely that many instances go undetected and may be putting other patients at risk. The findings support the need for more public education about state medical boards and how consumers can utilize them to help ensure they receive safe and quality health services.

We are pleased to present the findings of the *State Medical Boards Awareness Study* commissioned by the Federation of State Medical Boards, and hope that the results will serve as the basis for communications surrounding your public information campaign to raise awareness about the work of state medical boards and the resources they provide.



## KEY FINDINGS

### STATE MEDICAL BOARD AWARENESS: *Increased Awareness Is Needed As Most Americans Don't Know State Medical Board Capabilities*

Less than 3 in 10 Americans (27%) say they know how to find out if a physician has ever received a disciplinary action against their medical license. Younger adults are less likely than their older counterparts to know how to find this information, less than one quarter of those under age 55 (23%) compared to one third of those aged 55+ (33%).

Furthermore, roughly half of Americans (51%) do not know that state medical boards are responsible for the licensing and regulating of physicians in the United States, with close to one quarter (24%) falsely believing this responsibility belongs to the American Medical Association, and about 1 in 10 (9%) believing it is the role of state medical associations/societies. Adults ages 65+ are most likely to know that state medical boards have this responsibility:

	18-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
<b>n=</b>	<b>575</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>314</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>438</b>
<b>State medical boards</b>	38%	46%	49%	54%	62%

Perhaps lack of knowledge about the role of state medical boards is why nearly 7 in 10 Americans (69%) do not know that a state medical board is the best resource to contact first if you have a complaint about a physician's competence or conduct. Some incorrectly believe the best resource to contact first is the physician's office/hospital/group (15%), a lawyer (9%), or the American Medical Association (9%). Similar to knowledge of disciplining, regulating and licensing physicians, older adults are also more likely than their younger counterparts to know that a state medical board should be contacted first with a complaint about a physician's competence or conduct (41% aged 55+ vs. 25% under age 55). Adults aged 18-34 are nearly twice as likely as those aged 35-64 to incorrectly believe that the physician's office/hospital/group should be contacted first (21% vs. 11%). This is further evidence that the more awareness consumers have about state medical boards the more likely they will be to know where to go with complaints.



## **BAD BEHAVIOR: *Physician Misconduct Is Prevalent, But Few Are Reporting, And To The Organization Who Regulates Them***

Nearly 1 in 5 Americans (18%) have experienced an interaction with a physician who they believed was acting unethically, unprofessionally, or providing substandard care. Experiencing physician misconduct appears to be impacted by gender and age:

- Women are twice as likely as men to have experienced this (24% vs. 12%)
- Adults aged 18-34 and 55-64 are more likely than those aged 65+ to have experienced this (22% and 20% vs. 12%)
- Nearly 3 in 10 women aged 18-34 (28%) compared to 16% of men in this age group have experienced this

Additionally, physician misconduct may be more prevalent in the South and Midwest regions than the Northeast, as adults residing in those regions are nearly twice as likely to cite experiencing these types of interactions.

	<i>South</i>	<i>Midwest</i>	<i>Northeast</i>
<i>n=</i>	<b>761</b>	<b>415</b>	<b>436</b>
<b>Experienced interaction with a physician who they believed was acting unethically, unprofessionally, or providing substandard care</b>	21%	20%	12%

Among those who have experienced unethical, unprofessional, or substandard care interactions with a physician, only one third (33%) have reported said interaction or filed a complaint against the physician. Shockingly, a larger proportion of men have done so than women (41% of men vs. 30% of women) even though more women have experienced these types of interactions. Of those who did file a complaint or report the physician, only about a third (34%) notified the state medical board. Meanwhile close to the same proportion (31%) reported the physician to their office/hospital/group, and one quarter (25%) reached out to a lawyer which may not result in any/immediate action/consequences for the physician.

With so many instances of misconduct not getting reported, or not being reported to state medical boards, the misconduct could continue putting many patients across the U.S. at risk for similar experiences from these providers. These results support the need for more consumer education on what state medical boards do and how they can be utilized during instances of physician misconduct, and if not to protect oneself, to protect others who could be at risk.



## TOPLINE DATA

### **BASE: ALL RESPONDENTS**

**Q1** Do you know how to find out if a physician has ever received a disciplinary action against their medical license?

	<i>n=</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
		<b>2,018</b>
Yes		27%
No		73%

### **BASE: ALL RESPONDENTS**

**Q2** If you had a complaint about a physician's competence or conduct, which of the following resources would be the best to contact first?

	<i>n=</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
		<b>2,018</b>
State medical board		31%
The physician's office/hospital/group		15%
A lawyer		9%
American Medical Association		9%
State medical association/society		6%
Health insurance company		5%
Better Business Bureau		4%
Local law enforcement agency (i.e., police)		4%
U.S. Food and Drug Administration		1%
Other		*
Not at all sure		16%

### **BASE: ALL RESPONDENTS**

**Q3** To the best of your knowledge, who is responsible for the licensing and regulating of physicians in the United States?

	<i>n=</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
		<b>2,018</b>
State medical boards		49%
American Medical Association		24%
State medical association/society		9%
U.S. Food and Drug Administration		3%
Other		*
Not at all sure		16%



**BASE: ALL RESPONDENTS**

**Q4** Have you ever experienced an interaction with a physician who you believed was acting unethically, unprofessionally or providing substandard care?

	<i>n=</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
		<b>2,018</b>
Yes		18%
No		76%
Not at all sure		6%

**BASE: EXPERIENCED INTERACTION WITH PHYSICIAN WHO THEY BELIEVED WAS ACTING UNETHICALLY, UNPROFESSIONALLY OR PROVIDING SUBSTANDARD CARE**

**Q5** Did you file a complaint against or report the physician who you believed was acting unethically, unprofessionally or providing substandard care?

	<i>n=</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
		<b>409</b>
Yes		33%
No		67%

**BASE: FILED A COMPLAINT/REPORTED PHYSICIAN WHO THEY BELIEVED WAS ACTING UNETHICALLY, UNPROFESSIONALLY OR PROVIDING SUBSTANDARD CARE**

**Q6** Who did you file a complaint with or report to about the physician who you believed was acting unethically, unprofessionally or providing substandard care? Please select all that apply.

	<i>n=</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
		<b>128</b>
State medical board		34%
The physician's office/hospital/group		31%
A lawyer		25%
Health insurance company		18%
American Medical Association		15%
Better Business Bureau		15%
U.S. Food and Drug Administration		14%
State medical association/society		12%
Local law enforcement agency (i.e., police)		8%
Other		7%



## FULL METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of the Federation of State Medical Boards between October 5-9, 2018 among 2,018 adults ages 18+, among whom 409 have experienced an interaction with a physician who they believed was acting unethically, unprofessionally or providing substandard care, of which 128 reported said interaction.

Results were weighted for age within gender, region, race/ethnicity, income, and education where necessary to align them with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Poll avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in online surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in our panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

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### **A Note about Reading the Report**

The percentage of respondents has been included for each item.

- An asterisk (\*) signifies a value of less than one-half percent.
- A dash represents a value of zero.
- Percentages may not always add up to 100% because of computer rounding or the acceptance of multiple responses.

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### **About The Harris Poll**

The Harris Poll is one of the longest running surveys in the U.S. tracking public opinion, motivations and social sentiment since 1963 that is now part of Harris Insights & Analytics, a global consulting and market research firm that delivers social intelligence for transformational times. We work with clients in three primary areas; building twenty-first-century corporate reputation, crafting brand strategy and performance tracking, and earning organic media through public relations research. Our mission is to provide insights and advisory to help leaders make the best decisions possible. To learn more, please visit [www.theharrispoll.com](http://www.theharrispoll.com)