

**CONSUMER REPORTS® NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTER**  
Survey Research Report

# **Surprise Medical Bills Survey**

2016 Missouri State Online Survey

February 12, 2016

## Introduction

In December, 2015 - January 2016, the Consumer Reports National Research Center conducted a representative online survey to assess the experience of consumers with private health insurance. The objective was to ascertain (1) the frequency of insurance issues, namely unexpected medical bills, and (2) what consumers know about their rights regarding conflicts with health insurers. GfK Group administered the survey to a representative sample of 350 adult Missouri state residents. The data were statistically weighted so that respondents in the survey are demographically and geographically representative of the Missouri state population.

## Highlights

### Seven out of 10 Privately Insured Missourians Give Their Plan Good Grades

- Seven out of 10 privately insured Missourians would give their plan a grade of 'B' or higher.
- Of the respondents who received a surprise medical bill, few (9%) would give their health plan an 'A' for its response; many (55%) gave their plan a grade of 'C' or lower.

### Many Missourians Would Complain about an Unexpected Medical Bill

- Many (68%) Missourians are *very* (39%) or *somewhat likely* (29%) to complain about an unexpected medical bill.

### Nearly Four out of 10 Privately Insured Missourians Had a Problem with Their Insurer

- In the past two years, 38% of privately insured Missourians had at least one of the listed problems (e.g., billing issue, coverage denial) with their health insurer.
- Among just the *Hospital* subgroup (individuals who had emergency room visits/hospitalizations/surgery in the past two years), the number rises to 46%.

### Over a Third of Privately Insured Missourians Received a Surprise Medical Bill

- In the past two years, 35% of privately insured Missourians received a surprise medical bill (a medical bill where the health plan paid less than expected).
- Among just the *Hospital* subgroup (individuals who had emergency room visits/hospitalizations/surgery in the past two years), the number rises to 41%.
- While many (63%) took action to resolve their billing issue, over a third (37%) did not.

### Less Than a Third Satisfied with How Insurance Billing Issue Resolved

- Less than a third (31%) of privately insured Missourians with billing issues were satisfied with how the issue was resolved.
- For half the issue was either resolved unsatisfactorily (24%) or not resolved at all (26%).

**Consumers Unaware of Health Insurance Rights and State Entities**

- Two-thirds of privately insured Missourians are uncertain about which state entity is responsible for resolving issues with health insurance billing.
- Most (87%) don't know the state agency/department tasked with handling health insurance complaints.
- Many (77%) are unsure if they have the right to appeal to the state/an independent medical expert if their health plan refuses coverage for medical services they think they need.

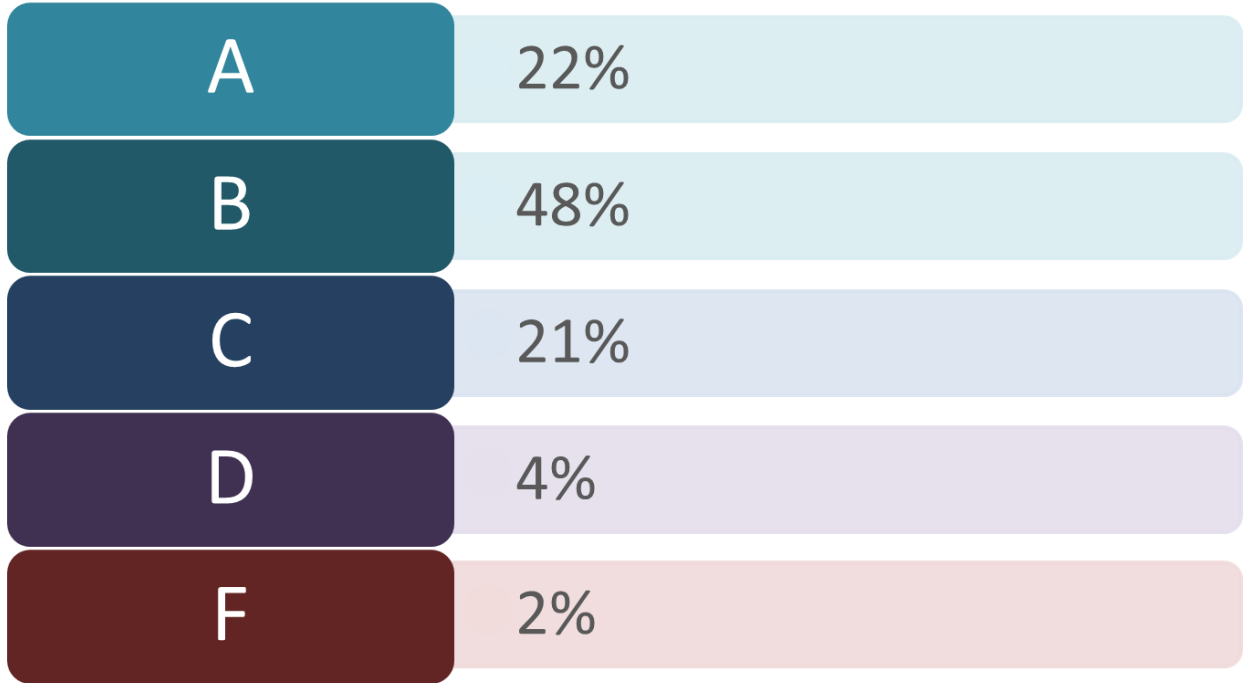
**Most Missourians Are Not Complaining to Government Agencies**

- Missourians are generally not complaining to government agencies; indeed most (84%) never complained to a government agency about any of the listed issues (e.g., cable bill, credit report error, bank fees).

**Seven out of 10 Privately Insured Missourians Give Their Plan Good Grades**

Seven out of 10 privately insured Missourians would give their plan a grade of 'B' or higher. Over half (56%) of privately insured Missourians get their health plan from their current employer. Many (60%) have had this insurance for 4 years or more.

## What grade would you give your insurance plan?



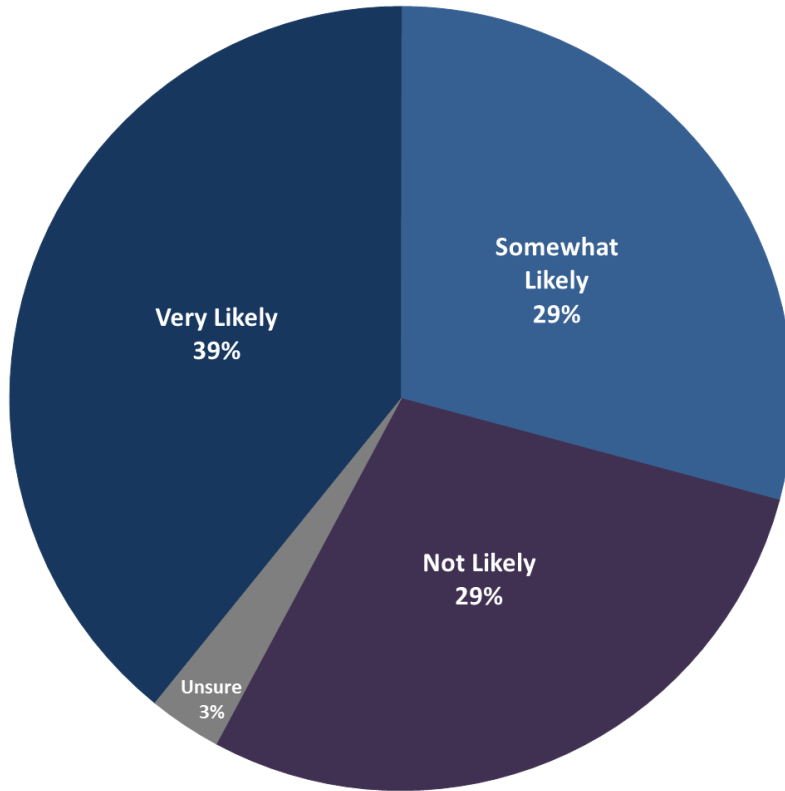
*Base: All respondents; Unsure/refused: 3%*

When asked about their (or a member of their household's) emergency room visits, hospitalizations or surgeries in the past two years, many reported NO emergency room visits/hospitalizations (48%) or surgeries (68%).

**Many Missourians Would Complain about an Unexpected Medical Bill**

Many (68%) Missourians are *very* (39%) or *somewhat likely* (29%) to complain about an unexpected medical bill.

**Consumer Likelihood to Complain about Surprise Medical Bill**



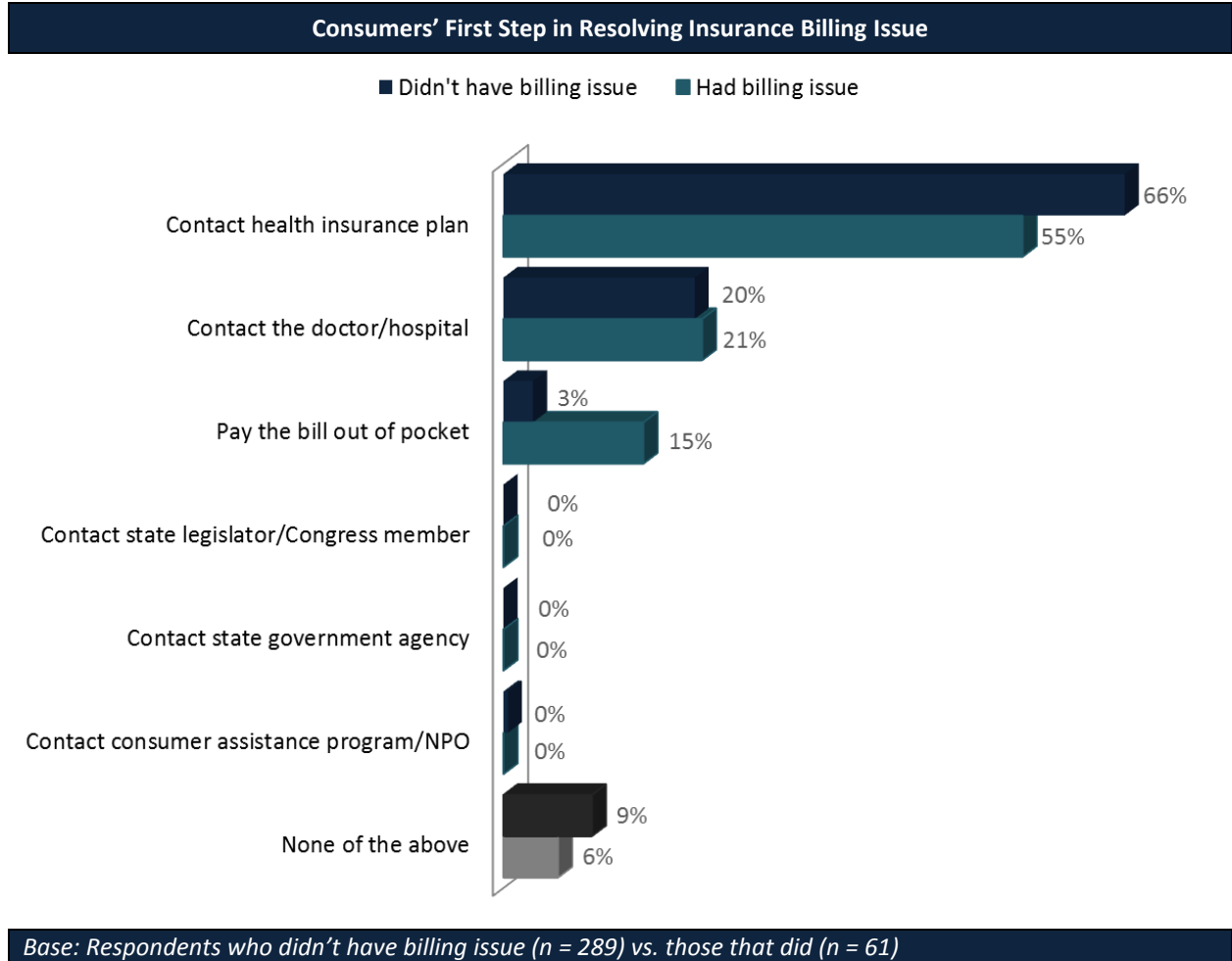
*Base: All respondents*

**Nearly Four out of 10 Privately Insured Missourians Had a Problem with Their Insurer**

In the past two years, 38% of privately insured Missourians had at least one of the listed problems (e.g., billing issue, coverage denial) with their health insurer. Among just the *Hospital* subgroup (individuals who had emergency room visits/hospitalizations/surgery in the past two years), the number rises to 46%.

Problems Consumers had with Their Medical Insurer		
	MO	MO*
	%	%
<i>(Net) Had any problem</i>	38	46
Billing or payment for medical services	18	20
A problem with health services plan does or does not cover	13	15
A coverage denial	8	10
Difficulty getting appointment with doctor	7	7
Not being able to get the specific medication needed	6	8
Difficulty getting someone from plan on phone to answer questions	4	5
Administrators or other plan staff being insensitive or not helpful	3	4
Being forced to change doctors or doctor being dropped from plan	2	4
Difficulty getting referrals to see a medical specialist	2	2
Delays in receiving care or treatment	2	3
A problem with a listing in the plan's provider directory	1	0
Other	1	1
None of the above	61	54
Refused	1	0
<i>Total</i>	350	178
<i>* Sample of individuals who had emergency room visits/hospitalizations/surgery in the past two years</i>		
<i>Base: All respondents</i>		

When faced with a problem with billing/payment of services, over half (55%) would first contact their health insurance plan (even among those who did NOT have this problem, two thirds reported this would also be their first course of action). One out of 5 would first contact their doctor, hospital, or health care provider.



**Over a Third of Privately Insured Missourians Received a Surprise Medical Bill**

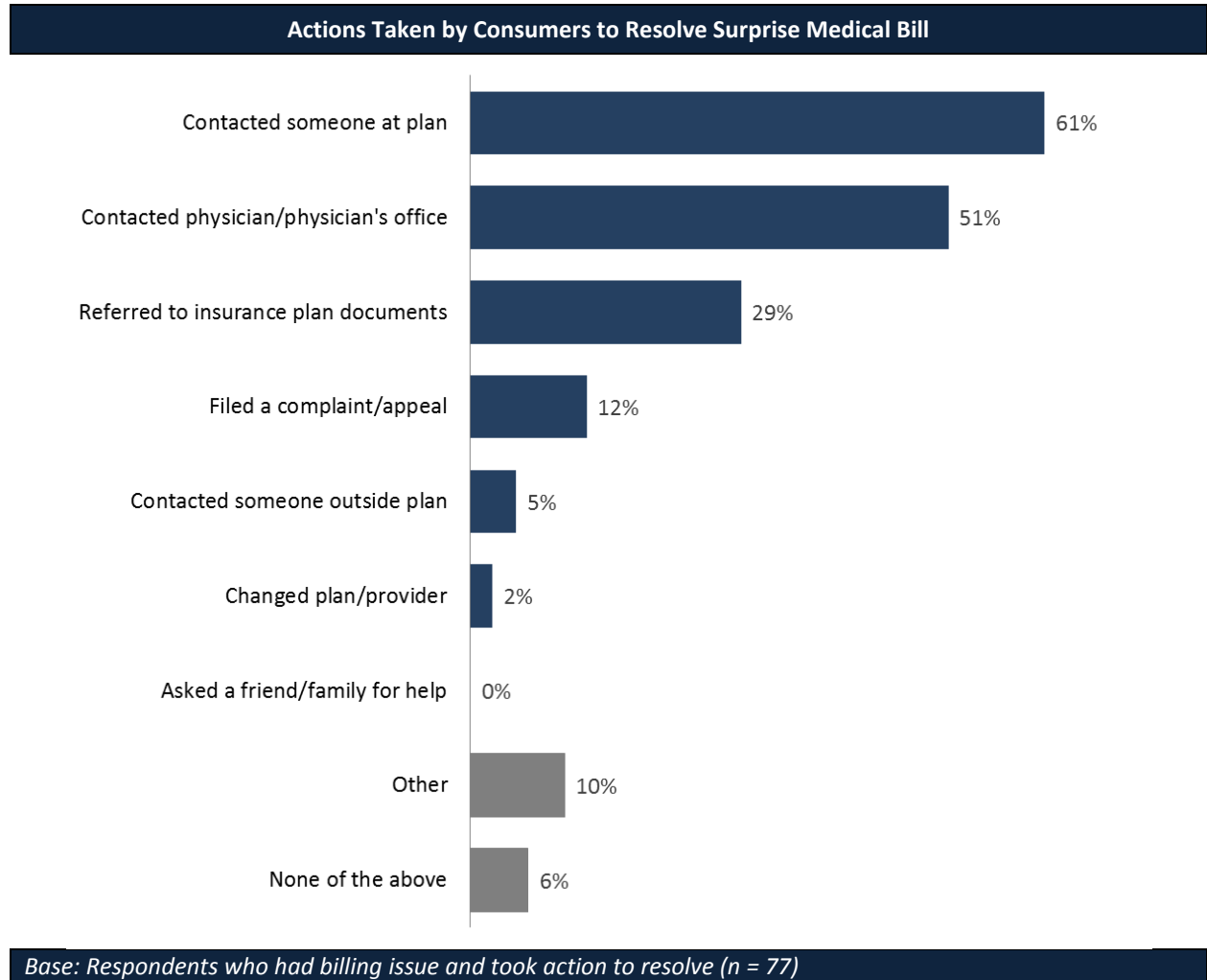
The majority (94%) of Missourians say they review their medicals bills *sometimes or more*. In the past two years, 35% of privately insured Missourians received a surprise medical bill (a medical bill where the health plan paid less than expected). Among just the *Hospital* subgroup (individuals who had emergency room visits/hospitalizations/surgery in the past two years), the number rises to 41%.

Among respondents who received a surprise medical bill, many (58%) were surprised that the total amount charged was higher than expected. Nearly 1 in 5 (18%) got a bill from a doctor they did not expect to get a bill from.

Surprise Insurance Billing Issues		
	MO	MO*
	%	%
The total amount charged was higher than expected	58	61
Got separate bills from multiple providers	22	30
Got a bill from a doctor did not expect to get a bill from	18	20
Was charged at out-of-network rate when thought the provider was in-network	14	17
Was charged for services did not receive	7	7
Other	15	10
Refused	0	0
<i>Total</i>	<i>123</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>* Sample of individuals who had emergency room visits/hospitalizations/surgery in the past two years</i>		
<i>Base: Received surprise medical bill</i>		

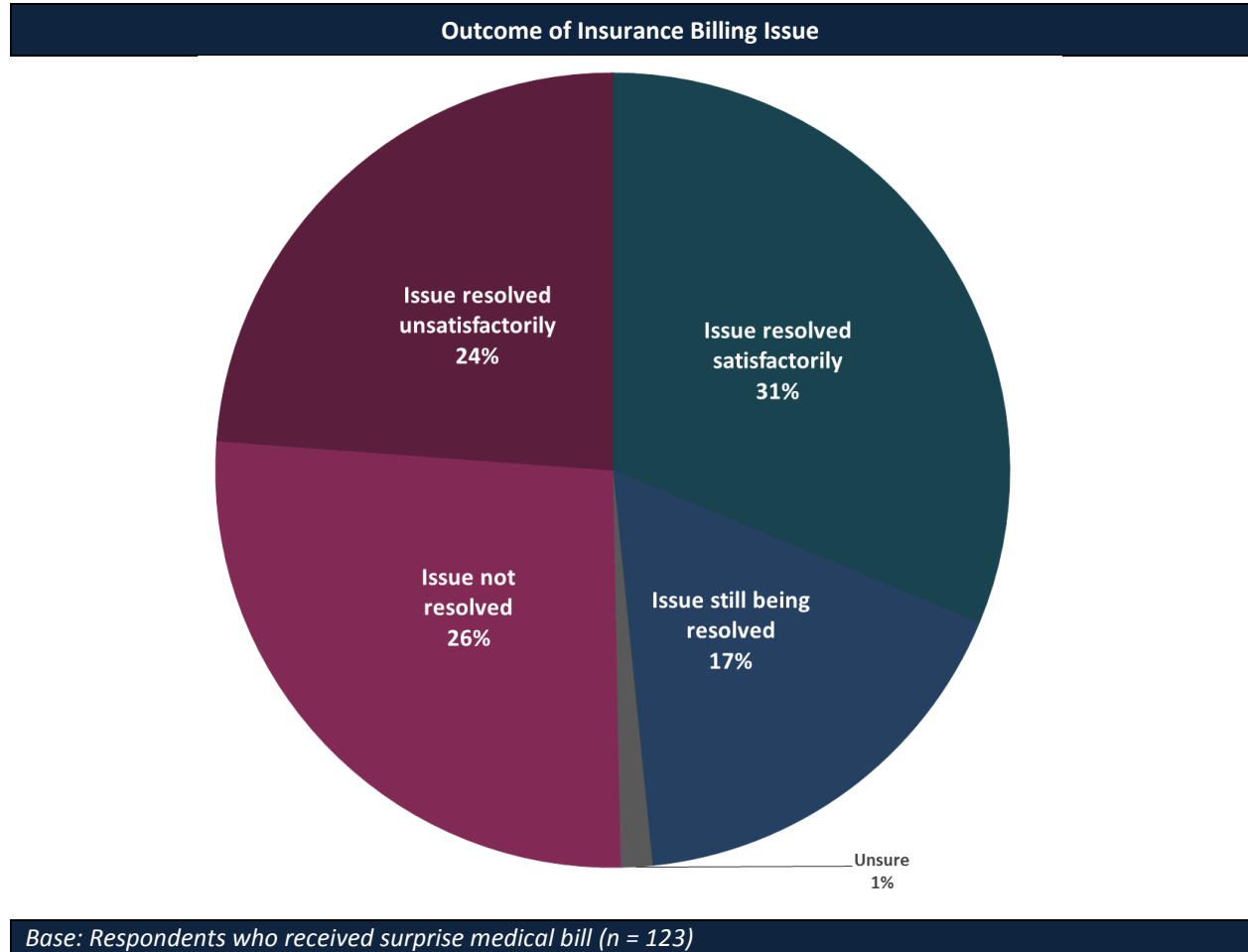


While many (63%) took action to resolve their billing issue, over a third (37%) did not. Among those who took action, 6 out of 10 first contacted someone at their plan; half contacted their physician first. Three out of 10 first referred to health insurance plan documents for information. Few (5%) first contacted someone outside of their health plan (e.g., lawyer or state agency).



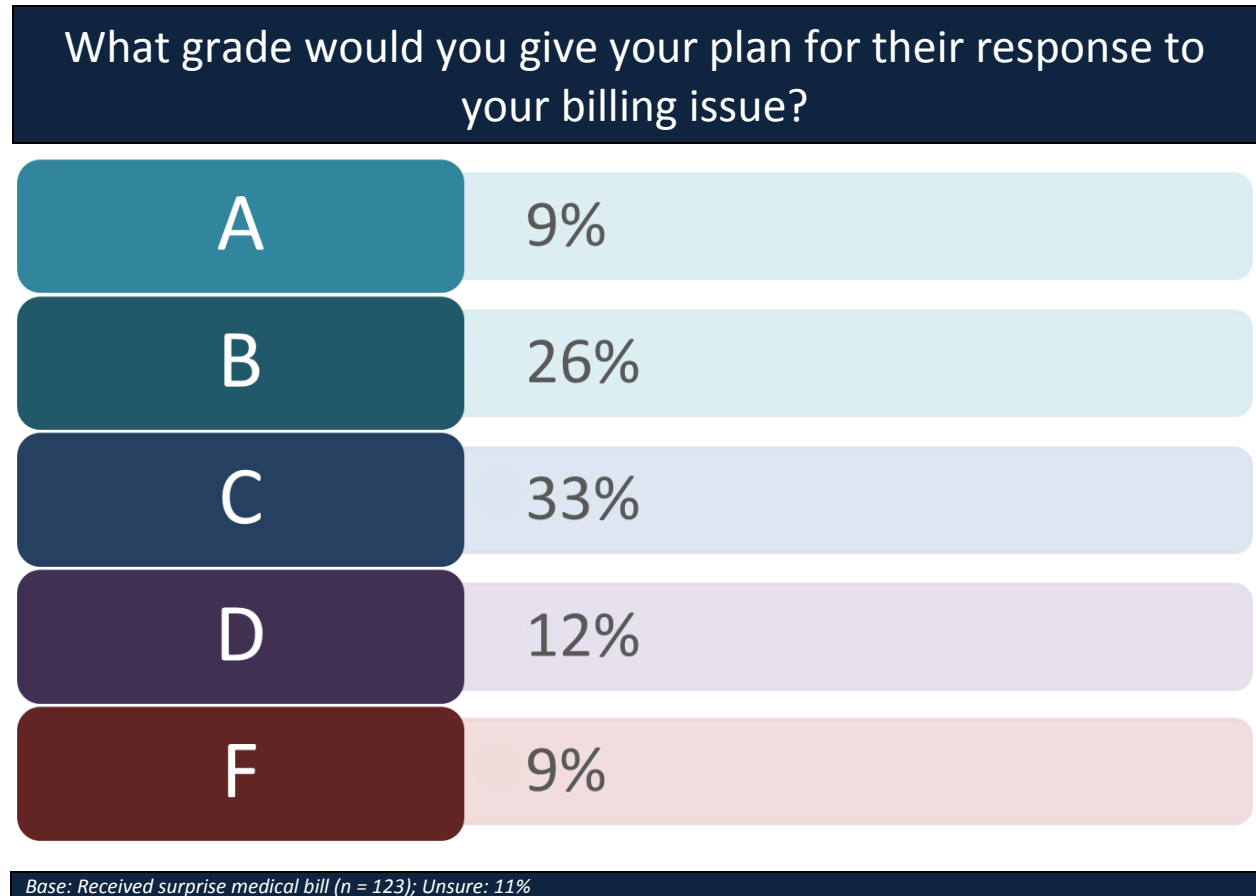
### Less Than a Third Satisfied with How Insurance Billing Issue Resolved

Less than a third (31%) of privately insured Missourians with billing issues were satisfied with how the issue was resolved. For half the issue was either resolved unsatisfactorily (24%) or not resolved at all (26%). Of this group (*issue not resolved to satisfaction/at all*), many (73%<sup>1</sup>) either paid for the bill in full (58%) or through a payment plan (14%).



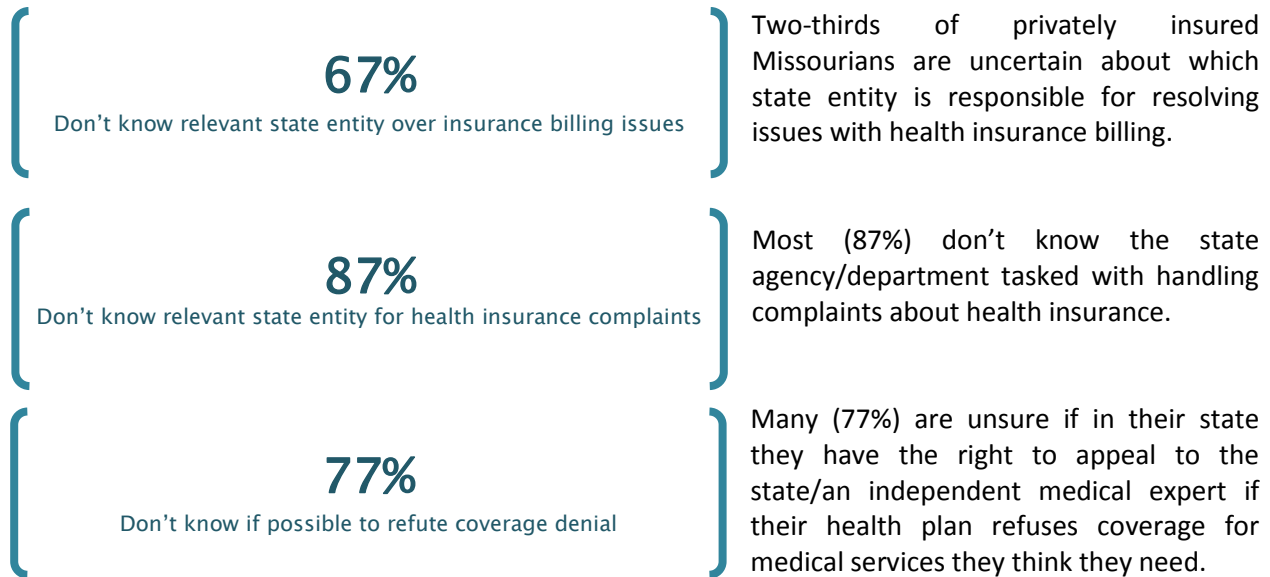
<sup>1</sup> Because of rounding 73% exceeds the sum of the 2 contributing factors.

Of the respondents who received a surprise medical bill, few (9%) would give their health plan an 'A' for its response; many (55%<sup>2</sup>) gave their plan a grade of 'C' or lower.



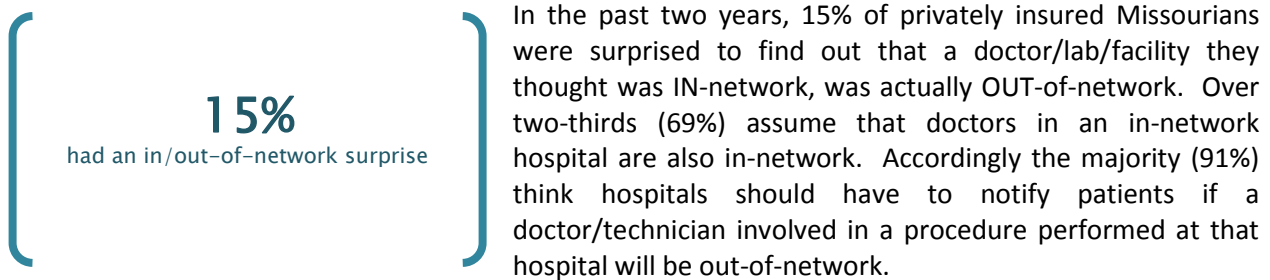
<sup>2</sup> Because of rounding 55% exceeds the sum of the 3 contributing factors.

### Consumers Unaware of Health Insurance Rights and State Entities



### Consumer Knowledge of In/Out-of-Network Issues

In the past two years, few (10%) have tried to use a doctor/facility outside of their plan's network.



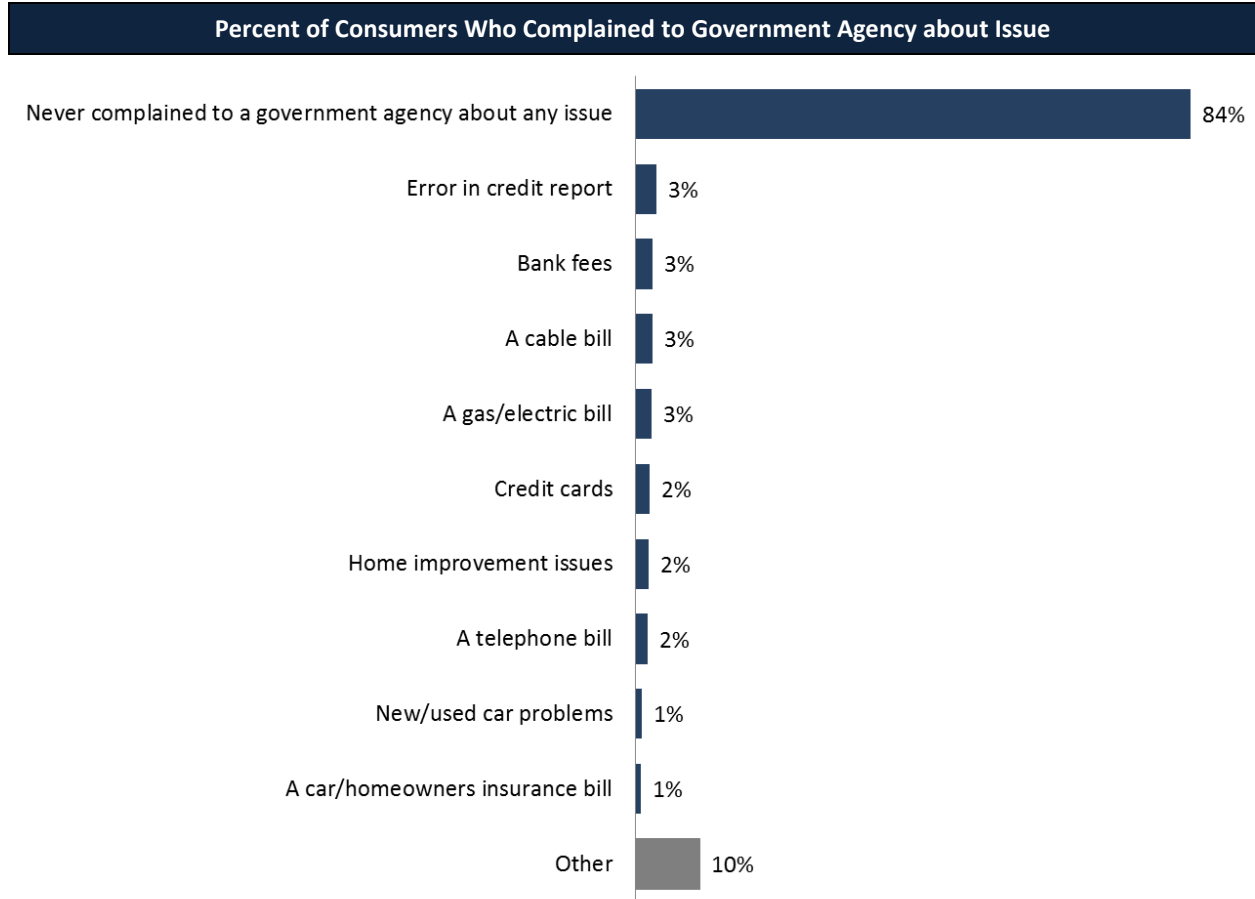
While 24% believe they must pay the extra cost if an error in their plan's provider directory causes them to go to a doctor/hospital that is actually out-of-network, many (58%) are uncertain about this.

### Consumer Issues with Health Plan's Online Provider Directory

Almost half (46%) of privately insured Missourians used their plan's online provider directory in the past two years; many (77%) used the directory (while enrolled in their plan) to find in-network doctors/facilities. The majority (91%) found the directory *somewhat easy* (63%) or *very easy* (28%) to use. Accordingly, most (97%) were able to find the information they were looking for. Half (51%) were highly satisfied (*completely or very satisfied*) with their plan's directory.

### Missourians Are Not Complaining to Government Agencies

Missourians are generally not complaining to government agencies; indeed most (84%) never complained to a government agency about any of the listed issues (e.g., cable bill, credit report error, bank fees).



*Base: All respondents*

### Summary

In recent years a sizable percentage of privately insured Missourians have received a surprise medical bill. While many took action to resolve this issue, quite a number did not. Perhaps relatedly, when we surveyed Missourians about health insurance policies and the state entities governing health insurers, we found most consumers are in the dark. These survey results suggest surprise medical bills are a problem, and some consumers don't know where to turn for help.

## **Methodology**

This online survey was fielded by GfK from December 17, 2015 – January 11, 2016. The target population consisted of the following: 18+ Missouri state residents who have private health insurance. The Missouri state sample was targeted using GfK Profile data.

The survey consisted of two stages: the initial screening for private health insurance and the main survey with the study-eligible respondents. To qualify for the main survey, a panel member must have been:

- 18 years or older
- Insured by one of the following in 2014:
  - A health plan from a current employer
  - A health plan from a previous employer
  - A health plan from their spouse's/partner's employer
  - A health plan through their parents or parent's employer
  - A privately-purchased health plan that they buy on their own
  - A health plan from healthcare.gov or their state health insurance marketplace

573 Missouri residents completed the screener; 350 were eligible for the survey. The margin of error is  $\pm 7.3$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level.