Penta Policy Insiders

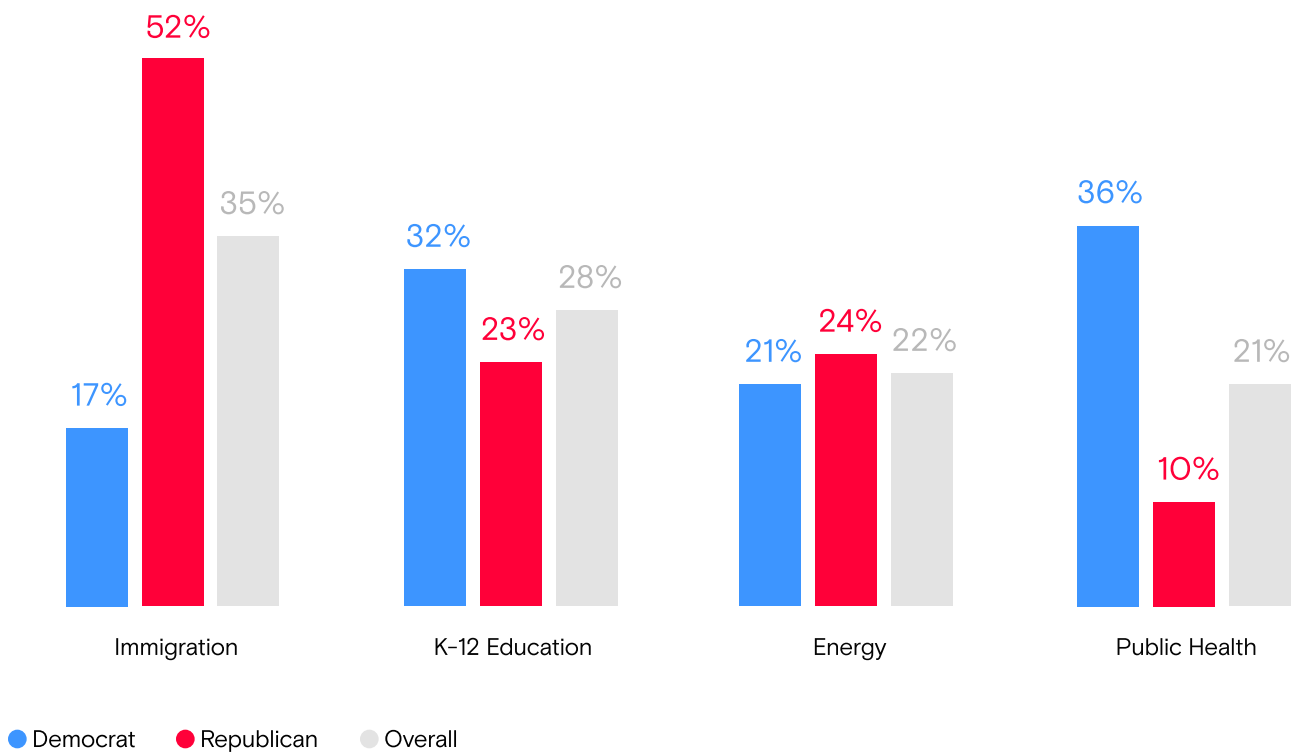# Texas Insights Review Series

Public Health

Executive summary

We are excited to share our findings from this year's Texas Insights Review. From September to December 2022, we surveyed and spoke with almost 300 state and local policymakers in Texas to understand their policy priorities as well as the top issues policy staff are facing across communities in the state.

Texas policy leaders we spoke to say immigration is a top challenge, with 35 percent of policy staff across both parties saying it is a main priority, particularly in relation to the state's labor force. When speaking on immigration, policy staff express viewpoints that vary across party lines. Democrats convey a need for increased legal pathways for immigrant workers in order to address the state's labor shortage, while Republicans emphasize the importance of curbing illegal immigration into the state. Improving K-12 education is also a top priority for Texas policy staff, with leaders citing the state's teacher shortage and school safety to be top concerns. Energy and public health are other issues at the forefront policy objectives for Democratic and Republican policy leaders we interviewed in the state.

This report is the fourth in a series that examines Texas policymakers' top policy priorities of 2022. This review examines public health in the state.

Top policy priorities in Texas

Bar chart showing top policy priorities in Texas by party.

- Immigration: Democrat 17%, Republican 52%, Overall 35%
- K-12 Education: Democrat 32%, Republican 23%, Overall 28%
- Energy: Democrat 21%, Republican 24%, Overall 22%
- Public Health: Democrat 36%, Republican 10%, Overall 21%

● Democrat   ● Republican   ● Overall

Public health and healthcare

Public health is a top priority in Texas, and policymakers want to address challenges such as high costs of healthcare and mental health. Policymakers are aware that a significant portion of the population does not have health insurance, a trend that is further contributing to already high costs of healthcare and existing challenges in overall access to services. Policymakers want to see higher health insured rates, more affordable healthcare services, and a greater focus on mental health across the state's health systems.

Top healthcare priorities

Priority	Percentage
High cost of healthcare	62%
Mental health	54%
Providing care to underserved communities	37%
Lack of insurance coverage	36%

Insurance and affordability

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, Texas has the worst health insured rates in the country, with 18.1 percent of the population lacking health insurance in 2021. In comparison, the uninsured rate across the country was reported to be 8.3 percent during the same year.[1] The Texas policymakers we spoke with are concerned that residents cannot afford healthcare services, and specifically acknowledge those who lack adequate insurance coverage as a group that needs attention.

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We see a lot of times that people don't have enough income to afford to pay for healthcare services... even some of the marketplace insurances, or insurance that's available through someone's employer, doesn't always cover [everything]. And so **with folks having to pay a whole lot of money out of pocket, it's just often they can't afford it.**

Program Specialist, Texas State Municipality, R

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Texas remains basically the uninsured capital of the U.S. in terms of just the amount of folks that do not have health care coverage in the state...

Legislative Director, Texas House of Representatives, D

Mental health spotlight

In addition to being a priority on the federal level, mental health is top of mind for policymakers in Texas. Research from National Alliance on Mental Illness shows that over 3 million adults in Texas are struggling with a mental health condition, and 45.3% report they did not receive mental healthcare because of the high cost.[2] Policymakers want to prioritize a discussion on how to improve mental health in the state.

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Because everyone coming out of COVID and just everything that we all went through, mental health issues that have arisen because of it. **I think [mental health] is something else that people don't really talk about, and that's something that we for sure need to start focusing more on, in my opinion.**

County Commissioner, Texas State Municipality, D

Conclusion

Fluctuations in weather have caused some concern about the reliability of Texas's energy sources during climate shifts, and policymakers want to ensure that the state's power supply is safeguarded. Policymakers are weighing the benefits and drawbacks of a variety of options including wind, solar, and fossil fuels to determine what will benefit the state in the future.

About Penta Policy Insiders

Penta Policy Insiders provides direct feedback from policymakers to government relations professionals, improving advocates' ability to understand, validate, and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their engagement.

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Citations

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2. https://abcnews.go.com/US/map-shows-us-states-dealing-teaching-shortage-data/story?id=96752632

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