

**GALLUP-PALMER COLLEGE OF CHIROPRACTIC INAUGURAL REPORT:**

# AMERICANS' PERCEPTIONS OF CHIROPRACTIC

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**SUBMITTED TO:**

James O'Connor  
Vice Chancellor for Marketing & Communication  
Palmer College of Chiropractic  
1000 Brady St.  
Davenport, IA 52803  
† 563.884.5662  
James.OConnor@palmer.edu

**SUBMITTED BY:**

Joe Daly  
Partner  
Gallup, Inc.  
901 F St. NW  
Washington, DC 20004  
† 202.715.3168  
Joe\_Daly@gallup.com



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About half of adults in the U.S. have been to a chiropractor as a patient. Fourteen percent of adults say they saw a chiropractor in the last 12 months, 12% say they saw a chiropractor in the last five years, and 25% say they saw a chiropractor more than five years ago.

- Women report that they have been to a chiropractor an average of two more times per year than men (11.5 visits vs. 9.4 visits, respectively).
- Women also have slightly more positive views of chiropractors in general, and female users are more likely than male users to want to see a chiropractor on a regular basis, even if they do not have pain.
- Although adults younger than 35 are less likely to say they have been to a chiropractor, there are positive signs that many from this group could become users if they were to experience neck or back pain. Adults younger than 50 are more likely than older adults to say a chiropractor would be their first choice if they had neck or back pain.

More than half of U.S. adults have a positive opinion about chiropractors and “strongly agree” or “agree somewhat” that they are effective at treating neck and back pain. These opinions hold true across all income and education groups. While adults’ trust in chiropractors improves with exposure, recent use is limited to a small percentage of adults.

Nearly one in four U.S. adults strongly agree or agree somewhat that chiropractic care is dangerous, while more than a third say they don’t know if it is dangerous. This uncertainty about the danger of chiropractic care rises to nearly half (47%) among people who have never been to a chiropractor, representing a possible barrier for nonusers to consider chiropractic care.

Among the 51% of U.S. adults who have never been to a chiropractor, there is also uncertainty regarding cost, expected number of visits, trustworthiness of chiropractors and the education required to become a chiropractor. About half or more of nonusers are unsure of these things. This represents an opportunity to educate many adults about chiropractors’ qualifications and the benefits of chiropractic care.

A lack of knowledge about health insurance coverage for chiropractic care and sensitivity toward costs are also barriers for some. Nearly half of adults who have been to a chiropractor within the last five years (46%) say they would go to the chiropractor more often if it wasn’t so expensive. Overall, about four in 10 adults in the U.S. believe chiropractic care is too expensive (43%) and think it requires too many visits (44%). Nearly half of U.S. adults do not know whether their insurance covers chiropractic care. More awareness about the coverage of chiropractic care and its costs could help potential clients consider chiropractic services.

# INTRODUCTION

The chiropractic industry has long sought to expand its market share beyond the small percentage of U.S. adults who report going to a chiropractor in a given year. While numerous studies have been conducted on alternative medicine, they have been unable to shed light on who uses chiropractic care and why these individuals decide to use it. Many studies of chiropractic and alternative medicine use are one-off studies, meaning their data cannot be trended over time, and they use such small sample sizes that findings cannot be projected to larger populations. Many of these studies are also outdated, drawing on data from the late 1970s to the early 1980s. Specifically missing is a multiyear, large-scale study that looks at chiropractic use across the entire country.

Palmer College of Chiropractic commissioned Gallup to conduct the first-ever nationally representative annual survey measuring perceptions of and experiences with chiropractic among U.S. adults. Previous research identified several barriers to widespread chiropractic use, including negative perceptions of chiropractic among both the public and physicians and unclear, narrow or nonexistent insurance coverage. The Gallup-Palmer study provides the first opportunity to test these assumptions and discover what U.S. adults think about chiropractic.

# EXPERIENCES WITH CHIROPRACTIC

## HALF OF U.S. ADULTS HAVE EXPERIENCE WITH CHIROPRACTIC

About half of adults in the U.S. have had some experience with a chiropractor as a patient. Fourteen percent of U.S. adults say they have been to a chiropractor as a patient in the last 12 months, and an additional 12% say they have seen a chiropractor within the last five years.<sup>1</sup> Twenty-five percent of adults were a patient of a chiropractor more than five years ago.

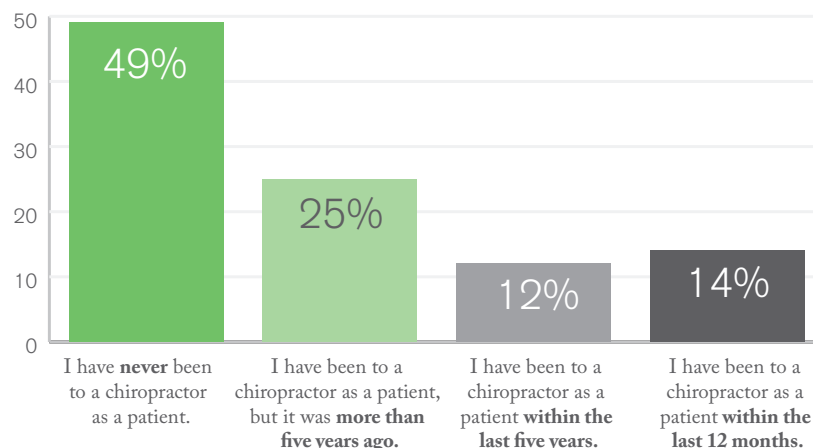
### Chiropractic Users Come From Various Backgrounds

Chiropractic use is not isolated to certain types of people living in the U.S. Adults who have been to a chiropractor in the last five years span the age spectrum and come from different racial, educational and socio-economic backgrounds. While there are not many demographic differences among recent users of chiropractic, there are notable differences among people who have never visited a chiropractor before. Adults aged 18 to 34 are more likely to report that they have never been to a chiropractor (63%) than older adults (44%, on average).

Blacks are more likely than whites or

Hispanics to report never having seen a chiropractor. Men, adults with higher income and adults with more education are also slightly more likely than women, those with lower income and those with less education to report never having been to a chiropractor.

Which of the following best describes your personal experience with a chiropractor?



1. Gallup validated the figure of 13.7% (rounded up to 14% in reporting) using three separate, nationally representative studies in 2015. All results fell within the margin of error. The 2012 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) reported 8.5% of adults say they received a chiropractic or osteopathic manipulation in the 12 months prior to the study. While these two numbers are statistically different, the margin of error of ±2 percentage points for the Gallup study estimates the true number to be between 11.7% and 15.7%, which is slightly higher than the NHIS study conducted three years prior.



**% Never been to a chiropractor**

18 to 34	63%
35+	44%
Blacks	59%
Whites	48%
Hispanics	47%
Men	52%
Women	47%

Recent chiropractic users demonstrate a strong commitment to receiving care, averaging 11 visits to a chiropractor in the last 12 months. While men and women are just as likely to use chiropractic in a 12-month period, women report visiting a chiropractor more frequently during that time frame — averaging 11.5 visits, compared with male users averaging 9.4. Recent users between the ages of 50 and 64 and those with annual household income levels of \$50,000 to \$100,000 visit the chiropractor less frequently than users from other age and income groups. Half of adults who say they saw a chiropractor in the last 12 months report more than six visits that year.

**Average visits to a chiropractor  
in the last 12 months**

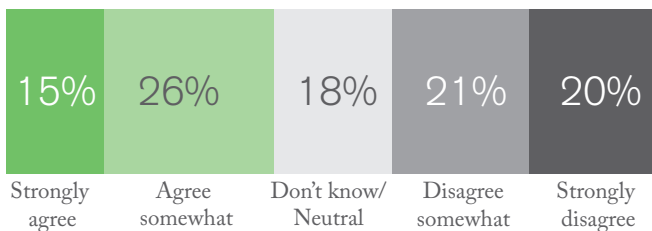
All past-year users	11.0
Men	9.4
Women	11.5

# PREFERENCES AMONG CHIROPRACTIC USERS

## CHIROPRACTIC USERS SPLIT ON WHETHER THEY ONLY WANT TO SEE CHIROPRACTOR FOR NECK OR BACK ISSUES

While attracting new patients is vital for the growth of the chiropractic profession, understanding the preferences of current or former users of chiropractic is also important. Adults who have been to a chiropractor in the last five years are divided when asked if they only want to see a chiropractor for neck or back issues. About four in 10 adults (41%) who have been to a chiropractor in the last five years strongly agree or agree somewhat that they only want to see a chiropractor for neck or back issues, but just as many strongly disagree or disagree somewhat with this. Nearly one in five adults who have been to a chiropractor in the last five years say they don't know.

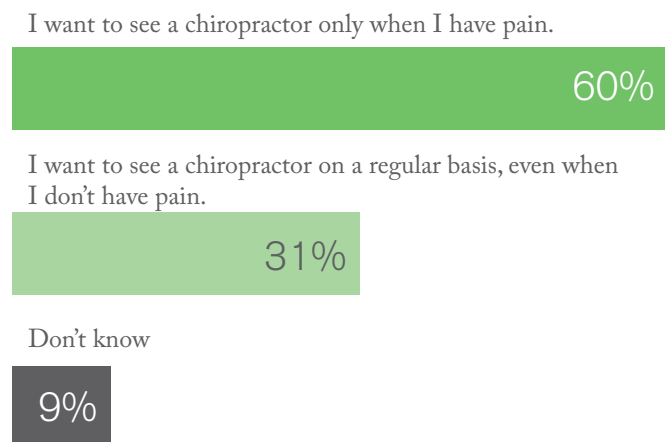
Based on what you know, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements about chiropractors: I only want to see a chiropractor for neck or back issues.



### A Majority of Chiropractic Users Say They Only Want to See a Chiropractor When in Pain

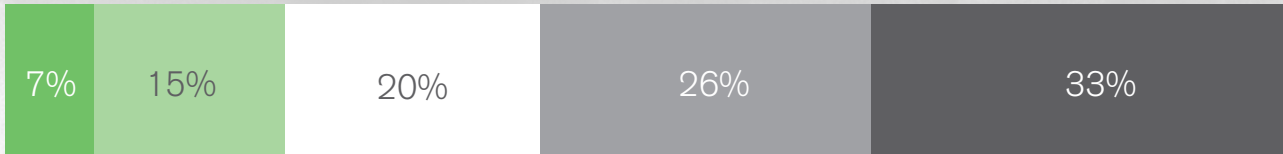
There are also different preferences among chiropractic users regarding whether they want to see their chiropractor only when they have pain or whether they want to see their chiropractor on a regular basis, even if they do not have pain. Sixty percent of adults who have been to a chiropractor within the last five years say they only want to see a chiropractor when they have pain, and 31% say they want to see a chiropractor on a regular basis, even if they don't have pain. Nine percent say they don't know what they want.

Which of the following best describes what you want? (Asked of adults who saw a chiropractor within the last five years)

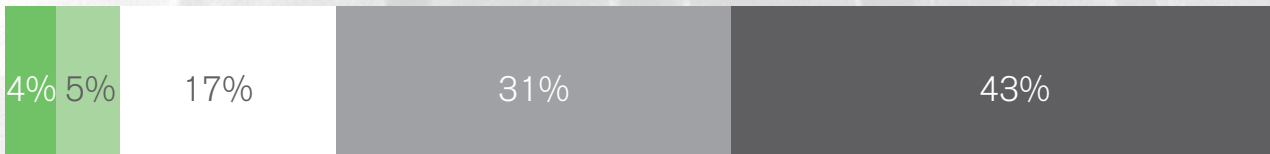




Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements about chiropractors:  
**I want to talk to a chiropractor about general health and wellness issues, such as diet and nutrition.**



**A chiropractor is the first healthcare provider I want to talk to about my health.**



Strongly agree
  Agree somewhat
  Don't know/Neutral
  Disagree somewhat
  Strongly disagree

### Most Users Don't See Chiropractors as Their First Healthcare Provider

Most chiropractic users do not view their chiropractor as the first healthcare professional whom they want to talk to about general wellness issues. Only about one in 10 adults (9%) who have been to a chiropractor within the last five years strongly agree or agree somewhat that a chiropractor is the first healthcare provider they want to talk to about their health. Nearly three in four (74%) strongly disagree or disagree somewhat with this statement. However, there is slightly more receptivity toward talking to chiropractors about general wellness issues such as diet and nutrition. Twenty-two percent of users strongly agree or agree somewhat that they want to do this, but more than half (59%) strongly disagree or disagree somewhat. One in five users don't know whether they want these things.

Adults in higher-income households are slightly more likely than adults in lower-income households to say they only want to see a chiropractor when they have pain. Female users (35%) are more likely than male users (27%) to say they want to see a chiropractor on a regular basis, even if they do not have pain; are more likely to say a chiropractor is the first healthcare provider they want to talk to about their

health; and are more likely to say they want to talk to their chiropractor about general health and wellness issues such as diet and nutrition. Female users are less likely than male users to say they only want to see a chiropractor for neck or back issues.

	Men	Women
I want to see a chiropractor on a regular basis, even if I do not have pain. (% <b>Yes</b> )	27%	35%
I only want to see a chiropractor for neck or back issues. (% <b>Strongly agree/Agree somewhat</b> )	43%	39%
I want to talk to my chiropractor about general health and wellness issues such as diet and nutrition. (% <b>Strongly agree/Agree somewhat</b> )	16%	25%
A chiropractor is the first healthcare provider I want to talk to about my health. (% <b>Strongly agree/Agree somewhat</b> )	7%	11%

# PERCEPTIONS OF CHIROPRACTIC

## ADULTS PREFER CHIROPRACTIC CARE FOR NECK OR BACK PAIN OVER MASSAGE, PHYSICAL THERAPY

The National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS), part of the National Institutes of Health, estimates that eight out of 10 people will suffer from back pain at some point in their lives.

Given a choice among five types of practitioners, 29% of Americans say they would most like to see a chiropractor if they experienced neck or back pain, with the majority, 54%, saying that they would see a medical doctor. Much smaller percentages would see a physical therapist, massage therapist or acupuncturist for neck or back pain.

Although men are more likely than women to say they would most like to see a medical doctor about neck or back pain, women are still more likely to choose a medical doctor

first over other healthcare providers. Adults younger than 50 are more likely than older respondents to say a chiropractor would be their first choice to see if they had neck or back pain.

About half of adults who did not say a chiropractor would be their first choice to see about neck or back pain agree they would see a chiropractor if other treatment methods did not work. Fifteen percent strongly agree, and 33% agree somewhat.

**Suppose you were experiencing neck or back pain and wanted to see a healthcare provider about it. If you had the opportunity to choose among any of the following healthcare providers and you knew the cost would be the same to you, who would you most like to see about your neck or back pain?**

	U.S. adults	Men	Women	Adults younger than 50	Adults 50+
Medical doctor	54%	59%	49%	48%	62%
Chiropractor	29%	27%	30%	32%	24%
Physical therapist	6%	5%	6%	7%	4%
Massage therapist	7%	5%	9%	9%	5%
Acupuncturist	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Someone else	1%	1%	2%	1%	2%

**Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement about chiropractors: I would visit a chiropractor for neck or back pain, but only if other treatment methods didn't work. (Asked only of adults who did NOT say a chiropractor would be their first choice)**

Strongly agree	15%
Agree somewhat	33%
Disagree somewhat	12%
Strongly disagree	14%
Don't know/Neutral	27%

Among adults who did not say a chiropractor was their first choice, 40% said they would be “very likely” (9%) or “somewhat likely” (31%) to see a chiropractor if they had neck or back pain. This could be because some respondents expect to need a referral from a medical doctor before they see a chiropractor.

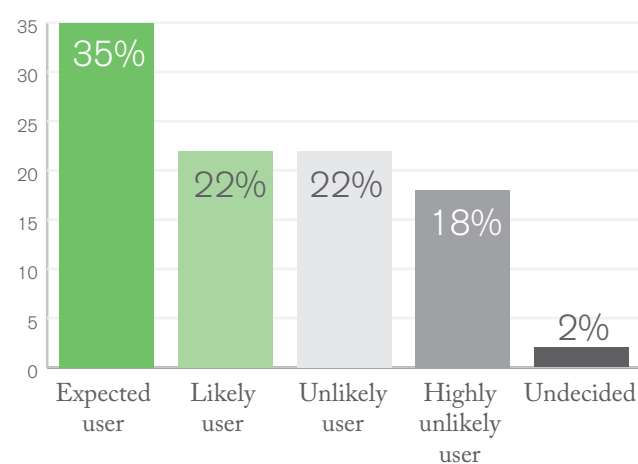
**Again, suppose you were experiencing neck or back pain and wanted to see a healthcare provider about it. How likely would you be to see a chiropractor if you had neck or back pain? (Asked only of adults who did NOT say a chiropractor would be their first choice)**

Very likely	9%
Somewhat likely	31%
Not very likely	31%
Not likely at all	26%
Don't know/Neutral	3%

In an effort to quantify the total number of U.S. adults who desire to see a chiropractor for back and neck pain, responses to two questions were combined to classify respondents as “expected users,” “likely users,” “unlikely users,” “highly unlikely users” or “undecided.” Slightly more than a third of U.S. adults either say a chiropractor would be their first choice to see about neck or back pain (29%) or say another healthcare provider would be their first choice, but they still say they would be “very likely” to see a chiropractor for neck or back pain (7%). (These respondents are labeled as “expected users” in the following chart.)

Another 22% of U.S. adults say they would be “somewhat likely” to see a chiropractor if they had neck or back pain, but mention that another healthcare provider would be their first choice. (They are labeled as “likely users.”) Twenty-two percent of adults in the U.S. say they would be “not very likely” to see a chiropractor for neck or back pain, and 18% say they would be “not likely at all.” Two percent don't know whether they would see a chiropractor for neck or back pain.

**Likelihood to See a Chiropractor for Neck or Back Pain**



Sixty-two percent of expected users are younger than 50. These findings suggest the potential for chiropractic use to increase significantly as adults age and are more likely to suffer from neck or back pain. About one in four expected users have never been to a chiropractor before (24%), while slightly more than a third (35%) have been to a chiropractor in the last 12 months.

Expected users have more positive views of chiropractic than other user groups. Expected users are also much more likely to say their health insurance plan covers chiropractic care. However, 28% of expected users who report having insurance do not know whether their health policy covers chiropractic care. Six percent of expected users reported being uninsured at the time they completed the survey.

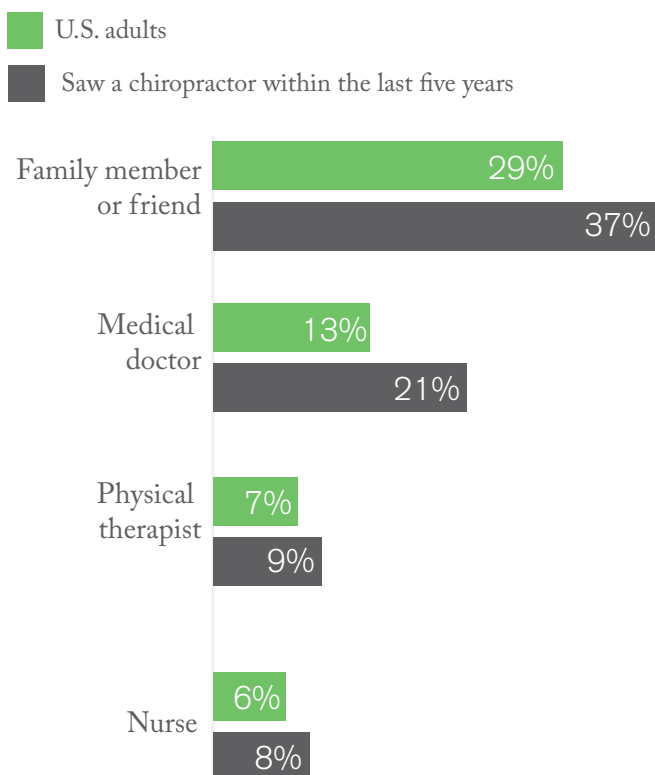
### Few Adults Have Had a Doctor, Nurse or Physical Therapist Discourage Chiropractic Care

Very few adults have ever had a medical doctor, nurse or physical therapist discourage them from going to a chiropractor; however, about three in 10 adults (29%) have had a family member or friend discourage chiropractic care. Adults who have seen a chiropractor in the last five years are more likely to report receiving discouragement from medical doctors and from friends and family members than those who have been to a chiropractor more than five years ago or who have never been to a chiropractor.

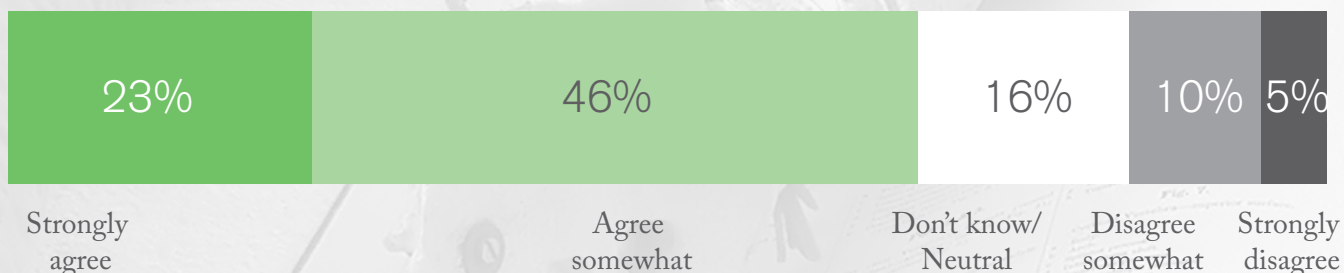
A majority of U.S. adults (69%) strongly agree or agree somewhat with the statement, "I have a good understanding of what chiropractors do." Only 15% strongly disagree or disagree somewhat, and 16% are uncertain.

Despite nearly seven in 10 adults agreeing that they have a good understanding of what chiropractors do, many are unsure about certain aspects related to chiropractic care, such as whether chiropractic care is dangerous and the educational requirements necessary for an individual to become a chiropractor.

Have you ever had any of the following people discourage you from going to a chiropractor? (% Yes)



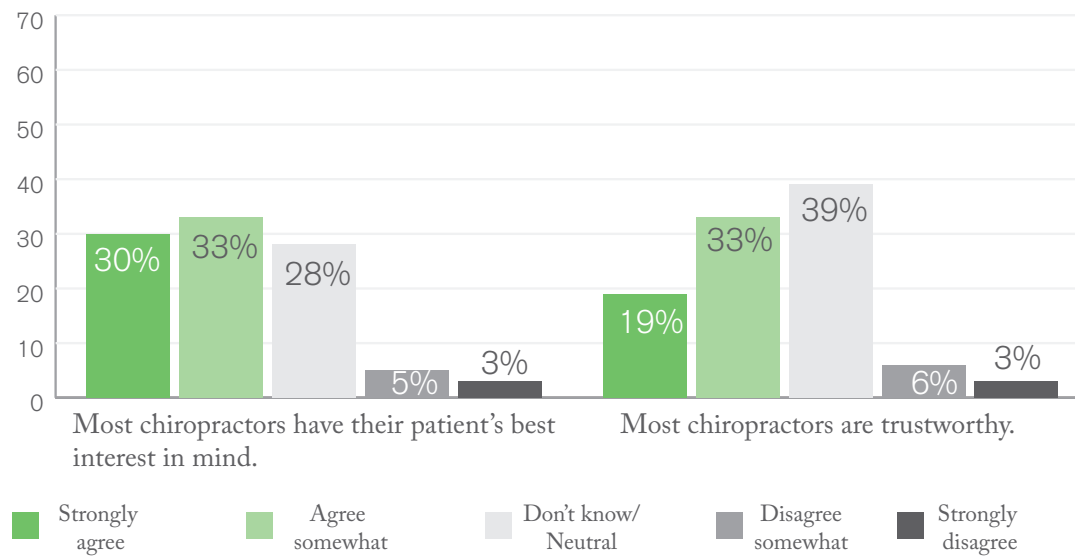
Based on what you know, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements about chiropractors: I have a good understanding of what chiropractors do.



### Most Adults in the U.S. View Chiropractors Positively

As the chiropractic profession seeks to attract more patients, it is important to understand the U.S. public's perceptions of chiropractors. Half of Americans (52%) strongly or somewhat agree that most chiropractors are trustworthy, and 63% agree that most chiropractors have their patient's best interest in mind. Less than 10% of adults strongly disagree or disagree somewhat with these statements. There is, however, some uncertainty about the profession, with 39% of adults saying they don't know (or neither agree nor disagree) as to whether most chiropractors are trustworthy, and 28% saying the same about chiropractors having their patient's best interest in mind.

Based on what you know, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements about chiropractors.



## AMERICANS' PERCEPTIONS OF CHIROPRACTIC

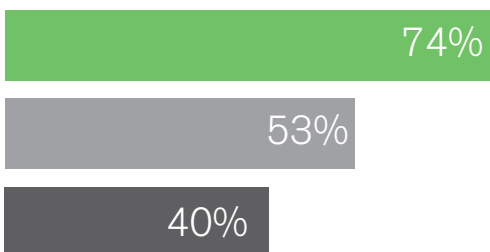
Previous Gallup studies have shown that few adults in the U.S. have outright negative views about the honesty and ethics of chiropractors. In a 2012 Gallup poll, only 11% of U.S. adults said chiropractors have “low” or “very low” honesty and ethical standards.

Americans who have exposure to chiropractors are more likely to have an opinion of them, and in general, those opinions are positive. About three out of four adults who have seen a chiropractor in the last five years agree they are trustworthy, and eight in 10 say they have their patient’s best interest in mind.

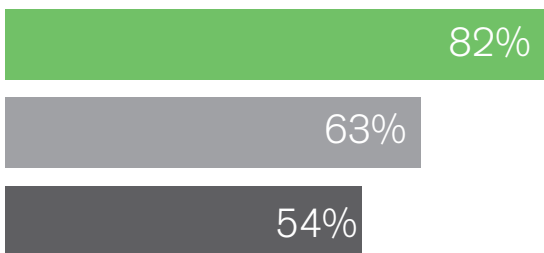
### Trust in Chiropractors Increases With Exposure

*% Strongly agree/Agree somewhat*

**Most chiropractors are trustworthy.**



**Most chiropractors have their patient’s best interest in mind.**



- Saw a chiropractor in the last five years
- Saw a chiropractor more than five years ago
- Have never seen a chiropractor

Chiropractic care has a strong reputation among U.S. adults for effective treatment of neck and back pain. More than half of adults either strongly agree (23%) or agree somewhat (38%) that chiropractors are effective at treating neck and back pain. Only 11% strongly disagree or disagree somewhat with this statement, and 28% of adults say they don’t know.

**Based on what you know, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements about chiropractors: Chiropractors are effective at treating back and neck pain.**

Strongly agree	<b>23%</b>
Agree somewhat	<b>38%</b>
Don't know/Neutral	<b>28%</b>
Disagree somewhat	<b>7%</b>
Strongly disagree	<b>4%</b>

### Nonusers Uncertain About Whether Chiropractic Care Is Dangerous

Nearly one in four adults in the U.S. strongly agree or agree somewhat that chiropractic care is dangerous, and more than a third say they don’t know if it is dangerous. This uncertainty about the danger of chiropractic care rises to nearly half (47%) among people who have never been to a chiropractor. Twenty-eight percent of these nonusers agree that it is dangerous. This doubt could represent a significant barrier for nonusers to consider chiropractic care. Adults who agree or are uncertain that chiropractic care is dangerous are much less likely to consider seeing a chiropractor for back or neck pain than adults who do not think it is dangerous.



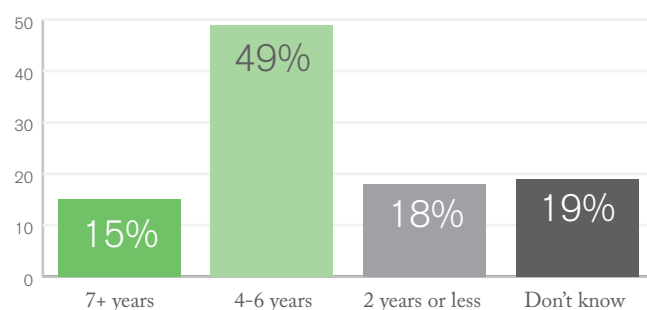
Based on what you know, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements about chiropractors: Chiropractic care is dangerous.

	% Strongly agree/ Agree somewhat	% Strongly disagree/ Disagree somewhat	% Don't know/ Neutral
<b>U.S. adults</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>37%</b>
Never been to a chiropractor	28%	25%	47%
Been to a chiropractor, but it was more than five years ago	27%	40%	34%
Been to a chiropractor within the last five years	17%	59%	23%

### Most Adults Don't Know the Training Required to Become a Chiropractor

Most U.S. adults don't know the educational requirements needed for an individual to become a chiropractor. Only 15% of adults correctly state that people need seven or more years of education after high school to become a chiropractor. Nearly half think chiropractors need four to six years of education beyond high school.

#### How many years of education after high school do you think is required to become a chiropractor?



Adults with a college degree or higher are the most likely to say they think people need more years of education after high school to become a chiropractor, but these adults are no more likely to report having been to a chiropractor than adults in other education groups. In general, women are more likely than men to say they think people need more years of education after high school to become a chiropractor.

Many adults who saw a chiropractor in the 12 months prior to the study do not know the accurate amount of education required to become one, although they think more education is needed than those who have not been to a chiropractor recently or have never been to one. Respondents who understand the amount of education required to become a chiropractor are much less likely to say they think chiropractic care is dangerous.

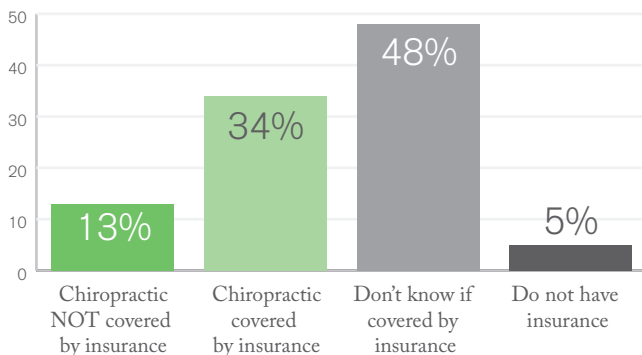


# PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE COST OF CHIROPRACTIC

HALF OF INSURED ADULTS IN THE U.S. DON'T KNOW IF THEIR INSURANCE COVERS CHIROPRACTIC CARE

A lack of knowledge about health insurance coverage for chiropractic care and sensitivity toward costs may be barriers preventing some adults in the U.S. from using chiropractic services. Nearly half of U.S. adults do not know whether their insurance covers chiropractic care. About a third say their insurance covers chiropractic care, and 13% say their insurance does not.

**Please think about your primary health insurance coverage, whether that is through a private health insurance company, Medicare or Medicaid. Which of the following best describes your situation?**



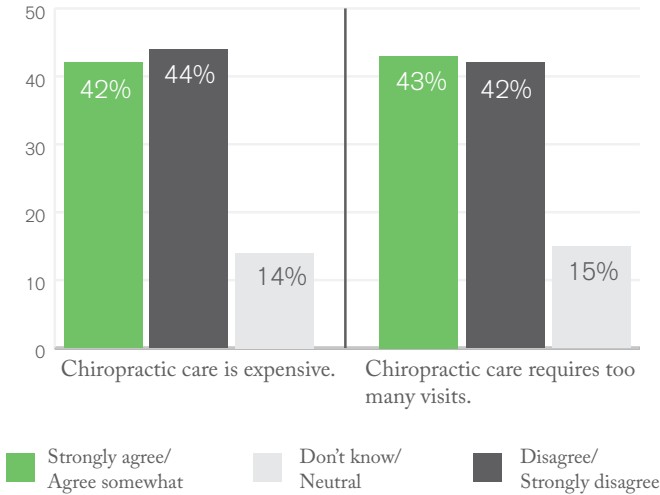
Respondents aged 18 to 34 and those aged 65 and older are less likely to know whether their insurance covers chiropractic. For older adults, this could be because they have transitioned to Medicare and do not yet know what coverage they have. Respondents aged 18 to 34 are more likely than older respondents to say they have never been to a chiropractor, which could affect their likelihood of being familiar with their insurance coverage for it.

**Percentage who don't know if chiropractic care is covered by insurance**

18 to 34	54%
35 to 64	43%
65+	54%

In addition to uncertainty about insurance coverage, perceptions about the cost of chiropractic care could also be a factor preventing some individuals from seeking it. About four in 10 adults in the U.S. believe chiropractic care is too expensive (43%) and think it requires too many visits (44%). About the same percentage of adults are uncertain as to whether these two statements are true. More awareness about insurance coverage for chiropractic care and its costs could help more potential clients consider chiropractic services.

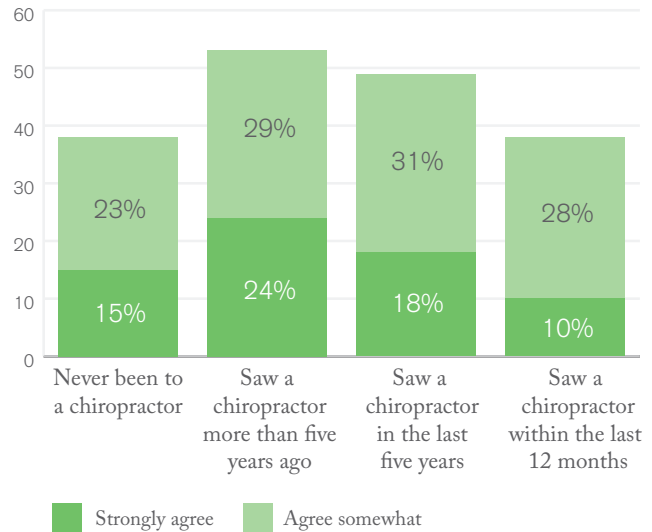
Based on what you know, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements about chiropractors.



Women are more likely than men to agree that chiropractic care is expensive. Men express more uncertainty about this. Respondents aged 18 to 34, those with less education and those with lower income are more likely than those in comparable demographic groups to agree that chiropractic care is expensive.

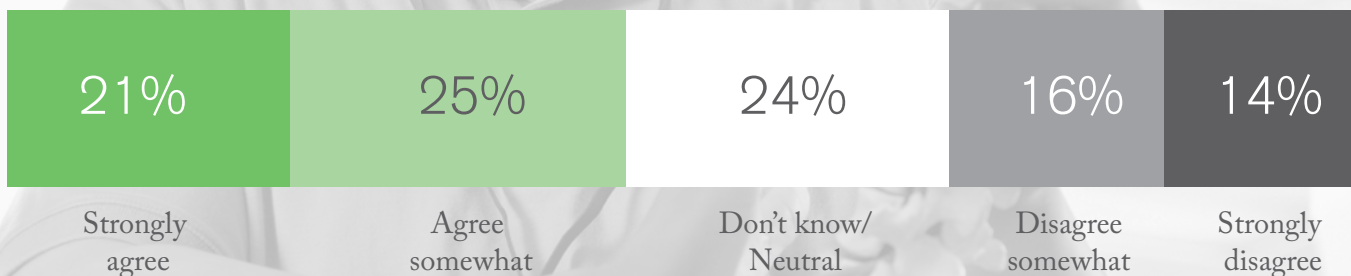
Adults who have been to a chiropractor more than five years ago are most likely to agree that chiropractic care requires too many visits.

Based on what you know, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements about chiropractors: Chiropractic care requires too many visits.



Nearly half of adults who have been to a chiropractor in the last five years (46%) say they would go to the chiropractor more often if it wasn't so expensive. Female users, those younger than 35 and those with lower income are more likely to agree that they would visit a chiropractor more often if it didn't cost so much.

Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements about chiropractors: I would visit a chiropractor more often if it didn't cost so much.



# CONCLUSION

More than half of U.S. adults view chiropractors positively and strongly agree or agree somewhat that they are effective at treating neck and back pain. However, uncertainty about costs and the potential dangers associated with chiropractic care could be barriers to some adults considering the use of chiropractic. Efforts should be made to make the costs of chiropractic more transparent for potential users, including details related to insurance coverage and likely number of visits required.

Most adults do not fully understand the extent of education needed for an individual to become a chiropractor. Increased awareness about the rigor of chiropractic training could help reassure the more than a third (37%) of adults who say they don't know if it is dangerous.

Current chiropractic users are more likely than less frequent users to have positive views about chiropractors and the effectiveness of chiropractic care to treat neck and back pain, suggesting that getting patients in the door could lead to continued use. Current users also see their chiropractor an average of 11 times per year, showing a strong commitment to chiropractic care. Users are somewhat divided on whether they only want to see a chiropractor for neck or back pain and on whether they want to discuss general health issues with their chiropractor.

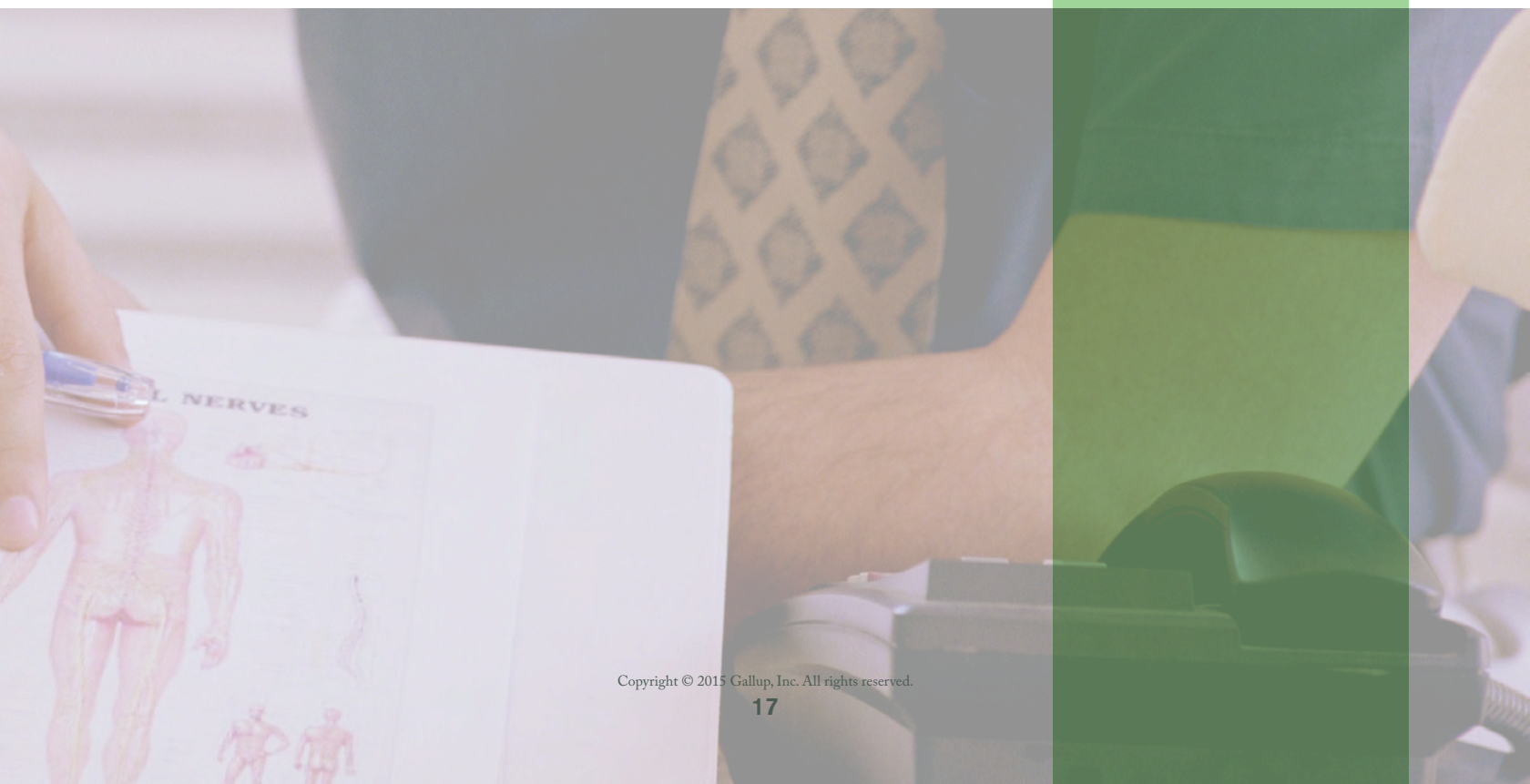
Adults younger than 50 represent a unique opportunity for the future of chiropractic because this group is more likely than older respondents to say a chiropractor would be their first choice to see about neck or back pain. However, adults aged 18 to 34 are more sensitive to chiropractic costs than are older adults. This group is more likely to perceive chiropractic care as expensive, less likely to know whether their insurance plan covers chiropractic and less likely to have been to a chiropractor than other age groups. The chiropractic community would do well to increase awareness among the public about the benefits of chiropractic care and the costs associated with it, including offering flexible methods of payment and assistance with navigating insurance, to ensure potential users have what they need to make an informed decision regarding care.



# METHODS

Results are based on a Gallup Panel study of 5,442 national adults, aged 18 and older, conducted Feb. 16-May 6, 2015, via the Web and by mail. The Gallup Panel is a probability-based longitudinal panel of U.S. adults whom Gallup selects using random-digit-dial phone interviews that cover landline and cellphone users. Gallup also uses address-based sampling methods to recruit Panel members.

The Gallup Panel is not an opt-in panel, and members do not receive incentives for participation. Using 2012 Current Population Survey figures, researchers weighted the sample for this study to be demographically representative of the U.S. adult population. For results based on this sample, one can say that the maximum margin of sampling error is  $\pm 2$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Margins of error are higher for subsamples. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error and bias into the findings of public opinion polls.





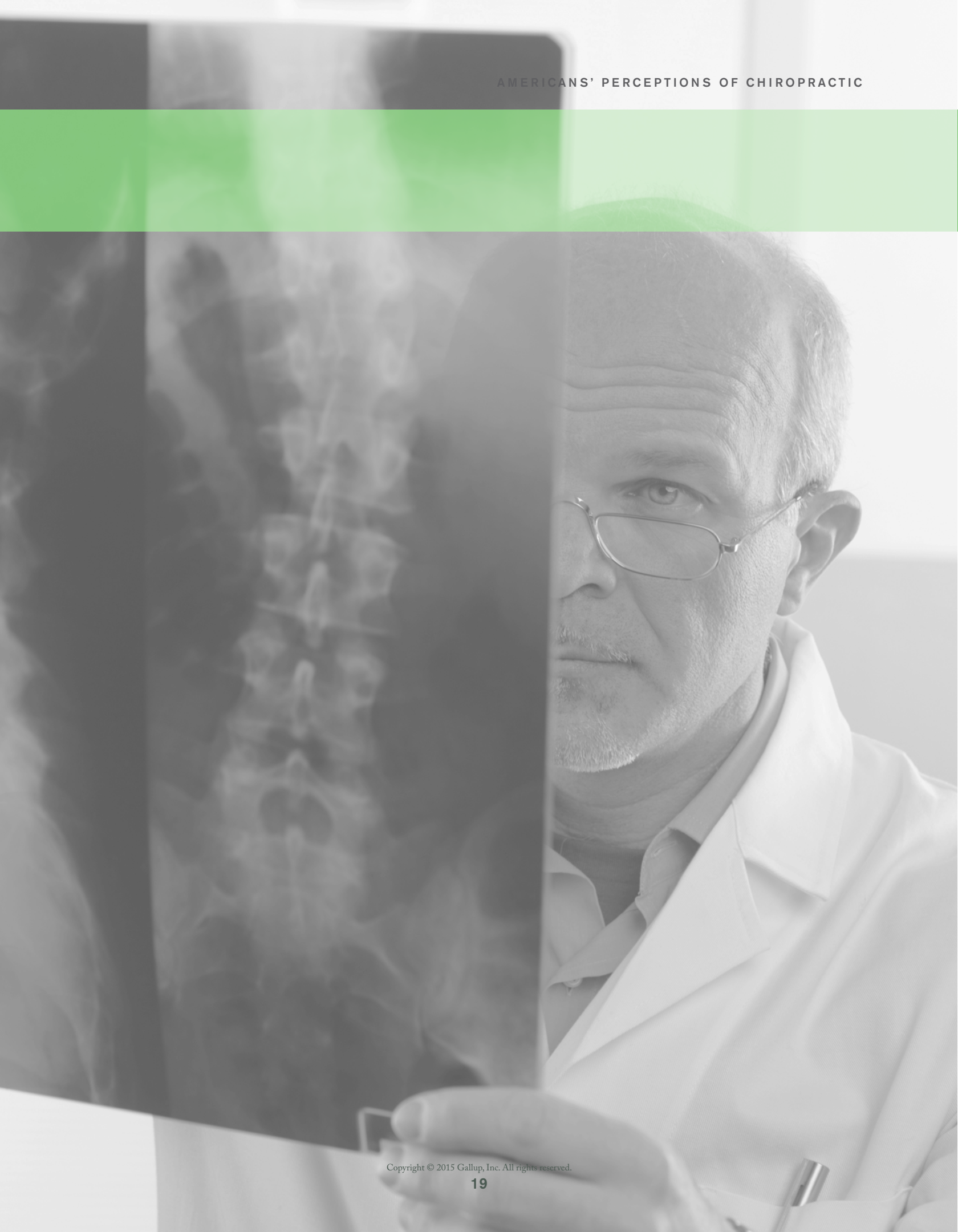
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## ABOUT PALMER

Palmer College of Chiropractic is the founding college of the chiropractic profession and is known as the trusted leader in chiropractic education. It was founded in 1897 in Davenport, Iowa, by Daniel David (D.D.) Palmer, who developed the science, art and philosophy of chiropractic and performed the first chiropractic adjustment in 1895. Palmer College of Chiropractic has more than 2,100 students at its campuses in Davenport, Iowa; Port Orange, Florida; and San Jose, California.











**GALLUP®**

**World Headquarters**

The Gallup Building  
901 F Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20004

**t** +1.877.242.5587

**f** +1.202.715.3045

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