

June 23, 2022

National health spending is declining as a percent of GDP

HIGHLIGHTS

- ▲ National health spending in April 2022 grew by 6.5%, year over year. In the absence of federal government support in 2021 and 2022, health spending would have grown by 5.5%.
- ▲ GDP in April 2022 was 9.7% higher than in April 2021 as GDP growth continues to outpace health spending growth. The difference in growth is largely attributable to the recent high rate of inflation, which has not yet had a major impact on health spending.
- ▲ In April 2022, health spending accounted for 18.1% of GDP but this share has been declining steadily over the past several months. It was 18.7% of GDP in December 2021.

National Health Spending and GDP*

	Apr 2020	Apr 2021	Mar 2022	Apr 2022
GDP	18.51	22.60	24.56	24.80
National Health Spending (HS)	4.40	4.22	4.46	4.49
HS Share of GDP	23.7%	18.7%	18.2%	18.1%
HS Share of PGDP	20.2%	18.4%	17.9%	17.9%
Growth from Prior 12 Months				
HS	18.1%	-4.0%	5.3%	6.5%
GDP	-12.7%	22.1%	9.7%	9.7%
HS minus GDP	30.8%	-26.1%	-4.4%	-3.2%
HS minus PGDP	15.7%	-9.7%	-4.2%	-2.9%

Source: Altarum monthly health spending estimates (see Methods box below). Monthly GDP is from IHS Markit. PGDP, defined as what GDP would be at full employment, is from the quarterly Congressional Budget Office estimates, converted to monthly by Altarum.

* Spending is in trillions of dollars at a seasonally adjusted annual rate (SAAR).

Altarum is a nonprofit research and consulting organization that creates and implements solutions to advance health among at-risk and disenfranchised populations. Since 2011, Altarum has researched cost growth trends and key drivers of U.S. health spending and formulated policy strategies to help bend the cost growth curve. This work was made possible through generous support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The Health Sector Economic IndicatorsSM reports are a monthly publication of Altarum and provide an analysis of health spending, employment, and prices. For more information, contact Ani Turner at ani.turner@altarum.org. George Miller, PhD (principal author), Ani Turner, Corwin Rhyan, and Matt Daly, PhD, contributed to this brief. Media Contact: press@altarum.org. For more information, visit <http://altarum.org/solution/health-sector-spending>.



DISCUSSION

At \$4.49 trillion, national health spending in April 2022 was 6.5% higher than in April 2021, while GDP grew over this same time period by 9.7%. This difference in growth rates is largely attributable to the recent high rate of inflation, which has not yet had a major impact on health spending. As a result, health spending has been declining as a percent of GDP in recent months. In the absence of COVID-related federal government support, health spending in April 2022 would have grown at a lower rate of 5.5%, largely because of an increase in April 2022 of federal support of public health via the Public Health and Social Services (PHSS) Emergency Fund.

Exhibit 1 shows our current estimate of the trajectory of growth in national health spending since the start of 2020 with and without COVID-related federal government support to providers and public health activities. Because much of this government support was not associated with actual consumption of health care goods and services, the trajectory without government support provides a better indication of expenditures used to provide personal health care. The exhibit illustrates the extent to which GDP growth since before the pandemic-induced recession has outpaced health spending: As of April 2022, GDP was 13.9% higher than in January 2020, while health spending grew by 11.3% and would have grown by 7.8% in the absence of the federal government support.

Exhibit 1. Percent Change in National Health Spending and GDP Since January 2020

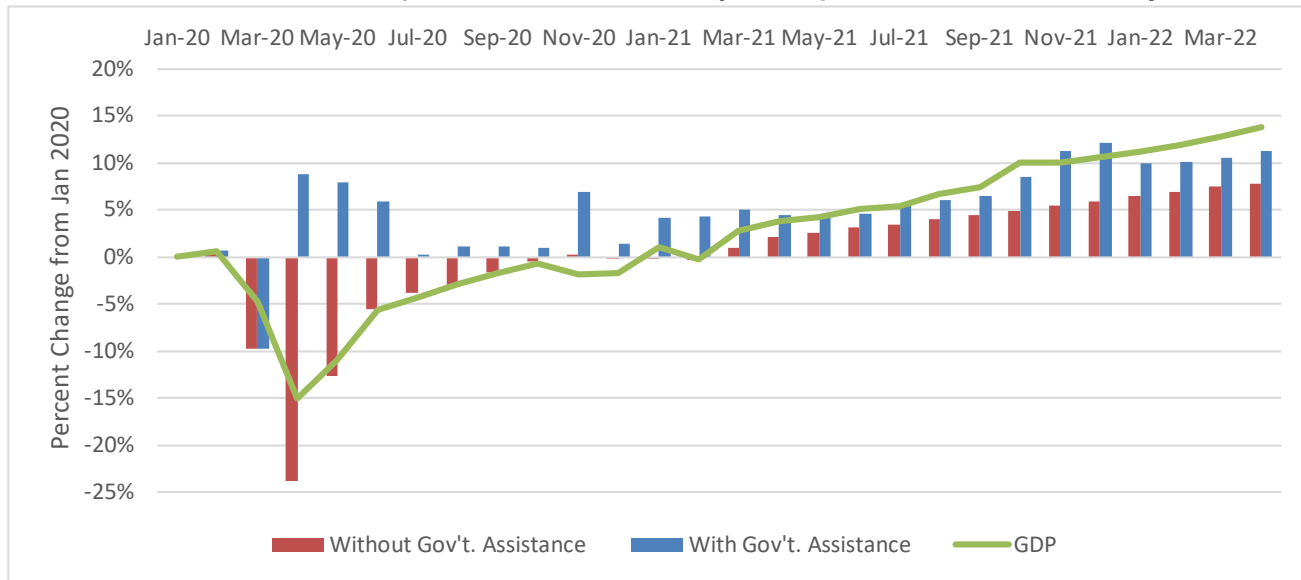


Exhibit 2 shows how spending growth among major categories has varied since January 2020, both with and without the government spending increase. With the decline in federal government support, the curves tend to converge in more recent months. Since January 2020, hospital spending has increased the most among the categories shown, at 8.5%, while spending on dental services remains 0.8% below its January 2020 level. During the same period, retail spending on prescription drugs, which did not receive significant federal support during the pandemic, grew by 10.0% (data not shown).



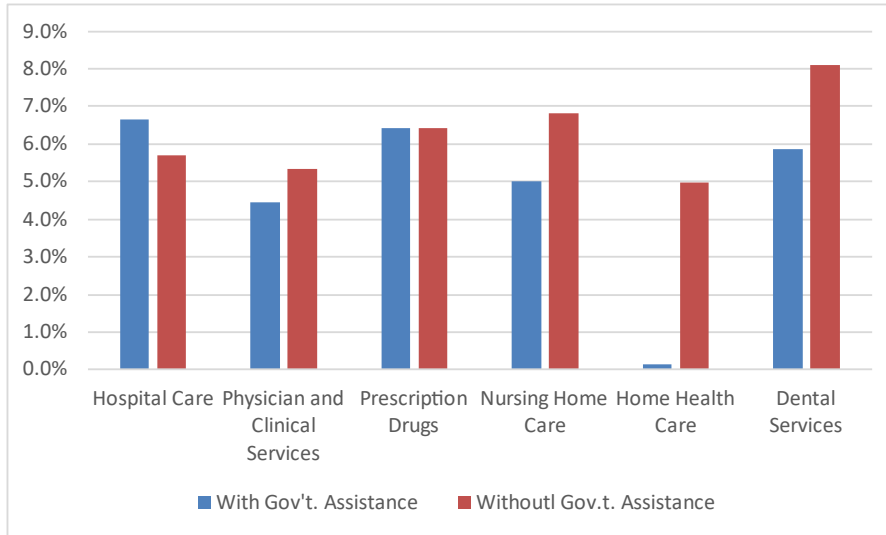
Exhibit 2. Percent Change in Spending Since January 2020, by Major Category



Exhibit 3 indicates the growth in spending by major categories over the past year, with and without the impact of federal government support. Since April 2021, hospital spending with government assistance grew the fastest, at 6.6%, while home health care grew the slowest, at 0.1%. However, the pattern of government support (as best we have been able to capture it from data published by the federal government) distorts the growth rates in the portion of spending actually used to provide clinical services. For example, the near-zero year-over-year increase in spending on home health care in April 2022 is the result of a significant influx of Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) funding in April 2021 that was not repeated in April 2022. The values for growth rates in the absence of government support provide a clearer picture of the growth in spending for personal health care; all of these rates fell between 5.0% and 8.1% from April 2021 to April 2022. Overall, personal health care spending growth for this period was 5.4% absent government support. For comparison, pre-pandemic growth in spending on personal health care for all of 2019 was a slightly more modest 4.4%.



Exhibit 3. Health Care Spending 12-Month Growth for Selected Categories





DETAILED HEALTH SPENDING

Exhibit 4. Monthly National Spending Estimates by Detailed Category

Levels (in billions of dollars)	Apr 2019	Apr 2020	Apr 2021	Apr 2022
GDP	\$21,203.5	\$18,512.2	\$22,604.2	\$24,801.8
National Health Spending	\$3,723.3	\$4,396.0	\$4,218.9	\$4,494.8
Personal health care	\$3,230.4	\$3,603.4	\$3,624.7	\$3,804.8
Hospital care	\$1,189.9	\$1,201.0	\$1,317.4	\$1,405.0
Physician and clinical services	\$758.9	\$825.0	\$841.7	\$879.2
Other professional services	\$110.0	\$148.0	\$124.6	\$128.2
Dental services	\$142.0	\$140.0	\$164.6	\$174.2
Other personal health care	\$274.3	\$371.8	\$359.7	\$362.4
Home health care	\$112.7	\$162.2	\$123.0	\$123.2
Nursing home care	\$173.8	\$303.0	\$181.5	\$190.5
Prescription Drugs	\$331.7	\$333.6	\$364.3	\$387.7
Durable medical equipment	\$56.6	\$40.6	\$58.5	\$61.1
Nondurable medical products	\$80.5	\$78.2	\$89.4	\$93.2
Program administration and net cost of private health insurance	\$193.7	\$204.2	\$215.6	\$228.4
Government public health activities	\$103.6	\$397.6	\$173.5	\$240.3
Research	\$55.6	\$59.0	\$64.7	\$69.6
Structures and equipment	\$139.9	\$131.7	\$140.4	\$151.7
HS Share of GDP	17.6%	23.7%	18.7%	18.1%
HS Share of PGDP	17.5%	20.2%	18.4%	17.9%

Source: Altarum monthly national health spending estimates. The monthly GDP is from IHS Markit.

Note: Spending is expressed in billions of dollars at a SAAR.

Exhibit 5. National Health Spending 12-Month Growth Rates by Detailed Category

Growth Rates	Apr 2020	Apr 2021	Apr 2022
GDP	-12.7%	22.1%	9.7%
National Health Spending	18.1%	-4.0%	6.5%
Personal health care	11.5%	0.6%	5.0%
Hospital care	0.9%	9.7%	6.6%
Physician and clinical services	8.7%	2.0%	4.5%
Other professional services	34.6%	-15.8%	2.9%
Dental services	-1.4%	17.6%	5.9%
Other personal health care	35.6%	-3.2%	0.8%
Home health care	43.8%	-24.2%	0.1%
Nursing home care	74.3%	-40.1%	5.0%
Prescription Drugs	0.6%	9.2%	6.4%
Durable medical equipment	-28.3%	44.2%	4.4%
Nondurable medical products	-2.8%	14.2%	4.3%
Program administration and net cost of private health insurance	5.4%	5.6%	6.0%
Government public health activities	283.6%	-56.4%	38.5%
Research	6.3%	9.7%	7.5%
Structures and equipment	-5.9%	6.6%	8.1%
HS Minus GDP	30.8%	-26.1%	-3.2%
HS Minus PGDP	15.7%	-9.7%	-2.9%

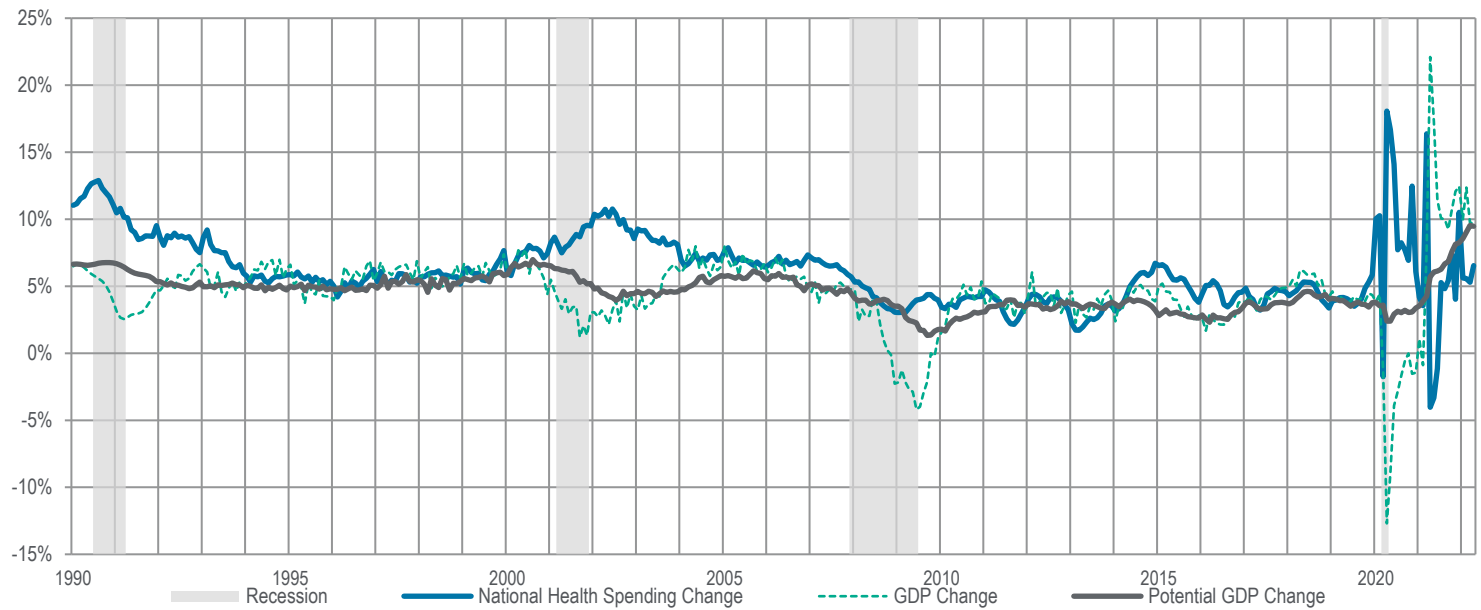
Source: Computed from Exhibit 2.

Note: This exhibit compares monthly national health spending to that of the same month from the previous year.



TIME SERIES TRACKER

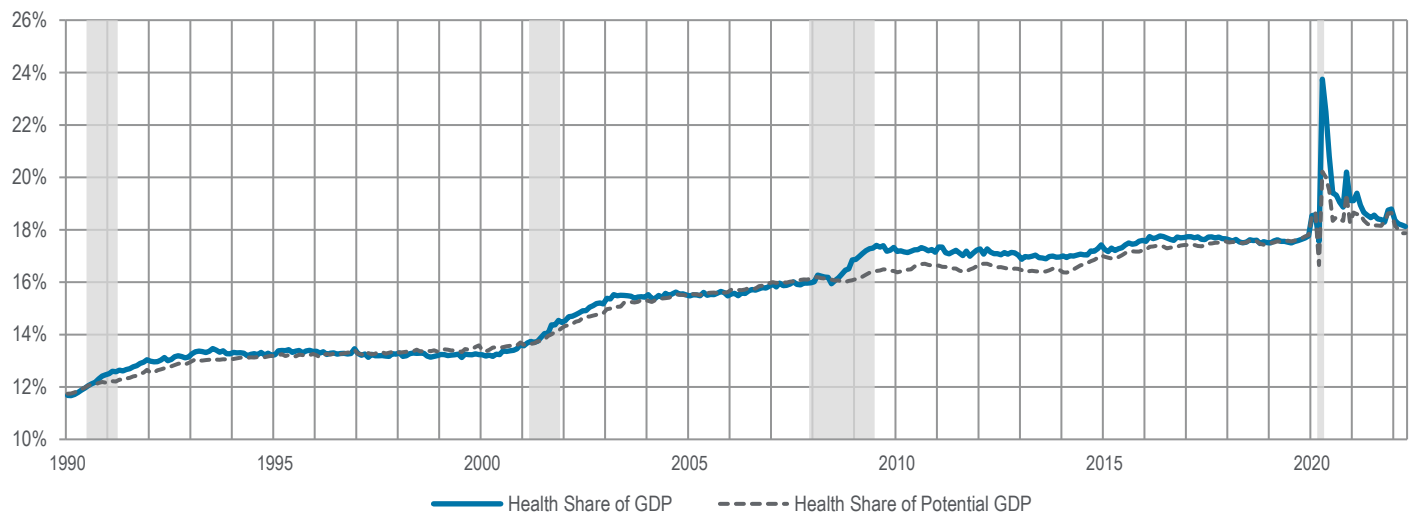
Exhibit 6. Year-over-Year Percentage Change in Spending and GDP



Source: Altarum monthly national health spending estimates. The monthly GDP is from IHS Markit.

Note: Lightly shaded bars denote recession periods.

Exhibit 7. Monthly Health Spending as a Percentage of Monthly GDP



Source: Altarum monthly national health spending estimates. Monthly GDP is from IHS Markit. PGDP is from the U.S. Congressional Budget Office and has been converted to monthly estimates. Note: Lightly shaded bars denote recession periods.

Methods. Altarum’s estimates are based on [BEA monthly health spending](#) and [CMS annual NHE estimates \(1990–2020\) and projections \(2021\)](#). BEA spending categories are matched to NHEA components by using information presented in the following: Hartman, M. B., Kornfeld, R. J., & Catlin, A. C. (2010, September). A reconciliation of health care expenditures in the National Health Expenditures Accounts and in gross domestic product. *Survey of Current Business*, 90(9), 42–52. For all NHEA personal health care categories except “other health, residential, and personal care,” monthly estimates are based on BEA spending adjusted to NHEA by using annual ratios. For the remaining categories, national health spending estimates and projections are allocated across months by using a simple trend. Annual ratio adjustments through 2021 are based on NHEA actuals (through 2020) and projections (for 2021) and ensure that monthly estimates sum exactly to NHEA annual amounts. The 2021 ratios are used to adjust BEA spending for months in 2022.