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Vermont Legislators' Opinions Regarding the Opioid Epidemic

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Vermont Legislators' Opinions Regarding the Opioid Epidemic

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Introduction

- The VT General Assembly includes 180 legislators: 150 representatives and 30 senators
- State legislators have substantial power to create opioid-related policies
- During the 2017-18 VT legislative session 22 opioid-related bills were introduced and 9 were passed
- No data currently exist on how VT legislators gather information and formulate public health decisions regarding opioid policies

Purpose

- Examine VT legislators' understanding of the opioid epidemic
- Identify what drives legislators to draft legislation, including beliefs, priorities, and voting decisions
- Inform health and human services professionals to best respond to legislators' knowledge gaps and continuing education needs

Methods

- Design:** 68-item web-based survey, including both closed and open-ended questions
- Population:** 176 legislators of the 2018 VT General Assembly; 22% response rate, from 12 of 14 counties
- Analysis:** REDCap and STATA

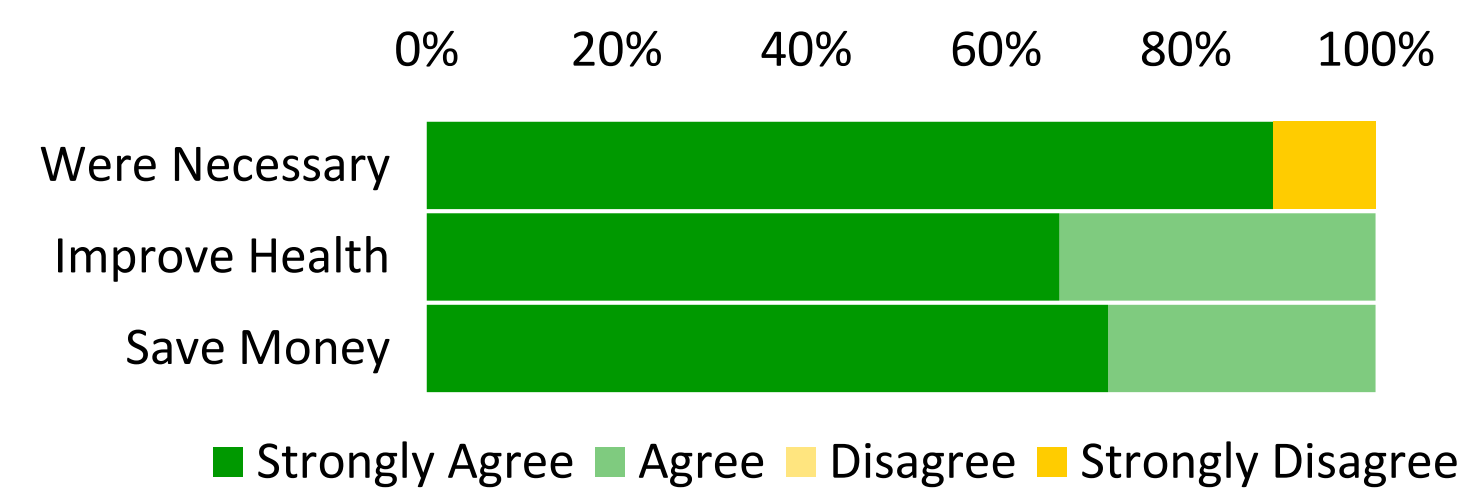
Respondent Characteristics, N=39				
Age, median (range)	68 (54-78)			
Sex, % male	61%			
Party	Dem	Rep	Ind	Prog
	26	10	1	1
Service, years	1-4 yr	5-8 yr	9-12 yr	13+ yr
	13	10	4	11

Results

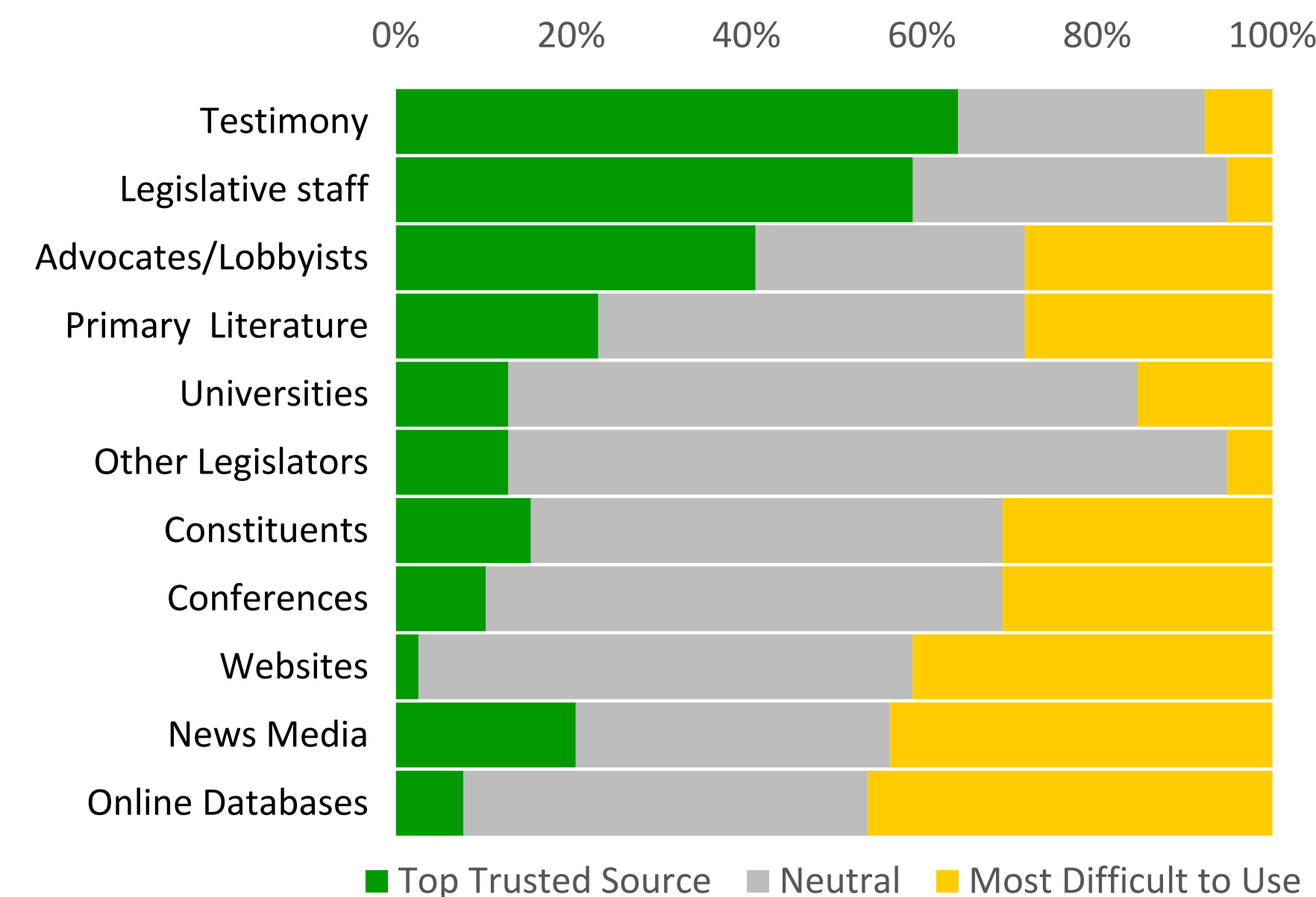
89% of legislators felt they have access to high quality information regarding the opioid crisis

90% of legislators were familiar or very familiar with the 2017 opioid prescribing rules

VT's new opioid prescribing policies...

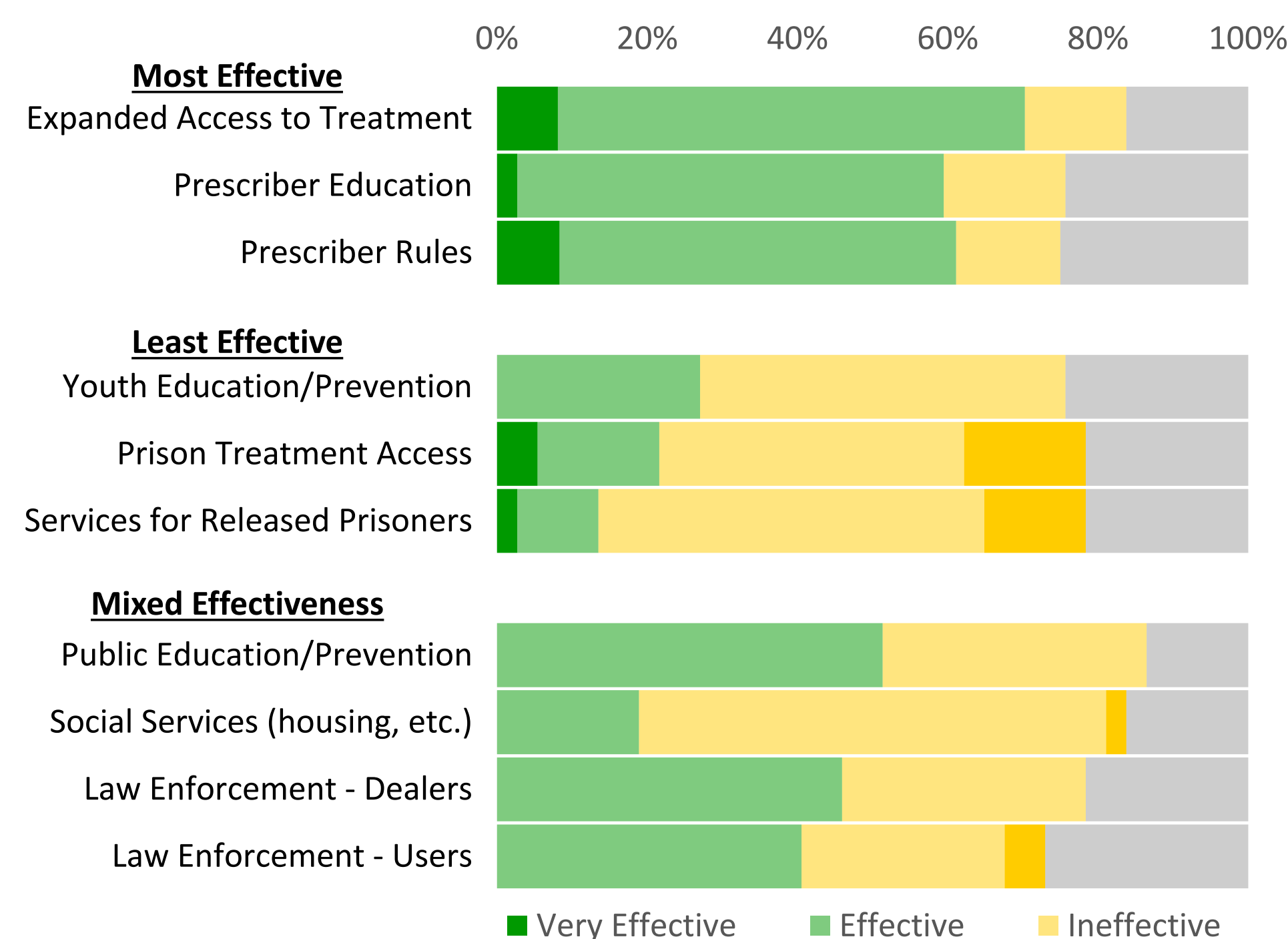


Sources for Information

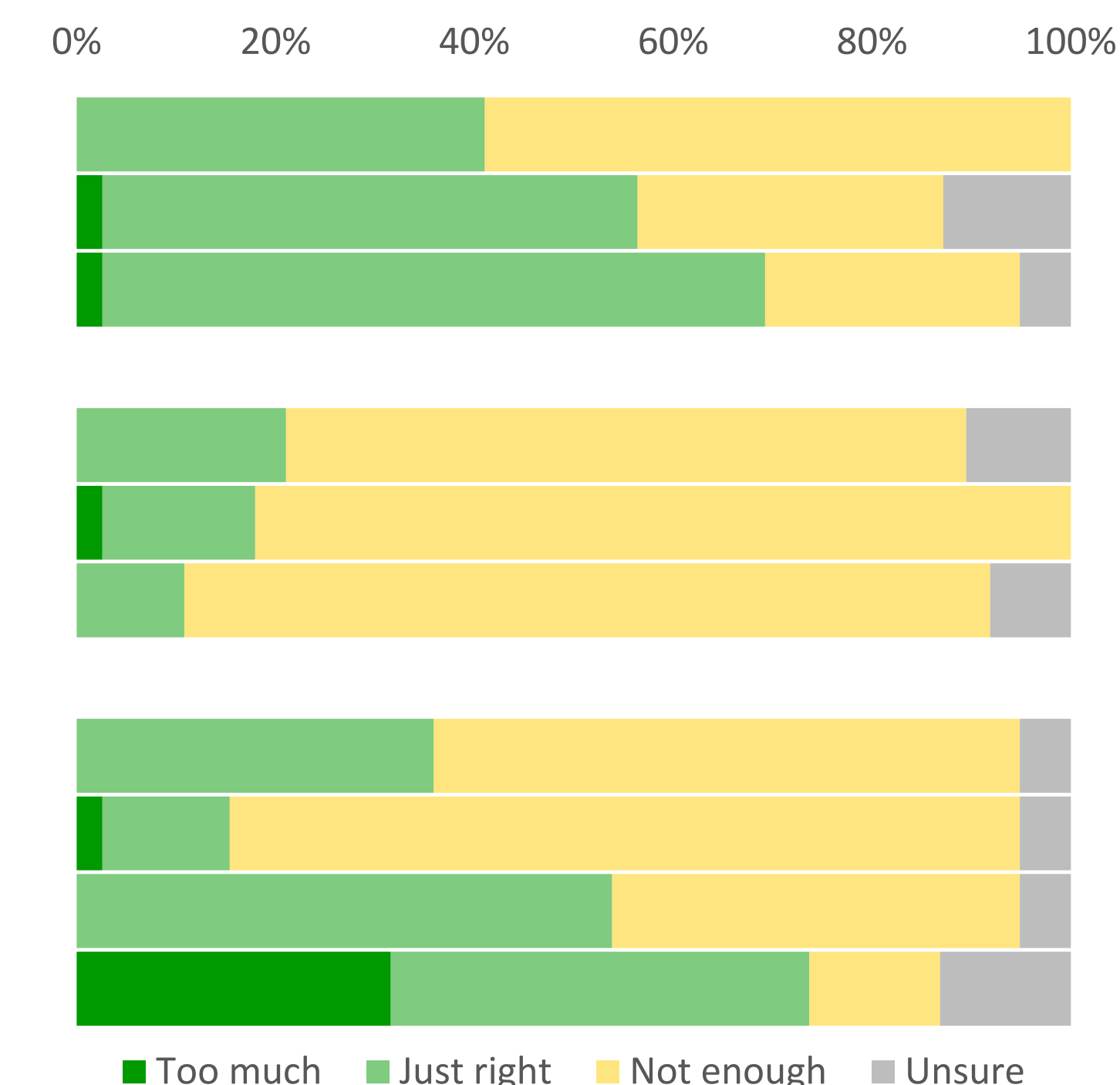


*Note possible overlap between Testimony and Advocate/Lobbyists

How effective are VT's programs?



How well funded are VT's programs?



Discussion

- Legislators agree that:
 - investment saves money and improves health (in particular: access to treatment, prescriber education, and prescribing rules)
 - need increased funding for social services, prevention, and treatment for people in the criminal justice system
- Mixed opinions regarding:
 - effectiveness of public education measures
 - role of law enforcement in addressing crisis
- Information:
 - top sources are those commonly available in the statehouse
 - online resources were ranked the most difficult sources to use
 - What is the potential role of universities as a reliable source of information for legislators?
- Limitations:
 - low response rate may introduce bias and limit generalizability

Conclusions & Implications

- Future investments should be directed toward youth education, support programs for those in recovery, and improve treatment for those in the criminal justice system
- Direct engagement is the preferred approach to inform legislators about public health efforts
- More research is necessary on how to enact youth and public education programs and on the role of law enforcement in addressing the opioid crisis