

Brookline Senior Center and Council on Aging: Planning for the Future

Key Findings & Recommendations

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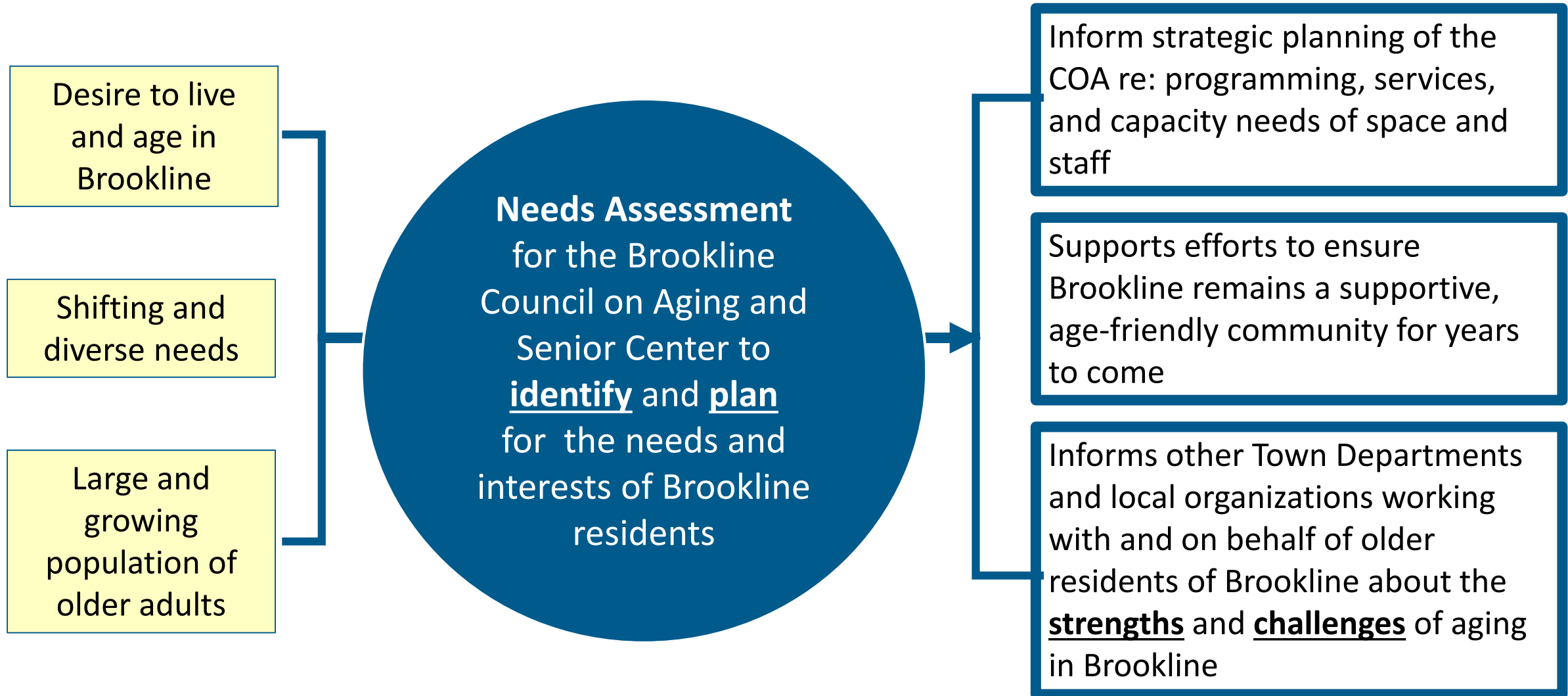
Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without support from:

- ❖ Town of Brookline
- ❖ Emily J. Williams, Director of the Senior Center and Council on Aging
- ❖ Yolanda Rodriguez, Chair of the Council on Aging
- ❖ Hsiu-Lan Chang
- ❖ Julia Herskowitz
- ❖ Joan Lancourt
- ❖ All of the stakeholders and residents who took time to participate in interviews, focus groups, and the survey



Background & Purpose



Data Collection Process

Components of the Brookline Needs Assessment

Demographic profile

7 Key informant interviews with municipal leaders representing Fire, Police, Public Works, Senior Center, Housing Authority, Food Pantry , Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

4 Focus Groups (n=41): Older adults, and community stakeholders

Community Survey of all residents age 60+ (n=2,259) (17% response rate)

Who did we hear from?

	Number of survey responses	Age distribution (%), survey responses	Age distribution (%) of Brookline's 60+ population*
Age 60 to 69**	669	30%	39%
Age 70 to 79	953	44%	37%
Age 80 to 89	499	23%	19%
Age 90+	69	3%	5%
Total***	2,259	100%	100%

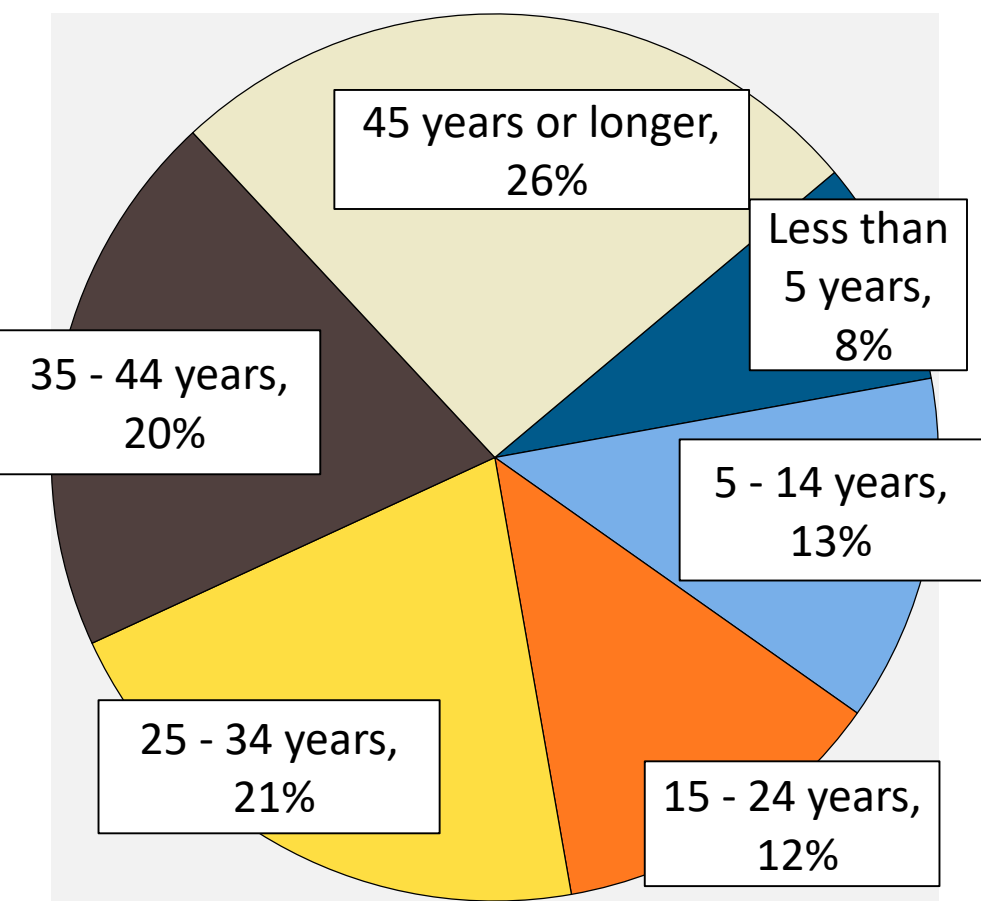
* Source: Town of Brookline census file current as of 2025.

** Age 60 to 69 includes 8 respondents who reported age under 60.

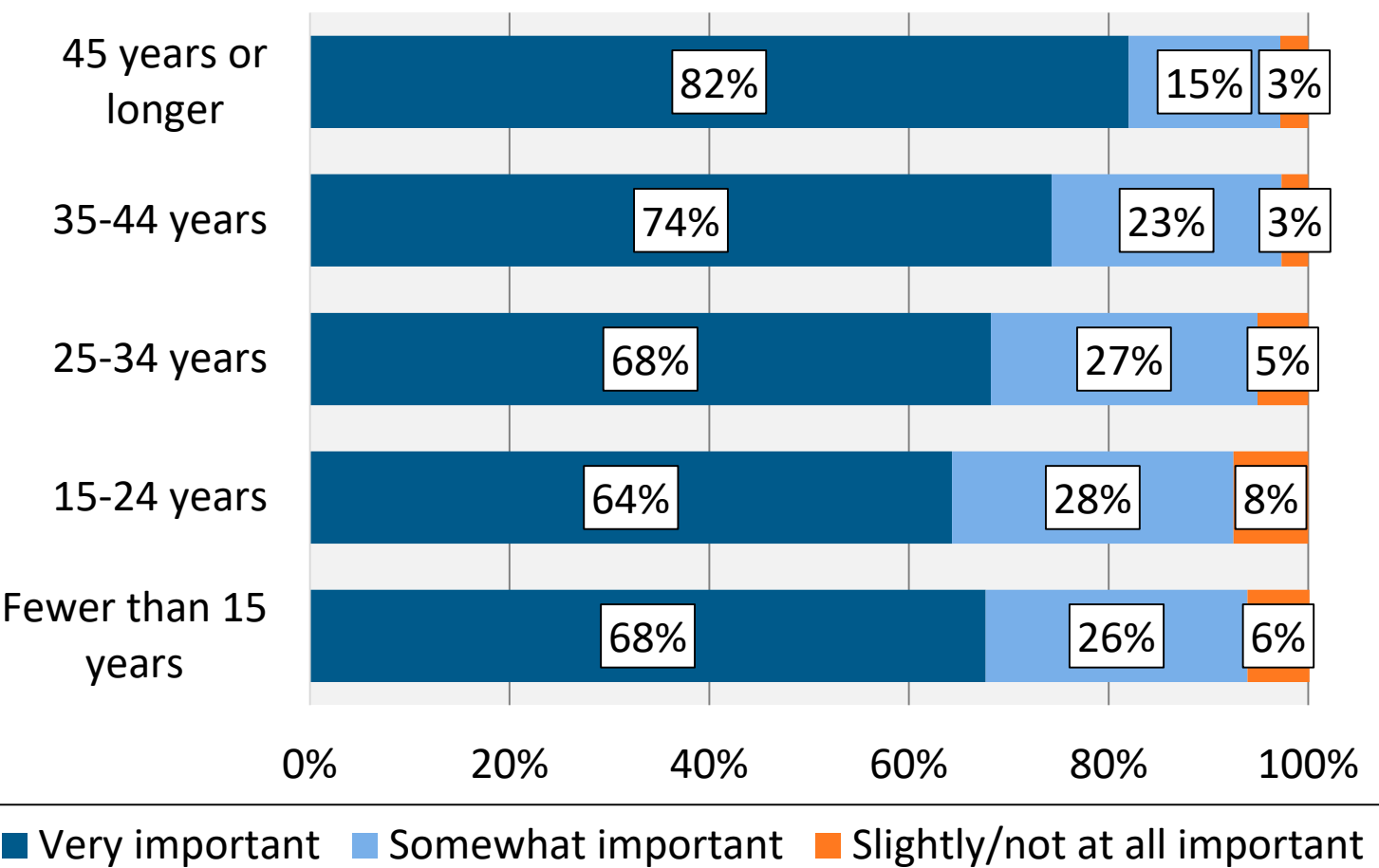
*** Total includes 69 respondents who did not report their age.

Residents have lived in town for a range of time—and most feel it is very important to stay in Brookline as they age

Length of time living in Brookline



Importance remaining in Brookline, by length of time living in community

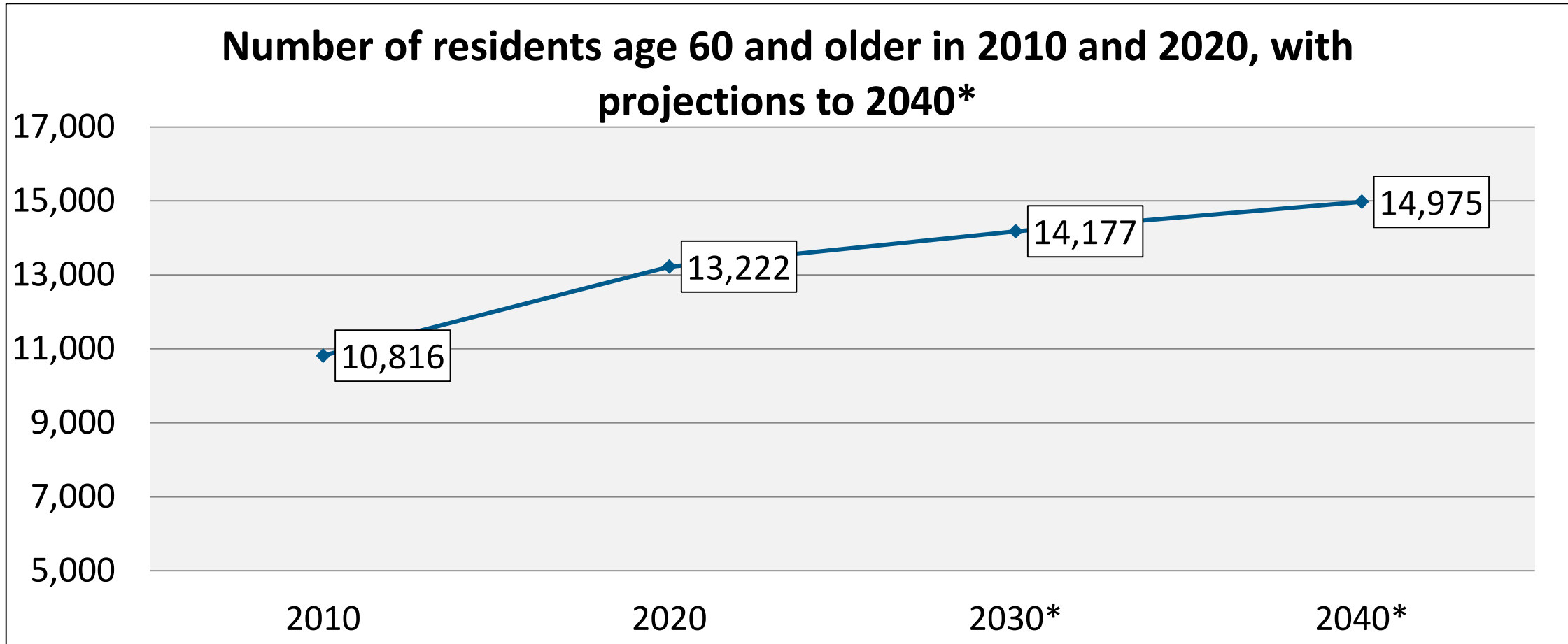


A stylized graphic on the left side of the slide features a light blue lighthouse with a small window and a flag on top. Behind the lighthouse is a large sunburst composed of many yellow rays of varying lengths, radiating outwards. At the base of the lighthouse, there are three wavy, light blue lines representing water or a path.

Key Findings

Information synthesized from all data sources

Currently, 21% of Brookline's 63,266 residents are aged 60 and older*—that share is expected to grow to 24% by 2040



Source: Population figures for 2010 and 2020 are from the U.S. Decennial Census.

*The projections for 2030 and 2040 estimated by the [Donahue Institute, University of Massachusetts](#)

Focus groups, interviews, and survey write-ins demonstrated that residents love their community...

"charming architecture, coffee shops and restaurants, public transit, proximity to Boston and cultural gems"

"Walkability, convenient to retail core yet preserving green space"

"Access to culture, health care, farmer's market, parks, shopping all within walking distance"

Residents value...

- Proximity to services
Boston/desirable location
- Culture/sense of community
- Walkability/accessible amenities

"I have many friends here. The neighborhoods are beautiful. It's close to many things I enjoy and need."

"vibrant semi urban environment, proximity to Boston, access to healthcare"

"...many concerned citizens who are involved in making Brookline better, both at the neighborhood and town level"

...but many residents are concerned about their ability to age in Brookline

Common concerns...

- Property taxes and the overall cost of living
- Difficulty maintaining homes and limited alternative housing options
- Challenges to personal wellness and independence

"While the services that Brookline offers are many and excellent, the costs of those services in rising taxes is a concern to me and likely many on fixed incomes."

"Walking, sidewalks that are trip friendly, ice."

"Unbelievably high taxes. Tough on a fixed income"

"Will aging in place be feasible? Ability to find affordable housing that would allow me to downsize."

"We live in 'too much' house with the kids grown and property taxes are a lot, but what's being built now in Brookline is too expensive to make downsizing appealing or particularly financially pragmatic."



Financial Insecurity & Housing Expenses

Housing Costs Drive Differences in the Income Older Residents Need

Norfolk County, MA

RENTER

The Elder Index is:
\$48,072 / year
*This is 141% of the national average of
\$34,032*

 Miscellaneous (Single) **\$462**
 Transportation (Single) **\$334**
 Housing (Renter) **\$2,389**

 Food (Single) **\$328**
 Good health **\$493**
Monthly Total **\$4,006**

OWNER WITH MORTGAGE

The Elder Index is:
\$51,936 / year
*This is 132% of the national average of
\$39,396*

 Miscellaneous (Single) **\$462**
 Transportation (Single) **\$334**
 Housing (Owner, mortgage) **\$2,711**

 Food (Single) **\$328**
 Good health **\$493**
Monthly Total **\$4,328**

OWNER WITHOUT MORTGAGE

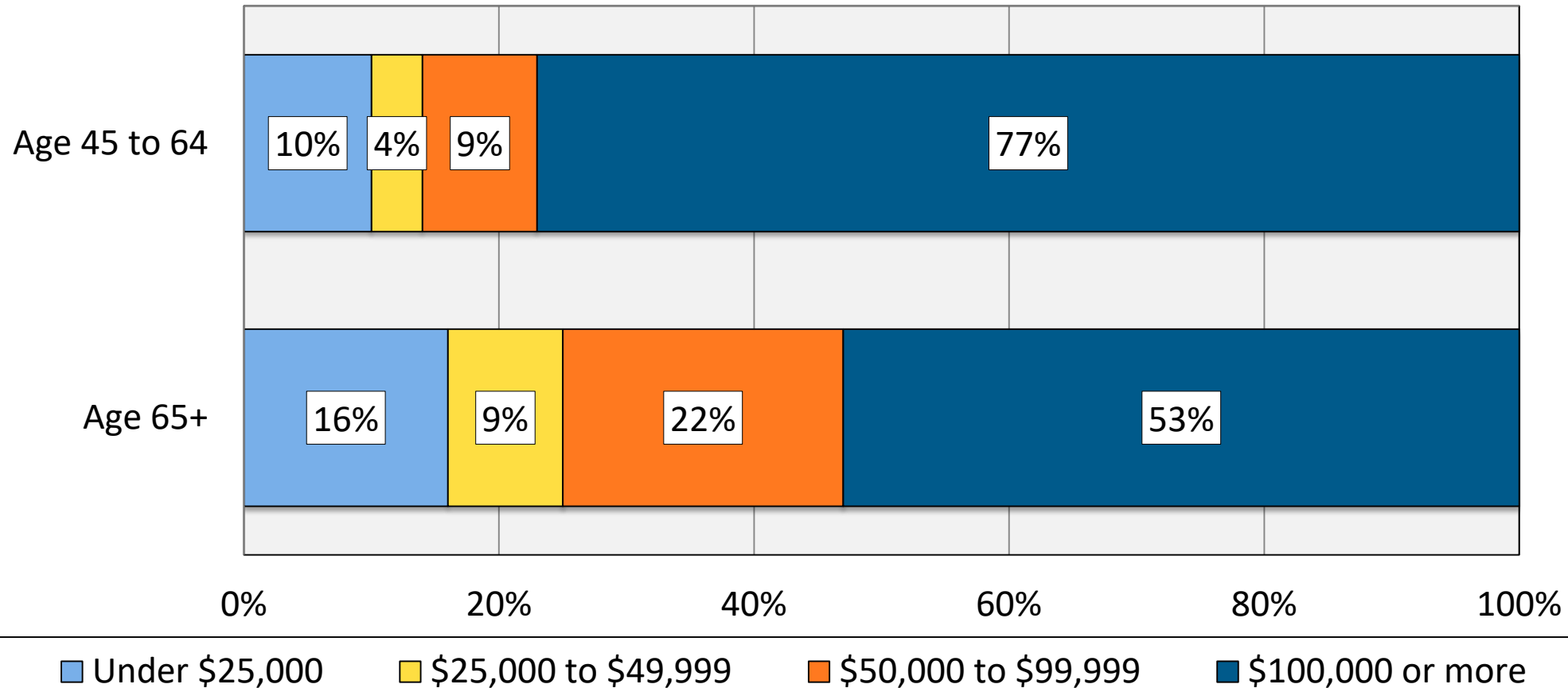
The Elder Index is:
\$33,264 / year
*This is 128% of the national average of
\$25,944*

 Miscellaneous (Single) **\$462**
 Transportation (Single) **\$334**
 Housing (Owner, no mortgage) **\$1,155**

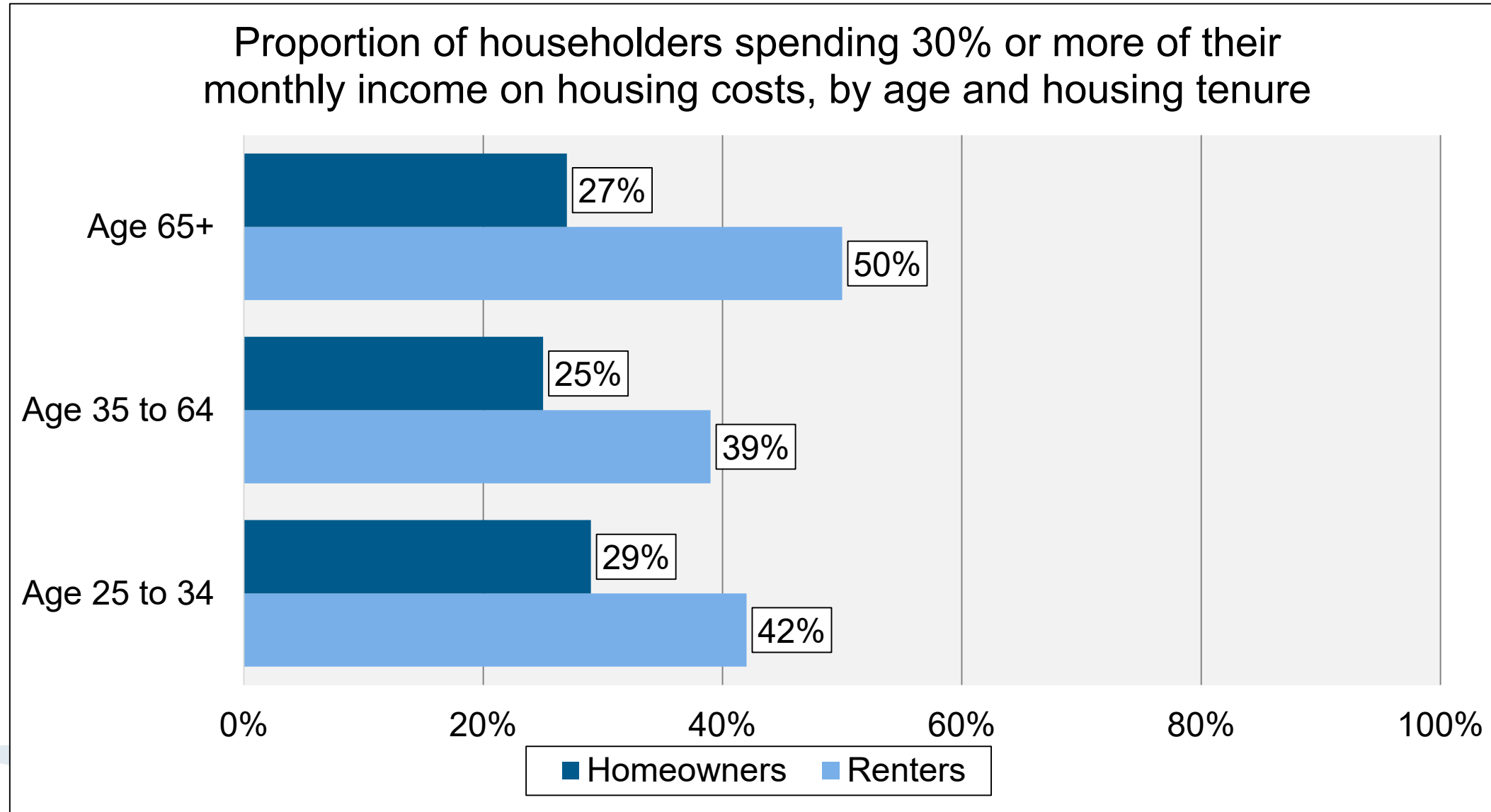
 Food (Single) **\$328**
 Good health **\$493**
Monthly Total **\$2,772**

16% of households headed by someone age 65+ have household incomes under \$25,000

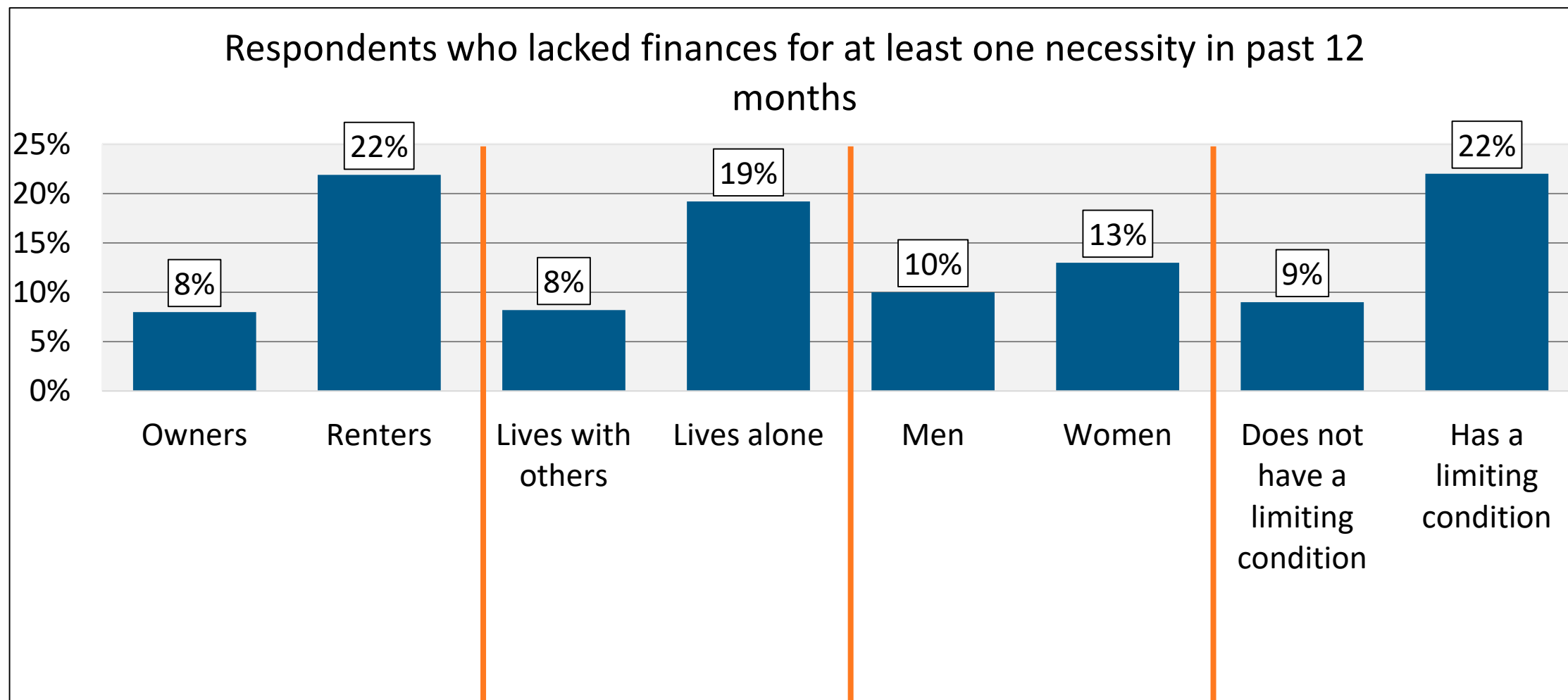
Household income distribution in Brookline by age of householder (in 2024 inflation-adjusted dollars)



Financial burden due to housing costs is greater for renters compared to homeowners and is particularly true for older renters

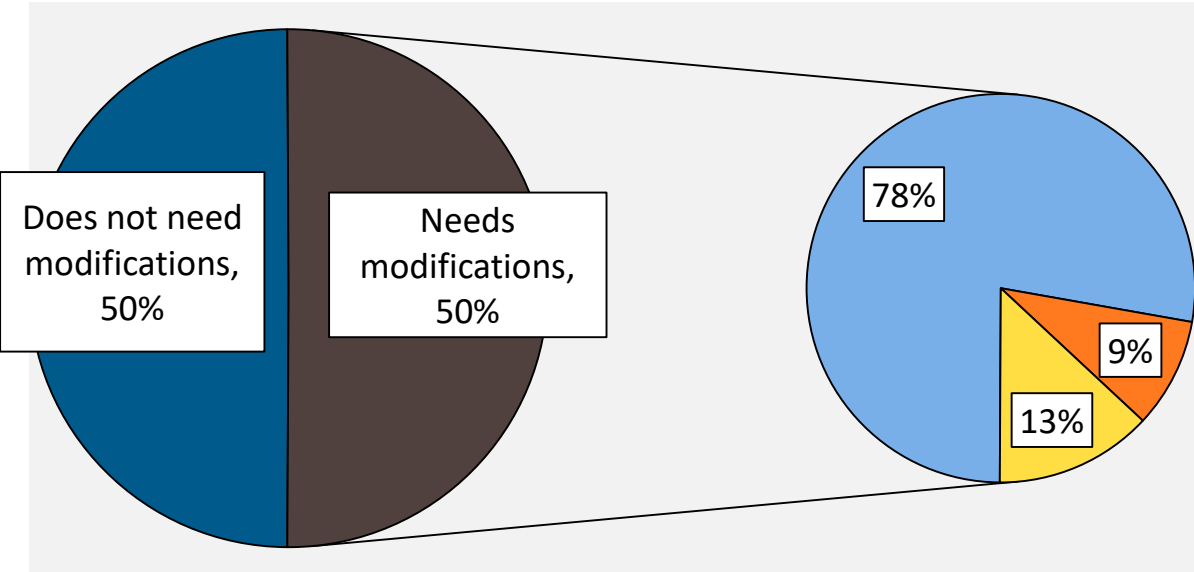


Some groups of older adults are at greater risk of financial insecurity



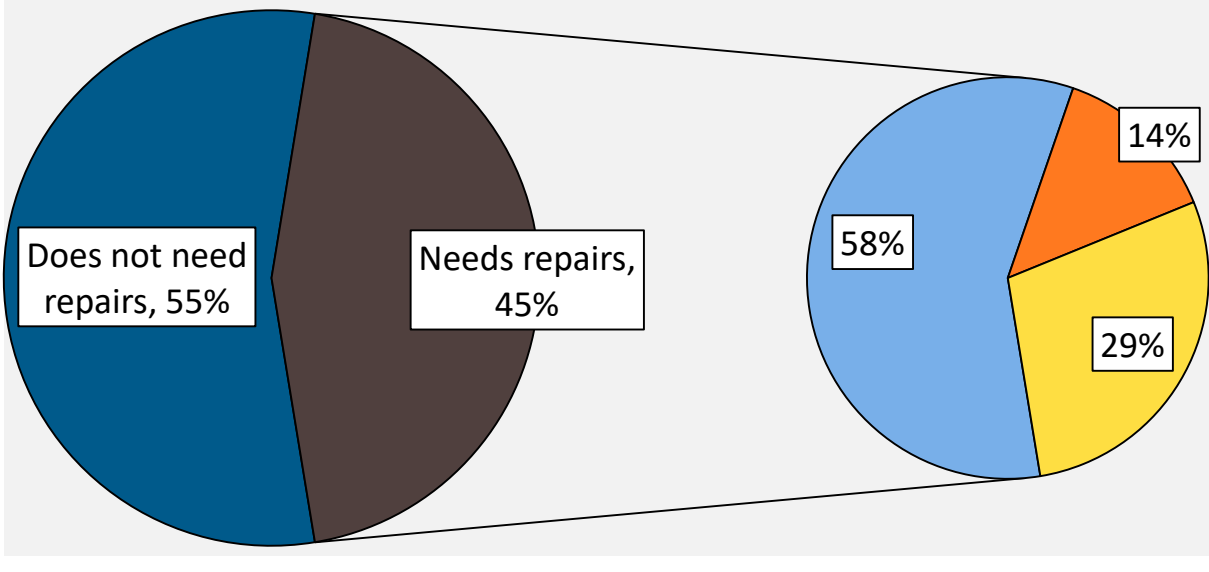
50% of respondents need home modifications and 45% need repairs to age in place safely—many cannot afford or are not responsible for the work

Need for home modifications (e.g., grab bars in showers or railings on stairs) to improve safety for the next 5 years



- Yes, and I can afford to make these modifications.
- Yes, but I cannot afford to make these modifications.
- Yes, but I am not responsible for making these modifications (e.g., I rent my current residence or my condo association is responsible).

Need for home repairs (e.g., new roof, electrical work, climate control/HVAC, etc.) to improve safety for the next 5 years



- Yes, and I can afford to make these repairs.
- Yes, but I cannot afford to make these repairs.
- Yes, but I am not responsible for making these repairs (e.g., I rent my current residence or my condo association is responsible).

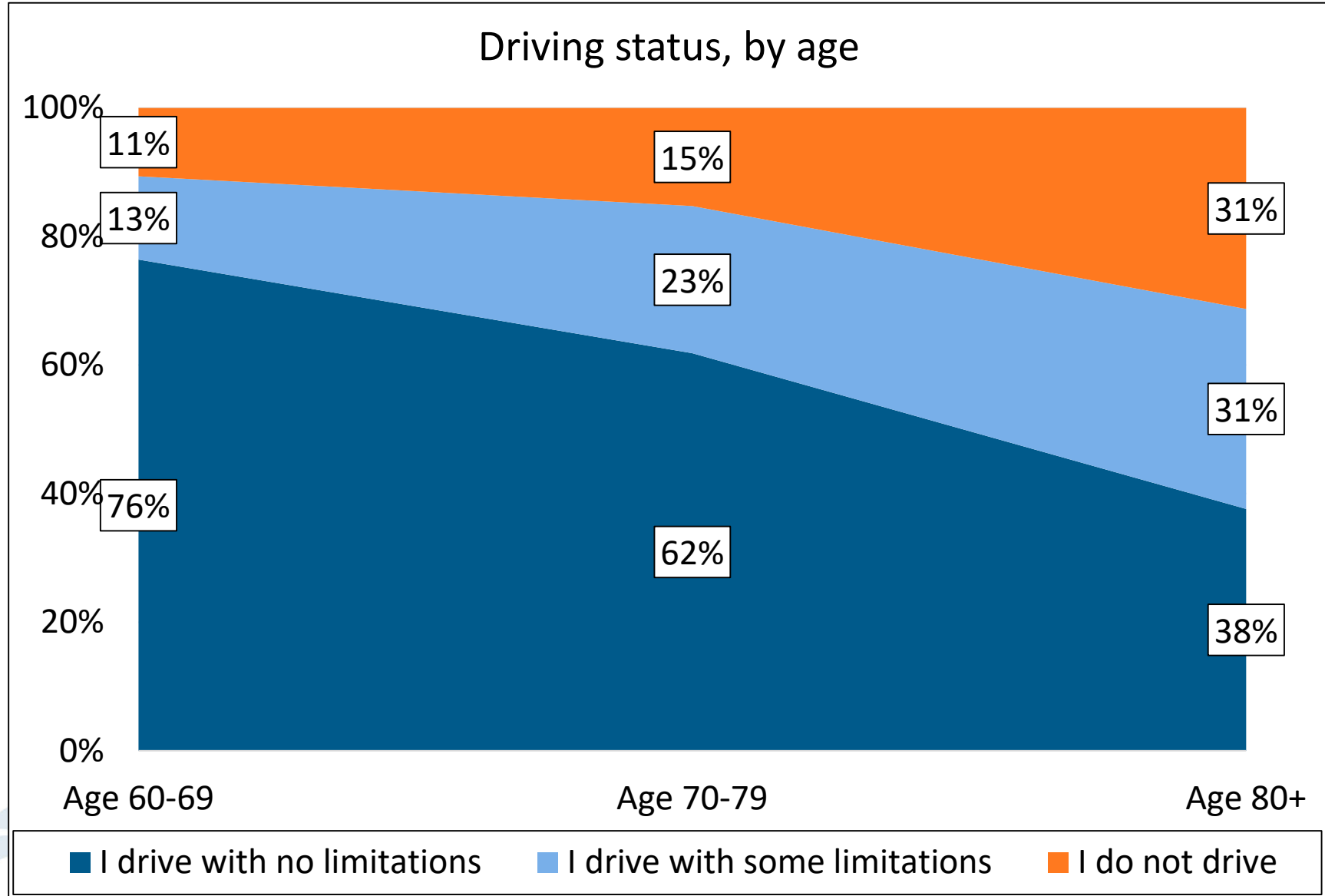


Transportation & Accessibility

Most people drive and/or walk. The proportion of those who limit their driving or cease driving altogether rises with age.

Primary ways of meeting transportation needs:

- Drive myself (74%)
- Walk (74%)
- MBTA train (63%); buses (30%)
- My partner or child(ren) drive(s) me (18%)
- Taxi, Uber, Lyft (23%)

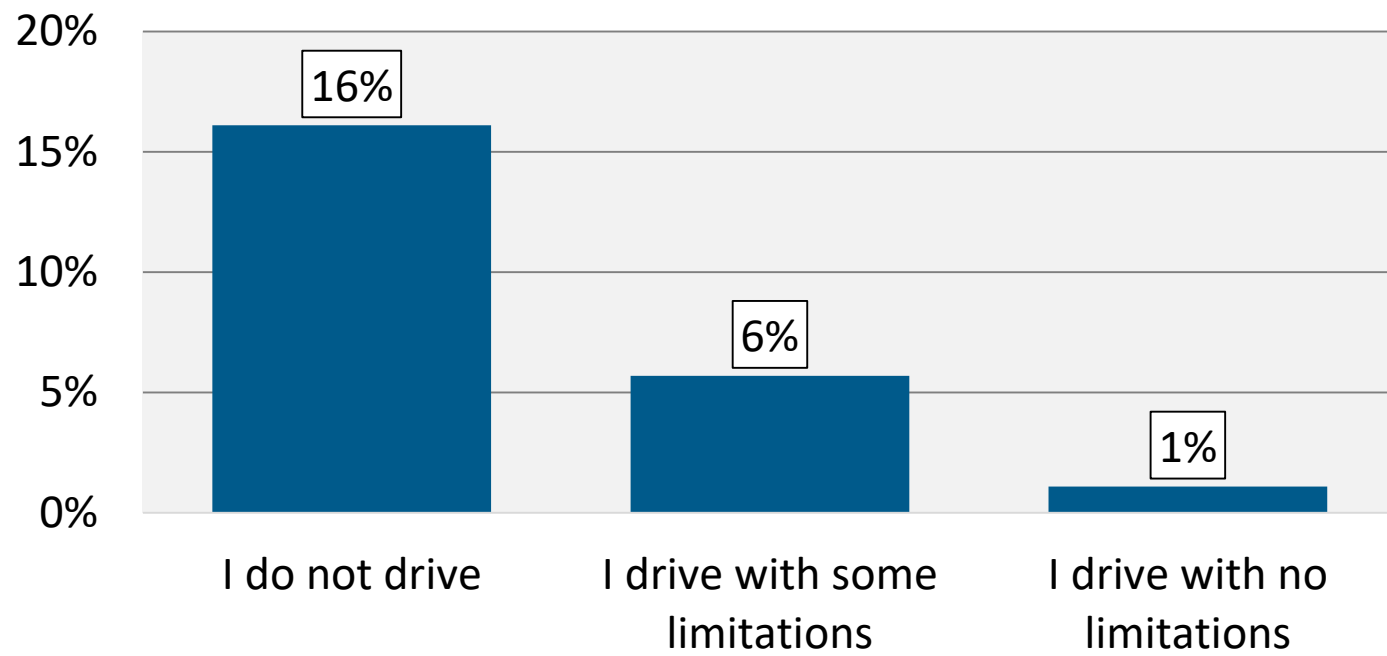


Transportation barriers can limit access to necessary services such as medical care

Among respondents who have experienced difficulties getting needed transportation, **top barriers:**

- Limited or unavailable parking
- Physical limitations or other impairments make accessing transportation options difficult

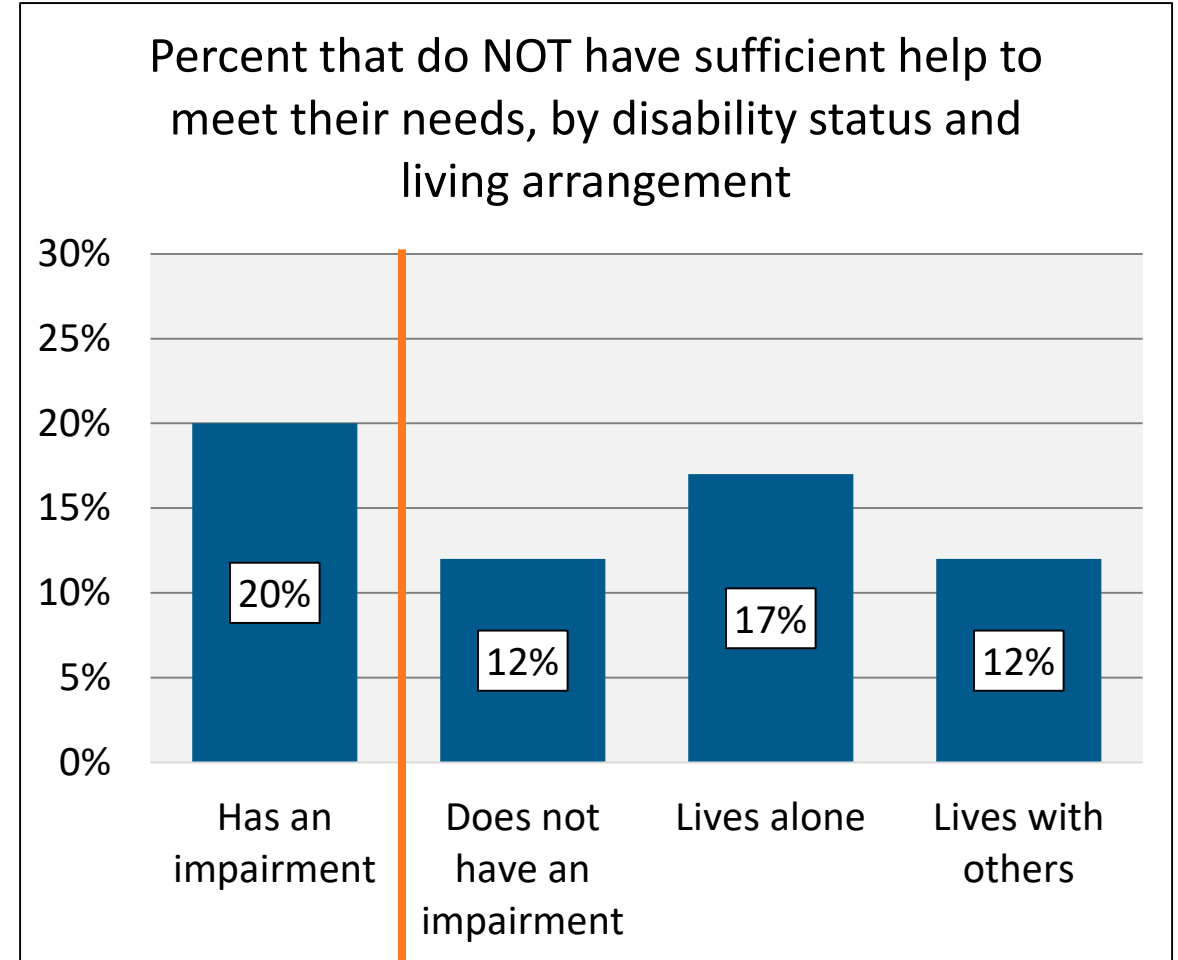
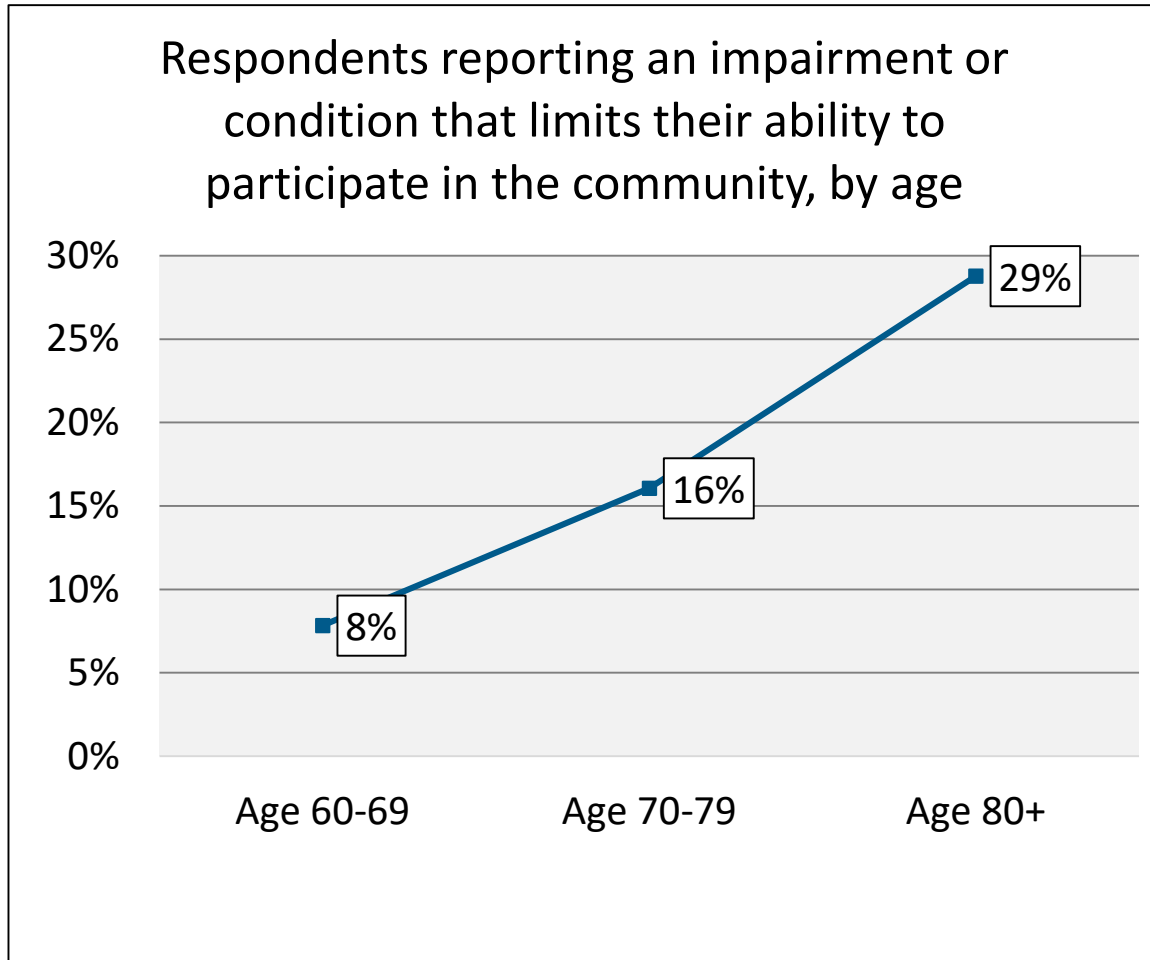
Percent of respondents who have had to miss, cancel, or reschedule a medical appointment because of a lack of transportation, by driving status



A stylized illustration of a light blue lighthouse on the left, with yellow sunburst rays emanating from behind it. At the bottom left, there are blue wavy lines representing water.

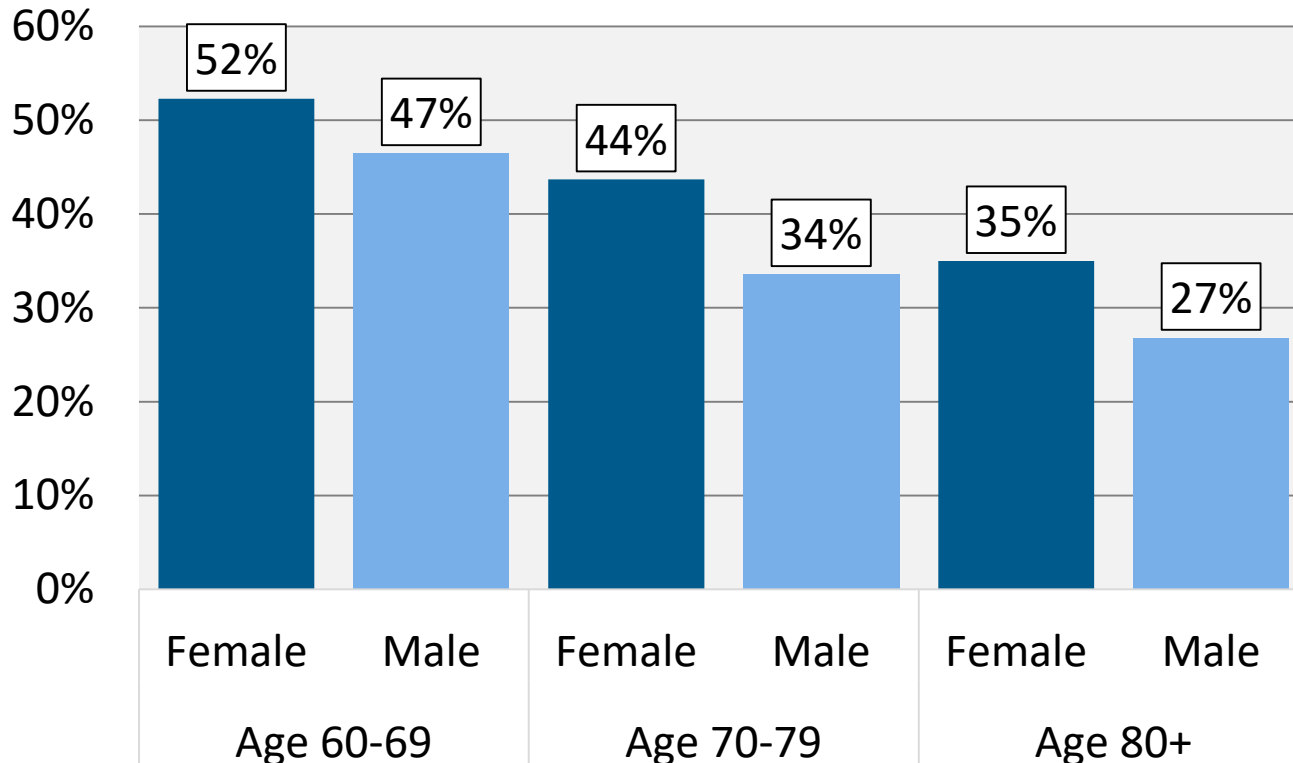
Health & Caregiving

17% of all respondents reported having a limiting impairment; the likelihood of impairment increases with age



Caregiving is common, particularly for those ages 60-69

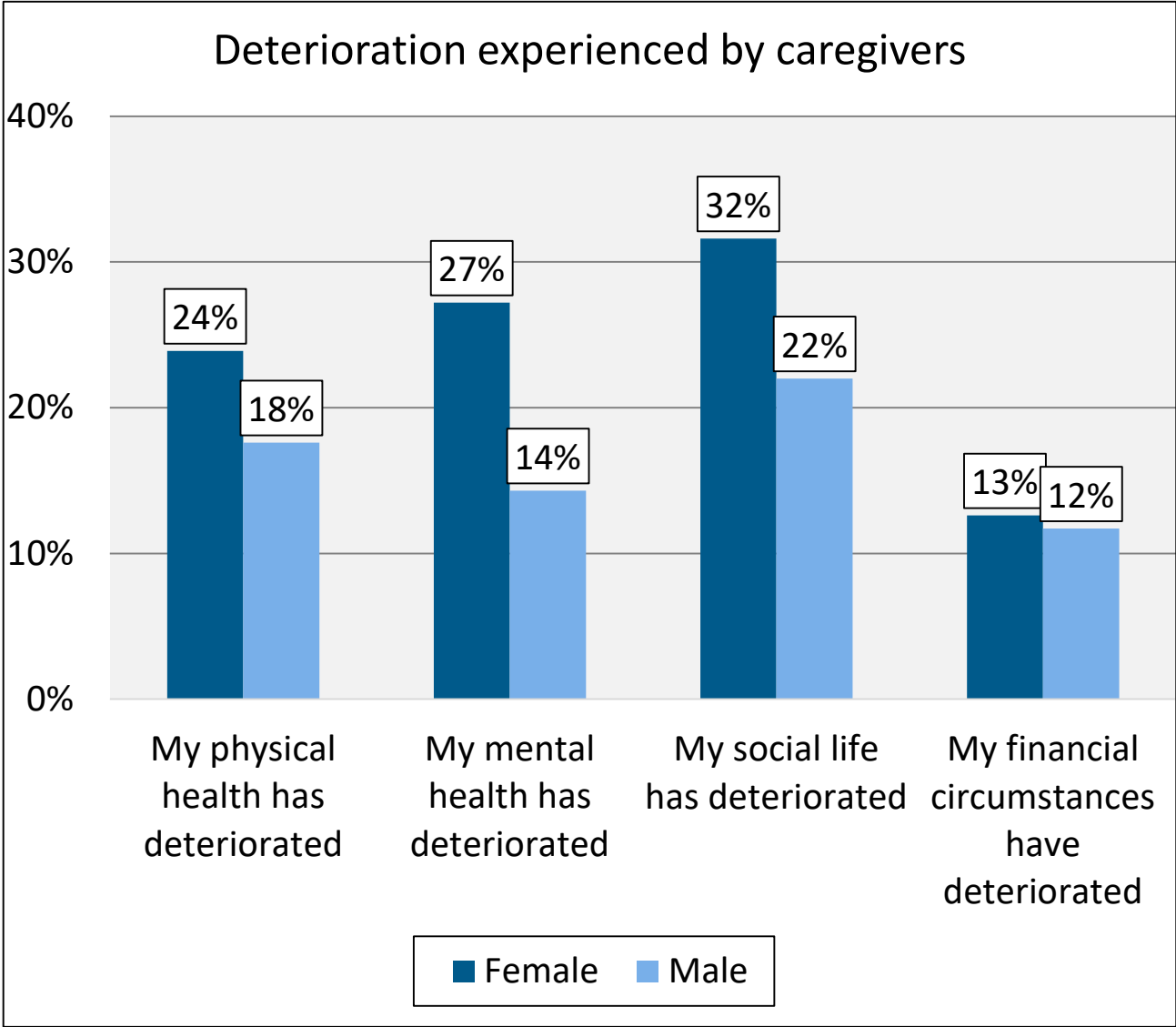
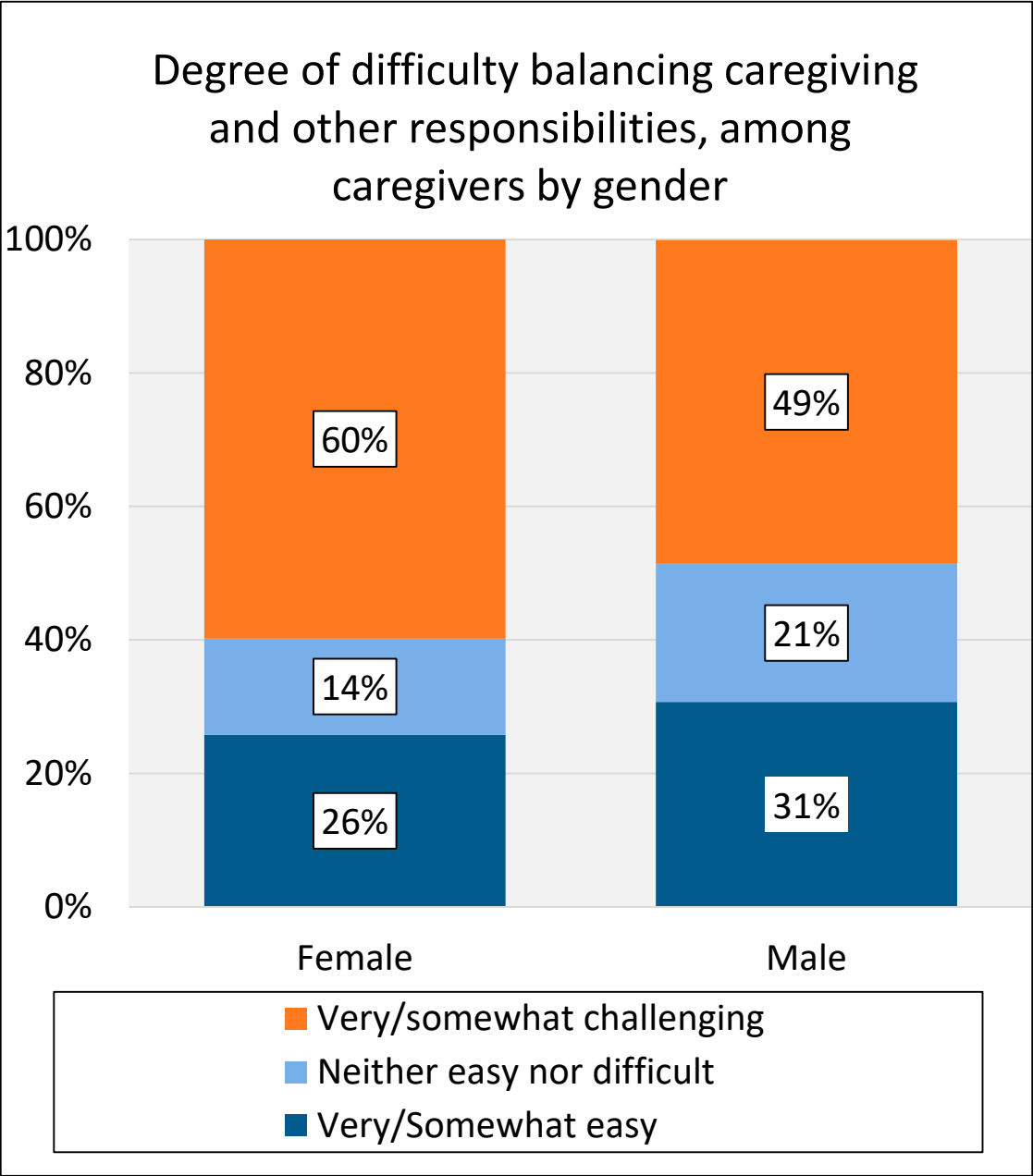
Percent of respondents who are currently or have in the past 5 years provided care or assistance to a person who is disabled or frail (e.g., a spouse, parent, relative, or friend), by age and gender



The most frequently reported conditions requiring care include:

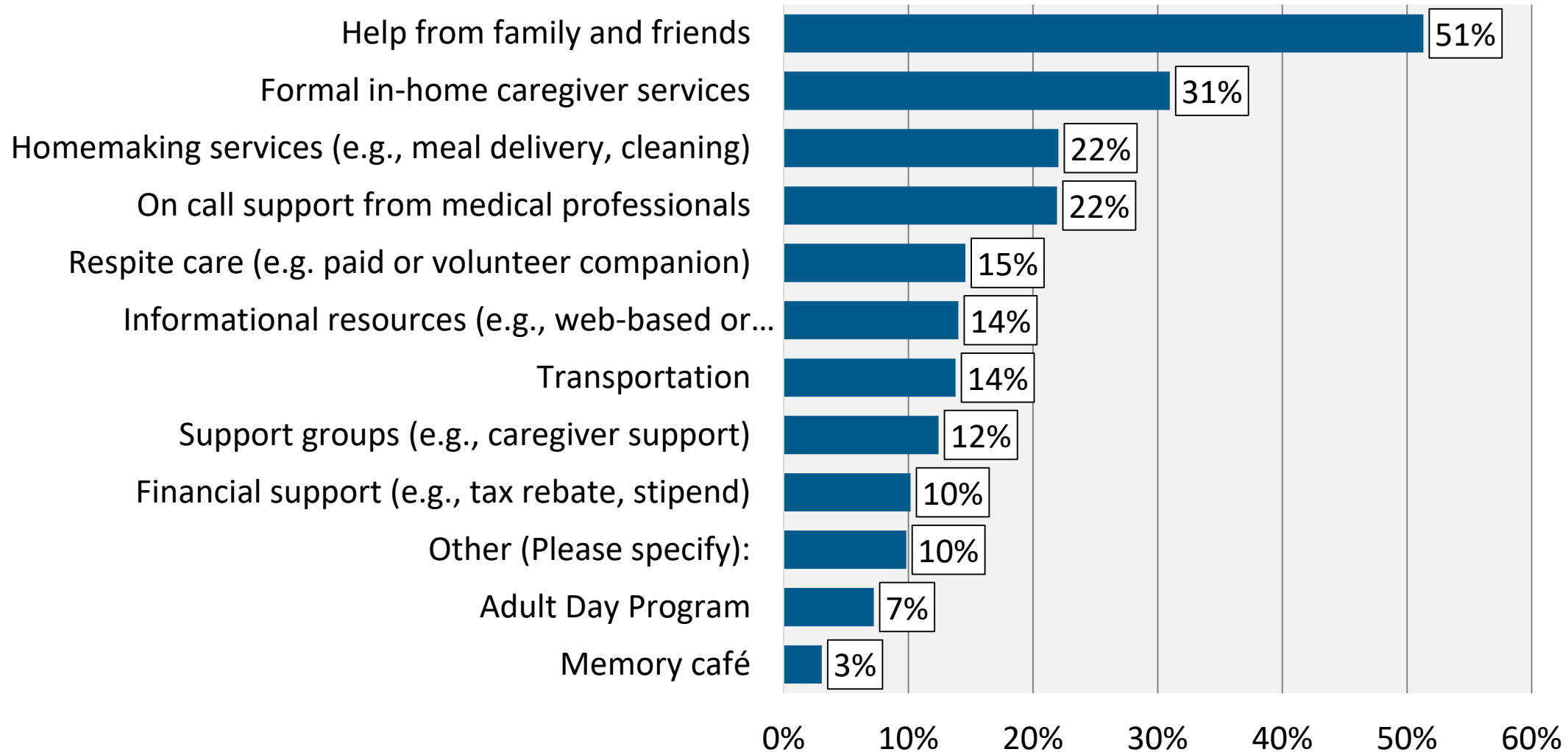
- Frailty or mobility impairment (such as difficulty walking or climbing stairs) (57%)
- Alzheimer's or related dementias (29%)
- Undiagnosed forgetfulness or confusion (27%)
- Chronic diseases like cancer, diabetes, asthma, Parkinson's (27%)
- Recovering from injury or surgery (27%)

Caregiving can affect many aspects of life



Caregivers need informal and formal help, as well as guidance accessing supports

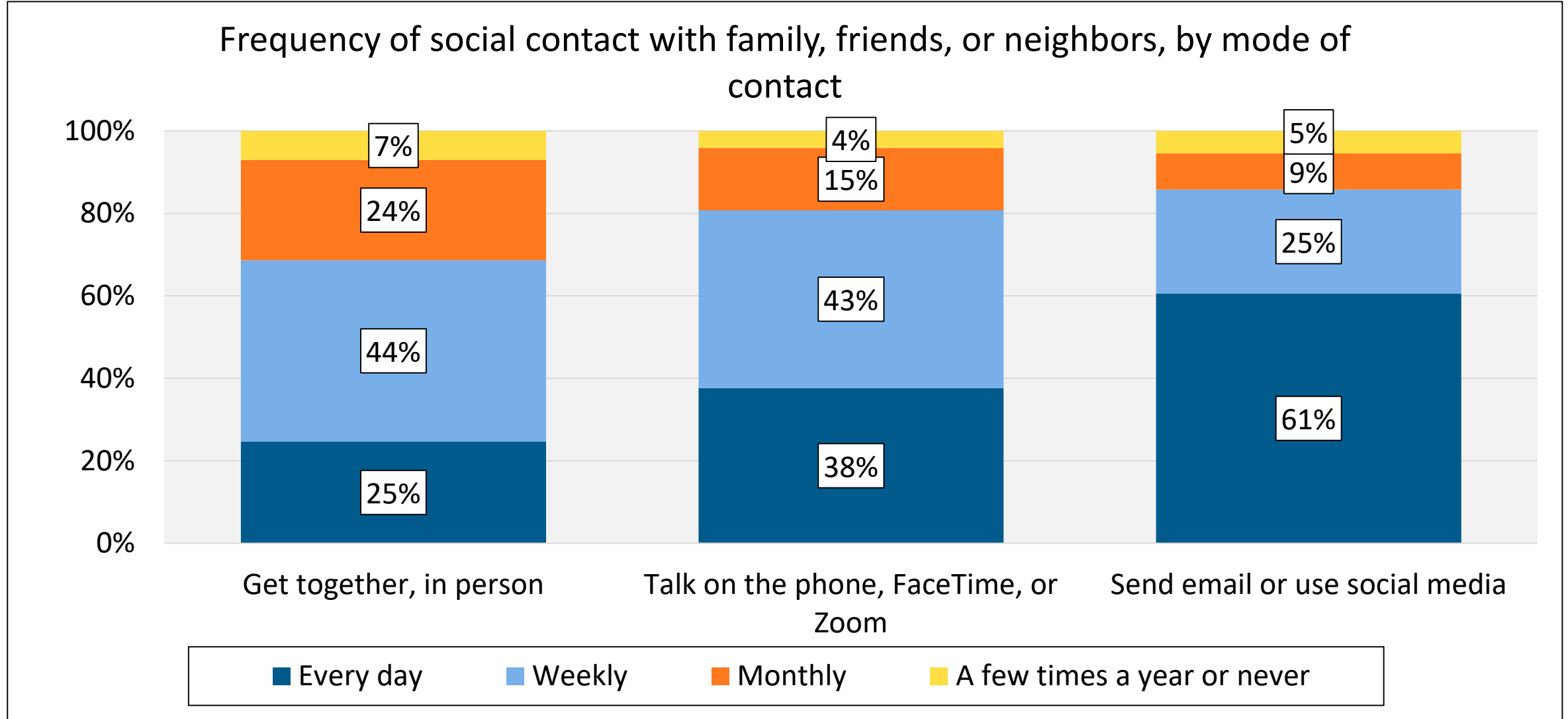
Most valuable supports for caregivers





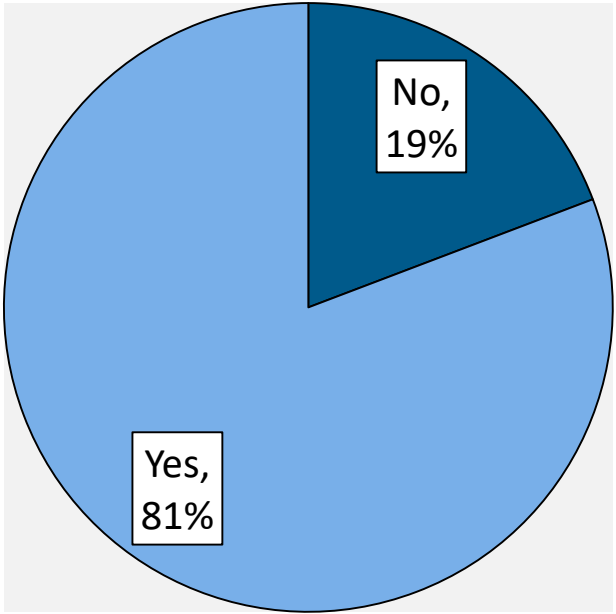
Social Wellness & Inclusion

A portion of older residents are at risk for social isolation

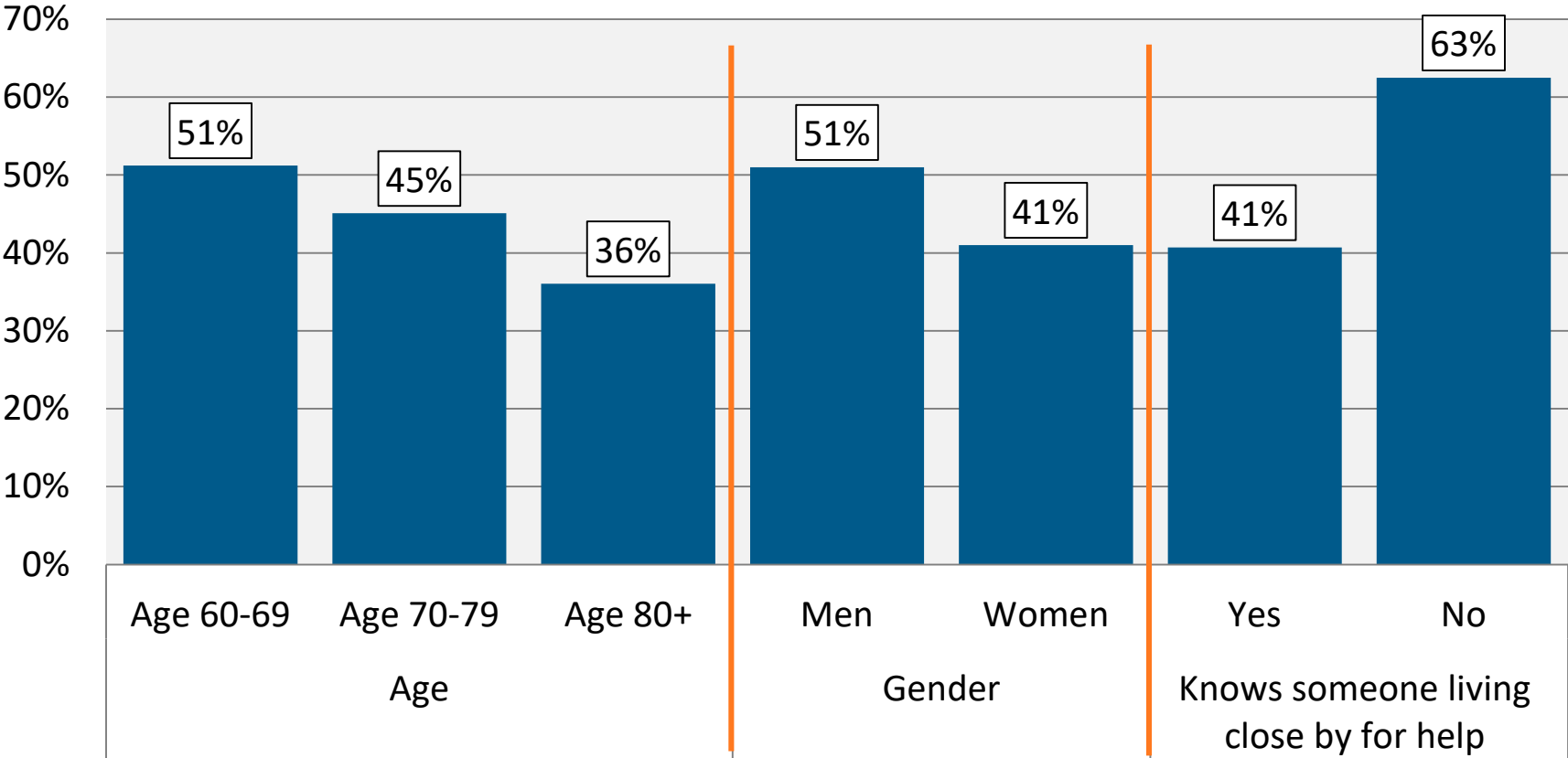


Segments of the older population may not be well connected to information and needed supports

Do you know someone living close by on whom you can rely for help when you need it?

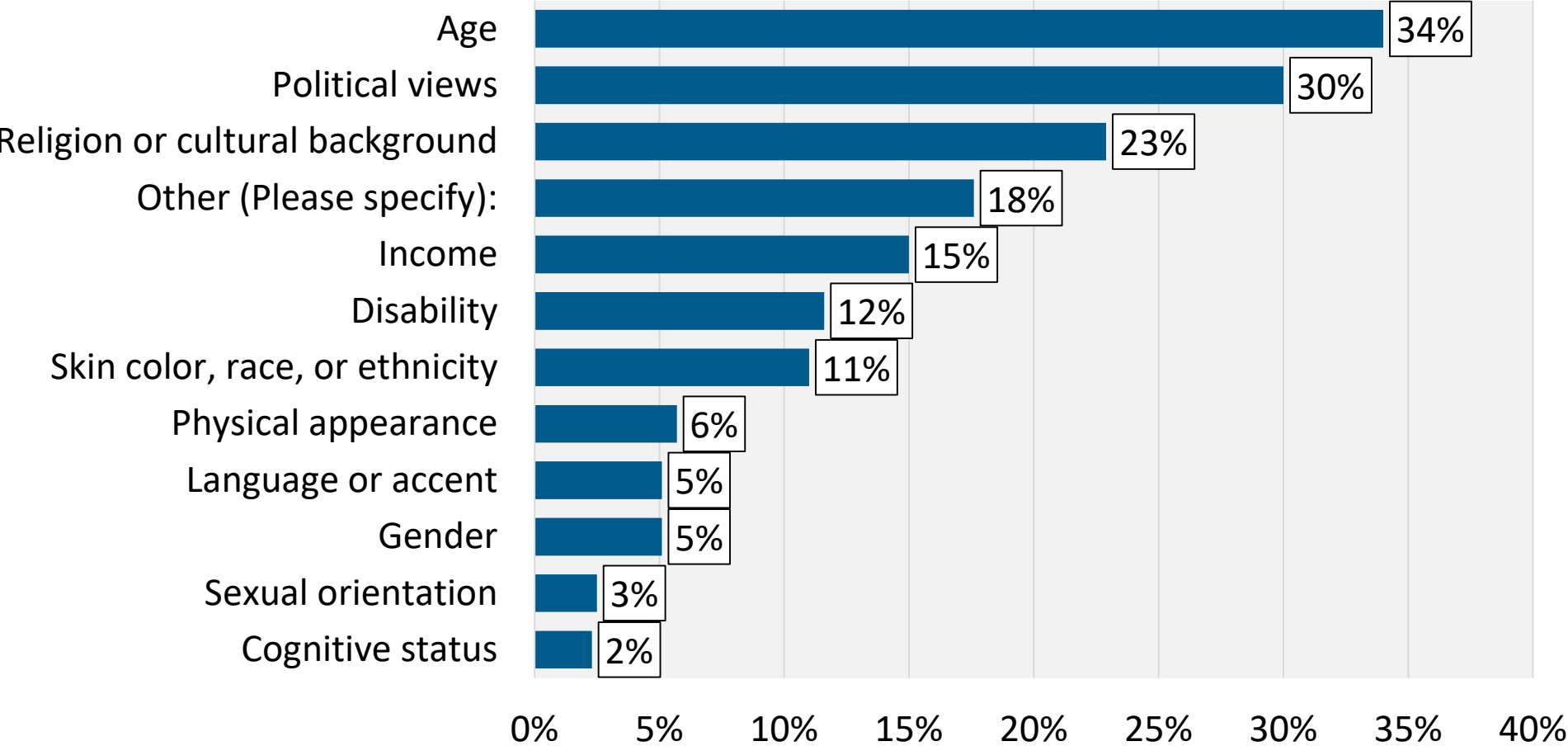


Percent of respondents who do NOT know whom to contact in Brookline if looking for help accessing social services

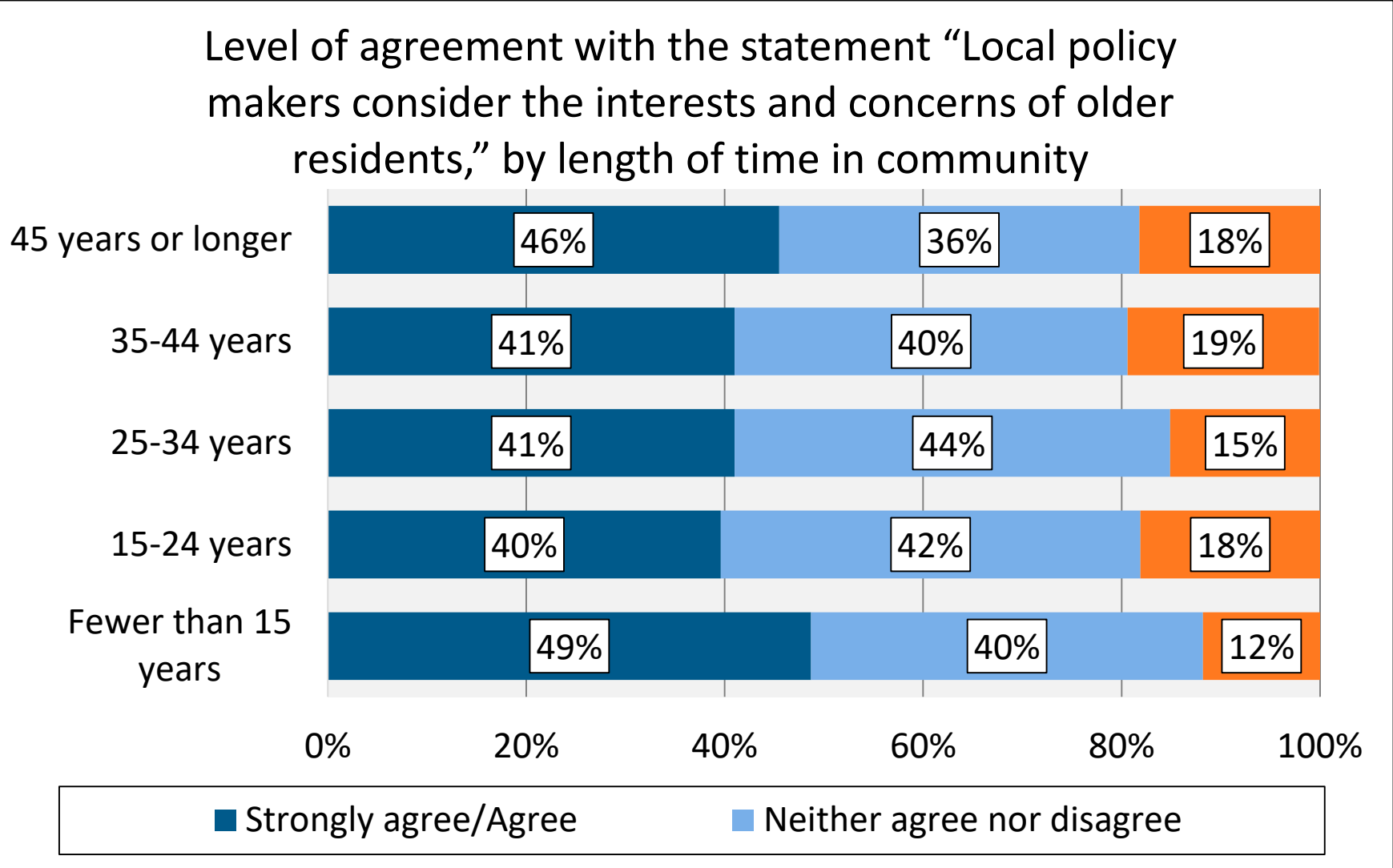


19% of older residents reported feeling excluded in Brookline over the past 5 years

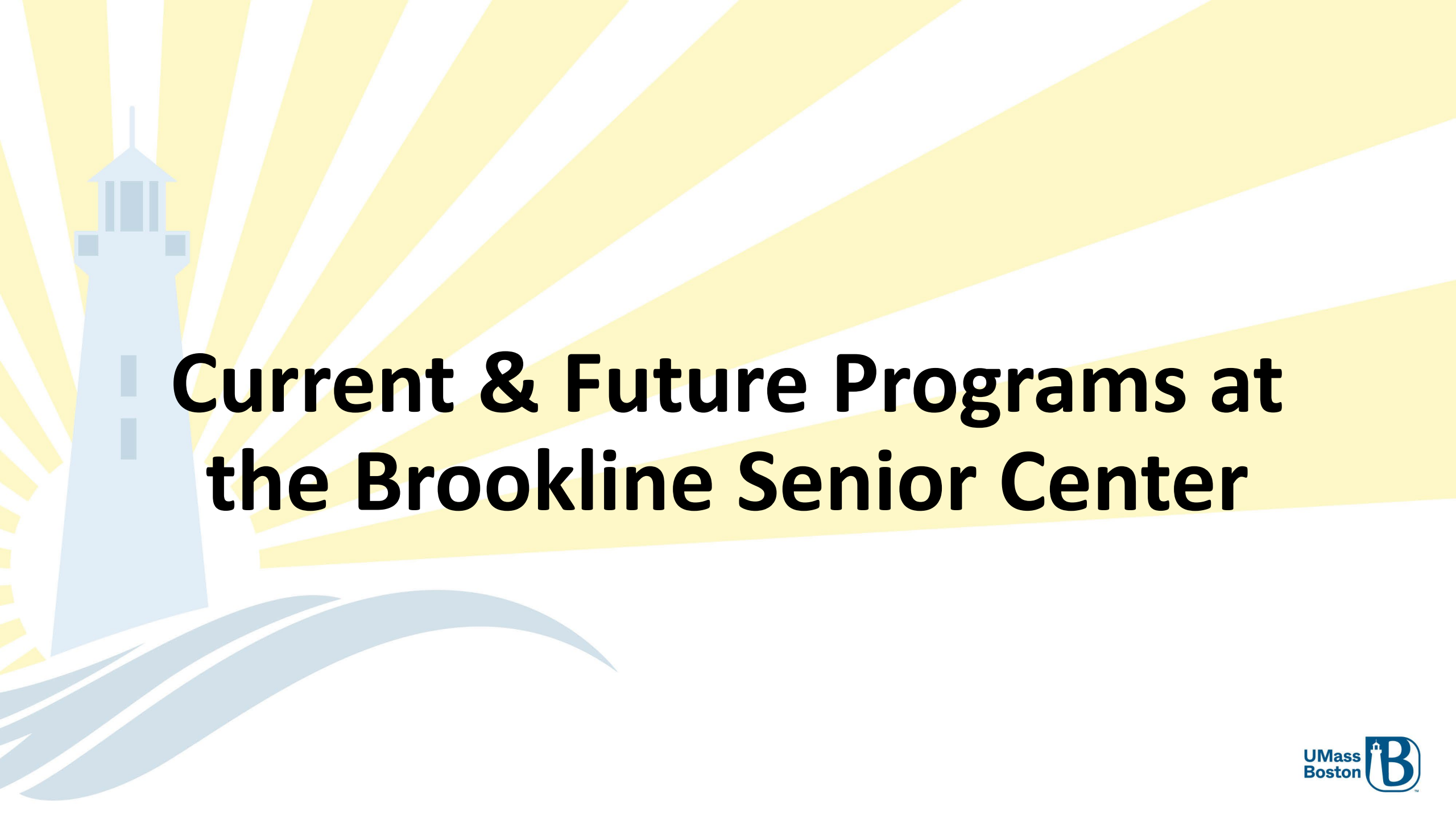
Reasons for feeling excluded or unwelcome in Brookline over the past few years, excluding respondents who have never felt excluded



About 40% of respondents are uncertain that older residents are heard and respected by local policymakers, and that share is smallest among residents who have lived in Brookline the longest



“There is a demographic that is very civically engaged and vocal, and we have a hard time reaching out to some of our more historically underrepresented, less vocal groups”—Key Informant

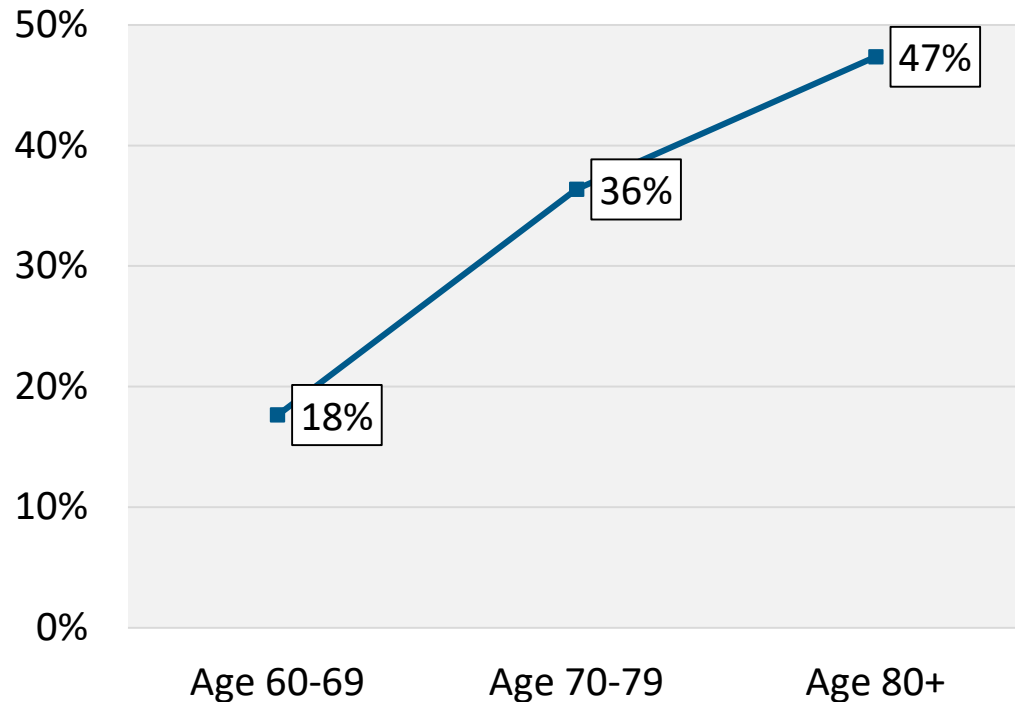
A stylized illustration of a lighthouse on the left, with yellow sun rays emanating from behind it. The lighthouse is light blue with a white top section. The background is white with yellow rays. The title text is centered in the middle of the image.

Current & Future Programs at the Brookline Senior Center

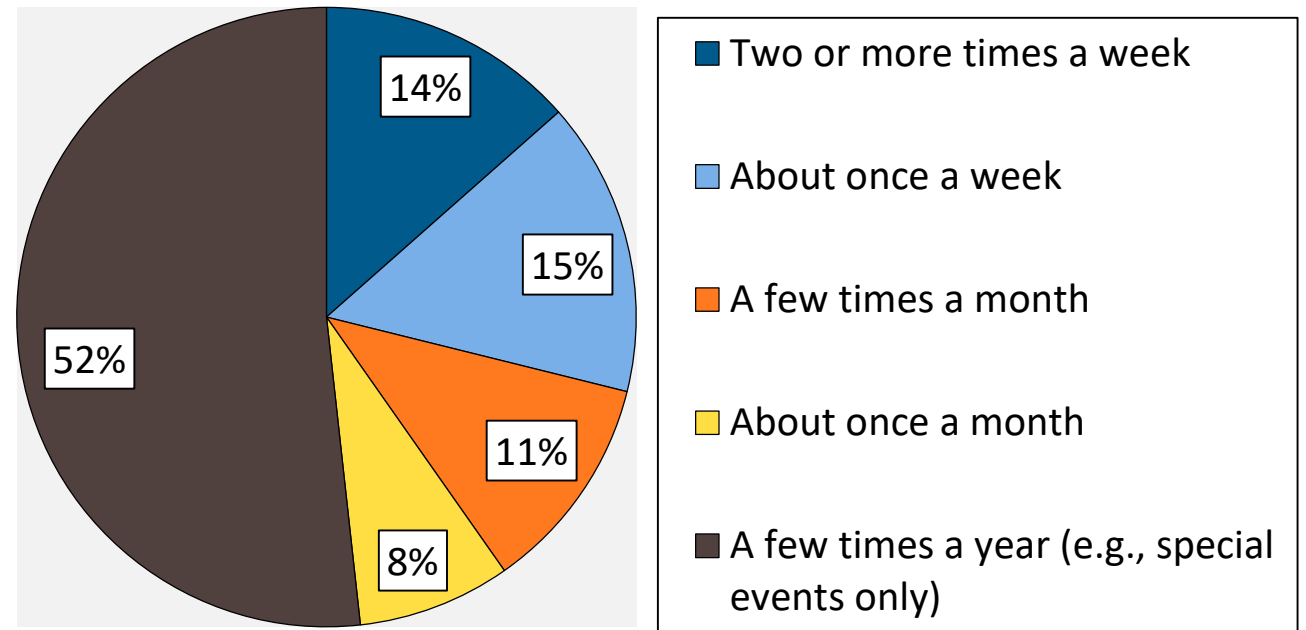
Attendance at Brookline Senior Center increases with age.

Among users, 52% come only a few times a year.

Participation rates at programs and services offered by the Brookline Council on Aging (COA) and Senior Center, by age



Frequency of participation at the Brookline Senior Center, excluding those who selected "never"



Respondents would be more likely to participate if they had more knowledge and if programs were better suited to their needs and interests. Parking was also a key issue.

Most selected responses to the prompt: “I would be more likely to use Brookline Senior Center programs and services if...”	Regularly attends (1x/month or more)	Attends a few times a year	Never attends
I had more knowledge about the programs and services that are available	12%	31%	55%
Programs and services were better suited to my needs and interests	26%	30%	22%
If I had more time (e.g., I’m still working)	13%	21%	28%
There were more parking	35%	32%	18%
If there were more people like myself at the Senior Center events	16%	21%	16%
Program	37%	17%	9%

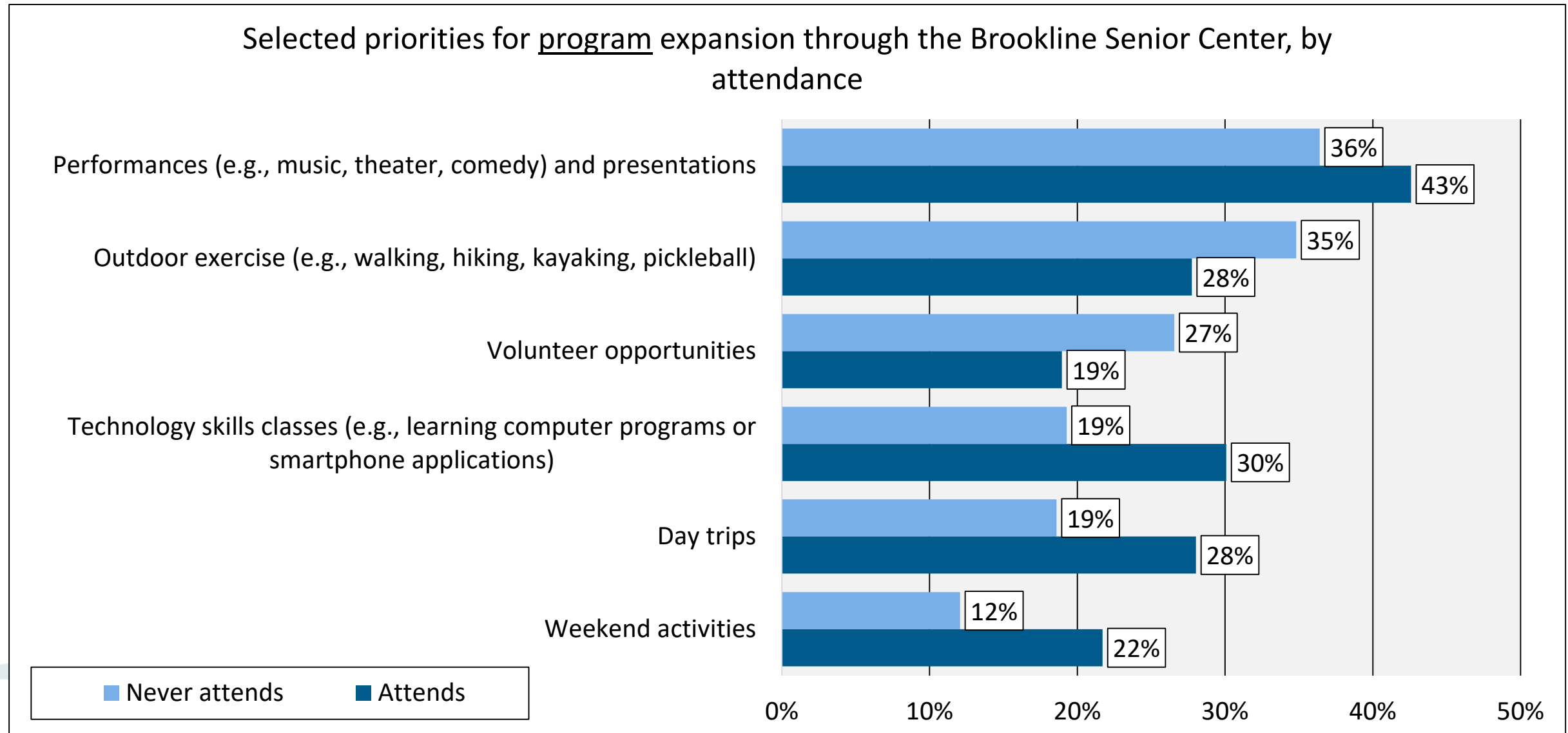
Write-in explanations for “Other” included:

- Multigenerational programs
- More virtual programs
- Better transportation options to the center

Top 5 Program Expansion priorities-All respondents

1. Guest speakers, lectures or cultural events (53%)
2. Educational courses/programming (e.g., history, or cooking (42%)
3. Indoor exercise (e.g., strength training, fitness center, yoga aerobics (39%)
4. Performances (e.g., music, theater, comedy) and presentations (37%)
5. Arts programs (e.g. painting, music, acting, digital photography) (34%)

Attendees and non-attendees prioritized a few programs differently



Top 5 Service Expansion Priorities- All respondents

1. Information/referral about local resources (44%)

2. Professional services (e.g., financial planning, tax preparations, legal services) (25%)

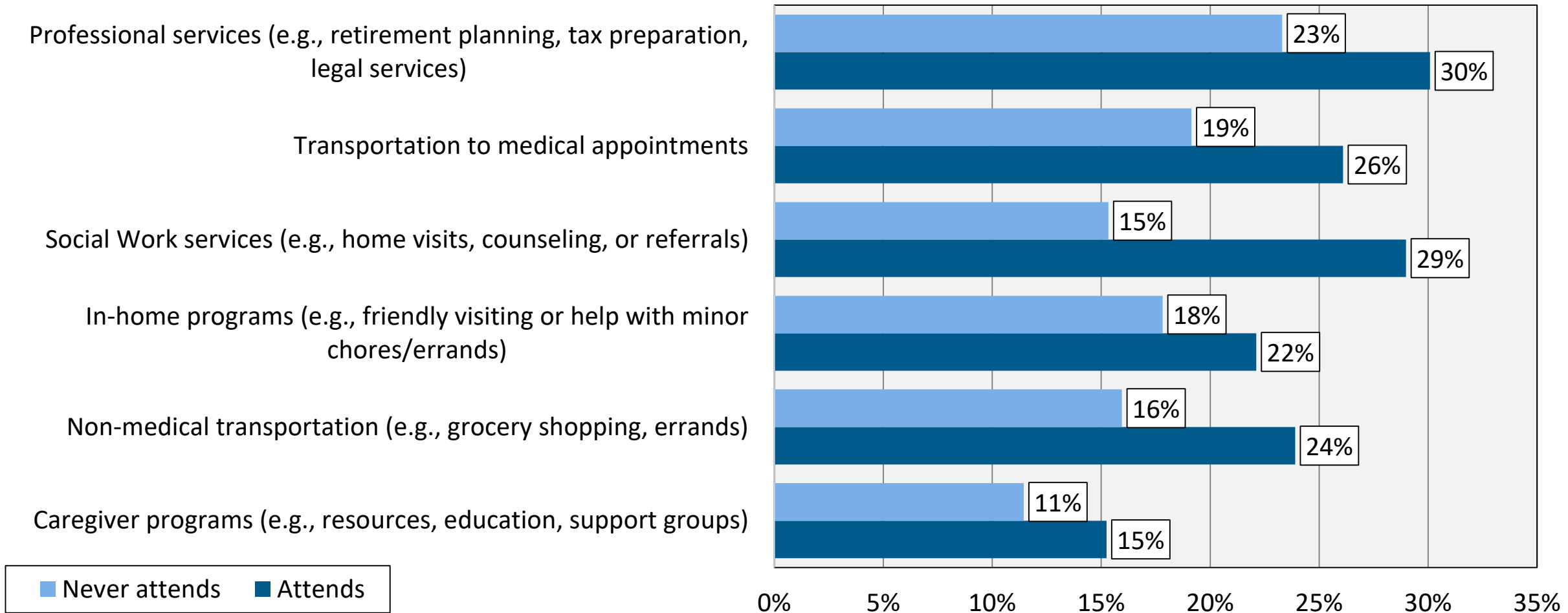
3. Transportation to medical appointments (21%)

4. Social Work services (e.g. home visits, counseling, or referrals) (20%)

5. In-home programs (e.g., friendly visiting or help with minor chores/errands) (19%)

A growing interest in practical assistance and community-based supports as engagement with the Senior Center increases

Selected priorities for service expansion through the Brookline Senior Center, by attendance



Preferred ways to find information about the COA& Senior Center vary by age

Age 60-69

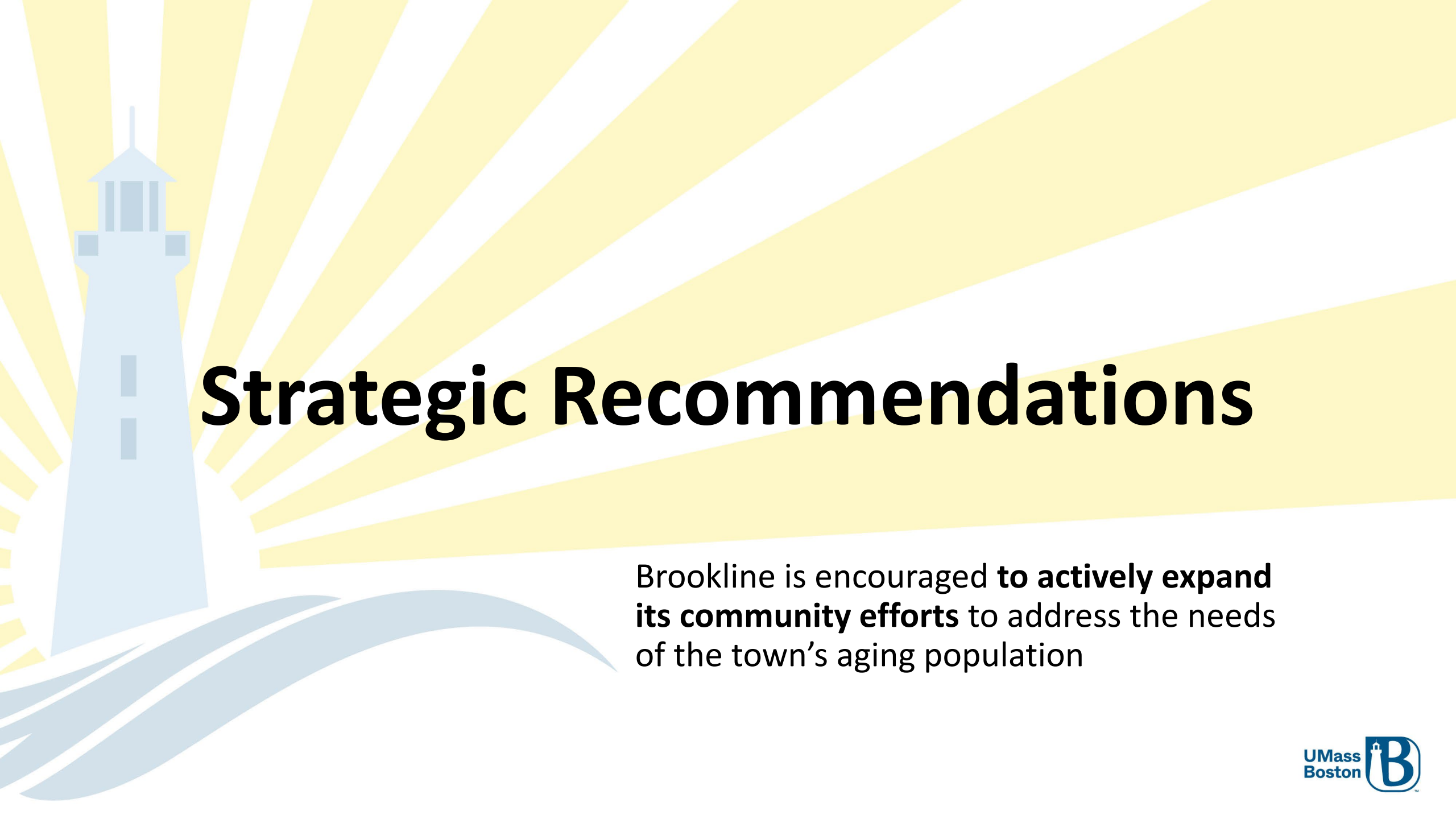
Email or text communication (43%)
Brookline Town website (38%)
Brookline Senior Center website (36%)

Age 70-79

Email or text communication (43%)
Local online newspapers (e.g., *Brookline.News*, *the Patch*) (39%)
Brookline Beacon (*Council on Aging Newsletter*) (print) (37%)

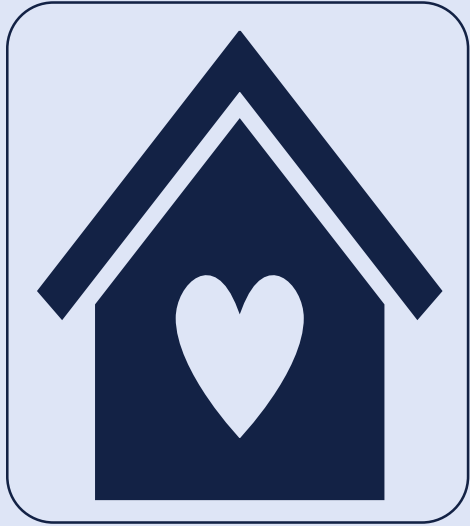
Age 80+

Brookline Beacon (*Council on Aging Newsletter*) (print) (48%)
Email or text communication (41%)
Local online newspapers (e.g., *Brookline.News*, *the Patch*) (35%)

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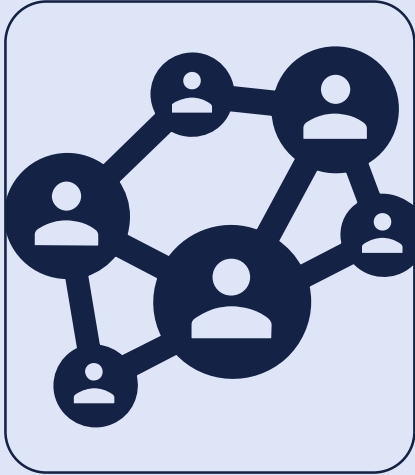
Strategic Recommendations

Brookline is encouraged **to actively expand its community efforts** to address the needs of the town's aging population



Address Economic Security for Older Residents

- Explore strategies that reduce financial strain on older adults aging in place
- Continue to review and expand existing property tax relief programs to help older homeowners remain in their homes



Prioritize outreach and in-home supports for adults ages 80 and older, particularly those living alone or without nearby family support

- Services could include friendly visiting programs, technology assistance, wellness checks or home-based programming. Consider exploring elder mental health outreach programs that already exist to pilot-test in Brookline.



Expand support for family caregivers and identify pathways to reach “younger older adults” who would benefit from caregiving support

- Expand support for family caregivers through education, navigation assistance, support groups, respite opportunities, and referrals to community resources. Identify pathways to reach “younger older adults” who would benefit from caregiving support.



Improve Accessibility Across the Community

- As the population ages, investments in accessible buildings, sidewalks, crossings, seating, and wayfinding will become increasingly important for maintaining participation in community life.



Prioritize the restoration and expansion of transportation services that help older adults access healthcare appointments

- Assess current gaps in service and explore partnerships with regional transportation providers, volunteer driver programs, and healthcare organizations.



Develop a Long-Term Senior Center Facilities Plan that focuses on expanding access to performances, lifelong learning, and exercise

- Future planning should consider renovation, expansion, or alternative service delivery models that better reflect the size, diversity, and interests of Brookline's growing older adult population and the expansion of satellite programming in South Brookline



Reposition the Senior Center as a central hub for information, engagement, and community connection by leading or participating in a coordinated communications strategy

- Lead or participate in a coordinated communications strategy using multiple platforms including print, digital, and telephone
- Update and improve communications about the Senior Center and about aging issues in general

Thank you!

Katherine Burnes M.Ed

Nancy Mazonson MS, OTR

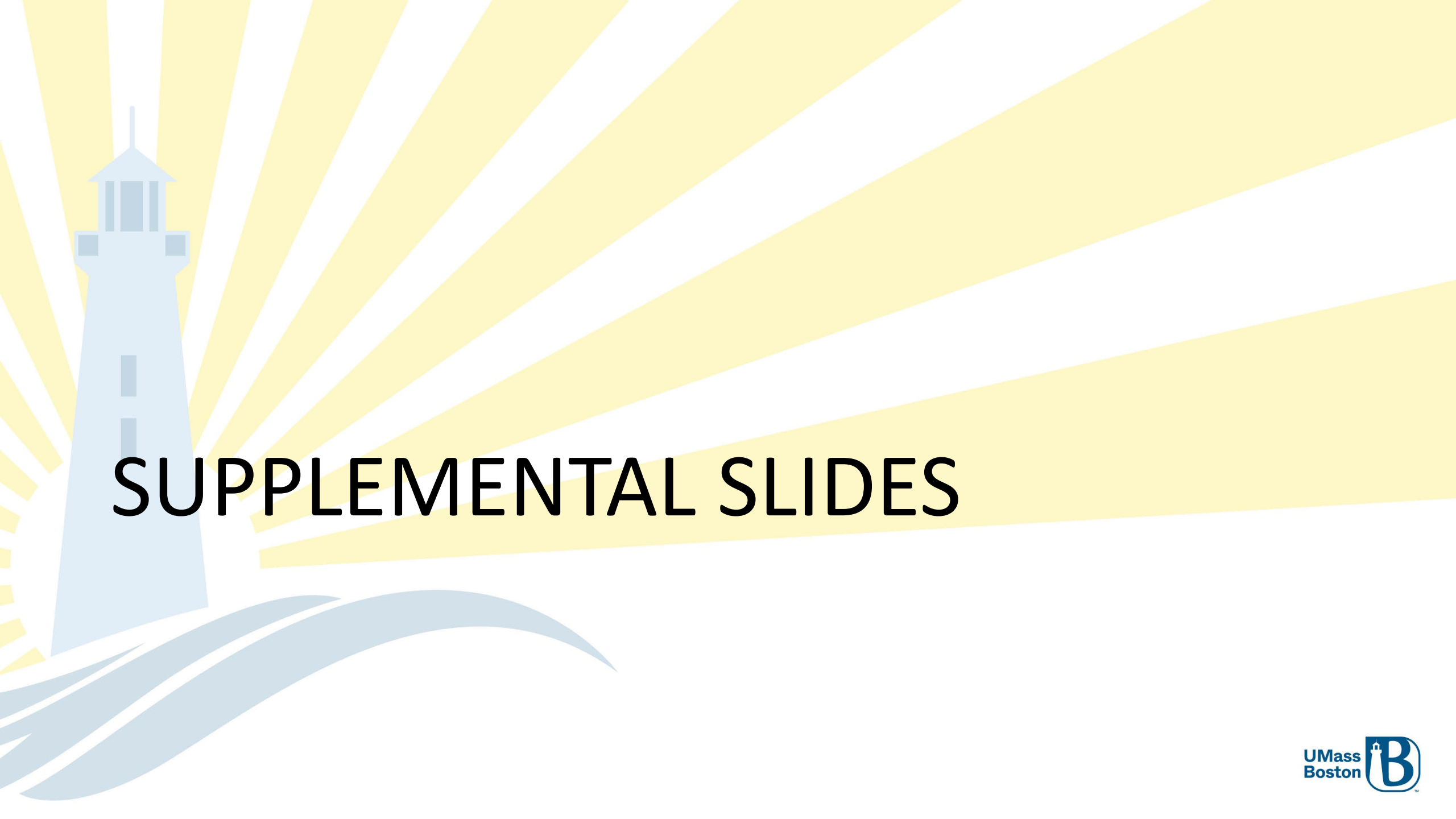
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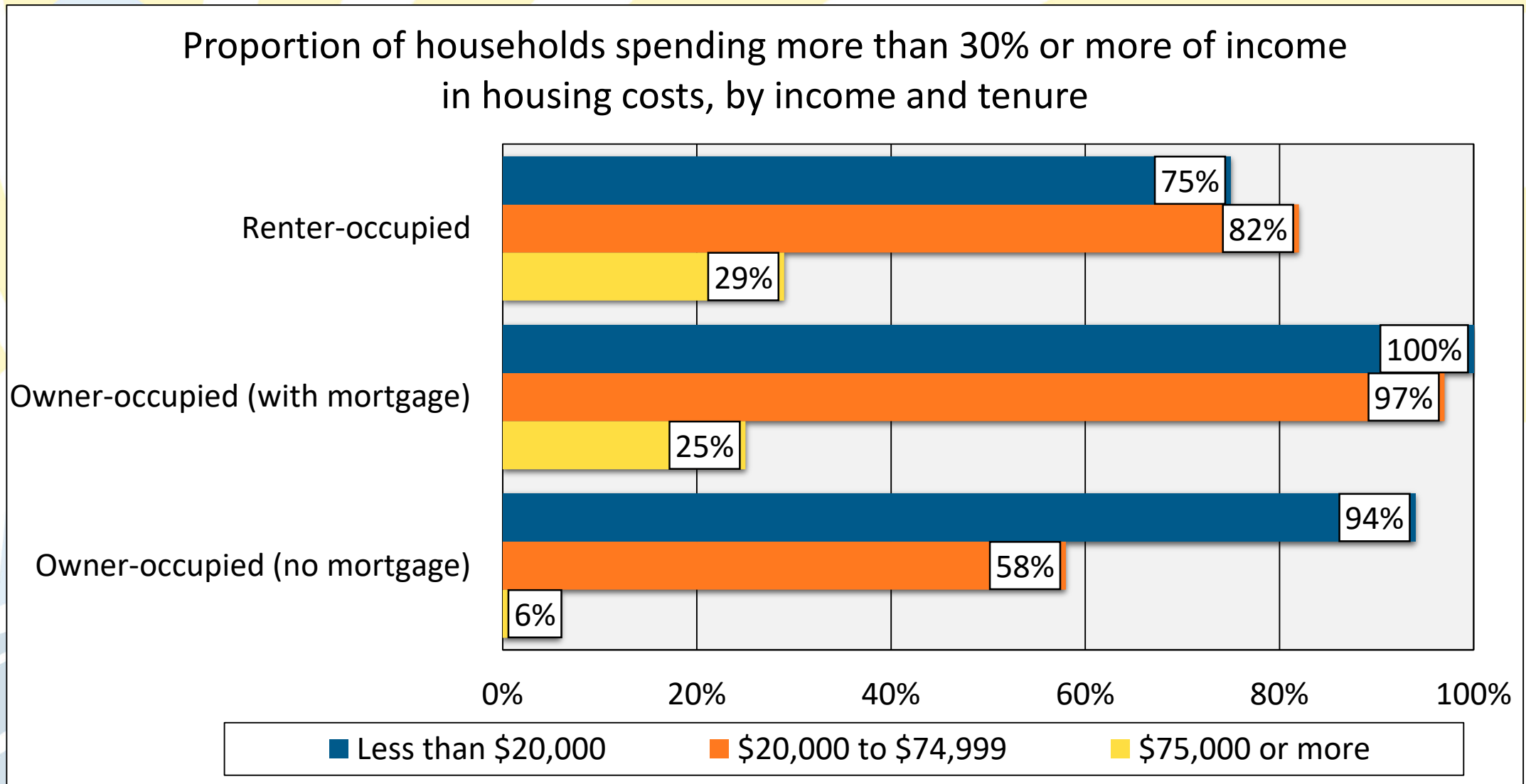
Caitlin.coyle@umb.edu



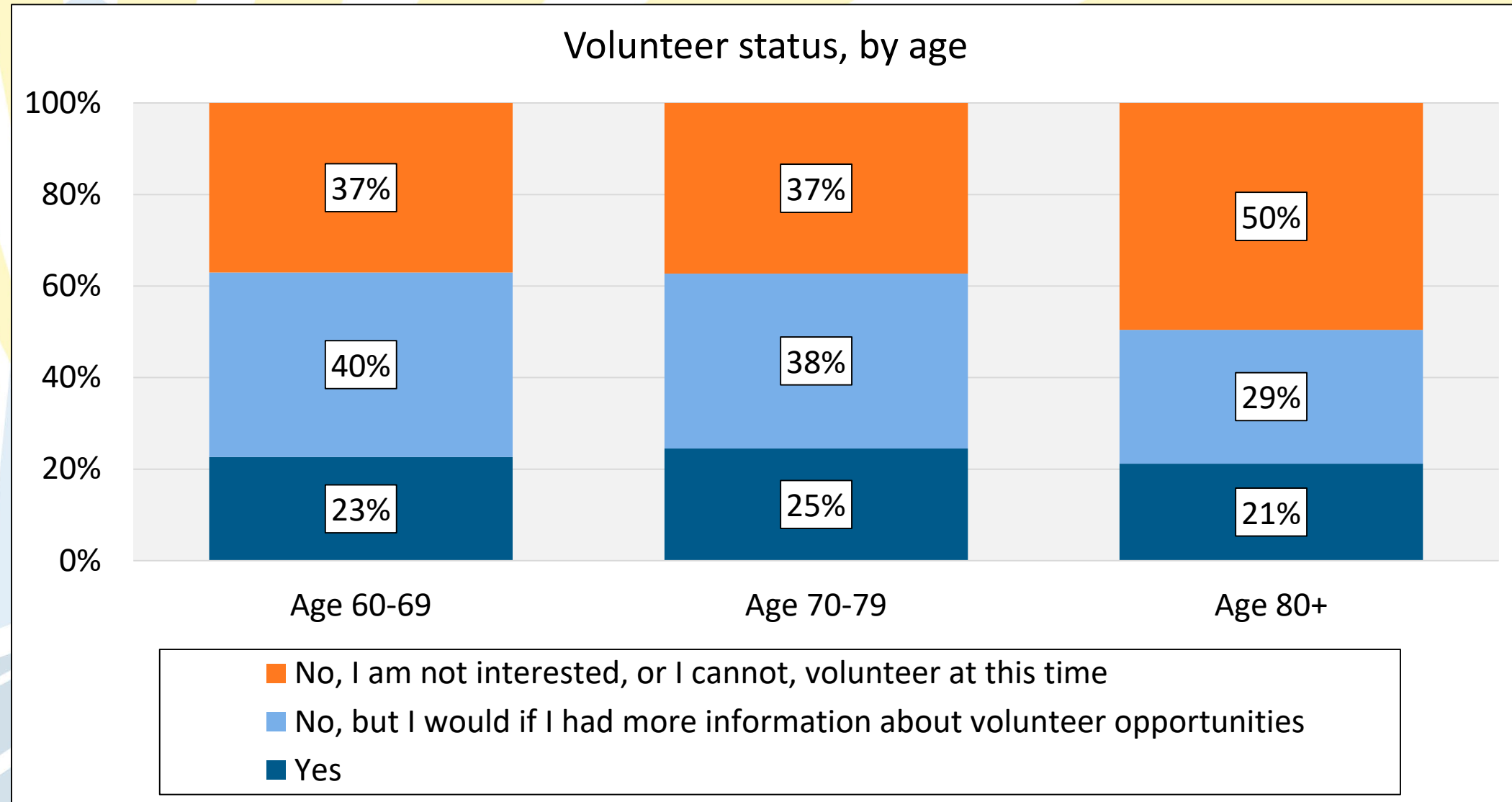


SUPPLEMENTAL SLIDES

Proportion of households spending more than 30% or more of income in housing costs, by income and tenure



More information about opportunities may increase volunteerism



Address Economic Security for Older Residents

Potential approaches:

- Expand awareness of existing tax relief programs
- Review eligibility requirements for relief programs
- Increase outreach to eligible residents
- Advocate for additional local or state-level tax protections for older homeowners on fixed incomes
- Strengthen access to home repair and modification providers. Help create a list of “handy person” workers. Continue educating residents about home maintenance and repair practices.
- Increase community education and awareness about alternative housing options that support aging in place, including home sharing and accessory dwelling units (ADUs)

Develop Senior Center Facilities Plan with a focus on expanding access to performances, lifelong learning and exercise

➤ Short-Term Enhancements

- Explore options to address concerns around lack of parking and parking restrictions (e.g. lack of sufficient handicapped parking, limited time to take advantage of senior center programs and services).
- Expand on satellite programming in South Brookline and other sites.

➤ Long-Term Plan

- Consider renovation, expansion or alternative service delivery models to better reflect the size, diversity, and interest of the growing older adult population.

Create a Coordinated Older Adult Communications Strategy

- Conduct an environmental scan of other aging organizations to identify shared goals, align efforts, leverage assets to streamline communication, and reduce duplication.
- Reposition the Senior Center as a central hub for information, engagement and community connection.
- Offer a centralized community calendar and a comprehensive listing of volunteer opportunities, courses, events and services.



Strengthen Medical Transportation Services

- Restore and expand transportation that help older adults access healthcare appointments.
- Assess current gaps in service and explore partnerships with regional transportation providers, volunteer driver programs, and healthcare organizations.



Build a Comprehensive Caregiver Support Initiative

- Expand support for family caregivers through education, navigation assistance, support groups, respite opportunities, and referrals to community resources.
- Identify pathways to reach “younger older adults” who would benefit from caregiving support. Target residents age 60-69 with tailored information about planning for and supporting aging loved ones.



Expand Community-based supports for Older Adults Aging Alone

- Prioritize outreach and in-home supports for adults ages 80 and older, particularly those living alone or without nearby family support. Supports could include friendly visiting programs, technology assistance, wellness checks or home-based programming.
- Consider exploring elder mental health outreach programs that already exist to pilot-test in Brookline.



Improve Accessibility Across the Community

- Conduct an accessibility review of municipal facilities, community destinations, and public spaces to better support residents with mobility limitations.
- Explore the AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit to help identify priorities for improving sidewalks, crossings, seating, and wayfinding.





Continue to incorporate Age-Friendly principles into all municipal planning efforts across departments and boards by engaging residents of all ages in developing policies and programs that promote inclusion, accessibility, and well-being across the lifespan

Integrate Reframing Aging Best Practices into Town communications. Using positive, asset-based messaging helps reduce ageism, highlights the contributions of older adults, and supports age-friendly community goals.

Integrate dementia-friendly practices into community planning.

Reframing Communications about Senior Centers- National Center for Reframing Aging

- <https://learning.reframingaging.org/products/reframing-communications-about-senior-centers-lessons-learned-from-pennsylvania>

