

# Emerson Hospital 2024 Community Health Needs Assessment

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**Final Assessment Findings**  
**June 2024**

# Acknowledgements

**Thank you to all the Emerson Health Community Advisory Board members:**

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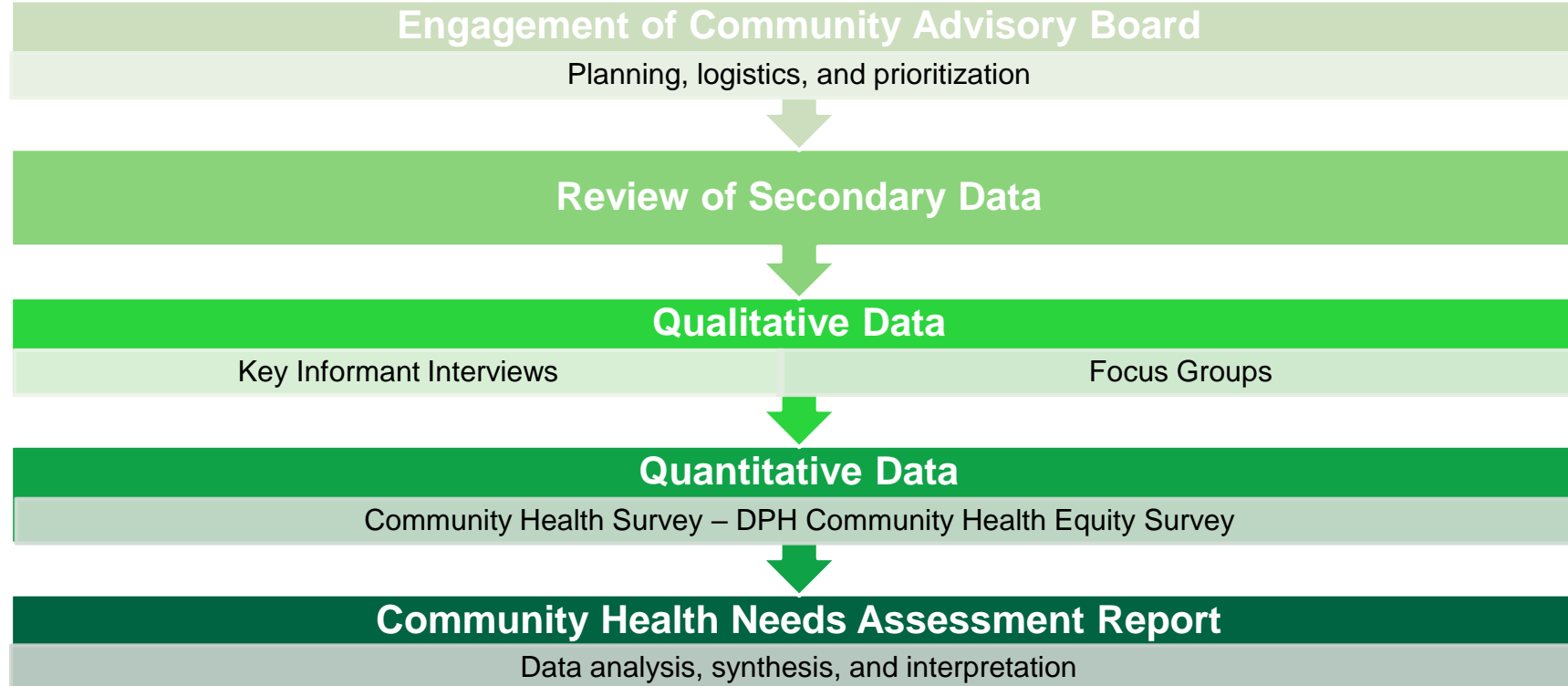
# Background and Purpose

- Emerson Hospital is a full-service, regional medical center headquartered in Concord, Massachusetts, with a 179-bed hospital and more than 300 primary care doctors and specialists.
- The Hospital's core mission is to make high-quality health care more accessible to those who live and work in our community.
- The Emerson Hospital 2024 Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) focused on the hospital's service area, which is comprised of 21 towns in Massachusetts.
- The goal was to gain a greater understanding of the issues that community residents face, how those issues are currently being addressed, and where there are gaps and opportunities to address these issues in the future.
- The assessment findings will be used to inform the strategic implementation plan (SIP) for the Hospital.



# **Community Health Needs Assessment Methods**

# Overview of CHNA Process

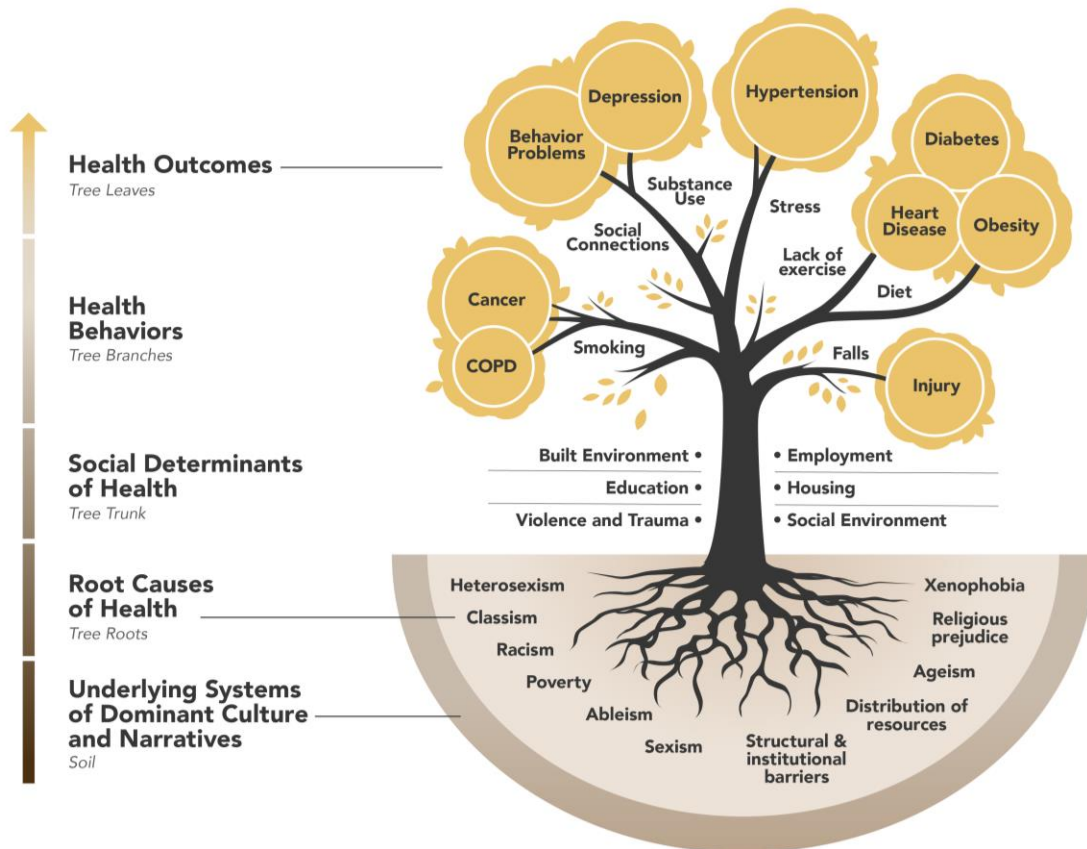


# Community Advisory Board

A Community Advisory Board was convened to inform the process of this assessment.

- The role of the Community Advisory Board consisted of:
  - Assisting with community engagement for data collection
  - Review and comment on draft documents
  - Participate in prioritization process
  - Disseminate findings
- Community Advisory Board members will also be participating in the planning process to develop Emerson Hospital's SIP.

# Social Determinants of Health and Health Equity



- A comprehensive view of health was taken in conducting this assessment:
  - Health and wellness is rooted in understanding that where we are born, grow, live, play, work, and age, and the connections between these experiences and contexts shape the health and well-being of individuals and communities.
  - The influences of race, ethnicity, income, and geography on health patterns are often intertwined. Institutional racism, economic inequality, discriminatory policies, and historical oppression of specific groups are a few of the factors that drive health inequities in the U.S.

# Secondary Data Review

The secondary data included in this report represent a range of topic areas:

- **The U.S. Census Bureau** provides a rich source of information about the changing characteristics of residents in the service area
  - 5 year (2018-2022) aggregate datasets from the **Census Bureau's American Community Survey** were used when available
- **MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School and District Profiles** (2022 – 2023) provide data related to the school-age population
- **MA Population Health Information Tool** makes a range of health-focused data available at the local level
- **Youth Risk Behavioral Survey**, Emerson Service Area (2020, 2022, and 2024) provides self-reported data on students' physical and mental health
- **Tufts Health Plan, Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative** (2018), provides data specifically related to older adults
- **Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Reports** (2022) provides annual crime-related data for jurisdictions across the U.S.
- **Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics** (2017-2023), provides monthly and annual employment, unemployment, and labor force data for communities
- **MA Department of Public Health**, provides a range of data through dashboards and reports including the Registry of Vital Records and Statistics Death Report (2021), Massachusetts Births Report (2021), Annual Childhood Lead Poisoning Surveillance Report (2020), and the Bureau of Substance Addiction Services dashboards



# Qualitative Data Collection

Qualitative data collection was completed from March – April 2024

- Six key informant interviews (KIIs) with subject matter experts and community leaders representing various segments
- Three focus groups (FG) with the following community segments:
  - Food pantry recipients
  - Adults involved in community mental health initiatives
  - Youth

Qualitative data were coded and analyzed thematically, where data analysis identified themes that emerged across sources. Selected quotes—without personal identifying information—are presented in the report to further illustrate points within topic areas.

# Community Health Equity Survey

- Massachusetts Department of Public Health survey conducted primarily online in the summer and fall of 2023.
- Purpose of the survey was to understand the most pressing health-related needs facing Massachusetts residents, including their social circumstances, economic situations, and resource needs.
  - The survey centered communities that are often underrepresented in data systems and most impacted by health inequities
- The survey was open to all people ages 14 or over living in Massachusetts.
- The data presented in this report includes responses (n=816) from the 21 communities that comprise the Emerson service area.

# CHES Respondent Demographics

## Community Health Equity Survey, Emerson Service Area Respondents, by Demographic Characteristics, 2023 (n=816)

Age	N = 816	%
14-17 years old	14	1.7%
18-24 years old	19	2.3%
25-34 years old	61	7.5%
35-44 years old	111	13.6%
45-64 years old	325	39.8%
65-74 years old	188	23.0%
75 years or older	98	12.0%
Age Categories	N = 816	%
Not Older Adult	436	53.4%
Older Adult (60 years or older)	380	46.6%
Race/Ethnicity	N = 816	%
American Indian or Alaska Native	*	*
Asian or Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic/Latine	28	3.7%
Black or African American, non-Hispanic/Latine	17	2.2%
Hispanic or Latine/a/o	38	5.0%
Middle Eastern or North African	5	0.7%
Multiracial, non-Hispanic/Latine	8	1.0%
Other race, non-Hispanic/Latine	*	*
White, non-Hispanic/Latine	664	86.6%

Educational Attainment	N = 816	%
Bachelor's degree or above	599	75.1%
Less than Bachelor's degree	199	24.9%
Gender Identity	N = 816	%
Female	565	73.3%
Male	191	24.8%
Non-Binary	*	*
Questioning /Undecided	*	*
Disability Status	N = 816	%
Any disability	169 (21.2)	21.2%
No disability	630 (78.8)	78.8%

NOTE: Emerson Service Area includes both the primary and secondary service areas. Asterisk (\*) indicates that data have been suppressed due to low sample size or to prevent recalculation of suppressed data. People of color (category included in selected CHES data visualizations) includes individuals identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic/Latine, Black or African American, non-Hispanic/Latine, Hispanic or Latine/a/o, Middle Eastern or North African, Multiracial, non-Hispanic/Latine, or Other race, non-Hispanic/Latine.

DATA SOURCE: Community Health Equity Survey (CHES), 2023

# Key Findings



# Key Assessment Themes

Based on findings across methods the following topics were identified as key themes. These themes were presented to the CAB in May 2024 for prioritization for the SIP.



Economic Stability



Healthcare Access



Mental Health



Transportation



Diversity, Equity, and Community Cohesion



Aging Population

# Economic Stability

- The percent of individuals living below the poverty line is lower in the service areas than the state or Middlesex County overall, but there is a range – in Sudbury just 1.5% of individuals live below the poverty line while it is 8.3% of individuals in Maynard.
- Unemployment peaked in 2020, but rates in the service areas returned to pre-COVID levels by 2022. Current unemployment is 2.7% in the primary service area and 3.0% in the secondary.

**“It is not affordable in any of the cities around here.”**  
*- Interview Participant*

# Economic Stability

- Interviewees and focus group participants noted that the cost of living has been increasing.
- While lower than the state overall, still almost a quarter (23.2%) of CHES respondents in the Emerson service area reported trouble paying for basic needs, it was about double that for those with less than a Bachelor's degree (45.0%) and with any disability (44.7%).
- CHES respondents in the Emerson service area reported having not enough money at the end of the month more than the state overall (22.6% vs. 16.5%).
- Housing and food came up as two areas of concern around affordability.
- As with the state overall, nearly half of households in many towns in the Emerson service area spend more than 30% of their income on housing.
- Fewer households receive SNAP in the service area, but food costs came up as a concern for those receiving and not receiving benefits.

**“All of us are experiencing the effects of the increase on pricing.”**

*- Interview Participant*

# Healthcare Access

- More than a third (38.4%) of CHES respondents reported an unmet need for short-term illness care and a little under a third (30.6%) reported an unmet need for ongoing health conditions.
- Language access: Key informant interviewees noted that some clinics do not provide translation or interpretation services and that doctors often do not send reminders or information in someone's native language.
- Cost: Even with health insurance, key informant interviewees and focus groups participants noted the cost with co-pays can still be a barrier to accessing services.
- Transportation: Some key informant interviewees noted the difficulty in accessing services because of limited or unreliable transportation options.



# Mental Health

- The health concern that came up the most across interviewees and focus groups was mental health. Among focus group participants, there was a focus on anxiety, depression, and isolation.
  - Almost a quarter (22.1%) of adults from the CHES reported having a mental health condition.
- Some interviewees noted the intertwined nature of mental health and social determinants of health.
- Interviewees and focus group participants identified youth as a community that is particularly impacted by mental health issues, citing school pressures & high expectations, along with social media and COVID-19 as leading factors.
  - Youth experiencing depression, self-injury, and suicide had decreased from 2022 to 2024.

# Transportation

- Transportation was mentioned as a challenge in each of the key informant interviews and focus groups. It was noted that a lack of transportation impacted people's abilities to reach medical appointments, food pantries, jobs, social activities, and the courthouse.

**“It’s a catch-22, you can’t afford a vehicle without a job, and you can’t get to a job without a vehicle.”**

*- Focus Group Participant*

# Diversity, Equity, and Community Cohesion

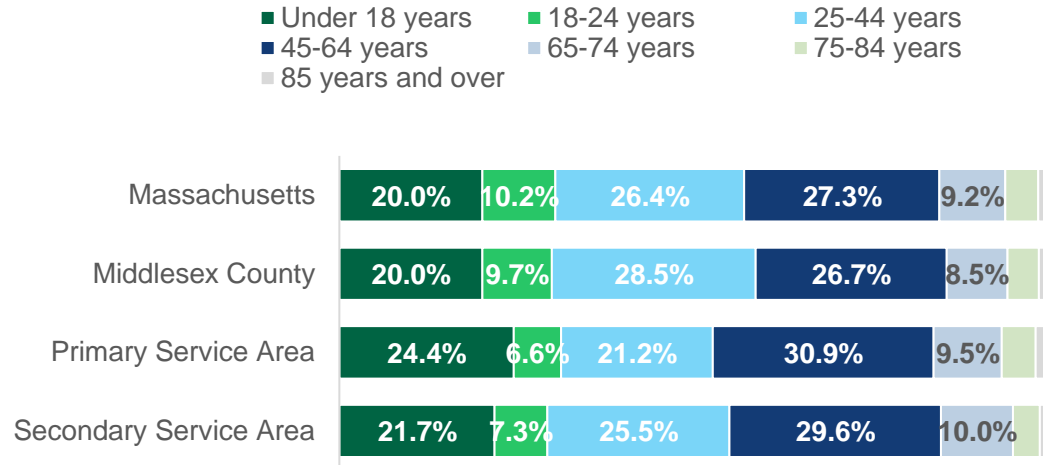
- Diversity of residents has increased over time (Primary Service Area: 76.9% White, non-Hispanic in 2018-2022; 78.9% in 2015-2019 and Secondary Service Area: 80.8% in 2018-2022 from 86.0% in 2015-219), and participants noted that change as well.
- Among CHES respondents, more than one in ten (13.1%) reported experiencing discrimination in the past year - those who identified as a person of color (28.7%) and with any disability (23.8%) reported higher percents of experiencing discrimination.
- The main strength noted by interviewees and participants was a strong sense of community and support throughout the area, while some commented that it can be hard to build social connections, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic

*“It’s become more diverse in terms of race, income, language. It isn’t bad, it’s just the change that occurs over time.”*

*- Focus Group Participant*

# Aging Population

## Age Distribution, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Service Areas, 2018-2022



NOTE: Labels for categories with 5% or less have been omitted in this figure.

DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022

- The Primary and Secondary Service Areas have larger older (65+) populations than the state.
- Participants discussed the unique challenges that older adults face in many of the key themes that emerged: accessibility and stigma around food pantries, transportation to reach medical appointments as well as daily activities, and isolation and loneliness.



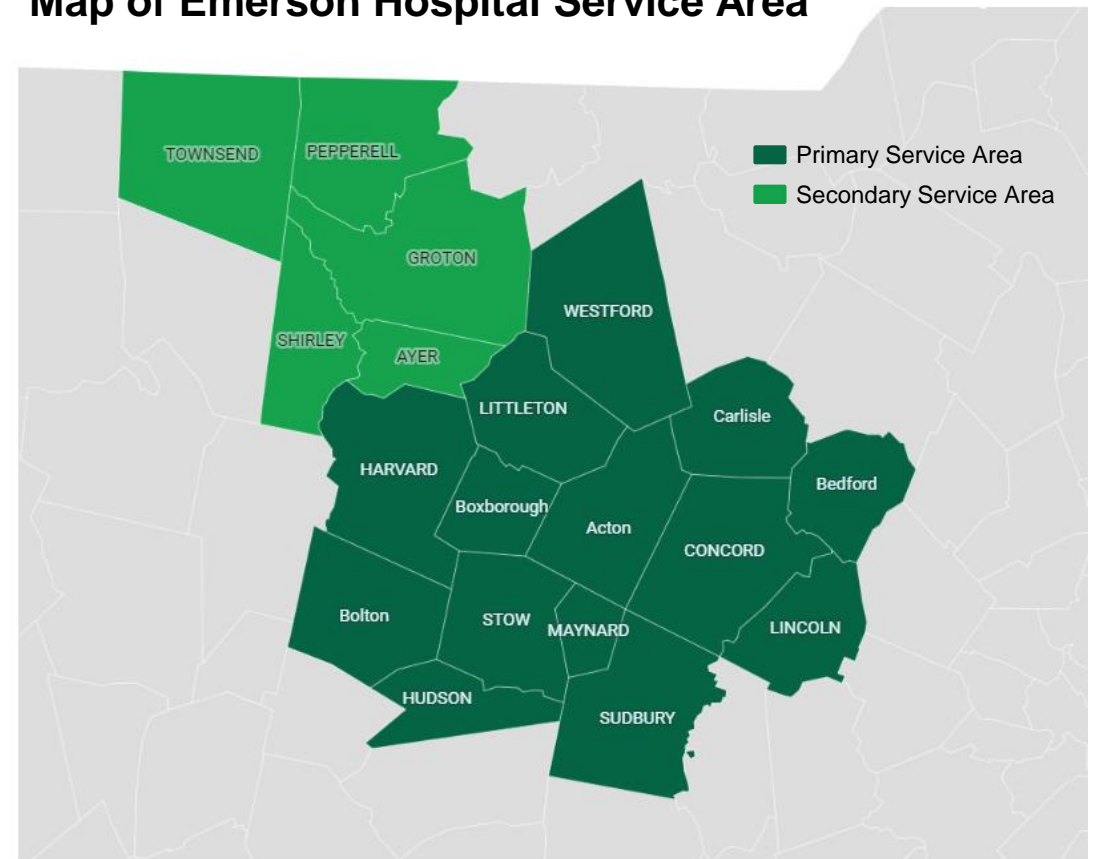
# Emerson Service Area Profile

# Definition of Community

The Emerson Hospital 2024 CHNA focused on the hospital's service area, which is comprised of 21 towns in Massachusetts. The primary service area of the hospital is comprised of 14 communities, **Acton**, **Bedford**, Bolton, Boxborough, Carlisle, **Concord**, Harvard, **Hudson**, Lincoln, **Littleton**, **Maynard**, Stow, **Sudbury**, and **Westford**. The secondary service area includes, Ayer, Devens\*, Groton, Hanscom\*, Pepperell, Shirley, and Townsend.

Towns noted in **bold** are the most populated, population >10,000, detailed demographic data is focused on these communities throughout the report  
\*not shown on map

## Map of Emerson Hospital Service Area



Map data: MassGIS • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

# Community Demographics

The following slides present data relating to the people that make up the Emerson service area. The population characteristics of a community, including changes in total population, age distribution, and race/ethnicity are important factors that inform our understanding of a community's health.

# Population

## Total Population, 2018-2022, and Percent Change from 2013-2017 to 2018-2022, by Town

Town	2018-2022	Change from 2013-2017 to 2018-2022
<b>Primary Service Area</b>		
Westford	24,524	1.8%
Acton	23,081	1.8%
Hudson	19,947	0.5%
Sudbury	18,926	1.2%
Concord	18,311	-5.5%
Bedford	14,408	2.7%
Maynard	10,671	1.1%
Littleton	10,084	3.4%
Stow	7,111	0.7%
Bolton	5,653	9.4%
Boxborough	5,462	-1.5%
Harvard	5,362	15.8%
Lincoln	5,216	8.9%
Carlisle	5,209	0.9%
<b>Secondary Service Area</b>		
Pepperell	11,667	-3.2%
Groton	11,212	-0.6%
Ayer	8,118	5.4%
Townsend	7,168	-3.8%
Shirley	7,092	-6.3%
Hanscom AFB	1,784	-11.3%
Devens	1,763	3.0%

NOTE: Towns ordered from most to least populated.

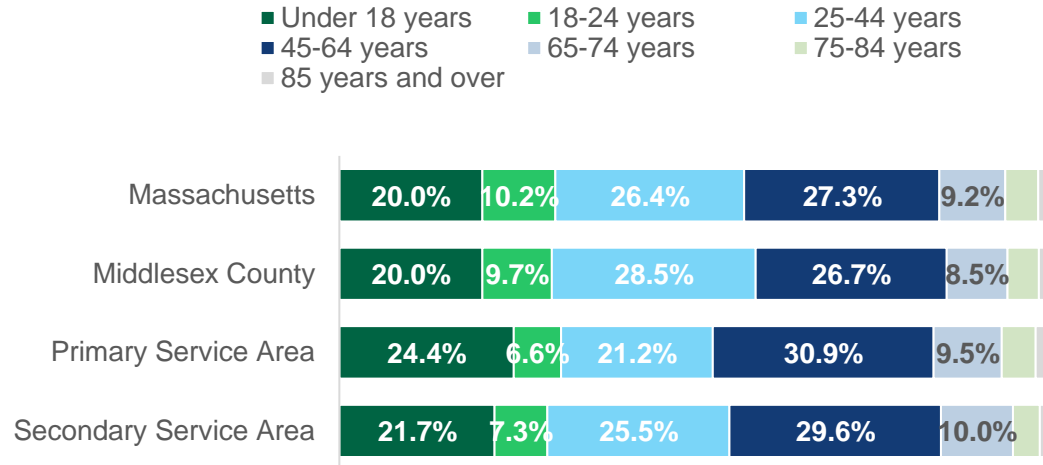
DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2013-2017 and 2018-2022

- Overall, the Primary Service Area grew less (1.5%) than the state of Massachusetts overall (2.8%), while the Secondary Service Area saw population decline (-2.0%)
- Towns with the most population growth in the Primary Service Area were Harvard, Bolton, Lincoln, and Ayer
- Towns with the population decline in the Primary Service Area were Concord and Boxborough
- There was some mention across focus group participants and key informant interviews around population growth in towns and the need for more resources and services, especially with the influx of migrants.



# Age Distribution

## Age Distribution, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Service Areas, 2018-2022



NOTE: Labels for categories with 5% or less have been omitted in this figure.

DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022

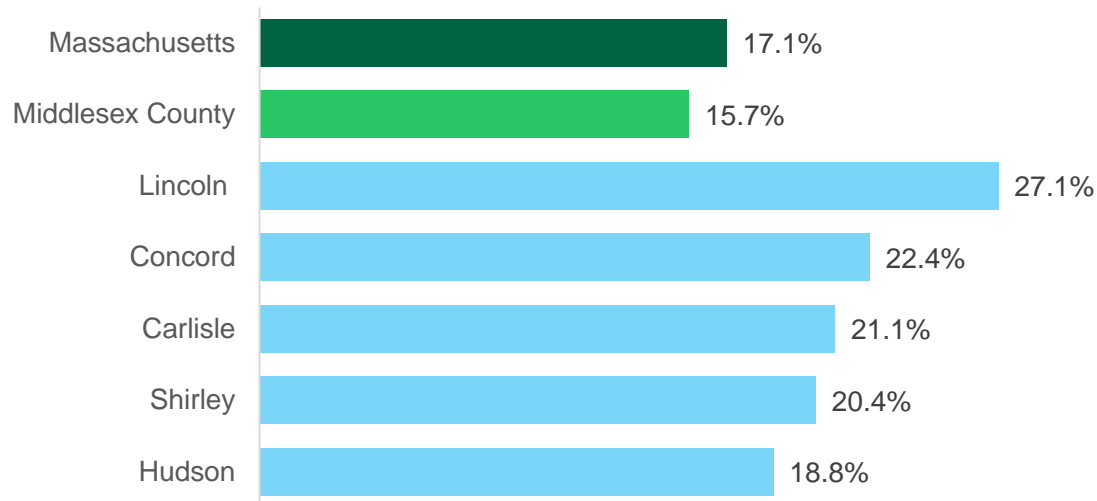
- The Primary and Secondary Service Areas had larger youth (<18) and older (65+) populations than the state.
- Participants from qualitative data collection pointed to the high cost of housing and lack options for older people to downsize in the community as barriers to young adults and families looking to move into the area.

***“You have young families who need space but can’t get them because [older] people can’t move out of them.”***

*- Focus Group Participant*

# Older Adults

## Total Population Age 65+, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Towns with Greatest Percent of Population of Older Adults, 2018-2022

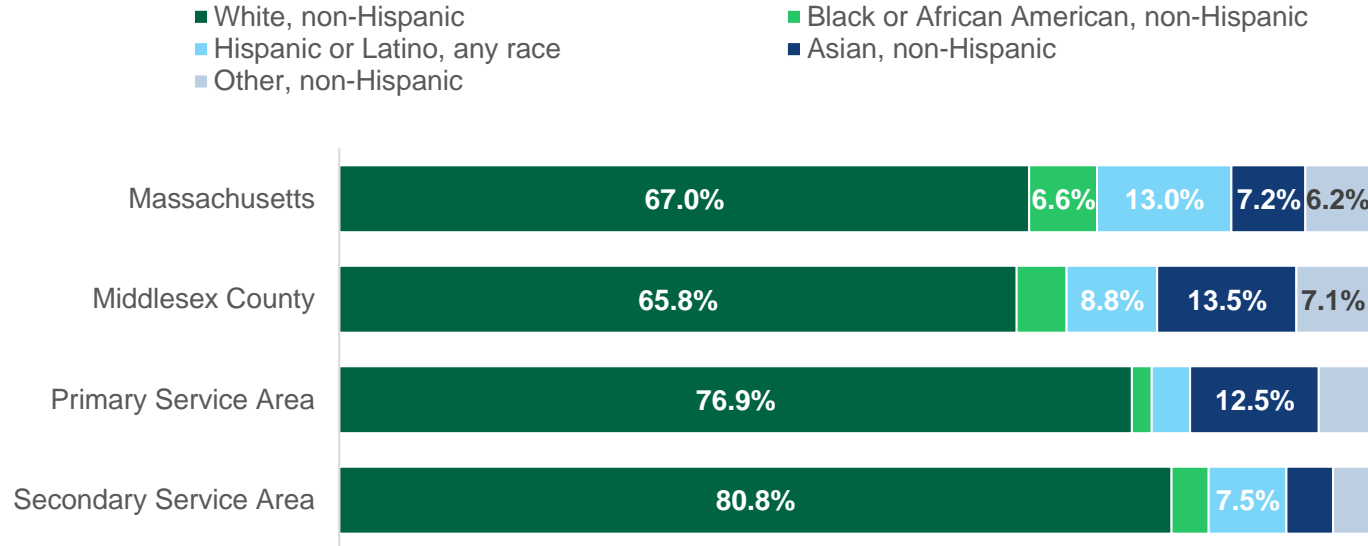


- More than a quarter of residents in Lincoln are aged 65+.
- Four other communities also have populations 65+ greater than the state.

DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022

# Race/Ethnicity

## Race/Ethnicity, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Service Areas, 2018-2022



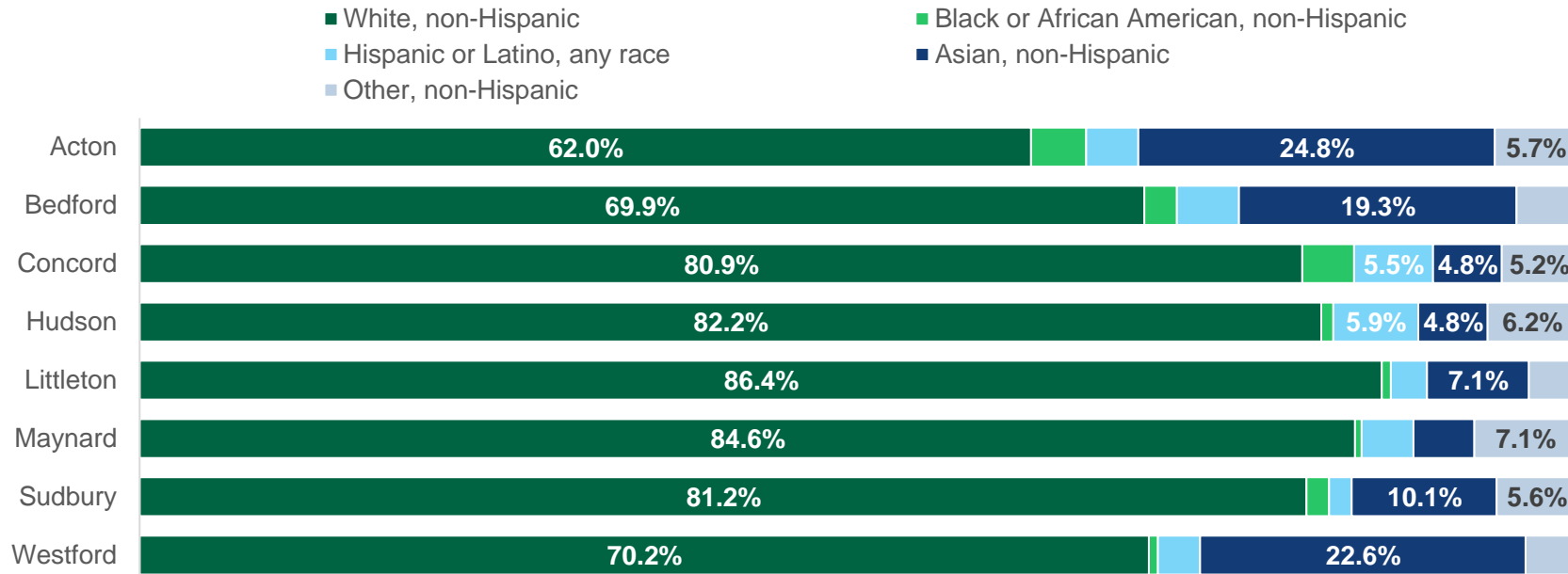
NOTE: Other includes American Indian and Alaska Native, non-Hispanic; Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic; Other race, non-Hispanic; and Two or more races, non-Hispanic. Values less than 5% not shown.

DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022

- The Primary and Secondary Service Areas are less racially and ethnically diverse than the state and Middlesex County.
- Diversity has increased over time (Primary Service Area: 76.9% White, non-Hispanic in 2018-2022; 78.9% in 2015-2019 and Secondary Service Area: 80.8% in 2018-2022 from 86.0% in 2015-2019), and participants noted that change as well.

# Race/Ethnicity

## Race/Ethnicity, by Most Populated Primary Service Area Towns, 2018-2022



*“It’s become more diverse in terms of race, income, language. It isn’t bad, it’s just the change that occurs over time.”*

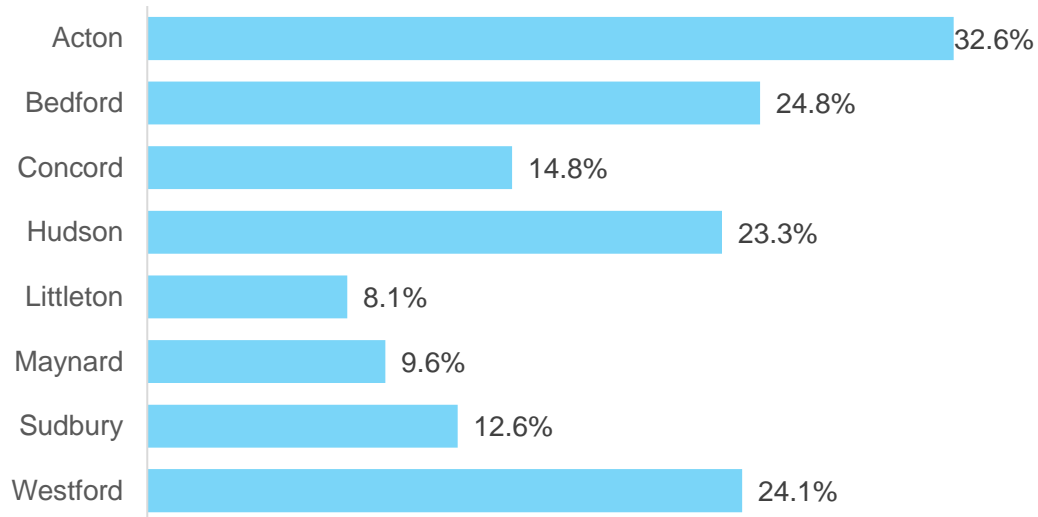
*- Focus Group Participant*

NOTE: Other includes American Indian and Alaska Native, non-Hispanic; Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic; Other race, non-Hispanic; and Two or more races, non-Hispanic. Values less than 5% not shown.

DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022

# Language

## Percent of Population Who Speak a Language Other Than English at Home, by Most Populated Towns in Primary Service Area, 2018-2022



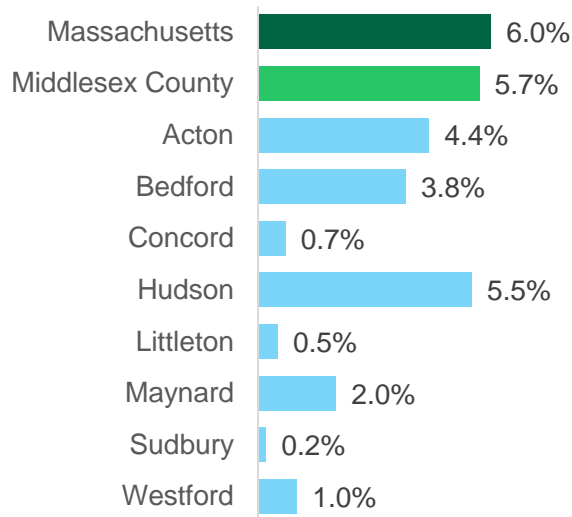
- There is a range across the service area towns in the percent of the population who speaks a language other than English at home.
- Almost a third of households in Acton speak a language other than English at home while under 10% do in Littleton and Maynard.

NOTE: Among population 5+ years of age.

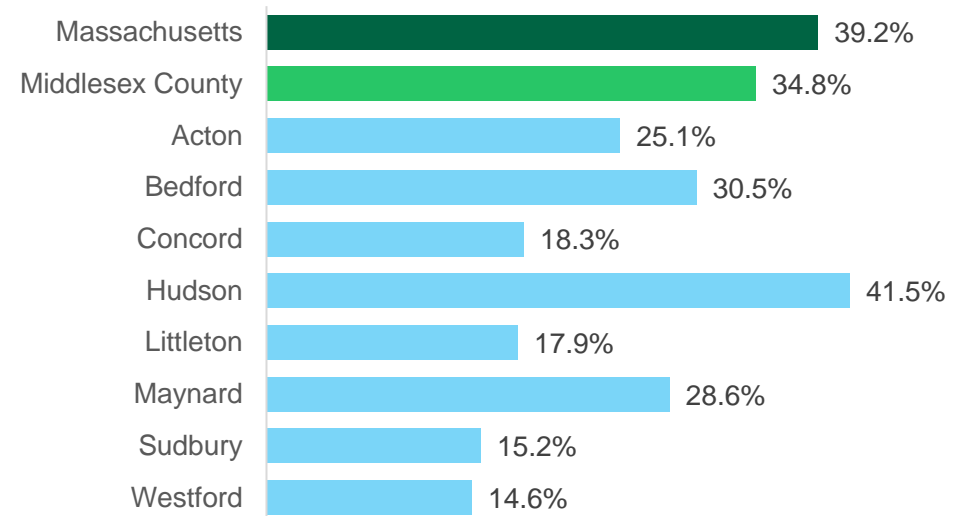
DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022

# Language

**Percent of Households with Limited English Speaking by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Most Populated Primary Service Area Towns, 2018-2022**



**Percent of Population that Lack English Proficiency Among Those Speaking Language(s) Other Than English at Home by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Most Populated Primary Service Area Towns, 2018-2022**



DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022

# Migrant Health

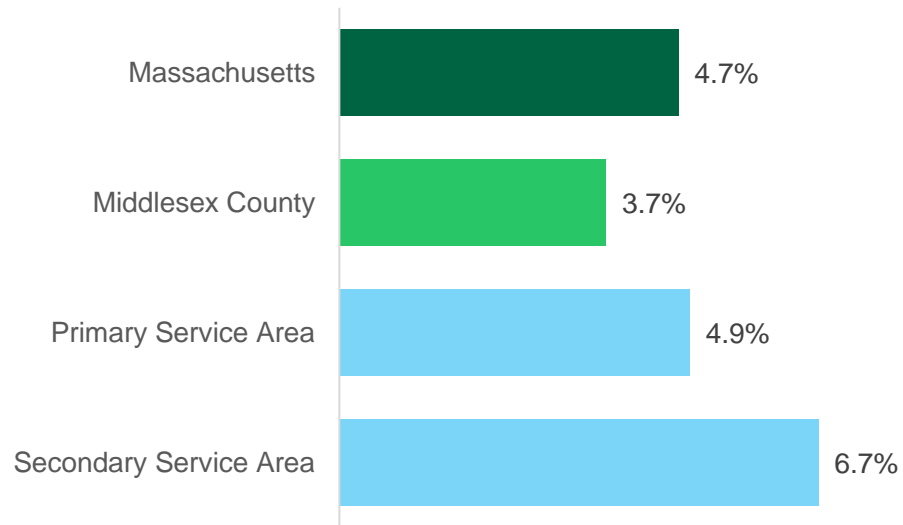
- Key informant interviewees noted that healthcare providers discriminate based on both someone's housing situation and their immigration status. **“The moment they hear it is a client at a shelter, they say they aren't taking new clients.”** They also noted that some clinics do not provide translation or interpretation services and that doctors often do not send reminders or information in someone's native language.

*“I feel like the town systems are being stressed a bit by more folks coming in – not necessarily bad, it just reveals cracks in the system.”*

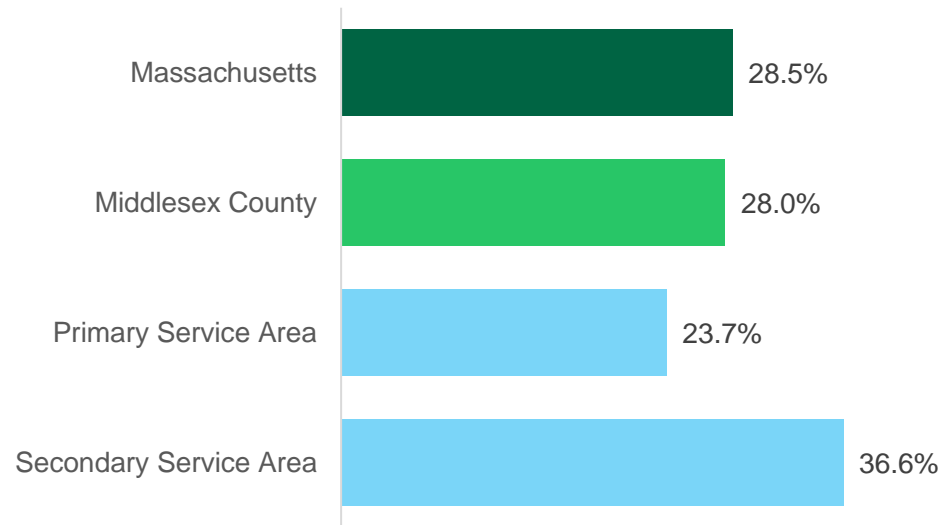
*- Focus Group Participant*

# Veteran Status

## Population with Veterans Status, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Service Areas, 2018-2022



## Veterans with a Disability, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Service Areas, 2018-2022



DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022



# **Social, Economic, and Environmental Context**



# Social, Economic, and Environmental Context

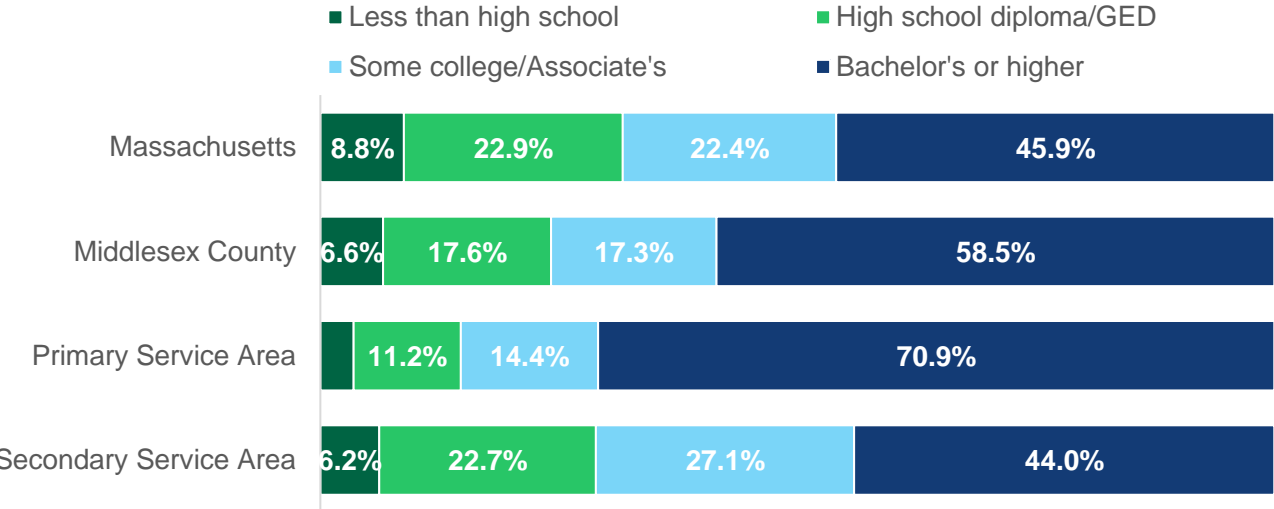
This section includes data related to the social, economic, and environmental context of the Emerson service area.

These upstream factors have a strong downstream influence on individual and community health. For example, income, employment, and cost of living all impact a person's ability to afford necessary health care services. The built environment, including transportation, can impact a community's ability to access employment, food, and health care.

Understanding these factors is key to understanding the health and wellbeing of a community in the present, as well as how it may be impacted in the future within this context.

# Education

## Educational Attainment Among Age 25+, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Service Areas, 2018-2022

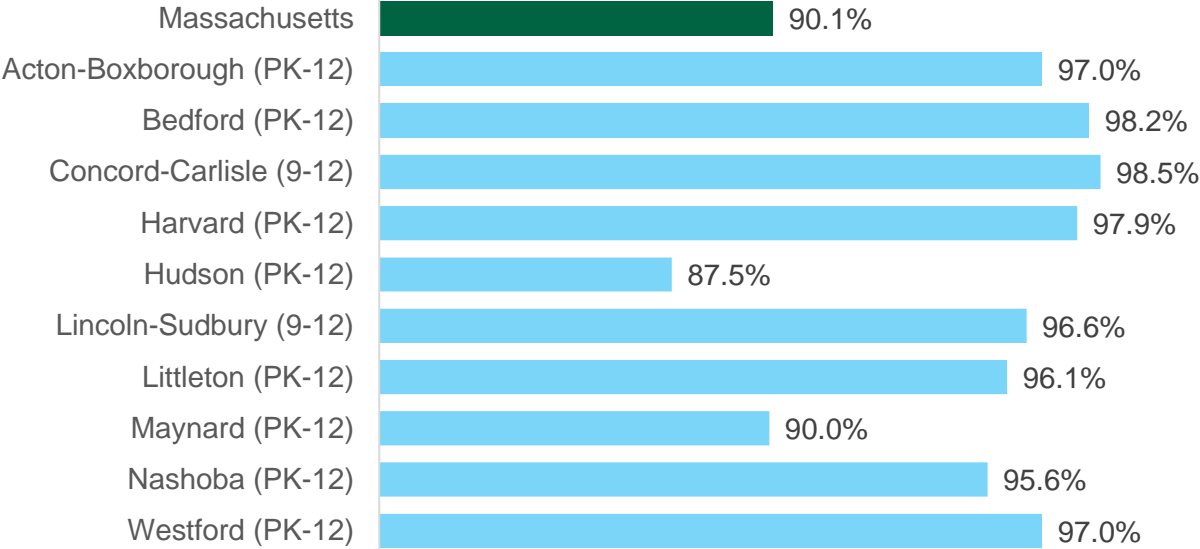


- Many noted that the school systems in the area are considered to provide high quality education, with some noting that is specifically why they moved to the area (especially in Acton).

NOTE: Labels for categories with 5% or less have been omitted in this figure  
DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022

# Education

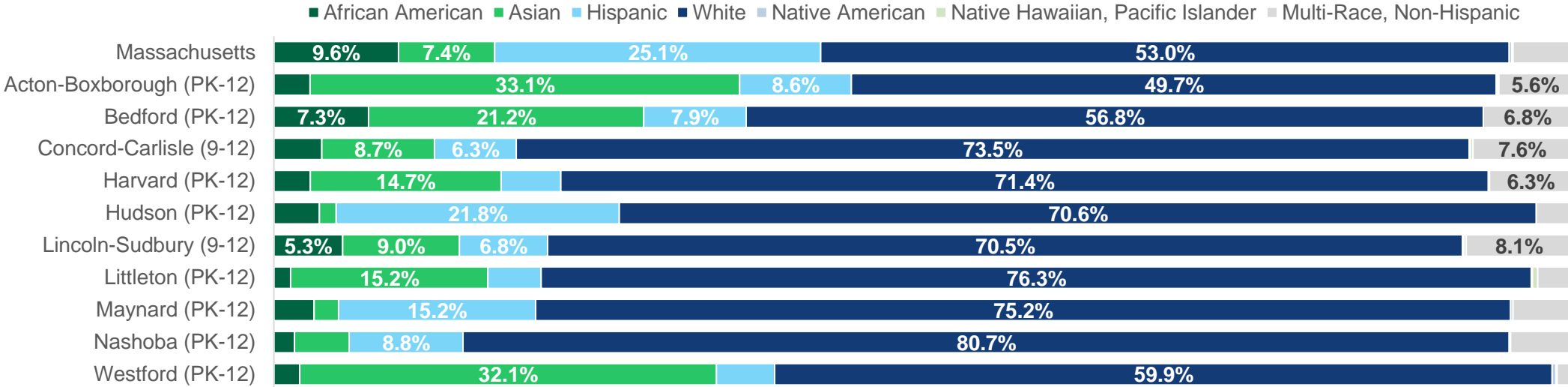
## High School Graduation Rates, by Massachusetts and Primary Service Area School Districts, 2022



DATA SOURCE: MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School and District Profiles, 2022

# Education

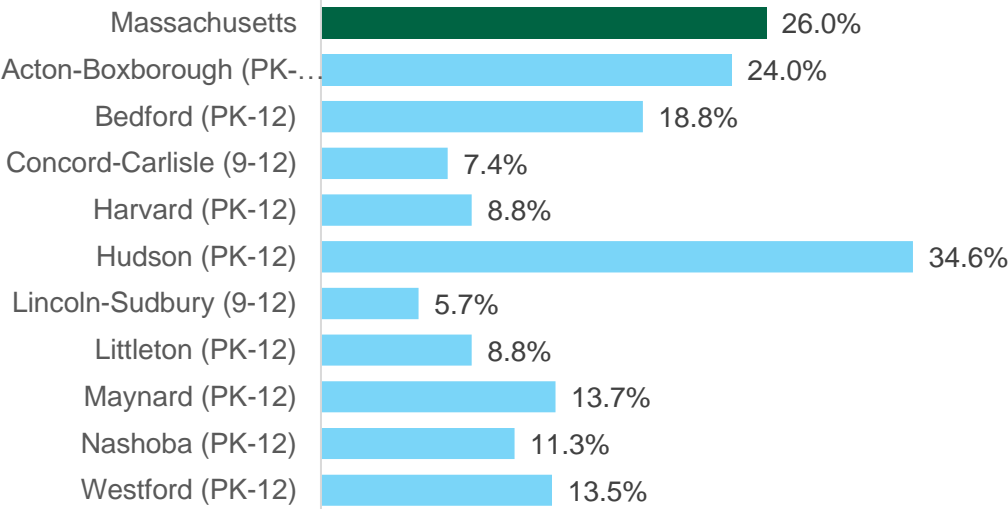
## Percent Student Population by Race/Ethnicity, by Massachusetts and Primary Service Area School Districts, 2022



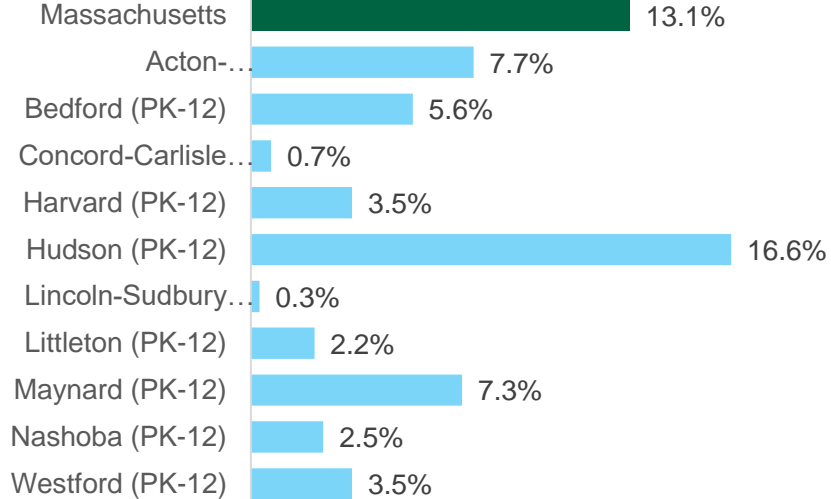
NOTE: Labels for categories with 5% or less have been omitted in this figure  
 DATA SOURCE: MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School and District Profiles, 2022

# Education

**Percentage of Student Population with First Language Not English, by Massachusetts and Primary Service Area School Districts, 2022-2023 Academic Year**



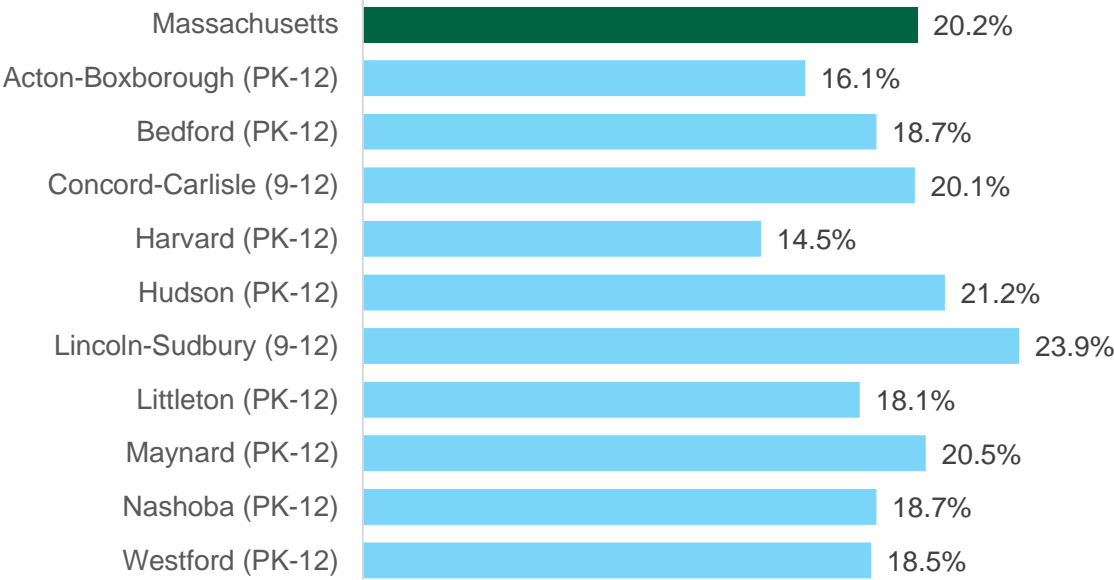
**Percentage of Student Population as English Language Learners, by Massachusetts and Primary Service Area School Districts, 2022-2023 Academic Year**



DATA SOURCE: MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School and District Profiles, 2022

# Education

## Percentage of Student Population with Disability, by Massachusetts and Primary Service Area School Districts, 2022-2023 Academic Year

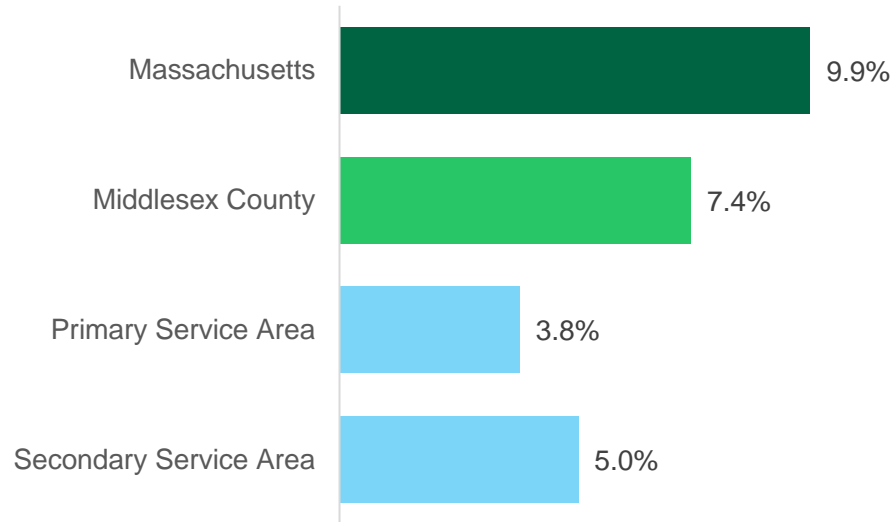


***“If you have a child who has special needs and needs services, it tends to have better services than other areas.”***  
- Focus Group Participant

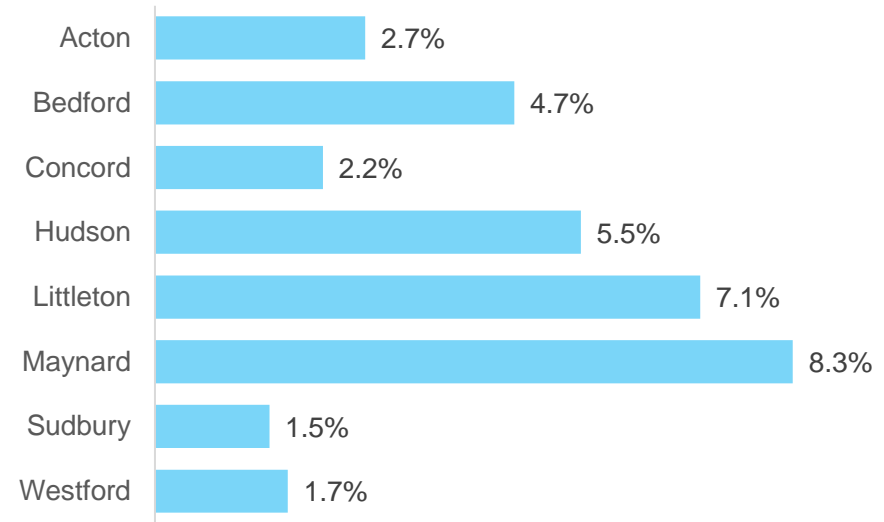
DATA SOURCE: MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School and District Profiles, 2022

# Poverty

**Percent of Individuals Below Poverty Level, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Service Areas, 2018-2022**



**Percent of Individuals Below Poverty Level, by Most Populated Primary Service Area Towns, 2018-2022**

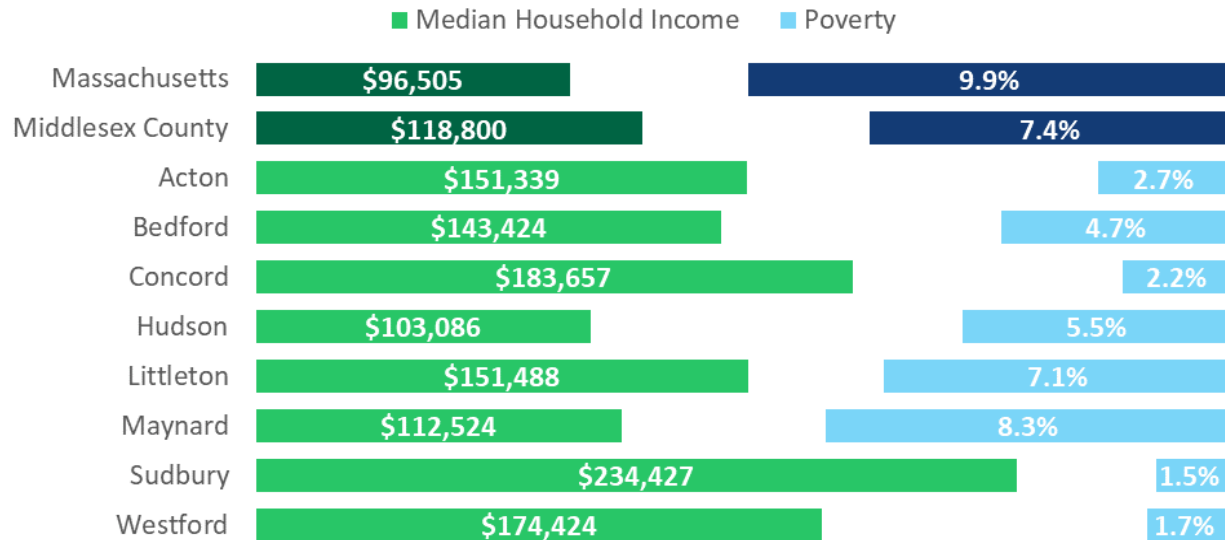


DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022



# Income

## Median Household Income and Percent Individuals Below Poverty Level, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Most Populated Towns in Primary Service Area, 2018-2022

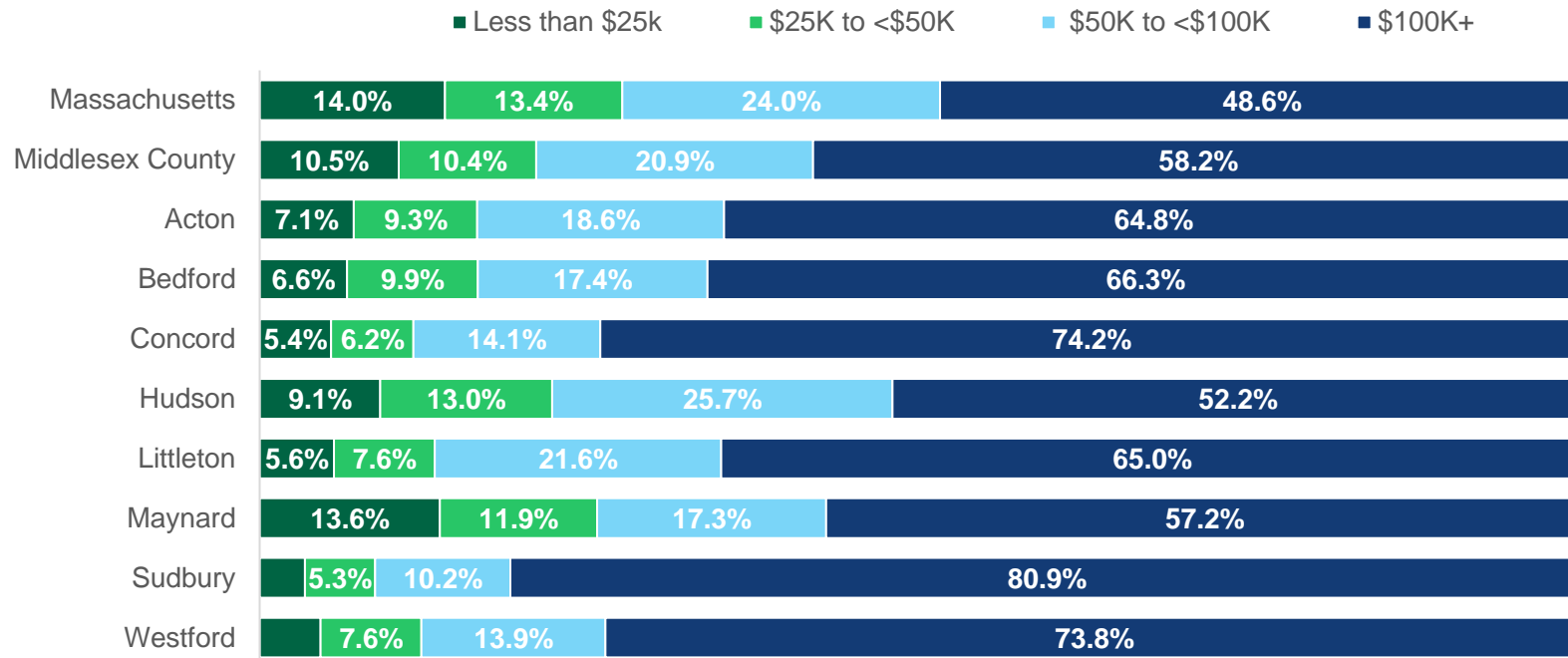


- All of the most populated towns in the service area have higher median household incomes and lower percentages of individuals living below the poverty line compared to the state.

DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022

# Income

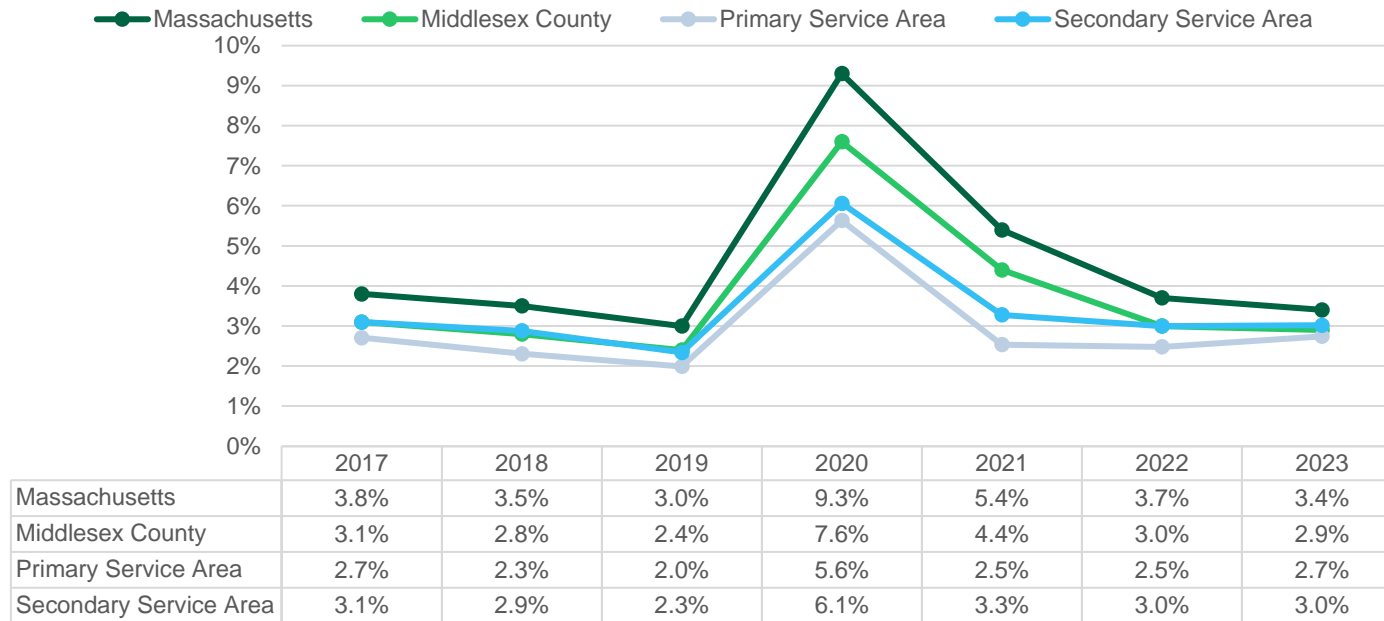
## Household Income Distribution, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Most Populated Primary Service Area Towns, 2018-2022



NOTE: Labels for categories with 5% or less have been omitted in this figure  
 DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022

# Employment

## Overall Unemployment by Year and Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Service Areas, 2017-2023

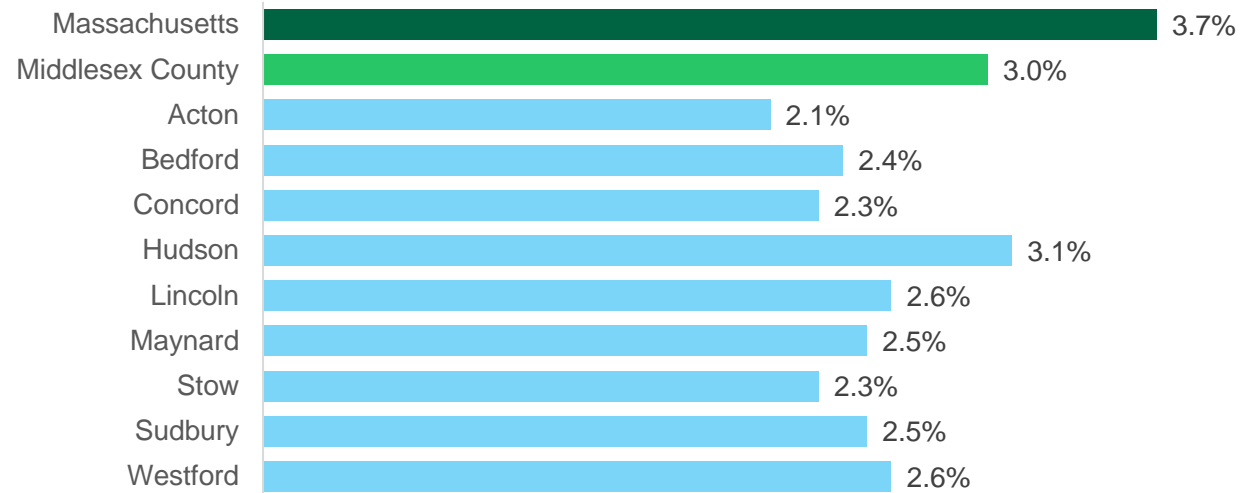


- Unemployment peaked in 2020, but rates in the service areas returned to pre-COVID levels by 2022.

DATA SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, 2017-2023

# Employment

## Percent of Population Unemployed, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Most Populated Primary Service Area Towns, 2018-2022



DATA SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, 2022

# Cost of Living

The rising and high cost of living, particularly the availability of housing – especially affordable housing – and cost of food, emerged as a key concern impacting residents of the Emerson service area. These issues were described as impacting residents across the board, but older adults, young families with children, and the migrant populations were seen as being particularly impacted by these challenges.

# Affordability and Cost of Living

Some interviewees and focus group participants noted that the cost of living has been increasing, with one person noting that wages haven't been increasing at the same rate. High taxes were also mentioned as a factor impacting households.

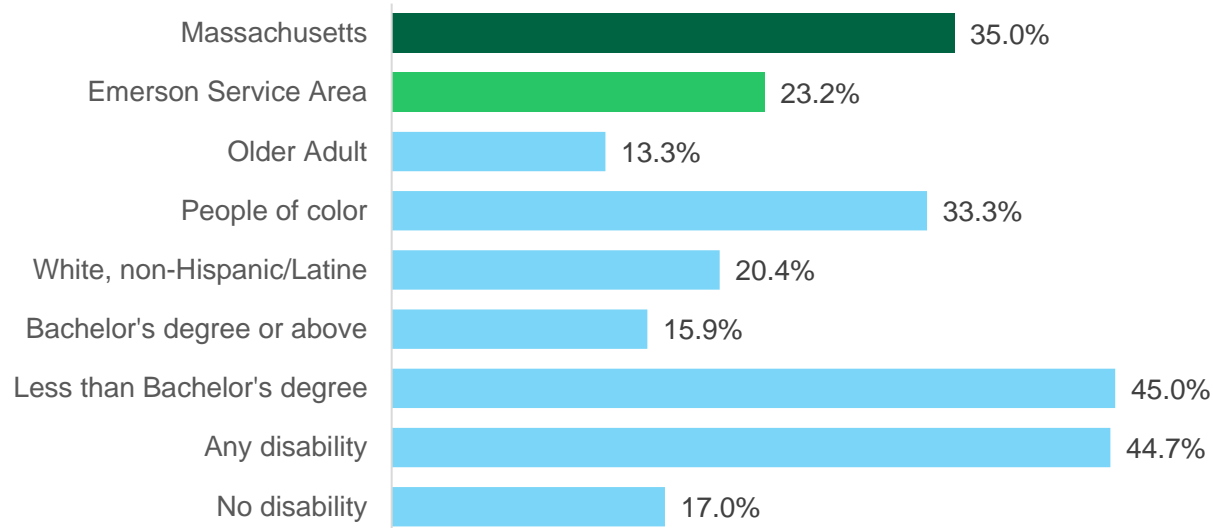
One interviewee described how people don't necessarily have a financial safety net when dealing with unexpected circumstances and that this can snowball into a crisis.

**“All of us are experiencing the effects of the increase on pricing.”**

*- Interview Participant*

# Affordability of Basic Needs

## Percent Adults Reporting Having Trouble Paying for Basic Needs, by Massachusetts, Emerson Service Area and Selected Populations, 2023



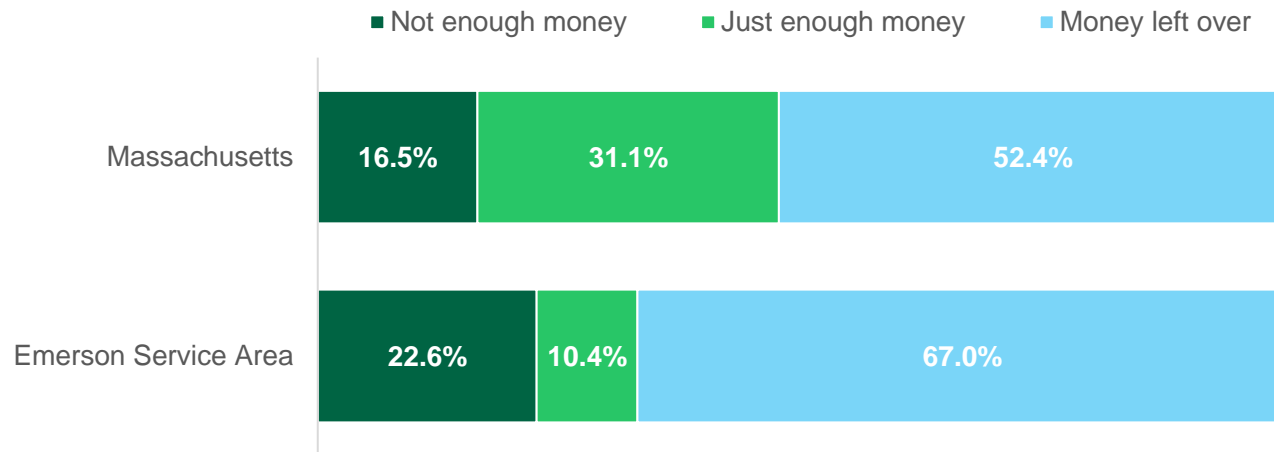
- While lower than the state overall, still almost a quarter of respondents in the Emerson service area reported trouble paying for basic needs, it was about double that for those with less than a Bachelor's degree and with any disability.

NOTE: Emerson service area includes both primary and secondary areas. Selected populations represents data within Emerson Service Area. People of color includes individuals identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic/Latine, Black or African American, non-Hispanic/Latine, Hispanic or Latine/a/o, Middle Eastern or North African, Multiracial, non-Hispanic/Latine, or Other race, non-Hispanic/Latine. Basic needs includes childcare/school, food or groceries, healthcare, housing, technology, transportation, or utilities.

DATA SOURCE: Community Health Equity Survey (CHES), 2023

# Monthly Finances

## Percent of Adults Reporting End of Month Finances, by Massachusetts and Emerson Service Area, 2023



- Respondents in the Emerson service area reported having not enough money or money left over more than the state overall, with fewer reporting having just enough money.

NOTE: Emerson service area includes both primary and secondary areas.  
DATA SOURCE: Community Health Equity Survey (CHES), 2023



# Housing Affordability

Housing came up as a challenge in most of the key informant interviews and focus groups across a range of communities within the service area. Many noted that the high housing costs makes it difficult for young families or low-income households to move to the area, or that they're being priced out of the areas, while the high taxes have impacted the older adults / seniors who would like to stay in the area but can't find lower cost options to downsize.

**“It’s the political aspect of things - affordable housing but “not in my backyard”. You need to make 80K for a family of two.**

**When people say affordable housing, I say “define affordable.”**

*- Focus Group Participant*

**“It is not affordable in any of the cities around here.”**

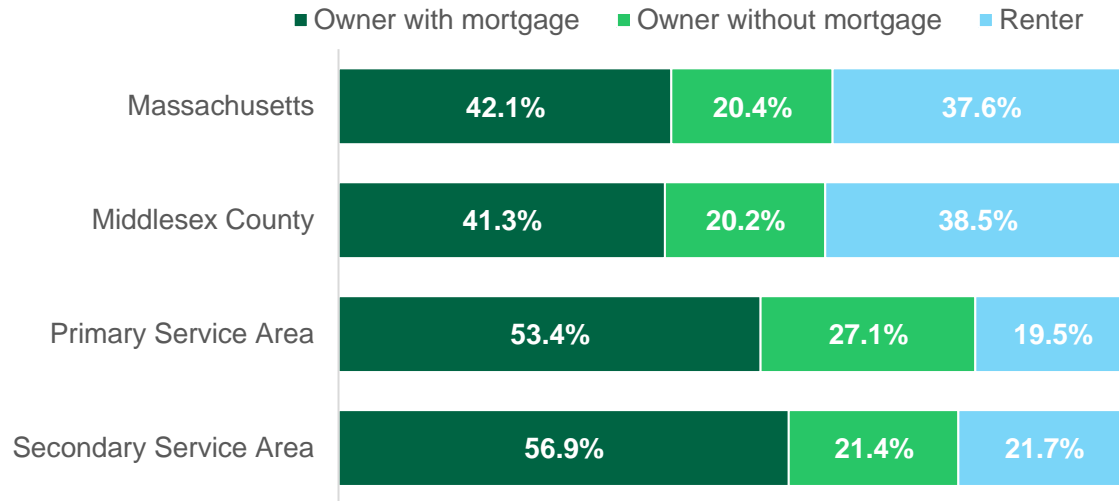
*- Interview Participant*

**“A lot of these people don’t necessarily want to be in these homes anymore because their kids have moved out, but they can’t downsize.”**

*- Focus Group Participant*

# Housing

## Housing Occupancy, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Service Areas, 2018-2022

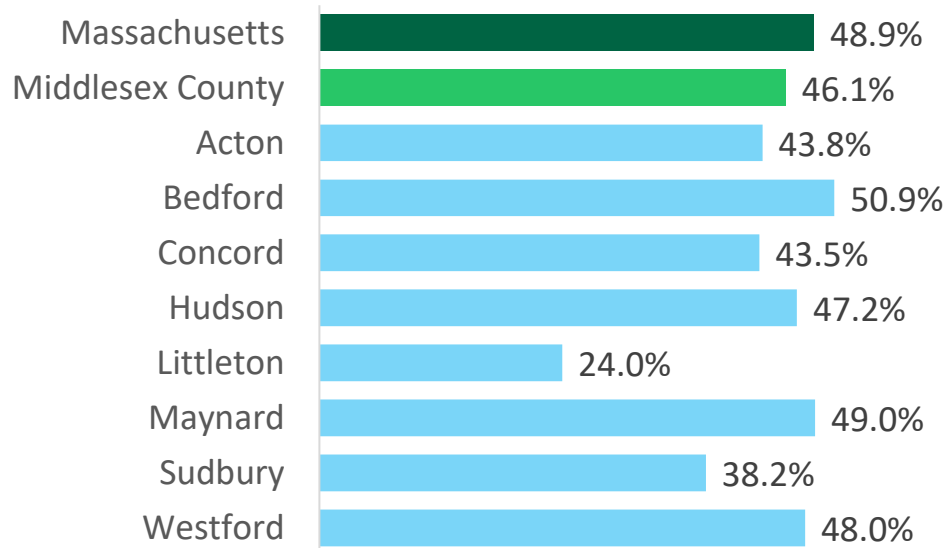


DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022

- The Emerson service area has a higher percentage of homeowners with and without mortgages than the state overall.

# Housing

## Households Spending More Than 30% of Income on Housing, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Most Populated Primary Service Towns, 2018-2022



- As with the state overall, nearly half of households in many towns in the Emerson service area spend more than 30% of income on housing.

DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022

# Food Access

Focus group participants and interviewees acknowledged the rising cost of food and the need for local food pantries in the area.

Focus group participants generally voiced a gratitude to the food pantries and the volunteers in the area for providing supplemental food options for community members, although there was a mention that it can be difficult to utilize the food bank options if there are dietary restrictions. Another participant mentioned that they have a micro-pantry in town that has a “take what you need, leave what you can” function and it’s always filled with items from the food pantry – indicating that people using the food banks are trading among each other through this micro-pantry.

# Food Access

## Stigma

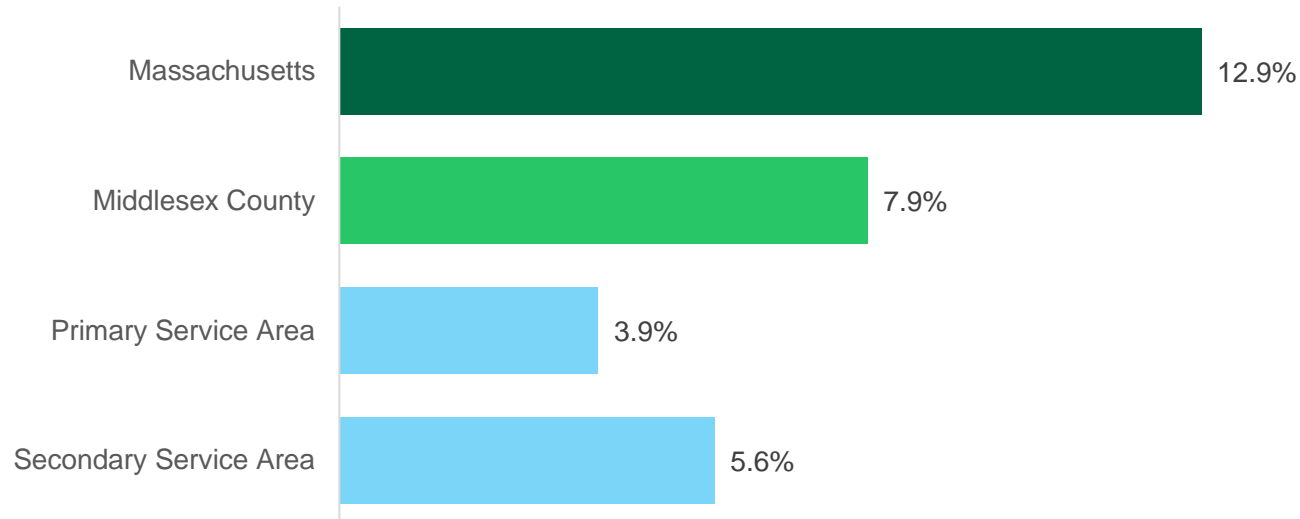
Some food pantries have worked to reduce the stigma related to utilizing the food banks by reducing the identifying info needed to participate and this has resulted in a large increase in households utilizing the food banks. Another key informant mentioned that they accept food donations at their organization and encourage community members to take these home which was viewed as more socially acceptable.

**“A lot of older folks are reluctant to go to the food pantry.”**

*- Interview Participant*

# Food Access

## Percent Households Receiving Food Stamps/SNAP, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Service Areas, 2018-2022

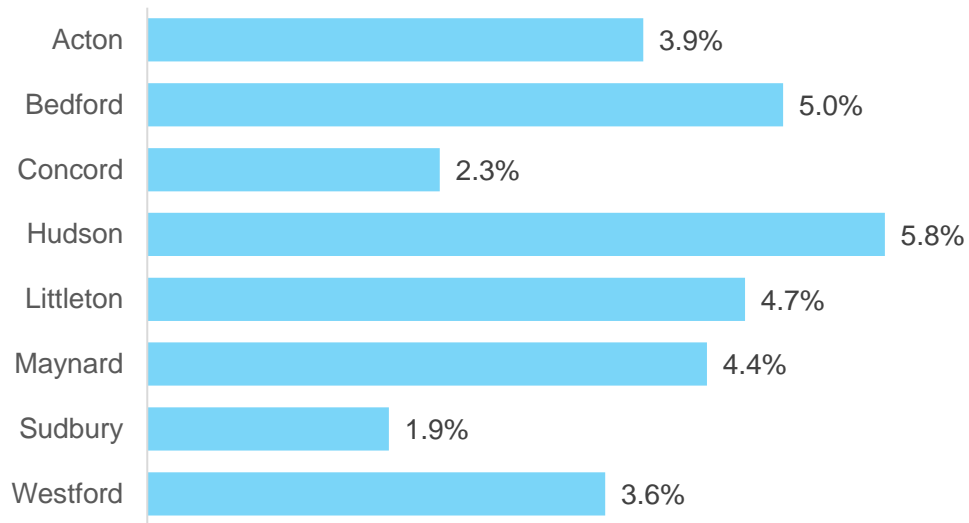


- Fewer households receive SNAP in the Emerson service area than the state or Middlesex County.

DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022

# Food Access

## Percent Households Receiving Food Stamps/SNAP, by Most Populated Primary Service Area Towns, 2018-2022

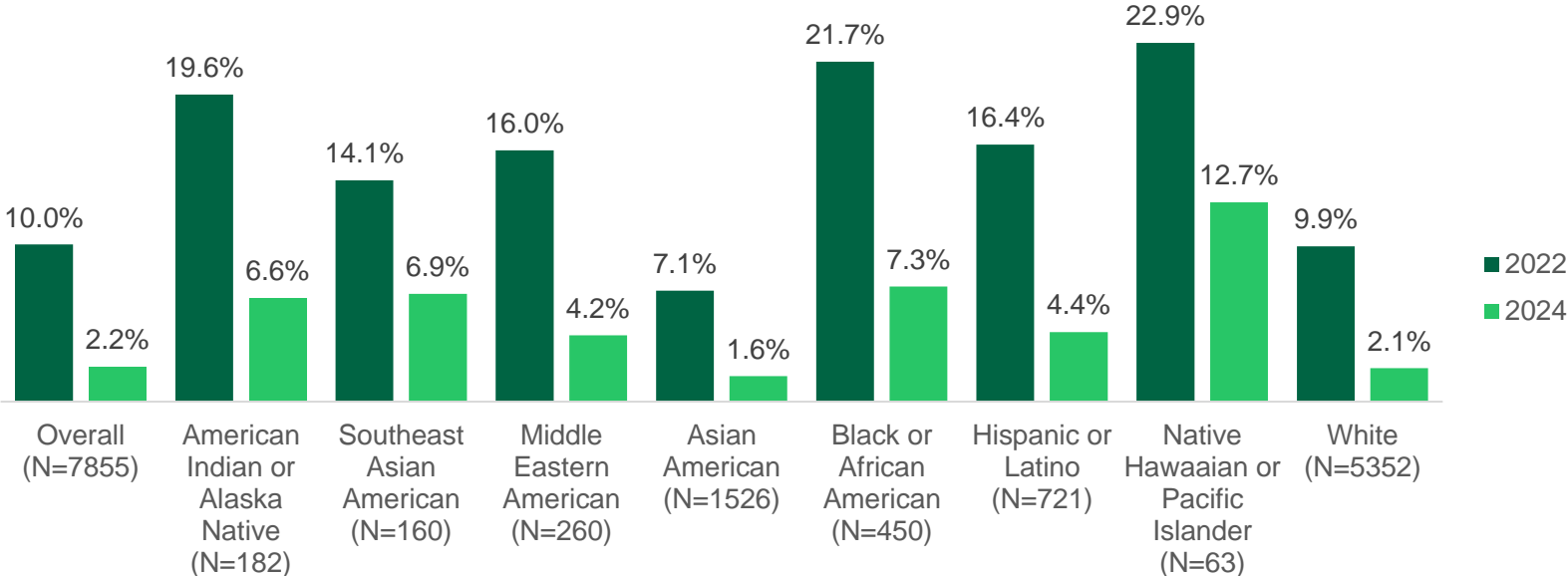


There was a general frustration among focus group participants that **SNAP policies need to be updated with inflation rates** and it is difficult to survive on even the maximum allotment of \$200 a month. One person mentioned how there is an incentive to not make more money in order to keep your SNAP benefits.

DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022

# Food Access

## Percent of Youth Went Without 1+ Meal in the Past 30 Days Because There Wasn't Enough Food, by Race/Ethnicity, 2022 and 2024



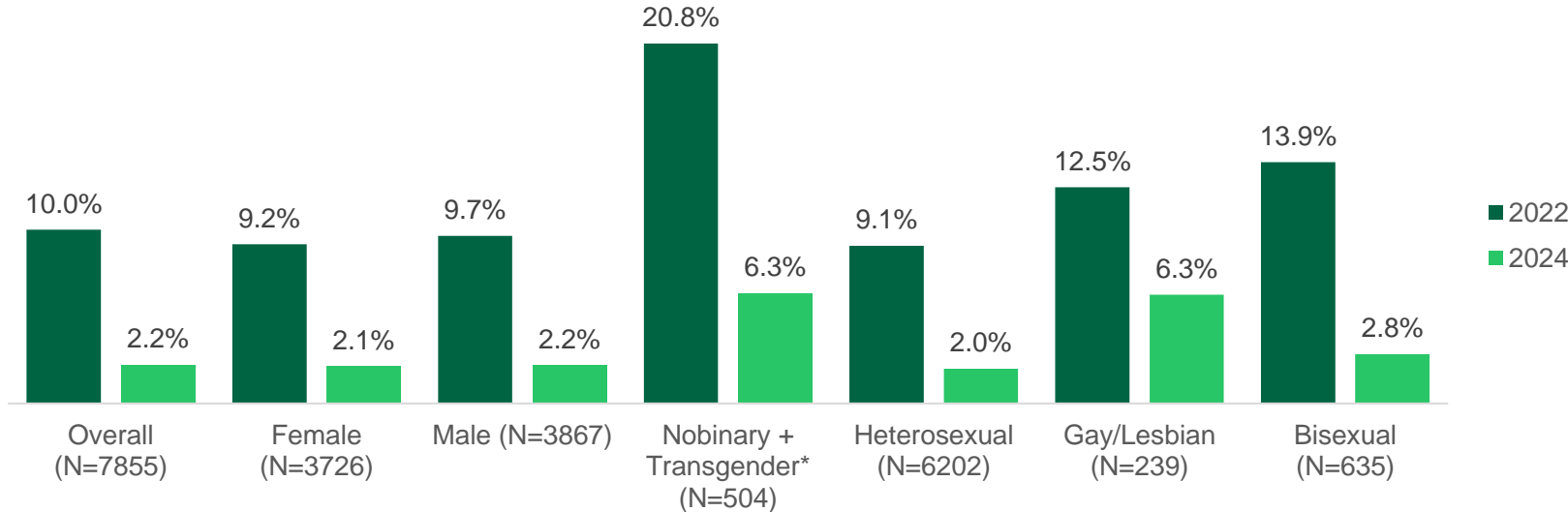
- The percent of youth who went without one or more meals in the past 30 days decreased from 2022 to 2024, but the disparities persisted.

DATA SOURCE: Emerson Hospital Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2022 and 2024



# Food Access

**Percent of Youth Went Without 1+ Meal in the Past 30 Days Because There Wasn't Enough Food, by Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation, 2022 and 2024**



DATA SOURCE: Emerson Hospital Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2022 and 2024

# Built Environment

The built environment, where we work, live, and play, plays an important role in the physical and mental health of communities. Factors in the built environment, such as the presence of sidewalks, accessible public transportation, and public green space, can dictate someone's physical activity level and whether they can access health care or other social services. Transportation emerged as a key concern for the Emerson service area.

# Transportation

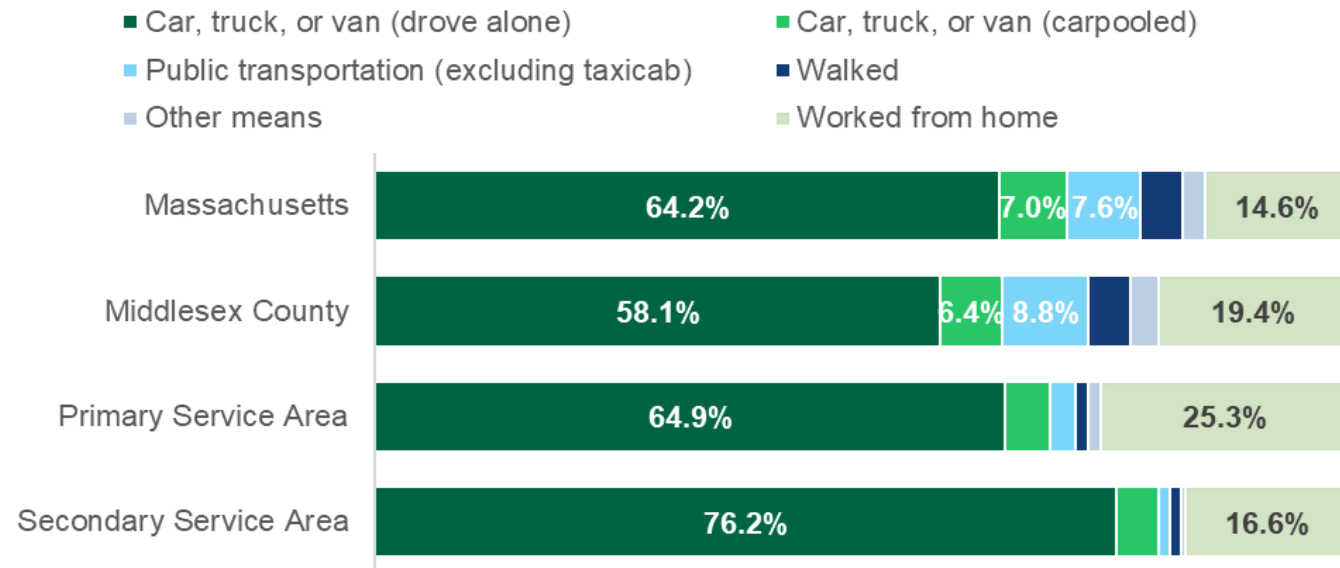
Transportation was mentioned as a challenge in each of the key informant interviews and focus groups. It was noted that a lack of transportation impacted people's abilities to reach medical appointments, food pantries, jobs, social activities, and the courthouse.

Many of the key informant interviews highlighted the difficulties of reaching medical appointments when patients do not have access to a vehicle, with one mentioning that there is no bus route to get to Emerson.

Seniors were especially highlighted as a group that may be isolated due to not being able to drive or not having access to transit.

# Transportation

## Transportation to Work Among Workers over 16 Years, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Service Areas, 2018-2022

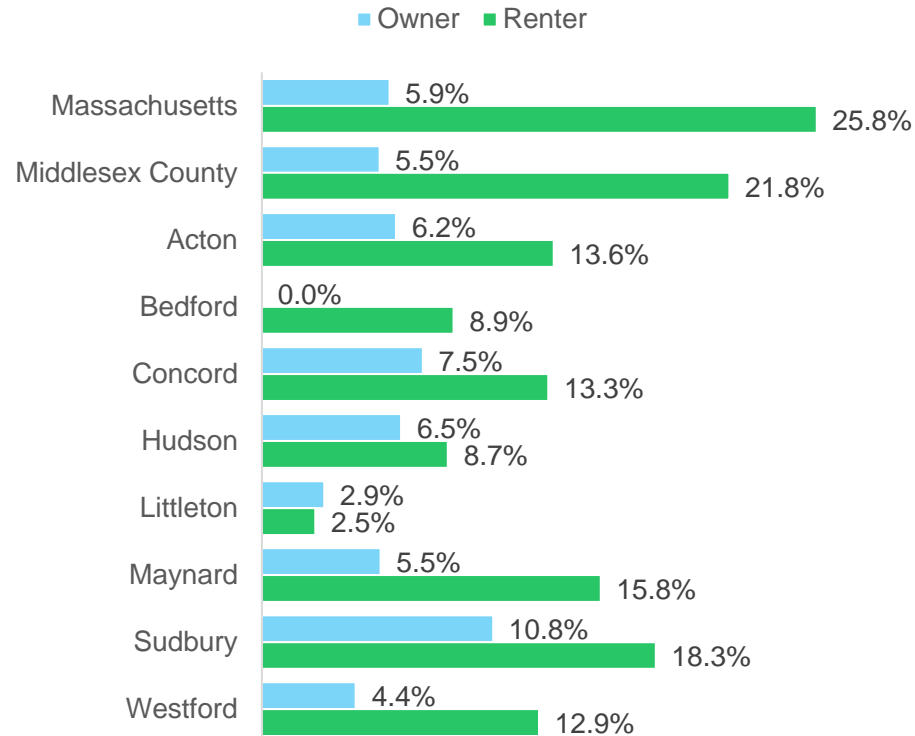


- Driving alone to work was more common in the Emerson service area, especially in the secondary service area.

NOTE: Labels for categories with 5% or less have been omitted in this figure  
DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022

# Transportation

## Households Without Access to a Vehicle, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Most Populated Primary Service Towns, 2018-2022



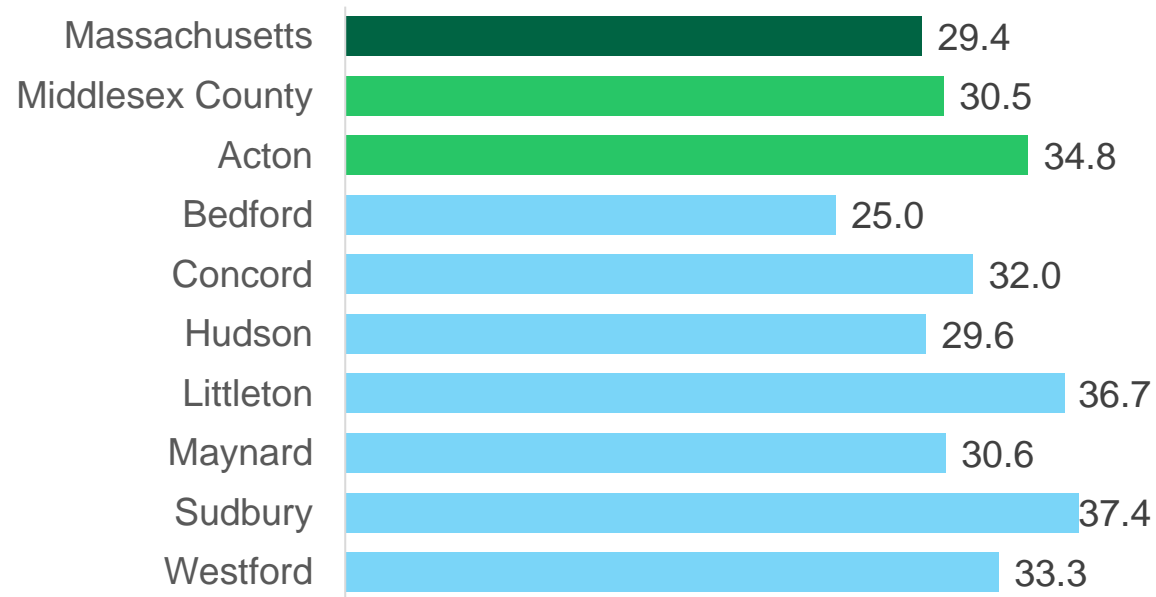
DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022

**“It’s a catch-22, you can’t afford a vehicle without a job, and you can’t get to a job without a vehicle.”**

*- Focus Group Participant*

# Transportation

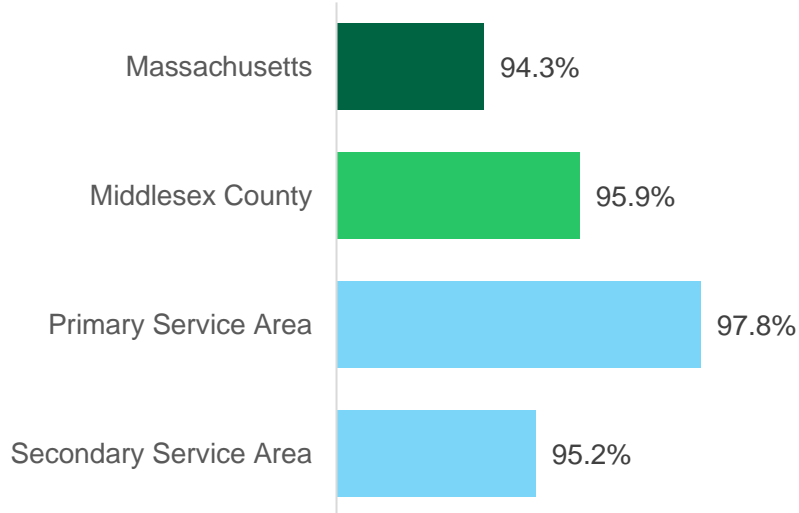
## Mean Travel Time to Work in Minutes, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Most Populated Primary Service Towns, 2018-2022



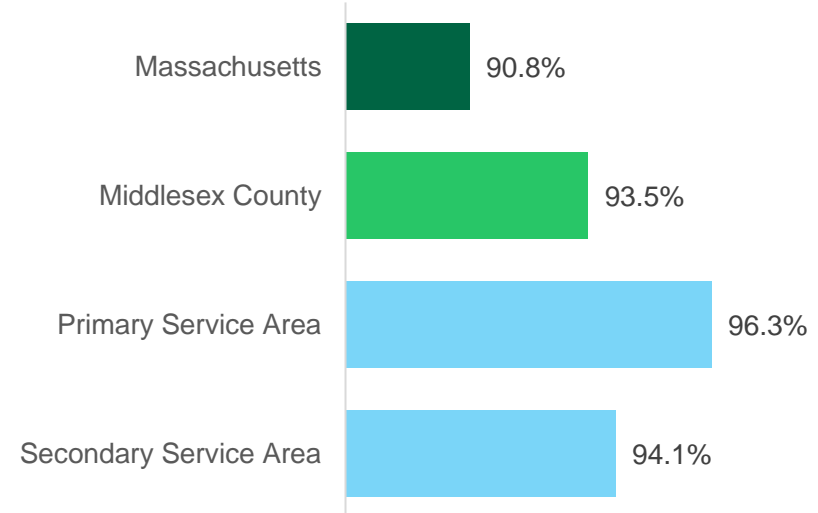
DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022

# Technology

**Percent of Households with a Computer, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Services Areas, 2018-2022**



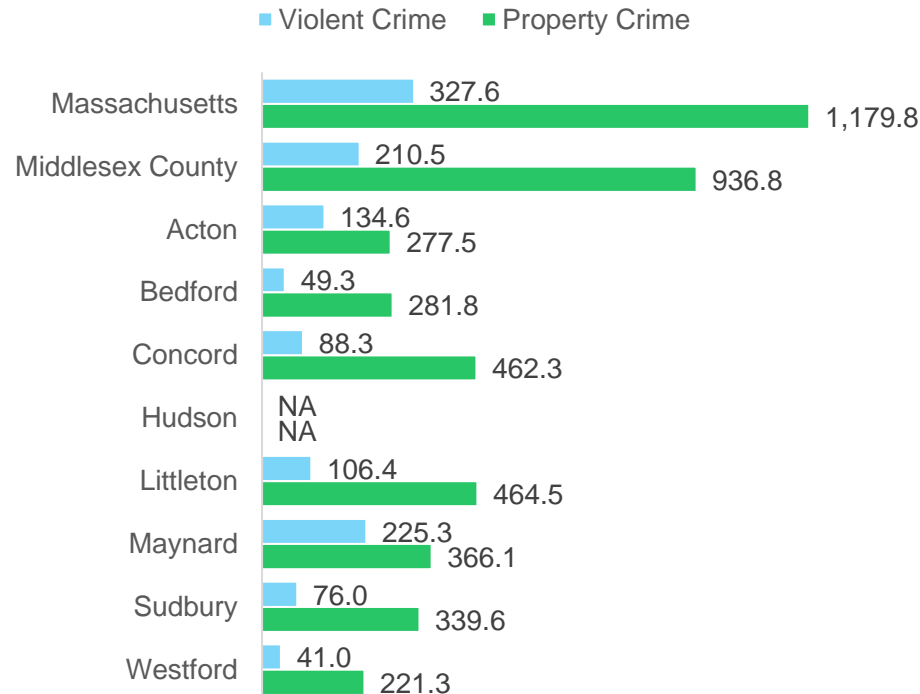
**Percent of Households with Internet Access, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Services Areas, 2018-2022**



DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022

# Violence and Crime

## Violent and Property Crime Rates per 100,000 Population, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Most Populated Primary Service Towns, 2019



- Violent crime and property crime is lower in the most populated towns in the primary service area than the state or Middlesex County.

NOTE: Data not available for Hudson.

DATA SOURCE: Federal Bureau of Investigation, Criminal Justice Information Services Division, 2019 Crime in the United States, Offenses Known to Law Enforcement, 2019

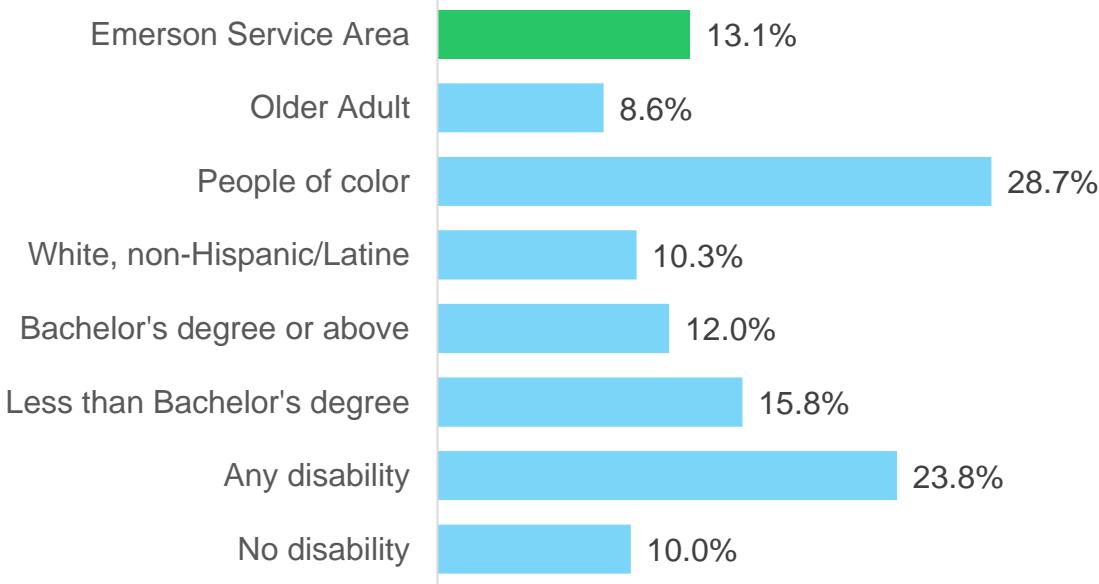


# Diversity, Equity, and Community Cohesion

Institutional racism, economic inequality, discriminatory policies, and historical oppression of specific groups are a few of the factors that drive health inequities in the U.S. Barriers to opportunities to services, supports, and resources may be disproportionately concentrated among certain populations, such as communities of color, low-income populations, persons with disabilities, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) community. Issues of racism and discrimination still exist within the service area and can impact individuals' mental health, well-being, and sense of belonging.

# Discrimination

## Percent of Adults Reporting Experiencing Discrimination in the Past Year, by Massachusetts and Emerson Service Areas, 2023



- More than one in ten respondents reported experiencing discrimination in the past year.
- Those who identified as a person of color and with any disability reported higher percents of experiencing discrimination.

NOTE: Emerson service area includes both primary and secondary areas. Selected populations represents data within Emerson Service Area. People of color includes individuals identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic/Latine, Black or African American, non-Hispanic/Latine, Hispanic or Latine/a/o, Middle Eastern or North African, Multiracial, non-Hispanic/Latine, or Other race, non-Hispanic/Latine.

DATA SOURCE: Community Health Equity Survey (CHES), 2023

# Community Cohesion

- The main strength noted by interviewees and participants was a strong sense of community and support throughout the area. Some noted that the people are generally welcoming and friendly. There's a general feeling that neighbors are willing to help each other out when needed.
- Others commented that it can be hard to build social connections, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.

***“There’s a welcoming attitude and mentality that nobody’s treated like a complete outsider in terms of being a resident of the town.”***

*- Focus Group Participant*

***“People are disconnected from each other now. Not feeling community can set people up for a lot of depression and other difficulties.”***

*- Focus Group Participant*

# Community Cohesion

- There were also a few discussions of isolation and political polarization.
  - Some community members feel disconnected from one another and that this can be another factor in how people are impacted by mental health issues. Supports for seniors was also highlighted as a specific group of people who may struggle with isolation.
  - A few focus group members identified a lack of community center space where people can gather and socialize.
  - “This is probably due to covid but recently there’s been a lot less connection between people of the community. When I was growing up, there was a sense that you belong. Now there’s a little bit less of that.”

***“The polarization of politics have trickled down into local communities. I feel like people are having more of a knee jerk reaction to each other now than they should.”***

*- Focus Group Participant*

# Community Cohesion

- Multiple focus group participants noted the surge of issues in swastikas, antisemitism, and backlash among Asian residents during COVID.
- A few focus group participants also noted that they believed the Acton and Boxborough area to be “more tolerant and accepting” than other areas where racial inequities “are much more pronounced”.
- Another participant noted that in moving to Acton, it was difficult to do certain things related to cultural food or celebrations but that they’ve built a community here and “it can be a good example for the whole country how **we can live together in diverse richness and celebrate each others festivals**. It can be a great community. We can be welcoming of immigrants, that’s the spirit of America.”

*“You hear about things happening in the school and the superintendent has to send letters about swastikas and you keep hearing about these things and maybe kids are doing things to get a rise or maybe not.”*

*- Focus Group Participant*



# **Community Health Outcomes and Behaviors**

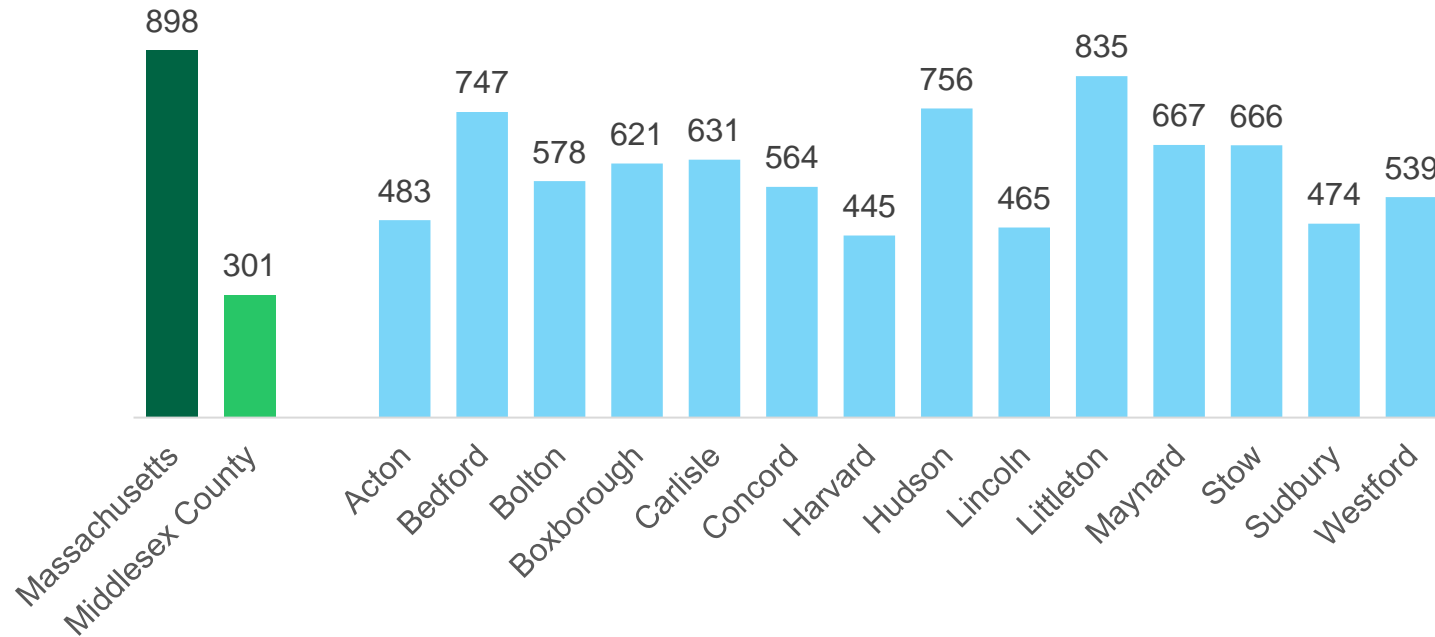
# Community Health Outcomes and Behaviors

This section includes data related to physical health outcomes, as well as health care access and lifestyle behaviors that influence our health.

Understanding the health status of a community can show where gaps and needs are in current systems. Individual's health plays an important role in people's day-to-day lives – it can impact employment, education, safety, and engagement with community and resources.

# Mortality

## Overall Mortality Rate per 100,000, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Primary Service Area Towns, 2021



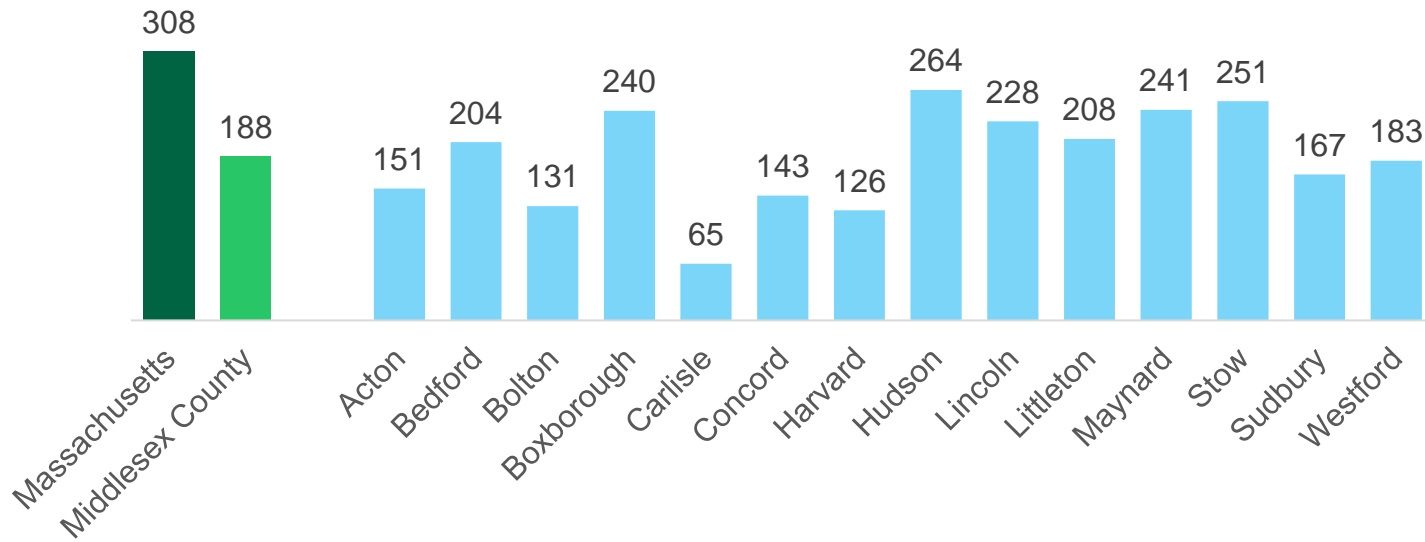
- Mortality rates were lower across all towns in the primary service area than the state, but higher than Middlesex County.

DATA SOURCE: MA DPH Registry of Vital Records and Statistics Death Report, 2021



# Mortality

## Premature Mortality (Deaths before Age 75) Rate per 100,000, by Massachusetts (2021), Middlesex County (2021), and Primary Service Area Towns, 2020



- Premature mortality was also lower across all towns in the primary service area compared to the state.

DATA SOURCE: MA Department of Health, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics Death Report, 2020 and 2021

# Mortality

## Leading Causes of Death, by Age-Adjusted Death Rate per 100,000, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Most Populated Primary Service Area Towns, 2021

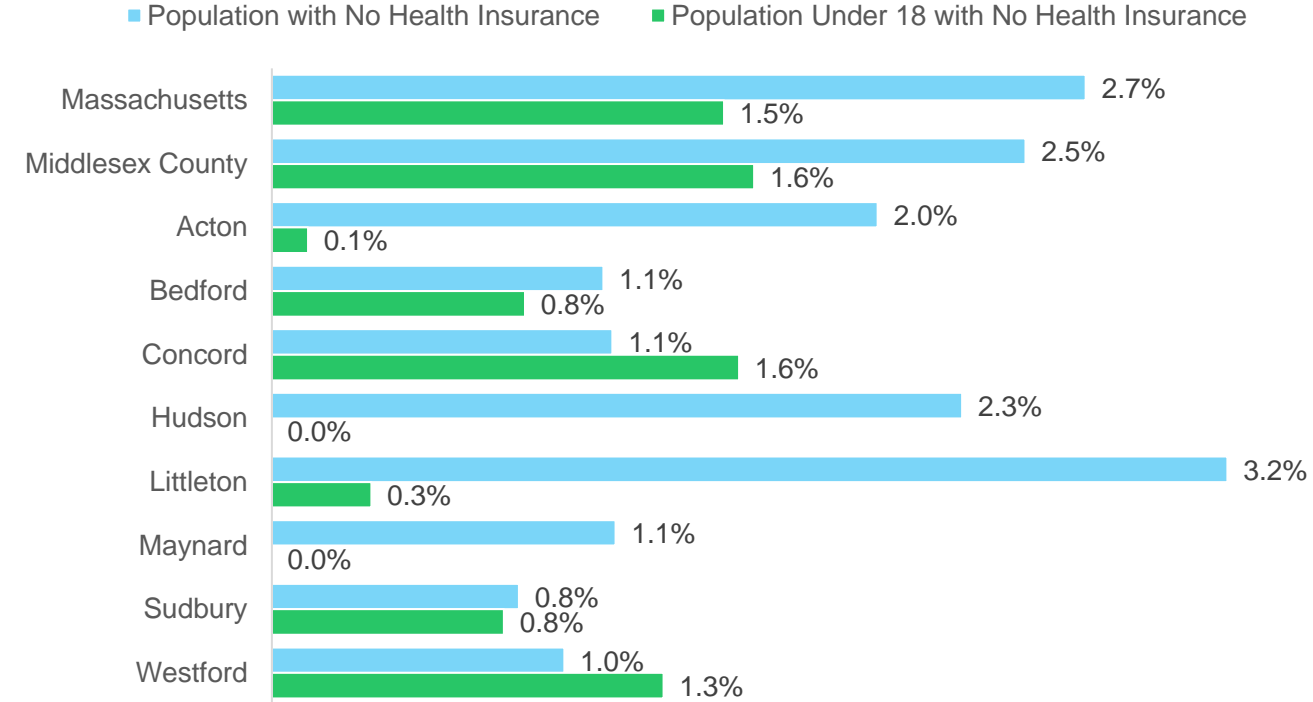
Massachusetts	Acton	Bedford	Concord	Hudson	Littleton	Maynard	Sudbury	Westford
Cancer (135.2)	Cancer (82.5)	Cancer (104.6)	Heart Disease (71.1)	Heart Disease (182.9)	Cancer (140.2)	Heart Disease (154.4)	Heart Disease (117.3)	Cancer (133.5)
Heart Disease (125.9)	Heart Disease (74.5)	Heart Disease (86.3)	Cancer (66.6)	Cancer (120.1)	Heart Disease (109.1)	Cancer (113.7)	Cancer (102.9)	Heart Disease (135.9)
COVID-19 (53.0)	Unintentional Injuries (34.7)	Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease (48.4)	COVID-19 (25.5)	Unintentional Injuries (50.1)	Suppressed	Unintentional Injuries (52.2)	Alzheimer's Disease (29.2)	Unintentional Injuries (55.6)
Unintentional Injuries (59.7)	Chronic Lower Respiratory Diseases (18.8)	Stroke (19.5)	Unintentional Injuries (22.3)	COVID-19 (32.5)	Suppressed	Suppressed	Stroke (26.2)	COVID-19 (25.9)
Chronic Lower Respiratory Diseases (26.1)	Stroke (17.7)	COVID-19 (20.5)	Alzheimer's Disease (10.4)	Chronic Lower Respiratory Diseases (25.8)	Suppressed	Suppressed	COVID-19 (20.5)	Diabetes Mellitus (26.0)

- The leading causes of death were similar in the primary service area towns compared to the state. Additional causes appeared in some towns: stroke, Alzheimer's disease, and diabetes mellitus.

DATA SOURCE: MA DPH Registry of Vital Records and Statistics Death Report, 2021

# Health Insurance

## Percent of Population and Population Under 18 with No Health Insurance, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and the Most Populated Towns in the Primary Service Area, 2022

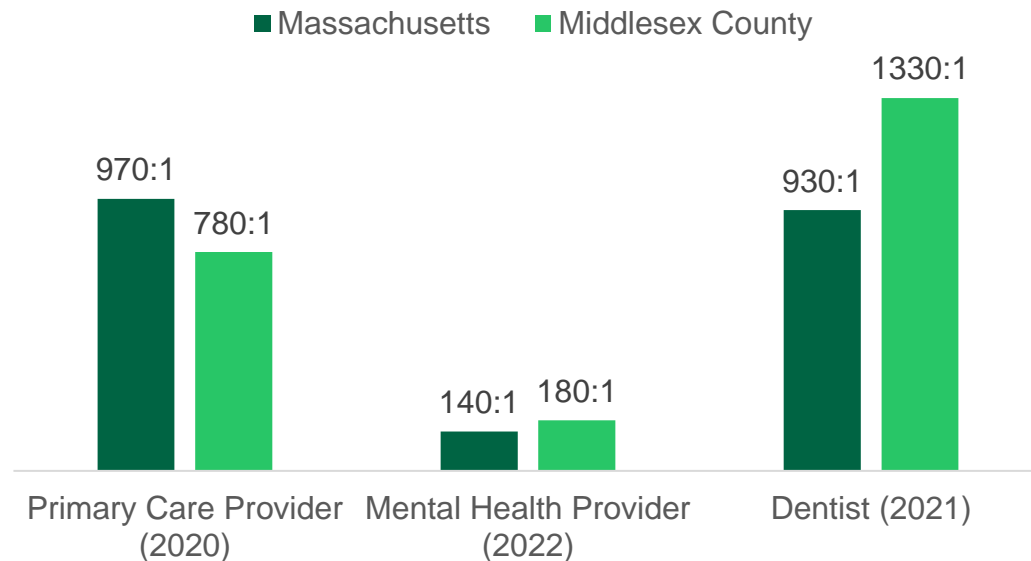


Even with health insurance, key informant interviewees and focus groups participants noted the cost with co-pays can still be a barrier to accessing services. From the provider point of view, insurance companies create a lot of confusion and complication - they are constantly changing the names of things, denying payments, dropping people’s insurance without notification.

DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates as cited by MA PHIT, 2018-2022

# Access to Health Care

## Ratio of Population to Primary Care Providers (2020), Mental Health Providers (2022), and Dentists (2021), by Massachusetts and Middlesex County



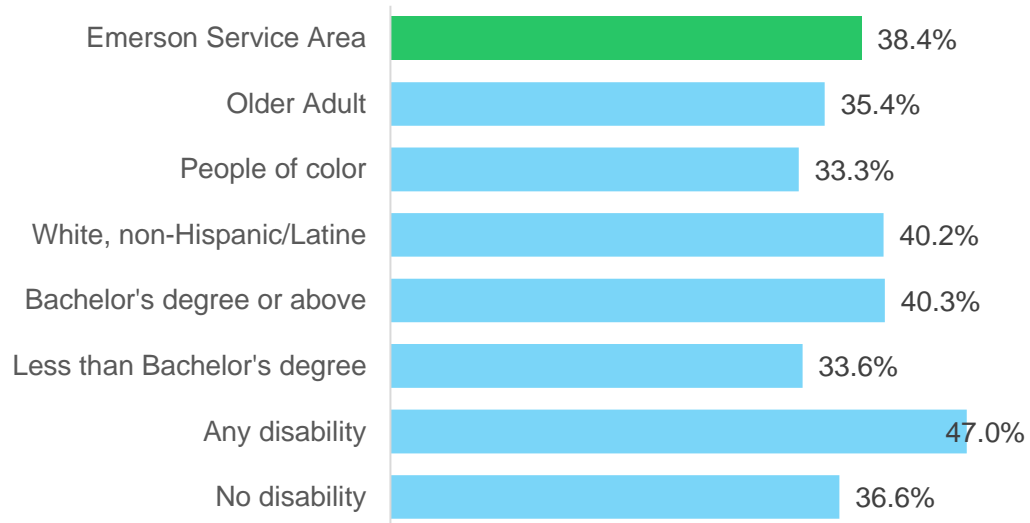
Some key informant interviewees noted the difficulty in a lack of transportation, the long wait times for appointments, and that it is easier to find pediatricians for their clients compared to primary care providers.

One focus group participant noted that MassHealth is great overall but that it's really hard to find a dentist that accepts MassHealth.

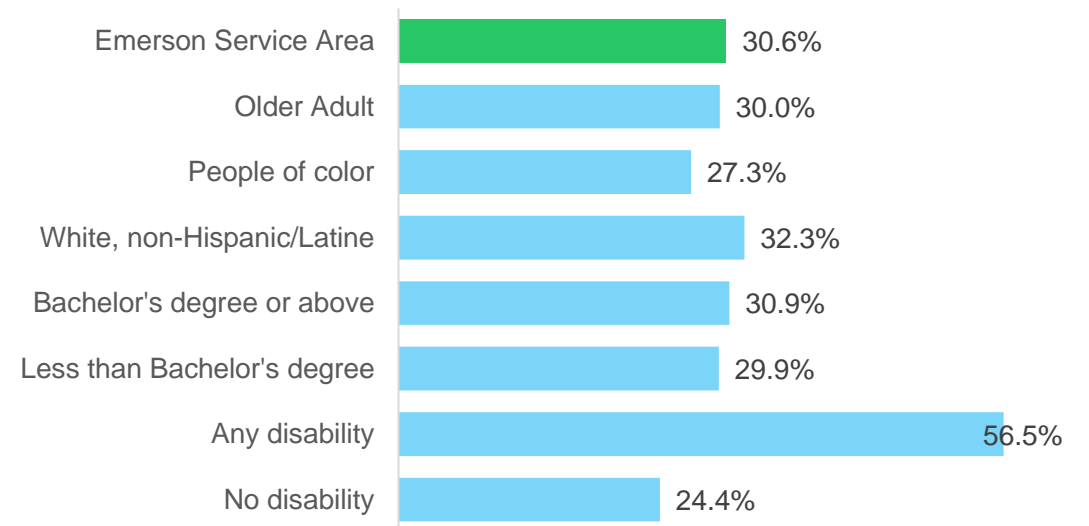
DATA SOURCE: Area Health Resource File/American Medical Association, 2020; CMS, National Provider Identification, 2022; Area Health Resource File/National Provider Identifier Downloadable File, 2021 as reported by County Health Rankings, 2023

# Access to Health Care

**Percent of Adults Reporting Unmet Need for Short-Term Illness Care in the Past Year, by Massachusetts and Emerson Service Areas, 2023**



**Percent of Adults Reporting Unmet Need for Ongoing Health Condition in the Past Year, by Massachusetts and Emerson Service Areas, 2023**

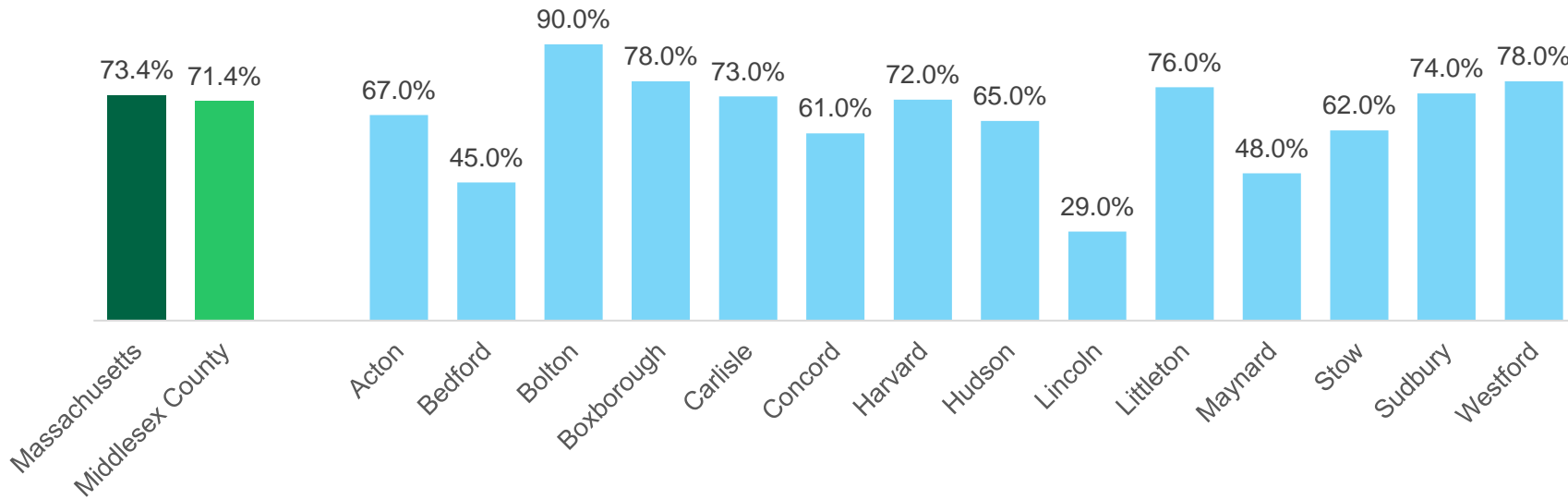


NOTE: Emerson service area includes both primary and secondary areas. Selected populations represents data within Emerson Service Area. People of color includes individuals identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic/Latine, Black or African American, non-Hispanic/Latine, Hispanic or Latine/a/o, Middle Eastern or North African, Multiracial, non-Hispanic/Latine, or Other race, non-Hispanic/Latine.

DATA SOURCE: Community Health Equity Survey (CHES), 2023

# Lead Screening

## Children 9-47 Months Screened for Lead Poisoning, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Primary Service Area Towns, 2020

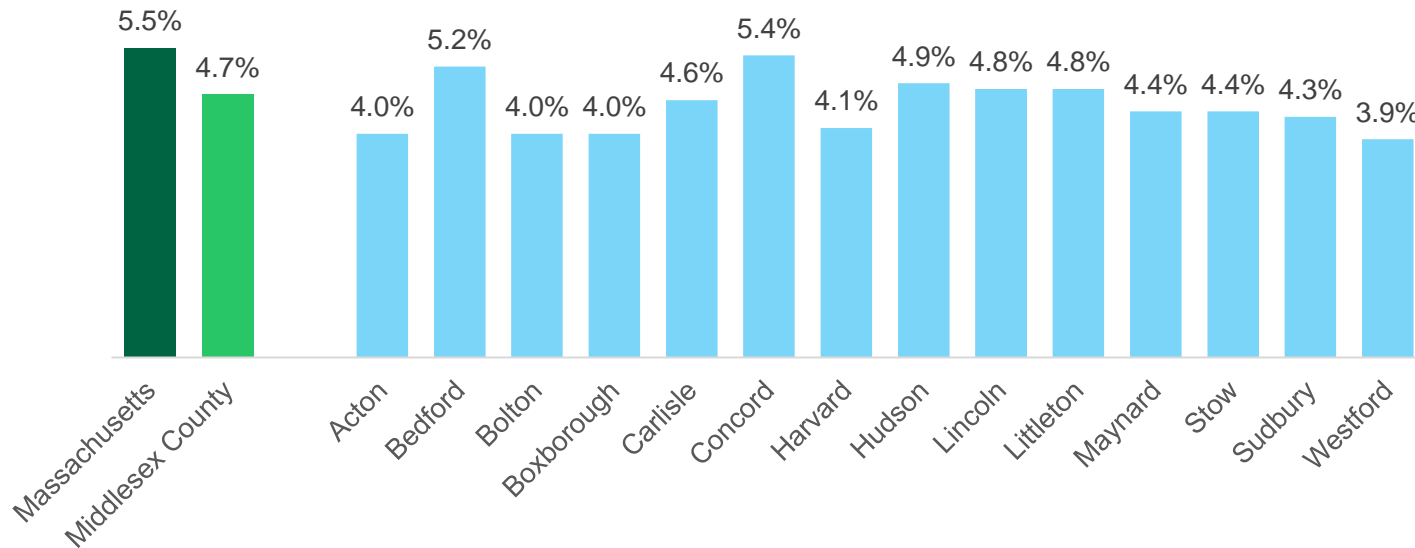


- There was large variation in lead screening in children, with less than a third screened in Lincoln and 90% in Bolton.

DATA SOURCE: MA Department of Health, Annual Childhood Lead Poisoning Surveillance Report, 2020

# Heart Disease

## Percent of Adults Reporting Heart Disease, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Primary Service Area Towns, 2021

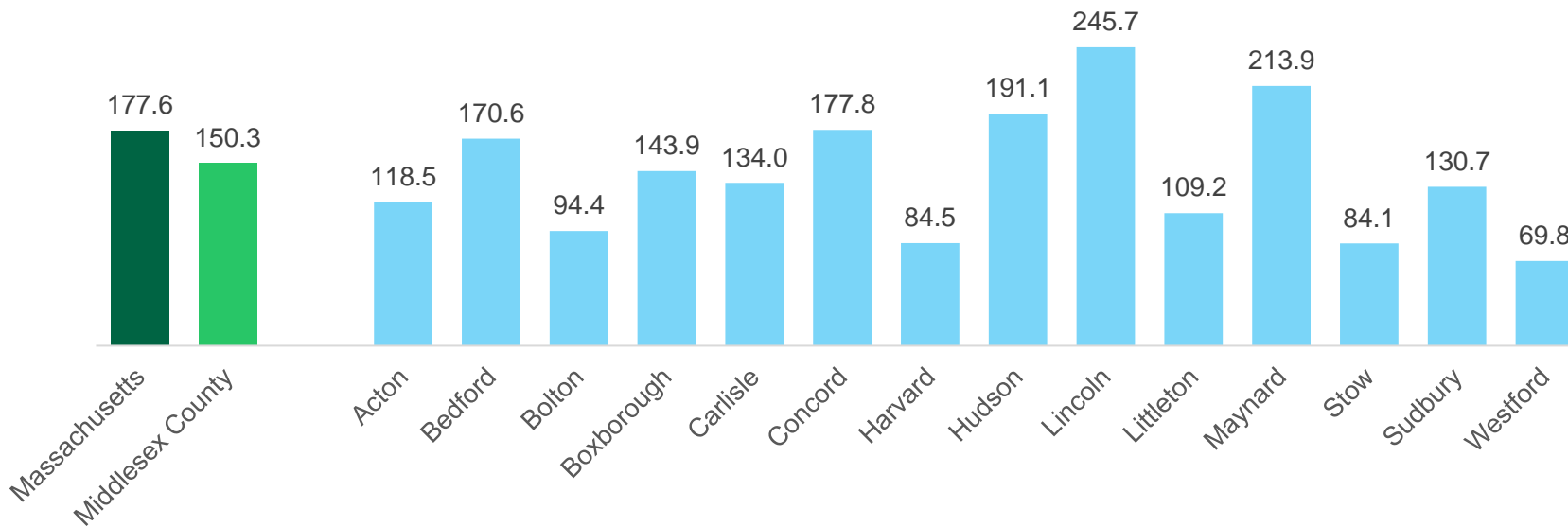


- All towns in the primary service area have a lower percent than the state overall reporting heart disease, but some towns (Concord, Bedford, Hudson, Lincoln, and Littleton) are higher than Middlesex County.

DATA SOURCE: CDC Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System via the PLACES Data Portal, as cited by MA PHIT, 2021

# Heart Disease

## Heart Disease Mortality Rate per 100,000, by Massachusetts (2021), Middlesex County (2021), and Primary Service Area Towns (2019)



- The mortality rate for heart disease is higher than the state overall in Lincoln, Maynard, Hudson, and Concord.

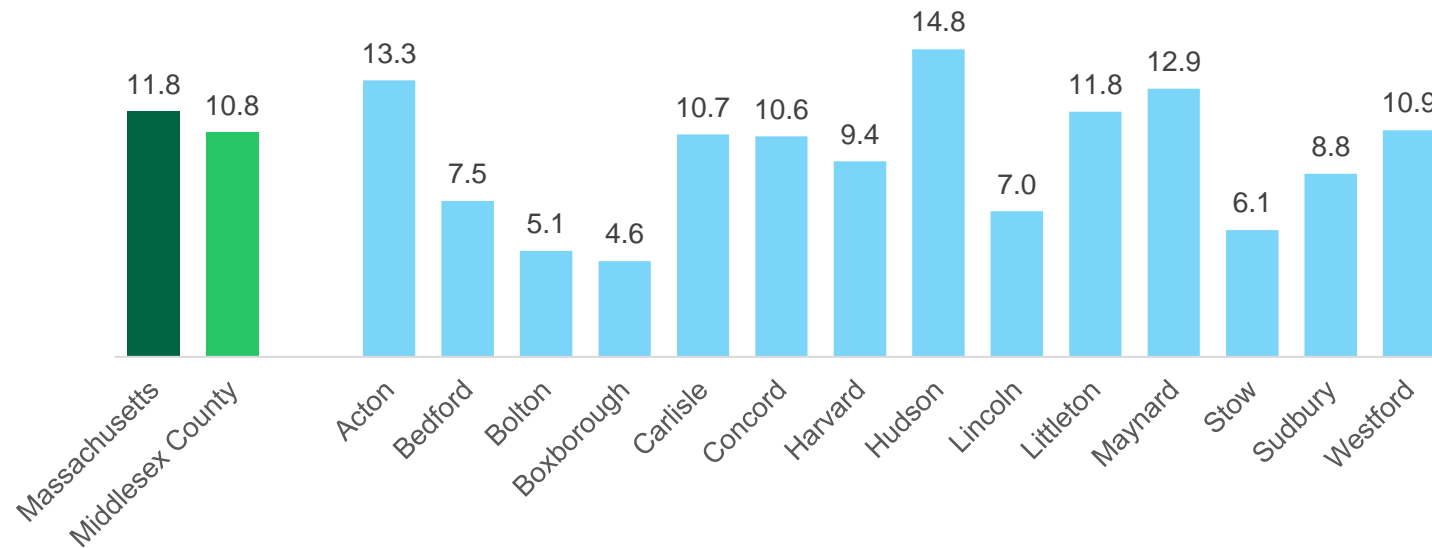
NOTE: Rates calculated using American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2015-2019

DATA SOURCE: MA Department of Public Health, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics, Massachusetts Death Report, 2019 and 2021



# Asthma

## Pediatric Asthma Prevalence per 100,000 among K-8th Grade Students, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Primary Service Areas, 2017-2018

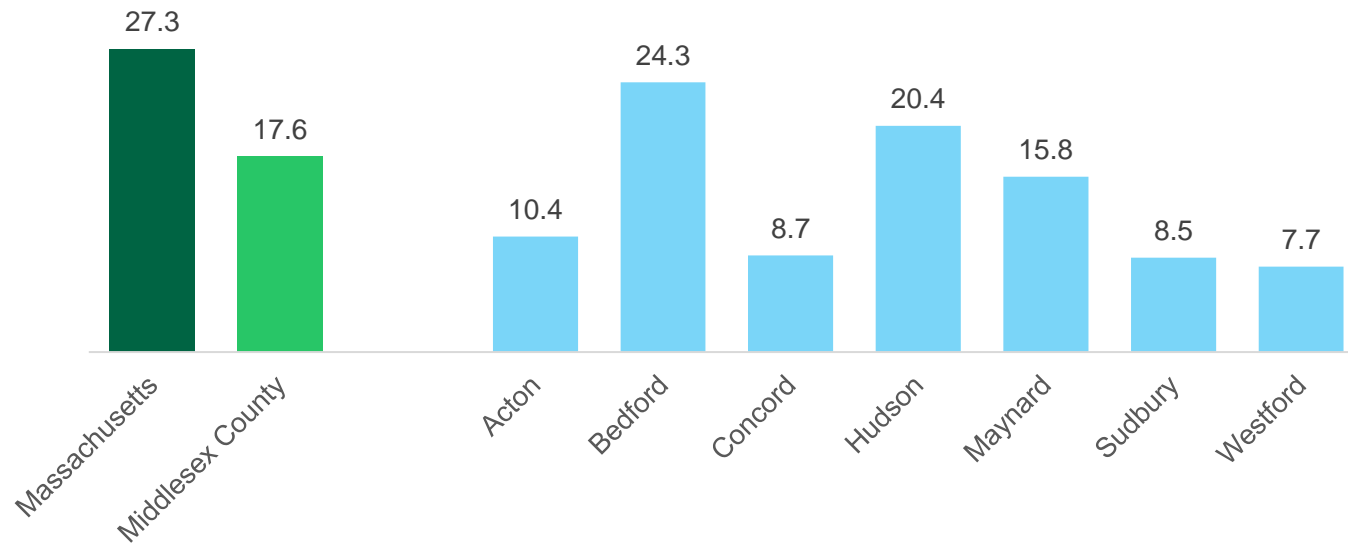


- Prevalence of pediatric asthma is higher in some towns (Hudson, Acton, and Maynard) than the state overall.

DATA SOURCE: MA Department of Public Health, Bureau of Environmental Health (PHIT), 2017-2018

# Asthma

## Asthma Emergency Department Visits per 10,000, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Primary Service Area Towns, 2020



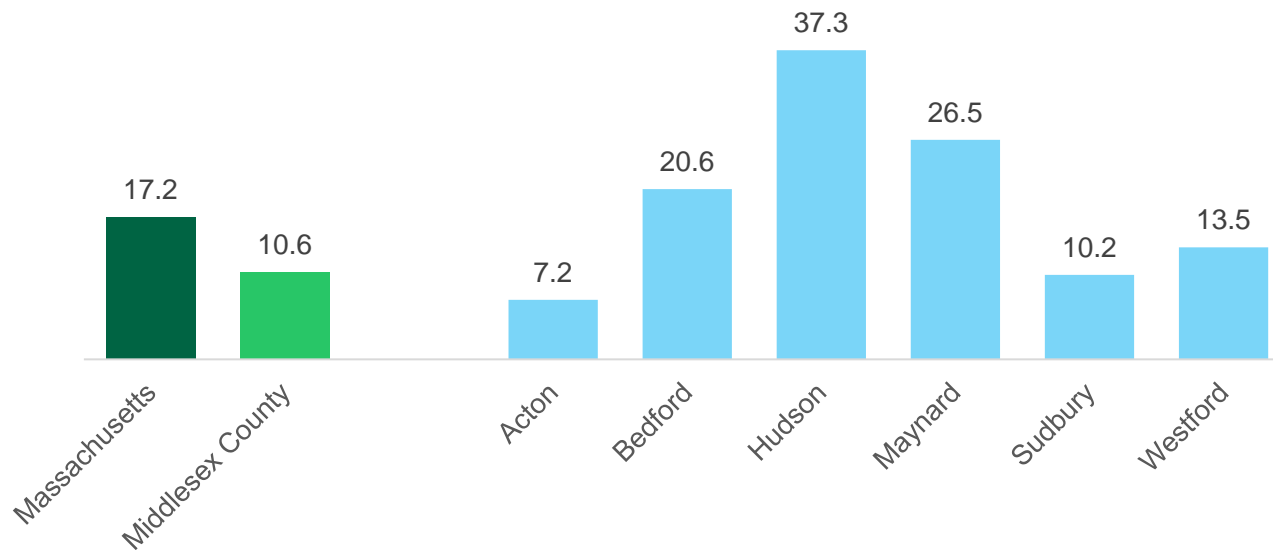
- Asthma emergency department visits are highest in Bedford and Hudson, but still below the state overall.

NOTE: Towns with less than 10 cases are not shown.

DATA SOURCE: MA Department of Public Health, Bureau of Environmental Health (PHIT), 2020

# COPD

## COPD Emergency Department Visits per 10,000, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Primary Service Area Towns, 2020



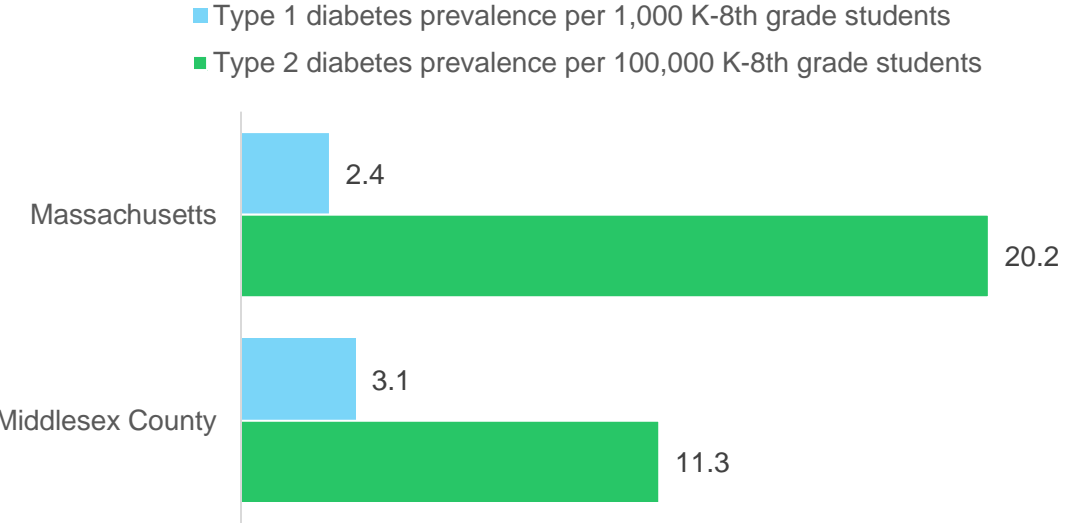
- Emergency department visits for COPD were more than double the state in Hudson.

NOTE: Towns with less than 10 cases are not shown.

DATA SOURCE: MA Department of Public Health, Bureau of Environmental Health (PHIT), 2020

# Diabetes

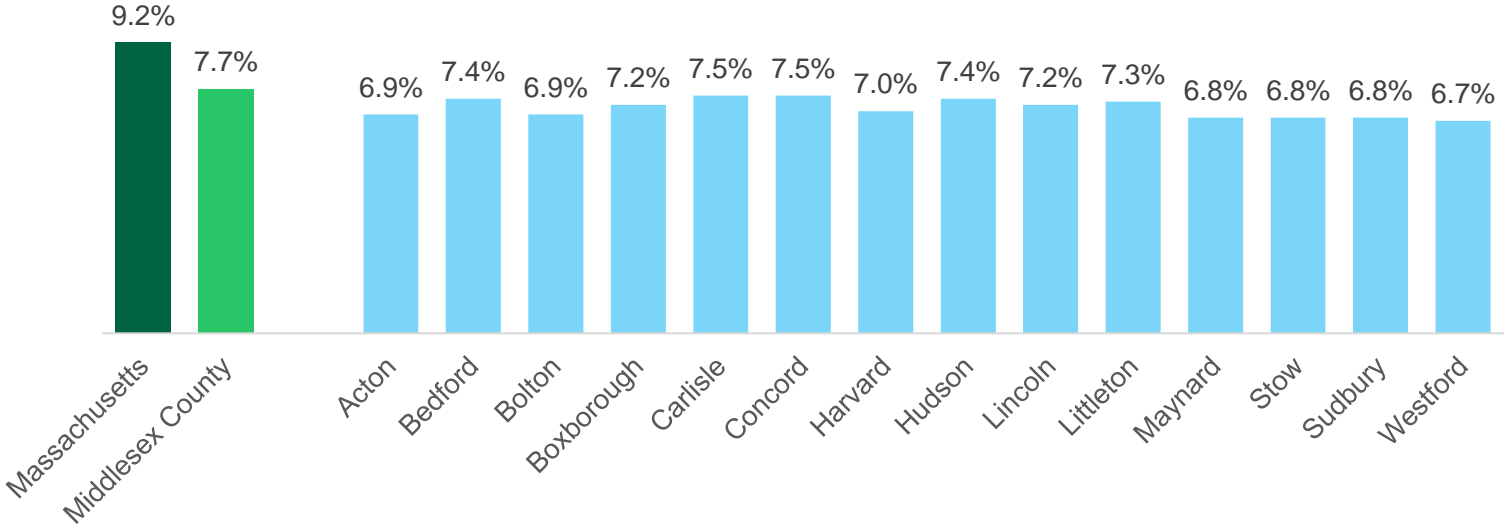
## Pediatric Diabetes Prevalence among K-8th Grade Students, by Massachusetts and Middlesex County, 2022-2023



DATA SOURCE: MA Department of Public Health, Bureau of Environmental Health (PHIT), 2022-2023

# Diabetes

## Percent of Adults Reporting Diabetes, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Primary Service Area Towns, 2021

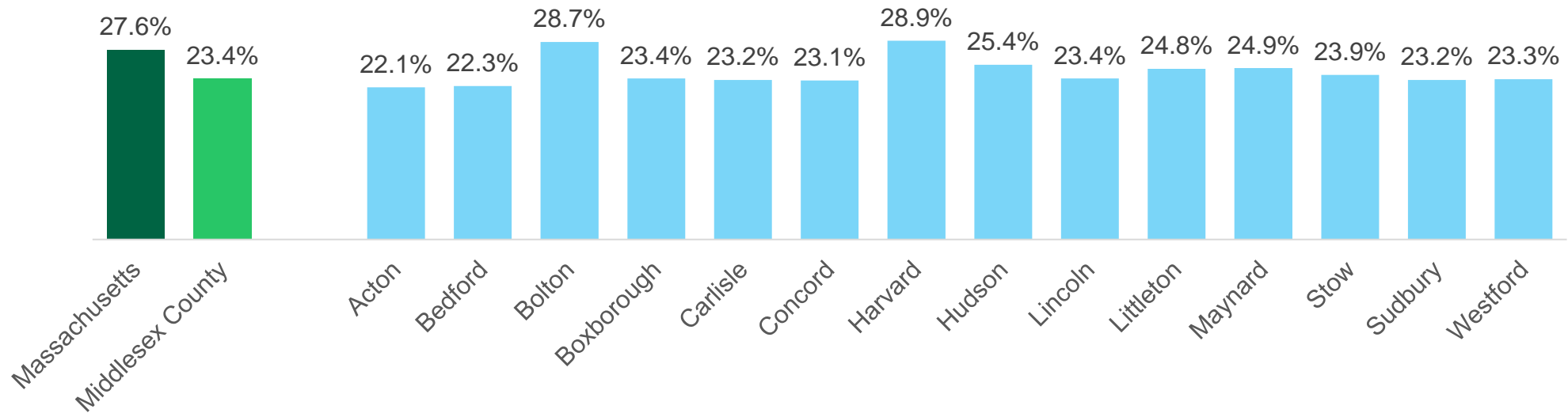


- The prevalence of diabetes is lower in all primary service area towns than the state and Middlesex County.

DATA SOURCE: CDC Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System via the PLACES Data Portal, as cited by MA PHIT, 2021

# Adult Obesity

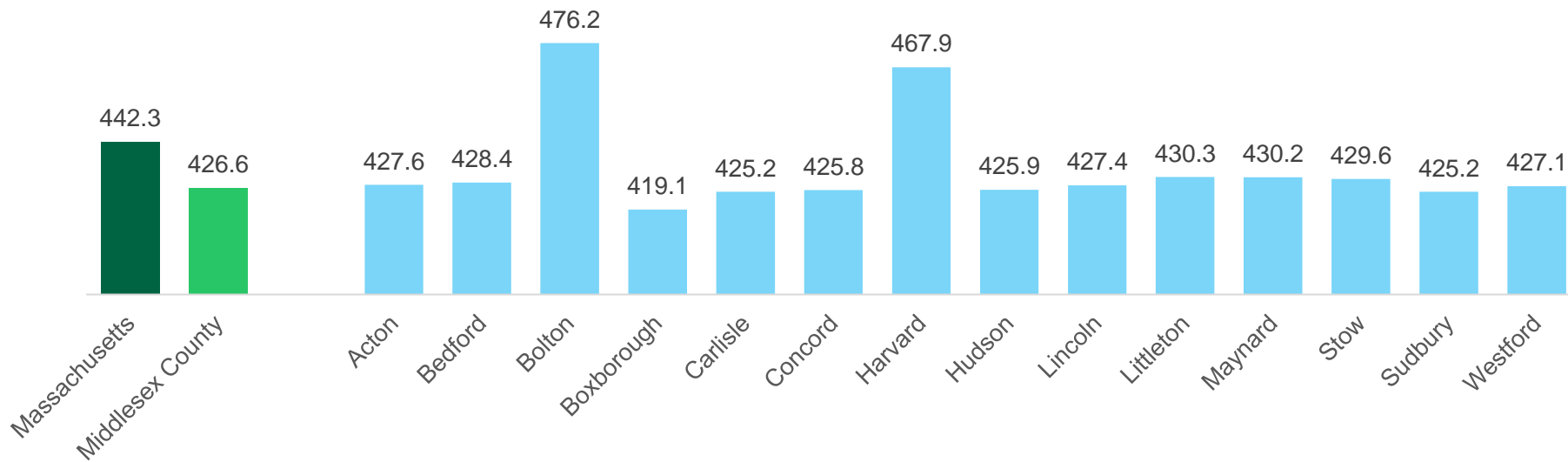
## Percent of Adults Self-Reported Obese, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Primary Service Area Towns, 2021



DATA SOURCE: CDC Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System via the PLACES Data Portal, as cited by MA PHIT, 2021

# Cancer

## Cancer Age-Adjusted Incidence Rate per 100,000, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Primary Service Area Towns, 2020

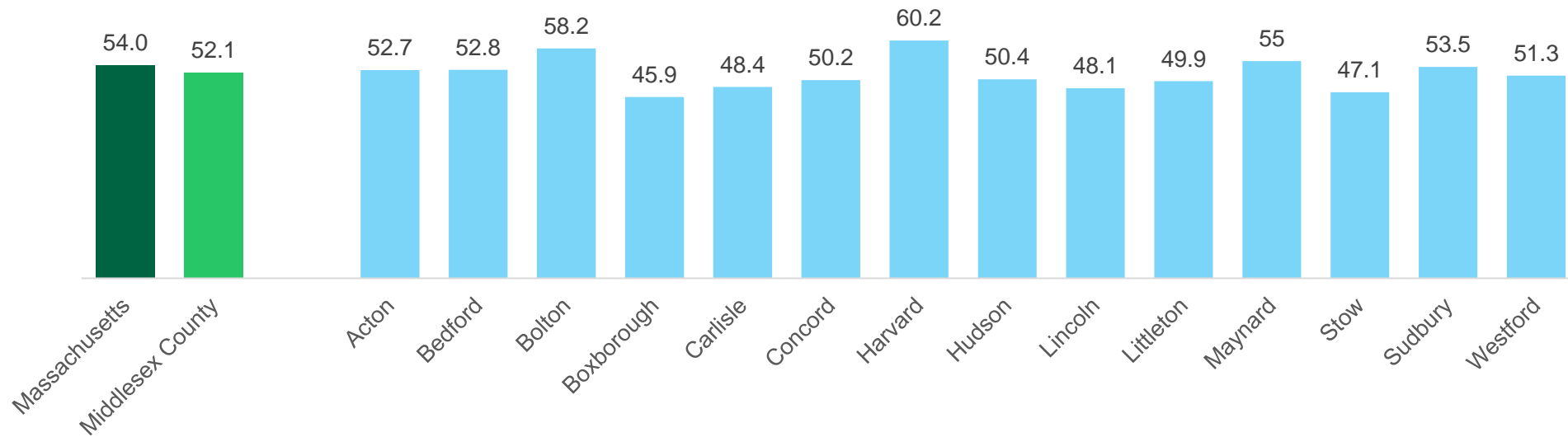


- Incidence of cancer was higher in Bolton and Harvard than the state.

NOTE: Rates adjusted to 2000 U.S. standard population age groups.  
DATA SOURCE: State Cancer Profiles, as cited by MA PHIT, 2016-2020

# Lung Cancer

## Lung Cancer Age-Adjusted Incidence Rate per 100,000, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Primary Service Area Towns, 2020

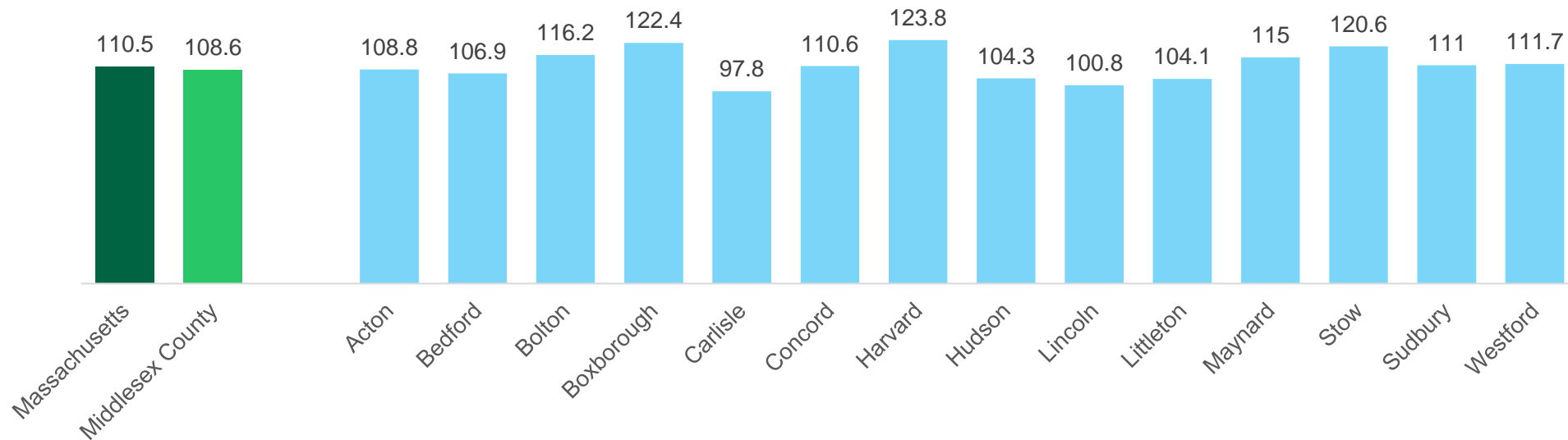


NOTE: Rates adjusted to 2000 U.S. standard population age groups.  
DATA SOURCE: State Cancer Profiles, as cited by MA PHIT, 2016-2020



# Prostate Cancer

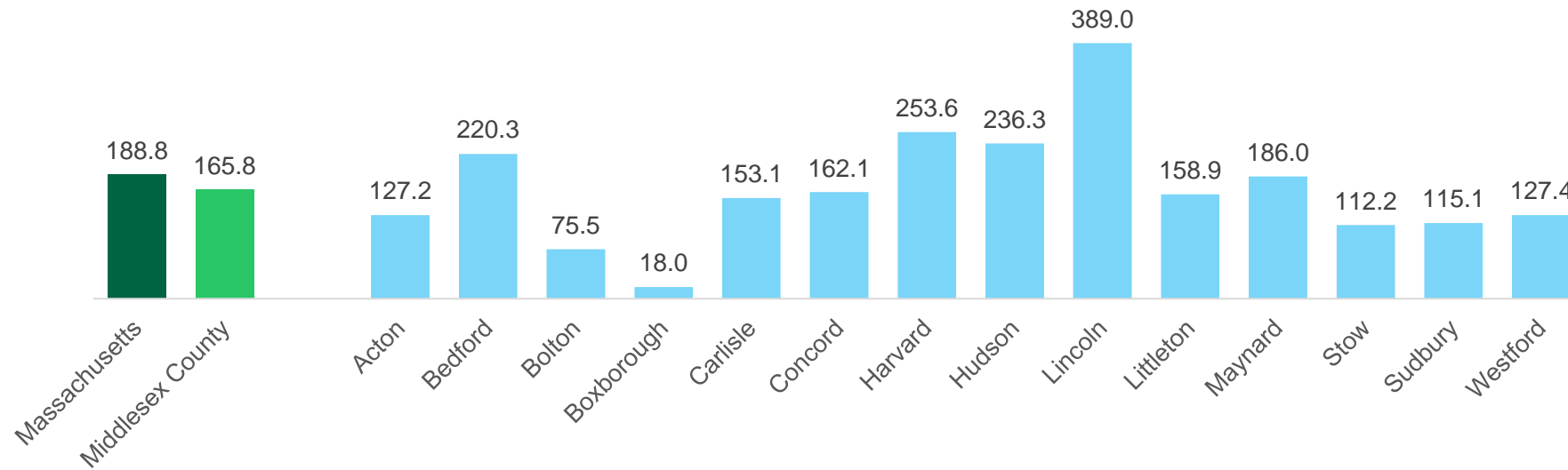
## Prostate Cancer Age-Adjusted Incidence Rate per 100,000, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Primary Service Area Towns, 2020



NOTE: Rates adjusted to 2000 U.S. standard population age groups.  
DATA SOURCE: State Cancer Profiles, as cited by MA PHIT, 2016-2020

# Cancer Mortality

**Cancer Mortality Rate per 100,000 Residents, by Massachusetts (2021), Middlesex County (2021), and Primary Service Area Towns (2019)**

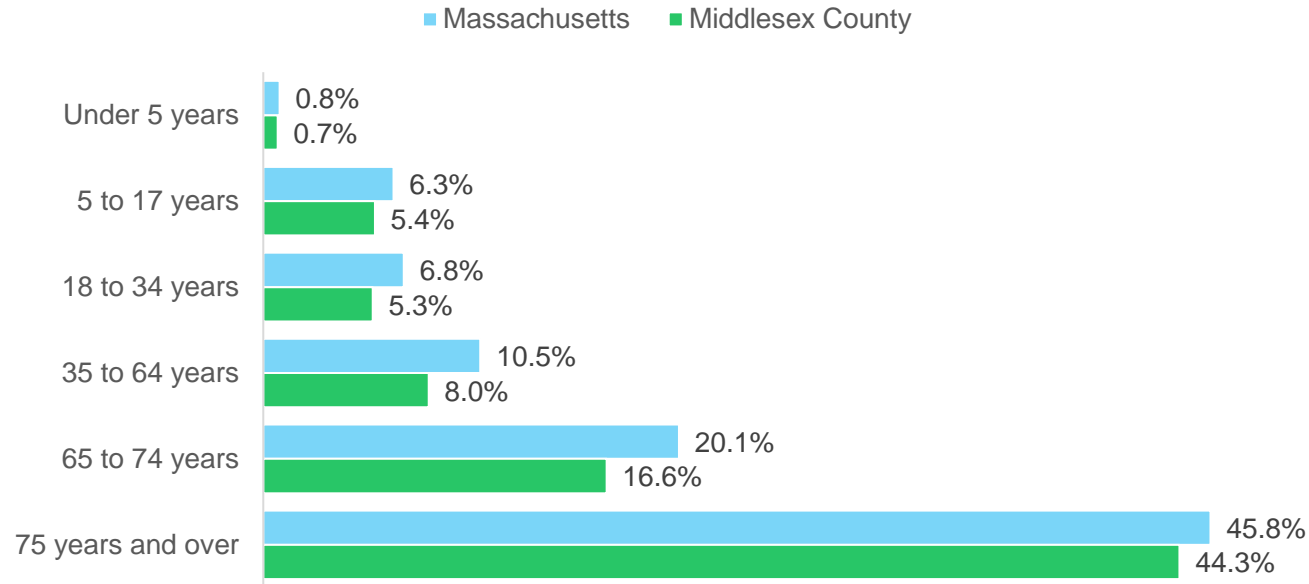


NOTE: Rates calculated using American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2015-2019

DATA SOURCE: MA Department of Public Health, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics, Massachusetts Death Report, 2019 and 2021

# Disability

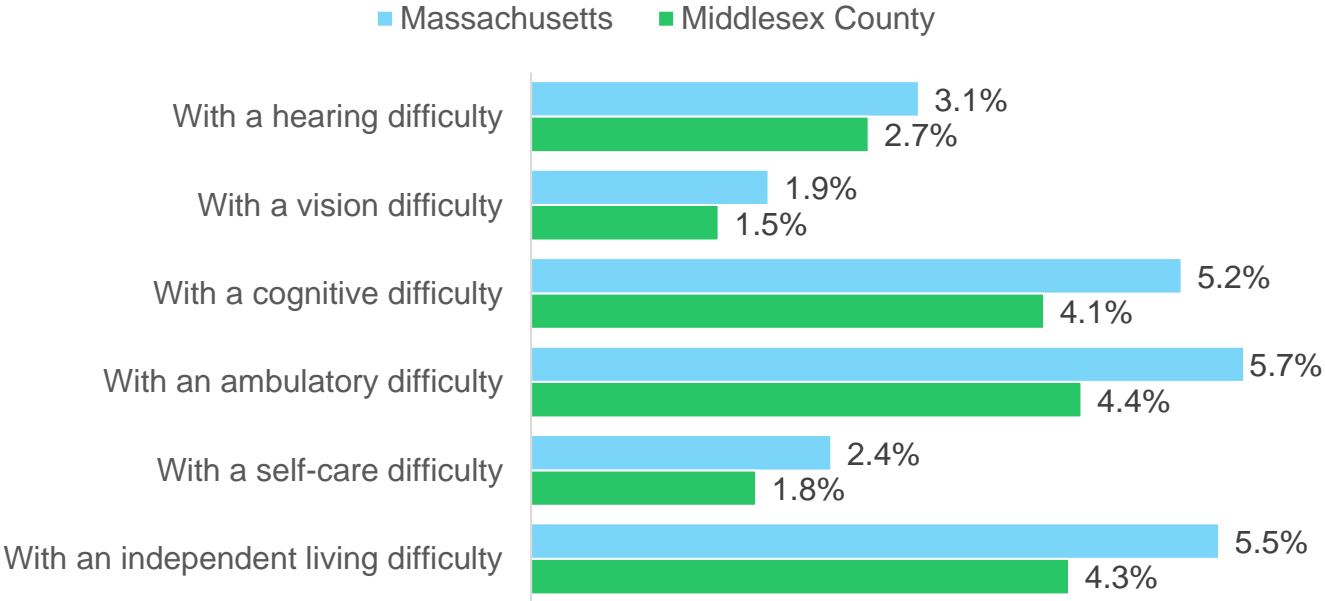
## Percent of Population with a Disability, by Massachusetts and Middlesex County, 2018-2022



DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022

# Disability

## Percent of Population with Types of Disabilities, by Massachusetts and Middlesex County, 2018-2022



DATA SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022

# Maternal Health

## Number and Percent of Low Birth Weight and Preterm Births by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Primary Service Area Towns, 2021

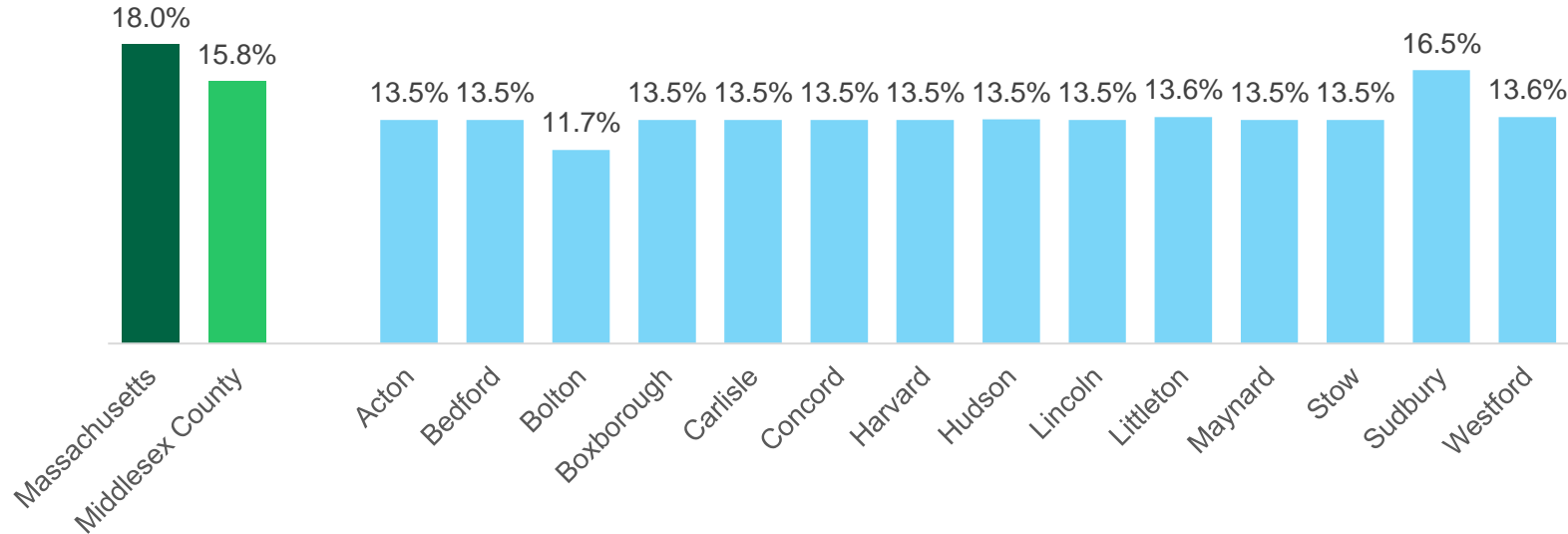
	Low Birth Weights		Preterm Births	
	n	%	n	%
Massachusetts	5,261	7.4%	6,272	8.9%
Middlesex County	1,203	7.4%	1,377	8.4%
Acton	13	7.3%	15	8.4%
Bedford	13	12.9%	15	14.9%
Concord	10	6.8%	17	11.6%
Hudson	8	3.8%	14	6.6%
Littleton	7	6.8%	6	5.8%
Maynard	5	4.4%	5	4.4%
Sudbury	6	3.6%	6	3.6%
Westford	7	4.2%	13	7.7%

- Bedford had a higher percent of low-birth-weight births than the state or Middlesex County.
- Bedford and Concord had a higher percent of preterm births than the state or Middlesex County.

NOTE: No Data reported in Bolton, Boxborough, Carlisle, Harvard, Lincoln, and Stow due to small numbers (n=1-4), exact count not provided.  
 DATA SOURCE: Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Report on Massachusetts Births, 2021

# Overall Health Older Adults

## Percent of Those 60+ Years Reporting Fair or Poor Health Status, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Primary Service Area Towns, 2018



- More older adults in Sudbury reported fair or poor health status, while they were lower in Bolton.

DATA SOURCE: Tufts Health Plan, Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative, 2018

# Behavioral Health



# Behavioral Health

Behavioral health includes mental health and substance use. The impacts of behavioral health challenges can be felt at the individual, family, and community levels. Behavioral health conditions can impact physical health and well-being, safety, and social connectivity, as well as have impacts on employment, education, housing, and other upstream factors.

Understanding behavioral health challenges and needs can help to inform the development of needed resources and services, as well to combat stigma that often prevents people from accessing those services.



# Mental Health

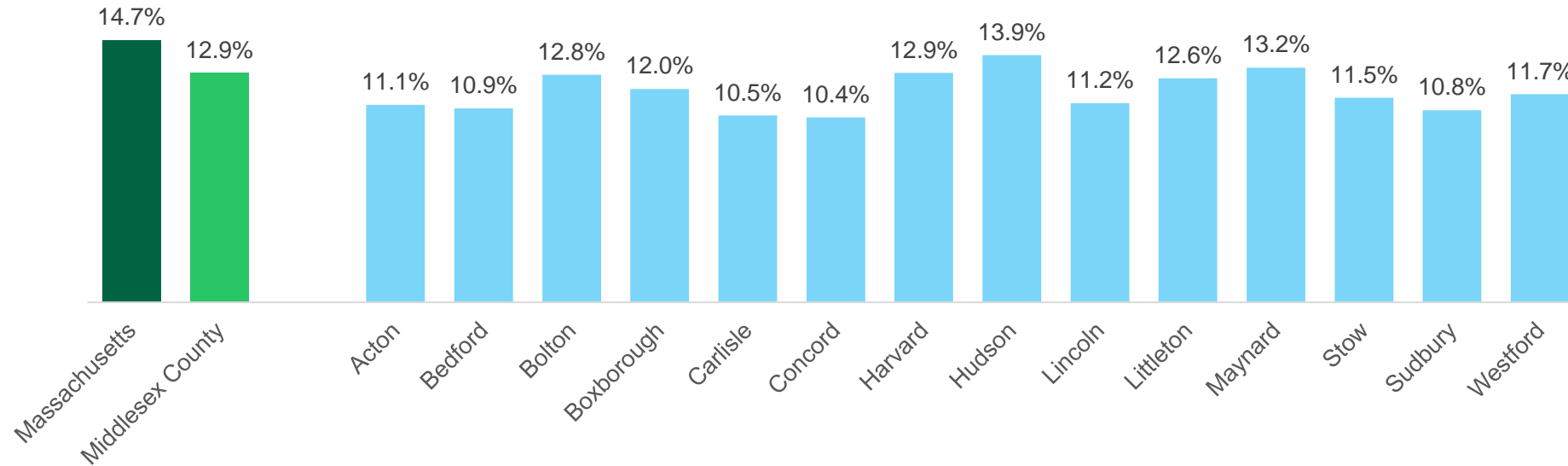
The health concern that came up the most across interviewees and focus groups was mental health. Among focus group participants, there was a focus on anxiety, depression, and isolation, with interviewees mentioning the impact of others such as hoarding, bipolar disorders, schizophrenia, borderline personality disorders, and trauma-related health impacts.

Some interviewees noted the intertwined nature of mental health and social determinants of health:

- “When you have bipolar or schizophrenia, those are chemical mental health issues that you don’t have control over that might impact getting a job or housing and sometimes it can be the other way around, if you’re struggling financially then it might lead to depression / anxiety.”

# Mental Health

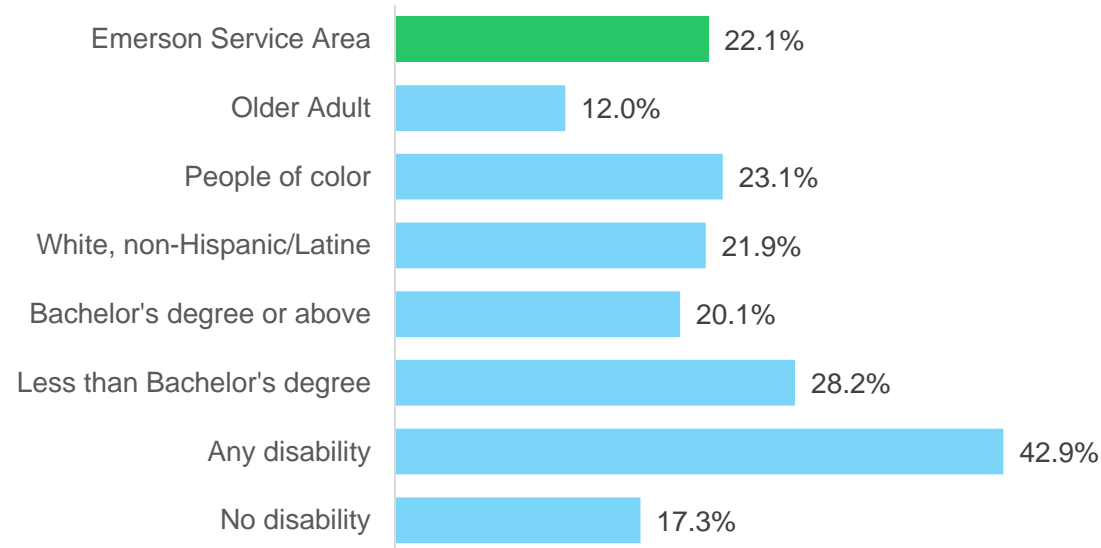
**Percent of Adults Reporting 14+ Days of Poor Mental Health in Past Month, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Primary Service Areas, 2021**



DATA SOURCE: CDC Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System via the PLACES Data Portal, as cited by MA PHIT, 2021

# Mental Health

## Percent of Adults Reporting a Mental Health Condition, by Massachusetts and Emerson Service Area, 2023

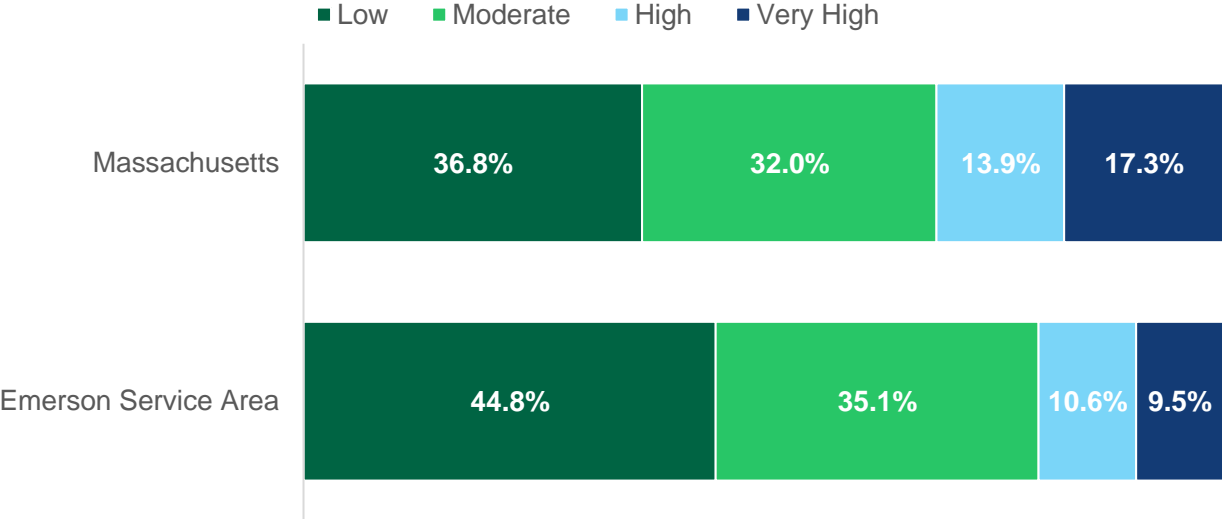


NOTE: Emerson service area includes both primary and secondary areas. Selected populations represents data within Emerson Service Area. People of color includes individuals identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic/Latine, Black or African American, non-Hispanic/Latine, Hispanic or Latine/a/o, Middle Eastern or North African, Multiracial, non-Hispanic/Latine, or Other race, non-Hispanic/Latine.

DATA SOURCE: Community Health Equity Survey (CHES), 2023

# Mental Health

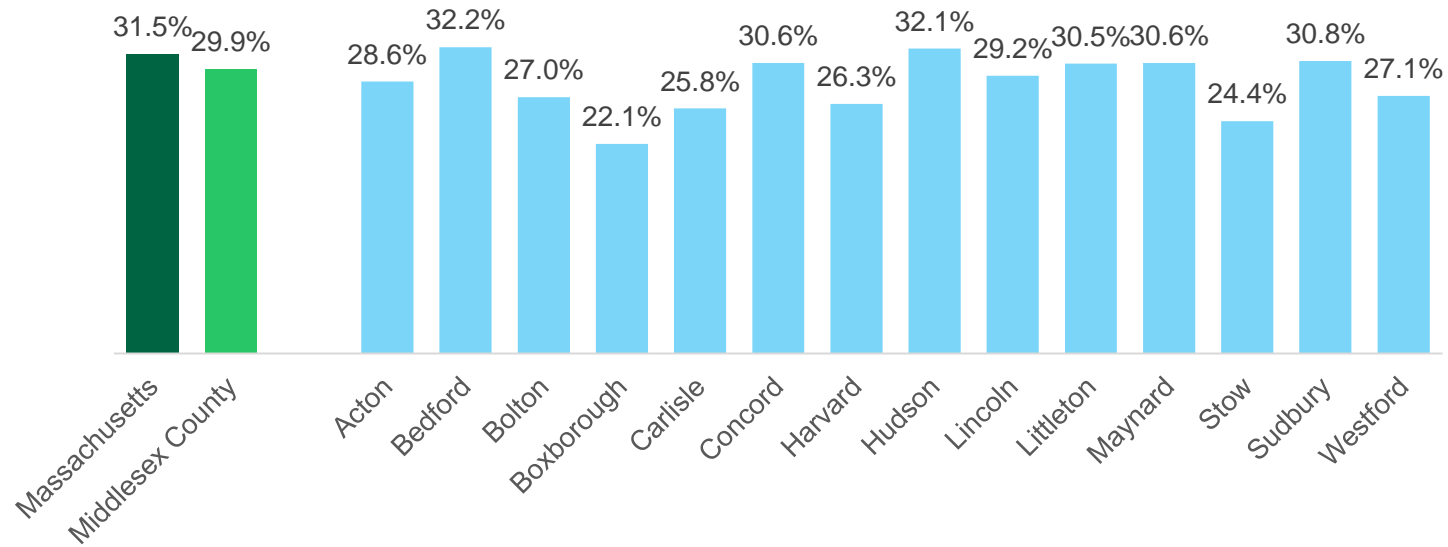
## Percent of Adults Reporting Psychological Distress in Past Month, by Massachusetts and Emerson Service Area, 2023



NOTE: Emerson service area respondents include both the primary and secondary service areas. Respondents were asked the 5-item version of the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale, including how often they were feeling nervous, hopeless, restless or fidgety, so depressed, or that everything was an effort. Scores from each item were summed and total scores were categorized into four levels of distress.  
DATA SOURCE: Community Health Equity Survey (CHES), 2023

# Mental Health

## Percent of Those Age 65+ Years with Depression, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Primary Service Area Towns, 2018



DATA SOURCE: Tufts Health Plan, Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative, 2018

# Mental Health

## Youth

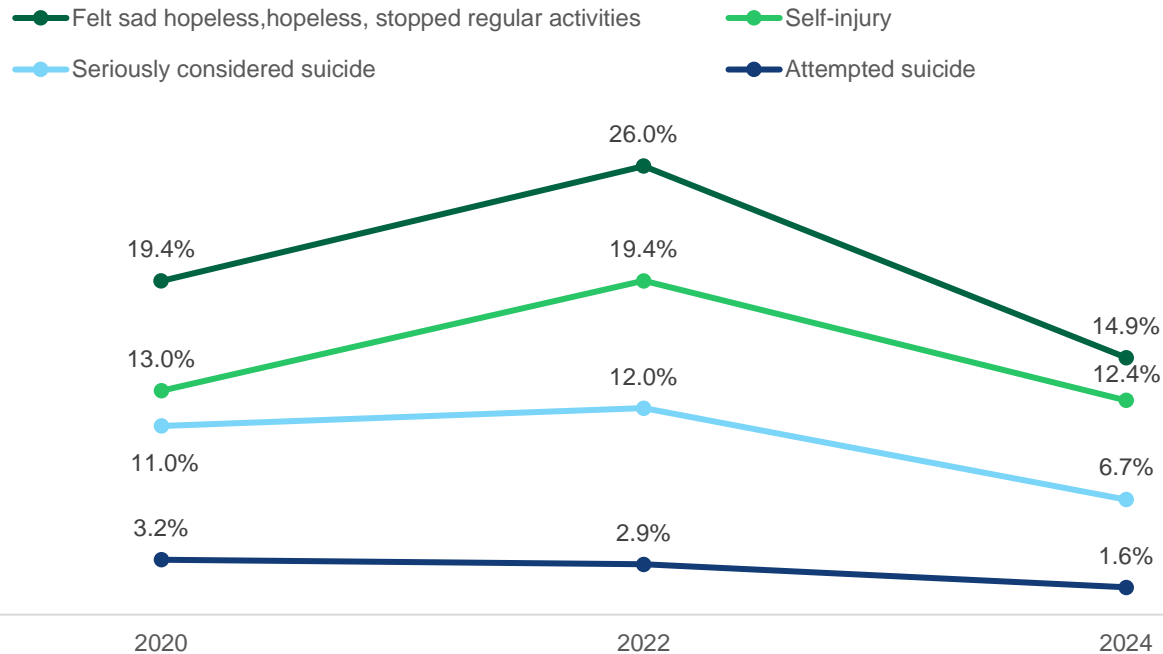
Many of the interviewees and focus group participants identified youth as a community that is particularly impacted by mental health issues, citing school pressures & high expectations, along with social media and COVID-19 as leading factors. Within the youth focus group, academic pressure was viewed as the key culprit, in combination of sports stress, and overall burnout from the intensive schedules. Generally, interviewees and focus group participants acknowledged that the community/schools have taken steps to alleviate school pressures and were working to address mental health among youth.

**“The school system is very highly ranked, and it’s also known as very high stress among the upper grades. A lot of push for excellence.” .”**

*- Focus Group Participant*

# Mental Health

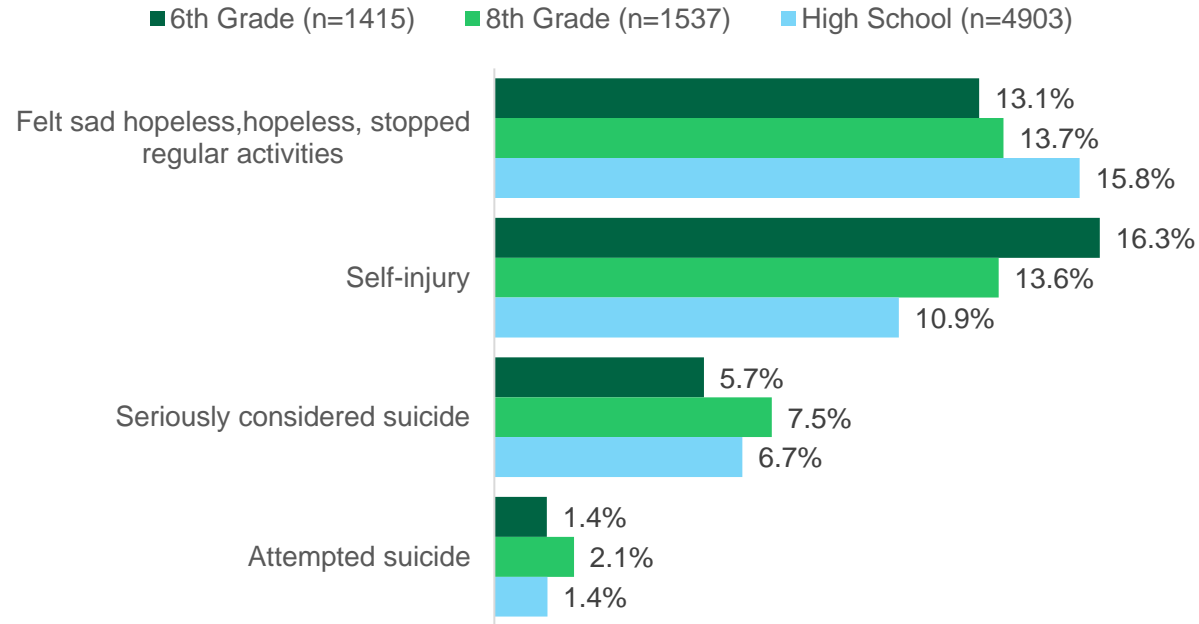
## Percent of Youth with Experiences of Depression, Self-Injury, Suicide, 2020, 2022, 2024



DATA SOURCE: Emerson Hospital Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2020, 2022, and 2024

# Mental Health

## Percent of Youth with Experiences of Depression, Self-Injury, Suicide, by Grade Level, 2024

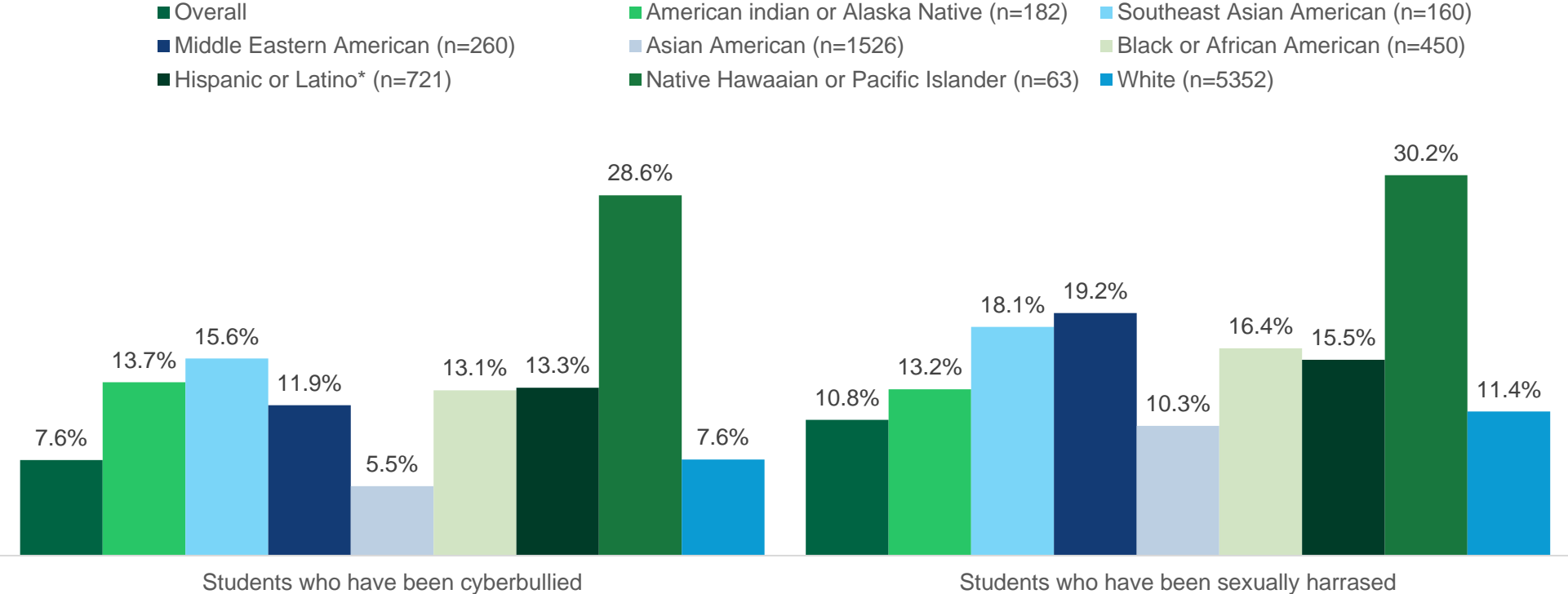


DATA SOURCE: Emerson Hospital Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2024



# Mental Health

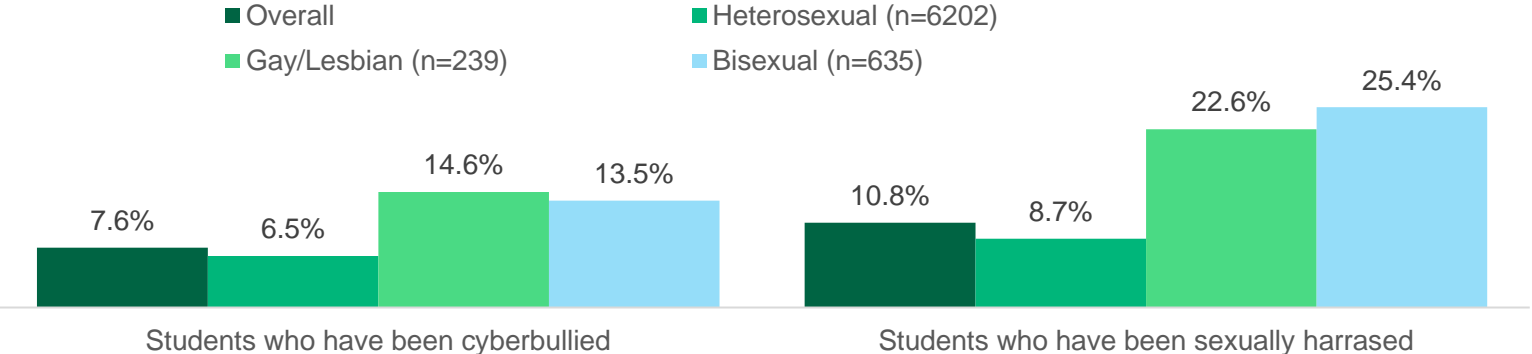
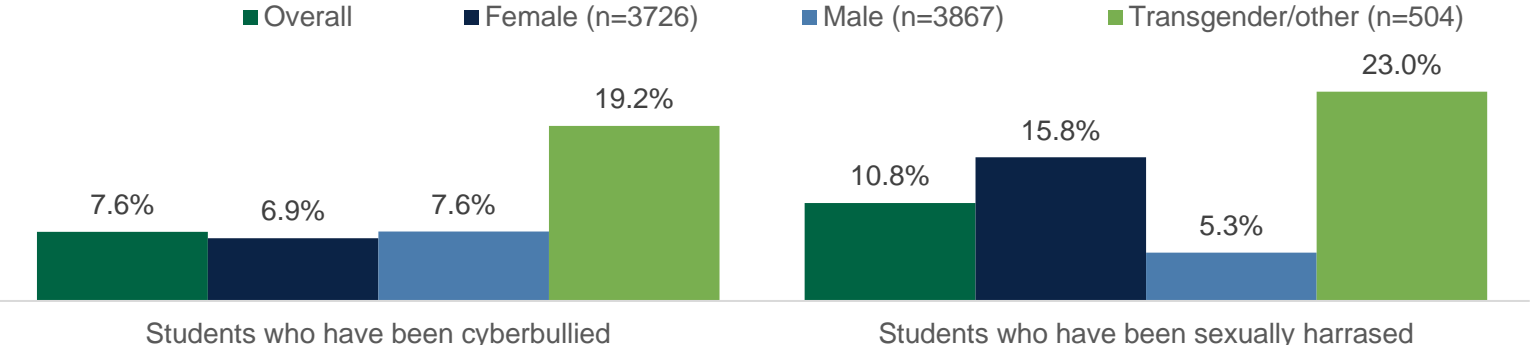
## Percent of Youth with Experiences of Cyber-Bullying, and Sexual Harassment, by Race/Ethnicity, 2024



DATA SOURCE: Emerson Hospital Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2024

# Mental Health

## Percent of Youth with Experiences of Cyber-Bullying, and Sexual Harassment, by Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation, 2024



DATA SOURCE: Emerson Hospital Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2024

# Mental Health

## Migrant Population

- Key informant interviewees noted that healthcare providers discriminate based on both someone's housing situation and their immigration status. **“The moment they hear it is a client at a shelter, they say they aren't taking new clients.”** They also noted that some clinics do not provide translation or interpretation services and that doctors often do not send reminders or information in someone's native language.
- **“Mental health is our biggest issue in all our shelters – the journey and trauma getting here.** Some of it is silent because we aren't privy to a lot of it, but when the symptoms present we uncover some of the trauma. The cultural aspect doesn't believe in mental health, it is nothing, it is the devil, so the cultural aspect needs more education around mental health.”

*“I feel like the town systems are being stressed a bit by more folks coming in – not necessarily bad, it just reveals cracks in the system.”*

*- Focus Group  
Participant*

# Mental Health

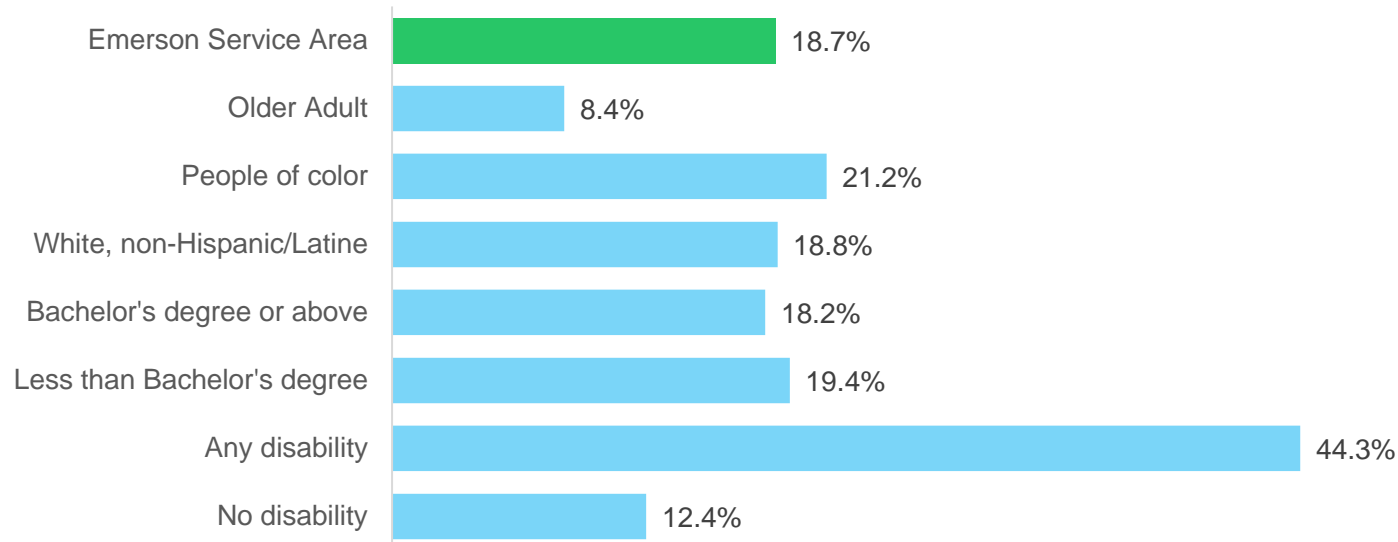
## Access to Care

A range of barriers were identified in relation to mental healthcare including a lack of practitioners, inadequate insurance coverage, long waitlists, and lack of hospital beds.

From the provider point of view, there is not enough communication between out-patient mental health clinics, community-based health centers, and in-patient hospitals which causes challenges in treating patients who might be in and out of different organizations/services while each organization is siloed in their treatment.

# Access to Health Care

## Percent of Adults Reporting Unmet Need for Mental Health Care in the Past Year, by Massachusetts and Emerson Service Areas, 2023



NOTE: Emerson service area includes both primary and secondary areas. Selected populations represents data within Emerson Service Area. People of color includes individuals identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic/Latine, Black or African American, non-Hispanic/Latine, Hispanic or Latine/a/o, Middle Eastern or North African, Multiracial, non-Hispanic/Latine, or Other race, non-Hispanic/Latine.

DATA SOURCE: Community Health Equity Survey (CHES), 2023

# Mental Health

## Resources

One focus group was particularly focused on how to incorporate tools such as mindfulness and meditation within the schools and community as a proactive measure for people to utilize. Another participant noted that it isn't a "one-size" fits all approach and that interventions should be tailored for each community.

Interviewees noted that the Behavioral Health Helpline was helpful for urgent appointment needs, while another noted that there is a gap in services for those managing eating disorders. One interviewee noted that transportation is a barrier for people accessing services at a physical site but that sometimes telehealth or phone crisis assessments can be better than nothing. There was also a mention that although there are outpatient services available, "residential programs at both mental health and substance use care don't really exist even across the state."

# Substance Use

Substance use was described as something that may not always be visible but still existed in the area. When speaking about the older adult population, a key informant interviewee noted **“I don’t see or hear about substance use as much but that doesn’t mean it’s not there.”** Meanwhile, another interviewee noted, **“substance use is kind of everywhere.”**

One key informant interview noted how substances are sometimes used by individuals to manage mental health issues that they don’t have the tools / resources to manage otherwise. **“With substance use in general, it comes from a place of needing to self-medicate their symptoms.”**

# Substance Use

## Stigma

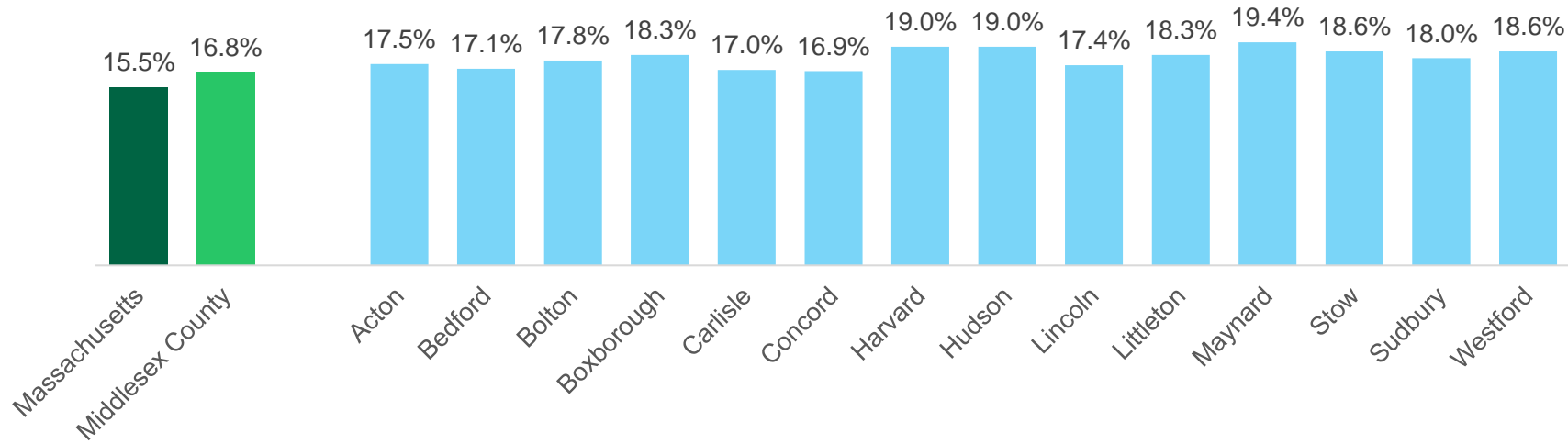
Some interviewees and focus group participants noted that the stigma surrounding substance use discouraged people from openly acknowledging what's going on or seeking resources / help.

- “I feel like Acton upholds an image – it’s a very nice image but because of that and while there is substance abuse education in the school system, but once they’re out of the school system and **if they struggle with addiction, they get washed to the wayside. There’s this image of this nice town** and there aren’t enough resources and dialog of people who are suffering and might feel shame throughout the lifespan. Older adults might feel lot of shame and isolation with addiction because they may feel embarrassed or negative and tainting this image that the town has.” (Focus group participant)
- “It is very few and far between that I get someone in my office saying “I need help.” It’s usually family members of the individual. Engagement and outreach is a big barrier and a recovery coach might be more effective.” (Key informant interviewee)



# Substance Use

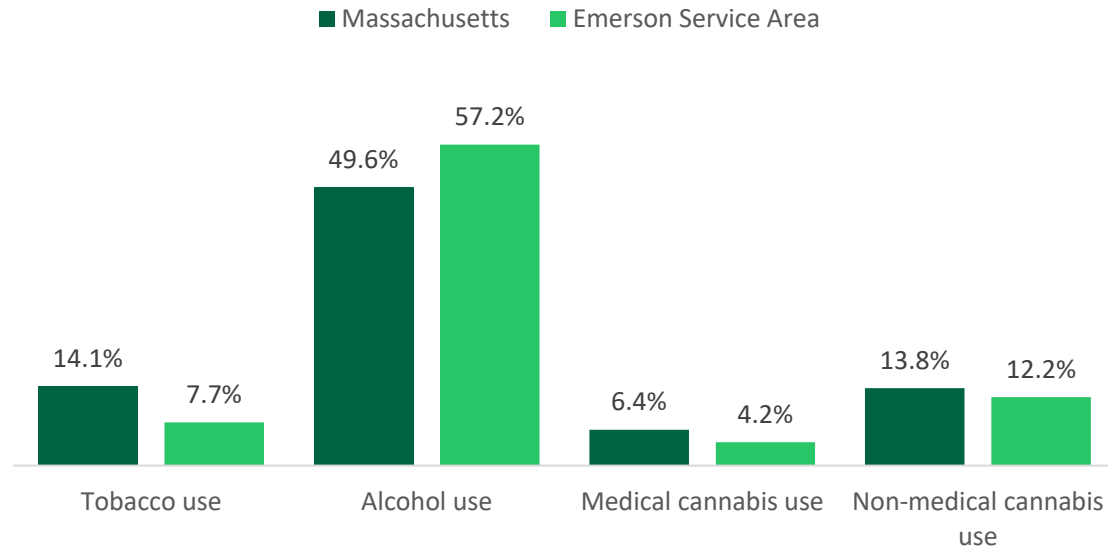
## Percent of Adults Who Report Binge Drinking in the Past 30 Days, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Primary Service Area, 2021



DATA SOURCE: CDC Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System via the PLACES Data Portal, as cited by MA PHIT, 2021

# Substance Use

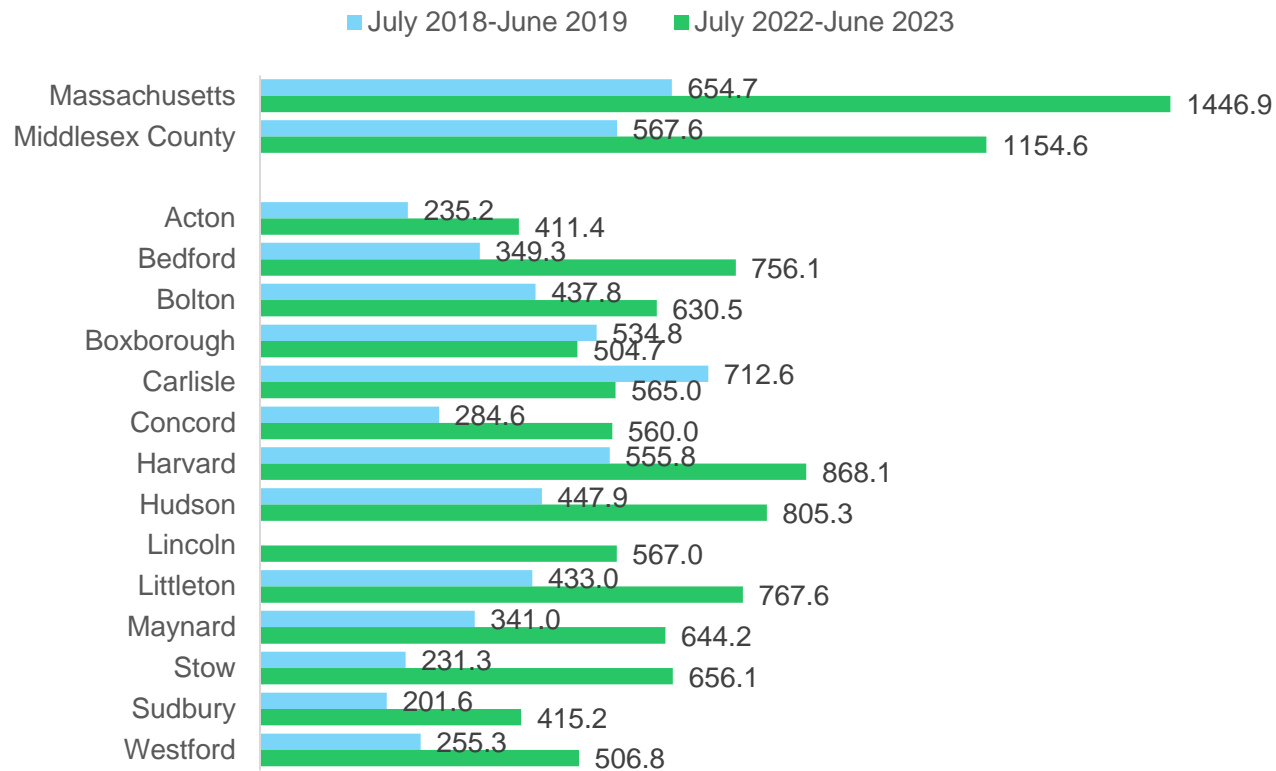
## Percent of Adults Reporting Substance Use in the Past Month, by Massachusetts and Emerson Service Areas, 2023



NOTE: Emerson service area respondents include both the primary and secondary service areas  
DATA SOURCE: Community Health Equity Survey (CHES), 2023

# Substance Use

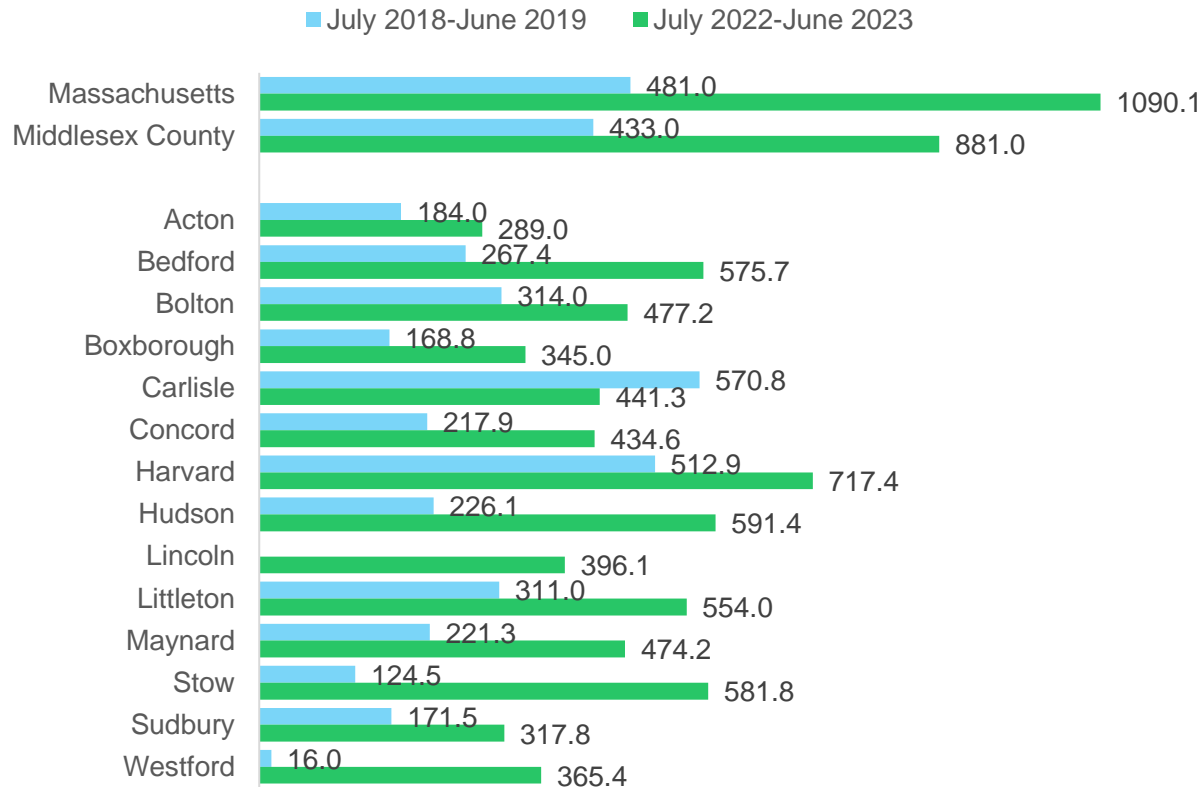
## Any Substance Use Related Emergency Room Visits per 100,000, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Primary Service Area Towns, July 2018-June 2019 and July 2022-June 2023



NOTE: Data has been suppressed for Lincoln July 2018-June 2019 for privacy considerations.  
DATA SOURCE: MA Bureau of Substance Addiction Services, 2022

# Substance Use

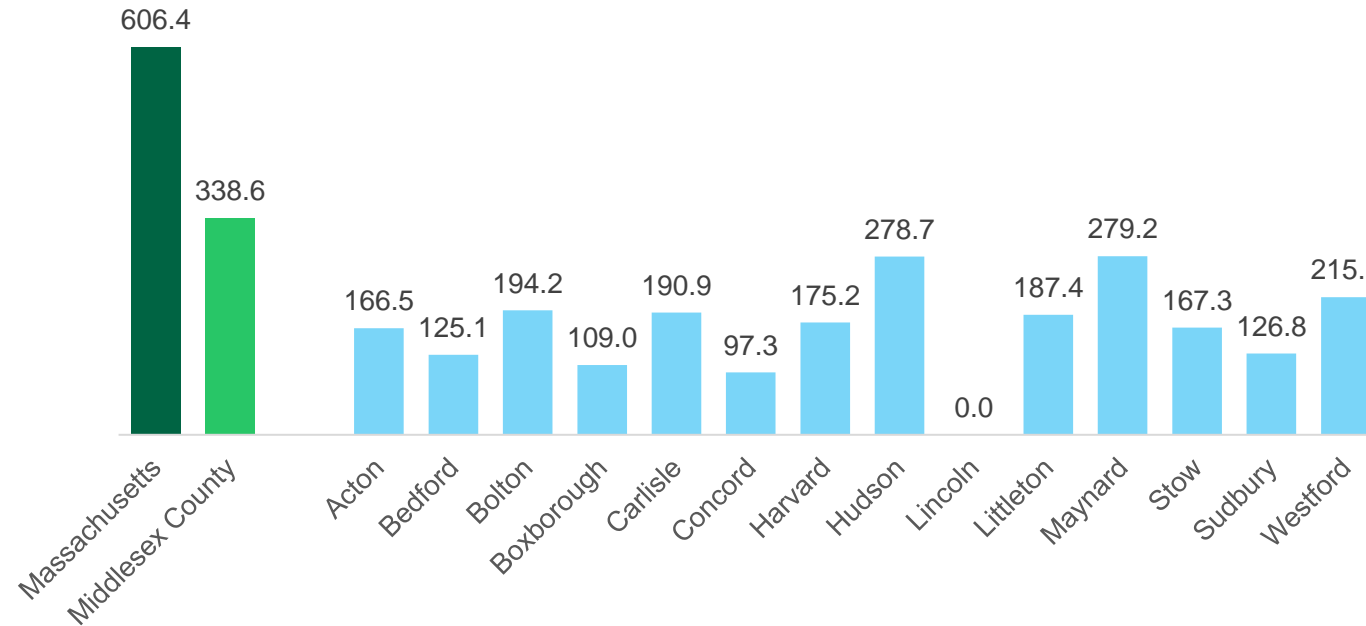
## Alcohol Related Emergency Room Visits per 100,000, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Primary Service Area Towns, July 2018-June 2019 and July 2022-June 2023



NOTE: Data has been suppressed for Lincoln July 2018-June 2019 for privacy considerations.  
 DATA SOURCE: MA Bureau of Substance Addiction Services, 2022

# Substance Use

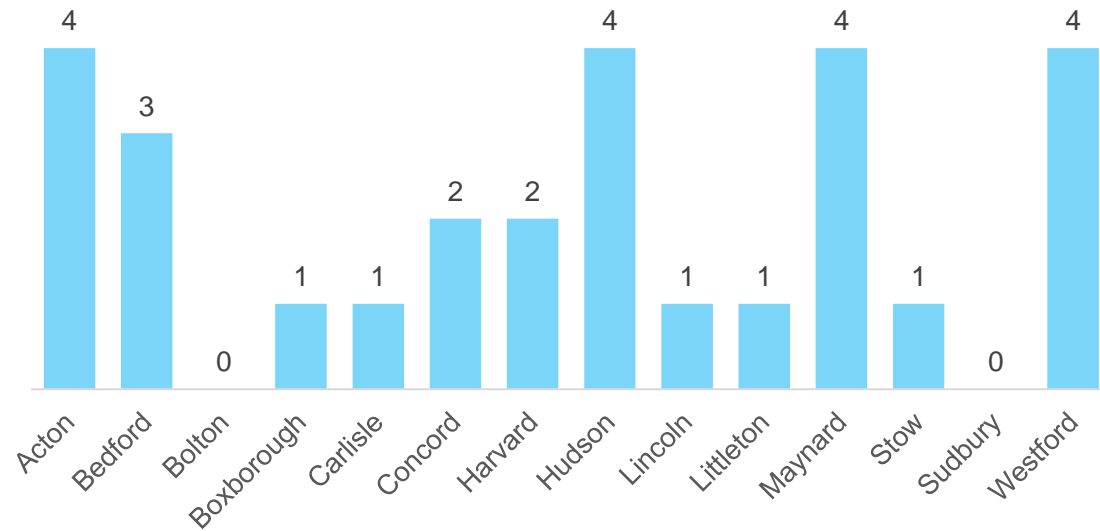
## Bureau of Substance Addiction Services Enrollment Rate per 100,000, by Massachusetts, Middlesex County, and Primary Service Area Towns, July 2022 - June 2023



DATA SOURCE: MA Department of Public Health, Bureau of Substance Addiction Services, July 2022 - June 2023

# Substance Use

## Opioid-Related Overdose Deaths, by Primary Service Area Towns, 2021









DATA SOURCE: MA DPH Registry of Vital Records and Statistics Death Report, 2021



# Key Themes and Priorities

# Key Assessment Themes

Based on findings across methods the following topics were identified as key themes. These themes were presented to the CAB in May 2024 for prioritization for the SIP.

-  High Cost of Living, including Affordable Housing and Food
-  Healthcare Access, availability of providers and affordability
-  Mental Health
-  Transportation
-  Diversity, Equity, and Community Cohesion
-  Aging Population



# Prioritization

- Following a presentation of data related to the assessment key themes, the Community Advisory Board voted to prioritize three topics to address through the Emerson Hospital strategic implementation plan. The three priority areas are:
  - Mental Health
  - Economic Security
  - Healthcare Access
- Goals, objectives, and strategies related to these three topics will be developed through a strategic planning process.

# Contact Information

**For questions or comments about this assessment please contact:**

Community Benefits

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