

# Aging in Somerville: A Community Needs Assessment

## Key Findings and Recommendations

Commissioned by the City of Somerville

Caitlin Coyle, PhD & Ceara Somerville, MS  
Center for Social & Demographic Research on Aging  
Gerontology Institute  
University of Massachusetts Boston



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## Acknowledgments

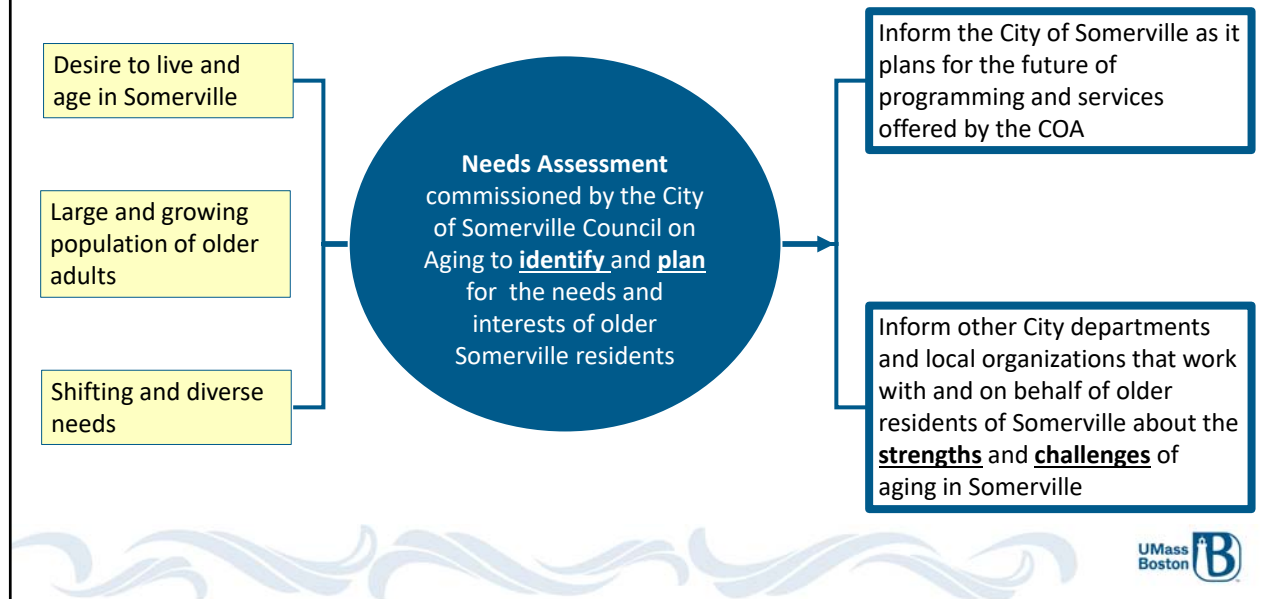
This project would not have been possible  
without support from:

- ❖ Mayor Katjana Ballantyne
- ❖ Ashley Speliotis, Director of the COA
- ❖ The Council on Aging Board
- ❖ Council on Aging Staff
- ❖ All the stakeholders and residents who took time to participate in interviews and the survey
- ❖ Additional support from CSDRA graduate students and undergraduate interns



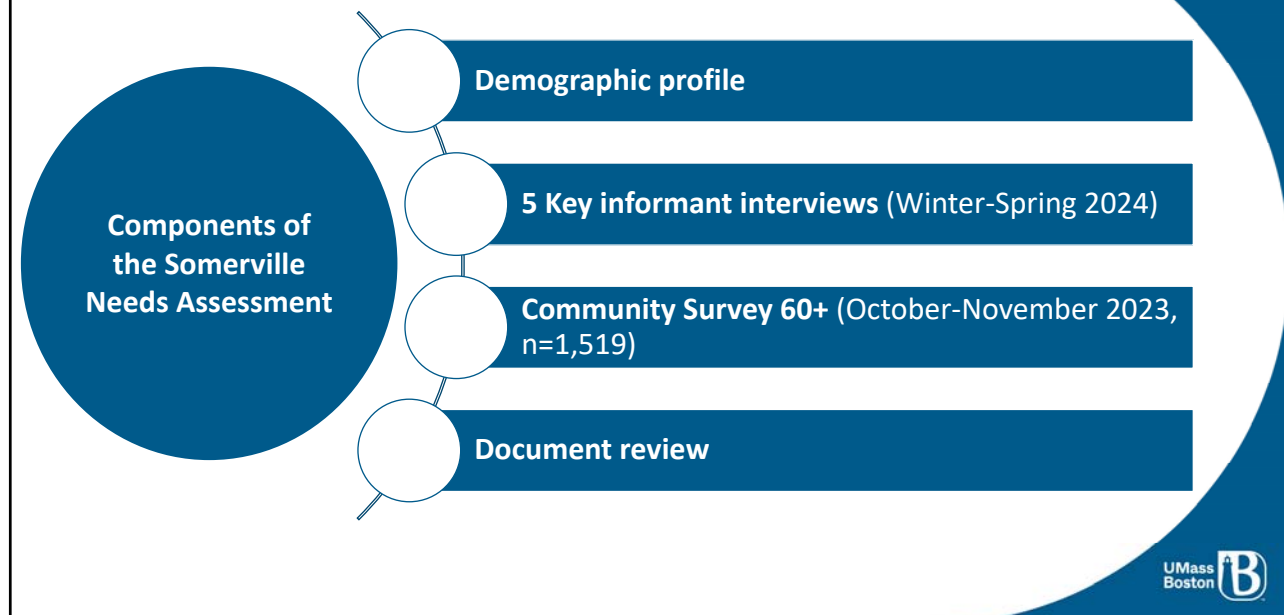
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## Background & Purpose



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## Project overview



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## Survey respondent characteristics

	Mailing list, random sample of residents age 60+		Survey responses	
	Count	Age distribution	Count	Age distribution
<b>Under 60</b>	0	--	7	<1%
<b>Age 60 to 69</b>	2,383	48%	635	44%
<b>Age 70 to 79</b>	1,685	34%	588	41%
<b>Age 80 to 89</b>	720	14%	173	12%
<b>Age 90+</b>	212	4%	29	2%
<b>Total</b>	5,000	100%	1,519*	100%

61% female

82% white  
 4% Black or African American  
 5% Asian  
 4% another race  
 5% Hispanic or Latine/o/a (any race)

14% speak another language  
 21% born outside of the U.S.



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## Somerville Council on Aging: Opportunities for Growth and Recommendations



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**Summary finding: Many older residents are not aware of the full range of offerings at the COA. As well, there is a perception that one must have “need” to participate at the COA, not just desire.**



**Recommendation: Focus efforts on increasing awareness of the Council on Aging.**

The COA currently advertises programs and services through a variety of media (e.g., COA newsletter in print and online, social media, email). In addition to continuing those efforts, consider expanding outreach efforts and messaging.

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**Summary finding: Programs that support active aging are desired by many survey participants, especially among those who do not currently attend.**



**Recommendation: Expand programs and services offered by the COA to reach a broader segment of Somerville residents.**

While the COA already offers a variety of programs, identifying opportunities for expansion is critical to continue meeting the needs and interests of older residents of Somerville, which is comprised of a very diverse group of individuals, backgrounds, and experiences.

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**Summary finding: The Somerville Council on Aging provides crucial programs and services to a share of Somerville residents; but its capacity to serve the diverse needs and preferences of older residents is limited.**



**Recommendation: Address immediate space needs of the Council on Aging, focusing on short-term accommodations.**

The COA is already at capacity with its current space. Some of the recommended programmatic changes cannot be implemented without access to additional space.

**Recommendation: Collaborate with City leadership and other departments to plan for long-term space needs.**

Further community engagement and assessment is needed before making any major or long-term decisions about COA space changes (e.g., new location, community center, etc.).

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## Aging in Somerville: Opportunities for Growth and Recommendations



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**Summary finding: Maintaining safety and quality of walkability and access to public transit are top priorities for older residents. This is particularly true for those with mobility limitations.**



**Recommendation: Continue efforts to make Somerville accessible for all, with particular attention on those with mobility impairments and advanced age.**

Build upon current initiatives to improve walkability and safety across Somerville. Consider expanding transportation options available to older residents, which can help reduce dependence on driving.

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**Summary finding: Accessibility of current housing stock, including ongoing home repair and maintenance are key features to being able to age well in Somerville.**



**Recommendation: Continue to develop, implement, and advertise information and resources that support aging in community.**

Find ways to promote existing resources available to older residents, such as direct support services provided by the Office of Housing Stability. Continue and expand support of the Somerville Housing Authority to provide affordable housing options as well as case management services to residents.

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**Summary finding: Financial insecurity among older adults is a growing concern, as many face challenges in maintaining quality of life and good health.**



**Recommendation: Bolster communication & information about existing financial security supports.**

Strengthen communication across City departments and organizations about resources available to help seniors who are struggling financially. Strengthen mechanisms for other City Departments and local organizations to refer residents to outreach staff at the Senior Center when a community member is known to need assistance

**Recommendation: Facilitate new approaches to addressing financial insecurity.**

Forge new partnerships with local businesses and organizations and develop programs focused on financial literacy.

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**Summary finding: Caregiving is common and families could use support.**



**Recommendation: Enhance direct supports for caregivers in Somerville.**

Create new ways of providing information and assistance for caregivers, support groups for caregivers, and provide information about referral resources available.

**Recommendation: Promote public education and awareness of caregiving experiences, particularly for Alzheimer's Disease and other dementias, as indirect support for caregivers.**

Dementia Friendly Massachusetts can provide resources and sample materials

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**Summary finding: Risk of social and political isolation among older residents is growing.**



**Recommendation: Mobilize neighborhoods and communities within Somerville to combat social isolation.**

Drawing on neighborhood connections, Somerville could foster ways for residents to work together on strategies for addressing social isolation

**Recommendation: Foster and expand strategies to empower older adults living in Somerville to remain civically engaged through advocacy and volunteer work.**

Continue efforts such as the Somerville Civic Day and identify new ways for getting older residents involved

**Recommendation: Greater awareness and understanding of the diversity of aging experiences is needed.**

Identify ways to educate the public as well as City staff and elected officials to reframe aging as active an experience and to dispel notions of ageism.

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# Thank you!

Caitlin Coyle, PhD, Director  
Ceara Somerville, MS, Research Associate

Center for Social & Demographic Research on Aging  
University of Massachusetts Boston

Contact: [Caitlin.coyle@umb.edu](mailto:Caitlin.coyle@umb.edu)  
617-287-7413



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## Supplemental slides



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## Key Findings: Aging in Somerville

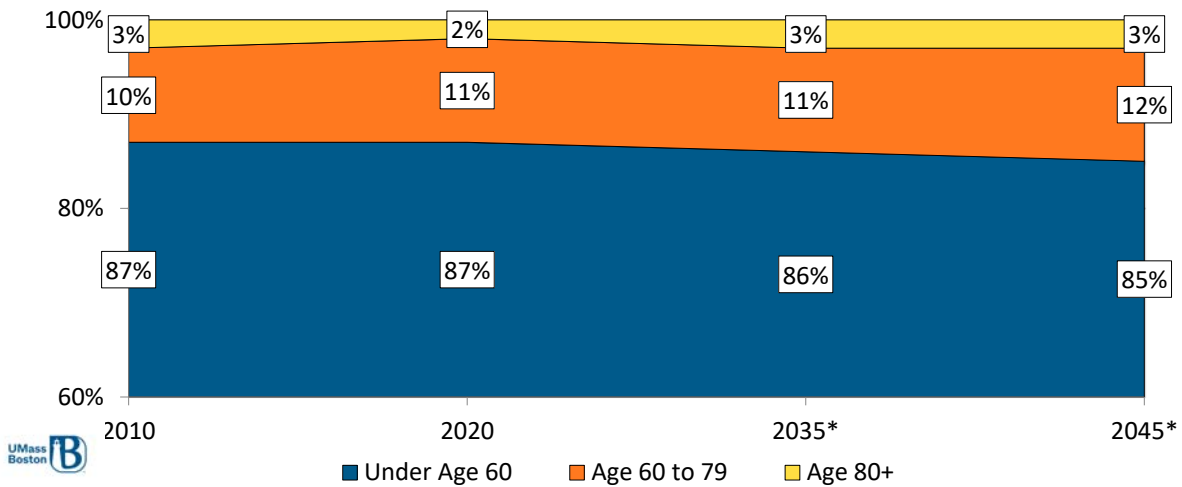
Information synthesized from all data sources



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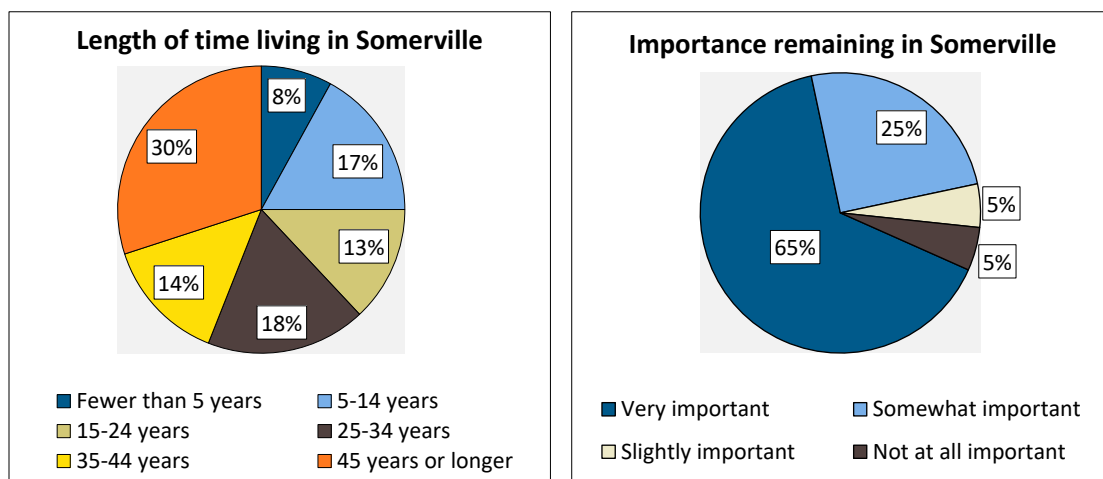
## Older residents make up a significant share of the Somerville population...and that is expected to continue

Population trends; age distribution of Somerville residents under age 60, age 60-79, and age 80 and older, 2010 to 2020 with projections to 2035\* and 2045\*



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## Older residents have varied histories in Somerville, most want to stay as they age



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Older residents rely on themselves and public transportation to get where they need to go

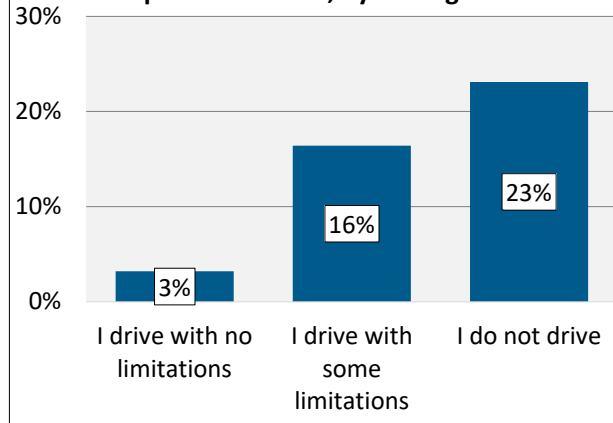
### Driving status

- 17% of survey respondents drive with some limitations
- 23% do not drive at all
  - 48% of respondents 80+

### Primary modes of transportation

- 67% drive themselves
- 54% walk
- 50% rely on MBTA subway lines
- 33% rely on MBTA buses

Percentage of respondents who have had to miss, cancel, or reschedule a medical appointment in the past 12 months, by driving status



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Sidewalk maintenance and lack of parking make it increasingly difficult for persons with mobility limitations to get around for those who cannot access the MBTA

- Three key informants described issues with mobility and transportation related to uneven sidewalks, poor snow removal, and bike lane safety

*"Walking down the streets is also a problem. Lots of torn up pavement and tree roots making sidewalks difficult to navigate."*

*"I'm trying to age in place BUT the city is making it harder to go places...I only shop where I can go safely by car. NO I can't walk safely to ANY bus or T stop anymore (like I did when I was young)."*

- 21% of survey respondents selected "There is not enough parking where I need to go" as a difficulty getting needed transportation
- 7% specified "there is not enough handicap parking where I need to go"

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## Housing that supports independence is needed

*I hope I can continue to get up the three flights of stairs to my apartment.*


**Key-informant interviews**

- Need for more affordable, accessible, comfortable, and safe housing is needed in Somerville
- Increased demand for public housing
- Public housing, “more than just a landlord”
- Interest in more home maintenance supports, like the COA snow shoveling program

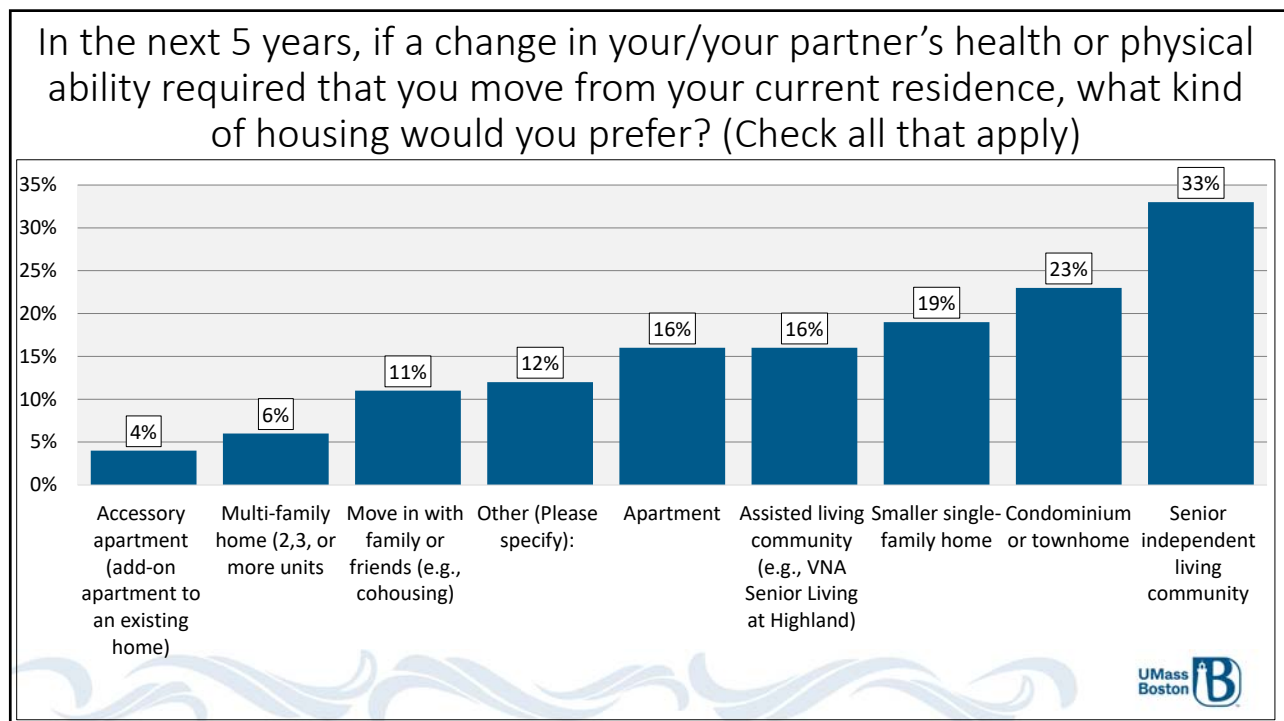
**Survey write-in responses**

- Being able to modify current homes for improved accessibility
- The need for support related to property maintenance
- Being able to maintain the functionality to live independently in their homes

*Maintaining an older home, dealing with landscaping (weeding, trimming, shoveling, etc.), retrofitting an older home for senior living.*

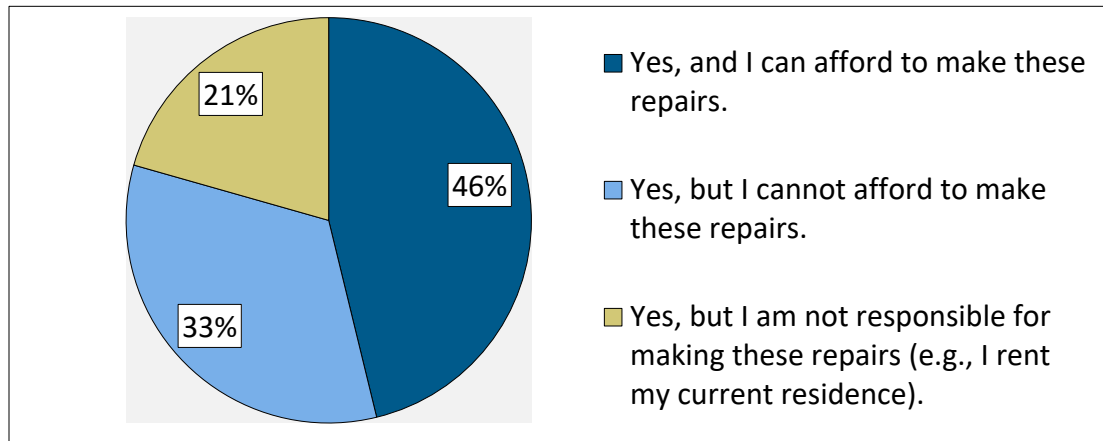
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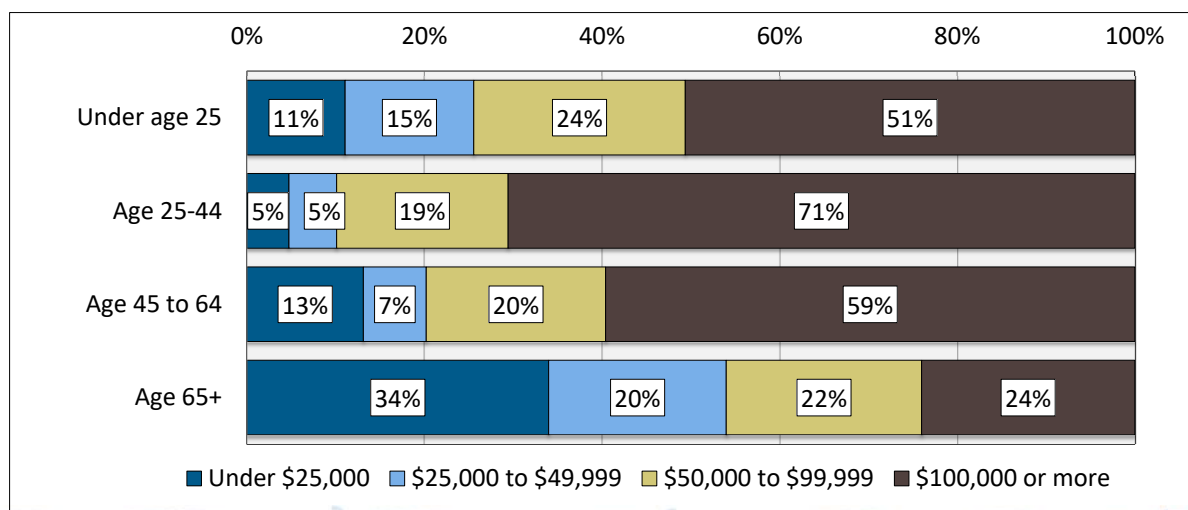
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## Ability to afford home repairs, among respondents who reported their home needs repairs



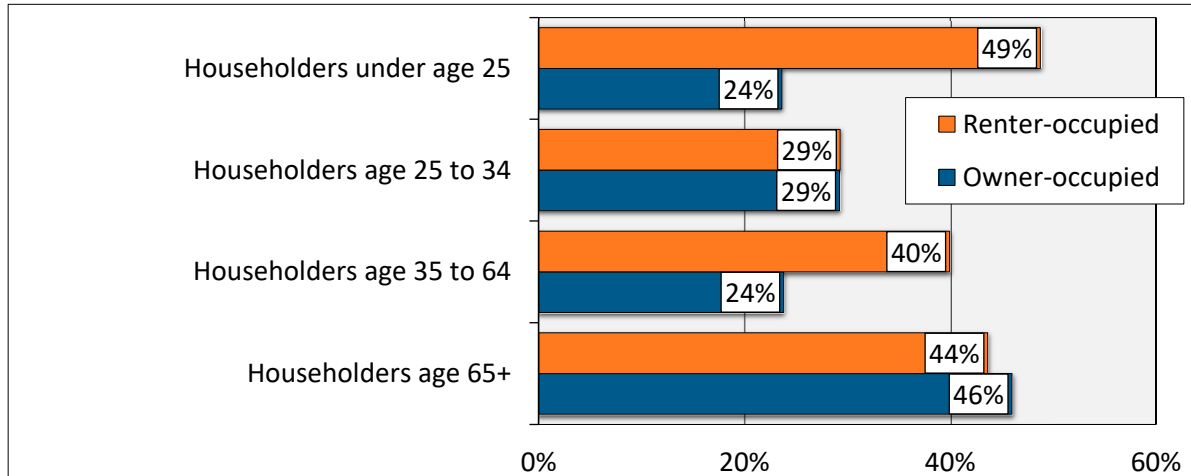
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## Household income distribution in Somerville by age of householder (in 2022 inflation-adjusted dollars)



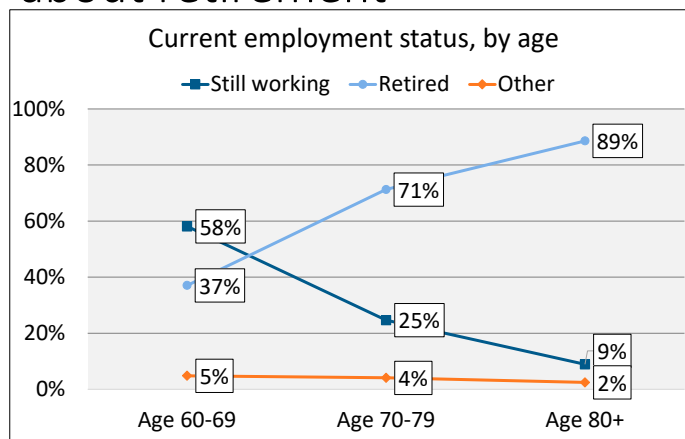
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## Proportion of households spending more than 30% or more of income on housing costs, by age and tenure

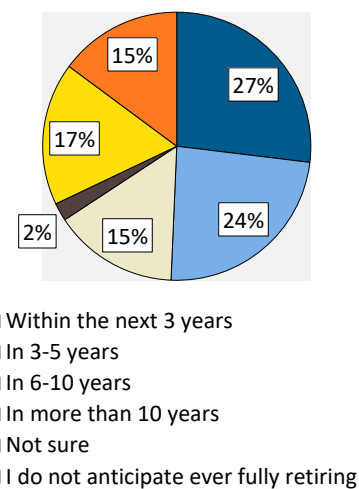


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## Many older residents continue to work and are uncertain about retirement



### Anticipated retirement timing, among those currently working



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## Cost of living—including rent, property taxes, utilities and food—a top concern among survey write-ins

*"I am getting priced out - taxes and water insurance - being on fixed income the increases in these things far exceeds any increase we get on S.S."*

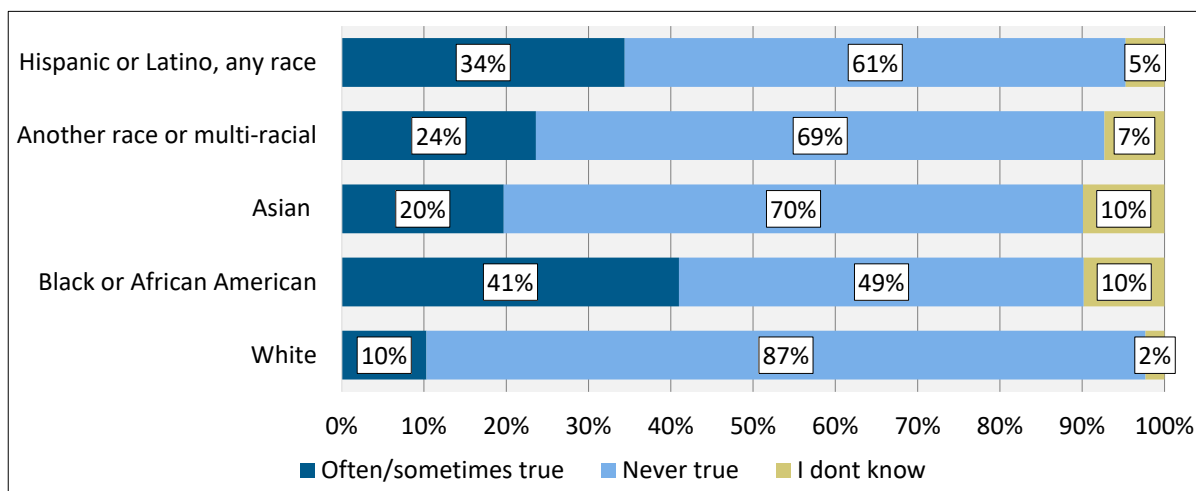
*"The cost of rent is becoming unsustainable on a fixed budget. I have lost hope in purchasing a home so I live with the worry of having to move again if the landlord sells or raises the rent more."*

*"Once I retire, my cost of living will become even more important as my income will go down drastically. I am afraid of what that will do to my ability to live a healthy life as rent continues to rise everywhere."*



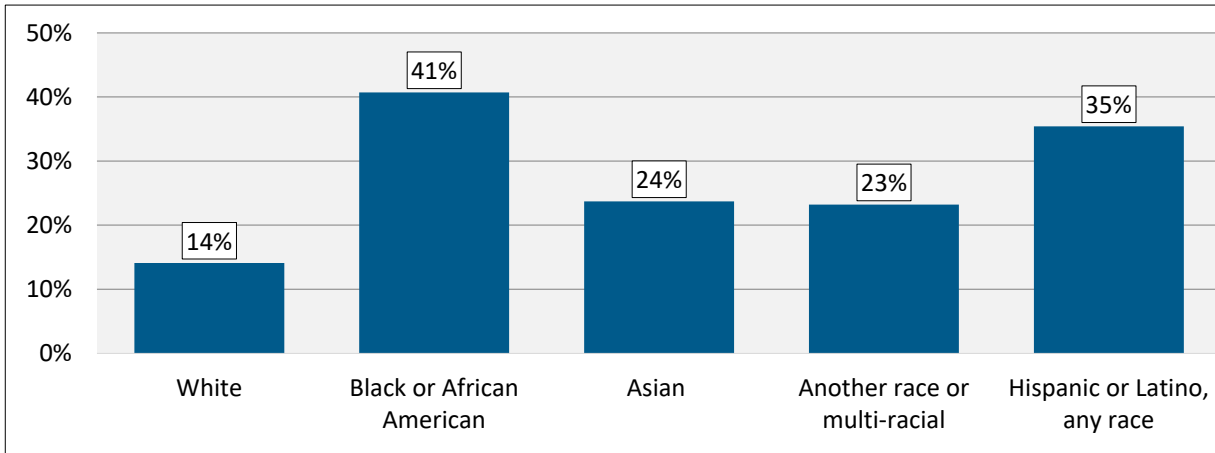
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"In the past 12 months, I worried whether my food would run out before I got money to buy more."



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Percent who disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, “I have adequate resources to meet my financial needs, including food, home maintenance, personal healthcare, and other expenses.”

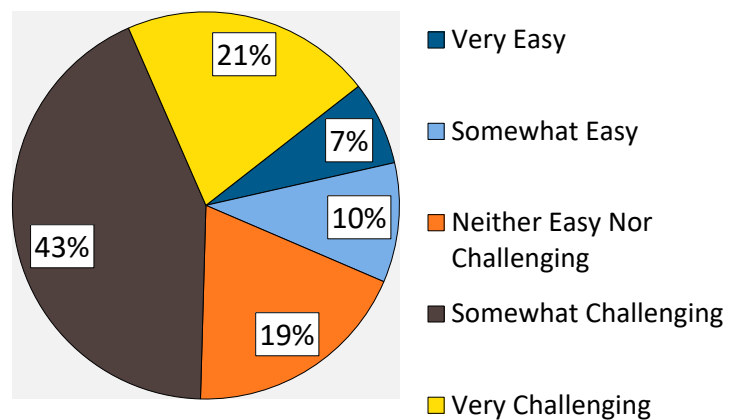


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Caregiving is common among Somerville residents, most find it challenging

- 36% of respondents reported being a caregiver
  - Among those in their 60s, 41%
  - 34% of those in their 70s
  - 24% of respondents age 80+
- Mobility limitations (58%), chronic conditions (32%) and Alzheimer's or other dementias (27%) were among the common causes of needing to provide care

**Among caregivers, how challenging is/was it for you to care for this person and meet your other responsibilities with family, your personal health, and/or work?**

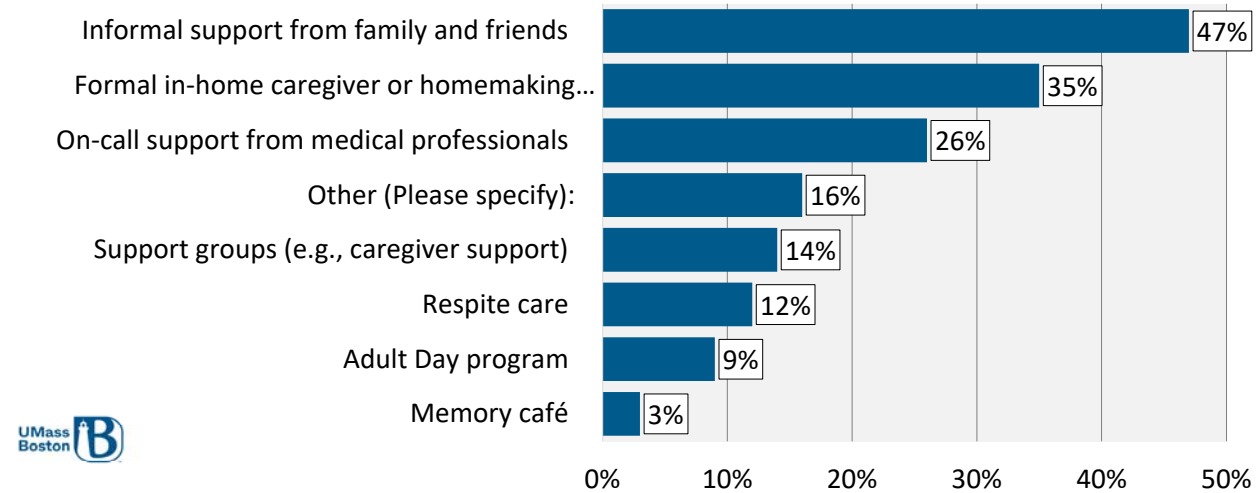


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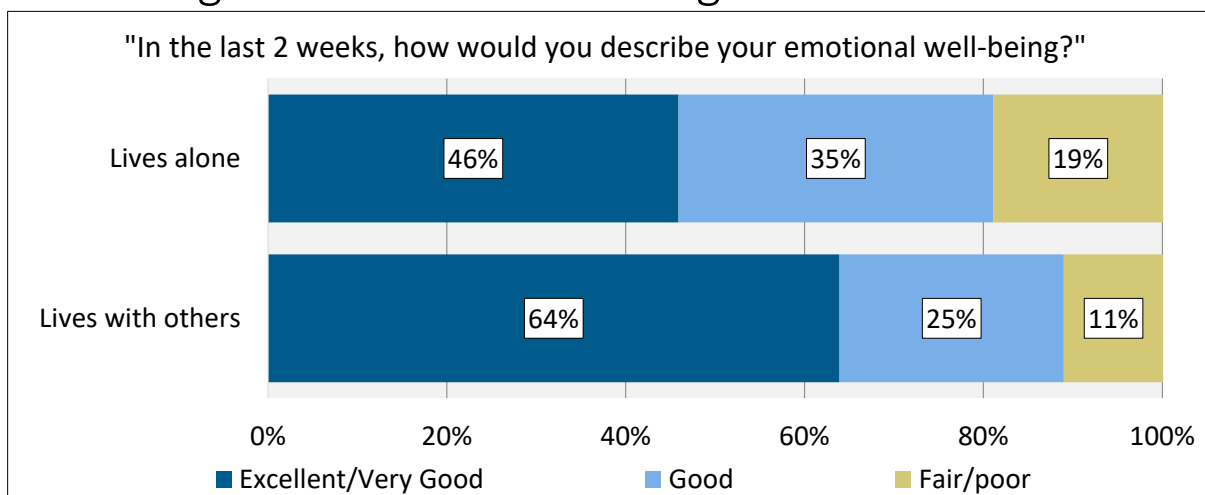
## Caregivers need informal and formal help, as well guidance accessing supports

Among caregivers, What supports were, or would have been, most valuable to you during your time providing care or assistance?



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## Older residents living alone rate their emotional wellbeing lower than those living with others

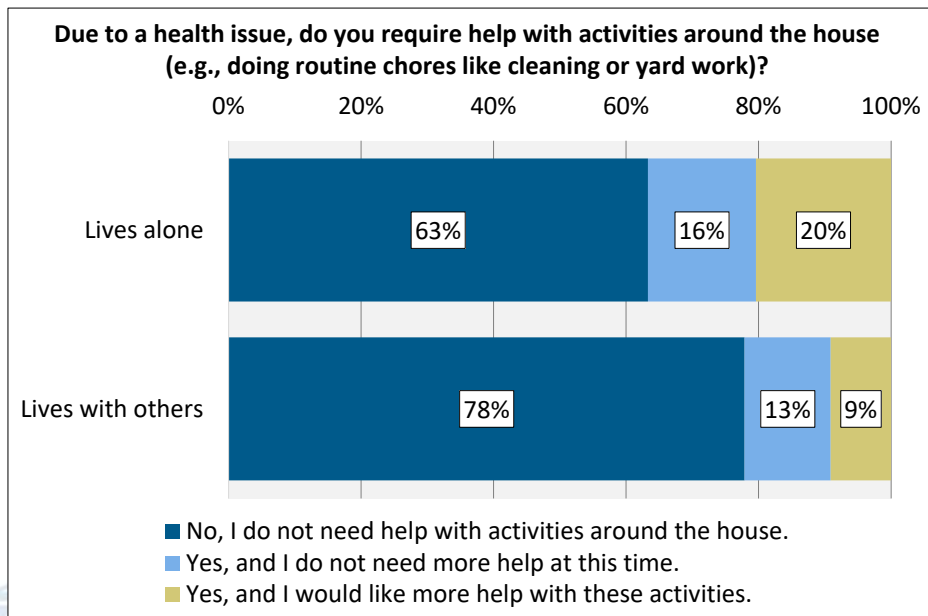


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## More than a third of older residents live alone, many need help

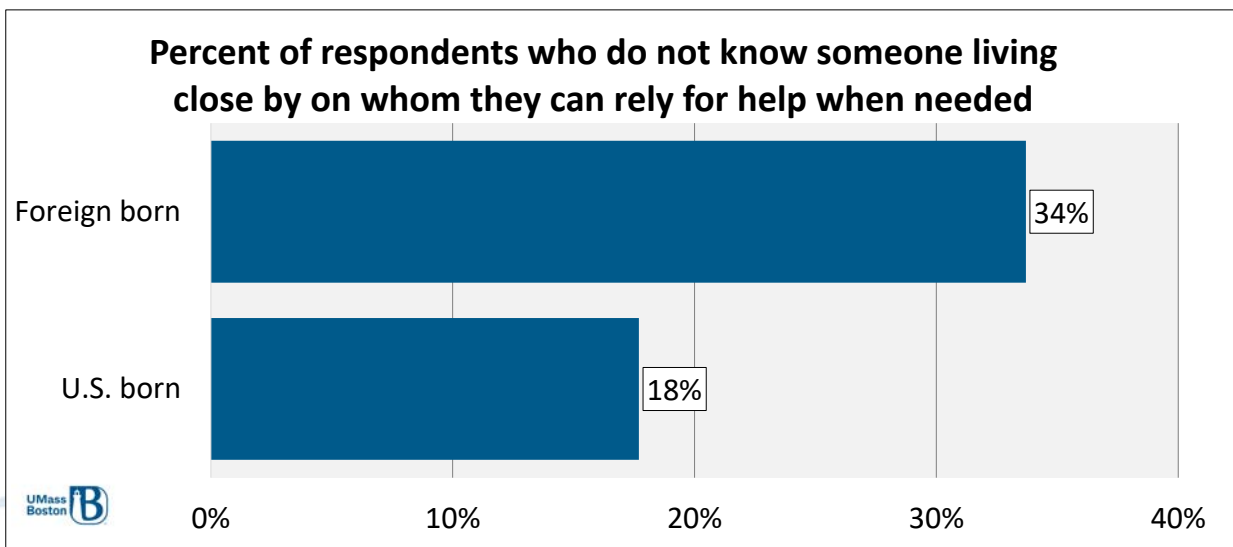
- 37% of older Somerville residents live alone

- 30% of those in their 60s
- 43% of those in their 70s
- 48% of residents age 80+



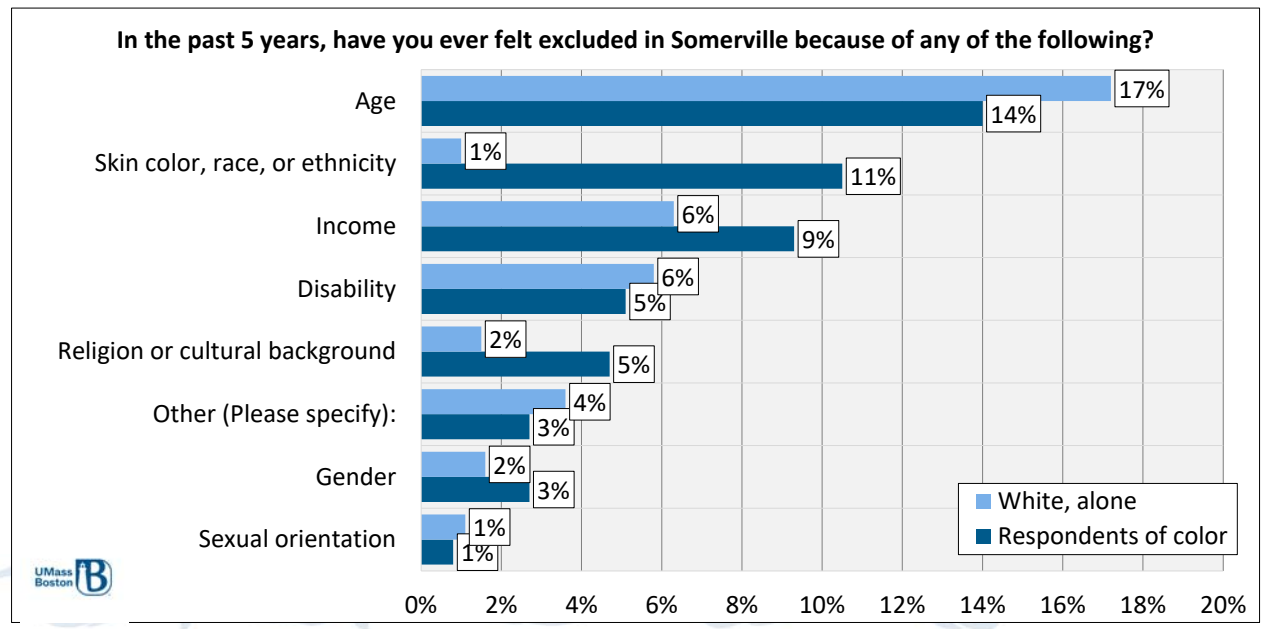
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## 1 out of 5 survey respondents don't know someone close by who they could rely on for help



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## Feelings of exclusion among older residents



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*"Feel very strongly that seniors have become a marginalized group - little advocacy for or focus on senior needs."*

*"We are underrepresented or not represented at all at the level of decision making that impacts our safety, well-being and inclusion now and in the future..."*

### Concerns that older residents are ignored, undervalued

*"City of Somerville citizens 60 yrs+ old are not one class of people. The city seems to feel that all seniors are in need + only offers services to those groups. The city does not categorize young families in this manner"*

*"Everything is about youth- bike paths, more development, too crowded"*

*"At this point in my life, the best thing the Council on aging can do is to lobby within the city for the needs of the elderly."*

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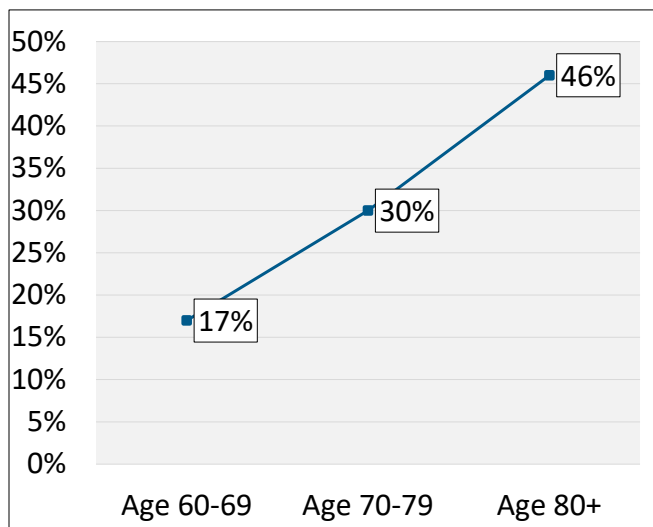
# Key Findings: Somerville Council on Aging

Information synthesized from all data sources



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## Participation at the Somerville Council on Aging



- 74% of all survey respondents never use the COA
- Among those who participate at the COA,
  - 50% go a few times a year
  - 22% go monthly
  - 28% go weekly
- 19% of respondents who live alone participate monthly (compared to 10% of respondents who live with others)

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## Council on Aging is a valued asset, but limited in capacity

*COA is an important resource for older residents. It was helpful to me when caring for my mother. Appreciate the resources available for older residents of Somerville*

*Their council on aging is great! and some more funding/space would enable them to do other additional things*

*Even though I am not yet "there," I do appreciate this survey & the work that the City and the Council on Aging is doing that might benefit others. Thanks.*

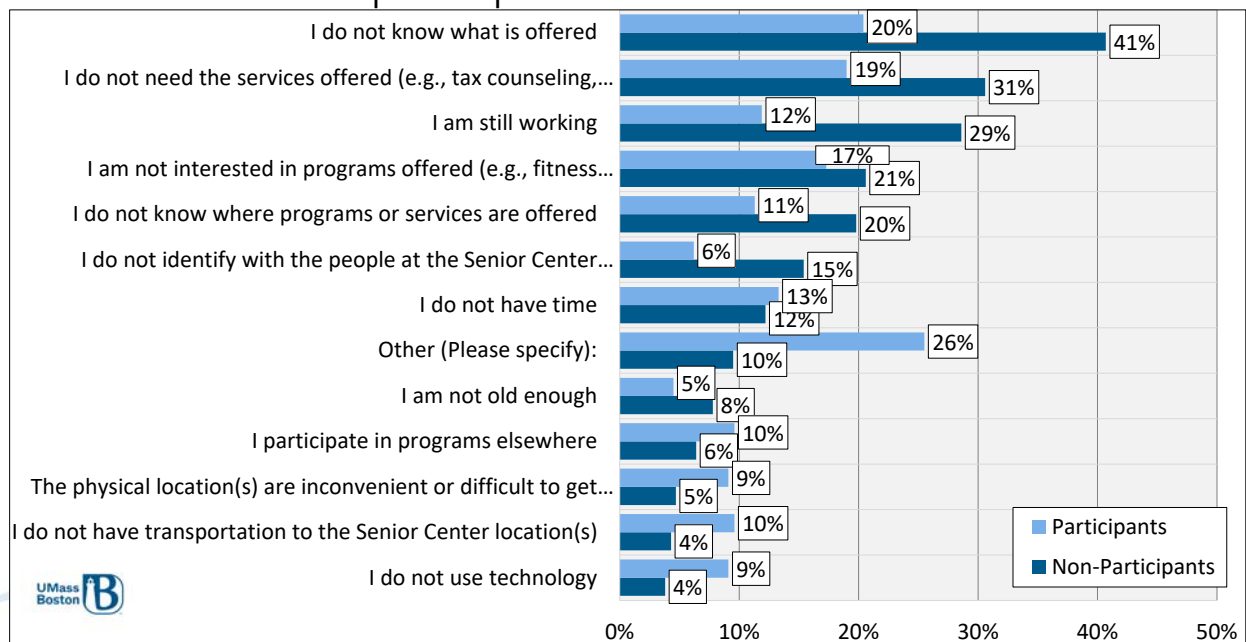
*The center needs a larger room for its physical activities such as Tai Chi- where there is sufficient floor space*

- **Holland Street Center**
  - Can run up to 3 programs simultaneously
  - Largest space fits ~65 people max
- **Ralph & Jenny Center**
  - 1 multipurpose room, maximum ~45 people
- **Increased demand for programs and services**
  - Waitlists for lunches, cultural events



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## Factors that limit participation at the Senior Center



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Most selected responses to the prompt: “I would be more likely to use the Somerville Council on Aging programs and services if...”

	All ages	Attendees	Non-Attendees
I had more knowledge about programs and services available	45%	36%	61%
Programs and services were better suited to my needs and interests	23%	35%	25%
It included residents of all ages and functioned as a community center	22%	24%	27%
There was more parking	16%	30%	15%
Other (Please specify):	16%	14%	21%

Write-in explanations for “Other” included

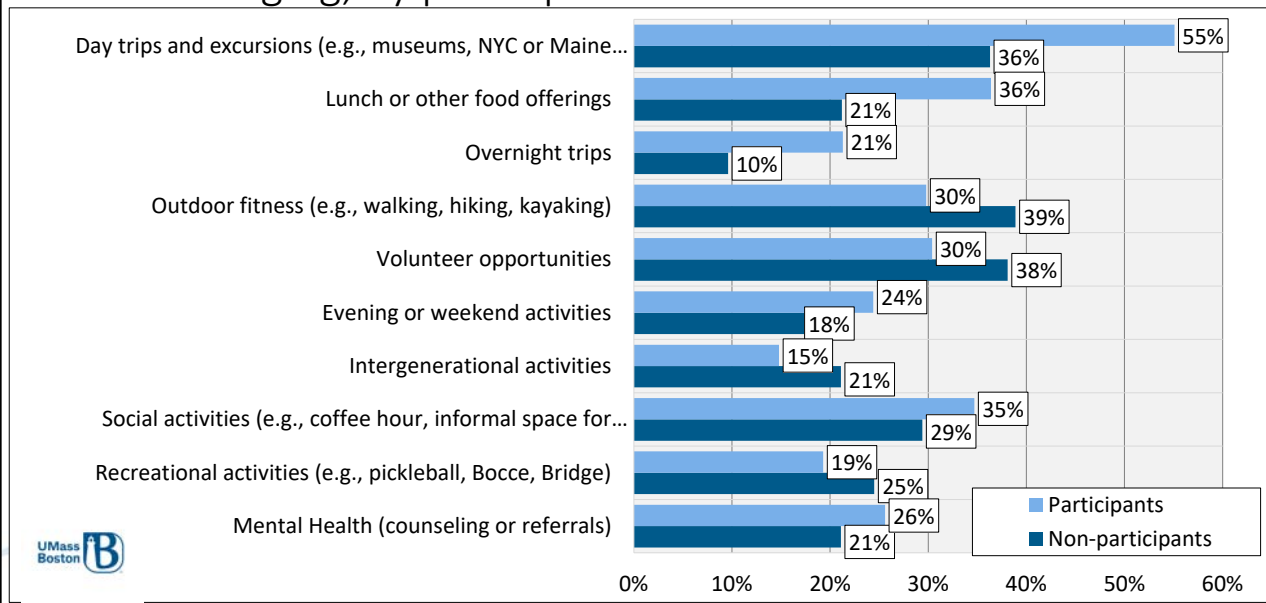
- No need or interest
- No time, hope to use it in the future
- Participate in programs elsewhere
- Ideas for additional programming

*“Currently my social/emotional etc. community is elsewhere and strong. I feel that in the next 5-10 years I will want and use these Somerville services and am glad they are here.”*



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## Selected priority areas for expansion through the Somerville Council on Aging, by participation



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## Further exploration of space adjustments is needed

"Thinking about the activities and services offered through the Somerville Council on Aging, please rate your preference for each arrangement" by participation

