RHODE ISLAND
LIFE
INDEX

Presented in partnership by:

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island

BROWN School of Public Health

ZIP Code is more important than genetic code.

Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island originally set out to create a "life index," armed with a growing body of evidence that when it comes to health outcomes and overall well-being, zip code is more important than genetic code. Where people are born and live in Rhode Island has a profound impact on their lives. We conducted a first of its kind survey of Rhode Islanders' perceptions of social determinants of health and well-being as an initial step to inform our future community investments and philanthropy.

Based on interviews conducted with more than 2,200 Rhode Islanders about life factors influencing health and well-being in the state, the Index offers a unique window into what state residents see as community strengths and those they believe to be significant challenges.

What did we find? Rhode Islanders have positive feelings about several aspects of their communities, including access to safe and reliable transportation; access to affordable, nutritious food; availability and quality of civic, social, and healthcare services for older adults and the ability to age in place; and programs and services available for children. In contrast, respondents, especially those living in the state's core cities,

had lower perceptions of the availability of quality affordable housing, job opportunities and job training programs. In short, many Rhode Islanders told us that they struggle to find affordable housing and jobs that pay well enough to ensure financial stability.

Armed with our vision and these data, BCBSRI will develop new approaches – and strengthen existing programs – to drive needed change in our state.

We look forward to sharing the survey results broadly, not only with our community partners but also with the general public, so that together, we can build healthier communities through Rhode Island.

Why a RI Life Index?

At Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island, our vision to passionately lead a state of health and well-being across Rhode Island was the impetus for the creation of this index. As a proud local company celebrating 80 years of being the state's largest health insurer, we are committed to building a healthier Rhode Island. In order to address factors like safe and affordable housing, access to transportation, the availability of nutritious food, and financial stability – all widely acknowledged to impact health and well-being – it is critical to start with a clear assessment of the landscape, because you cannot address what you do not measure.

What you will find in these pages, then, are measures of Rhode Island residents' perceptions about health and well-being in our state. We wanted to hear from Rhode Islanders themselves about where they feel they and their communities are on the spectrum of health and well-being.

The data we collected will also assist boots-on-the-ground organizations in their essential work to improve the lives of all Rhode Islanders. Many of these organizations are vital community partners of BCBSRI; their voices and input were invaluable to our thinking and planning as we launched this project with our academic and survey design collaborators at the Brown University School of Public Health.

Recognizing that there are several available data sets measuring various social determinants of health and well-being, we set out to collect information that complemented rather than duplicated existing data.

Each time we repeat the survey, we intend to pay special attention to a particular demographic group in our state; in this first survey, that group was older adults. We also plan to highlight a few issues of special concern. The opioid epidemic, discrimination in healthcare, access to mental health and substance abuse treatment, and emergency room use were issues we asked about in this survey.

We look forward to reporting on our progress on all fronts as our work begins in earnest.

The Methods

In April and May 2019, we randomly selected residents by landline telephone, cell phone, or web with geographic representation across the state of Rhode Island. Interviews lasted approximately 15 minutes and were conducted in English or Spanish. In total, 2209 surveys were completed with an oversample of individuals age 55 and older. Of the surveys, 902 were conducted by landline, 900 by cell phone, and 407 though a web survey tool.

The Survey

To inform the survey's content, we conducted focus groups and individual interviews with community stakeholders. In the survey, we asked three sets of questions to ask respondents about their perceptions of their communities. One set of questions asked respondents to rate statements about their communities in terms of whether the statement was completely descriptive, somewhat descriptive, not very descriptive, or not descriptive at all. A second set of questions asked respondents to rate how likely each aspect of life was for a typical person living in their community—very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, or very unlikely. The third set of questions asked respondents to specifically rate the experiences of older adults in their community from very good to very poor. In the survey, we also included questions about personal and household access to health care, social integration, emergency department use, concerns about discrimination in healthcare, experiences with opioid abuse, and overall mental and physical health.

The Analytic Approach

First, we weighted the data to be representative of the state of Rhode Island. Next, we created scores for various aspects of health and well-being in a community. We refer to these scores as POP (percent of the possible) scores. The POP score for each health component represents how close respondents believe their community is to an ideal or healthy community in these areas. We used this approach to combine multiple indicators into one score, allowing for easier observation of targets for improvement, as well as community strengths.

A POP score of 100 is the highest possible score for each component. A score of 100 is reached when every single respondent rates each of the individual indicators of a component at the highest (best possible) value. Scores ranging from 0 to 100 show how close the community is to the ideal. For creation of the POP scores, negative outcomes were reversed so that a higher POP score indicates moving towards a healthier community.

We also used ordinary least squares (OLS) regression modeling with each POP score individually treated as the dependent measure to examine the individual characteristics associated with each health and well-being component. Variables included in the models were: age, race/ethnicity, income, education, living arrangement, and geography. In the report, ▲ means that a variable is associated with higher (better) perceptions of that component. ▼means that the variable is associated with lower (worse) perceptions. A ▬ means that the variable was not meaningfully associated with that component.

Age	Race	Income	Education	Living Alone	Core City
▬	▬	▲	▲	▲	▼

Throughout this report, we show POP scores overall and stratified by geography (Core Cities vs Non-Core Areas – see box this page), age (<55 years vs ≥55 years), and household income (<$50,000 vs ≥$50,000). The darkest red colors represent the lowest (worst) POP scores while the darkest blue colors represent the highest (best) POP scores. This allows for easy visualization of how close to the ideal survey participants viewed each component of health and well-being.

Core cities

Woonsocket
Central Falls
Providence
Pawtucket

Core cities are those in which 25% or more of children are living below the federal poverty level.
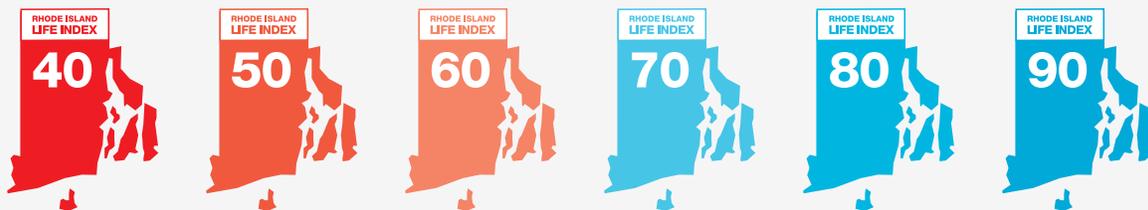

In addition to the POP scores, we show findings from this year's issues of special concern, including the opioid epidemic, discrimination in healthcare, access to mental health and substance abuse treatment, and emergency room use. Where possible, because of sufficient sample sizes, we also present these findings, which are reported as percentages, stratified by geography, age, and income.

Report organization

The report begins at the widest point of the lens, with summaries of perceptions of community that incorporate a range of social determinants of health, and quickly moves into a breakdown of those key factors. We also include data here on the actual experiences of respondents with regard to their own health and their and their household's access to healthcare. The report concludes with actual experiences of respondents around the issues of special concern cited above: the opioid epidemic; discrimination in healthcare; access to mental health and substance abuse treatment; and emergency room use.

Characteristics of the sample*

The characteristics of the survey participants were comparable to state of Rhode Island demographics. Half were female and aged 18 to 49. One-third reported having a high school education or less. The majority identified as non-Hispanic white and heterosexual/straight. Three quarters lived in households of two or more people with almost half reporting household incomes of less than $50,000.

# of people in household
44 3+
25 1
31 2

Gender
51 Female
47 Male

Education
High school or less 32
28 Bachelors or higher
40 Some college

Age
18-34 29
20 65+
25 50-64
22 35-49

Income
<$25K 22
20 >$100K
23 $50K-$99K
22 $25K-$49K

Race/ Ethnicity
Other 10
Hispanic/ Latinx 12
African American/ Black 6
73 White

Sexual Orientation
Lesbian/Gay/ Homosexual 3
Other 1
Bisexual 4
Heterosexual/ straight 88

*Percentages do not all add to 100% because of missing data.

QUALITY OF COMMUNITY

DEFINITION

Definition: Quality of community scoring represents **a summary** of how residents rate social and economic aspects of their community, including the following topics:

- Access to childcare
- Activities for youth
- Employment
- Food
- Housing
- Utilities

QUESTION WORDING:

For each statement, tell me if that statement is completely descriptive, somewhat descriptive, not very descriptive, or not descriptive at all **of your community**.

VARIABLES

Age	Race	Income	Education	Living Alone	Core City
—	—	▲	▲	▲	▼

RHODE ISLAND LIFE INDEX

52

Quality of Community

46
CORE CITY

54
NON-CORE

Under Age 55

44	46
<$50K	$50K+

Under Age 55

50	56
<$50K	$50K+

Age 55 & Over

47	49
<$50K	$50K+

Age 55 & Over

51	58
<$50K	$50K+
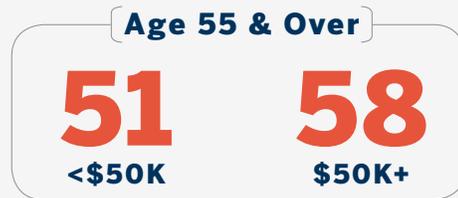
COMMUNITY LIFE

DEFINITION

Definition: Community life scoring represents **a summary** of how residents perceive the lived experiences of typical individuals in their community, looking at the following areas:

- Access to childcare
- Employment
- Education
- Food
- Housing

- Transportation
- Healthcare
- Recreational facilities and internet
- Personal safety
- Risk of incarceration

QUESTION WORDING:

For each statement, please tell me how likely each is for a typical person living in your community: very likely; somewhat likely; somewhat unlikely; and very unlikely

VARIABLES

Age	Race	Income	Education	Living Alone	Core City
▲	—	▲	—	▲	▼

RHODE ISLAND LIFE INDEX

70
Community Life

66
CORE CITY

72
NON-CORE

Under Age 55	
64	**64**
<$50K	$50K+

Age 55 & Over	
67	**68**
<$50K	$50K+

Under Age 55	
68	**72**
<$50K	$50K+

| Age 55 & Over	
71	**75**
<$50K	$50K+

JOBS

DEFINITION

How do residents rate job opportunities and job training programs?

TOPICS:

Availability of jobs; employment with living wage; access to adult education

RHODE ISLAND LIFE INDEX

56
Jobs

52
CORE CITY

57
NON-CORE

Under Age 55

49
<$50K

52
$50K+

Under Age 55

53
<$50K

57
$50K+

Age 55 & Over

52
<$50K

56
$50K+

Age 55 & Over

57
<$50K

61
$50K+

Percentage of respondents who said *somewhat* or *completely descriptive* to the following:

I´m going to read you a series of statements that some people make about the area where they live, that is, their community. For each, tell me if that statement is completely descriptive, somewhat descriptive, not very descriptive or not descriptive at all of your community.

There are enough jobs
that pay a living wage

39
50

Percentage of respondents who said *somewhat* or *very likely* to the following:

For each of the following aspects of life, please tell me how likely each is for a typical person living in your community: very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, very unlikely.

Being employed at a job that
provides them with a living wage

54
66
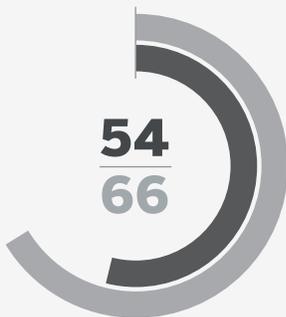
Having access to affordable
adult education, including job training

57
59

■ **Core City**   ■ **Non-Core**

VARIABLES

Age	Race	Income	Education	Living Alone	Core City
—	—	▲	—	▲	▼

HOUSING

DEFINITION

How do residents rate access to affordable, quality housing?

TOPICS:

Cost of housing; difficulty paying for utilities; access to internet connection

RHODE ISLAND LIFE INDEX

48
Housing

44
CORE CITY

50
NON-CORE

CORE CITY

Under Age 55

42	45
<$50K	$50K+

Age 55 & Over

42	47
<$50K	$50K+

NON-CORE

Under Age 55

45	53
<$50K	$50K+

Age 55 & Over

45	54
<$50K	$50K+

Percentage of respondents who said *somewhat* or *completely descriptive* to the following:

I´m going to read you a series of statements that some people make about the area where they live, that is, their community. For each, tell me if that statement is completely descriptive, somewhat descriptive, not very descriptive or not descriptive at all of your community.

The cost of housing makes it
hard to find a quality place to live

(reverse coded)

21
22

People may have a hard time paying for
utilities such as electric, gas, oil or water

(reverse coded)

16
30

**Percentage of respondents who said *somewhat* or *very likely* to the following:**

For each of the following aspects of life, please tell me how likely each is for a typical person living in your community: very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, very unlikely.

Being able to afford quality housing, that is,
all systems like heating and plumbing work
and the housing itself does not pose any
health dangers

62
71
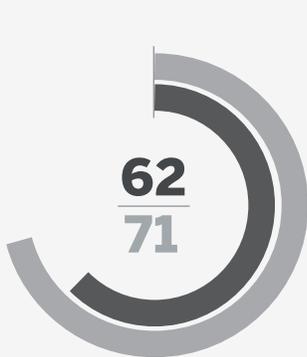
Having access to an affordable
internet connection

67
74
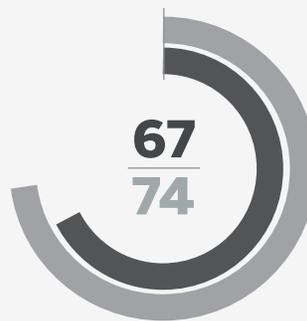
■ **Core City**　　■ **Non-Core**

VARIABLES

Age	Race	Income	Education	Living Alone	Core City
—	—	▲	—	▲	▼

FOOD

DEFINITION

How do residents rate access to affordable, nutritious food?

TOPICS:

Access to nutritious affordable food; convenience of location of nutritious food
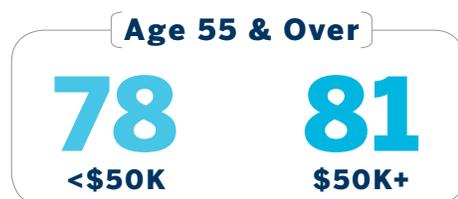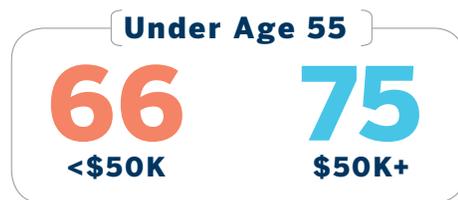
RHODE ISLAND LIFE INDEX

73
Food

67
CORE CITY

Under Age 55

63	63
<$50K	$50K+

Age 55 & Over

74	70
<$50K	$50K+

75
NON-CORE

Under Age 55

66	75
<$50K	$50K+

Age 55 & Over

78	81
<$50K	$50K+

Percentage of respondents who said *somewhat* or *completely descriptive* to the following:

I´m going to read you a series of statements that some people make about the area where they live, that is, their community. For each, tell me if that statement is completely descriptive, somewhat descriptive, not very descriptive or not descriptive at all of your community.

Most people are able to access affordable food that is healthy and nutritious
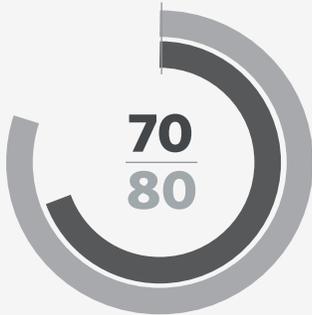
70
—
80

Percentage of respondents who said *somewhat* or *very likely* to the following:

For each of the following aspects of life, please tell me how likely each is for a typical person living in your community: very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, very unlikely.

Obtaining nutritious food at a convenient location

77
—
86
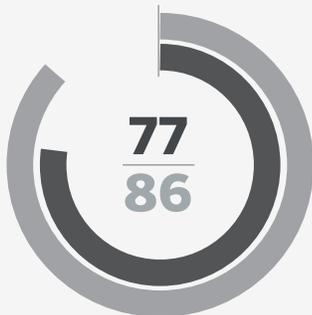
■ **Core City**   ■ **Non-Core**

VARIABLES

Age	Race (Black)	Income	Education	Living Alone	Core City
▲	▼	▲	—	—	▼

TRANSPORTATION

DEFINITION

How do residents rate the availability of safe and reliable transportation?

TOPICS:

Safe public transportation stops; special transportation services for people with disabilities and older adults; available transportation when needed
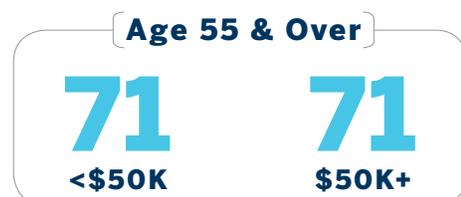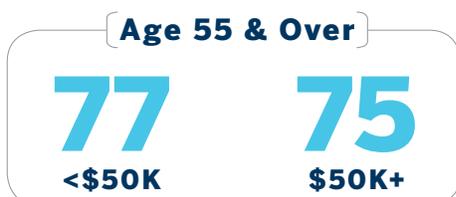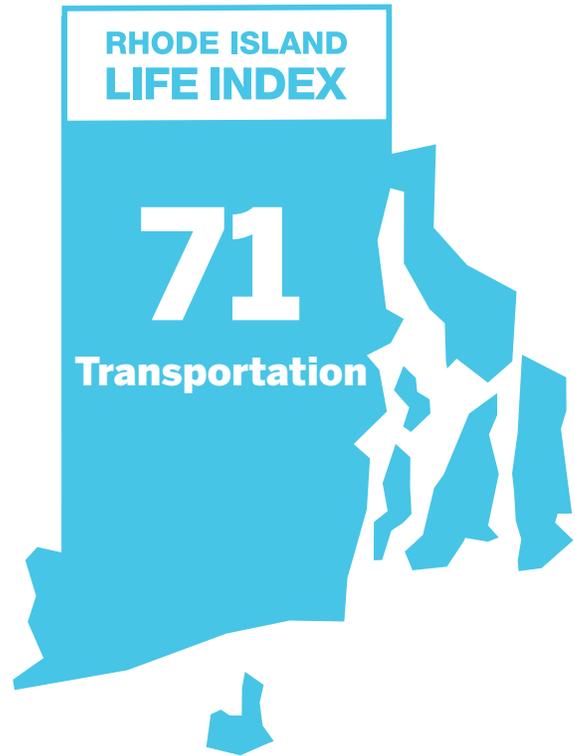
RHODE ISLAND LIFE INDEX

71
Transportation

74
CORE CITY

69
NON-CORE

Under Age 55
73 <$50K **73** $50K+

Under Age 55
69 <$50K **67** $50K+

Age 55 & Over
77 <$50K **75** $50K+

Age 55 & Over
71 <$50K **71** $50K+

Percentage of respondents who said *somewhat* or *completely descriptive* to the following:

I´m going to read you a series of statements that some people make about the area where they live, that is, their community. For each, tell me if that statement is completely descriptive, somewhat descriptive, not very descriptive or not descriptive at all of your community.

There are safe public transportation stops or waiting areas

82
69
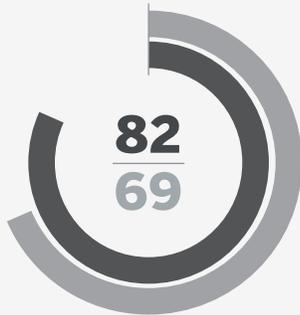
There are special transportation services for people with disabilities or older adults
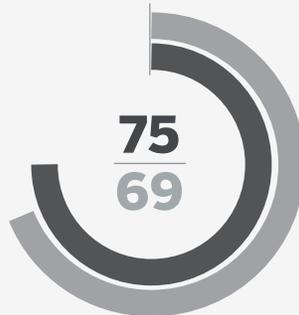
75
69

Percentage of respondents who said *somewhat* or *very likely* to the following:

For each of the following aspects of life, please tell me how likely each is for a typical person living in your community: very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, very unlikely.

Having transportation available when needed to go to work, shopping, or medical appointments

78
75
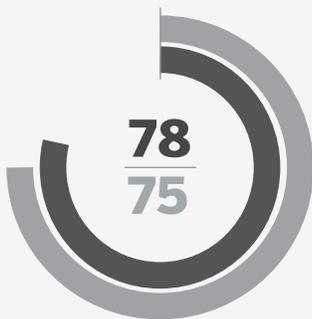
■ **Core City**   ■ **Non-Core**

VARIABLES

Age	Race (white)	Income	Education	Living Alone	Core City
—	▼	—	—	—	▲

SAFETY

DEFINITION

How safe do residents feel in and outside of their homes?

TOPICS:
Feelings of safety in neighborhood; feelings of safety in home; risk of incarceration

RHODE ISLAND LIFE INDEX

77
Safety

67
CORE CITY

81
NON-CORE

Under Age 55

64	65
<$50K	$50K+

Age 55 & Over

67	73
<$50K	$50K+

Under Age 55

74	84
<$50K	$50K+

Age 55 & Over

78	88
<$50K	$50K+

Percentage of respondents who said *somewhat* or *very likely* to the following:

For each of the following aspects of life, please tell me how likely each is for a typical person living in your community: very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, very unlikely.

Feeling as though it is safe to go outside in the neighborhood	Feeling safe and secure in their home	Being incarcerated (reverse coded)
78 / 94	84 / 94	59 / 77
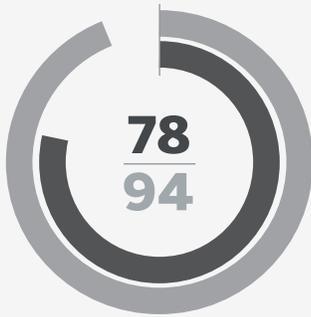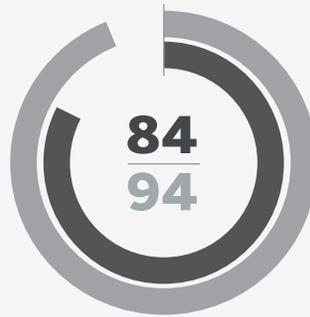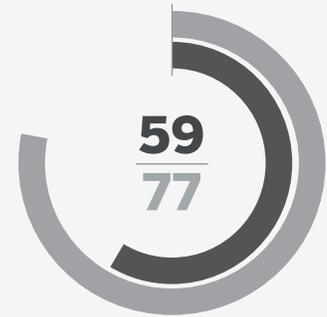
■ **Core City**   ■ Non-Core

VARIABLES

Age	Race (Black)	Income	Education	Living Alone	Core City
▲	▼	▲	▲	▲	▼

OLDER ADULTS

DEFINITION

How do residents rate the availability of services in their community for older adults?

TOPICS:

Availability of social and civic programs; quality of healthcare services; ability for people to age in place

RHODE ISLAND LIFE INDEX

63

Older Adults

59
CORE CITY

65
NON-CORE

Under Age 55

58 <$50K	**56** $50K+

Age 55 & Over

64 <$50K	**62** $50K+

Under Age 55

60 <$50K	**63** $50K+

Age 55 & Over

67 <$50K	**70** $50K+

Percentage of respondents who said *good* or *very good* to the following:

Thinking specifically about the experience of older adults in your community, please rate the following things as very good, good, fair, poor, or very poor.

The availability of social and civic programs for seniors	The quality of healthcare services for seniors	The ability for people to stay in their own homes as they get older
38 / 53	**46** / 53	**33** / 48

■ **Core City**   ■ Non-Core

VARIABLES

Age	Race	Income	Education	Living Alone	Core City
▲	—	▲	—	▲	▼

CHILDREN

DEFINITION

How do residents rate programs and services available for children?

TOPICS:
Place to raise children; access to childcare; access to recreation facilities; activities for youth
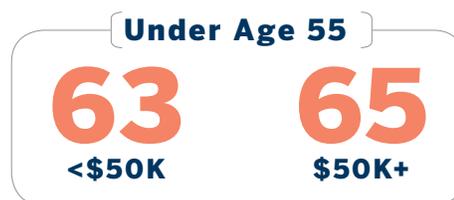
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63
Children

59
CORE CITY

65
NON-CORE

Under Age 55	
57	**58**
<$50K	$50K+

Age 55 & Over	
60	**59**
<$50K	$50K+

Under Age 55	
63	**65**
<$50K	$50K+

Age 55 & Over	
62	**69**
<$50K	$50K+

Percentage of respondents who said *somewhat* or *completely descriptive* to the following:

I´m going to read you a series of statements that some people make about the area where they live, that is, their community. For each, tell me if that statement is completely descriptive, somewhat descriptive, not very descriptive or not descriptive at all of your community.

Parents struggle to find affordable,
high-quality childcare

(reverse coded)

38
43

There are programs and activities for
youth outside of school hours

67
71
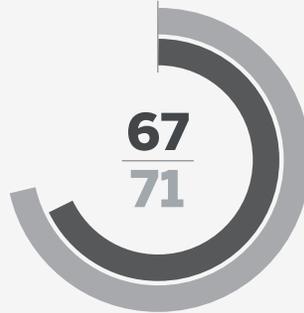
It is a good place
to raise children
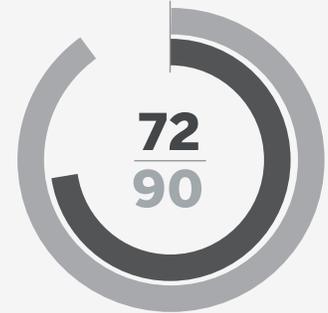
72
90

Percentage of respondents who said *somewhat* or *very likely* to the following:

For each of the following aspects of life, please tell me how likely each is for a typical person living in your community: very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, very unlikely.

Having access to affordable
childcare if needed

49
52

Having access to free or low cost recreation
facilities such as public parks, playgrounds,
and swimming pools

78
82
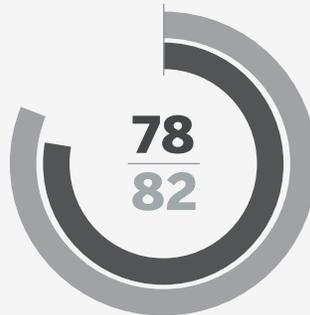
■ **Core City**   ■ Non-Core

VARIABLES

Age	Race	Income	Education	Living Alone	Core City
—	—	▲	—	—	▼

ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

DEFINITION

How do residents rate access to healthcare?

TOPICS:

Routine medical care; mental health or substance abuse treatment if needed
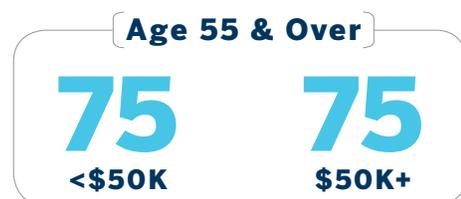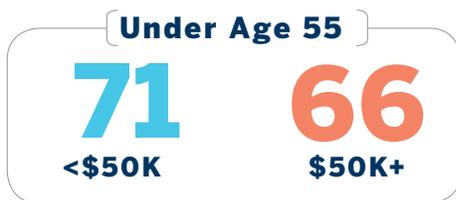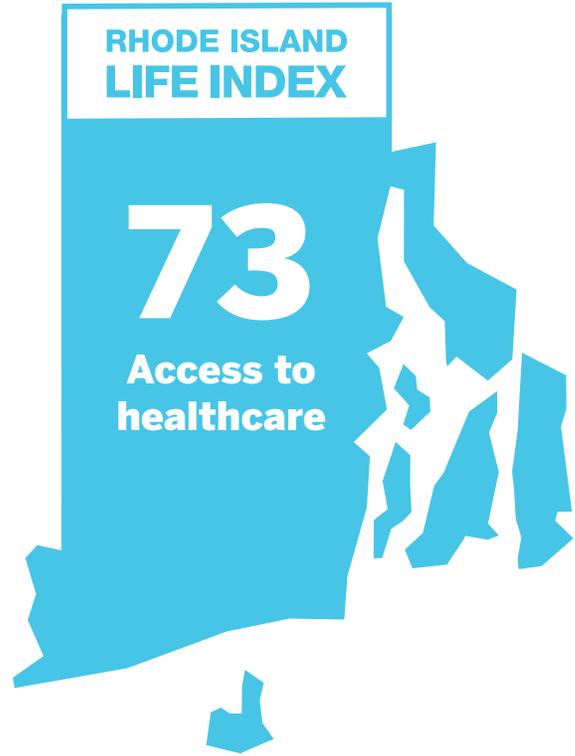
RHODE ISLAND LIFE INDEX

73

Access to healthcare

71
CORE CITY

73
NON-CORE

Under Age 55

71	**66**
<$50K	$50K+

Under Age 55

69	**74**
<$50K	$50K+

Age 55 & Over

76	**70**
<$50K	$50K+

Age 55 & Over

75	**75**
<$50K	$50K+

Percentage of respondents who said *somewhat* or *very likely* to the following:
For each of the following aspects of life, please tell me how likely each is for a typical person living in your community: very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, very unlikely.

Having convenient access to routine medical care

78
—
85

Having access to mental or substance abuse treatment if it is needed

71
—
70
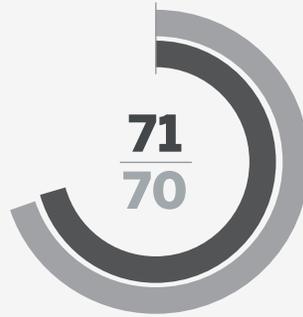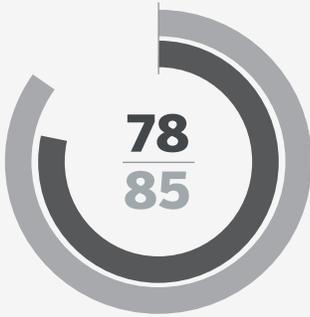
■ Core City   ■ Non-Core

VARIABLES

Age	Race	Income	Education	Living Alone	Core City
▲	—	—	—	▲	—

HOUSEHOLD ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

DEFINITION

To what extent are residents able to access needed healthcare?

TOPICS:

Prescription medicines; over-the-counter medicines; dental care; vision care; any other healthcare
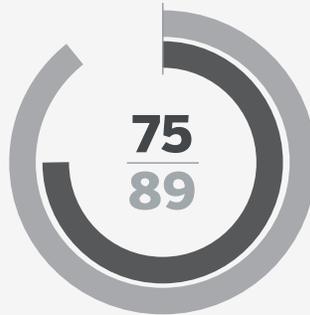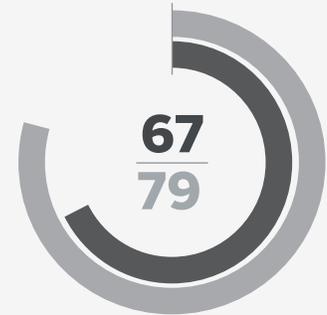
RHODE ISLAND LIFE INDEX

85

Household Access to Healthcare

81
CORE CITY

87
NON-CORE

Under Age 55

73	88
<$50K	$50K+

Under Age 55

79	91
<$50K	$50K+

Age 55 & Over

81	91
<$50K	$50K+

Age 55 & Over

85	92
<$50K	$50K+

Percentage of respondents who said *usually* or *always* to the following:

In the past 12 months, how often have you or any other member of your household been able to get any of the following when it was really needed? Always, usually, sometimes, rarely, never

Prescription medicines

79
89

Over-the-counter medicines

75
89

Dental care

67
79

Vision care

72
81

Any other healthcare

69
75

■ **Core City**   ■ **Non-Core**

VARIABLES

Age	Race (white)	Income	Education	Living Alone	Core City
▲	▲	▲	▲	—	▼

SOCIAL INTEGRATION

DEFINITION

To what extent are residents socially connected to others in their community?

TOPICS:

Visited with family friends or neighbors in person; talked to family or friends on the phone; kept up with friends or family using emails, text messages, or social media

RHODE ISLAND
LIFE INDEX

76

Social Integration

75
CORE CITY

Under Age 55

76	80
<$50K	$50K+

Age 55 & Over

63	80
<$50K	$50K+

76
NON-CORE

Under Age 55

73	82
<$50K	$50K+

Age 55 & Over

68	80
<$50K	$50K+

Percentage of respondents who said *about once a week or more* to the following:

Think about a few activities that some people do in their community. Consider the last 3 months and let me know whether you never did this, did it about once a month, about once a week, or more often than that.

| Visited with family, friends or neighbors in person about once a week or more	Talked with family or friends on the phone, not including text, once a week or more	Kept up with friends or family using emails, text messages, or social media such as Facebook about once a week or more
67 / 74	**86** / 87	**77** / 81
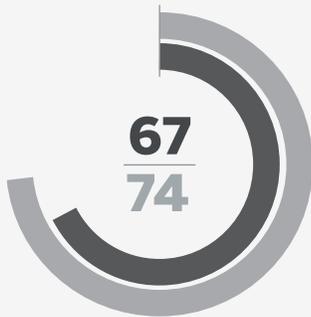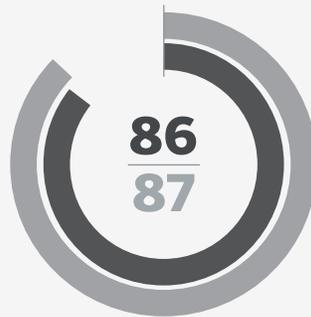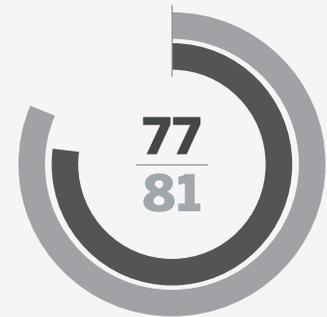
■ **Core City**   ■ **Non-Core**

VARIABLES

Age	Race	Income	Education	Living Alone	Core City
▼	—	▲	▲	▼	—

PERSONAL SELF-RATED HEALTH

DEFINITION

How do residents rate their own health?

TOPICS:
Overall health; mental health
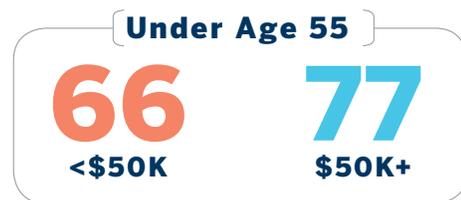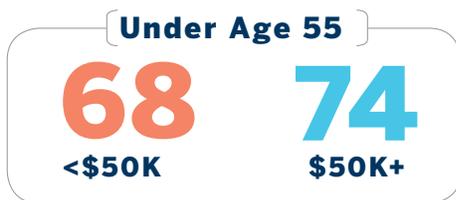
RHODE ISLAND LIFE INDEX

74
Personal Self-Rated Health

72
CORE CITY

75
NON-CORE

Under Age 55

68	74
<$50K	$50K+

Under Age 55

66	77
<$50K	$50K+

Age 55 & Over

67	82
<$50K	$50K+

Age 55 & Over

71	83
<$50K	$50K+

Percentage of respondents who said *good* or *very good* to the following:

How would you rate your health, very good, good, fair, poor, or very poor?

How would you rate your overall health?

How would you rate your mental health?

65 / 71

70 / 75
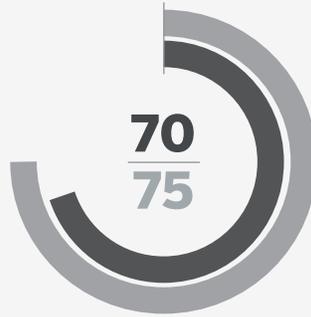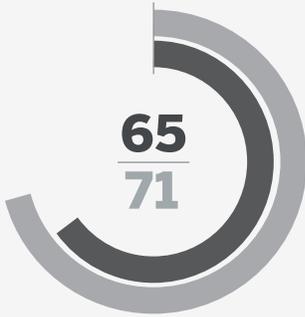
■ Core City   ■ Non-Core

VARIABLES

Age	Race (Black)	Income	Education	Living Alone	Core City
▲	▼	▲	▲	▼	—

OPIOID EPIDEMIC

DEFINITION

Have you, an immediate family member, extended family member, or friend abused opioids?

RHODE ISLAND LIFE INDEX

31%

Opioid Epidemic

28% CORE CITY

34% NON-CORE

Under Age 55		Age 55 & Over	
30	**36**	**20**	**24**
<$50K	$50K+	<$50K	$50K+

Under Age 55		Age 55 & Over	
44	**42**	**22**	**26**
<$50K	$50K+	<$50K	$50K+

12%
SELF OR IMMEDIATE FAMILY

10% CORE CITY

14% NON-CORE

19%
FRIENDS

18% CORE CITY

20% NON-CORE
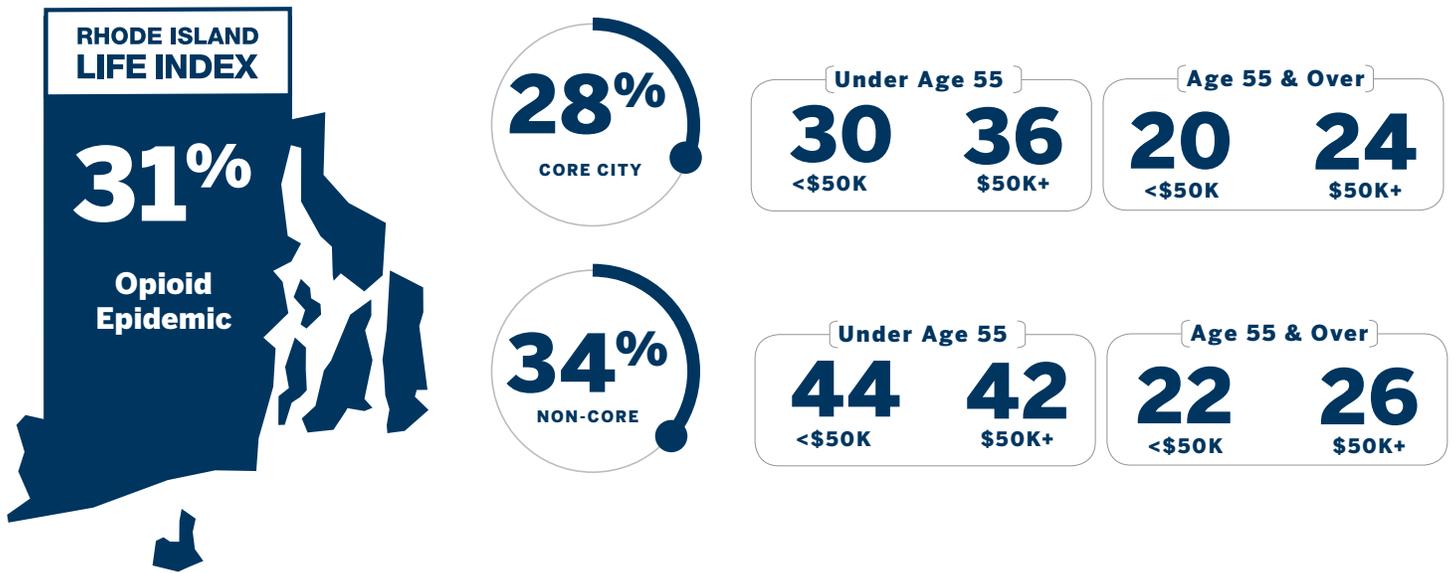
NEEDED MENTAL HEALTH OR SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT

RHODE ISLAND LIFE INDEX

65%
Mental Health Or Substance Abuse Treatment

68% CORE CITY

Under Age 55		Age 55 & Over	
72	**65**	**66**	**62**
<$50K	$50K+	<$50K	$50K+

64% NON-CORE

Under Age 55		Age 55 & Over	
73	**63**	**61**	**55**
<$50K	$50K+	<$50K	$50K+
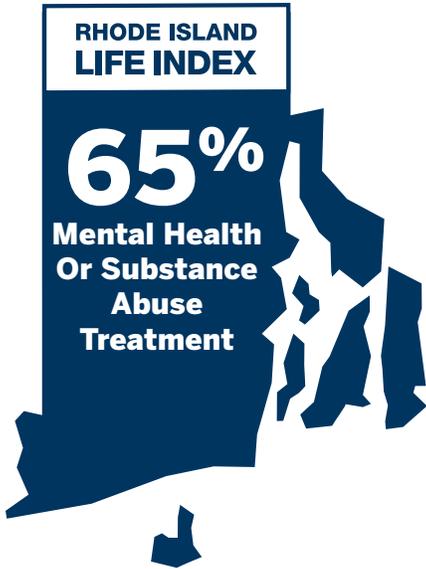
AMONG THOSE WHO NEEDED IT:

Were you able to access mental health or substance abuse treatment ?

RHODE ISLAND LIFE INDEX

62%
Able to get Treatment

59% CORE CITY

Under Age 55		Age 55 & Over	
54	**72**	**58**	**69**
<$50K	$50K+	<$50K	$50K+

64% NON-CORE

Under Age 55		Age 55 & Over	
55	**72**	**63**	**62**
<$50K	$50K+	<$50K	$50K+
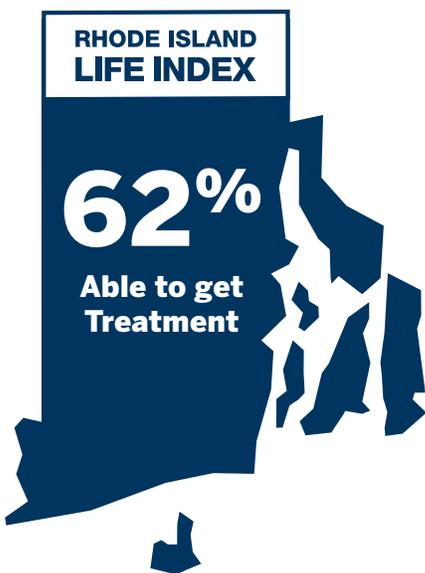
Percentage of respondents who said *usually* or *always*.

EMERGENCY ROOM USE IN PAST 12 MONTHS

DEFINITION

How many times have you visited an emergency room for a medical issue?

RHODE ISLAND LIFE INDEX

41%

Emergency Room Use In Past 12 Months

43%
CORE CITY

40%
NON-CORE

Under Age 55

51	**36**
<$50K	$50K+

Age 55 & Over

37	**34**
<$50K	$50K+

Under Age 55

50	**36**
<$50K	$50K+

Age 55 & Over

45	**34**
<$50K	$50K+
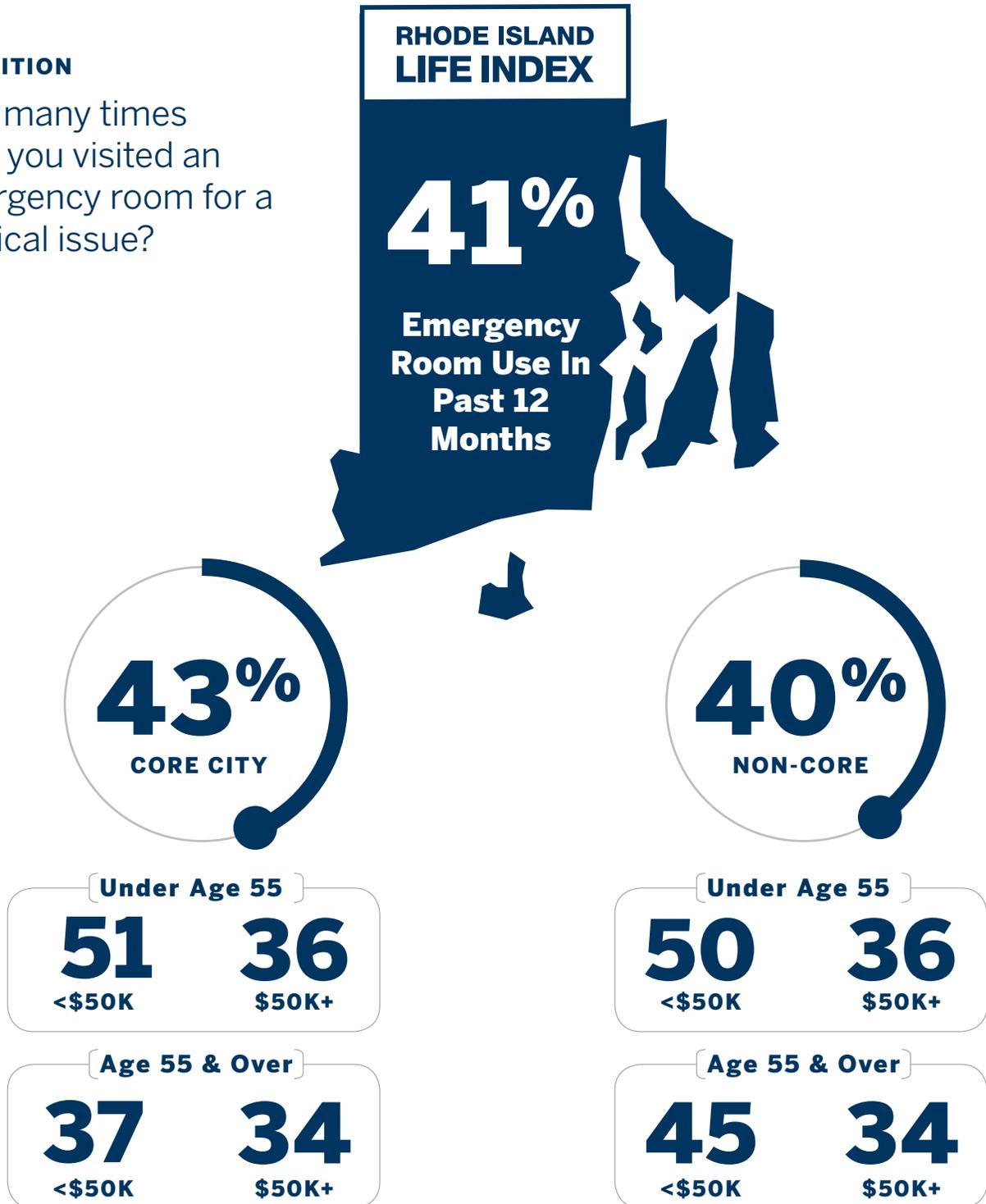
Percentage of respondents who indicated one or more visits to the emergency room for any reason in the past 12 months.

DISCRIMINATION IN PAST 12 MONTHS

DEFINITION

How often have you been concerned about being treated unfairly in a healthcare setting because of your race, ethnicity, or some other personal characteristic?

RHODE ISLAND LIFE INDEX

7%
Discrimination

9%
CORE CITY

7%
NON-CORE
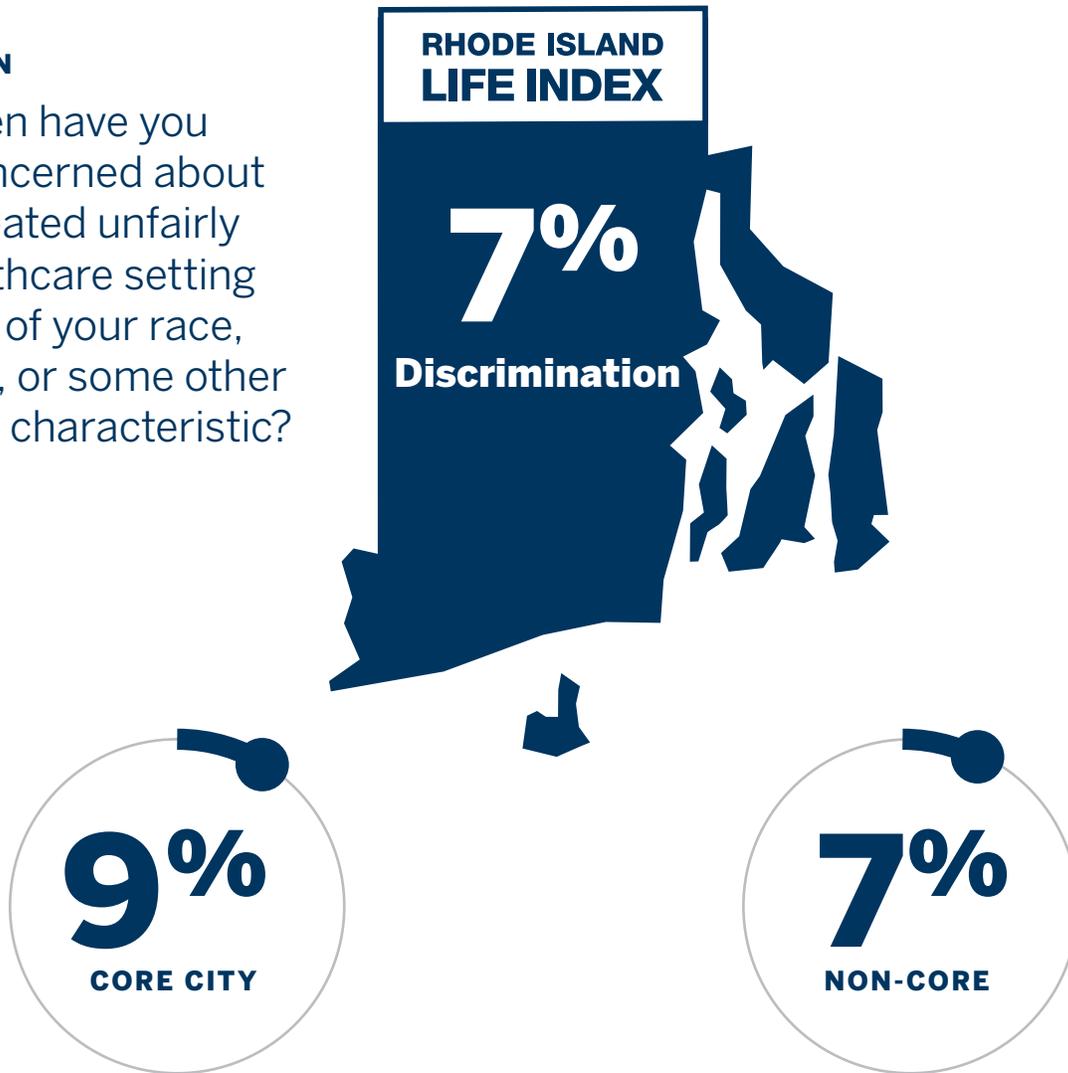
Percentage of respondents who said *usually* or *always*.

Note: Since only approximately 150 residents statewide endorsed this item, we could not reliably divide the sample into any categories other than Core City and Non-Core.

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