



Healthy Communities

Message Manual

AUGUST 2025





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About This Manual

This manual is designed to help Health Forward, its partners, and funding recipients communicate effectively and consistently with communities across the Kansas City region about how race, place, connection, and access shape our health—and to inspire action that helps build a healthier, more connected region.

It provides messages and examples that equip leaders to spark conversation, strengthen connection, bridge divides, and expand opportunity across the region—laying the foundation for lasting narrative change around health, equity, and belonging.

The approach taken to create this manual draws on science-based models and best practices for persuading and motivating people through language that informs and inspires. The messages were developed through extensive engagement with Health Forward’s team and local communities.

How to Use This Manual

We can draw on the themes, language, and ideas in this manual to engage current and potential audiences compelling them to support and amplify a vision for a healthier, more equitable region. The messages in this document can be repeated word for word or adapted to reflect your voice, audience, and goals.





What It Takes To Change the Narrative

Changing the narrative around health equity in the Kansas City region doesn't happen spontaneously. It happens when everyday people and trusted messengers use consistent, values-based messages to shift how we talk, think, and act—especially about the challenges shaped by race, class, and place.

The stories people hear and repeat influence what we believe is true—about ourselves, our neighbors, and the causes of poor health. Over time, those stories form powerful narratives that shape how we treat each other, what we fund, and what we prioritize in policy.

To build a healthier region, we need to shift the story. That means telling a different one—a story grounded in shared values, real experiences, and a belief that everyone should have what they need to live well.

Through research, roundtables, and message testing, we heard a clear throughline:

Health is shaped by where we live, how we're connected, and what we can access, and everyone has a role to play in making our region healthier.

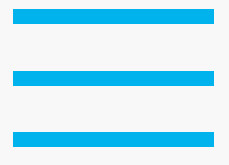
What To Know About Your Audience

Throughout this process, we listened closely to residents from across the region. Their experiences, hopes, and hesitations reveal key insights about how to communicate in ways that connect:

- People here have deep pride in where they come from and where they live and want to see their communities thrive.
- They believe in connection, care, and lending a hand, but many feel unsure of what to do.
- People view health as personal, but are open to seeing it as something we build together.
- People are ready to help, especially when they feel seen and supported and are shown how they can help.
- Some people are held back by fear, misinformation, and isolation. Clear, tangible messages help them move from hesitation to action.

*Learn more about the research insights starting on **page 17**.*

The Aspirational Narrative in this manual unites these insights into one powerful message that is designed to resonate across the region, whether you're talking to city residents or rural towns, longtime organizers or first-time volunteers.



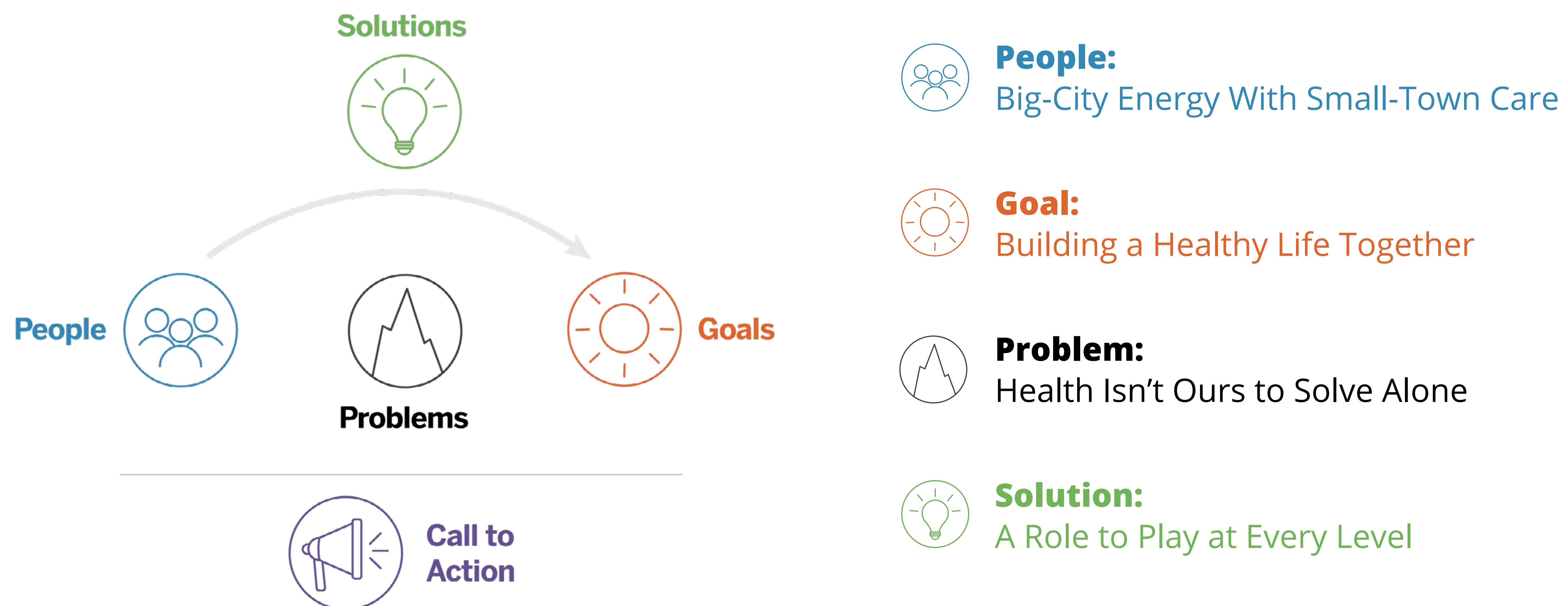
Aspirational Narrative



Introduction to the Narrative Framework

Our message is organized in a simple but powerful Narrative Framework, based on multicultural studies, motivational psychology, and other fields of research. This framework reflects a common way that people across many cultures think about the world and communicate their ideas.

It creates a complete, coherent narrative that motivates people to support this work by putting our audience in the role of the protagonist, so they “see themselves” reflected (**people**). The **goals** are their aspirations, and the **problems** are challenges or needs they face in realizing those aspirations. The **solutions** are the things we do to meet those needs and help people achieve their goals. The **call to action** creates a sense of urgency and tells people what actions they can take.





One-Minute Message

This One-Minute Message serves as the foundational text about how we can build healthy, equitable communities together, and the work it takes from all of us. It can be said in about a minute. This message does not need to be repeated word for word. Rather, it should serve as a cornerstone for communications of all kinds.

In a region known for big-city energy and small-town care, people here show up for their families, their communities, and each other.

Across the region, we're building something meaningful together—a healthy life where each of us can live well, feel safe, and know we belong. When people have connection, care, and access to what they need, our whole community is healthier, and no one gets left behind.

Health doesn't begin or end at the clinic—and it isn't ours to solve alone. Our health is shaped by where we live, who we're connected to, and what's within reach, from good housing to fresh food. But too often, people are left to figure it out by themselves.

Healthy communities don't just happen; they are made by people who care. We build them, whether it's organizing for safer housing, checking in on a neighbor, or helping someone access food. Every act of care, big and small, leads to a stronger, more connected region.



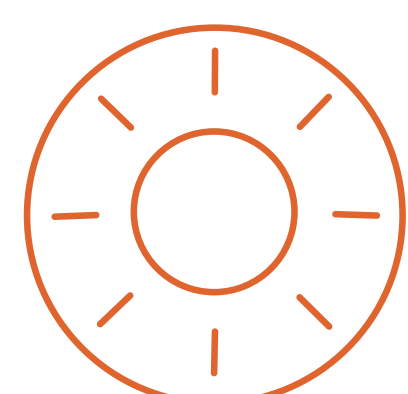
One-Minute Message, Annotated



People:

Big-City Energy With Small-Town Care

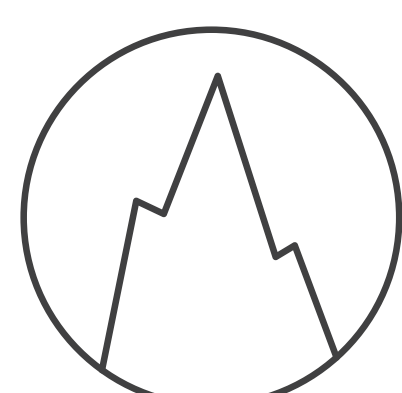
In a region known for big-city energy and small-town care, people here show up for their families, their communities, and each other.



Goal:

Building a Healthy Life Together

Across the region, we're building something meaningful together: a healthy life, where each of us can live well, feel safe, and know we belong. When people have connection, care, and access to what they need, our whole community is healthier, and no one gets left behind.



Problem:

Health Isn't Ours to Solve Alone

Health doesn't begin or end at the clinic—and it isn't ours to solve alone. Our health is shaped by where we live, who we're connected to, and what's within reach, from good housing to fresh food. But too often, people are left to figure it out by themselves.



Solution:


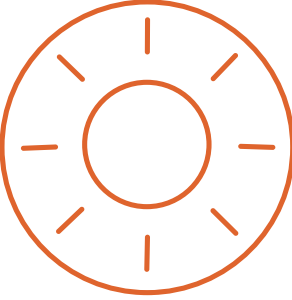
A Role to Play at Every Level

Healthy communities don't just happen; they are made by people who care. We build them, whether it's organizing for safer housing, checking in on a neighbor, or helping someone access food. Every act of care, big and small, leads to a stronger, more connected region.





Winning Words

Winning Words are crafted to evoke emotional responses and to be easily understood, so people can easily retain and repeat them. You can use them in almost any context to tell the story of our work.

NARRATIVE FRAMEWORK	SAY THIS	WHY IT WORKS
<div>People: Big-City Energy With Small-Town CareSupport Them</div>	<p>Big-city energy and small-town care</p> <p>People show up for each other</p> <p>Families, communities</p>	<p>When we start with a shared vision of what people love about their home, we encourage them to be part of keeping it that way.</p> <p>People living in and around Kansas City celebrate the balance of access to big-city amenities and community connection, which sets the region apart and keeps them rooting for their home.</p> <p>They take pride in the way neighbors take care of each other.</p>
<div>Goal: Building a Healthy Life Together</div>	<p>Building something meaningful together</p> <p>A healthy life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Live well- Feel safe- Know we belong <p>Connection, care, and access</p> <p>Our whole community is healthier</p> <p>No one gets left behind</p>	<p>People want to be a part of the magic that’s happening in and around Kansas City, so we want to tie their individual goals to building something together that makes everyone’s life better.</p> <p>People are excited about what the region has to offer, and they want to be part of it.</p> <p>We want to connect the qualities that they want for themselves with the things that make a healthy life. And then we want them to see that a healthy life happens at the individual level, in relationships, and at the whole community level.</p>


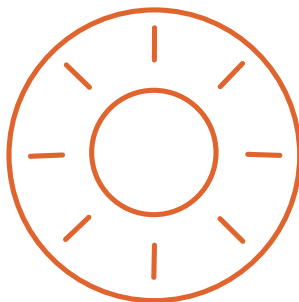


NARRATIVE FRAMEWORK	SAY THIS	WHY IT WORKS
 Problem: Health Isn't Ours to Solve Alone	<p>Health doesn't begin or end at the clinic</p> <p>Health isn't ours to solve alone</p> <p>Our health is shaped by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Where we live- Who we're connected to- What's within reach <p>Too often, people are left to figure it out by themselves</p>	<p>People default to thinking about health as an individual experience, so we need to remind them that health is more than the clinic, and is shaped by forces beyond our control.</p> <p>Most people in the Kansas City region agree in theory that race, place, connection, and opportunity shape health. But they often fall back on more personal experiences of and decisions about health because it feels easier to control.</p> <p>To make the system real, we need to remind them of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Many different things that affect our health are outside our control.2) Different people have different levels of access to the things that make us healthier.3) People don't have to solve it by themselves.
 Solution: A Role to Play at Every Level	<p>Healthy communities don't just happen</p> <p>We build healthy communities</p> <p>Acts of care add up</p> <p>Actions big and small</p> <p>Stronger and more connected</p>	<p>By showing people they have a role and giving examples of actions big and small, we can overcome people's sense of powerlessness.</p> <p>Discussing big, systemic challenges makes it easy for people to disengage. But they want to feel connected with other people, so we need to show how many different actions contribute to the region they're proud to call home.</p>



Get Specific

The Aspirational Narrative and Winning Words are intended to be a guide, not a script. You know your audiences and your community best. Use the Framework to get specific about what is right for *your* work.

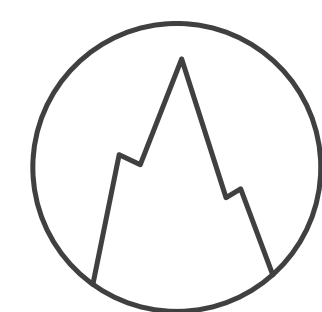
NARRATIVE FRAMEWORK	GET SPECIFIC ABOUT YOUR WORK	EXAMPLES OF TAILORING
<div></div> <div>People: Big-City Energy With Small-Town Care</div>	<div>Define Your Community</div> <div>Use the language that works best to talk about where you live.</div>	<div>Our neighborhood</div> <div>Our town</div> <div>Our ZIP code</div> <div>Our region</div> <div>Kansas City</div> <div>Jackson County</div> <div>Southeast Kansas</div> <div>64024</div>
<div></div> <div>Goal: Building a Healthy Life Together</div>	<div>Envision a Healthy Life</div> <div>Shape a vision of what it looks and feels like to live a healthy life based on the work you're leading.</div>	<div>Live well</div> <div>Feel safe</div> <div>Know we belong</div> <div>Happier</div> <div>More fulfilled</div> <div>Deep connections</div>



NARRATIVE FRAMEWORK

GET SPECIFIC ABOUT YOUR WORK

EXAMPLES OF TAILORING



Problem:
Health Isn't Ours to Solve Alone

Name What's Within Reach—and What Isn't

Be clear about factors that contribute to health, but are outside the control of individuals—and not accessible to everyone.

Good housing
Stable home
Fresh and affordable food
Higher paying jobs
Better transportation options
Affordable childcare
Green space
Cleaner air
Walkable neighborhoods
Safer streets
Places to gather
Places to play



Solution:
A Role to Play at Every Level

Every Act of Care, Big and Small

Share examples of actions people can take, or offer specific calls to action. Pair small acts that anyone could do today with larger acts that can transform systems.

Advocating for safer housing
Checking in on a neighbor
Helping someone access food
Donating to a local nonprofit
Volunteering with a local nonprofit
Attending a community event
Showing up at a town hall
Writing to your state representative
Fighting for better healthcare policies
Voting for policymakers who look out for people's health



Content Examples

This section shares examples of how the narrative may look in different types of content such as social posts, newsletters, or event flyers. Each example draws directly from the Framework, reinforcing the idea that health is shaped by where we live, how we're connected, and what we have access to—and that everyone has a role to play in making our region healthier.

Feel free to customize the details to reflect your audience, your organization, and the work you're doing. The goal is to stay grounded in the shared message while making it your own.

Flyer or Event

Headline:

Join us for Community Cleanup
Day—Because Healthy Places Start With Us

Goal

Body:

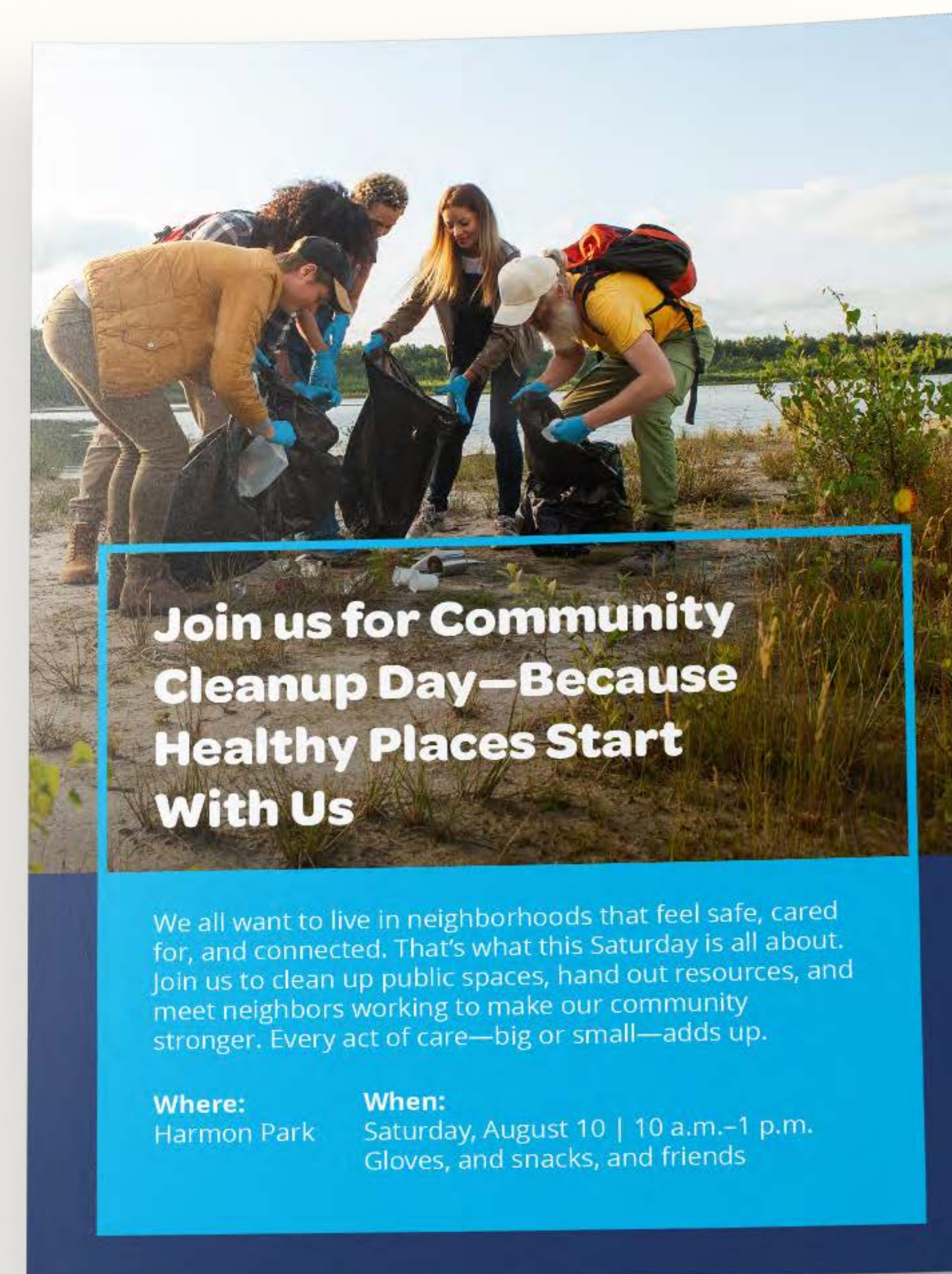
We all want to live in neighborhoods that feel safe, cared for, and connected. That's what this Saturday is all about. Join us to clean up public spaces, hand out resources, and meet neighbors working to make our community stronger. Every act of care—big or small—adds up.

People

Solution

Where: Harmon Park

When: Saturday, August 10 | 10 a.m.–1 p.m.
Gloves, and snacks, and friends provided





Newsletter Intro

This year, we've heard again and again:
People in our region want to live in safe,
connected communities—and they're willing
to show up for each other to make that
possible.

People

Goal

Whether it's helping someone get to a
doctor's appointment or making sure every
family has access to fresh food, our work
is about more than services. It's about
creating a region where everyone feels like
they belong and has the support they need
to live well.

Solution



Healthy And Connected Communities

This year, we've heard again and again: People in our region want to live in safe, connected communities—and they're willing to show up for each other to make that possible.

Whether it's helping someone get to a doctor's appointment or making sure every family has access to fresh food, our work is about more than services. It's about creating a region where everyone feels like they belong and has the support they need to live well.





Donor or Fundraising Email

Subject Line:
You're Building a Healthier Region

Body:
When you support this work, you're doing more than funding programs. You're supporting care that meets people where they are. And you're investing in the kind of community where no one has to go it alone.

Together, we're building something powerful—a region rooted in care, connection, and shared strength. Thank you for being part of it.

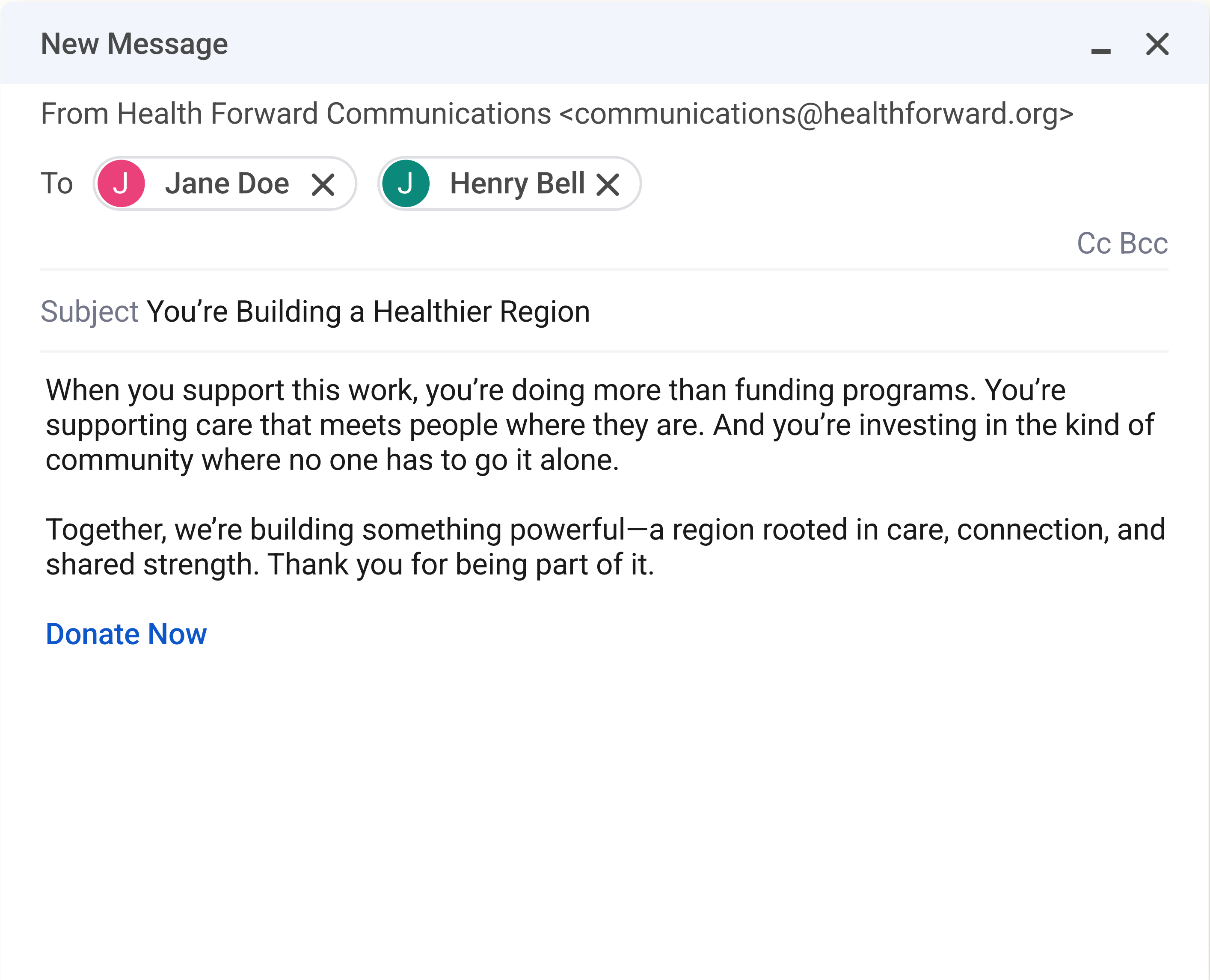
Donate Now

Solution

Problem

People

Goal



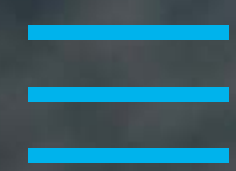


People

Goal

Solution





Audience Insights



Methodology

The insights and messages in this manual were developed based on a research process that included the factors discussed below.

Audience Segmentation Survey

We began the research in March 2025 with an audience segmentation survey, informed by rich conversations with you and your partners that helped us to incorporate the following goals into our approach:

- Explore awareness of and attitudes toward health equity, particularly the connection between race, class, and individual and community health.
- Understand people's aspirations for the future of their community—and how that relates to advancing health equity.
- Test terms and language about health equity that resonate with residents.
- Explore the motivations and barriers people face in taking action toward a more equitable region.
- Learn which people and channels residents trust for information about health equity.
- Segment your audience by meaningful criteria to better identify and engage your target.

The survey reached a representative sample of 1,300 adults across Kansas City and Jackson, Cass, and Lafayette Counties in Missouri, as well as Johnson, Wyandotte, and Allen Counties in Kansas.



Focus Groups

Following the survey, we conducted three focus groups with key audience segments identified through the survey in May 2025. These segments were defined by people's awareness of racial and health equity issues and their level of community involvement. We selected the three group types with the greatest potential to be moved by strategic communications. Each group included a mix of participants across race, gender, urbanicity, and political affiliation to reflect the broader makeup of each of the following segments:

- **Disconnected Champions** participate in community efforts from time to time and strongly acknowledge racism in their community.
- **Connected Acknowledgers** actively participate in community efforts and somewhat acknowledge racism in their community.
- **Disconnected Acknowledgers** participate in community efforts from time to time and somewhat acknowledge racism in their community.

These focus groups helped us explore participants' aspirations for their communities, their experiences with community connection across urban, suburban, and rural areas, and how they understand health equity. We also identified language that resonates, motivations that drive engagement, and barriers that may deter people from taking action.

In-Depth Interviews

To complement the voices we heard in focus groups and further inform our message frames, we conducted four in-depth interviews with community leaders in the Kansas City region who are working to address disparities related to health, race, class, or community division, and who could become potential partners with Health Forward Foundation to help advance this narrative work.

Through these conversations, we learned about partners' shared values and community aspirations, the opportunities and challenges in their work, how they communicate about health equity, and how our messages resonate with those working across different audiences and contexts.

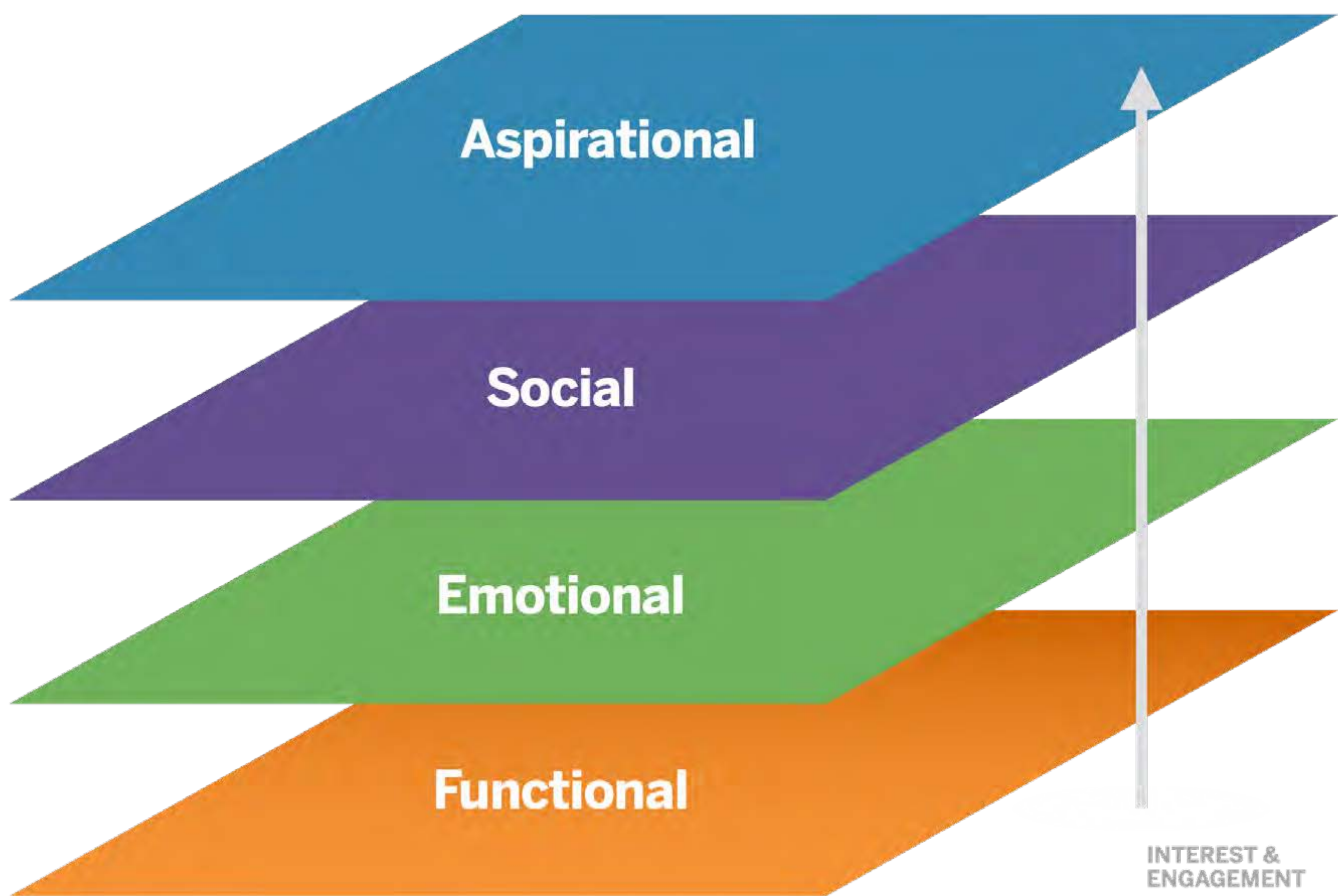


Aspirational Communication Model

Our messaging is informed by the Aspirational Communication Model, which provides a science-based framework to help communicate with maximum motivating power.

Drawing from motivational, cognitive, and social psychology, the model suggests that you achieve greater levels of interest and engagement when you connect with people on multiple levels: appealing to their hopes and values (**aspirational**), putting people in the picture (**social**), speaking to both the heart and the head (**emotional**), and offering benefits that people understand and value (**functional**).

Our communications research and development explored questions such as these:



Aspirational: What aspirations do people have for their community and community health?

Social: How do social relationships shape people’s understanding of and behavior around community health?

Emotional: How do people feel about individual health and community health?

Functional: What do we need to build powerful and healthy communities that offer opportunities for everyone?



Audience Insights Formula

This formula identifies the key motivations of your audience and the drivers, differentiators, and value that Health Forward’s work delivers. Understanding our audiences’ mindsets can help us effectively communicate about our work and compel people to support us.

Hometown Pride Powers Shared Vision of Care and Contribution

Collective pride in where they come from fuels a deep care for one another, and a shared goal to build a community where everyone lends a hand so all can live their best lives possible.

Connection Sparks Action, but Fear Holds Some Back

Residents share a desire for connection, but fear and distrust can still hold many back. Those who feel connected are more optimistic about what they can do for their community and are ready to act.

Feel the Pain, but Don’t See Their Power

Residents want to see their neighborhoods healthy and strong, but feel powerless to address the challenges holding people back. Unsure of how to help, they focus on managing their own health rather than influencing change at the community level.

Desire Security for All, Reality Only for Some

Kansas Citians see a healthy community as more than just access to health care—it’s about safety, stability, and everyone having a fair shot. But they also recognize that not everyone in their community experiences that reality today.



Hometown Pride Powers Shared Vision of Care and Contribution

Collective pride in where they come from fuels a deep care for one another, and a shared goal to build a community where everyone lends a hand so all can live their best lives possible.

Why It Works

Residents take pride in being part of a place that feels like home. That sense of pride and belonging is especially strong among longtime residents. Residents, especially those from urban and suburban areas, enthusiastically agree that they feel part of the Kansas City community. Respondents' pride and belonging often stem from shared experiences—attending sporting events, local festivals, or simply being part of a growing, diverse region.

Their pride in and ownership of their community fosters care for one another and drives a powerful aspiration: to live in a community where everyone helps one another live their best life possible. When residents talk about their communities, they want more than just a good life for themselves—they want it for their neighbors, too. Whether it's lending a hand, building opportunities for the next generation, or coming together in times of need, residents are motivated by a desire to strengthen the community they love.



In Their Own Words

*I feel like I am [part of Kansas City]. I've grown up here, **lived here all my life ... I'm proud to be from Kansas City**, [I] love all my sports teams, so I do feel like I'm a part of Kansas City. —Disconnected Champion*

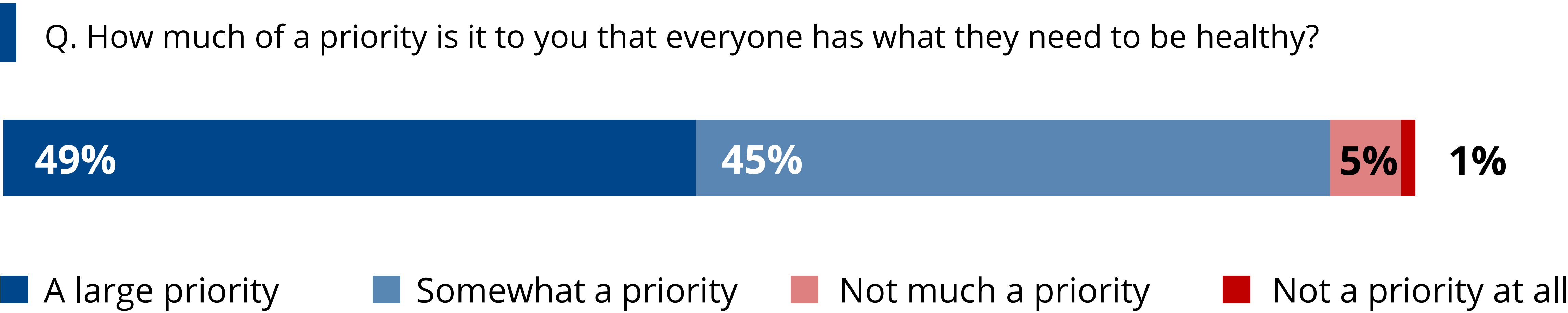
*I broke my leg two years ago, and my neighbor mowed my yard for the whole year. I didn't ask him. There's the neighborhood there. **There's a connection with where I live.** —Disconnected Acknowledger*

*I think we all can help at some point, even if it's just a little, small thing. **But if everyone did the little things, they would become a big thing.** —Disconnected Acknowledger*

*I work with the vulnerable population to begin with, so just being able to see that they have everything they need in order to feel normal [motivates me]. **Whatever resources we can [contribute] to make life a little easier for them is a goal for me.** —Disconnected Champion*

Data

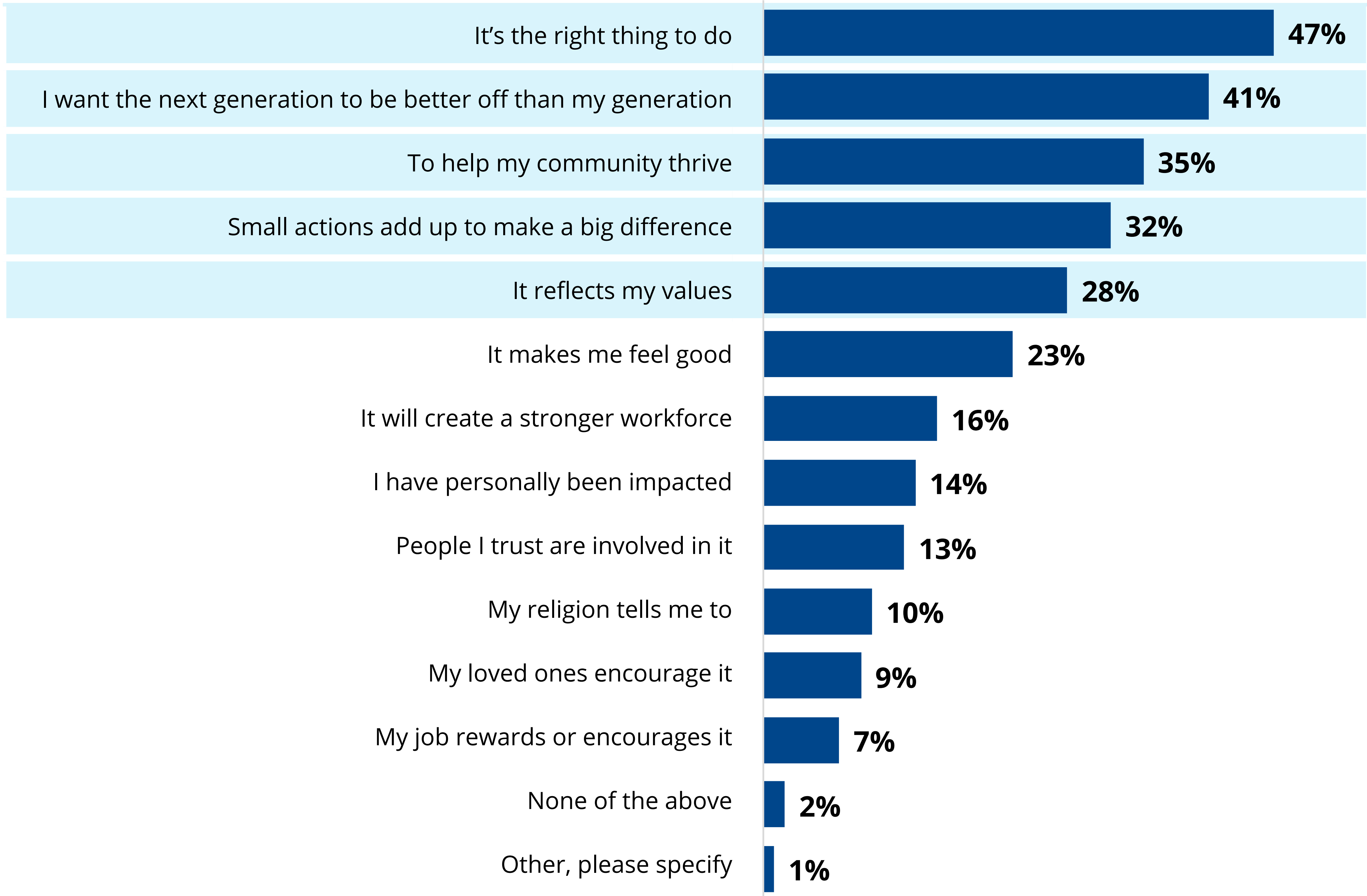
Nearly all residents say community well-being is a priority for them.





Residents are driven by their core values and the desire to make things better for their community.

Q. Which of the following do you think are the best reasons to push for policies and programs that ensure everyone has what they need to be healthy? Select up to three.





Connection Sparks Action, but Fear Holds Some Back

Residents share a desire for connection, but fear and distrust can still hold many back. Those who feel connected are more optimistic about what they can do for their community and are more ready to take action.

Why It Works

Grounded in a sense of shared identity, many residents express a strong desire for connection. When asked to describe an ideal community, they often envision a close-knit place where people are friendly, communicate openly, and share experiences and interests.

However, not all residents feel the level of connection they hope for. Those who do feel more connected are more likely to recognize community challenges, take action, and believe they can make a difference. This sense of connection—though varied across neighborhoods—is a powerful driver of community involvement and engagement with community health and health equity. Urban residents, in particular, tend to report stronger community ties and are more likely to participate in local activities, which fuels greater interest in this work.

Still, many hesitate to reach out or get involved due to fear—of being judged, starting conflict, or putting themselves at risk. In today's polarized climate, some hold back because they lack trust in others or worry their actions could lead to harm, misunderstanding, or backlash.



In Their Own Words

*I think the spirit of the city is connectivity. **Kansas City has a spirit of really connecting everyone, and that is very palpable.** You walk down the street, you make eye contact with some random people, and you just wave your hand and say hi. That's why people come here and stay. It's in the spirits. —In-Depth Interview Participant*

*I want to see a community where we are a family outside of our homes, really being **able to communicate with each other in a healthy fashion.** —In-Depth Interview Participant*

***I really feel like [Kansas City] is segmented.** And there are lines around that. There are people who live in the urban core. There are people who live in the suburbs. There are people who live in little towns. —Disconnected Champion*

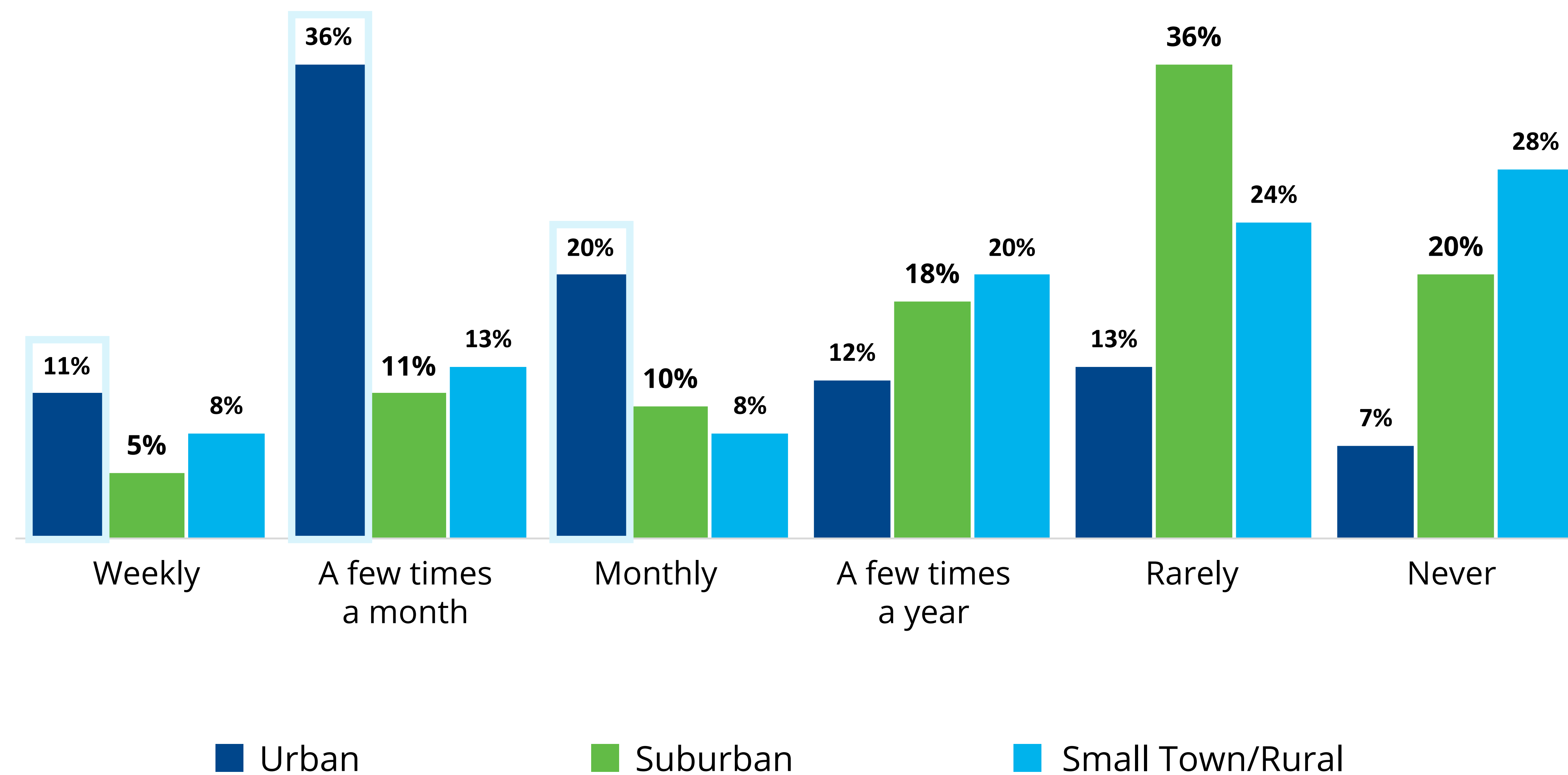
***When was the last time you stopped when you saw someone on the side of the road with a flat tire, clearly needing help? Or maybe they were out of gas, standing there with a can.** But these days, people are afraid to stop. —Connected Acknowledger*



Data

Urban residents are more likely to actively participate in events that improve their communities, and thus become more connected to them.

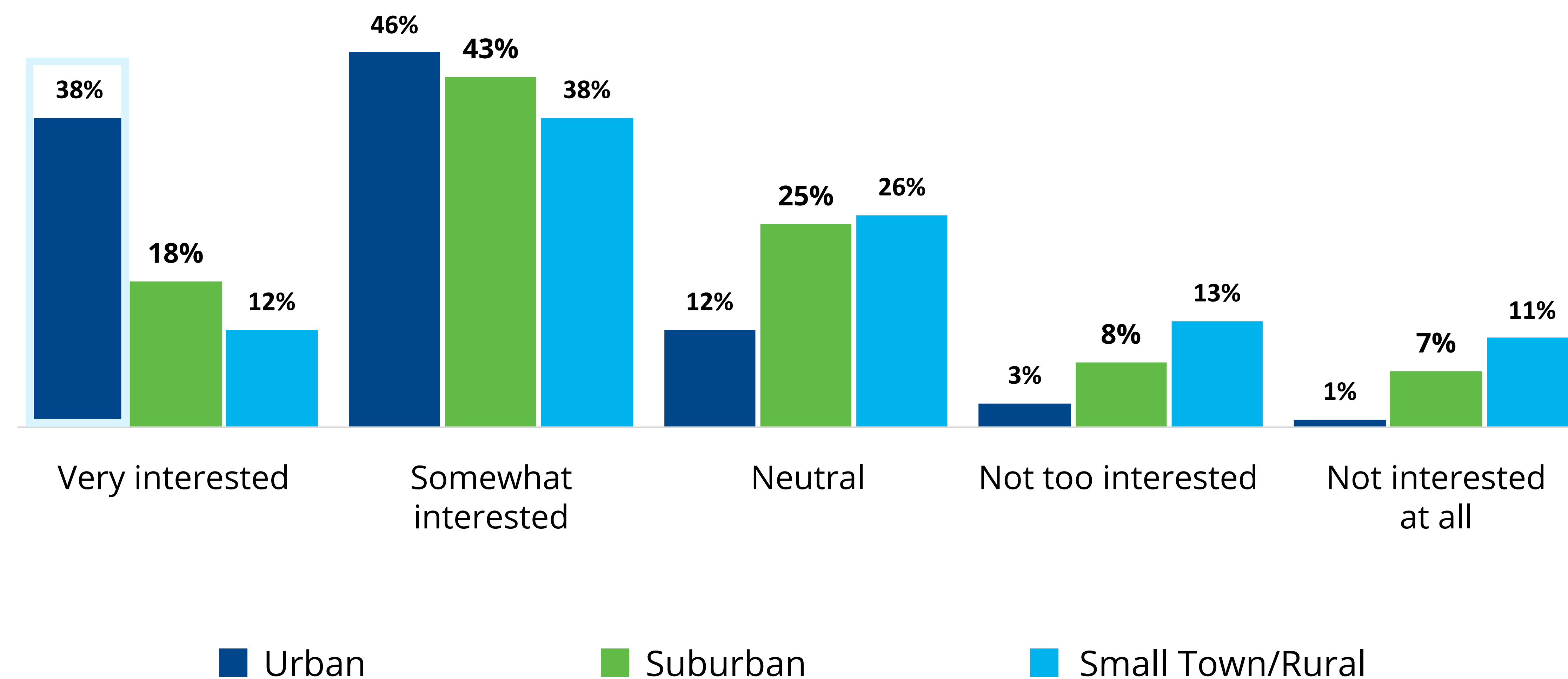
■ Q. How often do you participate in activities, such as community events, volunteer work, or town halls, that help make your community better?





As a result of that connection, people in urban areas are also much more likely to show interest in engaging more in activities that contribute to community health.

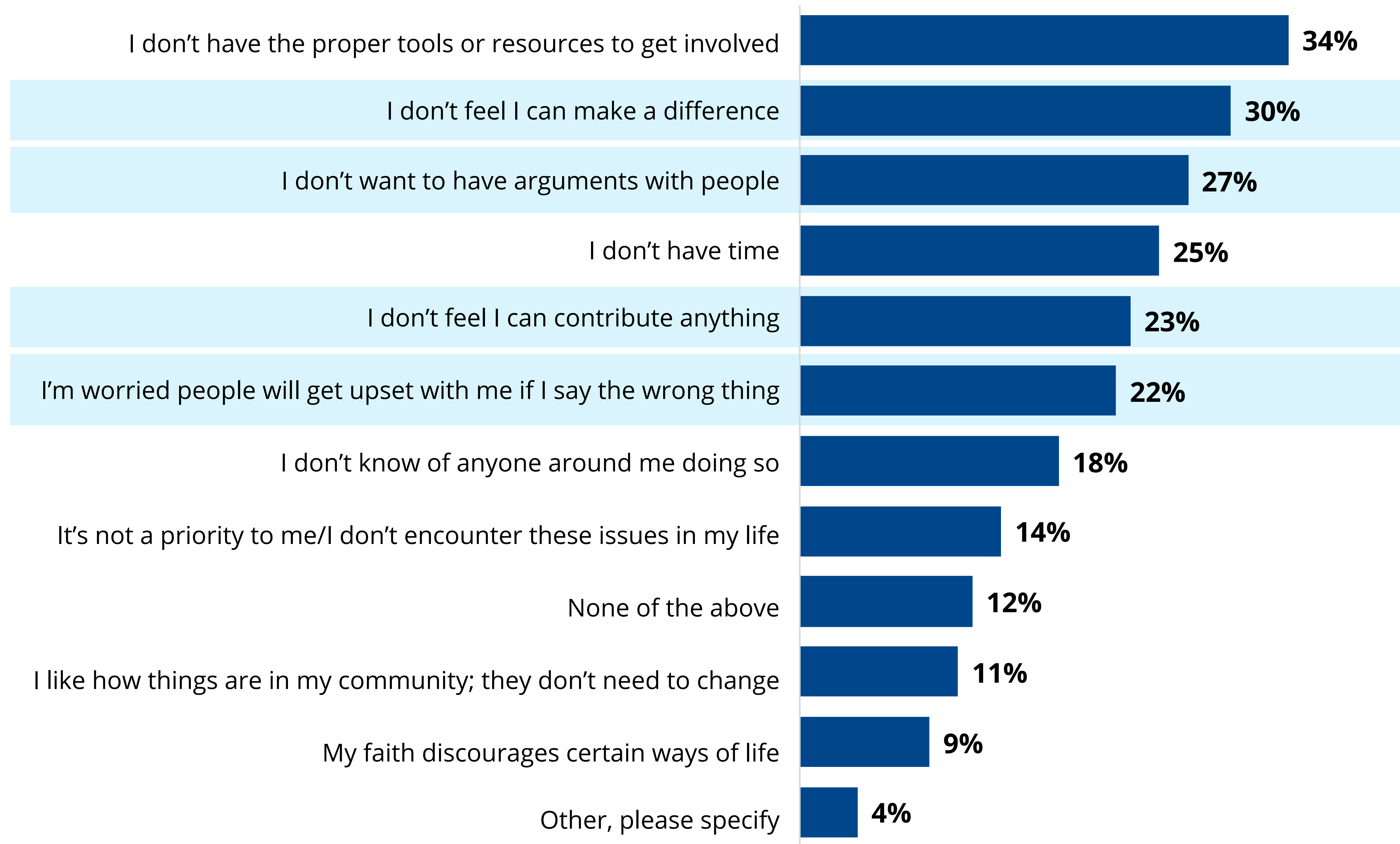
■ Q. How interested are you in increasing your involvement in activities that help ensure everyone in your community has what they need to be healthy?





However, fear still holds some people back from participating: fear of judgment, of falling short, or of putting themselves at risk.

Q. Which of the following concerns might cause you to hesitate before advocating for policies and programs that help ensure everyone has what they need to stay healthy? Select up to three.





Feel the Pain, but Don't See Their Power

Residents want to see their neighborhoods healthy and strong, but feel powerless to address the challenges holding people back. Unsure of how to help, they focus on managing their own health rather than influencing change at the community level.

Why It Works

People understand that health is shaped by environment and circumstance, and they acknowledge the barriers that prevent a healthy community. They recognize that many people are trapped in a system that denies them the opportunities needed for a healthier life—with rising rent, costly food, and worsening public safety.

Yet people take a put-your-own-mask-on-first approach to health. When asked whether community health should be a priority, many said they would put their own health first. They view this as a personal topic and believe that if they can't take care of themselves, they won't be able to help others.

Residents feel that community health is too big to fix alone. Some people don't see the role an individual can play and feel they need to see a larger effort taken by the government. Regarding the connection between community and health, residents think that the community should support individuals by providing the necessary resources and services, but they don't necessarily view community health itself as something they should prioritize and support. This personal lens can obscure shared barriers and make it harder to recognize collective solutions led by advancing community health—and their potential role in creating change.



In Their Own Words

*"Oftentimes, I think I've experienced being with poor people, and **they don't feel like they have a choice. They can't break out of where they are to get better**, to feel like they can move forward. Sometimes they're kind of in a rut, and what do they do? You know?" —Disconnected Champion*

*"It does seem like the ones that are excluded are ones that are dealing with real everyday issues, such as housing, eating, and **they may not feel concerned about their community if they're more concerned about themselves having to survive.**" —Connected Acknowledger*

*"I think it **starts at home first**. You can't help anyone else if you can't help yourself." —Disconnected Acknowledger*

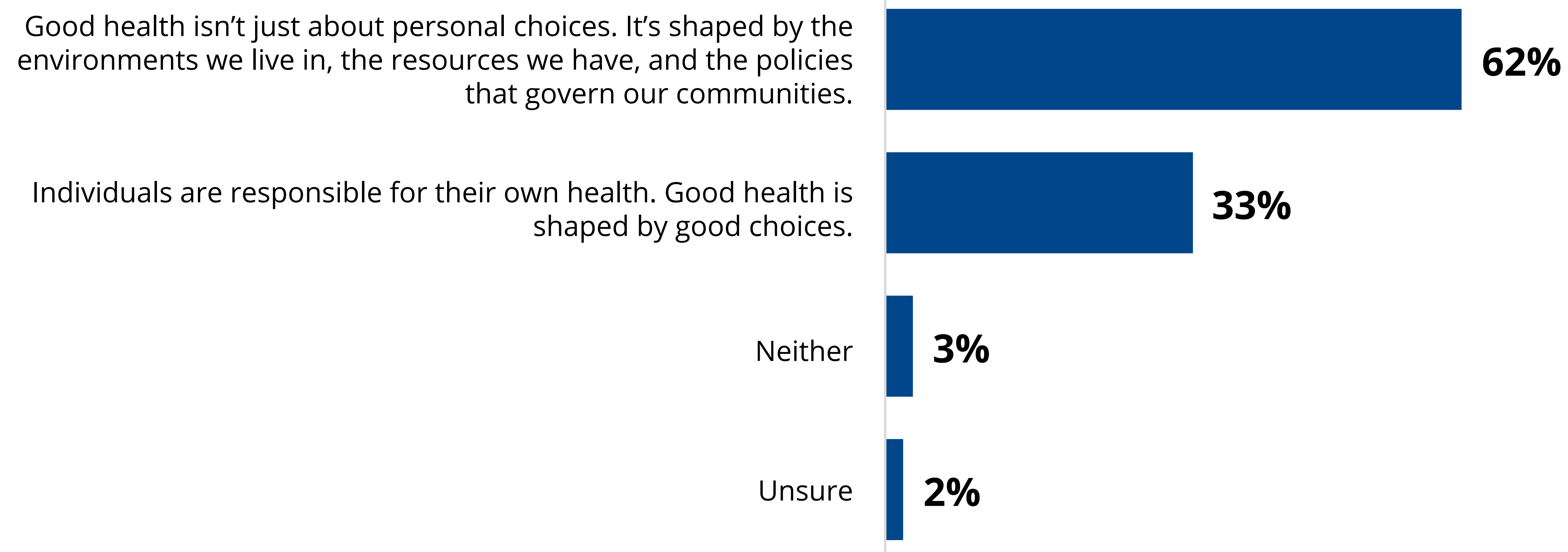
*"I think **mayor or state representatives** should play a part in that [community health]." —Disconnected Acknowledger*



Data

Residents understand that health is shaped by our environment and circumstances, not just personal choices.

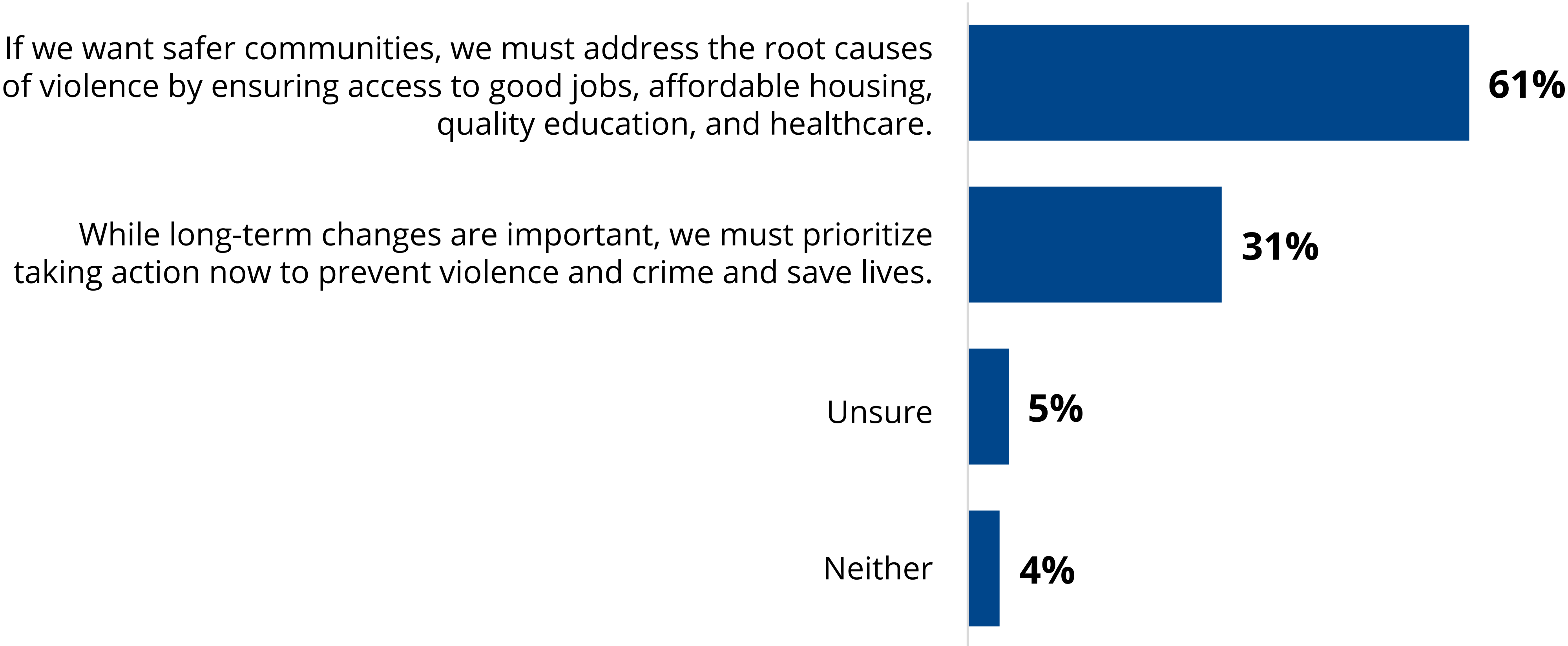
■ Q. Which of the following statements is more closely in line with your personal view?





They are looking for long-term solutions to these prevalent challenges that impact their neighborhoods; solutions that make their community safer and stronger in the long run.

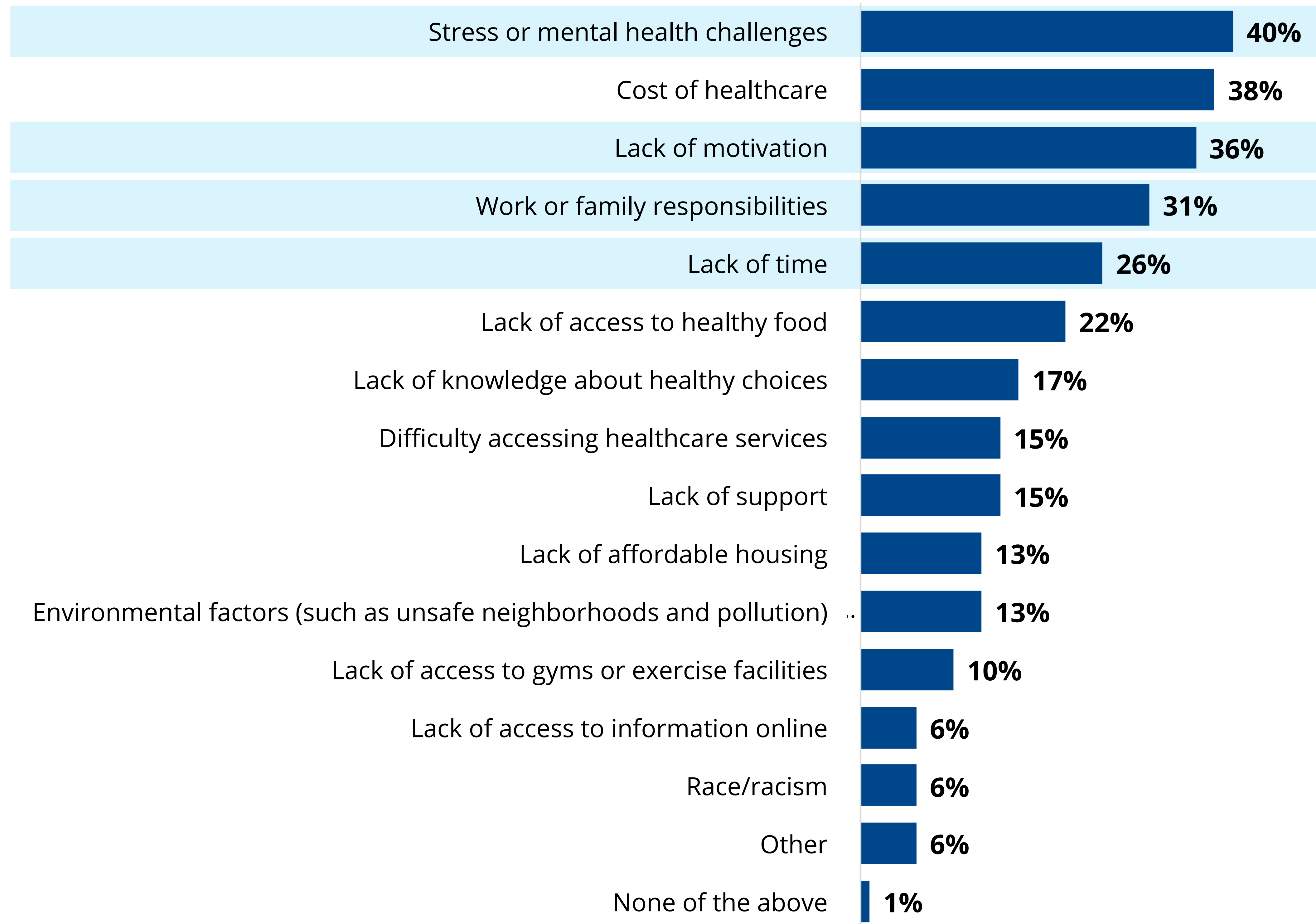
■ Q. Which of the following statements is more closely in line with your personal view?





But, residents are more focused on overcoming the personal barriers to good health, such as stress, motivation, and responsibilities, than the systemic barriers, such as difficulties accessing health care and environmental factors.

■ Q. What gets in the way of you being as healthy as you could be? Please select the top three most significant barriers.





Desire Security for All, Reality Only for Some

Residents see a healthy community as more than just access to health care — it's about safety, stability, and everyone having a fair shot. But they also recognize that not everyone in their community experiences that reality today.

Why It Works

When it comes to health, residents want more for their community than just decent health care and services; they understand community health as more complex and nuanced. True community health requires widespread safety and security, made possible through access to economic opportunity, affordable housing, quality healthcare, and nutritious, affordable food.

But in Kansas City, lived experiences vary widely, and many recognize a stark gap between this ideal and reality. They know the city is divided, and that some people lack access to necessities.

Residents' focus on food access, in particular, clearly illustrates how they think about kinds of barriers that keep people from being healthy and secure. Across focus groups, people frequently brought up food as an issue affecting people in their communities. For many, access to fresh, affordable food signals broader well-being—if you can get healthy food, you likely have access to other essentials needed to thrive. Concrete examples like this make it easier for residents to connect a sense of security with health, and help bring the idea of community health to life.



In Their Own Words

*"If everyone has what they need to live a healthy life, they would be able to get the **food they need, good jobs, housing, medical care, and safe living conditions.**"* —Disconnected Champion

*"People [need] a living wage. **Right now, they can work for 40, 50 hours a week at a McDonald's and need to afford a family of 3 or 4. They can't live on that.**"* —Disconnected Champion

*"We love to do things, but we're constantly looking for things that aren't pinching our wallet, [as we are] just trying to put food on the table. **I think the Kansas City area doesn't make things accessible for everyone, because they do have price tags on them.**"*
—Connected Acknowledger, lives in a rural area

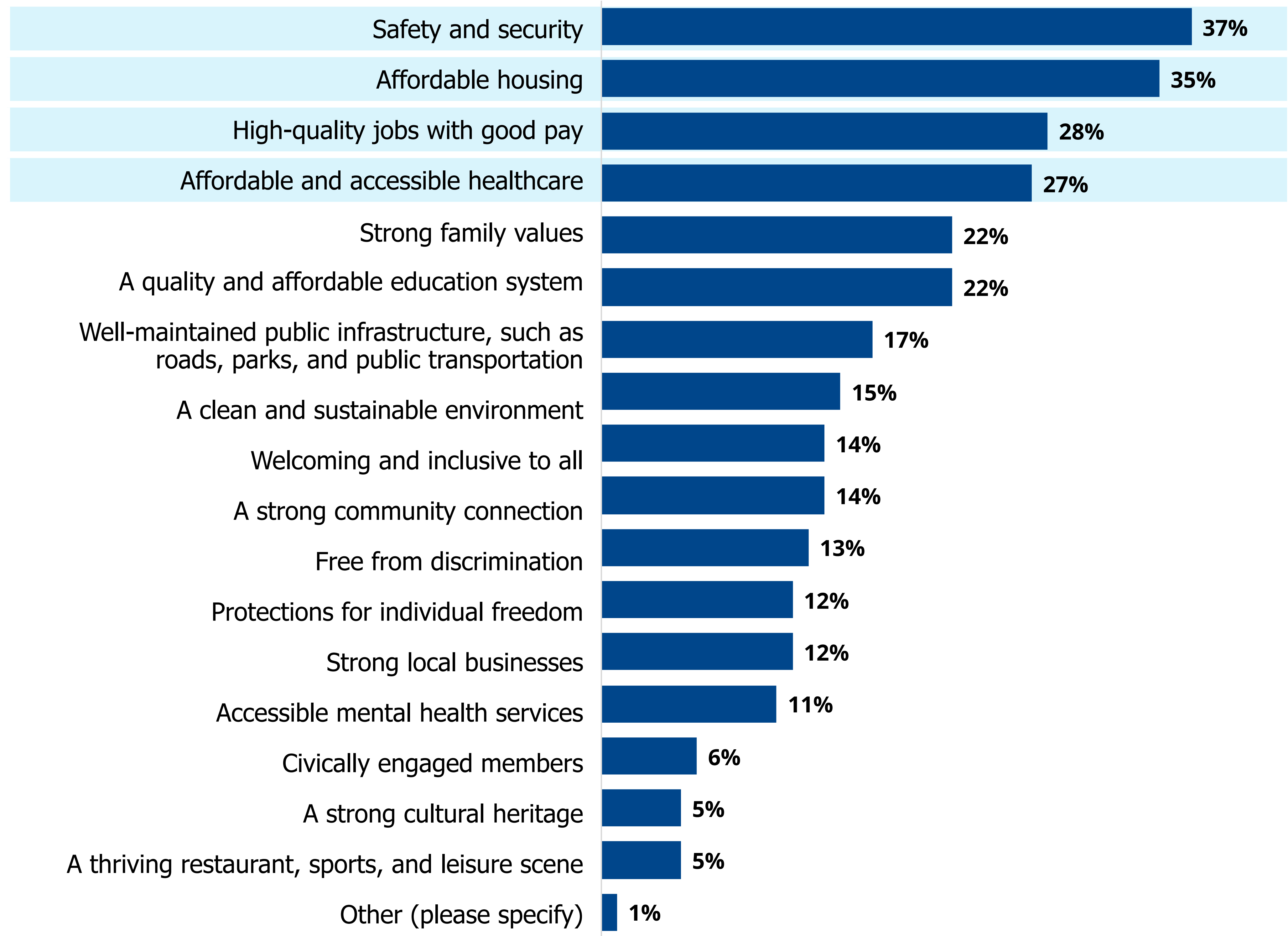
*"Even Walmart [is] far away, it's hard to get to the super center. I feel like, **if you live close to Whole Foods, or any of these options, you'll automatically get so much healthier** if you just cook your own food."*
—Disconnected Acknowledger



Data

Safety and security are most important to a thriving community, and are made possible through access to affordable housing in a safe neighborhood, economic opportunity, and quality healthcare.

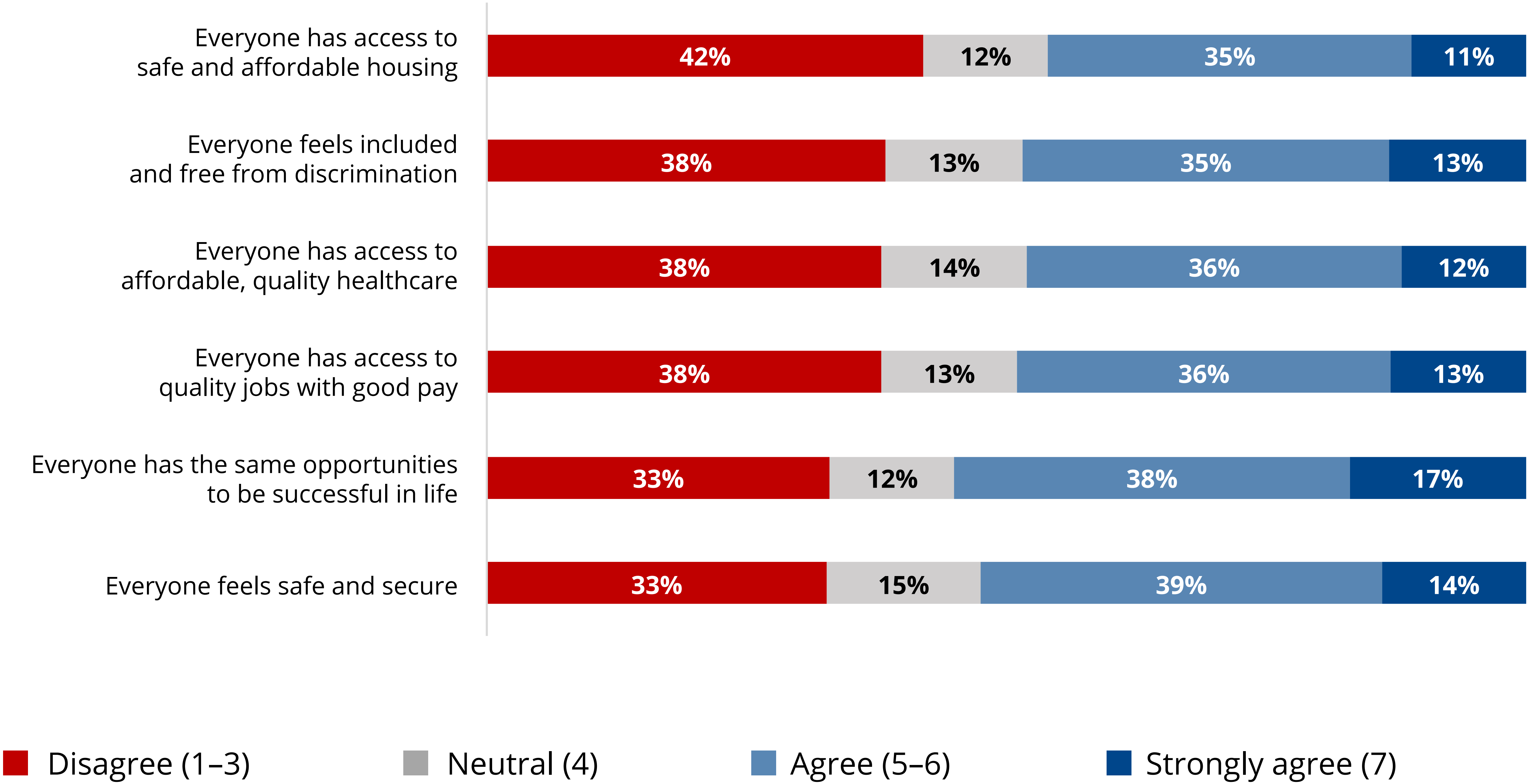
■ Q. In your opinion, what are the most important components of a thriving community? Select up to three.





Residents don't feel confident that everyone in their community feels safe and secure or has access to the things they need.

Q. Thinking about your community in particular, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.





Audience Segmentation

Audience segmentation is a valuable tool for understanding the specific mindsets, motivations, and barriers that shape how different groups engage with community health.

Our research shows that a person’s sense of connection to their community plays a major role in their belief that they can make a difference—the more connected someone feels, the more likely they are to take action. At the same time, an understanding of how race and place affect health outcomes varies widely among Kansas City region residents.

To reflect these dynamics, the segmentation explores two key dimensions: people’s connection to their community and their recognition of how racism impacts some residents’ lives. Together, these lenses help reveal the diverse attitudes shaping engagement.

The chart below shows the full spectrum of segments. The section that follows takes a closer look at three key audiences who may feel uncertain—but are still open to being engaged.

	High awareness of racism (Strongly agree some people in community experience racism)	Medium awareness of racism (Somewhat agree/neutral that some people in community experience racism)	Low awareness of racism (Disagree that some people in community experience racism)
Connected to community (Participates in events/actions to make community better at least monthly)	Connected Champions (29%)	Connected Acknowledgers (15%)	Connected Doubters (3%)
Disconnected from community (Rarely or never participates in events/actions to make community better)	Disconnected Champions (24%)	Disconnected Acknowledgers (19%)	Disconnected Doubters (9%)



Disconnected Champions

(24% of Kansas City Region)

With strong values but weak community ties, they struggle to turn their ideals into action.

Who They Are

Disconnected Champions recognize racial and social inequities in their communities—often because they have experienced these challenges firsthand. They aspire to live in a place that is welcoming, inclusive, and fair and care deeply about doing the right thing, helping their community thrive, and creating a better future for the next generation.

However, despite these strong values, they often feel disconnected from others around them and unsure how—or whether—they can make a meaningful impact. Their desire to engage is often outweighed by a sense of powerlessness, lack of time, or not having the right tools or resources. This tension between caring deeply and feeling limited in their ability to act creates a frustrating gap between their values and their engagement—one that can be bridged through messaging that acknowledges their concerns, affirms their values, and offers clear, accessible ways to contribute.

63% strongly agree that some people in their community experience barriers because of what they look like. Another 58% strongly agree that some people in their community experience barriers because of where they live.

72% believe we must address the root causes of violence by ensuring access to good jobs, affordable housing, quality education, and healthcare if we want safer communities.

2% think they can make a large impact on their community.



In Their Own Words

*"I think sometimes [in] some of our suburban areas, **depending on your race, [you] can feel like you're not as included [as others].**"*

*"It sounds like a good talk. They say they are ready for the conversation, but what part of the conversation? **Do they want to talk about the truth that white and Black people are still treated unequally, or do they want to just hear what they want to hear?**"*

*"I'm kind of held back on that because I know a couple of people who've been through those things. Part of my heart is like you need to do this, **but the other part [of my heart] is kind of afraid, because I don't want to experience what they actually went through, because it's scary.**"*

Engagement Opportunities

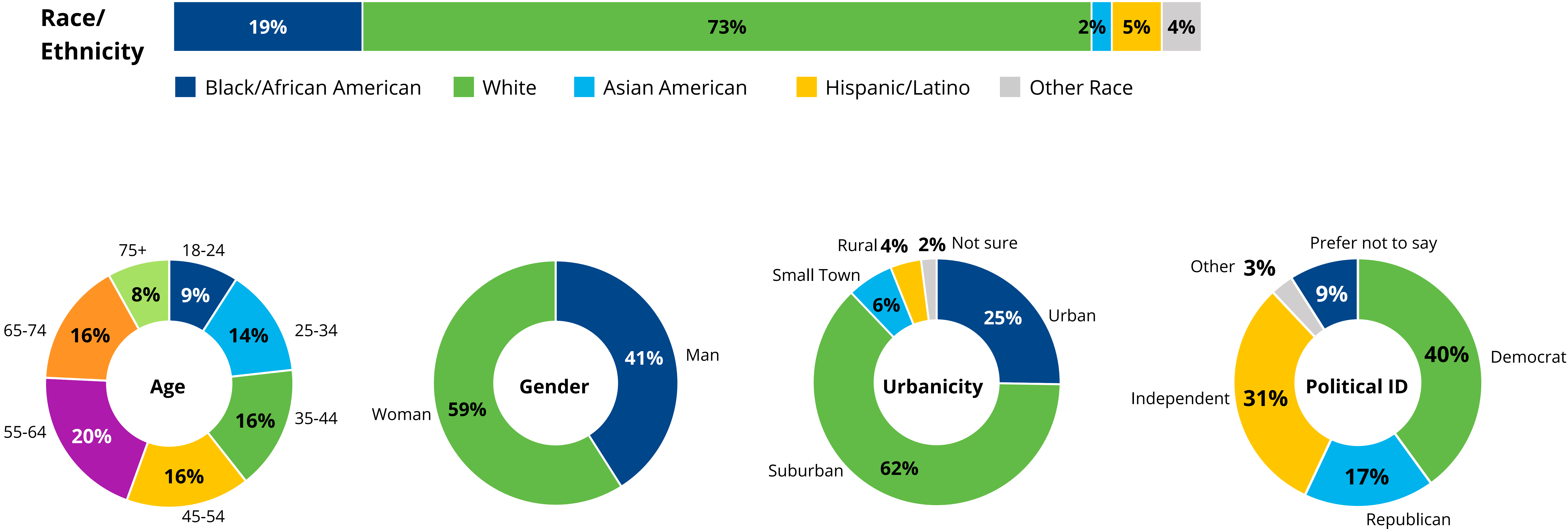
- **Offer one-time, low-barrier actions.** Examples: Help pack food boxes, distribute resources and food, participate in a school supplies drive.
- **Provide visible, immediate impact.** Show exactly what their small actions can lead to, and provide examples and stories from people who have made a difference in their community through small, local action.
- **Offer roles that don't require "leading."** Invite them to support or show up for community health, not to show up as a leader to "fix" it.



Sample Tailored Message

You care about building a better future and that starts with making sure everyone has what they need to live a healthy, secure life. We’re working to make that possible by expanding access to housing. If you’ve ever felt like you wanted to help but didn’t know where to start, this is a way in. Your voice, your presence, your care—they all matter.

Demographics





Connected Acknowledgers

(15% of Kansas City Region)

Feel rooted in their community and are motivated to help it thrive, even if they only partly acknowledge systemic barriers like racism.

Who They Are

Connected Acknowledgers are active and invested members of their communities who value strong families and connecting with everyone in their community—even those who are different from themselves. They feel a genuine sense of pride in where they live and are motivated by the belief that small, everyday actions—like volunteering, attending local events, or helping a neighbor—can make a meaningful difference.

While they recognize that some people face barriers based on race or where they live, they are less likely to name systemic inequity as a primary driver of poor health outcomes. Many are hesitant to engage in issues they perceive as politically charged or divisive, and worry about saying the wrong thing or getting into arguments. They want to be part of positive change, but prefer to do so through collaborative, nonconfrontational efforts that align with their values of personal responsibility, mutual respect, and community care.

59% seek out different perspectives and try to talk with others in their community who are different from them.

88% are very or somewhat interested in increasing involvement in activities that help everyone in their community have what they need to be healthy (34% very interested).

58% believe that if you work hard, you can get ahead, no matter where you started. Only a third strongly agree some people experience barriers because of where they live and what they look like.



In Their Own Words

*"We live in a well-established neighborhood. So all of the neighbors know each other, and **I love that we all look out for one another!**"*

*"**I volunteered with [The American Cancer Society] quite a bit.** And they do a lot of rides and shelter while people are in treatment."*

*"Being a person of color myself. **I've never incurred any kind of difference because I'm Hispanic or non-white, in my health or in being secure.** But ... this statement sounds like you're saying it's a fact: **"Race plays a role in who gets to live a healthy and secure life."** And I just don't agree with that."*

Engagement Opportunities

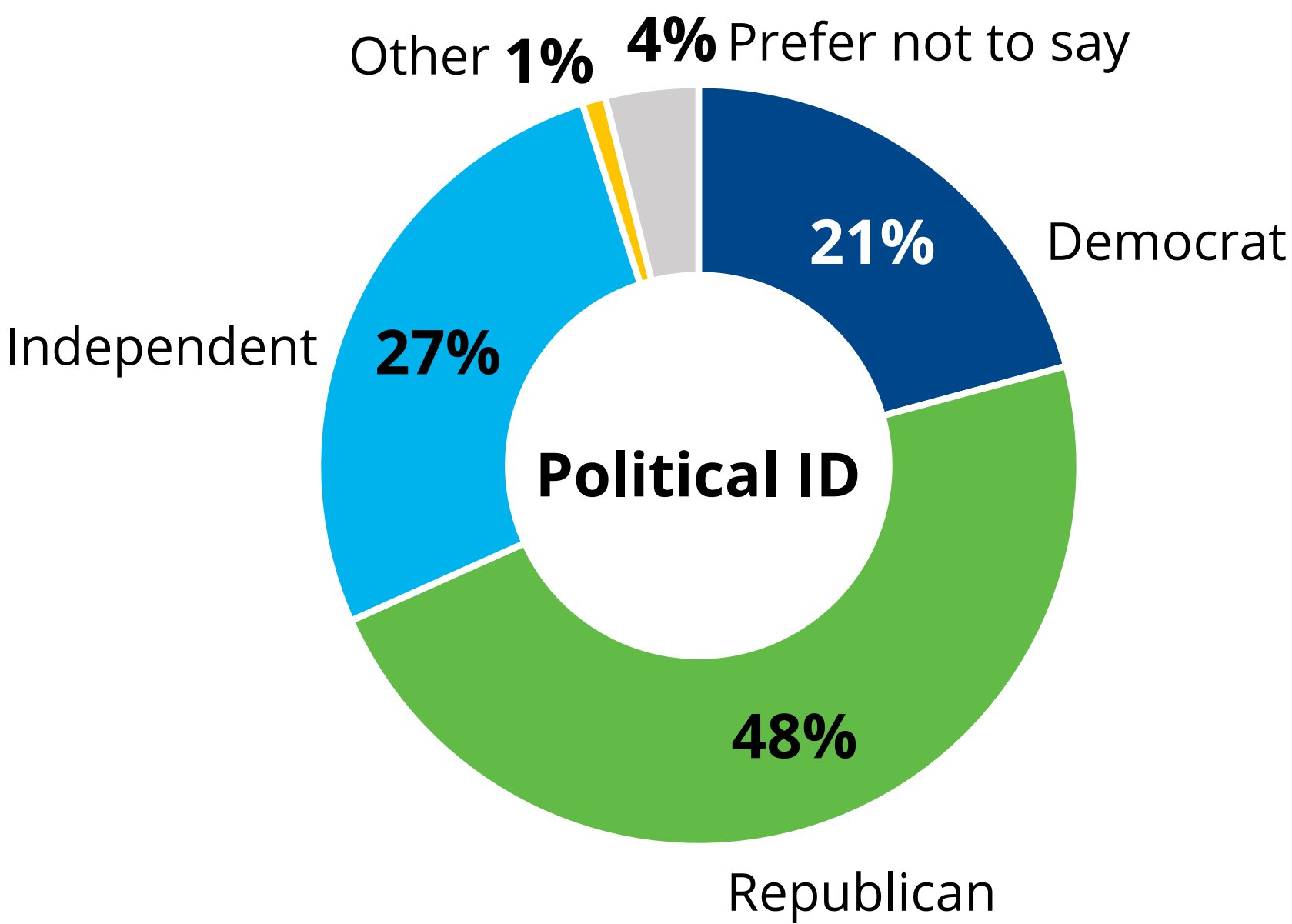
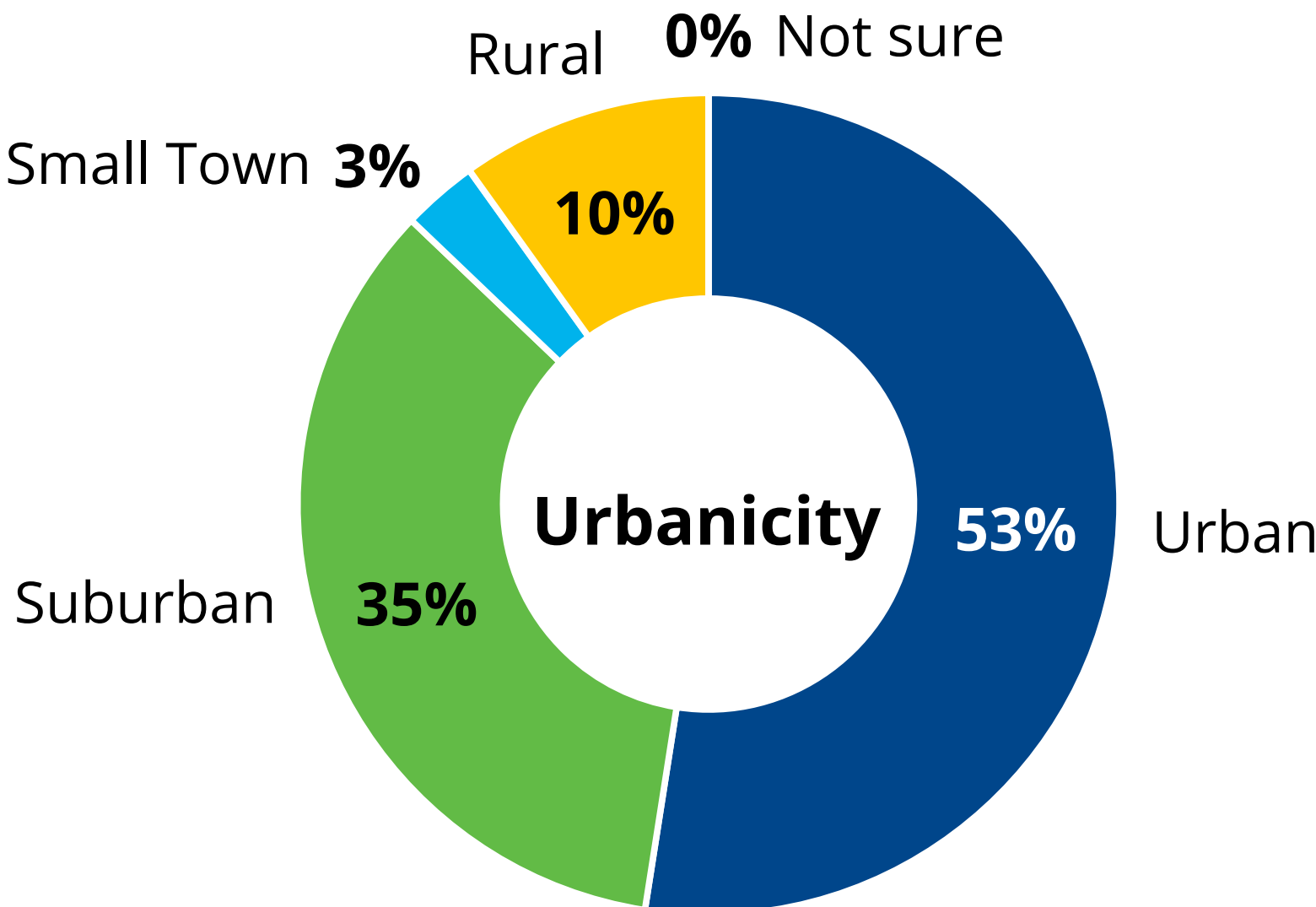
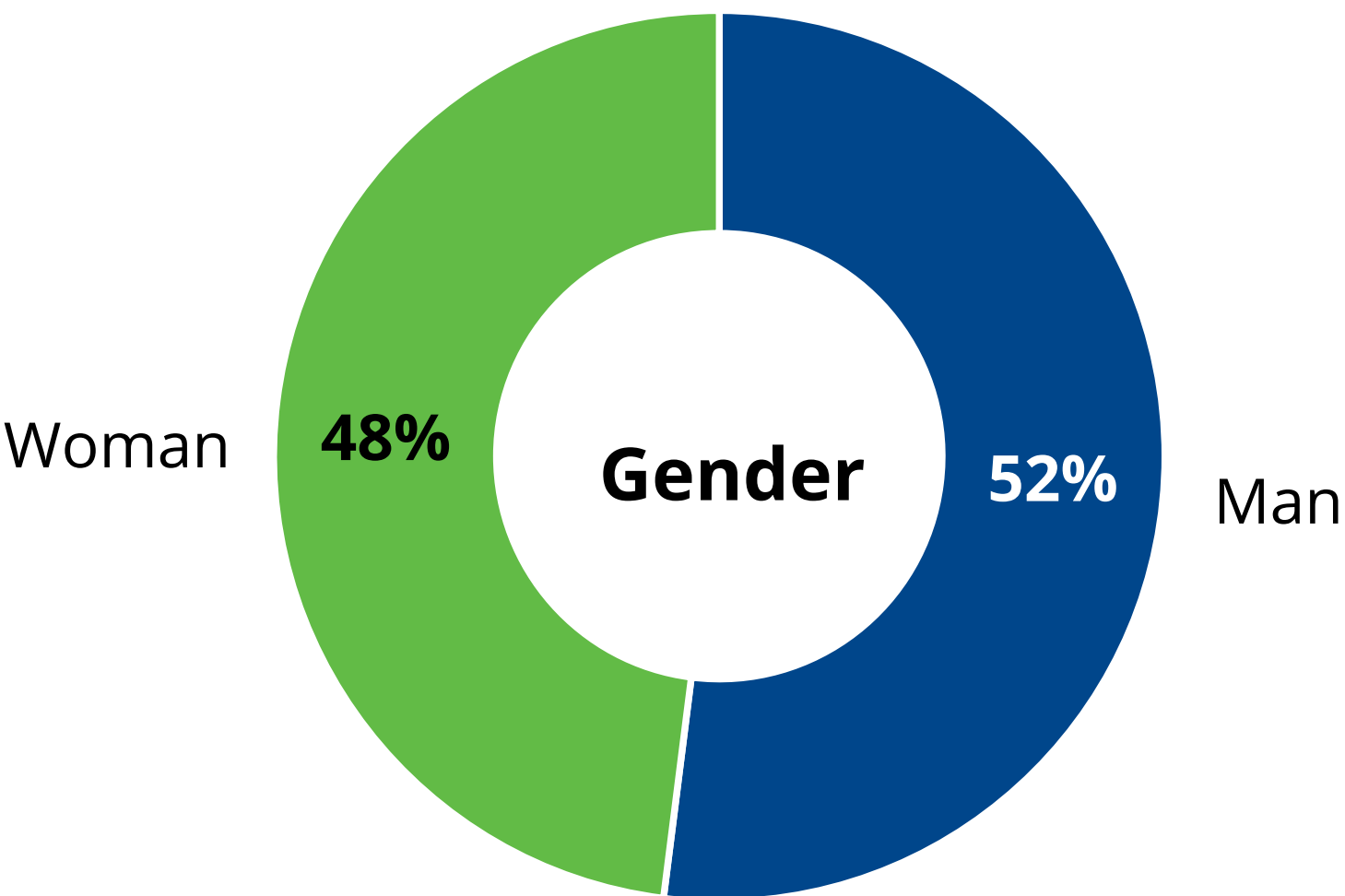
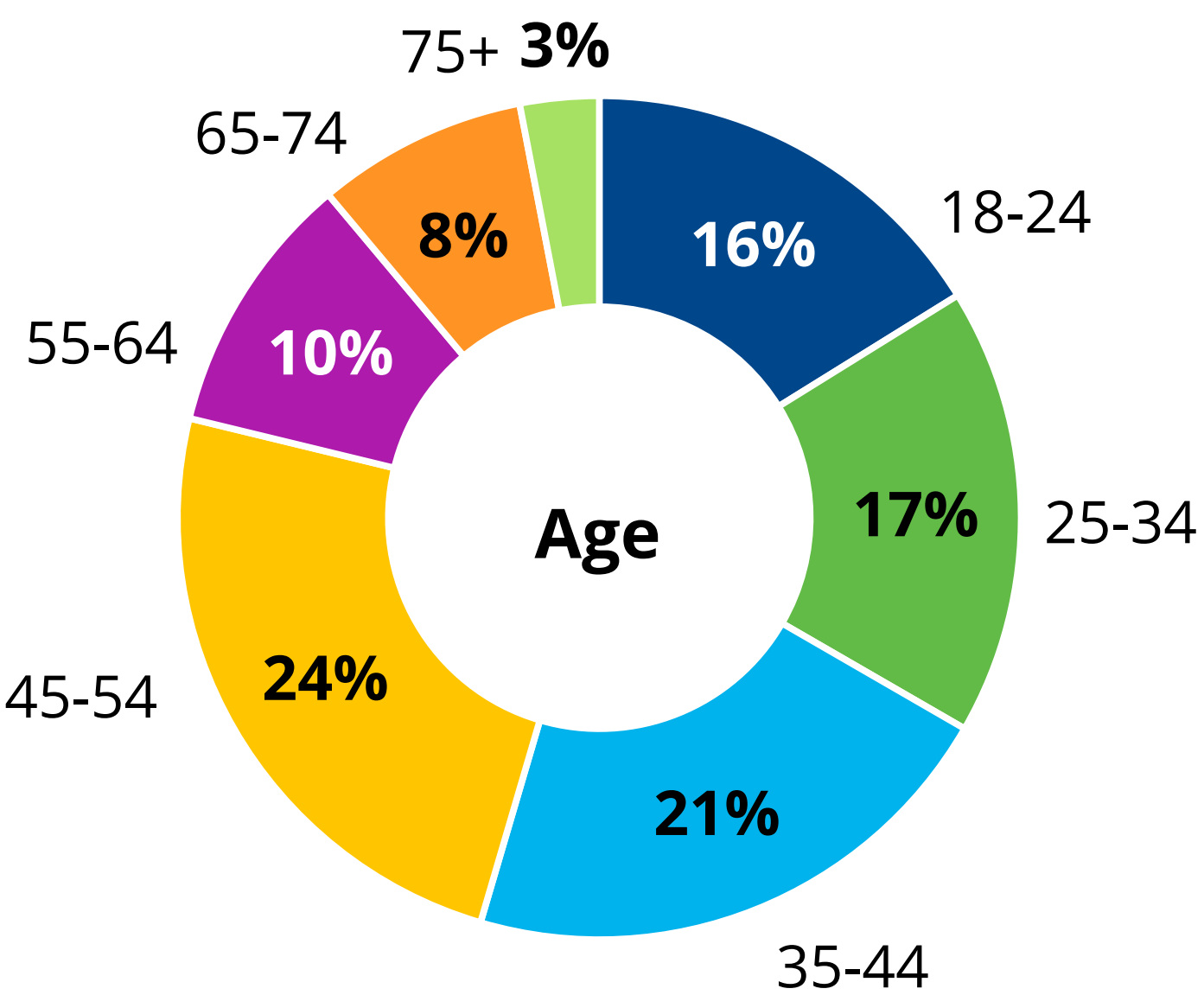
- **Emphasize action-oriented, family-friendly opportunities.** Examples: community gardening, volunteering at school events, helping at local health fair.
- **Tap their belief in "small actions = big impact."** Show how a minor but tangible effort they make can accumulate into lasting change.
- **Avoid high-conflict or overtly political events.** Keep events welcoming, with clear outcomes (e.g., "build a bench," "restock the pantry").
- **Show how their involvement helps others and sets an example.** Messaging like: "When you show up, others follow."



Sample Tailored Message

You show up for your neighbors, your kids’ schools, and your community—and that’s exactly the kind of care we need to build a healthier region. Our work is about making sure families across the region have what they need to thrive—access to healthy food, safe places to live, and a chance to build a better life.

Demographics





Disconnected Acknowledgers

(19% of Kansas City Region)

With low community connection and limited belief in systemic barriers, they prioritize practicality and self-reliance over collective action.

Who They Are

Disconnected Acknowledgers value family, personal responsibility, and stability, but also feel little connection to the broader community around them. They tend to approach health and well-being as private, individual matters and are often skeptical of the idea that systemic barriers—like racism or neighborhood inequity—play a significant role in shaping outcomes.

While many care about fairness in principle and want to “do the right thing,” they often feel unsure about how they could contribute meaningfully to community-wide efforts. Barriers for this group include a perceived lack of time, resources, and confidence, along with a general disinterest or discomfort with civic or political involvement. Because they feel disconnected and uncertain about their impact, they are less likely to participate in initiatives unless they are approached in ways that feel practical, personally relevant, and low risk.

41% think that individuals are responsible for their own health—good health is shaped by good choices.

18% strongly agree some people experience barriers because of what they look like, and (23%) because of where they live.

7% are very interested in increasing involvement in activities that help ensure everyone in their community has what they need to be healthy. Only 2% think they can make a large impact on their community.



In Their Own Words

"I don't think region or race matters in shaping people's health. It is about their own drive."

"There isn't really much that can be done as an individual to [affect] community health."

"[I don't feel we could speak up anymore.] I feel like it's getting harder and harder with the current administration. We all voted certain ways in Missouri on several issues, abortion being one of them, and it all got overturned. And it was said we didn't know what we were doing."

Engagement Opportunities

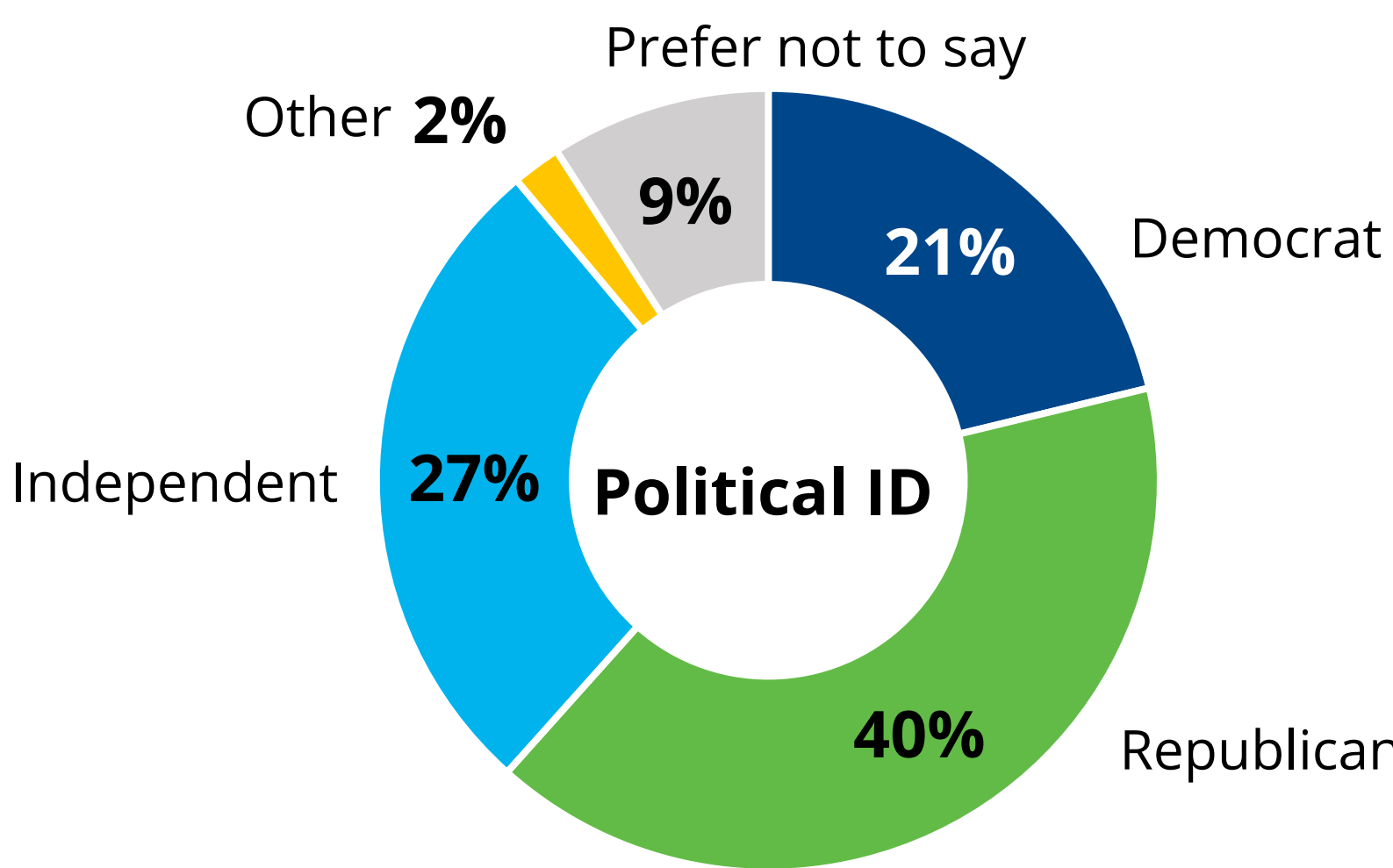
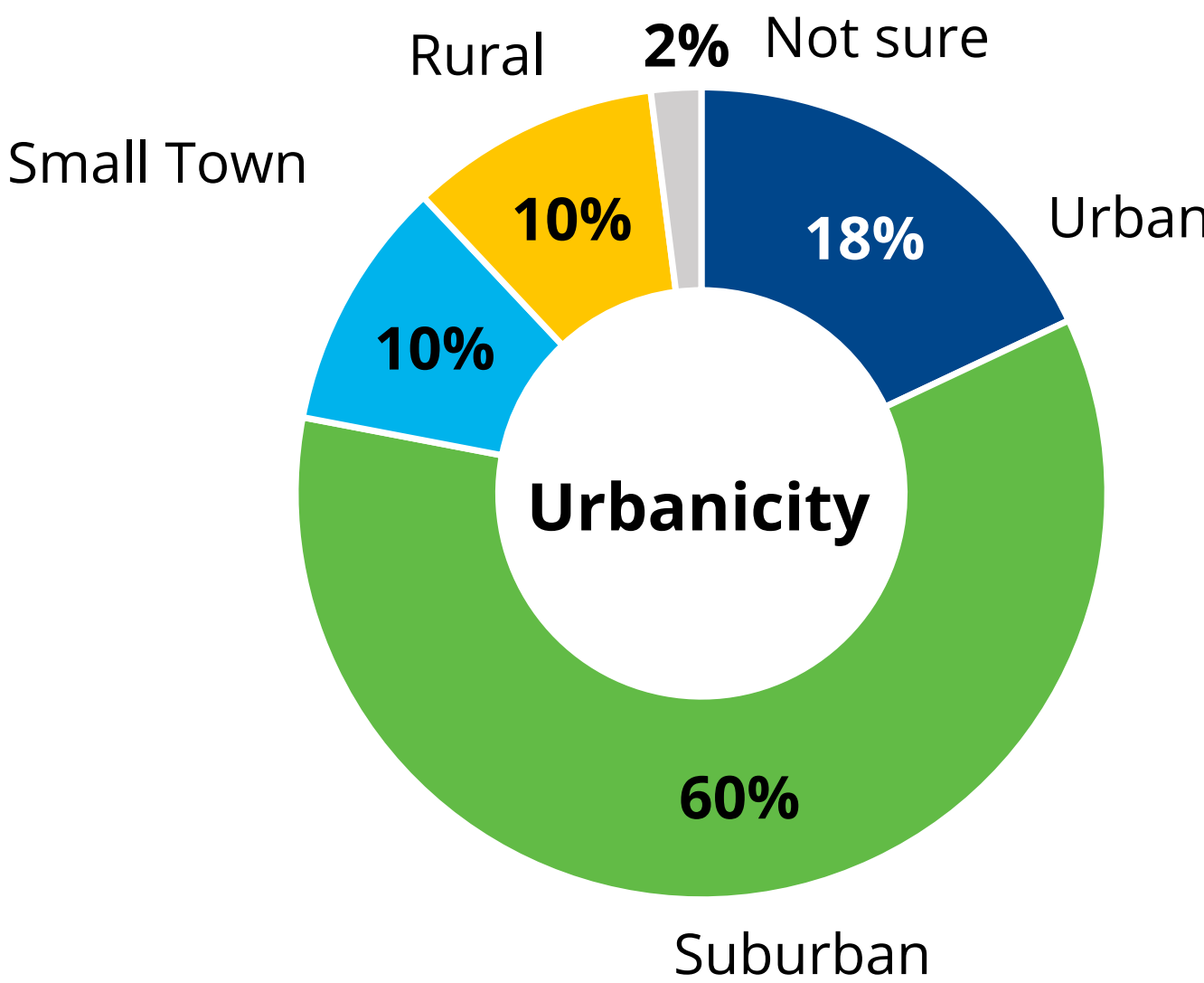
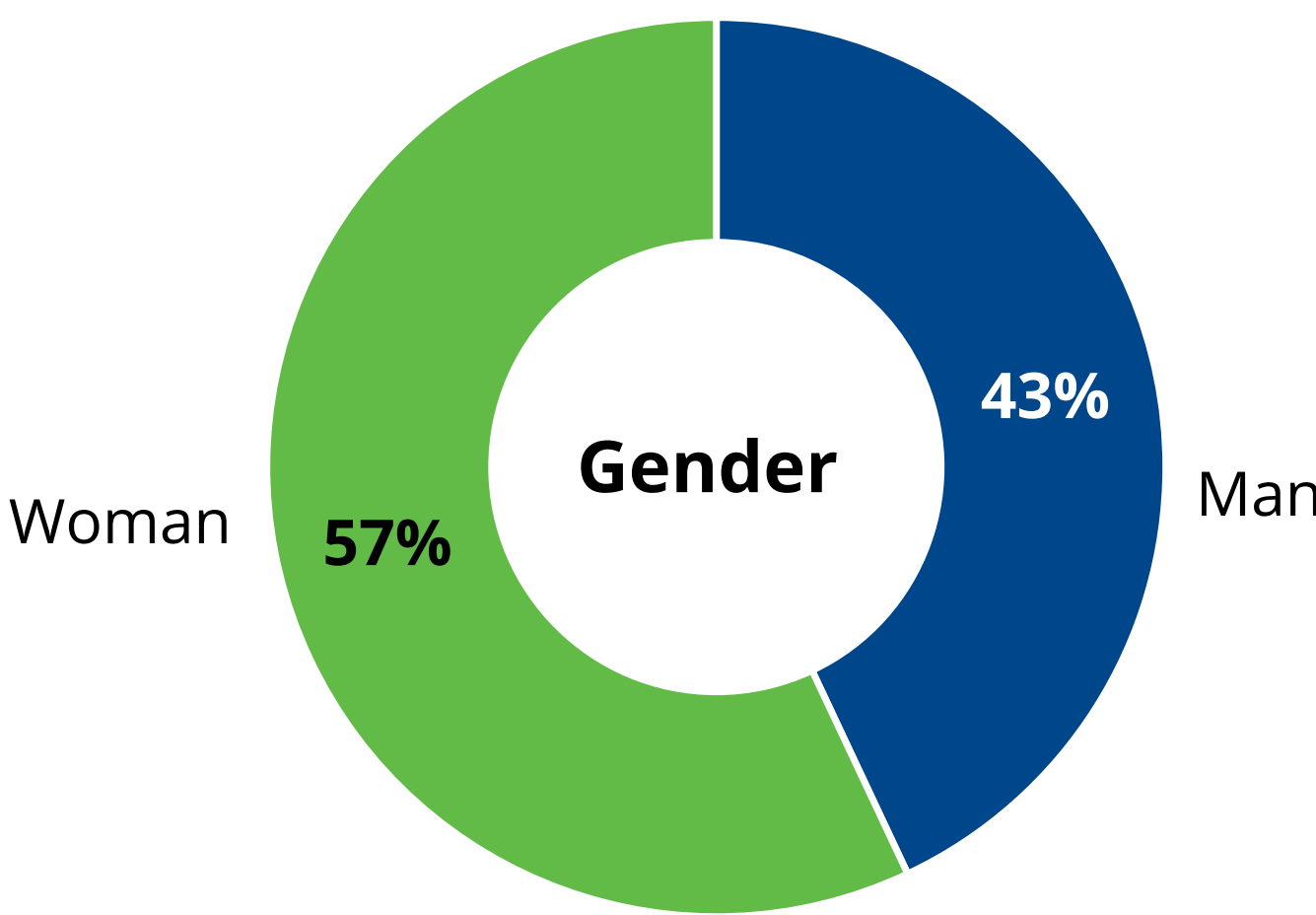
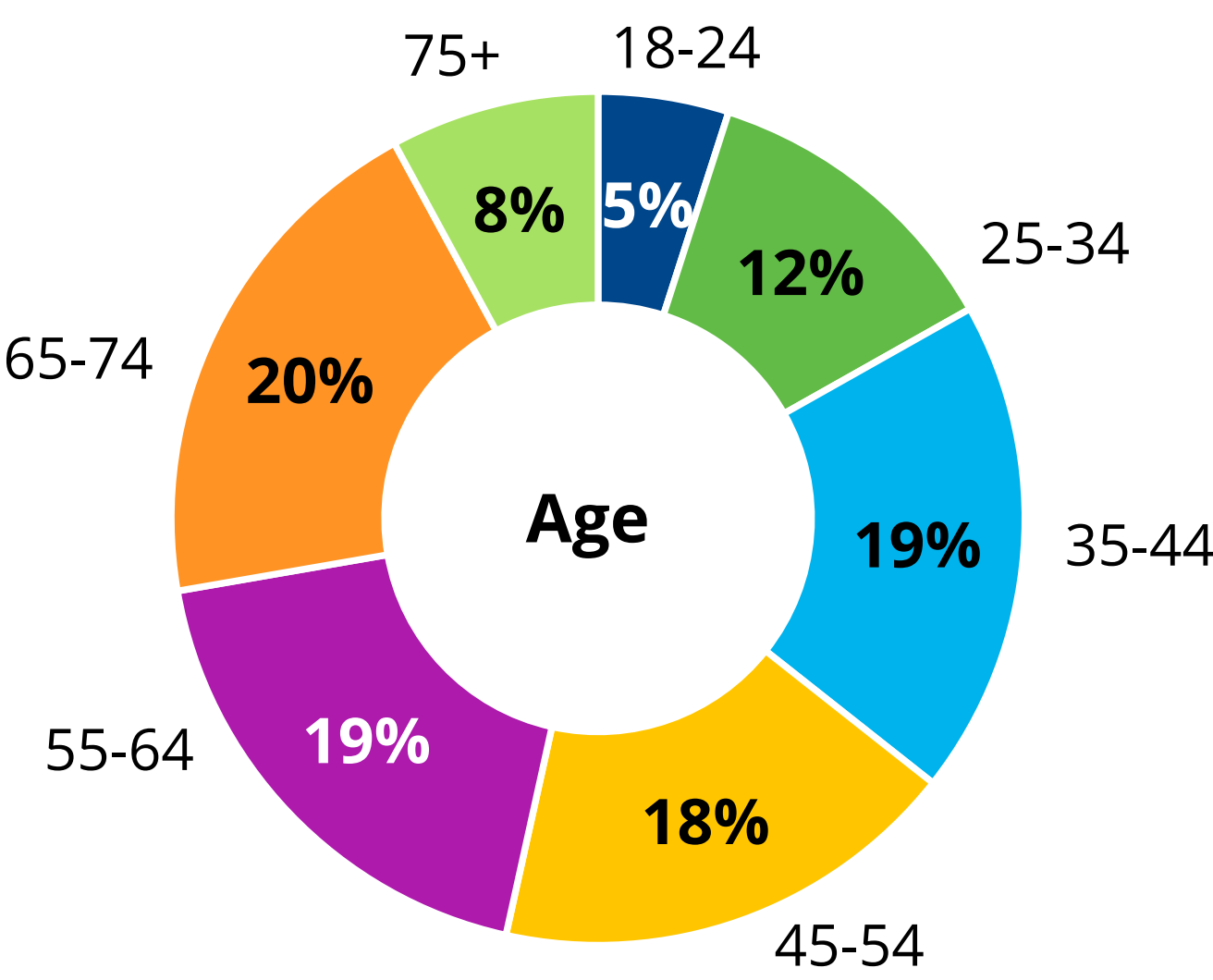
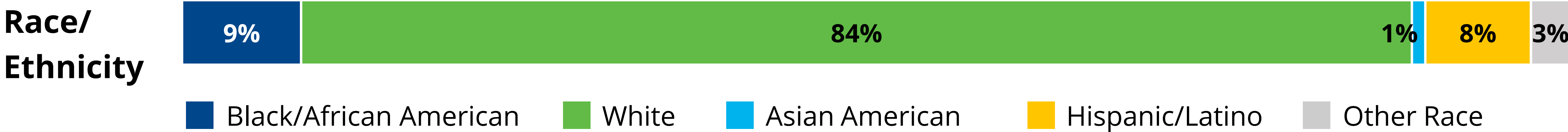
- **Focus on hyperlocal, tangible results with clear personal benefits.** Help them see how their engagement will directly impact their community and their families.
- **Offer roles that reflect competence, not vulnerability.** Frame participation as "being helpful" or "being part of the solution," not as advocacy or fixing inequities.
- **Engage through trusted institutions.** Like churches, schools, and neighborhood associations—not through advocacy organizations or government bodies.
- **Avoid abstract asks. Show what success looks like.** Use before/after stories or testimonials from relatable peers.



Sample Tailored Message

We know that health feels personal, but no one should have to figure it out alone. That’s why we’re focused on practical changes that help more people access things like healthy food, safe housing, and trusted care. Big change starts with small things—like people looking out for each other when it’s needed most.

Demographics





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