A thick, dark brown curved line arches across the top of the page, ending in a yellow five-pointed star on the right side.

# AARP/American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)

## National Poll on Hearing Health Results Summary

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*The right information for the right decisions.*



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## Background and Objectives

- AARP and ASHA have partnered to highlight needs for human communication, specifically to highlight issues relating to hearing among the 50+ US population.
- The poll outlines the “State of Hearing” among the 50+ generation. Poll topics center on:
  - Attitudes towards hearing help.
  - Needs and unmet needs that the 50+ population has for hearing help.
  - Knowledge of where to go for help as well as enablers and barriers to getting this help.
- This poll is a joint initiative of AARP and the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. Project Directors:
  - Reginald Ray, AARP Services, Inc. (202) 434-7556 [r-ray@aarp.org](mailto:r-ray@aarp.org);
  - Joseph Cerquone, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, (301) 296-8732 [jcerquone@asha.org](mailto:jcerquone@asha.org).
- This report is a summary of the overall findings of the poll. A supplemental report, which contains findings specific to minorities, is also available. This report shows that African-Americans are more likely than others to report that their hearing is “excellent” and Hispanics report the highest rates of untreated hearing issues.



## Methodology

- The poll was conducted using two methodologies:
  - An online poll of 1,821 AARP members.
  - A telephone poll of 411 AARP members.
- The total sample size for this poll was 2,232.
- Sampling frames (lists) were provided by AARP, from the AARP membership database.
- Quotas were set by age group, gender, and race/ethnicity. These quotas ensure that the resulting study dataset closely matches the AARP membership universe on key demographic characteristics.
- The telephone poll was included to provide representation from members who do not have an email address on file.
- Study data were weighted to known parameters in the AARP membership database. The result is that study data are representative of the AARP membership.
- Data collection occurred from September 13 to 26, 2011. The online and telephone poll occurred simultaneously and the content of the two polls were identical.

Respondents for this poll were selected from the AARP membership list. Data have been weighted to reflect the composition of key demographic characteristics of the AARP membership. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the study and is not a true probability sample, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.



## Sample size summary

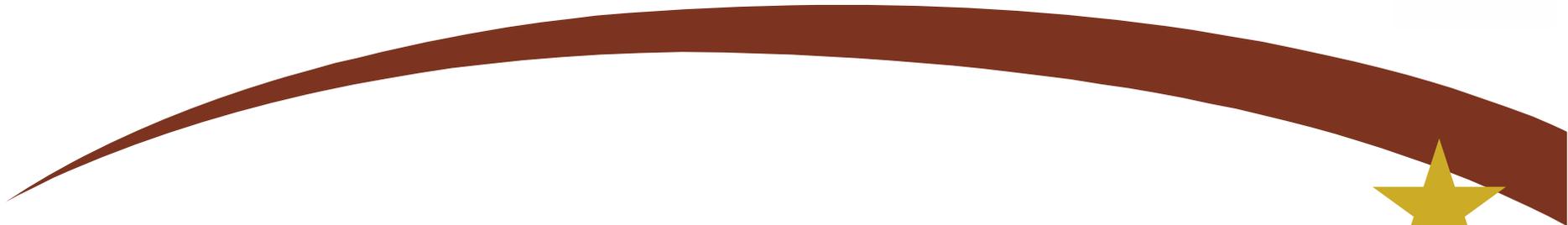
| Gender | respondents |
|--------|-------------|
| Male   | 1,183       |
| Female | 1,049       |

| Age   | respondents |
|-------|-------------|
| 50-59 | 519         |
| 60-69 | 799         |
| 70+   | 914         |

| Race        | respondents |
|-------------|-------------|
| White/other | 1,966       |
| Black/AA    | 182         |
| Hispanic    | 72          |

| Grandchildren | respondents |
|---------------|-------------|
| Yes           | 1,548       |
| No            | 684         |

| Employment                     | respondents |
|--------------------------------|-------------|
| Full-time                      | 475         |
| Part-time                      | 229         |
| Not employed, looking for work | 96          |
| Not employed, not looking      | 51          |
| Retired                        | 1,329       |
| Homemaker                      | 52          |



## Summary/Key Findings



## Summary/Key Findings

### The State of Hearing Health

- Maintaining hearing health as one ages is seen as a very important health concern among older Americans. It contributes closely to their quality of life. For example, 70% of respondents who say their hearing is excellent also say they feel younger than their actual age while 59% of those with untreated hearing issues say they feel younger than their actual age. A large majority (76%) say their hearing health is of great importance to them personally.
- However, despite the recognition of the importance of hearing health, almost half (47%) of respondents reported having untreated hearing health issues. This means that of the 99 million U.S. adults who are age 50+, about 46 million have untreated hearing issues. Also, males are more likely to have untreated hearing issues than females.
- There is a widespread recognition among older Americans that their hearing is getting worse. The most common issue reported is having trouble hearing amidst background noise and many say they have to strain to hear conversations.
- Most older Americans fail to get a hearing test. Just 43% had gotten a hearing test in the past five years, less than half the percentage who have gotten vision tests. Hearing testing ranked next to the bottom in terms of number of respondents who reporting getting health tests over the past five years. Men are more likely to get their hearing checked than women.
- Men are also more likely to use hearing aids than women, but the poll showed very little use of hearing aids before the age of 70.



## Summary/Key Findings

### *Continued*

- While most wearers of hearing aids feel that they enhance the quality of their life, many hearing aid owners are not consistently wearing them. The most common complaint about hearing aids is that they don't work well in a crowded room, which corresponds to the number one hearing issue to result from the polling -- not being able to hear with noise in the background.
- It appears that hearing issues are difficult to discuss with loved ones. Only 60% of respondents who know a family member or a friend with a hearing issue have recommended seeking treatment to them.

#### **Do people feel that hearing health issues merit more attention?**

- A large majority of older Americans (68%) feel that hearing health issues do not receive enough attention compared to other health concerns. Nearly 40% are not willing to discuss hearing difficulties with family or friends.

#### **What are the consequences of hearing difficulties?**

- Hearing difficulties are affecting the quality of life for older Americans. Many report having problems following conversations in noisy situations.
- Hearing difficulties are also affecting relationships – relationships with family and friends as well as social situations such as family gatherings. Many (44%) poll respondents strongly agree or agree that hearing difficulties can negatively impact their relationships with their families and friends.



## Summary/Key Findings

### *Continued*

- Also, approximately one third are concerned that hearing difficulties could affect their effectiveness at work, while more than one fifth say they make them feel cut off from family and friends.
- However, people are reticent to discuss hearing difficulties with their families and loved ones. They are most likely to discuss hearing difficulties with their primary care physician.
- Older Americans get a bit defensive when asked about hearing difficulties. They claim not to be withdrawing from conversations and that hearing challenges do not limit their activities. They don't see hearing issues as presenting a problem for them at work.

### **What prevents people from getting treatment for hearing health issues?**

- Respondents have many reasons for not seeking treatment. Fifty-seven percent of those with untreated hearing problems say their problems don't warrant treatment and are easy enough to 'cover up.' The foremost reason for not seeking treatment is a perception that their hearing issue isn't severe enough – that they are getting by without treatment. They seem to have found ways that they believe cover up their hearing issues, and do not see a connection to an improved quality of life that treatment may provide.
- However, a large majority (63%) cite health insurance coverage limitations, concerns about cost, and lack of health insurance as reasons for not seeking treatment. Also, 65% report they would seek treatment for hearing problems if they were sure they could afford to do so.
- There is not a large stigma to hearing health issues. Older Americans seem largely unconcerned about others knowing they have hearing issues, which provides a contrast to their reticence to discuss hearing issues with loved ones.

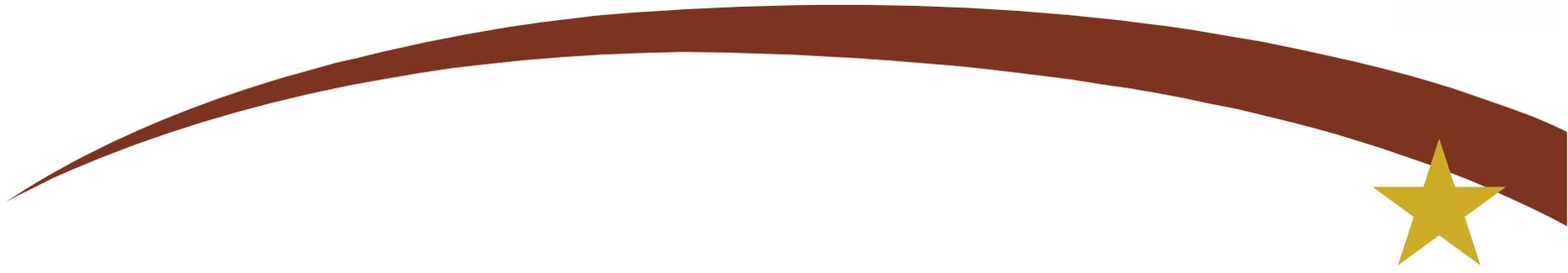


## Summary/Key Findings

### *Continued*

#### **What will motivate more people to seek treatment for hearing health issues?**

- Ultimately, it seems that more people will seek help for hearing issues if their issue is linked to their relationships. Nearly 70% would seek treatment if they felt it was affecting their relationships with family and friends. Nearly as many would do so if someone they cared about asked them to seek treatment.
- Cost and affordability is also a key issue. The study indicated concerns over costs and health care coverage for hearing treatment.
- Nearly 75% of respondents report that finding a provider with a high level of training in hearing difficulties is critically important to them were they to see professional help. However, their first stop appears to be their primary care physician, with a referral to an audiologist. The Internet is a key source for information, and local events and TV are seen as effective ways to communicate the importance of hearing checkups.



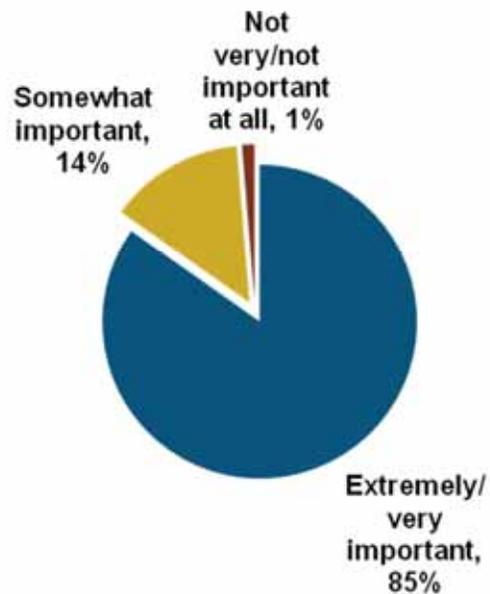
## What is the *State of Hearing Health?*



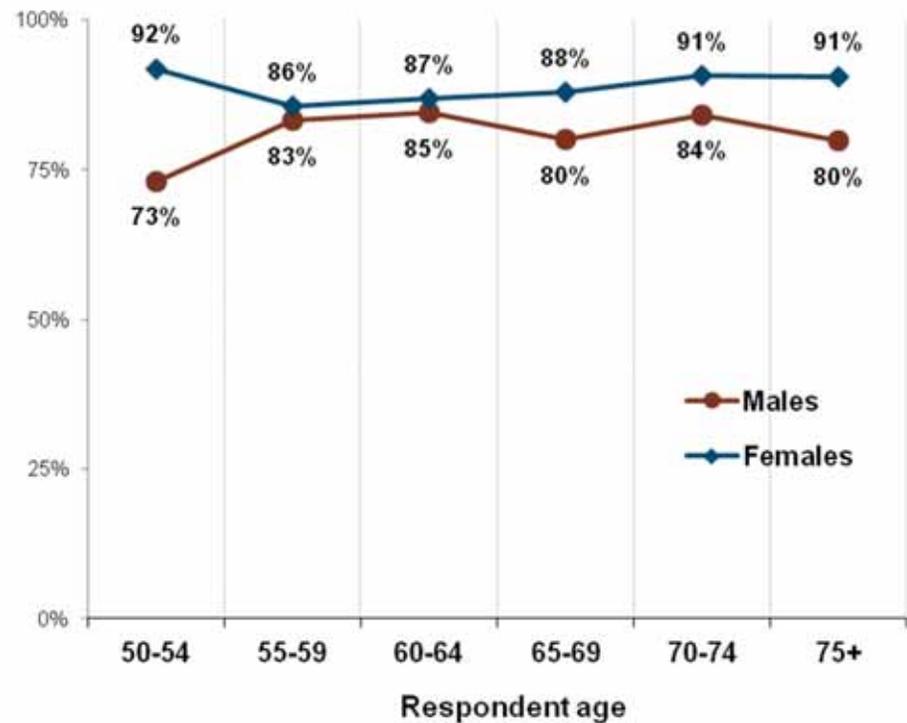
# Older Americans attach a high level of importance to maintaining their hearing health

*Women seem to recognize the importance of hearing health at a younger age than men*

As you age, how important is maintaining your hearing health to the quality of your life?



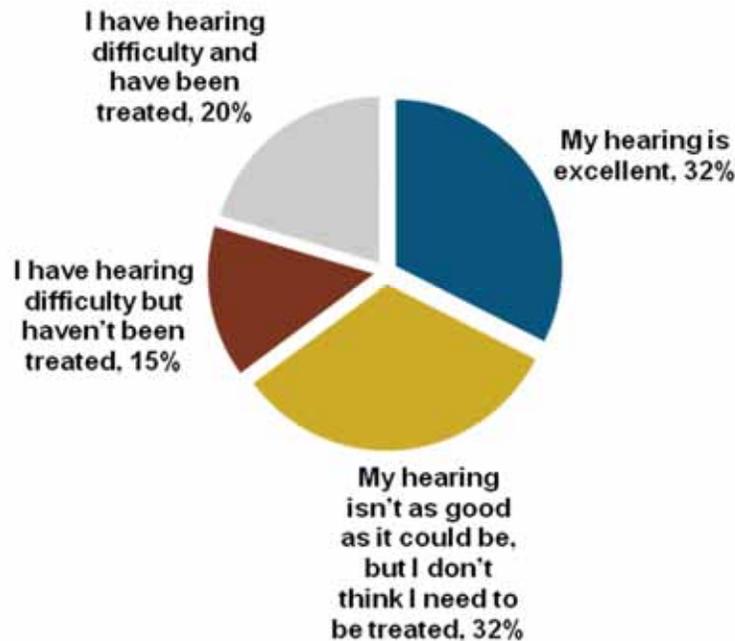
*% Extremely/very important*



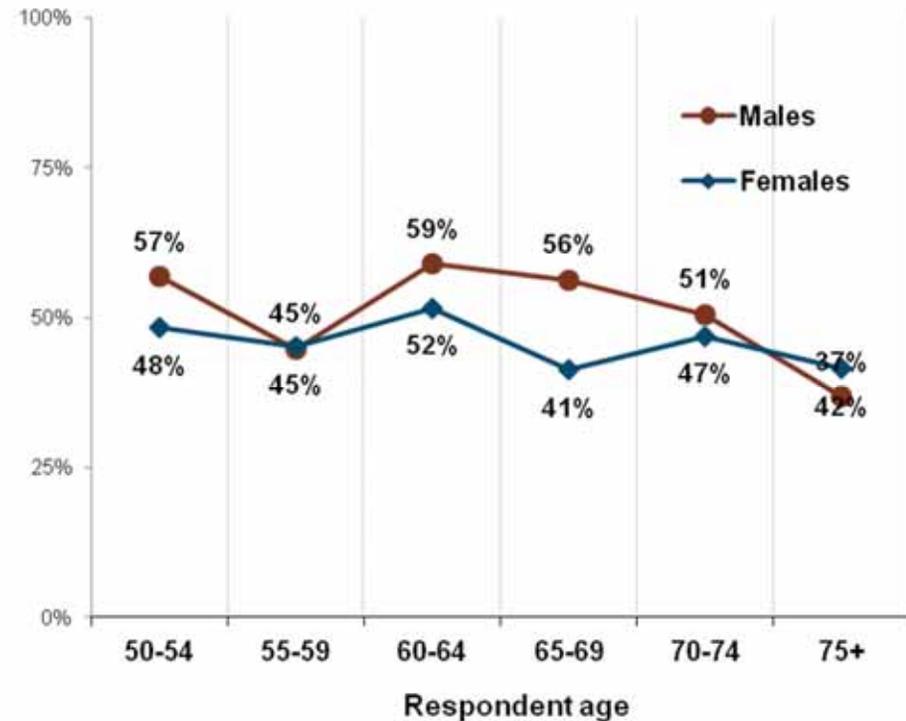
# Yet, significant numbers of older Americans report having untreated hearing health issues

47% report having untreated hearing issues. This translates to more than 46 million people.\*

Which best describes your own hearing health?



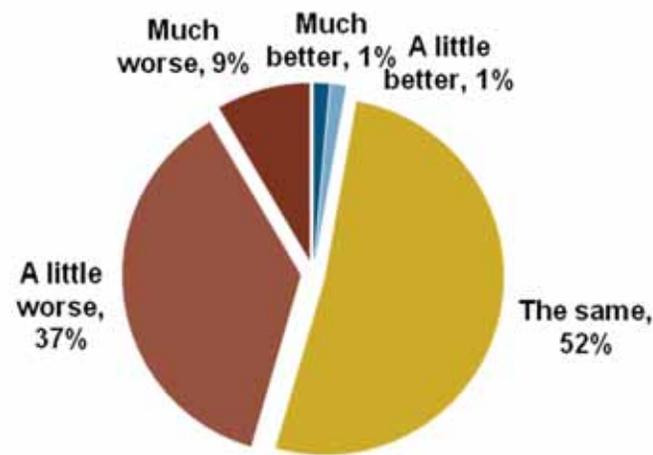
% with untreated hearing difficulties



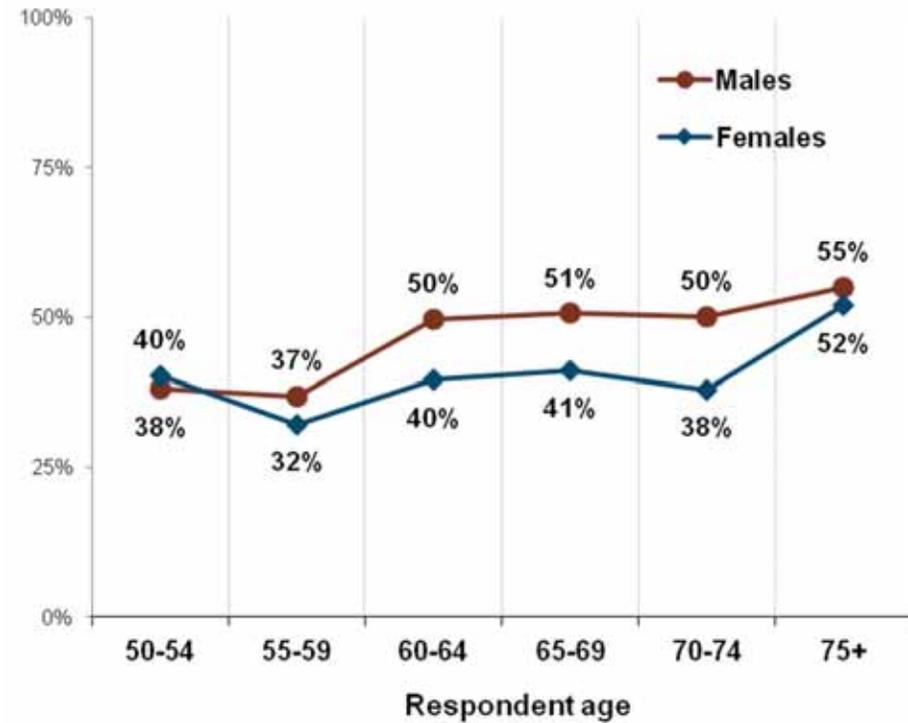
# 46% say their hearing is getting worse

*Men are more likely than women to say their hearing is getting worse*

How would you describe your hearing compared to 5 years ago?



*% much worse/a little worse*

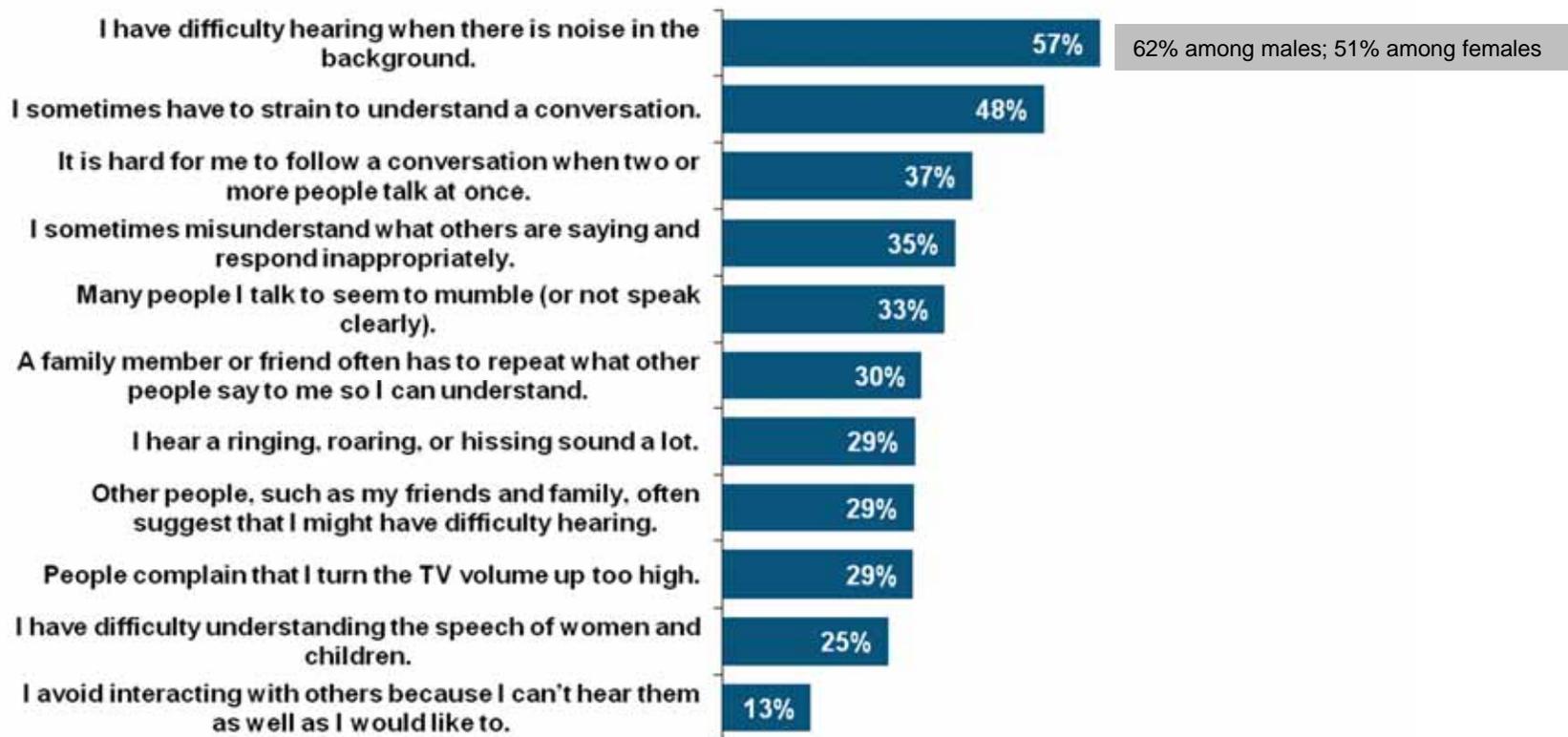




# The most common hearing issue is having difficulty hearing when there is background noise

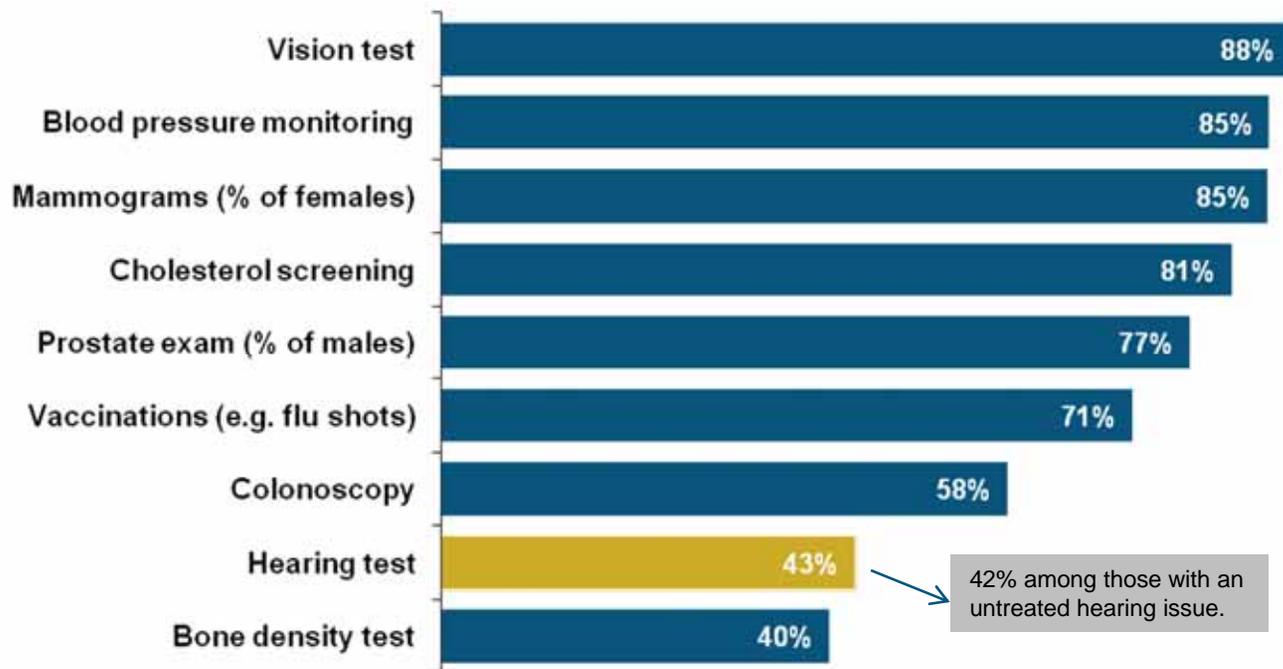
Please check “yes” or “no” to indicate if the following statements are true for you.

*% Yes*



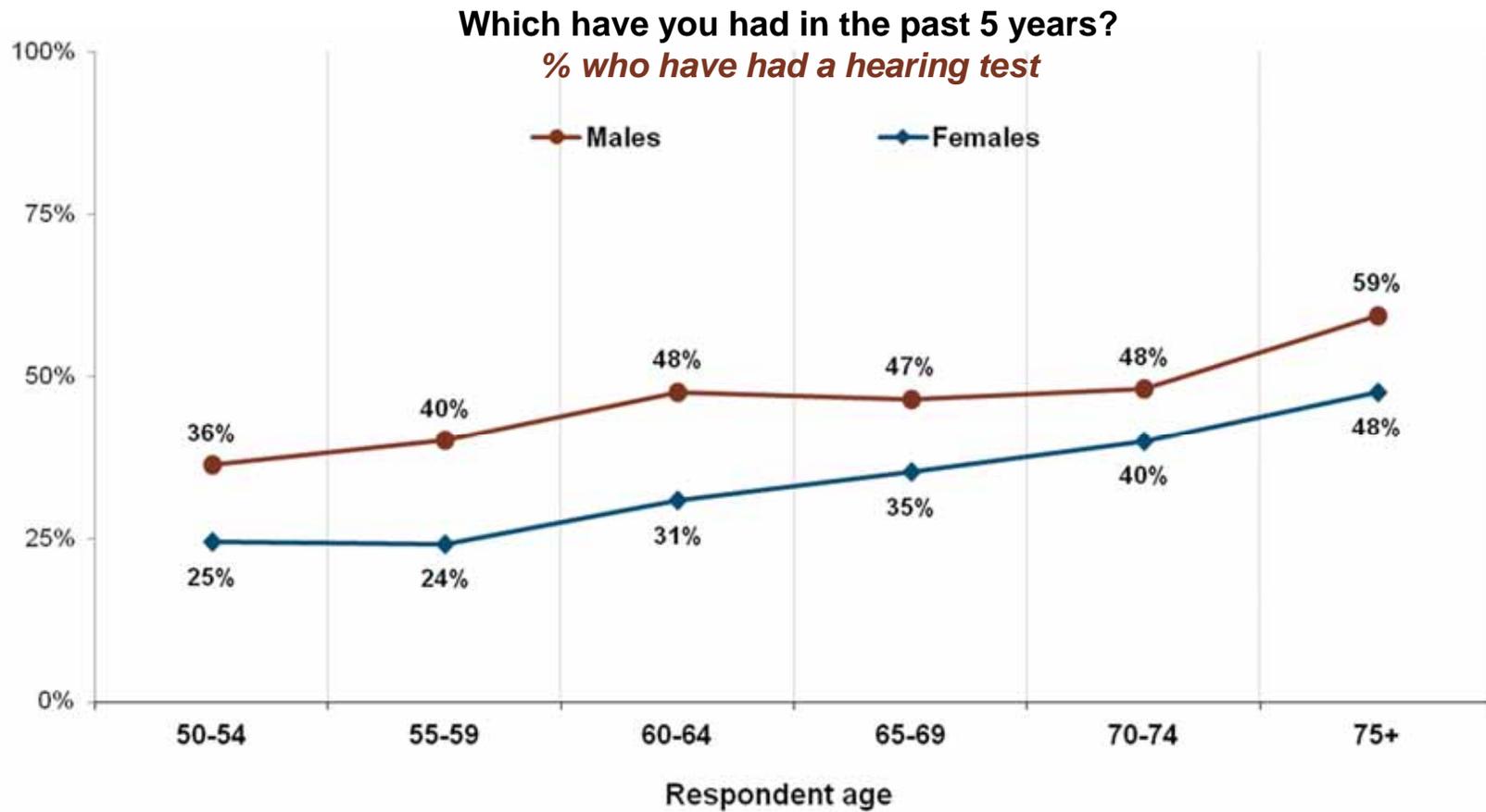
# Just 43% of respondents have had a hearing test in the past 5 years

Which have you had in the past 5 years?



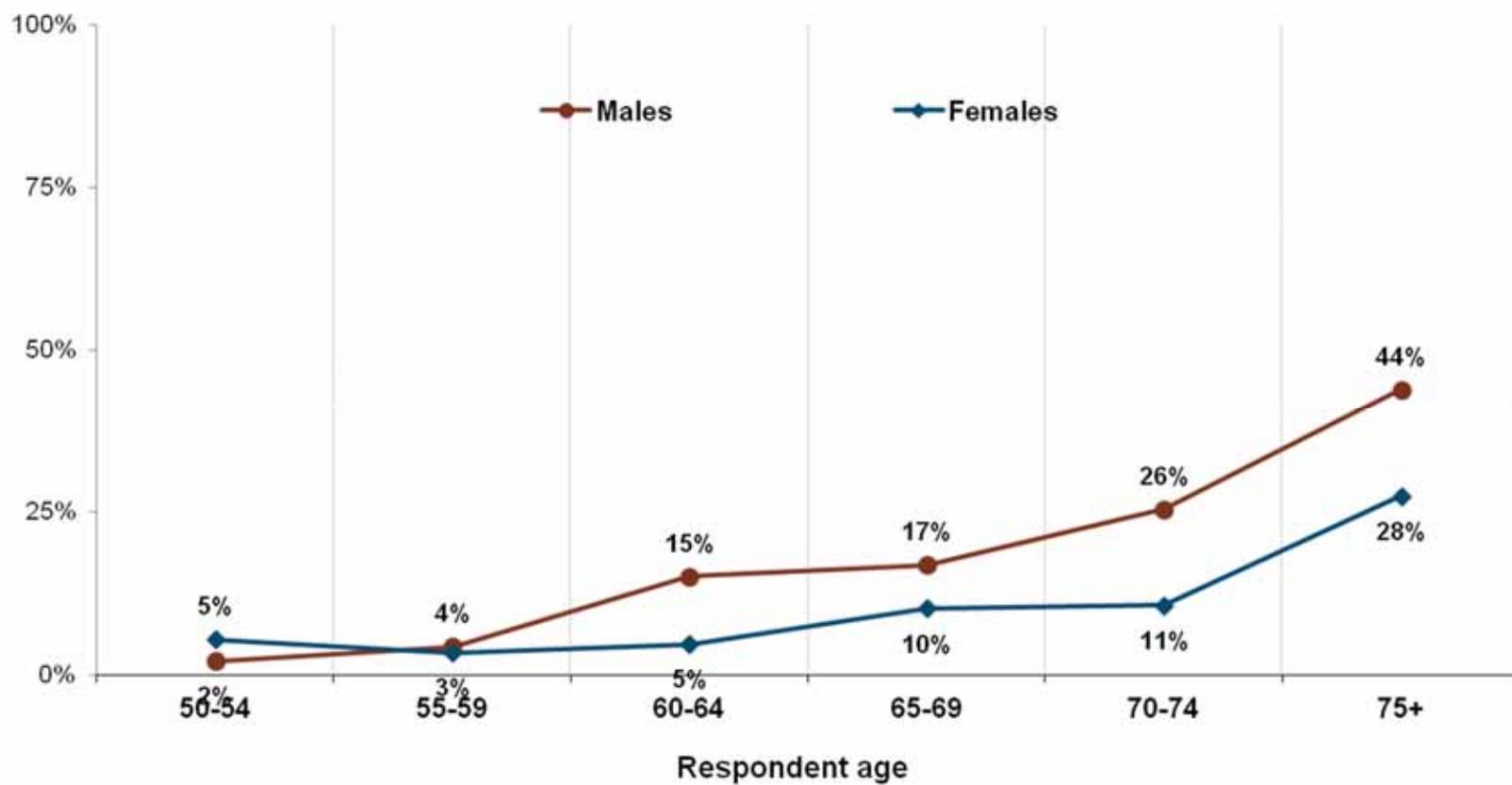
# Men are more likely to get a hearing test than women

*Likelihood to get a hearing test rises with age*



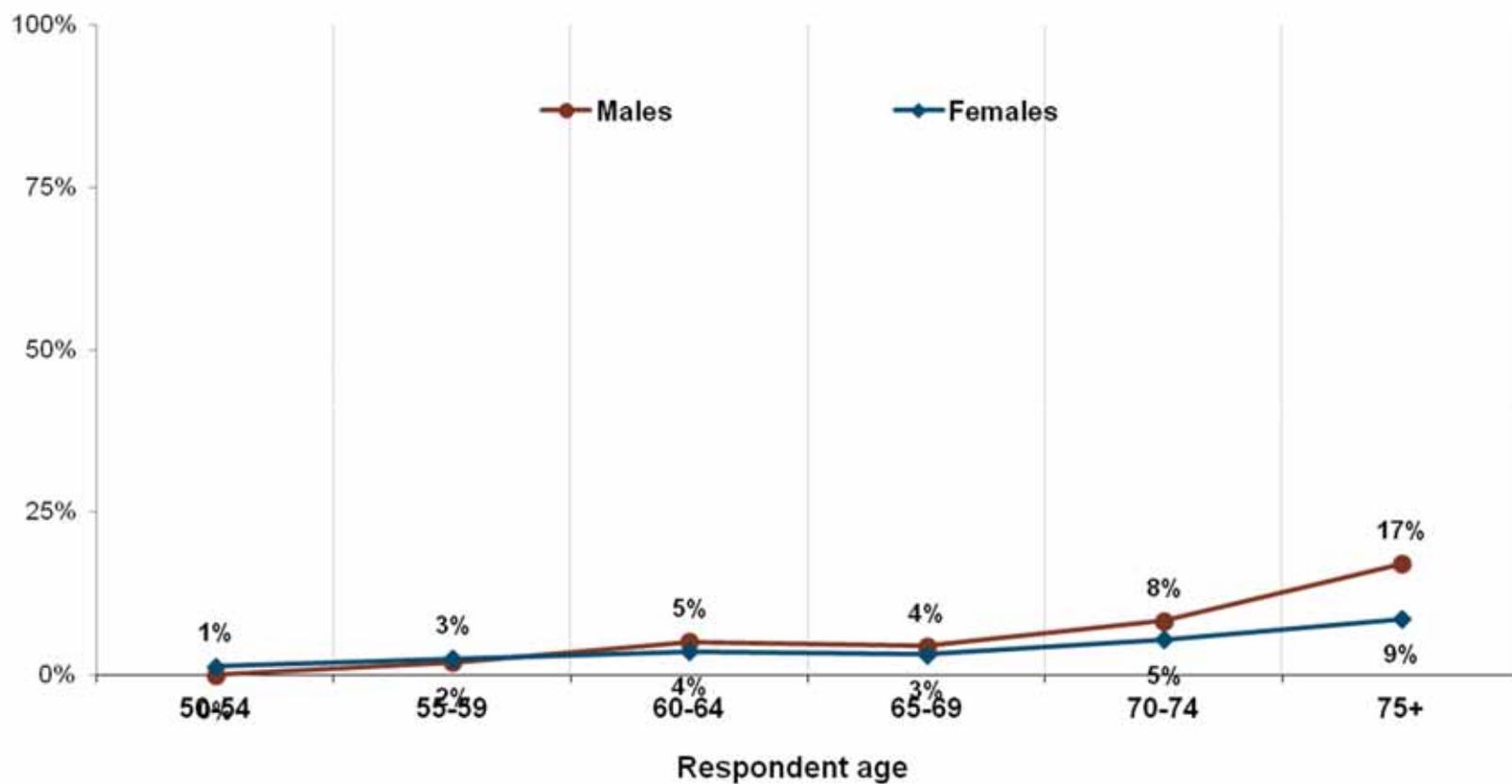
# Men are more likely to own hearing aids than women

% of Respondents who own hearing aids



## Few use other types of hearing assistive technologies

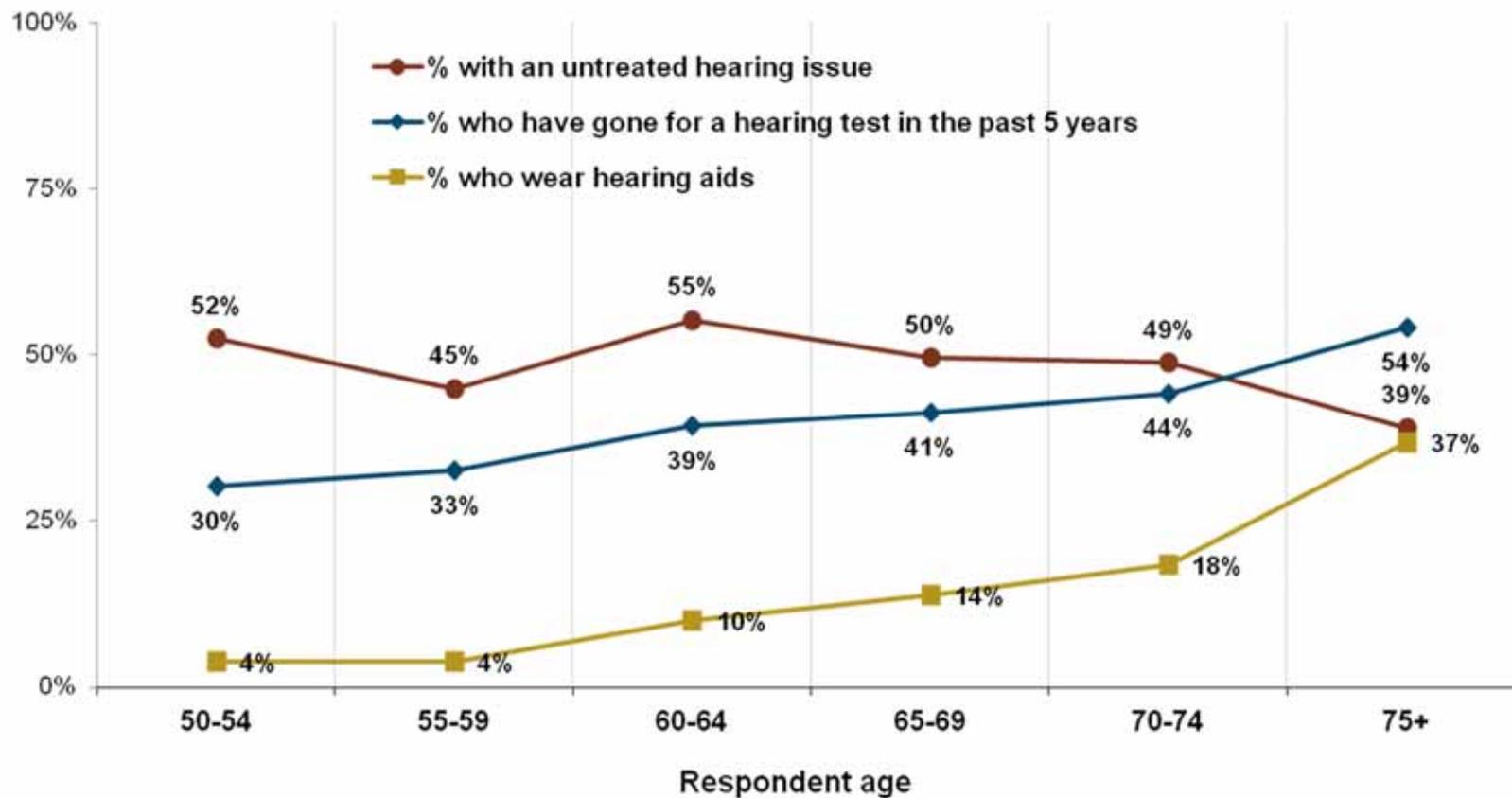
% of Respondents who own other hearing assistive technologies\*



\* Other hearing assistive technologies include FM systems, infrared systems, induction loop systems, one-to-one communicators, amplified telephones, and TV ears.

# Hearing issues largely go undiagnosed and untreated, particularly at the younger portion of the age range surveyed

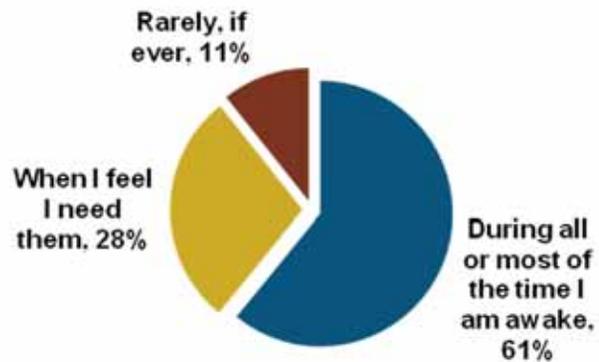
## Hearing Issues and Treatment



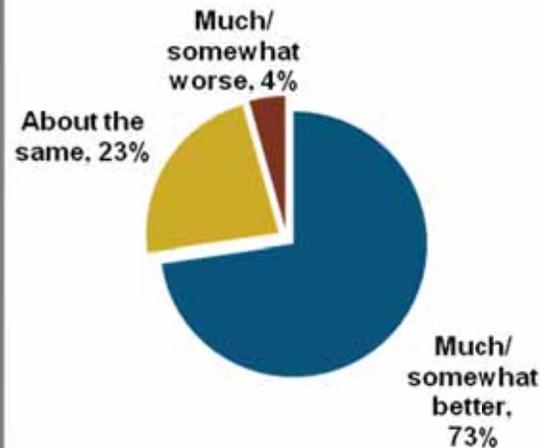
# While most wearers feel hearing aids enhance their quality of life, many owners (39%) do not consistently wear them

## Questions asked among those with hearing aids

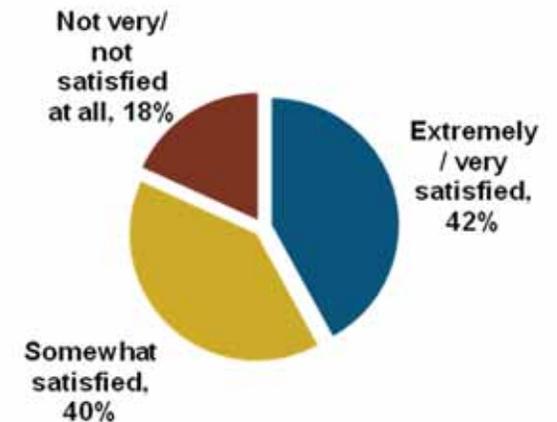
How frequently do you wear your hearing aids?



How would you rate the quality of your life since you have been wearing hearing aids?



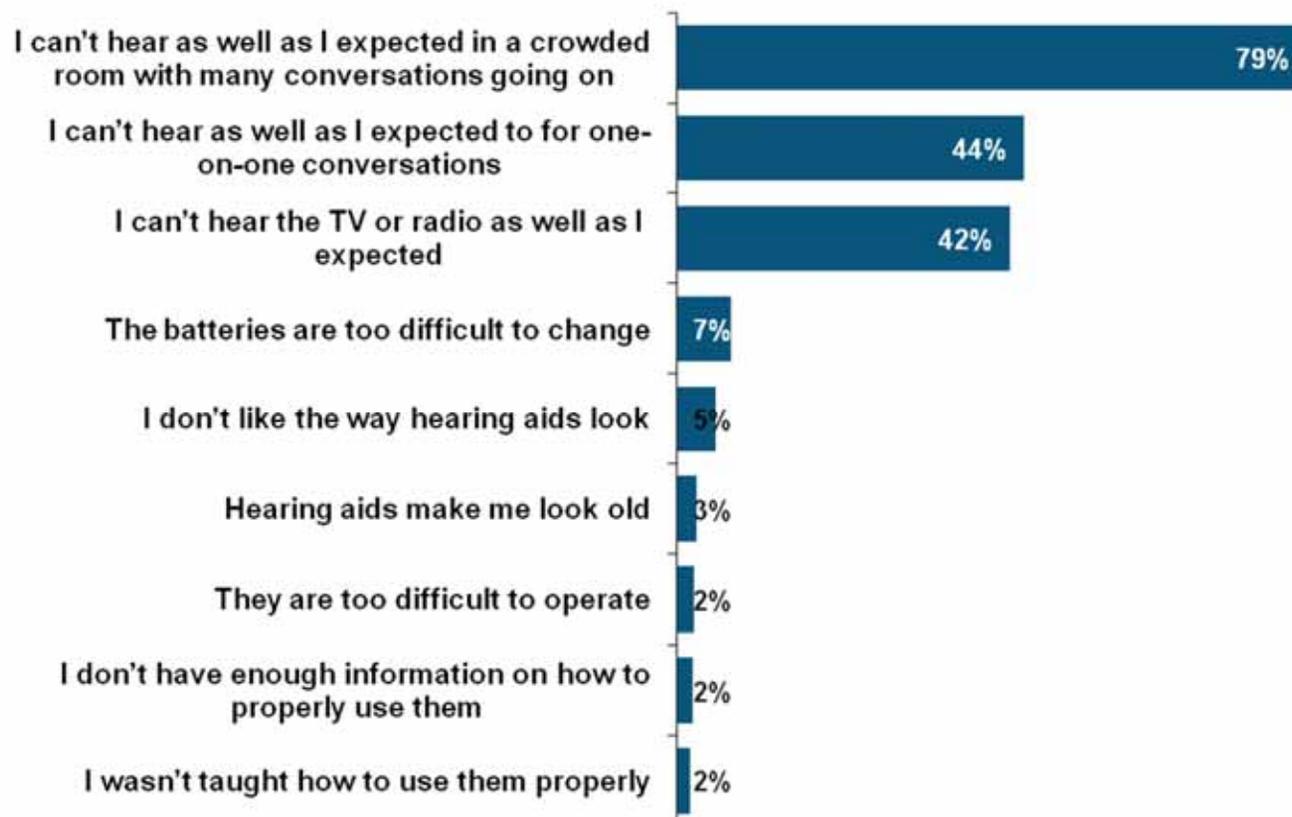
How would you rate your satisfaction with your hearing aids?





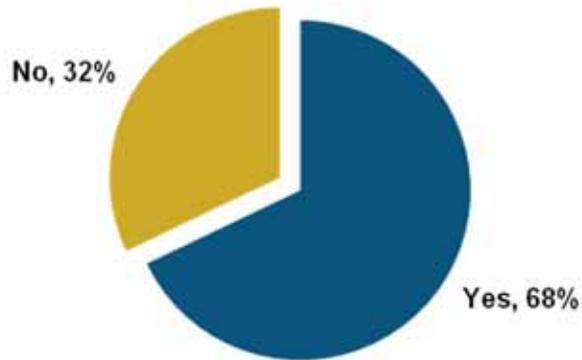
## The most common complaint about hearing aids is that they don't perform as well as expected in a crowded room

### Why are you less than fully satisfied with your hearing aids?



# Just 60% of those who have a family member with a hearing difficulty have suggested they get treatment

**Do you know a family member or friend who has difficulty hearing?**



**Have you ever suggested to someone that they get professional help and treatment for a hearing difficulty?**

*Among those who know someone with a hearing difficulty*



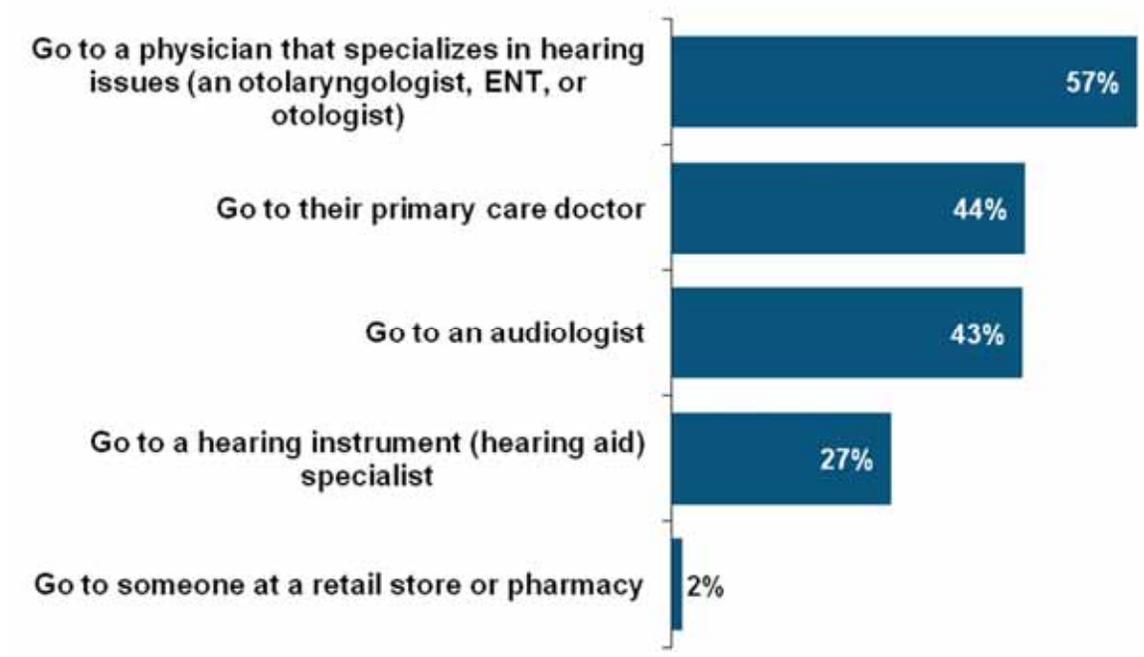
Q260 All respondents (n=2,232)

Q265 Know someone with hearing difficulty (n=1,510)



## Respondents are most likely recommend that someone with hearing difficulty go to a specialist

**What have you suggested a person with hearing difficulty do?**  
*Among those who have suggested someone get treatment*

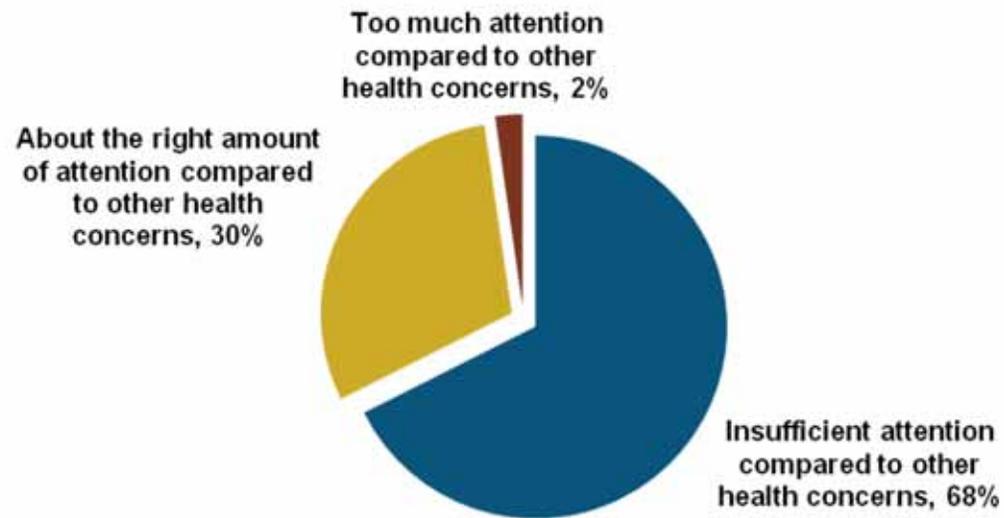




**Do people feel that hearing health issues  
merit more attention?**

## Respondents feel that the importance of getting a hearing checkup does not get enough attention

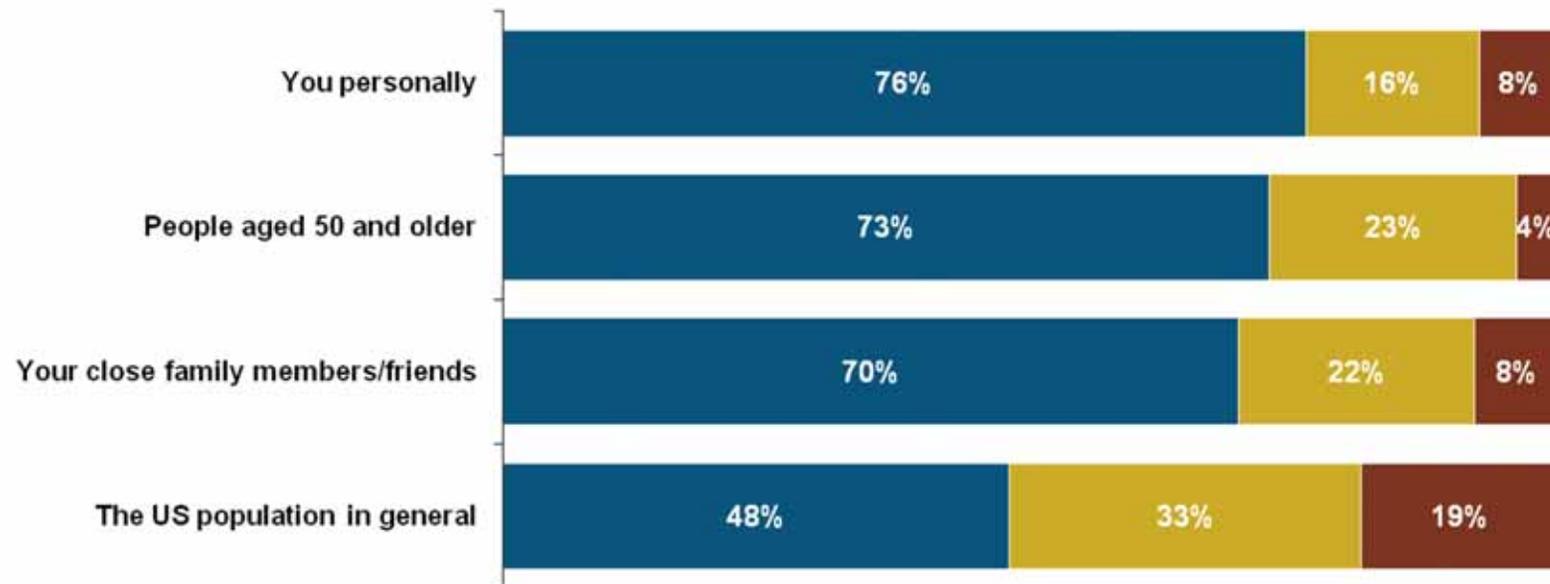
In your experience, does the importance of getting a regular hearing check-up get ...?

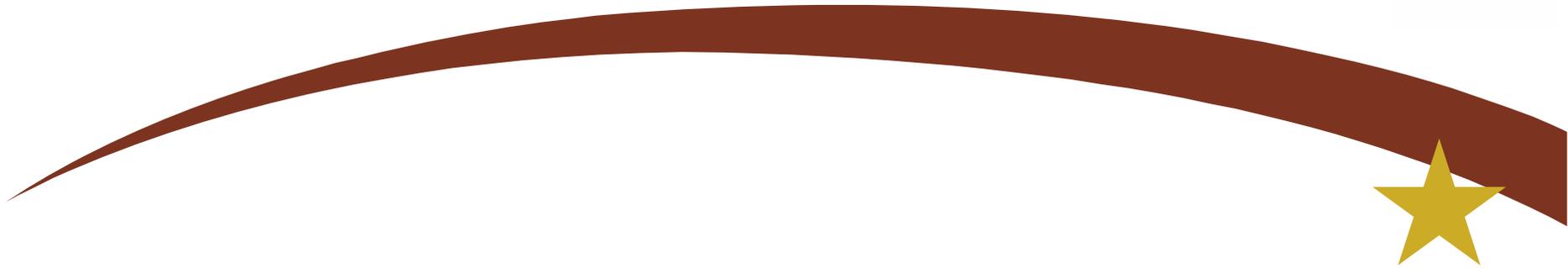


## Hearing health is seen as an important personal concern

In your opinion, how important of a concern is hearing health to ...?

■ Extremely/very important concern ■ Somewhat important concern ■ Not a very important concern/not a concern at all

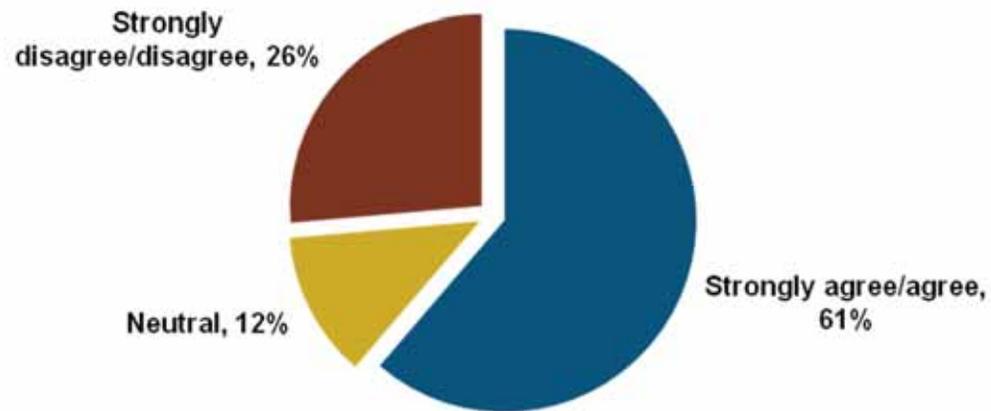




**What are the consequences of hearing difficulties?**

## Hearing difficulties make it hard for people to follow conversations in noisy situations

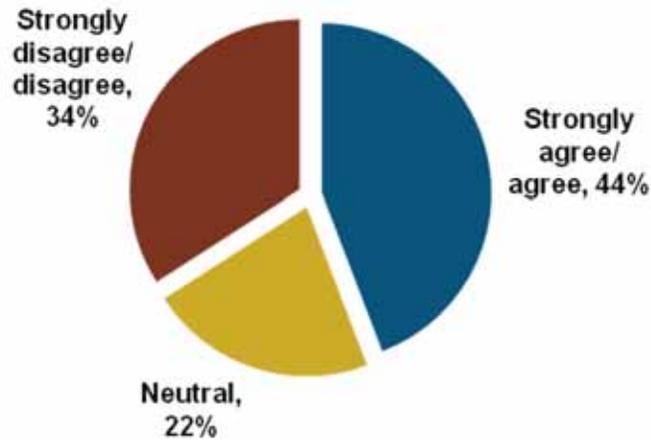
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?  
*I find it hard to follow conversations in noisy situations.*



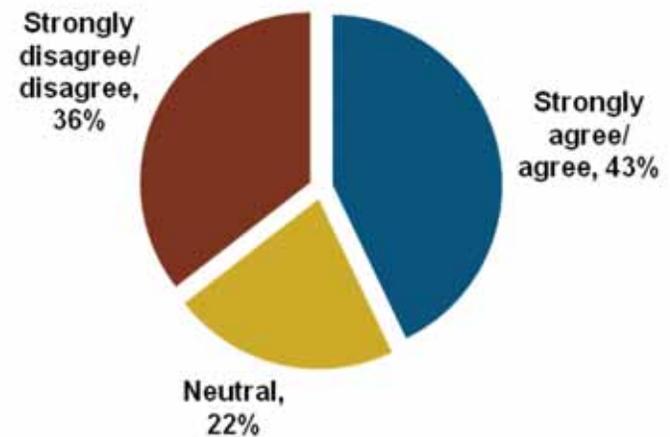
# Hearing difficulties can affect relationships with family and friends

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

*Hearing difficulties can negatively impact my relationships with my family and friends.*

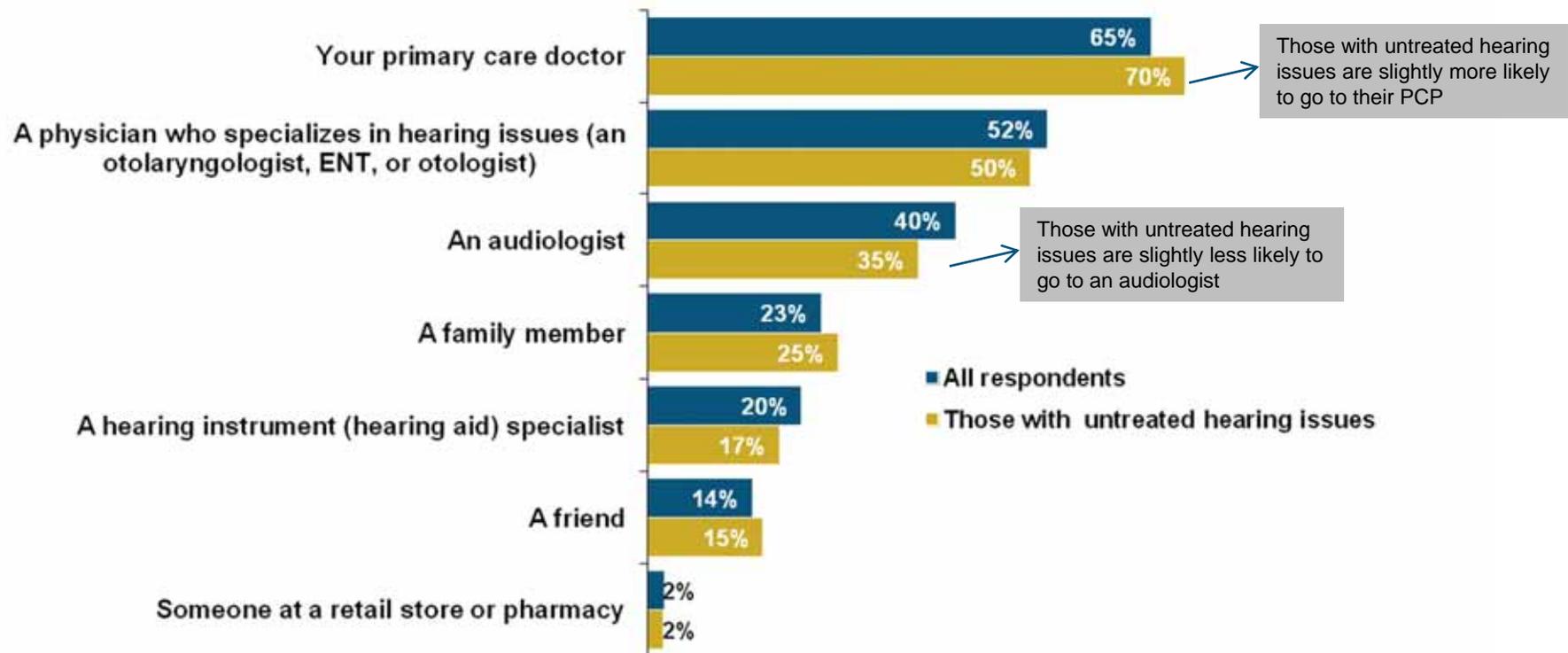


*Family gatherings are a strain because so many people are talking at once.*



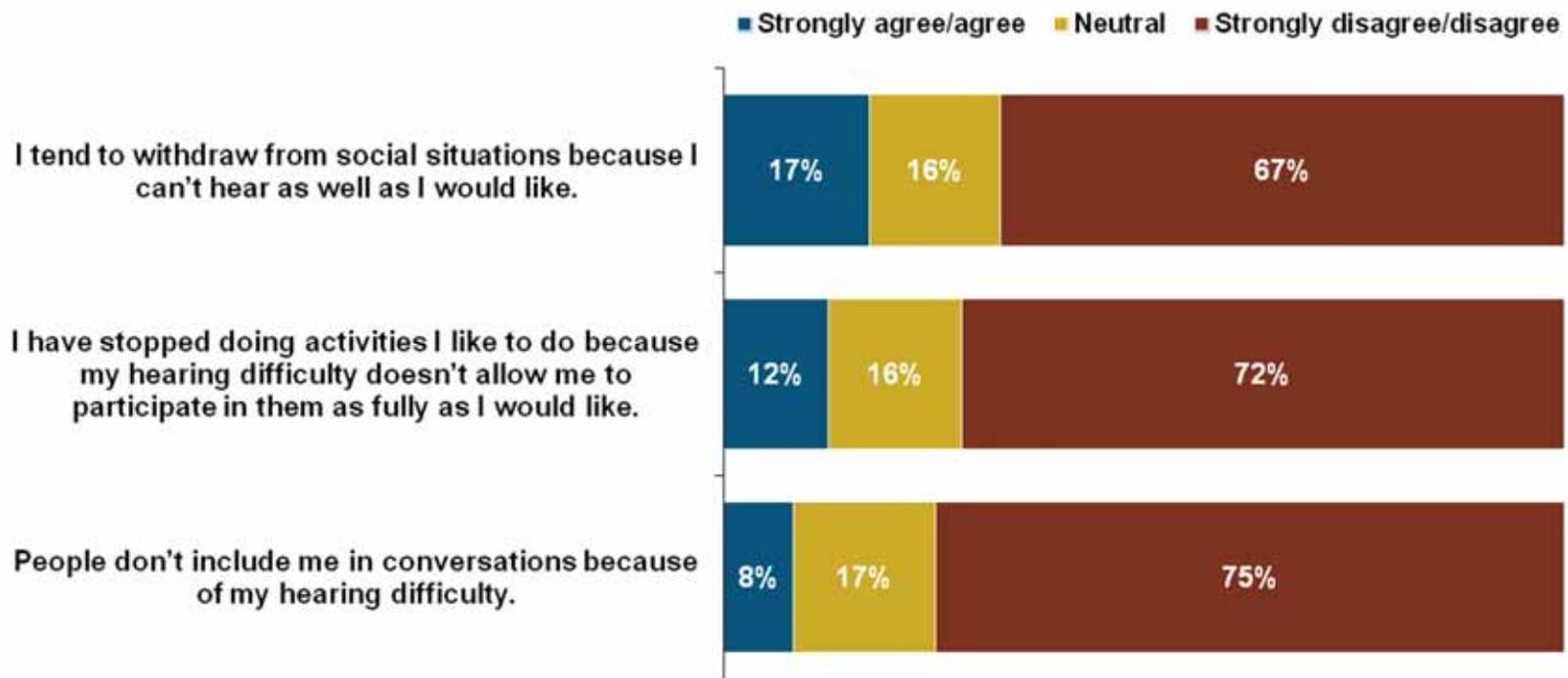
# Many are willing to talk to medical professionals about hearing issues, but few are willing to talk to family members

Who would you be likely to talk to if you felt you had difficulty with your hearing?



# Older Americans are not likely to withdraw from situations, activities, or conversations because of hearing issues

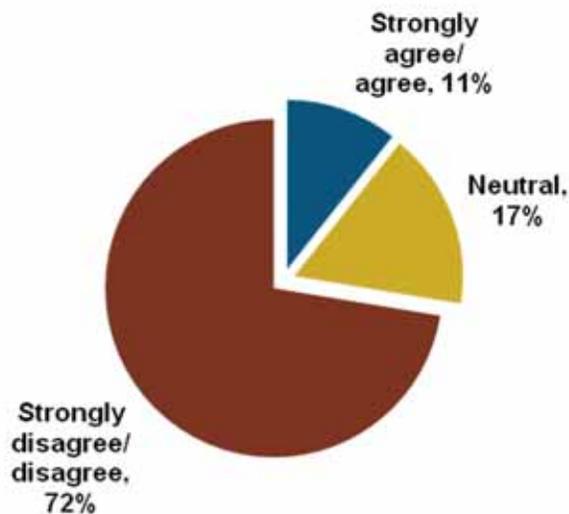
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



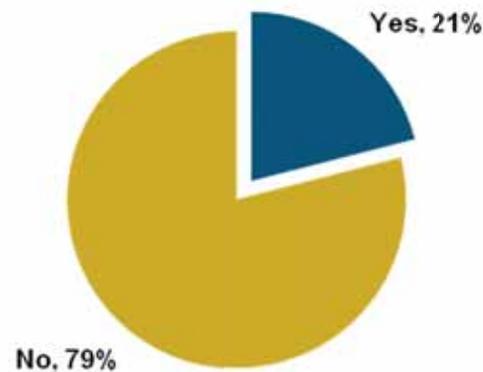
# Most respondents are not concerned that hearing difficulties could potentially affect their work lives

*Questions asked among those who are currently employed*

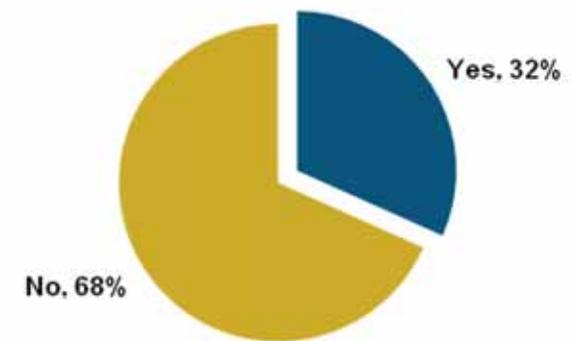
*Revealing my hearing difficulty could cause me problems in my job.*



Would you be concerned that hearing difficulties would hurt your ability to remain employed?

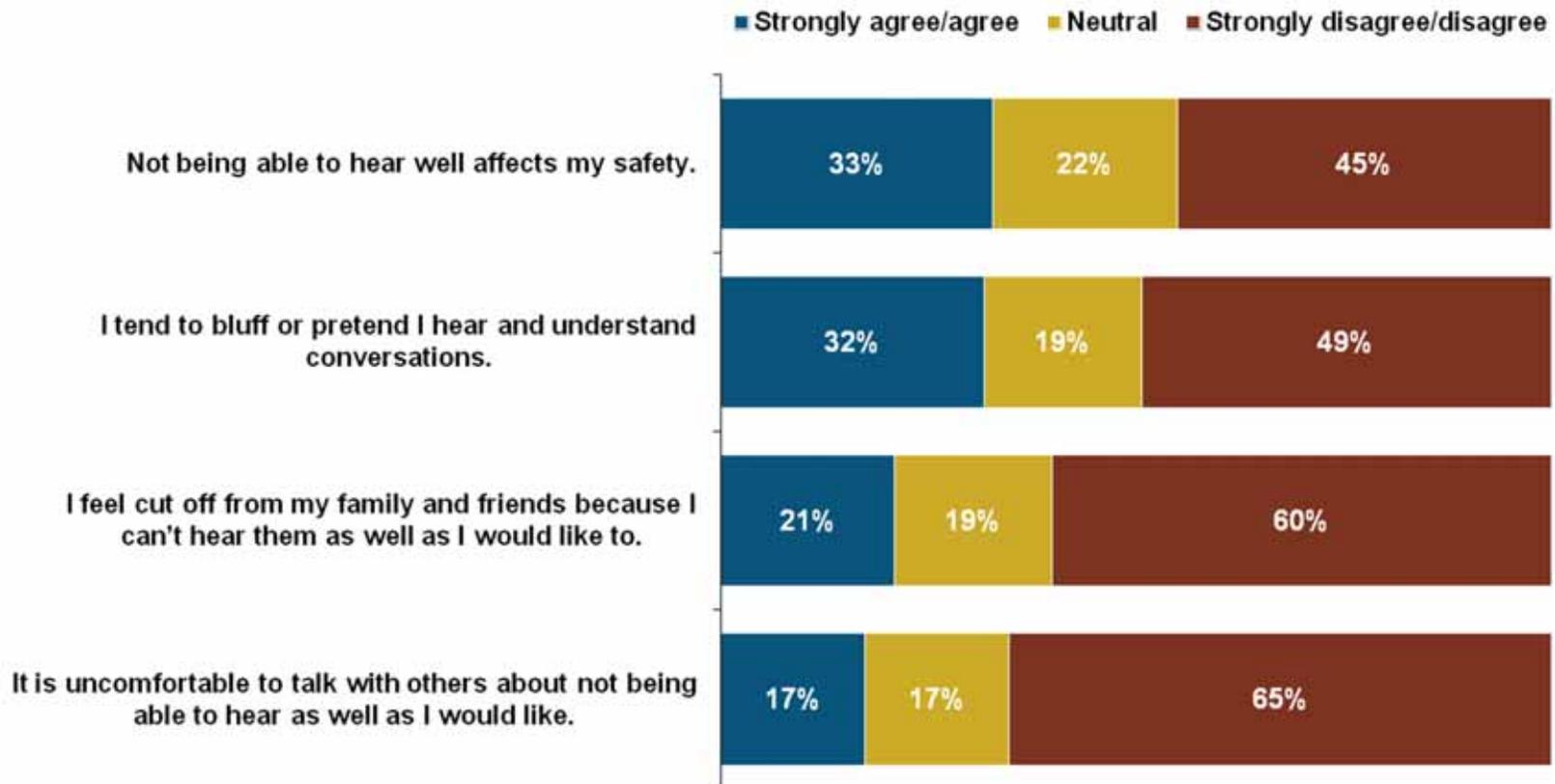


Would you be concerned that hearing difficulties would reduce your effectiveness at work?



## Smaller percentages of older Americans report other consequences of not being able to hear well

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?





**What prevents people from getting treatment  
for hearing health issues?**

# Respondents give a number of reasons for not getting treatment for hearing difficulties



**Earlier, you said that you have hearing difficulties but have not been treated for them.**  
*What are the main reasons why you haven't sought treatment for your hearing difficulty?*

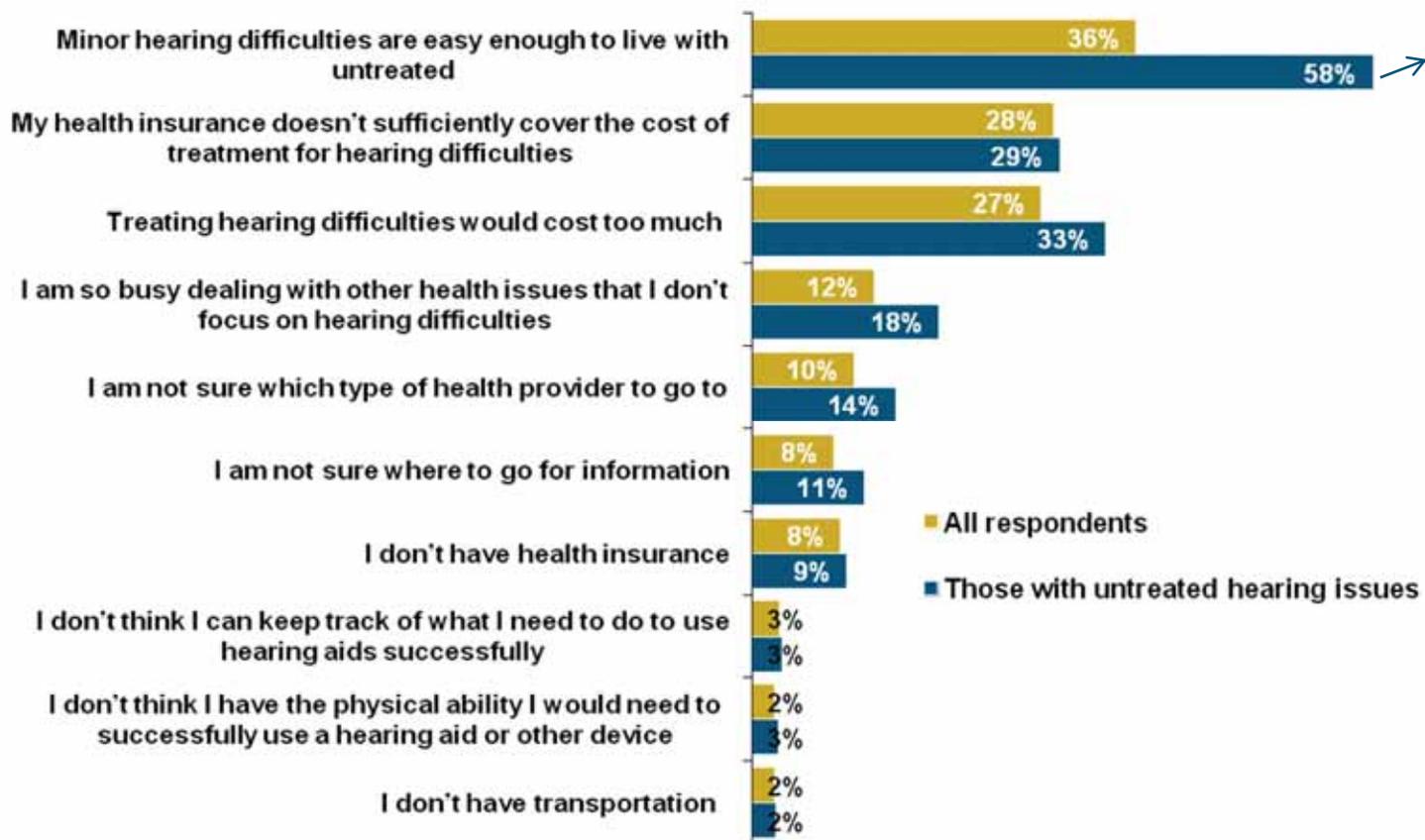
- “The costs. The price of seeing a doctor is very costly these days.”
- “I haven't sought treatment because I don't feel it's bad enough. I have also heard that hearing aids don't work.”
- “I don't have the money and I have Medicaid which doesn't pay for it.”
- “I'm really not that bad. Every now and then things get a little fuzzy with my ears but mostly sometimes my ears get blocked up from the wax and that makes it a little hard to hear things.”
- “I have more important health issues than checking my hearing.”
- “When I went to an ENT doctor and had my hearing tested, he told me I had hearing loss but that all men my age start losing their hearing. He told me it was just another difficulty with aging. He did nothing. He made me feel as if I had wasted his time. I have not had my hearing tested again since then.”
- “I'm just not ready I guess. I don't drive so finding a way is hard sometimes. I went with a friend one time and they had such a hard time with them that it just turned me off to it.”
- “I just have them repeat what they say to make sure I know what they are saying.”
- “Because it is occasionally that I don't hear something correctly or have to ask somebody to repeat.”



# A perception that hearing difficulties are easy to live with prevents treatment

*Respondents are also concerned about costs and health care coverage*

## Which might prevent you from getting help for your hearing difficulty?

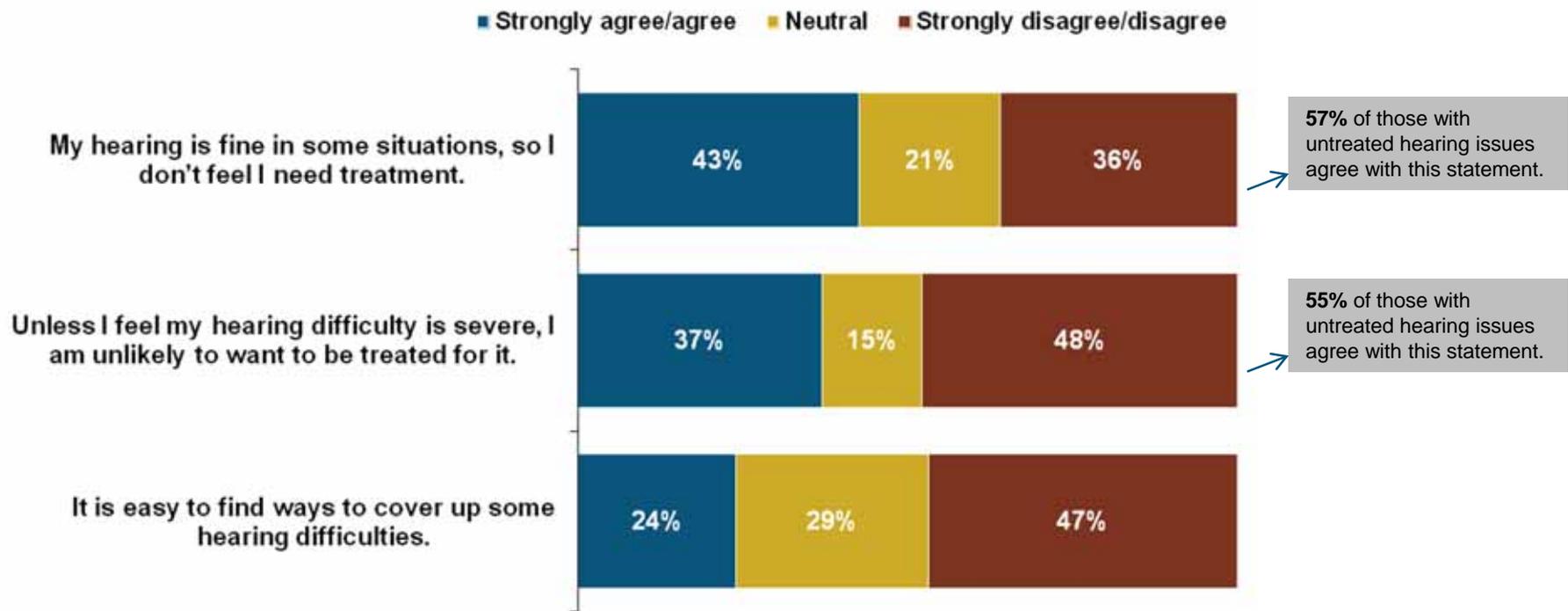


Those with untreated hearing issues are far more likely to feel that hearing difficulties are easy enough to live with.



# Many feel that their hearing problem isn't severe enough to treat, or is easy enough to "cover up"

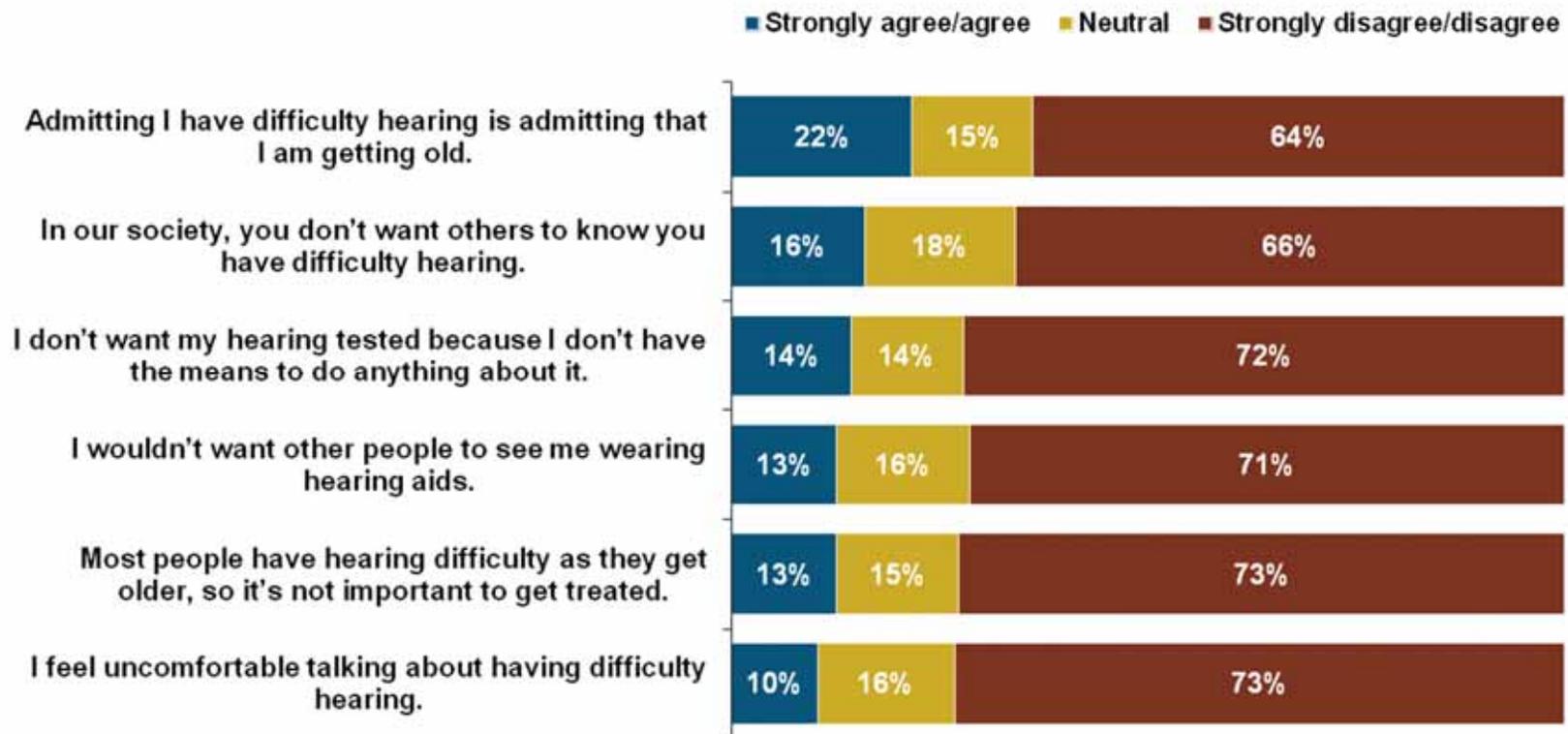
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

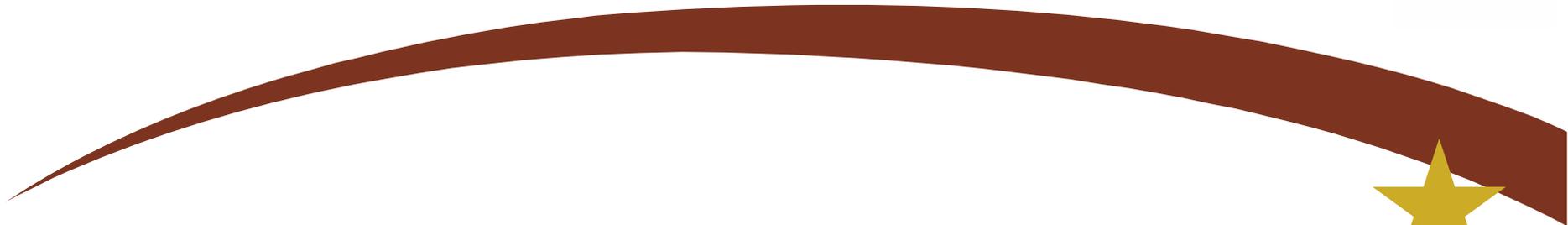




# Respondents do not tend to feel that there is a stigma to having hearing issues as one ages

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?





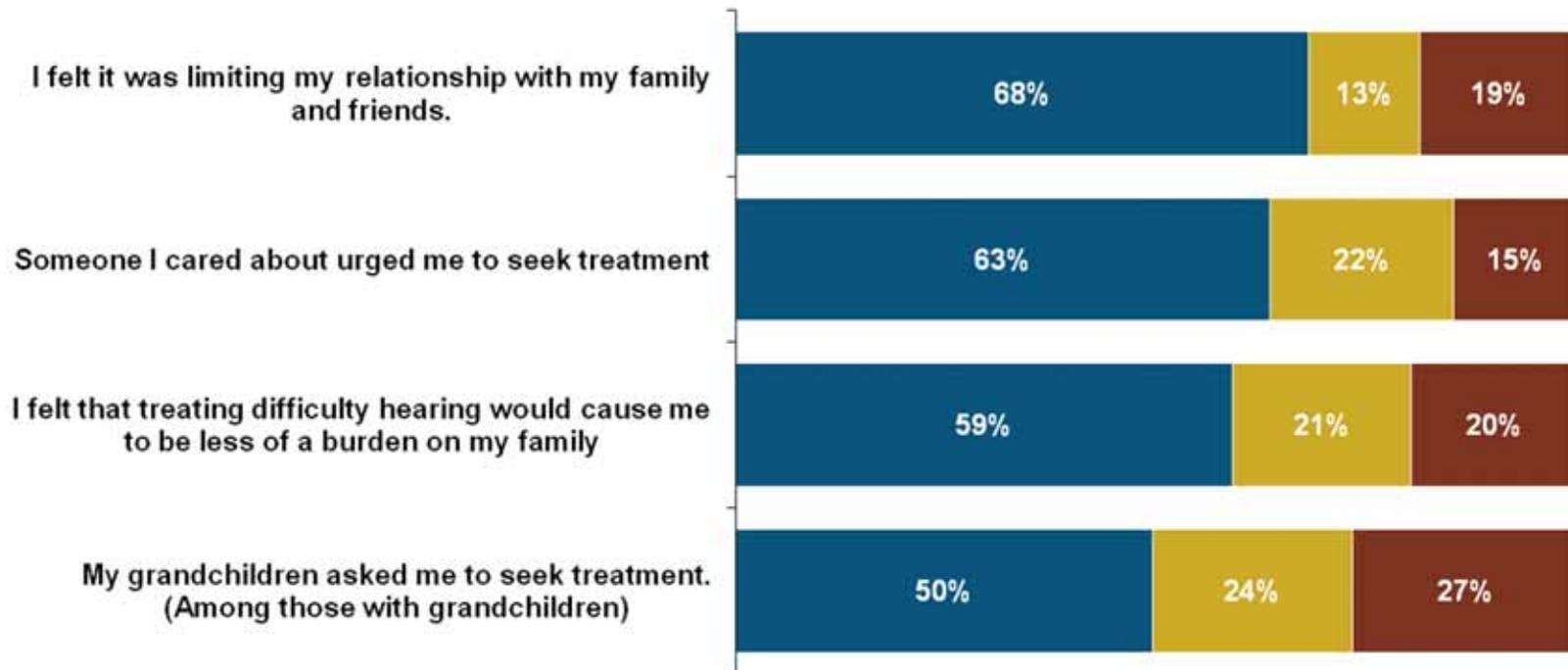
**What will motivate more people to seek treatment  
for hearing health issues?**

# People are compelled to seek help for hearing issues if they feel their issues limit their relationships

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

I would be more likely to seek treatment for a hearing difficulty if ...?

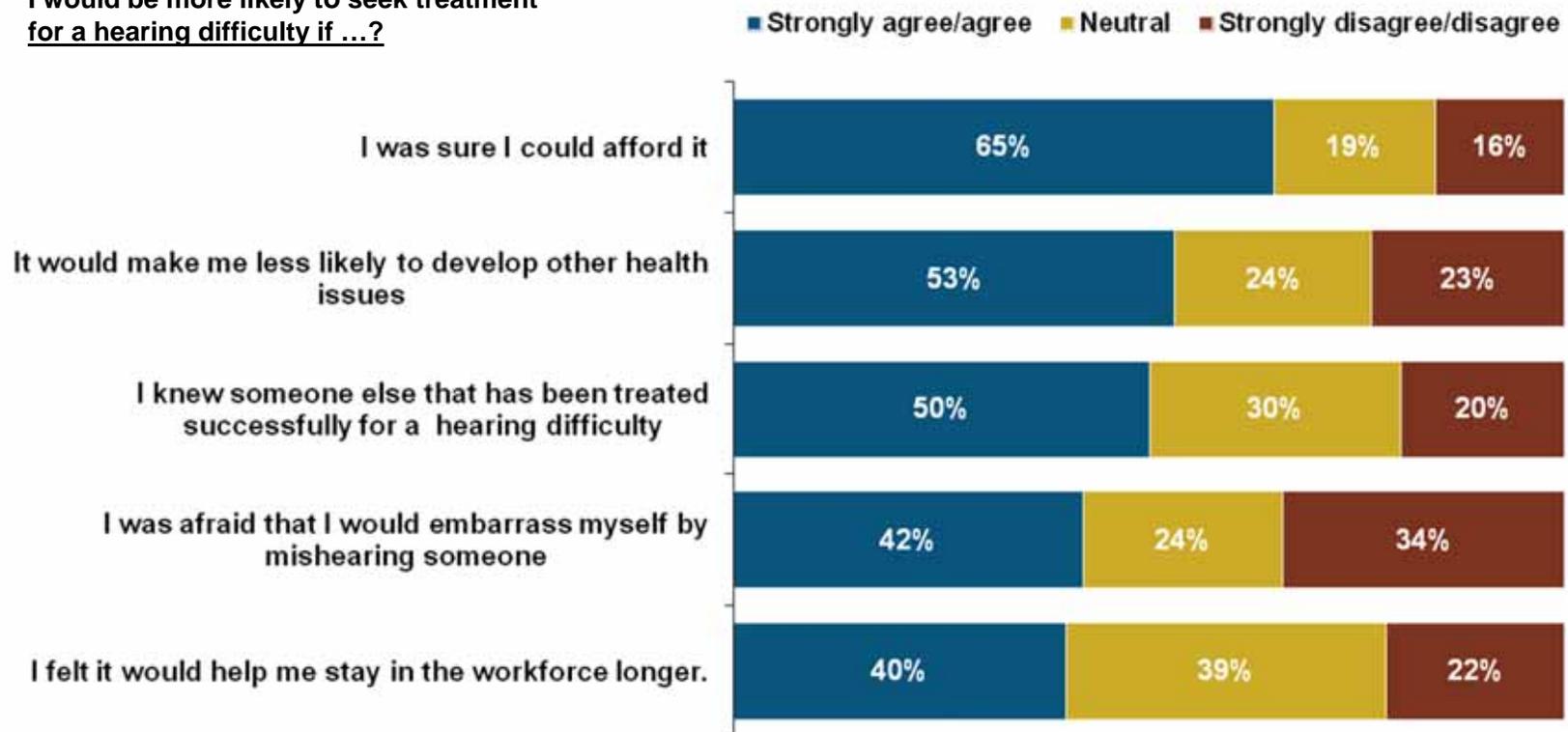
■ Strongly agree/agree ■ Neutral ■ Strongly disagree/disagree



## People will also be likely to seek treatment if they see it as affordable

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

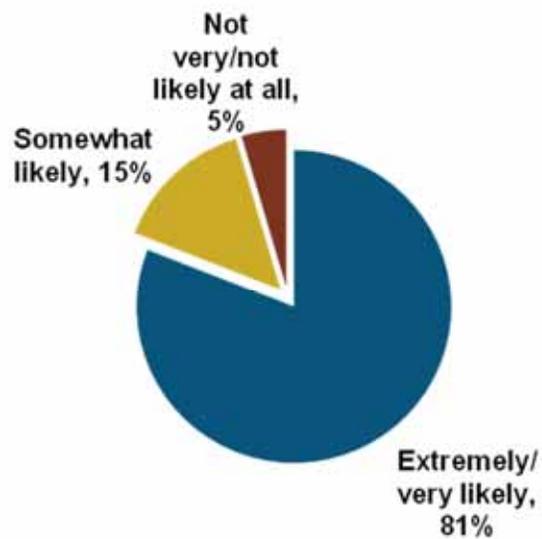
I would be more likely to seek treatment for a hearing difficulty if ...?



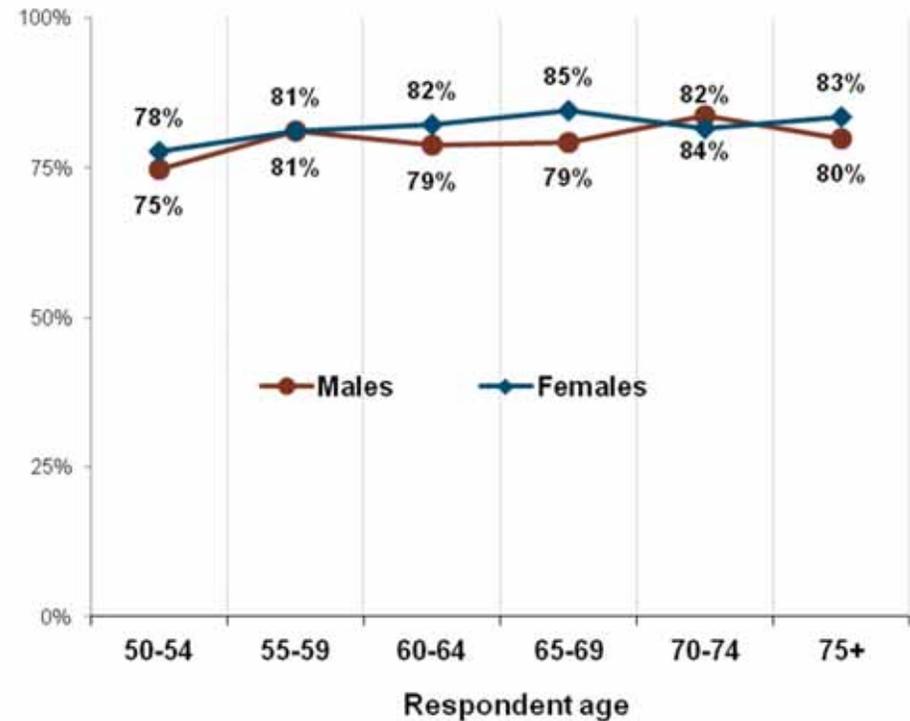


# Most say they would be likely to get a check-up if they felt they had difficulty hearing

If you felt you had difficulty with your hearing, how likely would you be to get a hearing check-up?

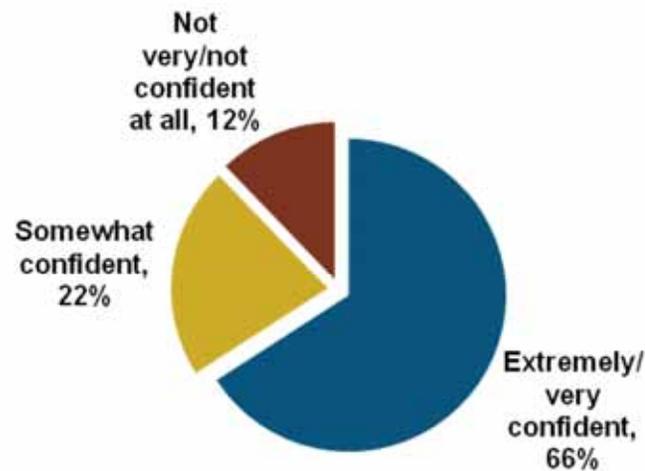


*% Extremely/very likely*

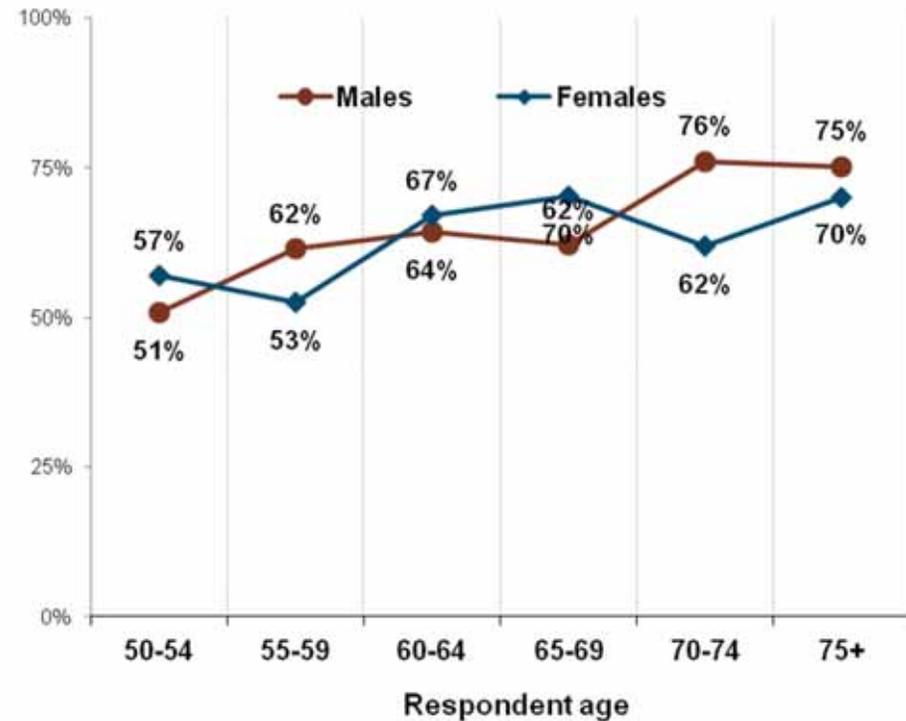


# Confidence in knowing where to go for help with hearing issues increases with age

If you felt you had difficulty with your hearing, how confident are you that you would know where to go for help?



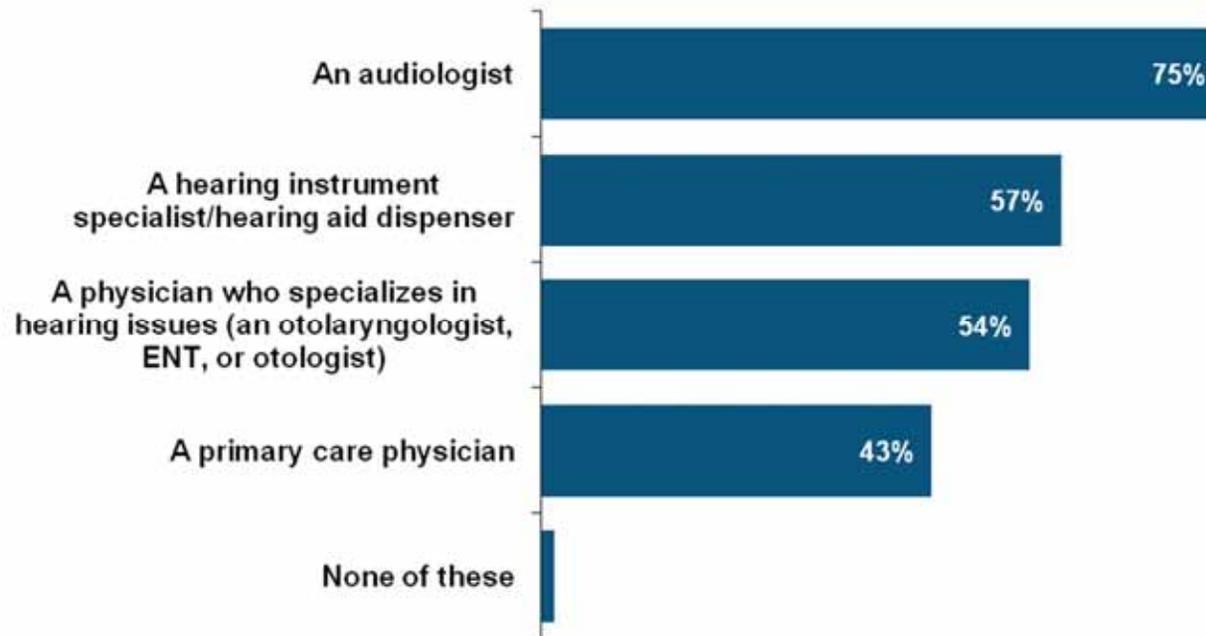
*% Extremely/very confident*





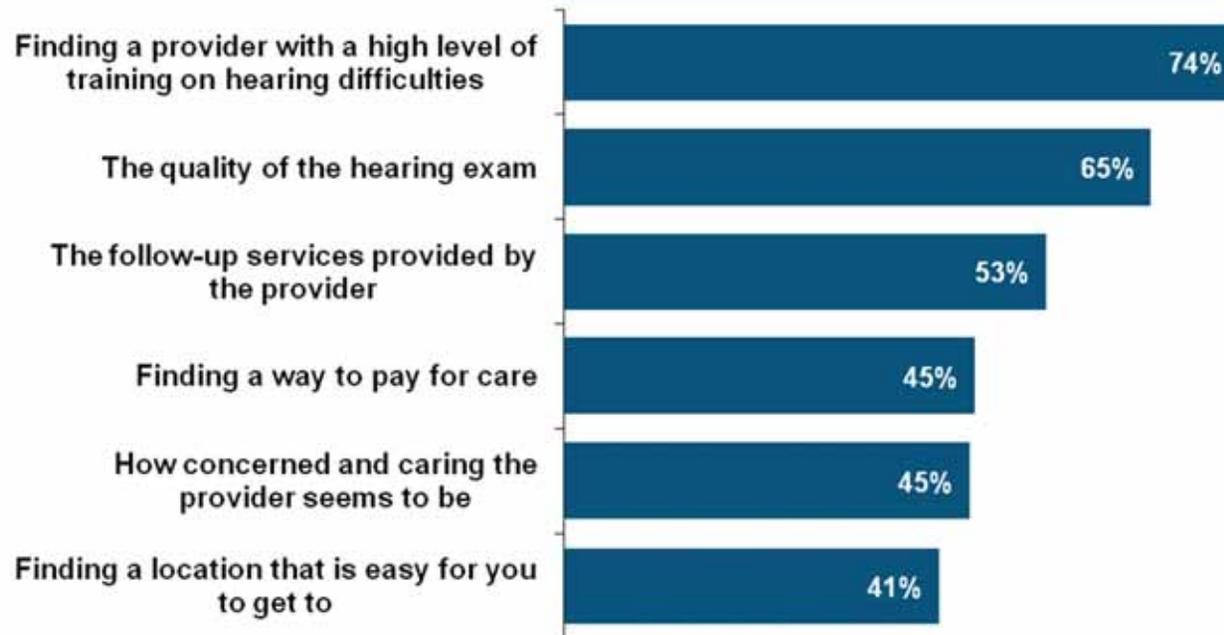
## Those who have been treated are most likely to have discussed their hearing issue with an audiologist

**Have you discussed your hearing difficulty with ...?**  
*Asked of those who have been treated for a hearing difficulty*



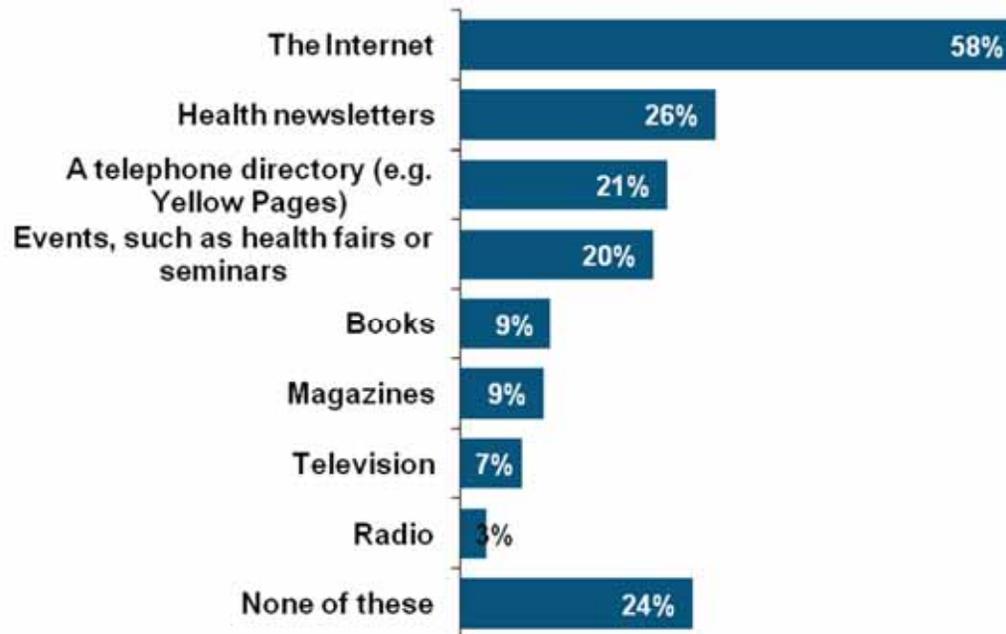
## Finding a health provider trained in hearing difficulties is a primary concern

Which would be critically important to you if you were to seek help for a hearing difficulty?



## The Internet is an importance source for information for hearing health issues

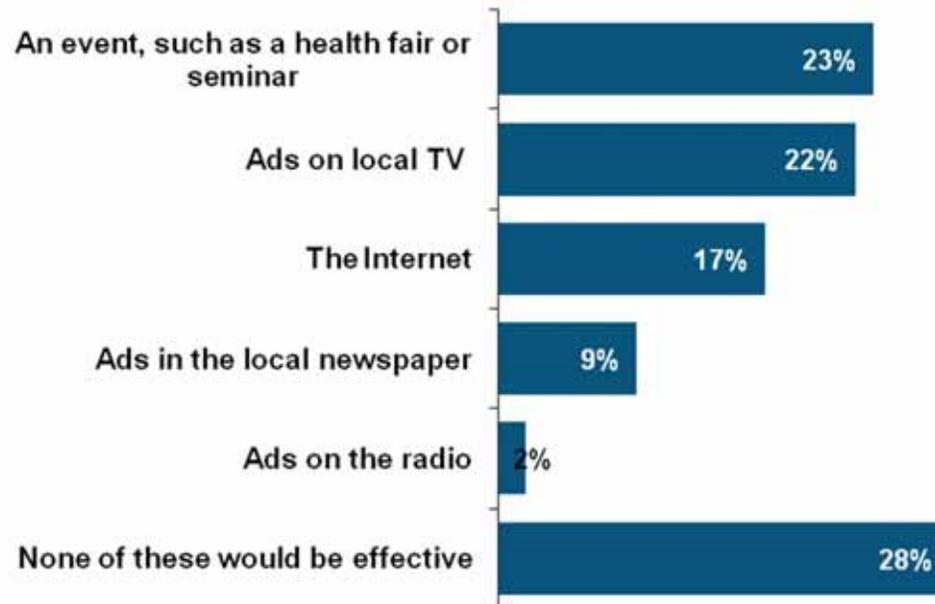
If you felt you had difficulty with your hearing, where would you look for information?

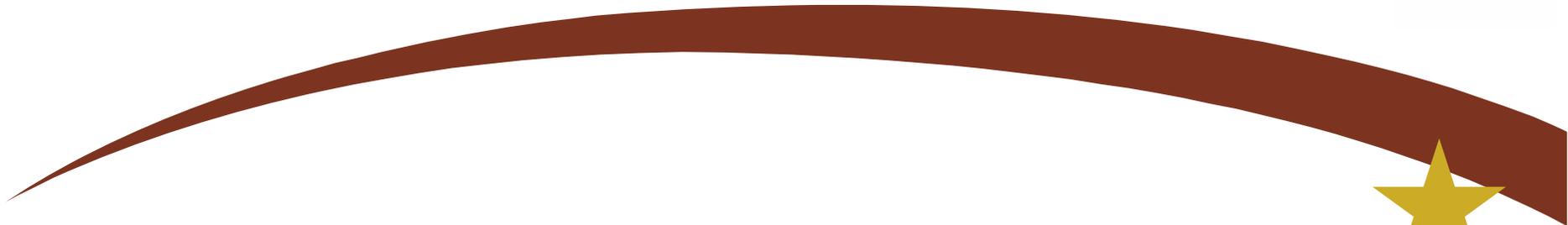




## Hearing checkups can be most effectively promoted through events and local TV

What is the most effective way a health provider can communicate the importance of a hearing checkup to you?





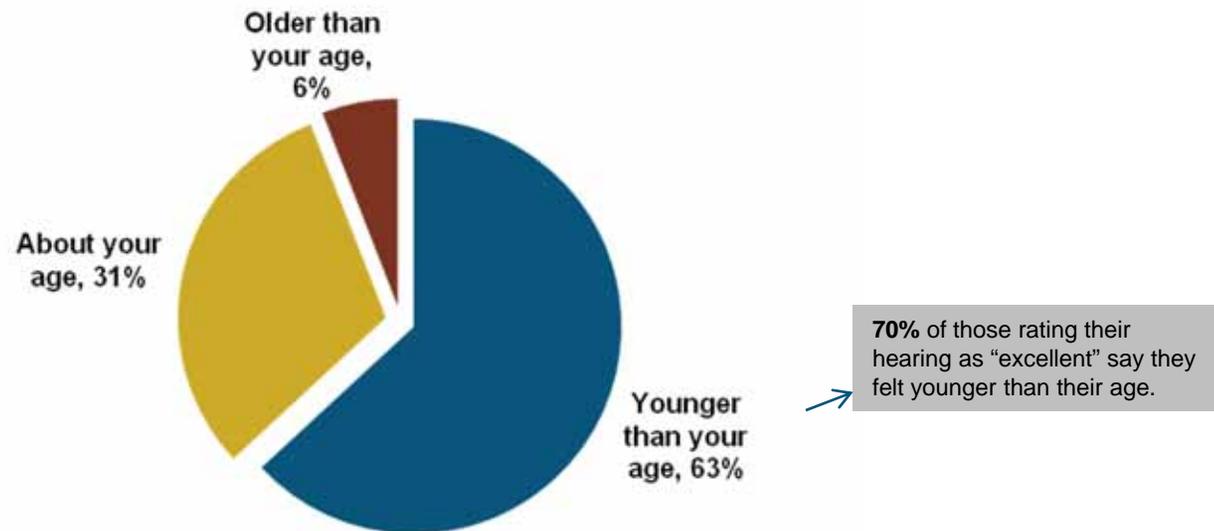
## Other issues



# Most AARP members report feeling “younger” than their age

*In general, the better your hearing health, the younger you feel*

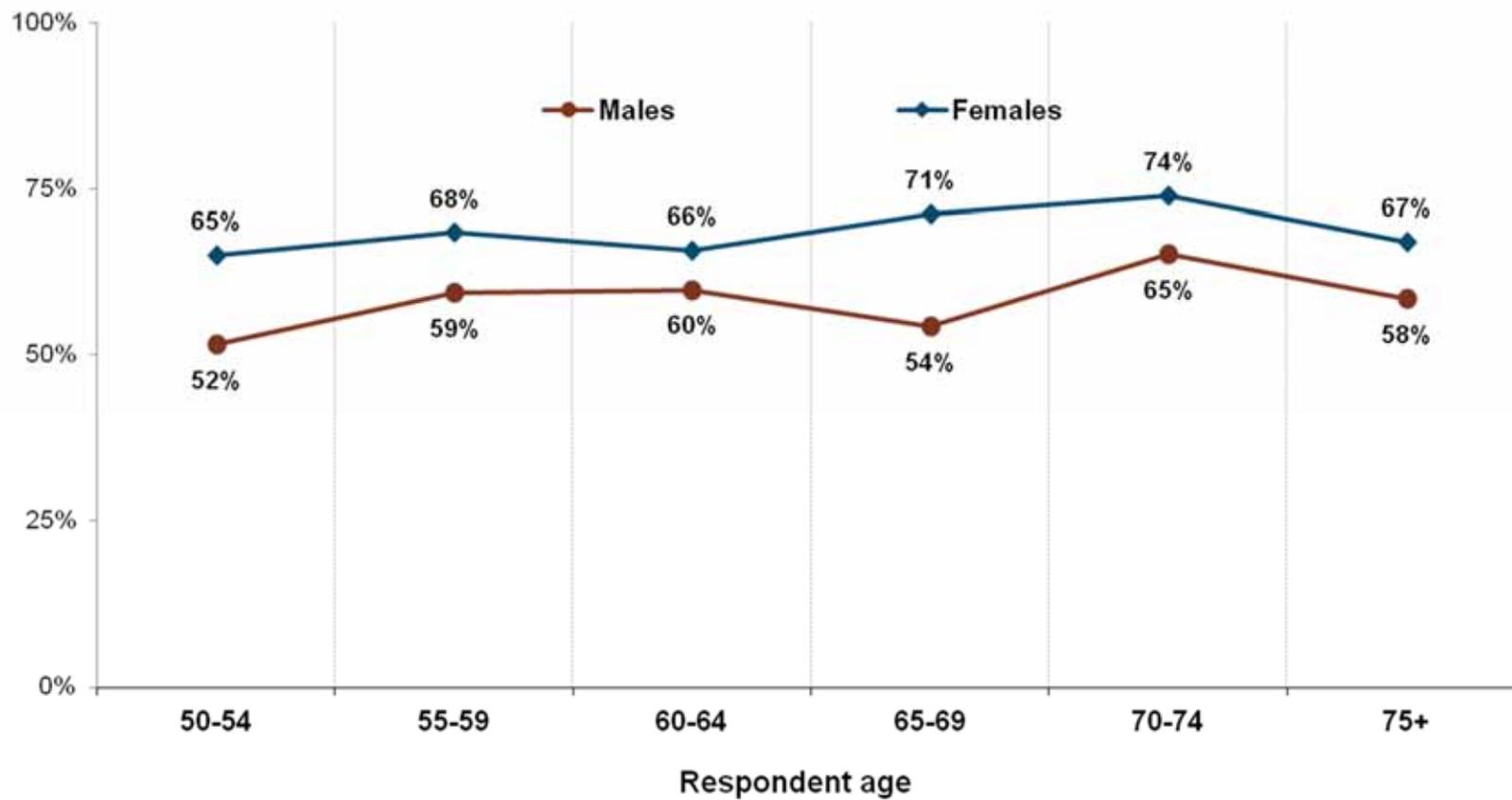
How do you feel about your age? Do you feel?



# Women are even more likely than men to say they feel younger than their age



% of respondents who feel “younger than their age”



## Most respondents are concerned about the use of headphones and ear buds among young people

How concerned are you that excessive use of ear buds and headphones will cause hearing difficulties for today's young people?

