

Attitudes and Actions Towards Hearing Health

Summary Report of U.S. Adults Ages 18+

- 1 Importance of Hearing Health
- 2 Barriers to Treatment
- 3 Motivating Factors for Treatment
- 4 Impact of Hearing Difficulties on Daily Life
- 5 Hearing Challenges During the Pandemic

Objectives

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is interested in collecting data on hearing loss, including:

- Attitudes towards hearing health and treatment for hearing loss
- How the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted those with hearing difficulties and their willingness to seek treatment
- Public perception about the impact of hearing loss on other aspects of wellness

Methodology

- Data was collected between March 16 and March 23, 2021. The survey was carried out online.
- A nationally representative sample of US Adults 18+ (n=2,439) was constructed and balanced to be representative of all US adults 18 and over.

Summary of Findings

Hearing Health is Important to Americans, in Theory

The vast majority of Americans recognize the importance of maintaining hearing health, and hearing health's impact on daily life and overall health. Nearly 7-in-10 understand that untreated hearing loss can lead to feelings of social isolation and nearly as many realize it can lead to feelings of depression. Social and emotional impacts aside, more than half realize that those with hearing loss are more likely to have trouble with balance. Among employed Americans, concerns that hearing difficulties could hurt their ability to remain employed were reported by 37%, and concerns that hearing difficulties would reduce their effectiveness at work were reported by 44%.

However, in Actuality, Barriers to Acknowledging Hearing Problems and Seeking Treatment are Pervasive

Nearly 3 in 4 Americans claim they would get their hearing tested if they experienced difficulty hearing. Yet, roughly half of Americans report some degree of trouble hearing—and most have not taken action. Among all adults, just two in 10 U.S. adults report having their hearing tested in the past 5 years, compared to six in 10 for vision. Still more concerning, only 11% of those who report difficulty hearing are being treated.

Americans seem complacent toward addressing minor to moderate hearing problems, with 6-in-10 of those with untreated hearing difficulties saying that if their hearing is fine in some situations, they are unlikely to seek treatment. Nearly, the same amount indicate that they would only want to be treated if their hearing difficulty was “severe.” Fully two-thirds of those with hearing trouble who have not yet sought treatment cited at least one barrier to seeking help for hearing difficulties. Roughly 1-in-3 with untreated hearing problems seem resigned to simply living with hearing difficulties. Financial factors are common barriers, including treatment costing too much, insurance not covering enough of the cost, or lacking health insurance.

Additionally, while working in a loud environment and using headphones at high volume are most commonly recognized as potential contributing factors in hearing loss, far fewer see attending sports or other large events, hunting, or playing an instrument as factors. Nearly half of Americans don't take any of the precautions asked about to protect their hearing.

Summary of Findings

Motivating Factors for Treatment

Key motivators for seeking treatment include personal relationships, potential to avoid other health issues associated with untreated hearing loss (e.g., dementia, depression), and affordability of treatment. Additionally, for those in the workforce, a majority of workers would be more likely to seek treatment if they felt it would help them remain in the workforce longer. Echoing the importance of personal relationships, calling on loved ones is also an effective strategy: majorities of Americans would be likely to seek treatment if their spouses/partners, children, or grandchildren asked them to do so. Nearly half would be likely to do so if a friend encouraged them to seek treatment. Informational campaigns designed to share information around the benefits of treating hearing loss are also potential drivers to encouraging more people with hearing loss to get treatment. The association between untreated hearing loss and dementia is the most influential informational call to action tested, with nearly 3-in-10 saying knowing this would make them much more likely to seek treatment. Nearly all statements tested result in roughly 6-in-10 indicating they would be more likely to seek treatment.

Impact of Hearing Difficulties on Daily Life

Hearing amidst background noise is the most commonly experienced hearing-related challenge among all adults, regardless of the state of their hearing health. Other frequent challenges including hearing ringing or other noises in the ear, straining to understand a conversation, and difficulty following conversations when multiple people speak at once. Over three fourths of those experiencing hearing difficulties indicate they've been having trouble hearing for over a year. Among those who have never sought treatment, 76% have experienced hearing difficulties for a year or more and 31% have experienced difficulties for five years or more.

Nearly 4-in-10 Americans experience some sort of household friction over hearing difficulties, most commonly frustration with the person who can't hear and giving up on communicating.

Summary of Findings

Hearing Challenges During the Pandemic

Fully 60% of those 18+ have either personally experienced hearing issues due to masks, physical distancing or participating on video calls—or noticed others they are close to having these issues. This goes up to 86% of those who identified as having untreated hearing difficulties.

Forty percent have personally experienced these hearing problems, rising to 75% among those with hearing difficulties. Among those who have experienced these difficulties, the most commonly reported issue is having a hard time hearing or understanding what is being said when someone is wearing a mask, reported by 80%. Muffling is the most common issue (90%) for those who have difficulty hearing someone who is masked, followed by inability to see lips (44%) or facial expressions (39%). Sound quality (46%) and having a hard time hearing when people talk over each other (45%) are the most common issues faced for those who have a hard time hearing on video calls.

For those who acknowledge they have hearing difficulties, the pandemic adds another layer of trouble. Half of those with hearing difficulties who reported hearing issues due to masks, distancing or on video calls report pretending to understand people even when they couldn't hear what was being said. More than 1-in-3 indicated they had trouble understanding staff at a medical appointment.

One-in-five of those who had trouble hearing someone masked, distanced or on a video call have considered or made an appointment with a medical professional. However, the same number report avoiding those situations. But, three-in-ten who experienced hearing difficulties while others were masked, distanced or on video calls reported that this made them more likely to seek treatment.

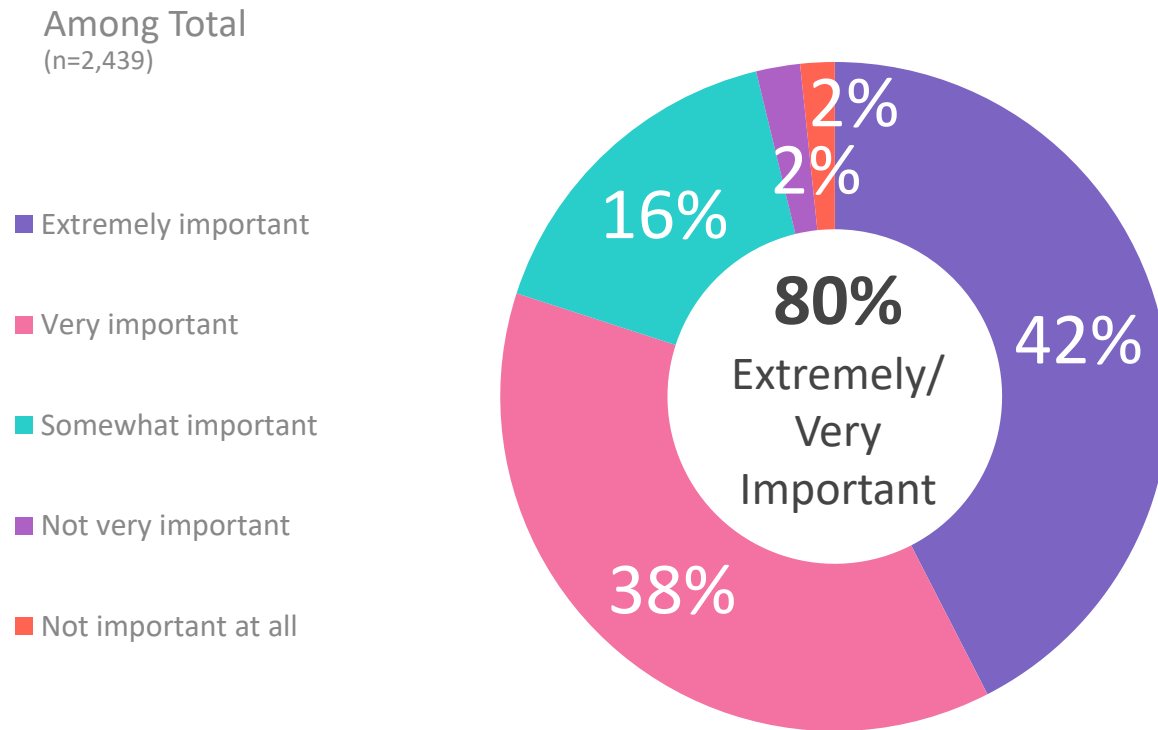
More than half (51%) of Americans 18+ have noticed a friend, family member or co-worker having trouble hearing someone masked, distanced or on video calls. Nearly one-quarter (23%) of those who noticed a family member or friend was having hearing difficulties related to masking, distancing or video calls suggested that person talk to or made an appointment with a medical professional.

Importance of Hearing Health

The vast majority of Americans recognize the importance of maintaining hearing health

- This is true across all age groups, though it is especially pronounced among Baby Boomers (85%).
- This presents a sharp contrast vs. the surprisingly low percentage of Americans who have actually had hearing tests in the past five years (even among those who consider it “extremely important,” only 23% have had their hearing tested).

Importance of Maintaining Hearing Health



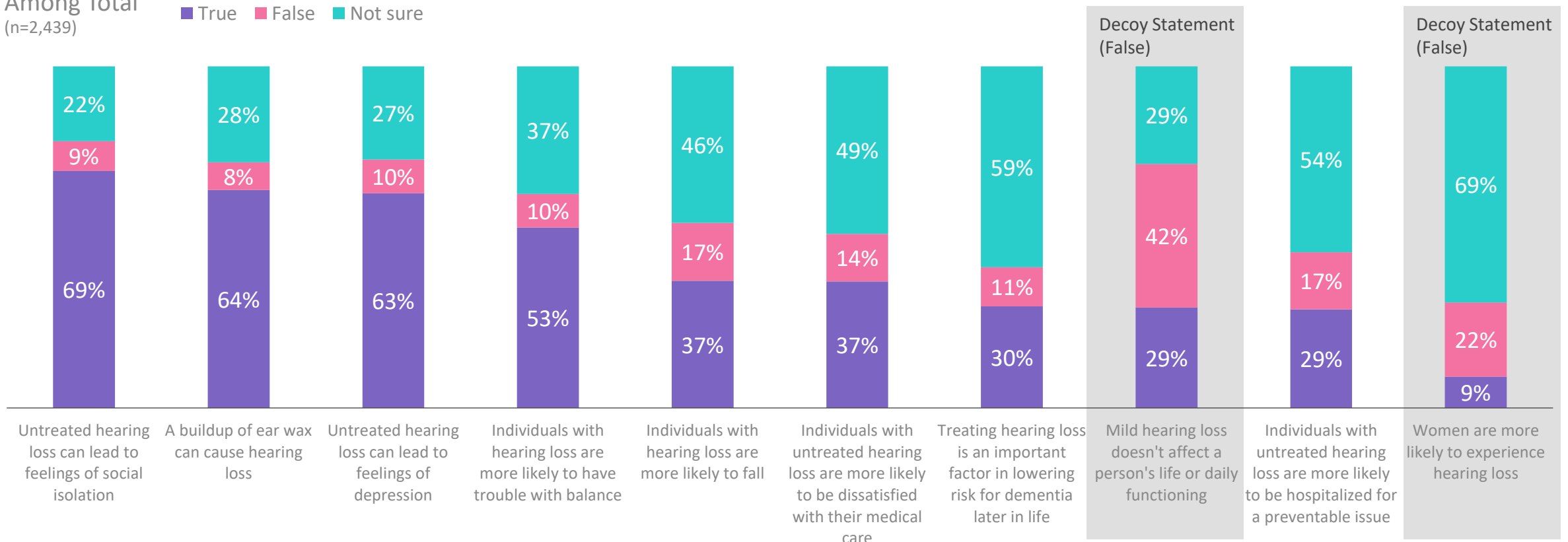
A 42% plurality of Americans understand that mild hearing loss can affect a person's life or daily functioning

- Many are unsure of the association between untreated hearing loss and dementia, as well as hospitalization for preventable issues

True/False Statements about Hearing Loss

Among Total
(n=2,439)

■ True ■ False ■ Not sure



Q6: Please indicate whether you think each statement below is true or false.

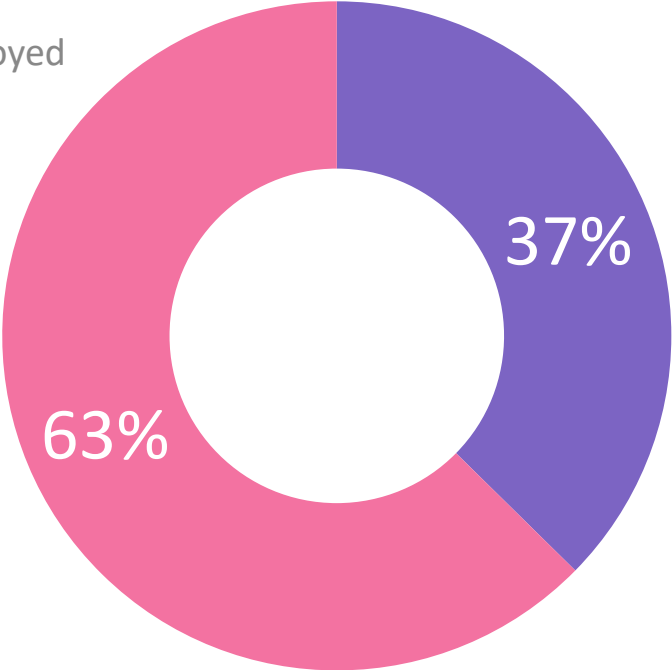
Nearly four in 10 employed Americans expressed concerns that hearing difficulties could hurt their ability to remain employed.

- Even more Americans worry hearing difficulties would reduce their on-the-job effectiveness

Concerns that Hearing Difficulties Would Hurt Employment Ability

Among Employed
(n=989)

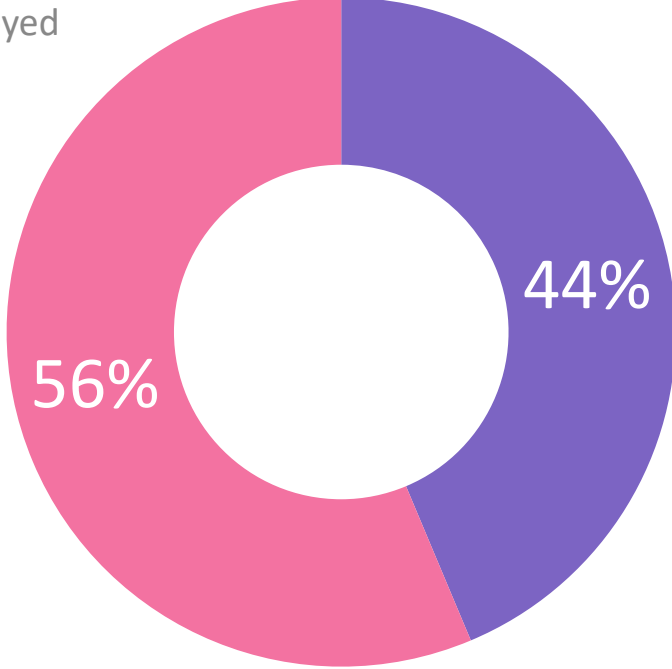
- Yes
- No



Concerns that Hearing Difficulties Would Reduce Effectiveness at Work

Among Employed
(n=989)

- Yes
- No



Q315: Would you be concerned that hearing difficulties would hurt your ability to remain employed?

Q320: Would you be concerned that hearing difficulties would reduce your effectiveness at work?

Barriers to Treatment

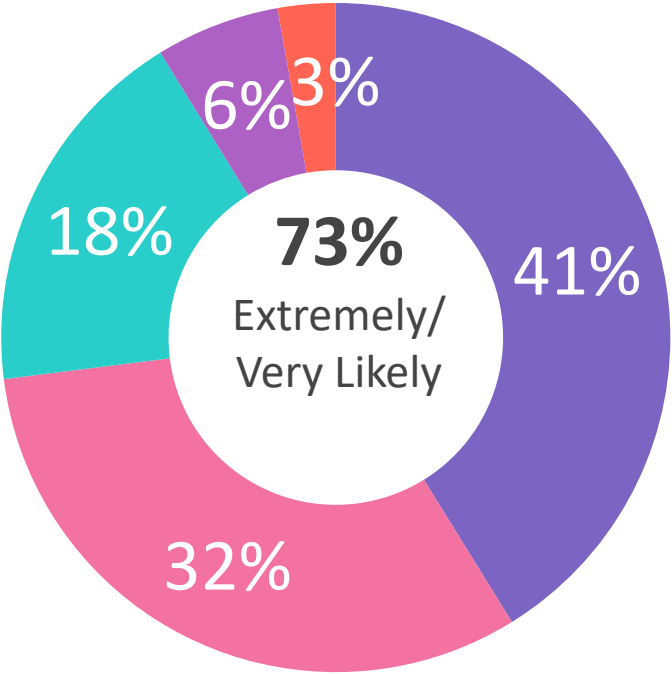
Nearly 3 in 4 Americans claim they would get a hearing check if experiencing difficulty

- Over 4 in 10 say they would be extremely likely to get a hearing check-up.

Likelihood to Get Hearing Check-up

Among Total
(n=2,439)

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Not very likely
- Not likely at all



Q220: If you felt you had difficulty with your hearing, how likely would you be to get a hearing check-up?

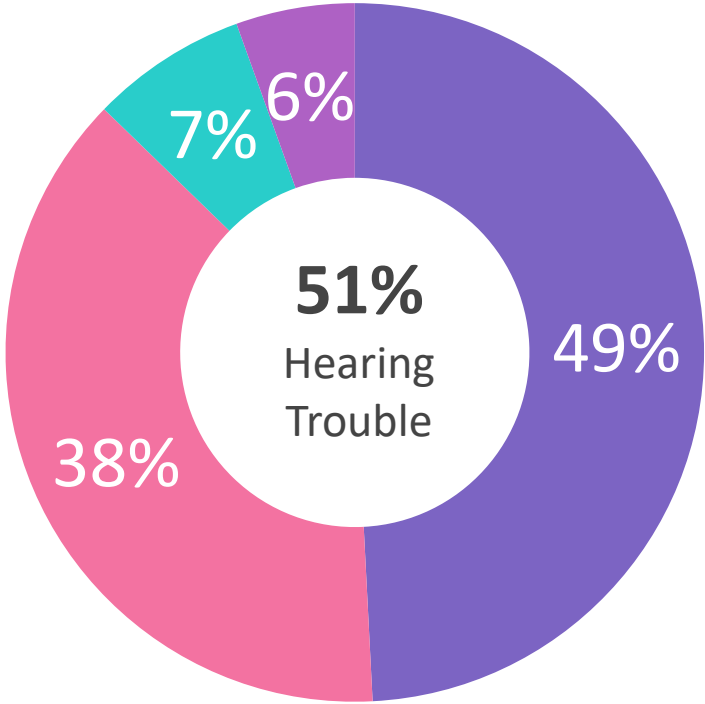
Yet roughly half of Americans report some degree of hearing trouble – and most have not sought treatment

- Of those with some degree of difficulty, the vast majority seem resistant to the idea that they are in need of treatment.
- Only 11% of those experiencing self-acknowledged hearing difficulty have been treated.

Hearing Health Description

Among Total
(n=2,439)

- My hearing is excellent
- My hearing isn't as good as it could be but I don't think I need to be treated
- I have difficulty hearing but haven't been treated
- I have difficulty hearing and have been treated



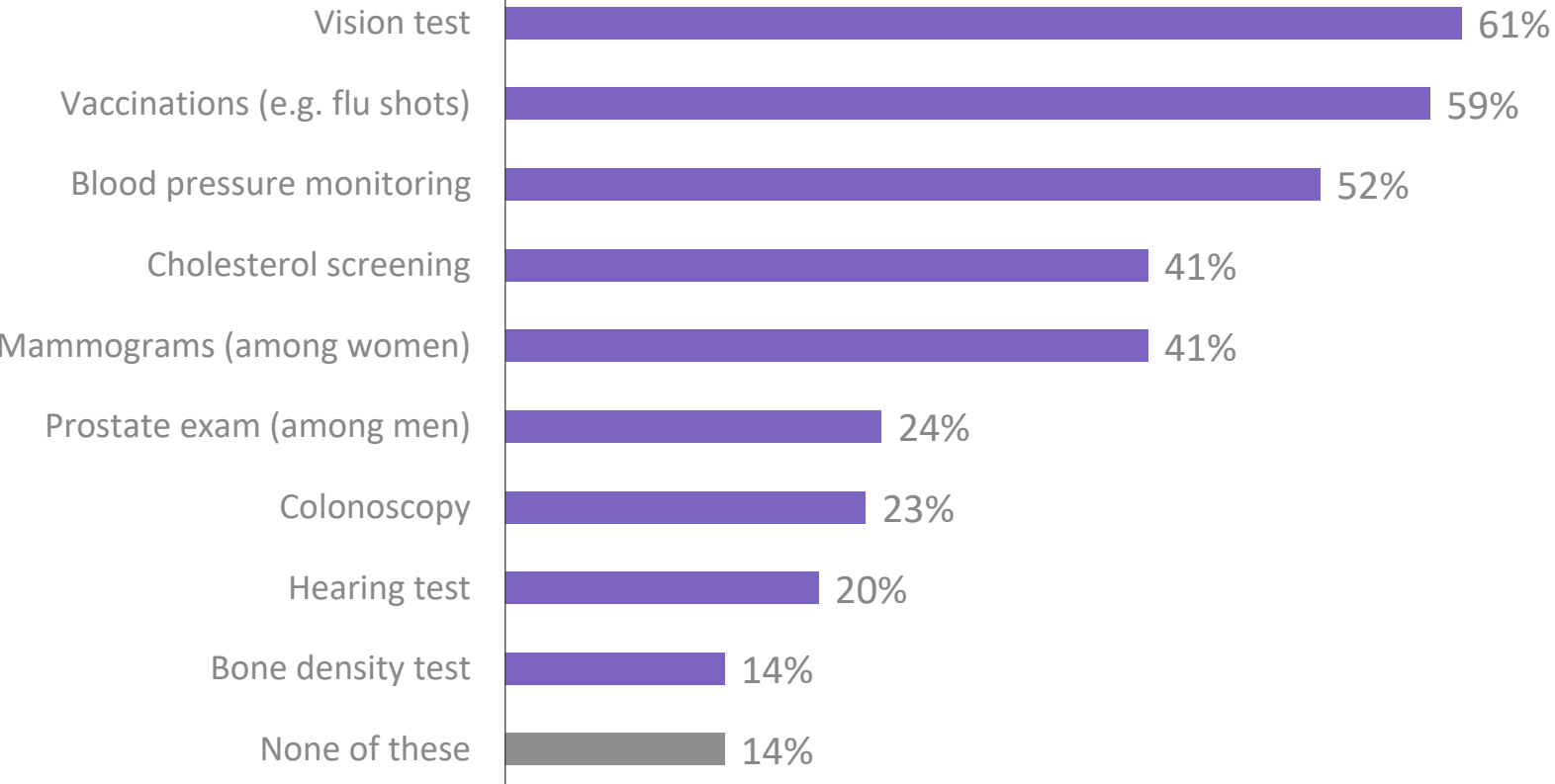
Q240: Which best describes your own hearing health?

Only two in 10 US adults report having their hearing tested in the past 5 years

- Americans are only a third as likely to have had their hearing tested as their vision.
- More surprising still, only 21% of Baby Boomers have had their hearing tested in this timespan.

Medical Services Received Past 5 Years

Total
(n=2,439)



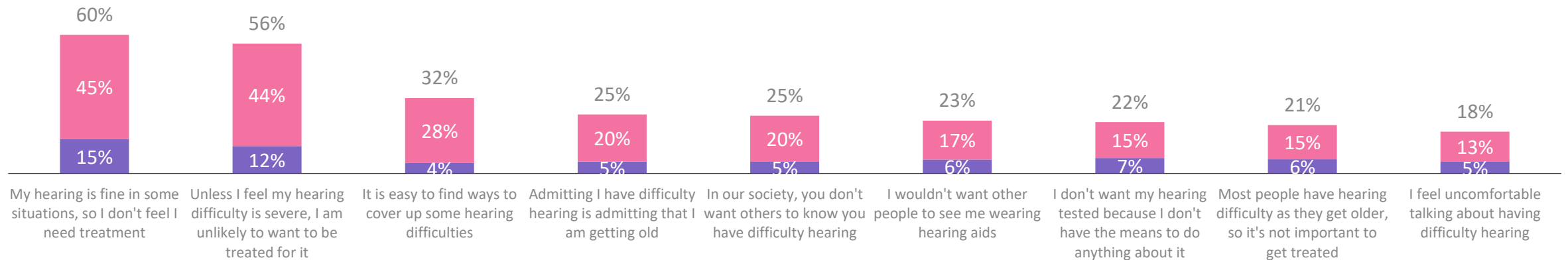
Q200: Which have you had in the past 5 years? Please select all that apply.

Americans seem complacent toward addressing minor to moderate hearing difficulty; with 6-in-10 of those with untreated hearing trouble saying that if their hearing is fine in some situations they don't feel they need treatment—and nearly the same amount indicating that they would only want to be treated if their hearing difficulty was severe.

Agreement Statements: Barriers to Treatment

Among Those With Untreated Hearing Trouble (n=1,101)

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree



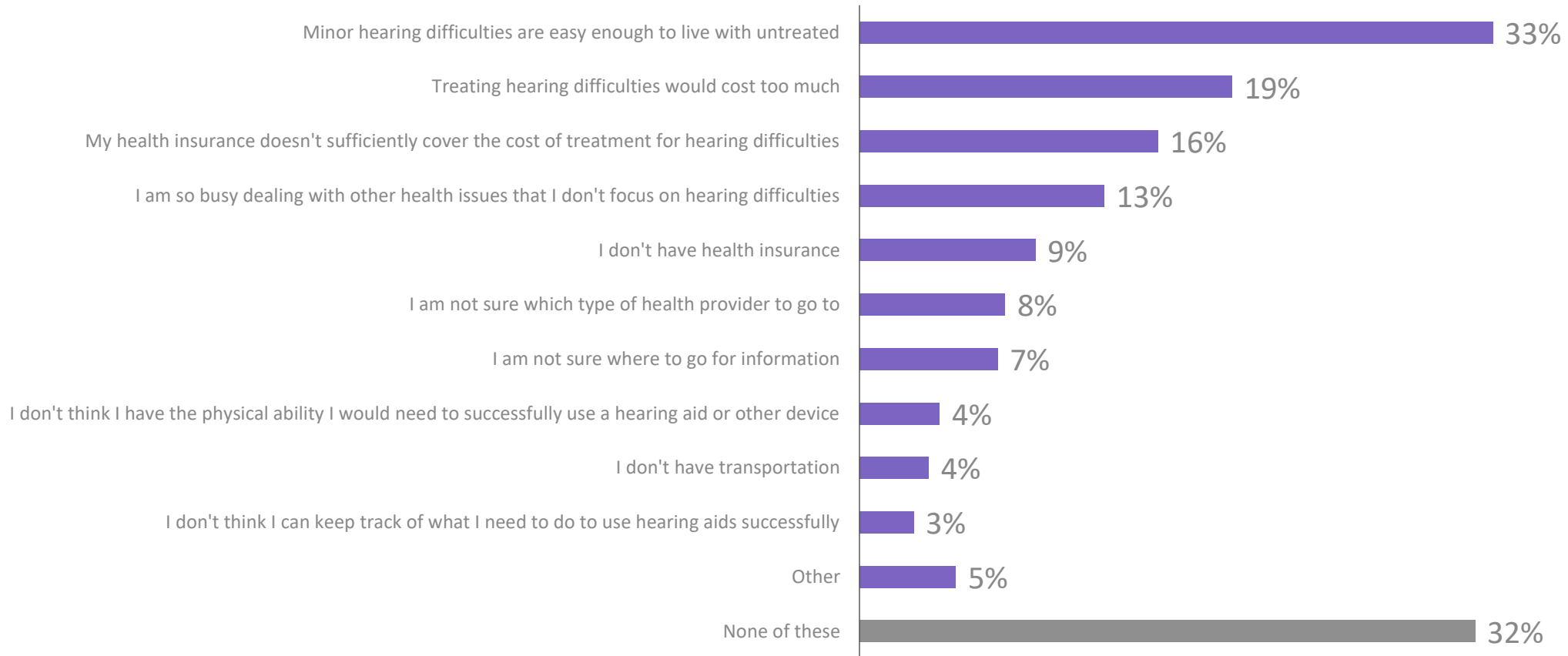
Q310: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Fully two-thirds of those with untreated hearing trouble cited at least one barrier to seeking help

- Dishearteningly, roughly 1-in-3 with untreated hearing problems seem resigned to simply living with hearing difficulties (“Minor hearing difficulties are easy enough to live with untreated”).
- Financial factors were common barriers, including treatment costing too much, insurance not covering enough of the cost, or lacking health insurance.

Barriers to Seeking Help for Hearing Difficulties

Among Those With Untreated Hearing Trouble (n=1,101)



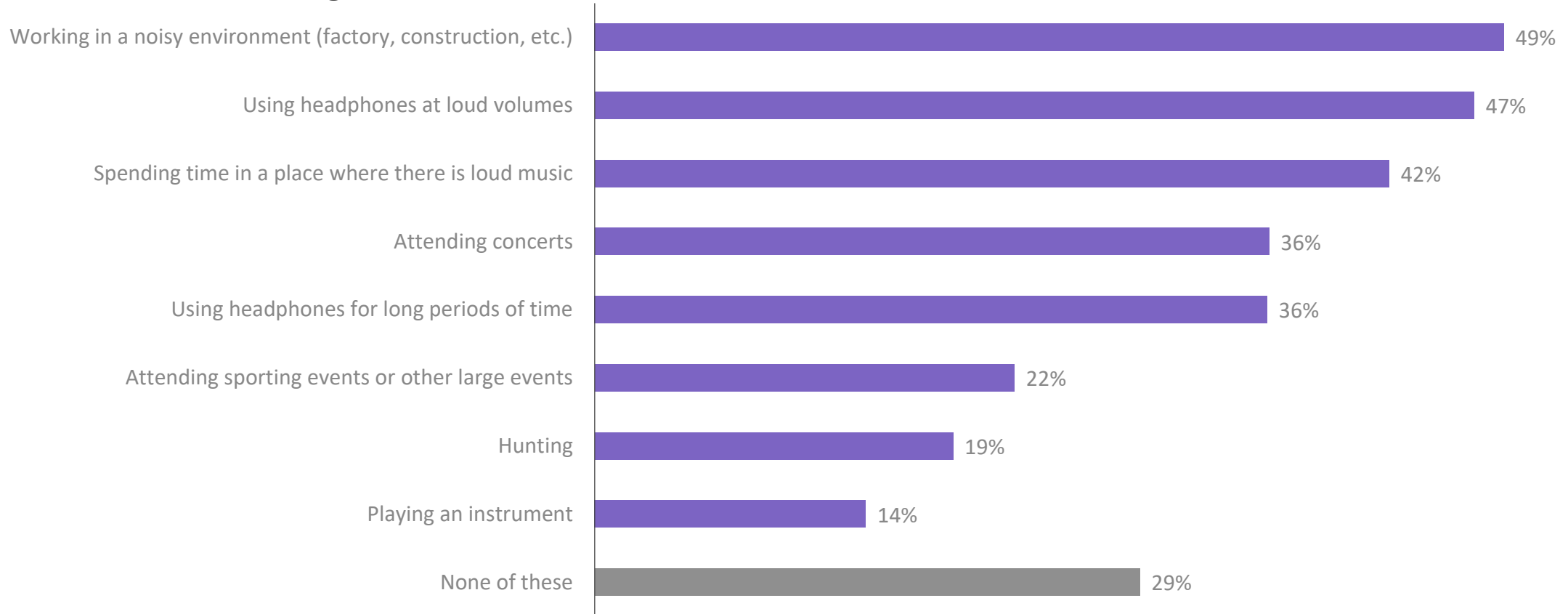
Q305: Which might prevent you from getting help for your hearing difficulty? Select all that apply.

Working in a loud environment and using headphones at high volume are most commonly recognized as potential contributing factors to hearing loss

- Far fewer see attending sports or other large events, hunting, or playing an instrument as contributing factors

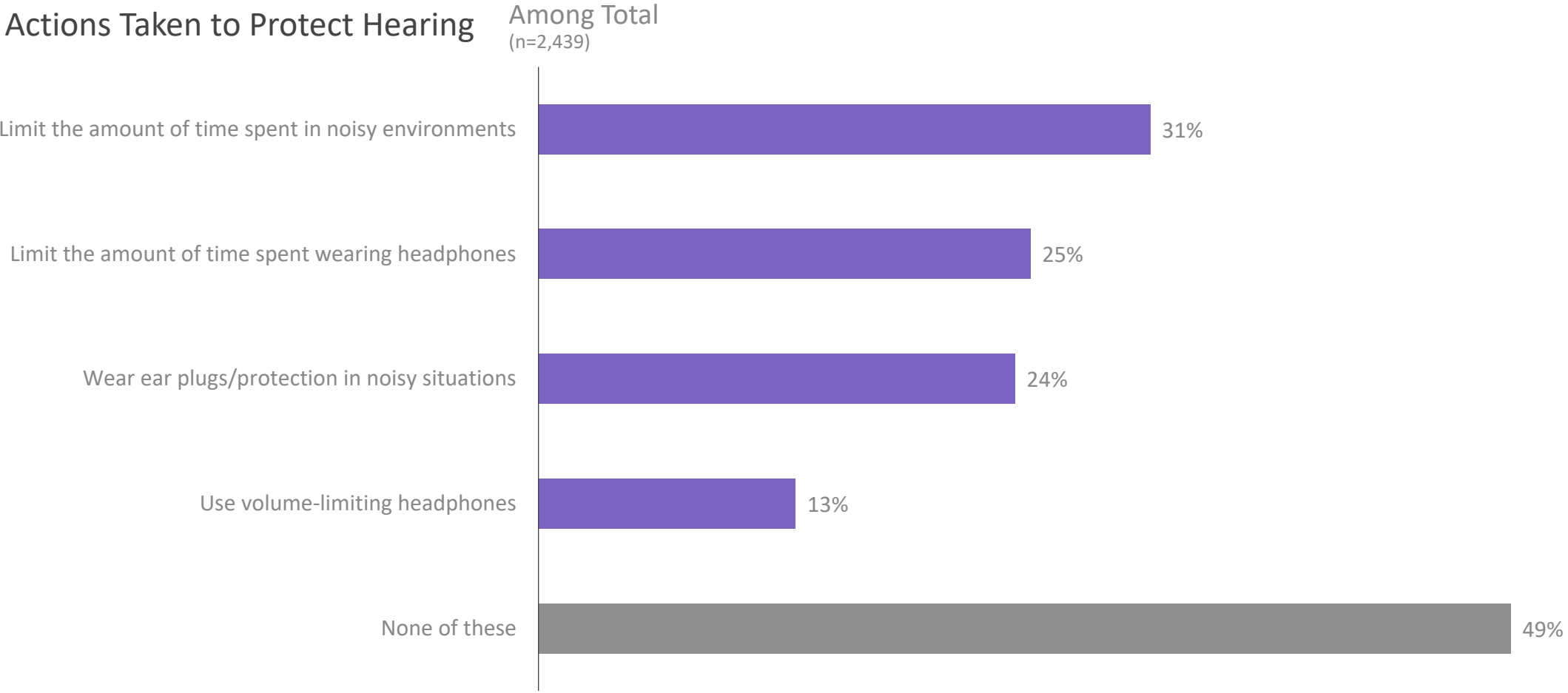
Actions that Have/Could Have Contributed to Hearing Problems

Among Total
(n=2,439)



Nearly half of Americans don't take any of the precautions asked about to protect their hearing

- Among those who do take precautions, nearly six in 10 limit the amount of time spent in noisy environments and nearly half limit the amount of time they spend wearing headphones



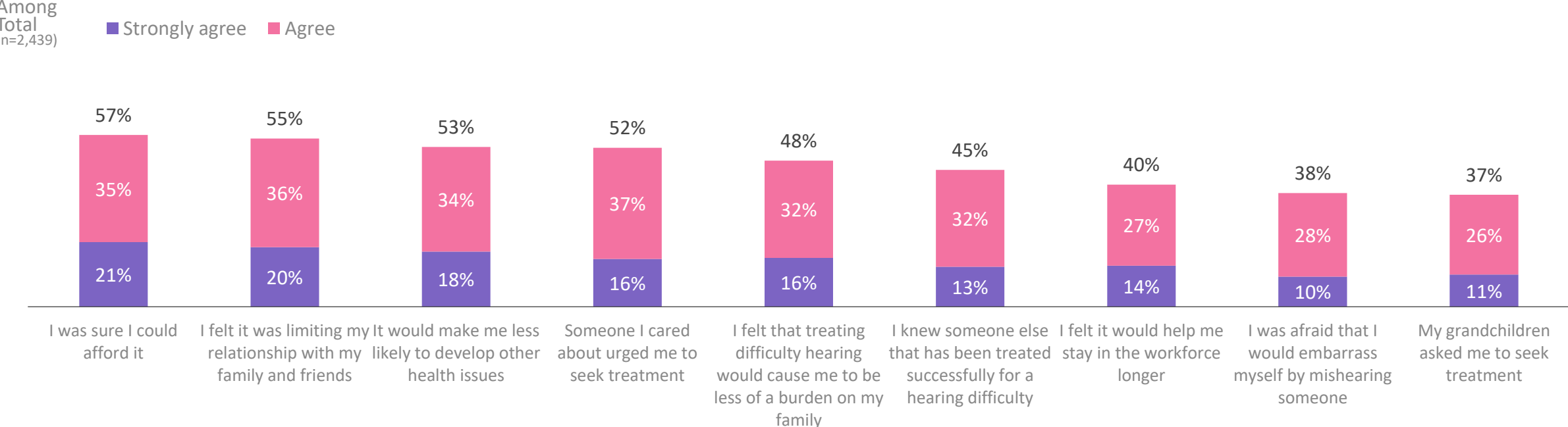
Q4: Do you, personally, currently do any of the following?

Motivating Factors for Treatment

Key drivers most likely to encourage Americans to seek treatment for hearing difficulties include affordability, personal relationships, and potential to avoid developing other health issues

- A 55% majority of workers would be more likely to seek treatment if they felt it would help them remain in the workforce longer

Agreement Statements: Treatment Drivers



Q400: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? I would be more likely to seek treatment for a hearing difficulty if...?

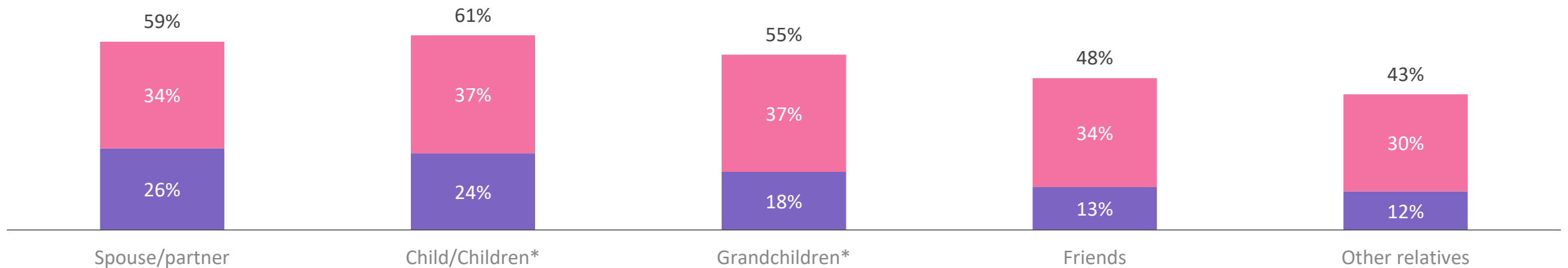
Majorities of Americans would be likely to seek treatment if their spouses/partners, children, or grandchildren asked them to do so.

- Nearly half would be likely to do so if a friend encouraged them.

Likelihood to Seek Treatment if Asked by:

Among Total
(n=2,439)

■ Extremely likely ■ Very likely



Q1: How likely would you be to seek treatment for a hearing difficulty if each of the following people asked you to?

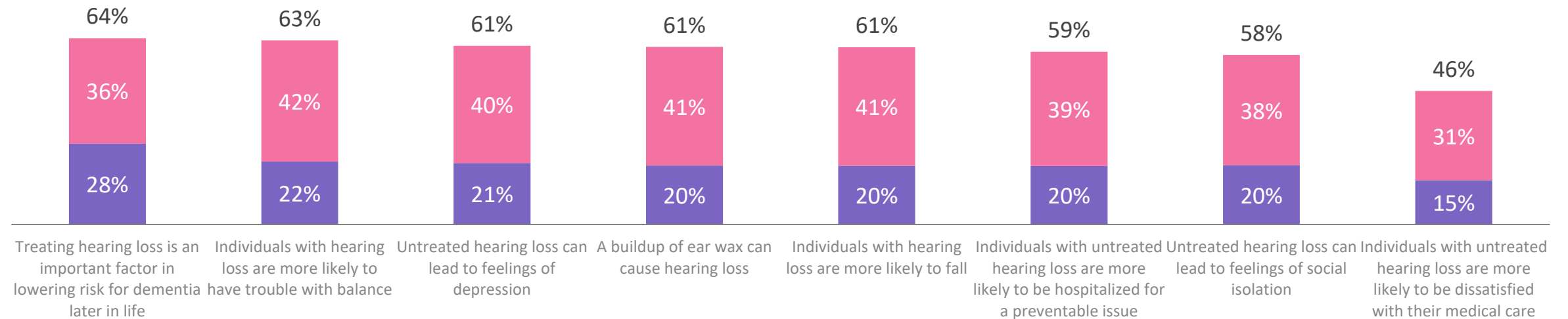
*Asked among those with Children or Grandchildren only, respectively

The association between untreated hearing loss and dementia is the most impactful informational call to action tested, with nearly 3-in-10 saying knowing this would make them much more likely to seek treatment. Nearly all statements (except dissatisfaction with medical care) result in roughly 6-in-10 indicating they would be more likely to seek treatment. -The dementia prevention aspect resonates the most with Baby Boomers, as compared to other generations.

Impact of Calls to Action:

Among Total
(n=2,439)

■ Would make me much more likely ■ Would make me more likely

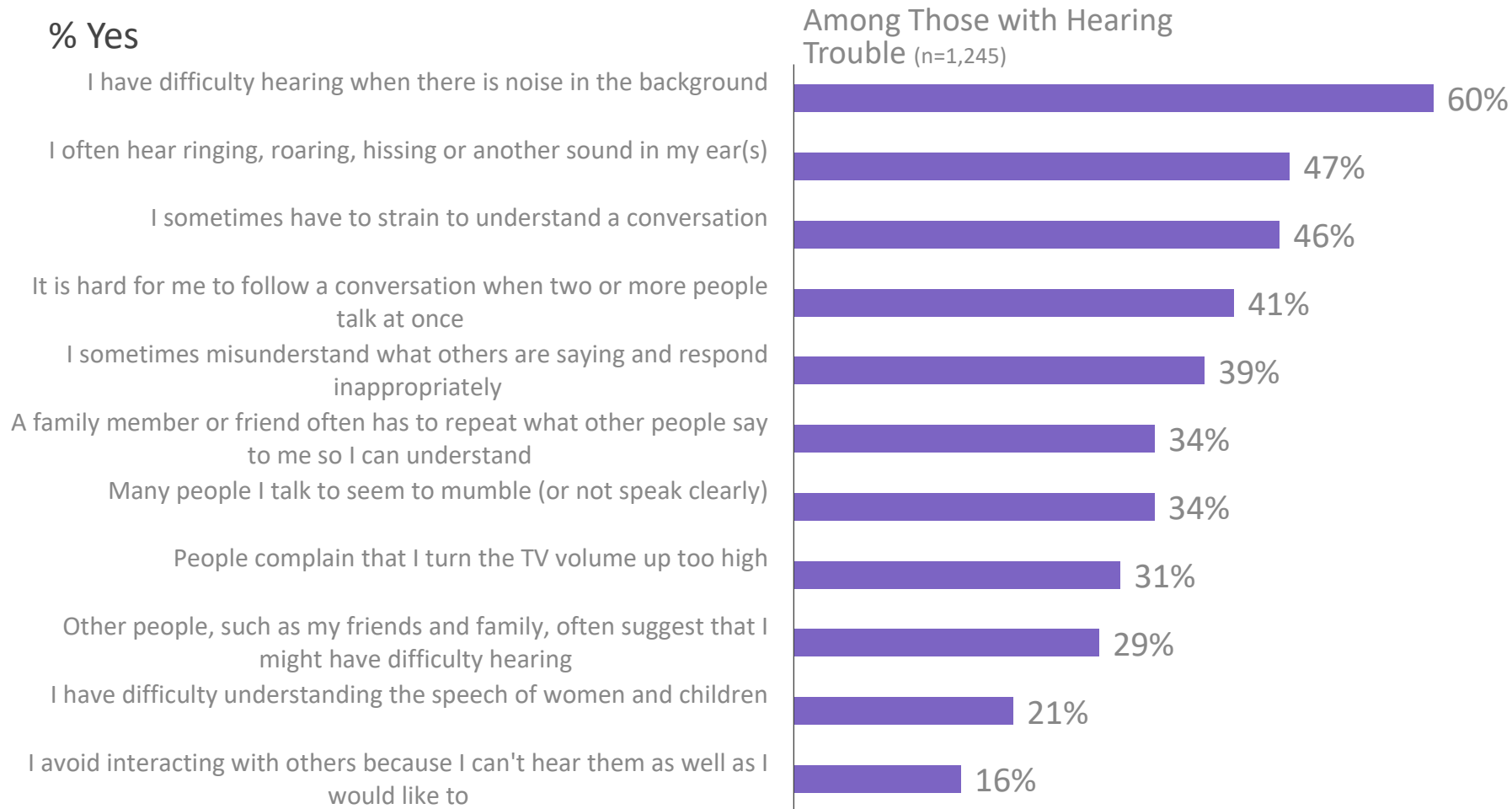


Q7: The statement shown below is true. How, if at all, does knowing that impact the likelihood that you would seek treatment if you suspected you had hearing loss?

Impact of Hearing Difficulties on Daily Life

Difficulty hearing amidst background noise is the most commonly experienced challenge

- Other frequent challenges including ringing or other noises in the ear, straining to understand a conversation and difficulty following conversations when multiple people speak at once.



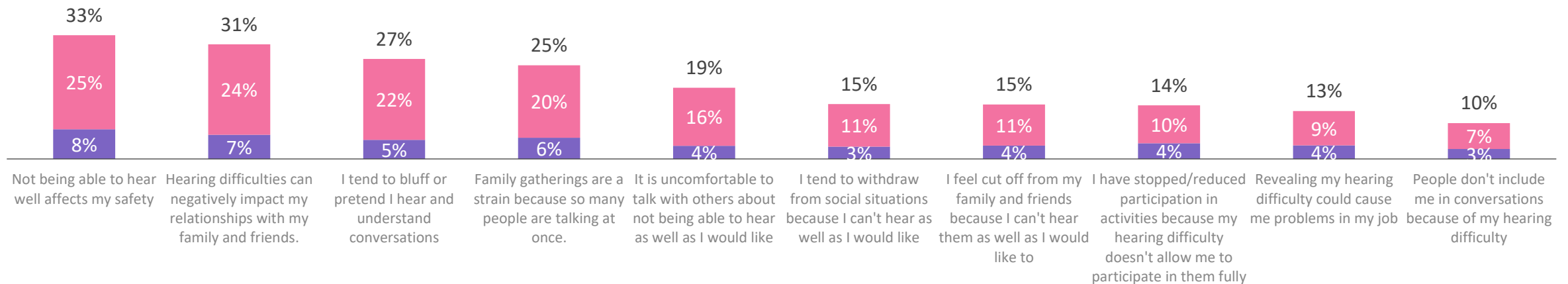
Q255: Please check "yes" or "no" to indicate if the following statements are true for you. Select one response per row.

Physical safety, relationships with family/friends, and bluffing or pretending to understand when talking to others are among the most common ways hearing problems impact daily life for those with trouble.

Agreement Statements: Effects on Daily Life

Among Those With Hearing Trouble
(n=1,245)

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree



Q500: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

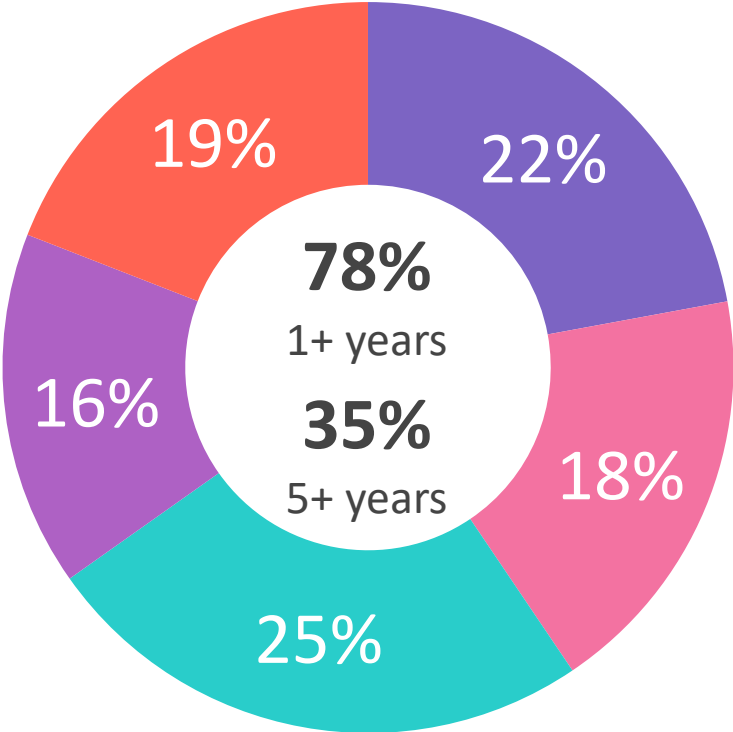
Over three fourths of those experiencing hearing difficulties indicate they've been having trouble hearing for over a year

- More than a third have been experiencing it for over five years.

Length of Time with Hearing Trouble

Among Those With Hearing Trouble
(n=1,245)

- Less than a year
- 1 year to less than 2 years
- 2 years to less than 5 years
- 5 years to less than 10 years
- 10 years or more

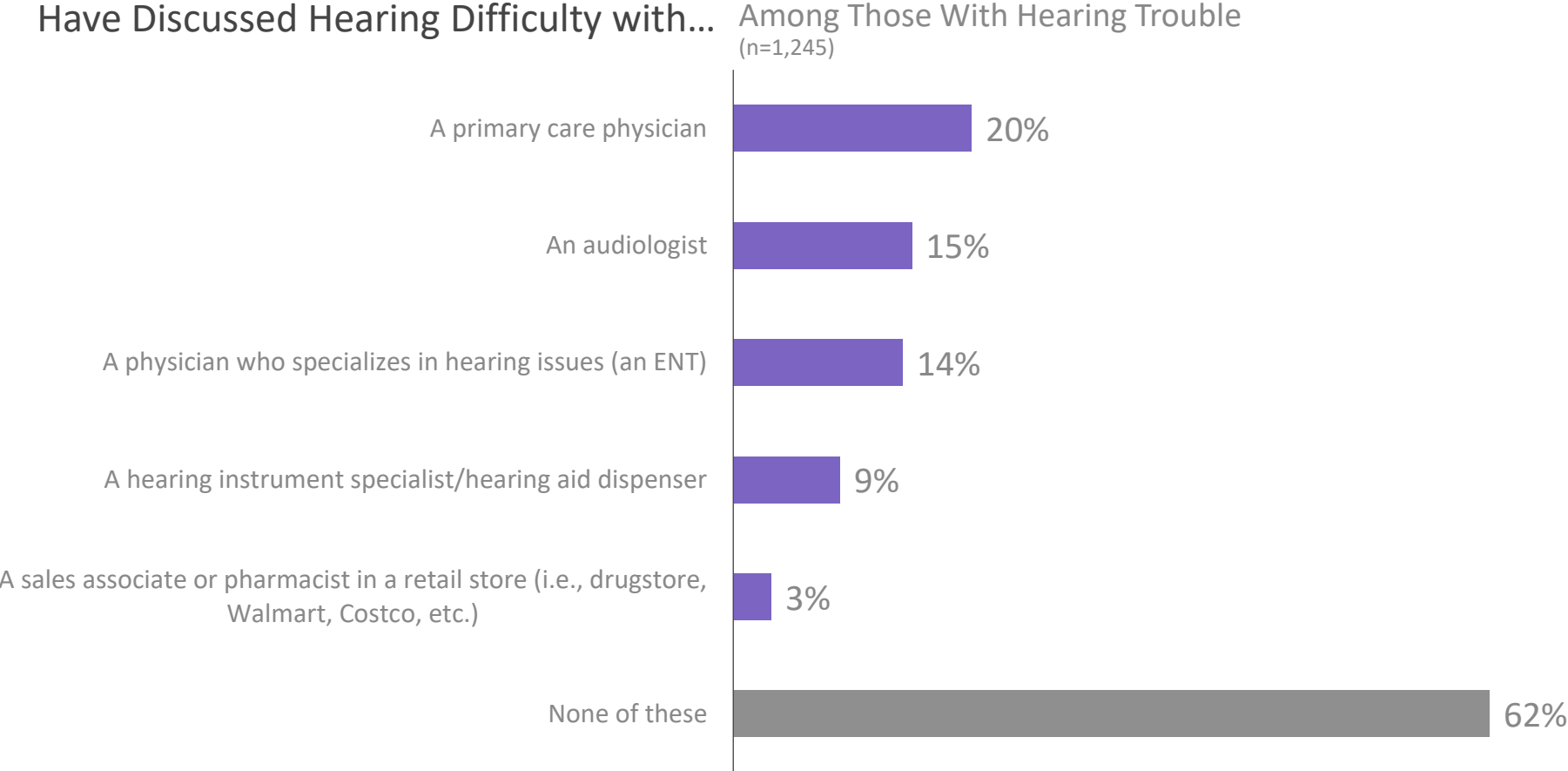


Among those with hearing trouble who have not sought treatment:
1+ Years: 76%
5+ years: 31%

Q2: Earlier you mentioned that you have trouble hearing. About how long have you had trouble hearing?

Only 38% of those of those with hearing trouble have discussed it with a professional

- Just 15% have discussed with an audiologist

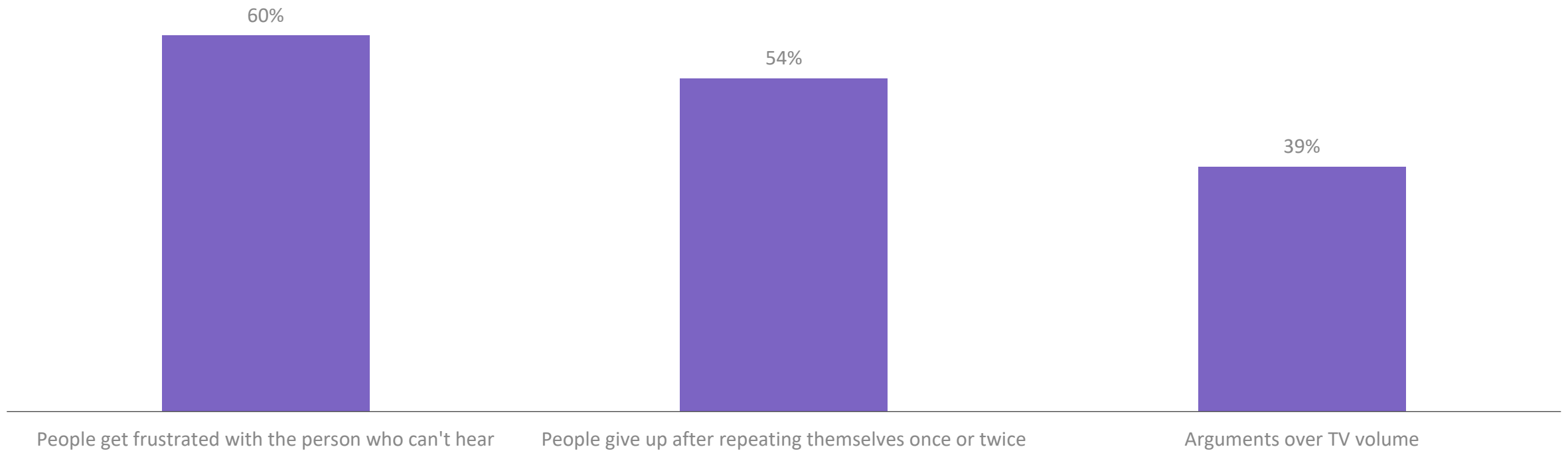


Q270: Have you discussed your hearing difficulty with ...? Please select all that apply.

Nearly 4-in-10 experience some sort of household friction over hearing difficulties, most commonly frustration with the person who can't hear and giving up on communicating.

37%
report household friction over hearing difficulties

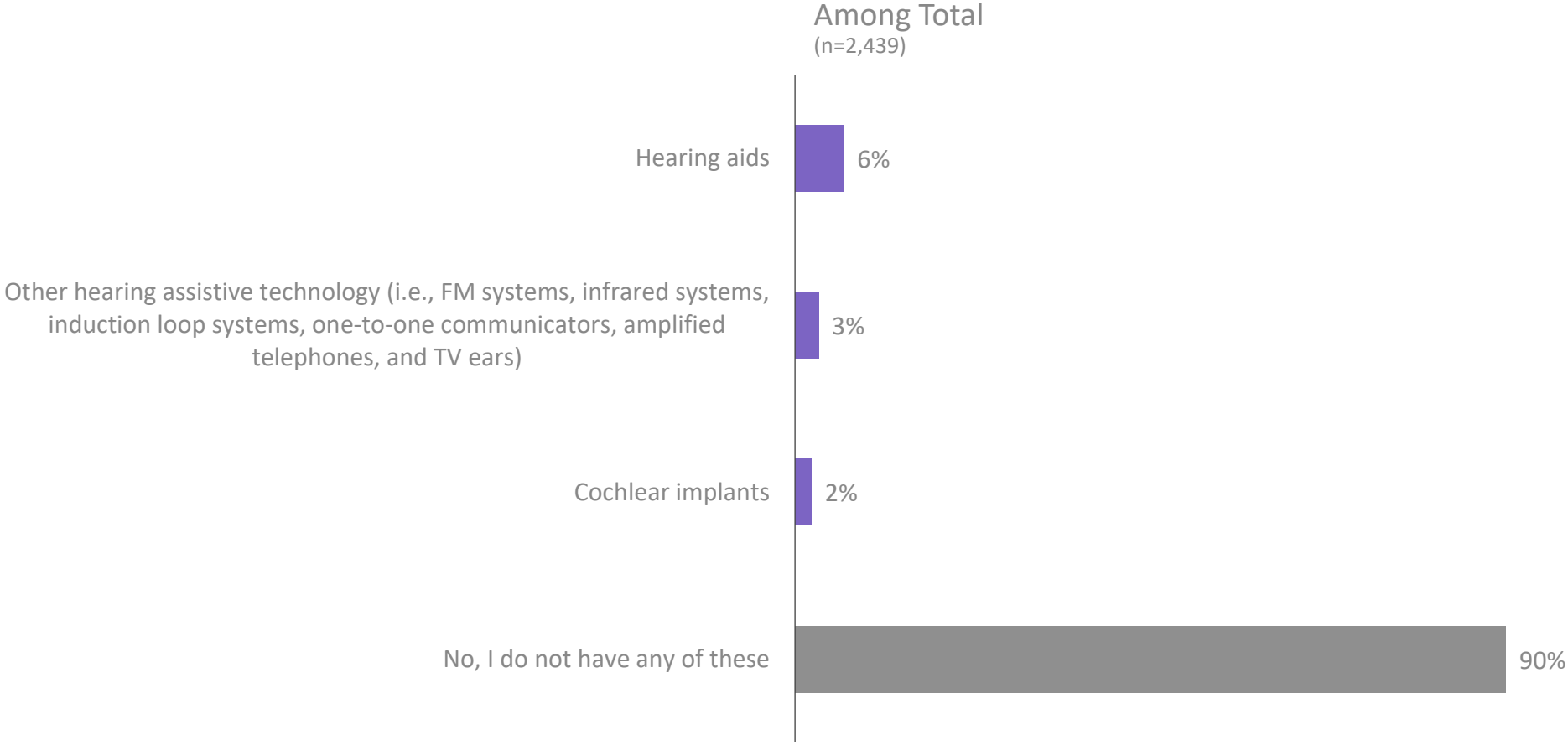
Types of Friction Reported
Among Those who Report Friction
(n=889)



Q24: What kinds of things happen in your household as a result of hearing difficulties? Select all that apply.

One in ten Americans utilize hearing aids and/or another form of hearing assistive technology.

- Even among those reporting hearing difficulties, this only rises to 16%.



Q275: Do you have any of the following to help you hear better? Please select all that apply.

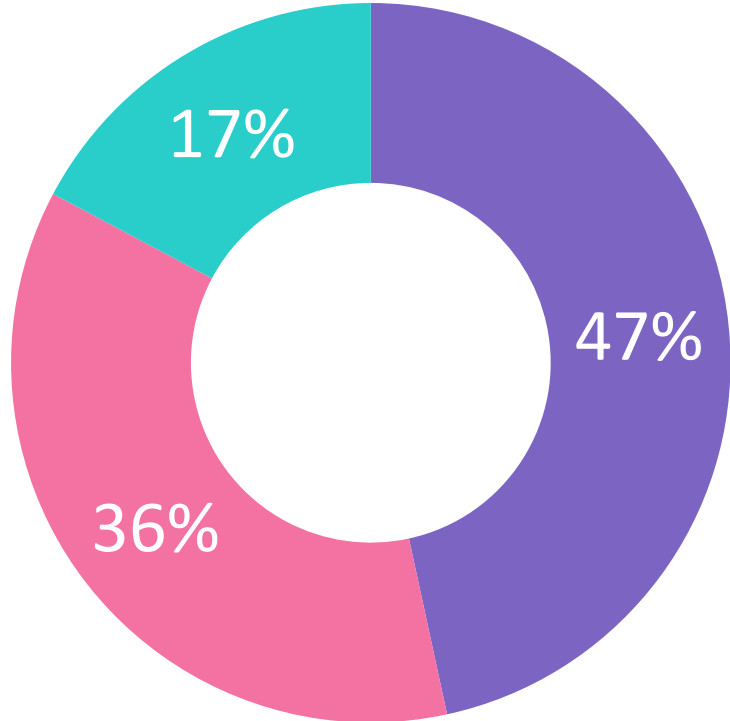
Less than half of hearing aid users wear their devices all or most of their waking hours

- Over a third wear when they feel they need, while less than two in 10 say they wear them rarely, if ever.

Frequency of Wearing Hearing Aids

Among Hearing Aid Owners
(n=152)

- During all or most of the time I am awake
- When I feel I need them
- Rarely, if ever



Q282: How frequently do you wear your hearing aids?

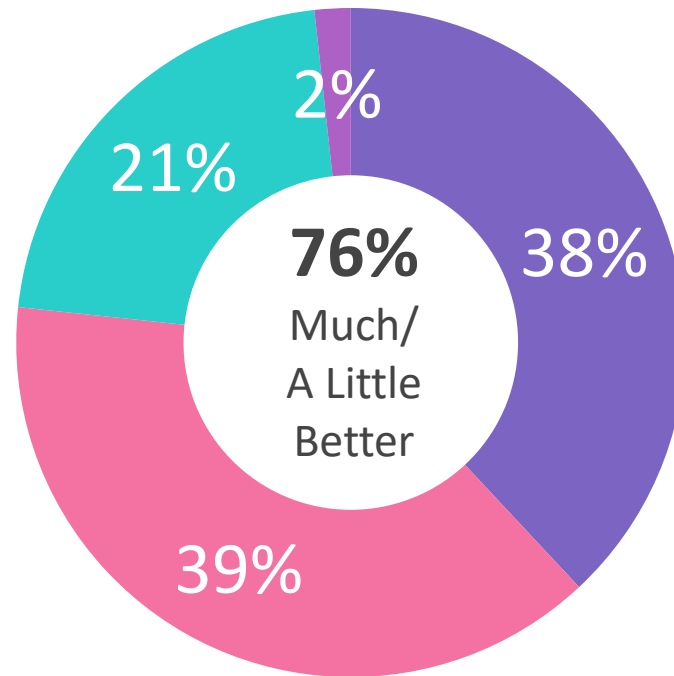
The vast majority of hearing aid users say their quality of life has improved since wearing

- Nearly eight in 10 rate their quality of life either “Much” or “A little bit” better since they began wearing hearing aids
- Most remaining wearers rate their quality of life as about the same as before they began wearing aids, with only 2% saying their quality of life has gotten worse.

Quality of Life With Hearing Aids

Among Hearing Aid Owners
(n=152)

- Much better
- A little better
- About the same
- A little worse
- Much worse



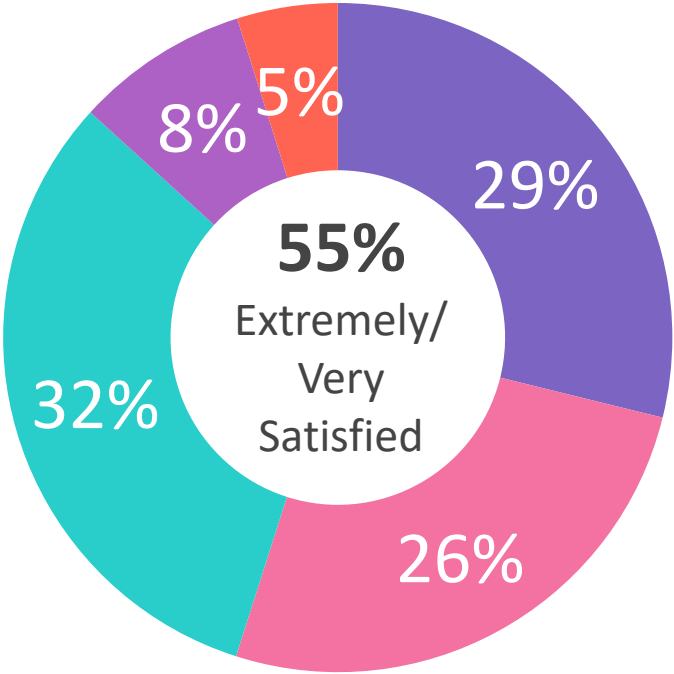
Q285: How would you rate the quality of your life since you have been wearing hearing aids?

More than half are extremely or very satisfied (55%), and an additional third are somewhat satisfied.

Satisfaction With Hearing Aids

Among Hearing Aid Owners
(n=152)

- Extremely satisfied
- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Not very satisfied
- Not satisfied at all

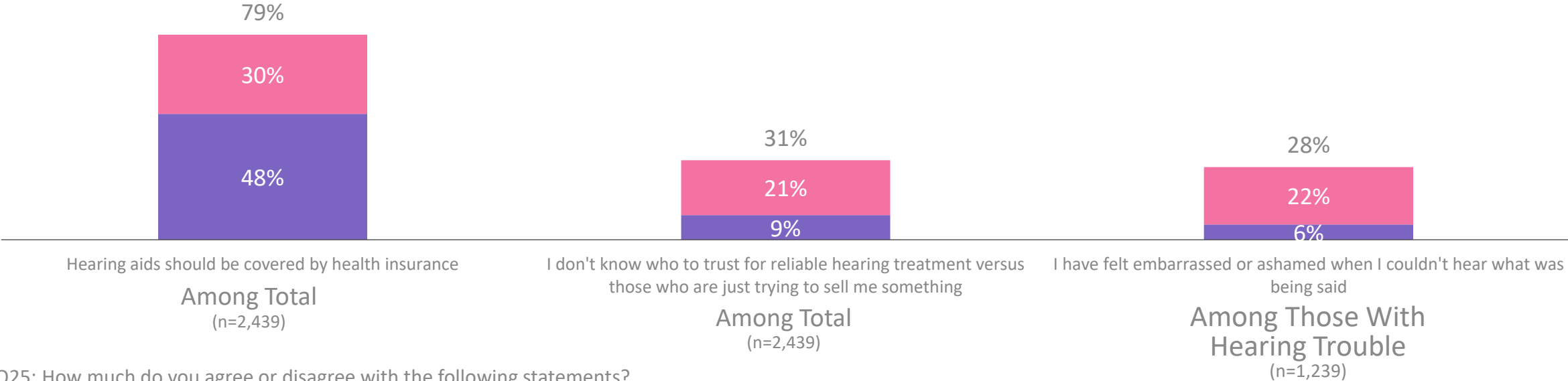


Q290: How would you rate your satisfaction with your hearing aids?

Nearly 8-in-10 (79%) believe hearing aids should be covered by insurance, rising to 85% of Boomers+. Three-in-10 who have trouble hearing have felt embarrassed or ashamed.

Agreement with Statements

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree



Q25: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Hearing Challenges During the Pandemic

Fully 60% of those 18+ have either personally experienced hearing difficulties while masking, social distancing or on video calls—or noticed others doing so. This goes up to 86% of those who identified as having untreated hearing difficulties.

Among those who have experienced these difficulties, the most commonly reported issue is having a hard time hearing or understanding what is being said when someone is wearing a mask, reported by 80%.

40%
Have experienced pandemic specific hearing difficulties, rising to **75%** of those who have (self-acknowledged) difficulty hearing

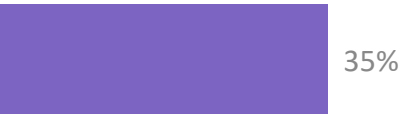
Pandemic-Specific Hearing Difficulties Experienced

I have a hard time hearing or understanding what is being said when someone is wearing a mask

Among Those Who Experienced Pandemic-related Hearing Problems (n=964)



It is hard for me to hear when I am socially distanced from the person speaking (at least 6 feet)



It is hard for me to participate in video calls (i.e., Zoom, FaceTime, Google Hangouts, etc.) because I have trouble hearing what is being said



Q12: Which, if any, of the following have you noticed about yourself over the past year? Select all that apply.

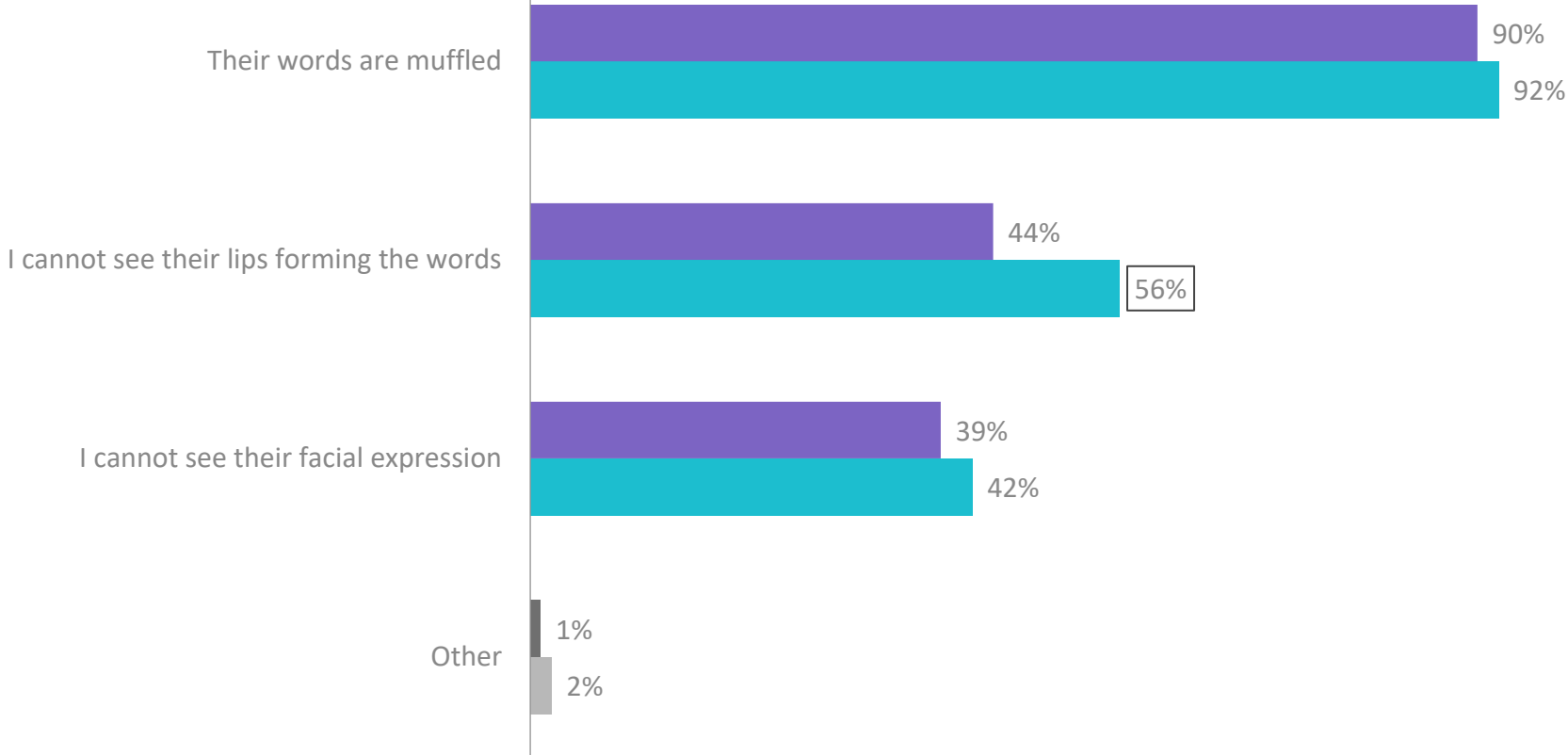
Muffling is the most common issue (90%) for those who have difficulty hearing someone who is masked, followed by inability to see lips (44%) or facial expressions (39%).

-Those with hearing difficulties are significantly more likely to say that not seeing the person's lips forming the words contributes to them having a hard time.

Reasons for Having a Hard Time Hearing Someone who is Masked

Among Those Who Have A Hard Time Hearing Someone Wearing A Mask (n=768)

■ All (n=768) ■ With Self Identified Hearing Difficulties (n=206)



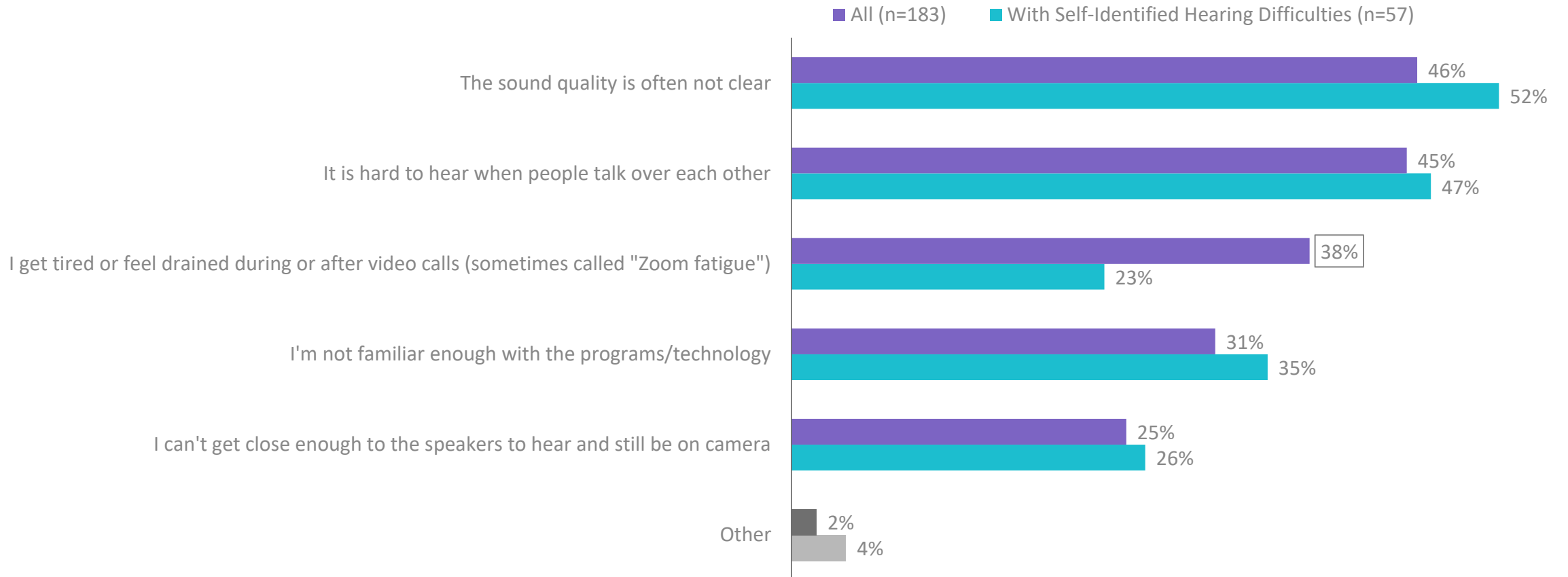
Q14: Which, if any, of these are reasons you have a hard time hearing or understanding what is being said when someone is wearing a mask? Select all that apply.

☐ = statistically significantly higher than other group at the 90% C.L.

Sound quality (46%) and difficulty hearing when people talk over each other (45%) are the most common issues faced on video calls.

Reasons for Having a Hard Time Participating in Video Calls

Among Those Who Have A Hard Time Participating In Video Calls



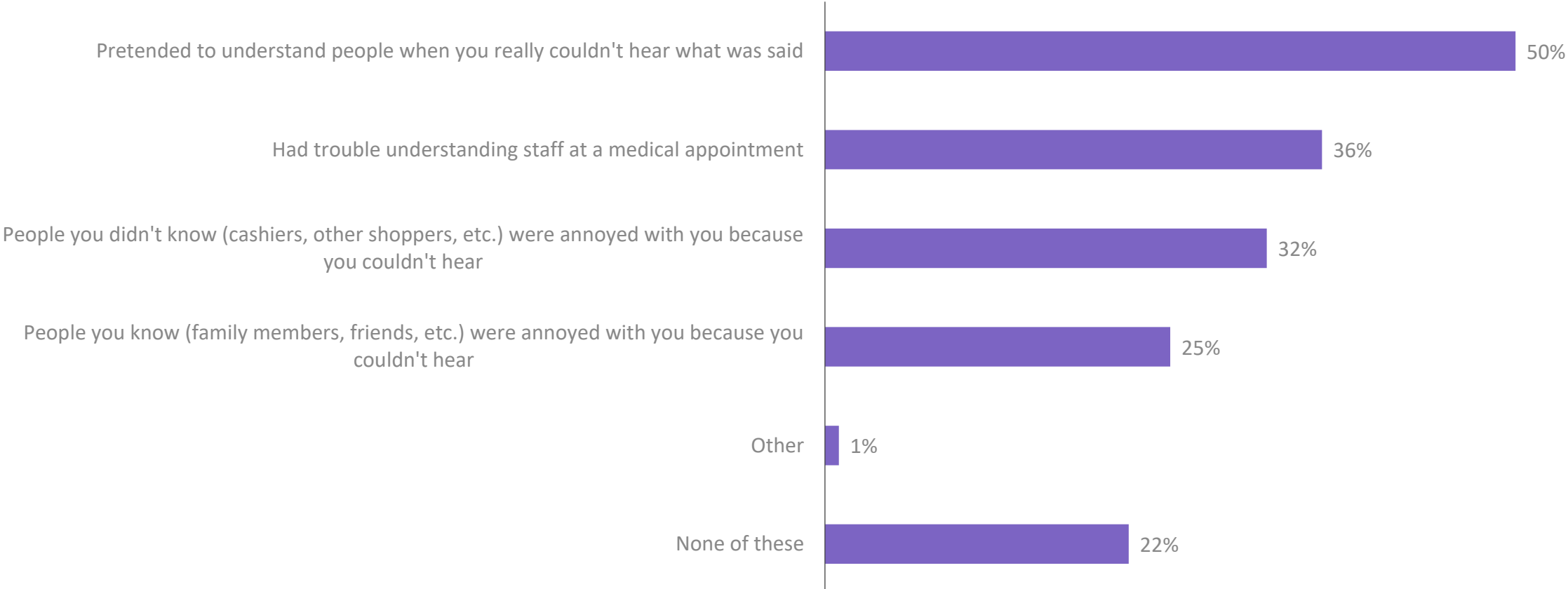
Q15: Which, if any, of these are reasons you have a hard time participating in video calls? Select all that apply.

= statistically significantly higher than other group at the 90% C.L.

For those who acknowledged they had existing hearing difficulties, the pandemic adds another layer of trouble. Half who reported hearing issues while masking, distancing or participating on video calls say they've pretended to understand people when they really didn't. More than 1-in-3 indicated they had trouble understanding staff at a medical appointment.

Outcomes of Difficulties While Masked/Distanced

Among Those With Self Identified Hearing Difficulties who Experienced Pandemic-related Hearing Problems (n=245)

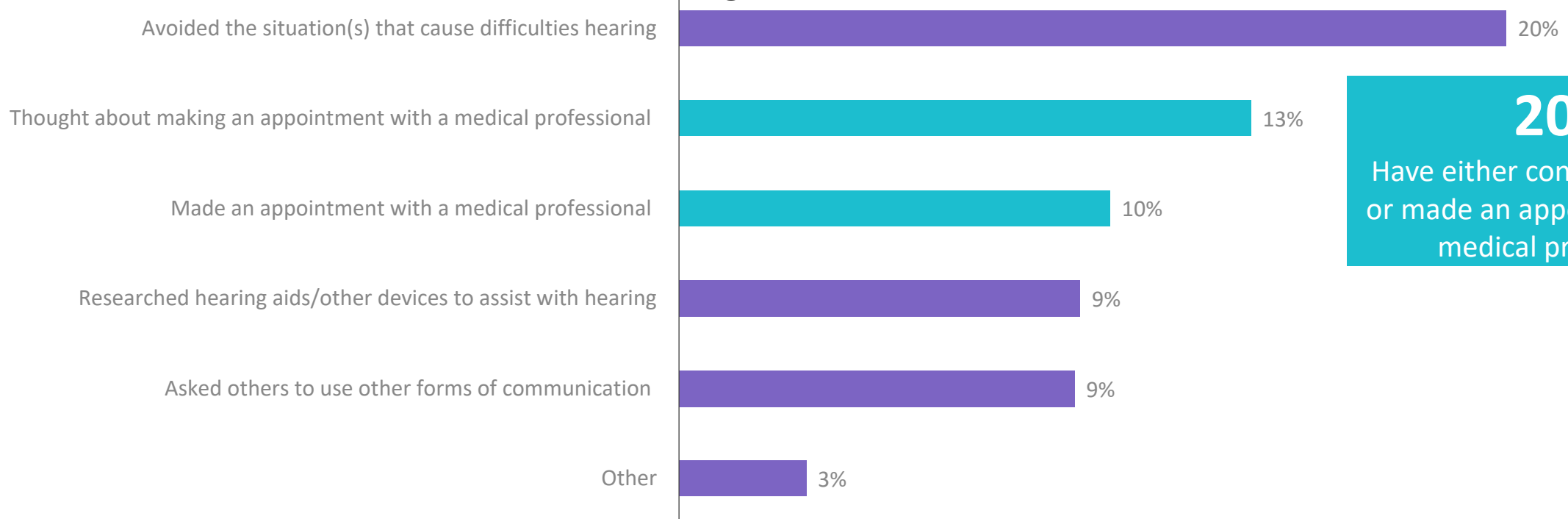


Q13: Have you had any of the following happen to you while in public while wearing a mask or social distancing?

One-in-five of those who had trouble hearing someone masked, distanced or on a video call have considered making or made an appointment with a medical professional. However, the same number report avoiding those situations.

Actions Taken as a Result of Difficulties Hearing:

Among Those Who Had Trouble Hearing Someone Masked, Distanced, or on a Video Call (n=964)



20%
Have either considered making or made an appointment with a medical professional

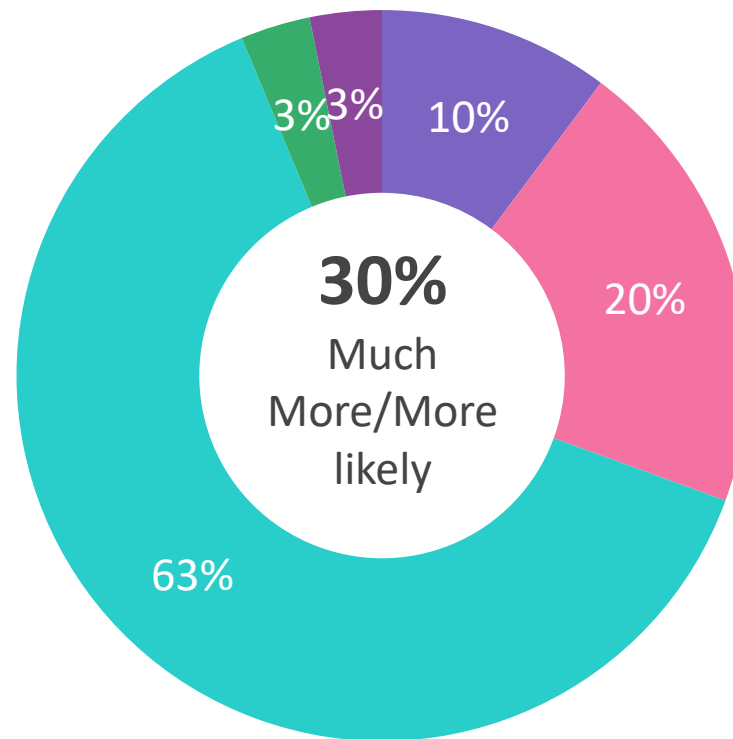
Q17: As a result of noticing that you have a hard time _____ have you done any of the following?

Three-in-ten who experienced hearing difficulties while others were masked, distanced or on video calls reported that this made them more likely to seek treatment.

Impact of Noticing Difficulties Hearing on Likelihood to Seek Treatment:

Among Those Who Had Trouble Hearing Someone Masked, Distanced, or on a Video Call (n=964)

- Made me much more likely
- Made me somewhat more likely
- Had no impact
- Made me much less likely
- Made me somewhat less likely



Q18: How much impact, if any, did noticing that you have a hard time _____ have on your likelihood to seek treatment for hearing issues?

More than half (51%) of Americans 18+ have noticed a friend, family member or co-worker having trouble hearing someone masked, distanced or on video calls.

Among Total
(n=2,439)

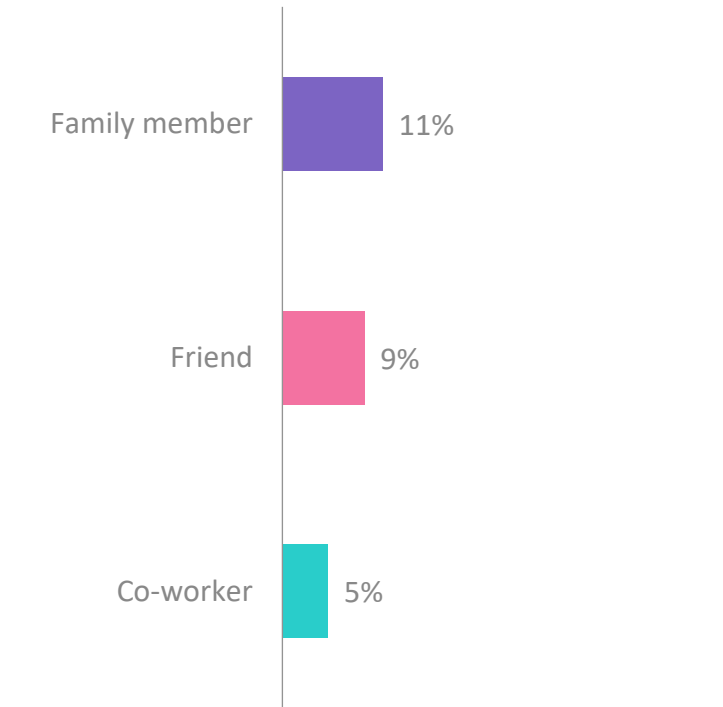
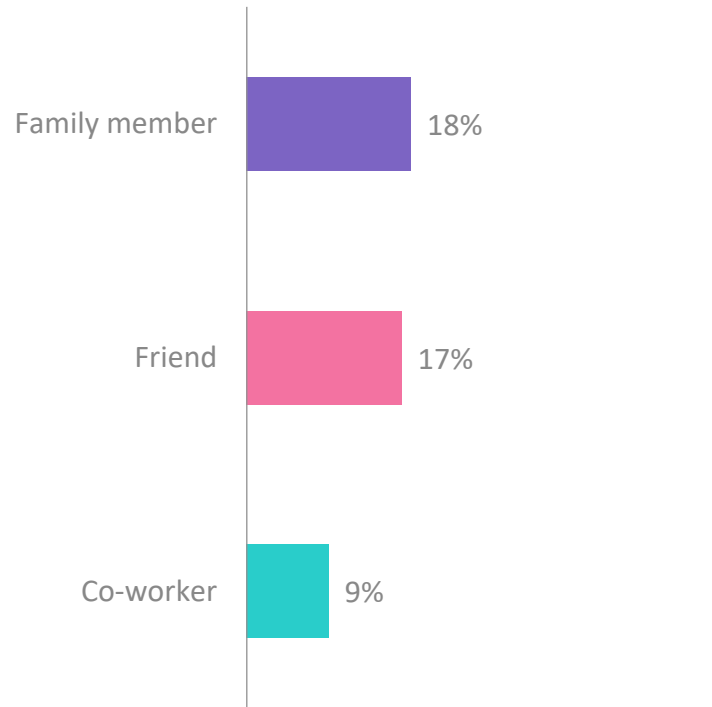
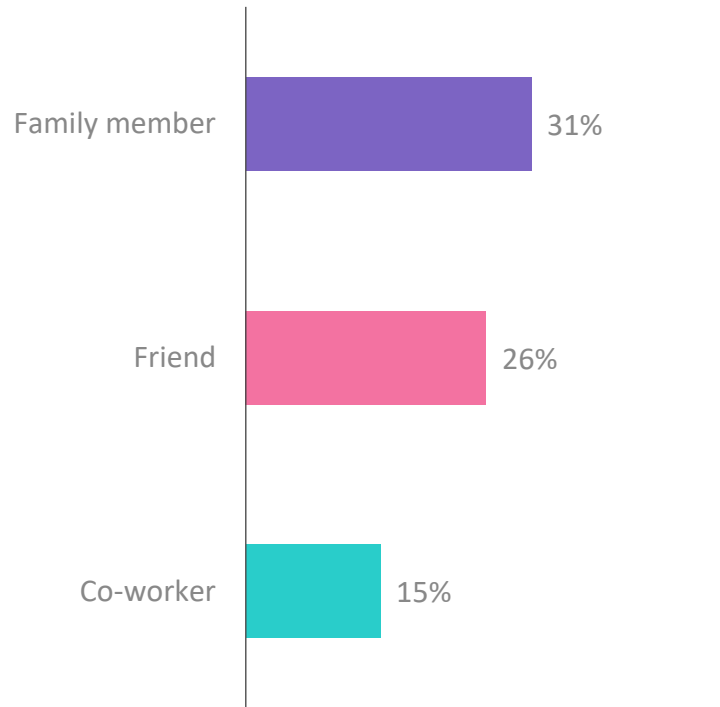
Noticed someone else having...

a hard time hearing or understanding what is being said when someone is wearing a mask

a hard time hearing or understanding what is being said when someone is 6+ feet away

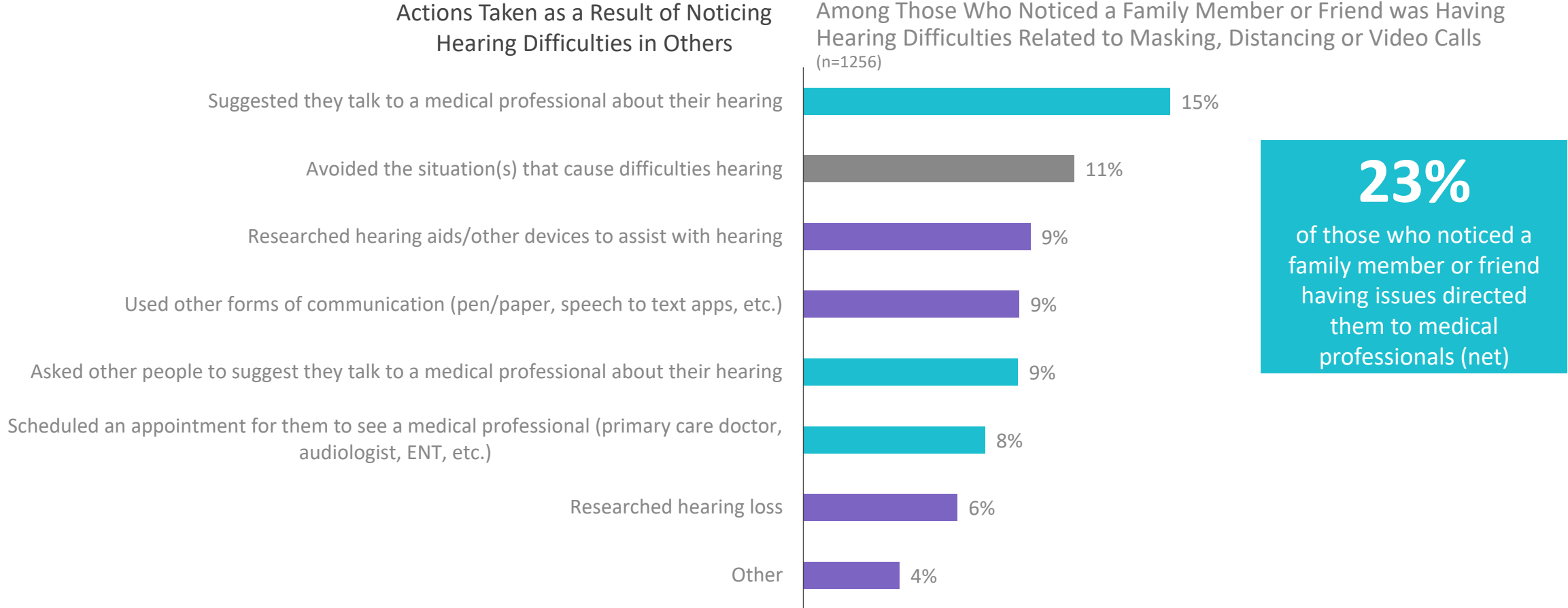
difficulty participating in video calls because they have trouble hearing what is said

36%
noticed a family member having pandemic specific hearing difficulties



Q19_1: Now, thinking about others, have you noticed anyone else having this issue? Select all the people that apply.

Nearly one-quarter (23%) of those who noticed a family member or friend was having hearing difficulties related to masking, distancing or video calls suggested that person talk to a professional or made an appointment for them.



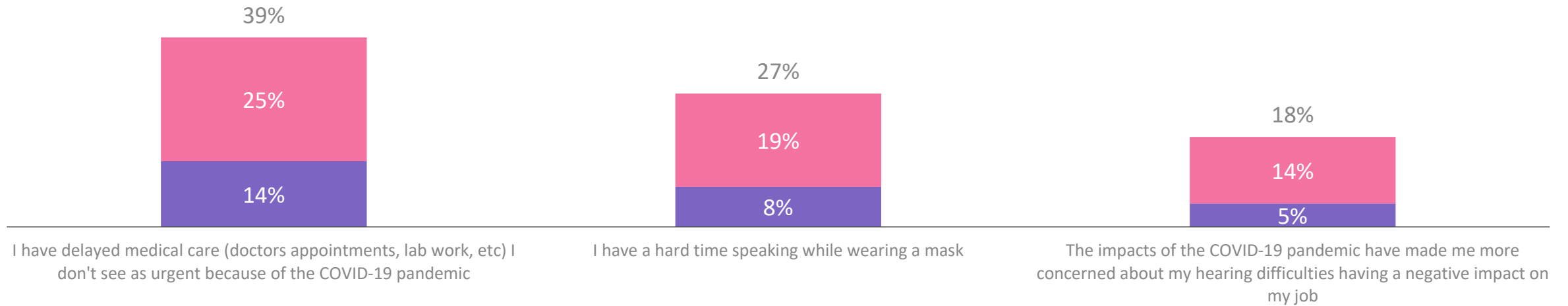
Q21: As a result of noticing that _____ has had these difficulties, have you done any of the following?

Nearly 4-in-10 (39%) have delayed medical care that they do not see as urgent due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Agreement with Statements

Among Total
(n=2,439)

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree



Q25: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

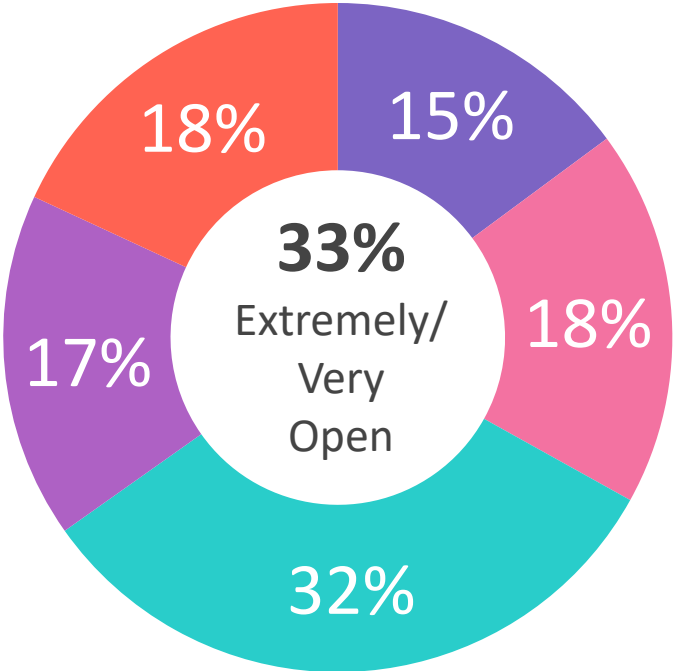
Nearly two thirds of Americans would be at least somewhat open to using telehealth for hearing services

- This includes 61% of those with some level of hearing difficulty and 62% of those with difficulties who have not sought treatment.

Openness to Telehealth for Hearing Services

Among Total
(n=2,439)

- Extremely open
- Very open
- Somewhat open
- Not very open
- Not open at all



Q5: How open would you be to using a telehealth (a web-enabled platform with video) for hearing services?