



ADVANCING ACCESS & EQUITY

Workers with Disabilities in Boston

BPDA Research Division
October 2023



**boston planning &
development agency**

Presentation Outline

- National Trends
 - Increasing number of people with disabilities
 - Increasing employment of people with disabilities
- Profile of Boston's working age residents with disabilities.
 - Half of the people with disabilities are working age.
 - Differences in prevalence of disabilities by demography and geography.
- Employment of Boston residents with disabilities
 - The number of people with disabilities is increasing and more people with disabilities are working.
 - Variation in employment and earnings by disability type
- Mayor's Commission for Persons with Disabilities

Questions about Disability in the American Community Survey

For all people

1. Is this person deaf or does he/she have serious difficulty hearing? **(Hearing)**
2. Is this person blind or does he/she have serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses? **(Vision)**

For people aged 5+

1. Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, does this person have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions? **(Cognitive)**
2. Does this person have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs? **(Ambulatory)**
3. Does this person have difficulty dressing or bathing? **(Self Care - Due a physical, mental, or emotional condition lasting 6 months or more)**

For people aged 15+

1. Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, does this person have difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping? **(Independent Living)**

1990 Americans with Disability Act

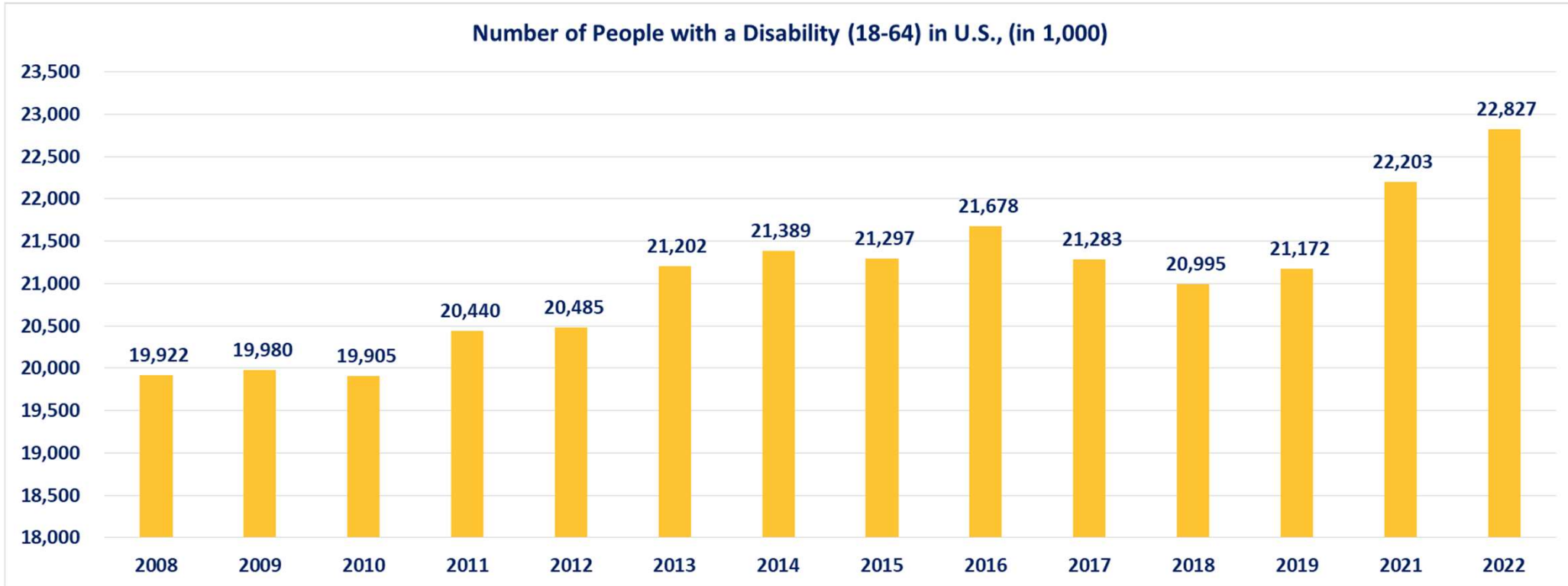
The ADA is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life

- Equal employment opportunity for individuals with disabilities
- Nondiscrimination on the basis of disability in state and local government in services like transportation
- Nondiscrimination on the basis of disability by public accommodations and in commercial facilities

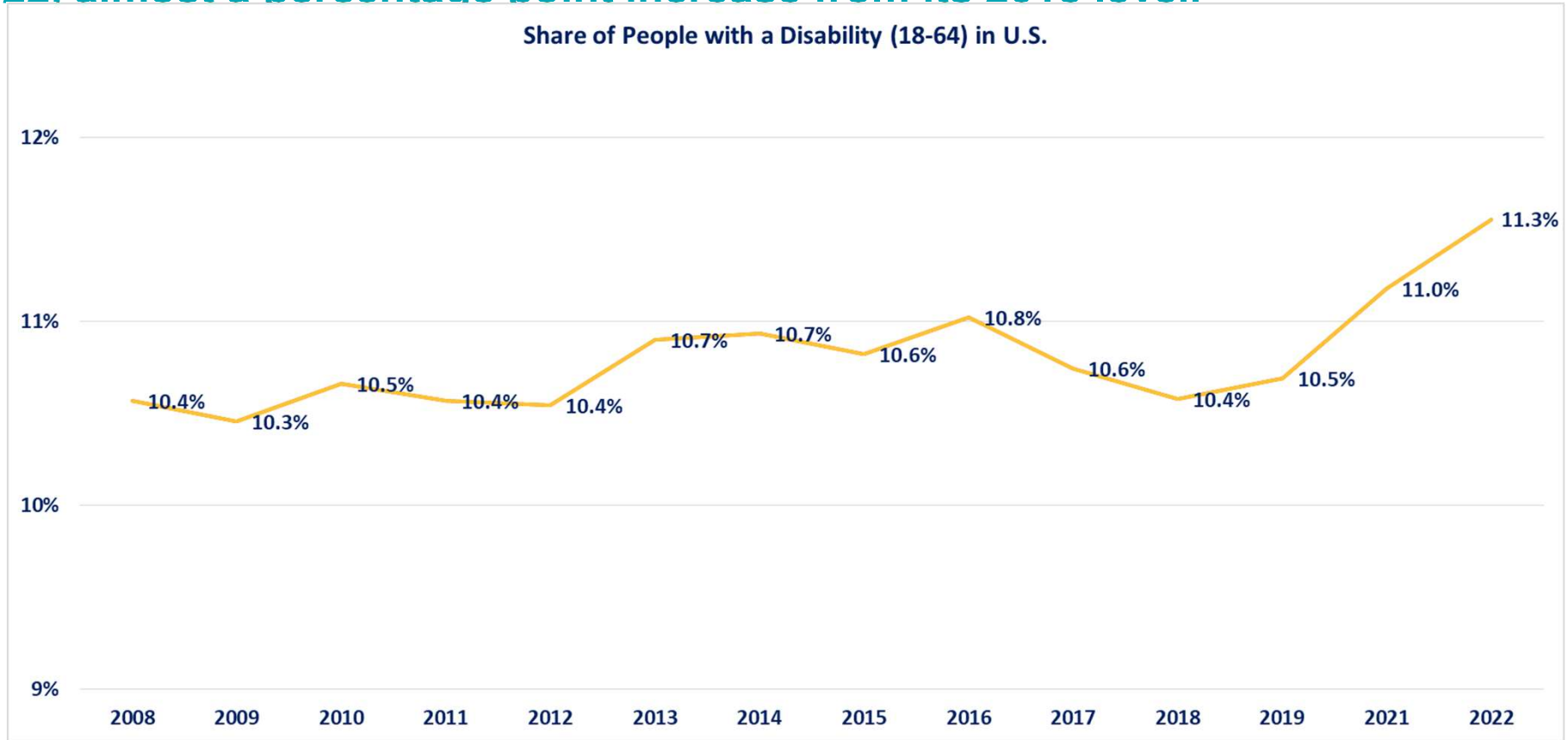
The ADA defines a person with a disability as a person who has a *physical or mental impairment* that substantially limits *one or more major life activities*. This includes people who have a record of such an impairment, even if they do not currently have a disability. It also includes individuals who do not have a disability but are regarded as having a disability.

National Trends for Workers with Disabilities

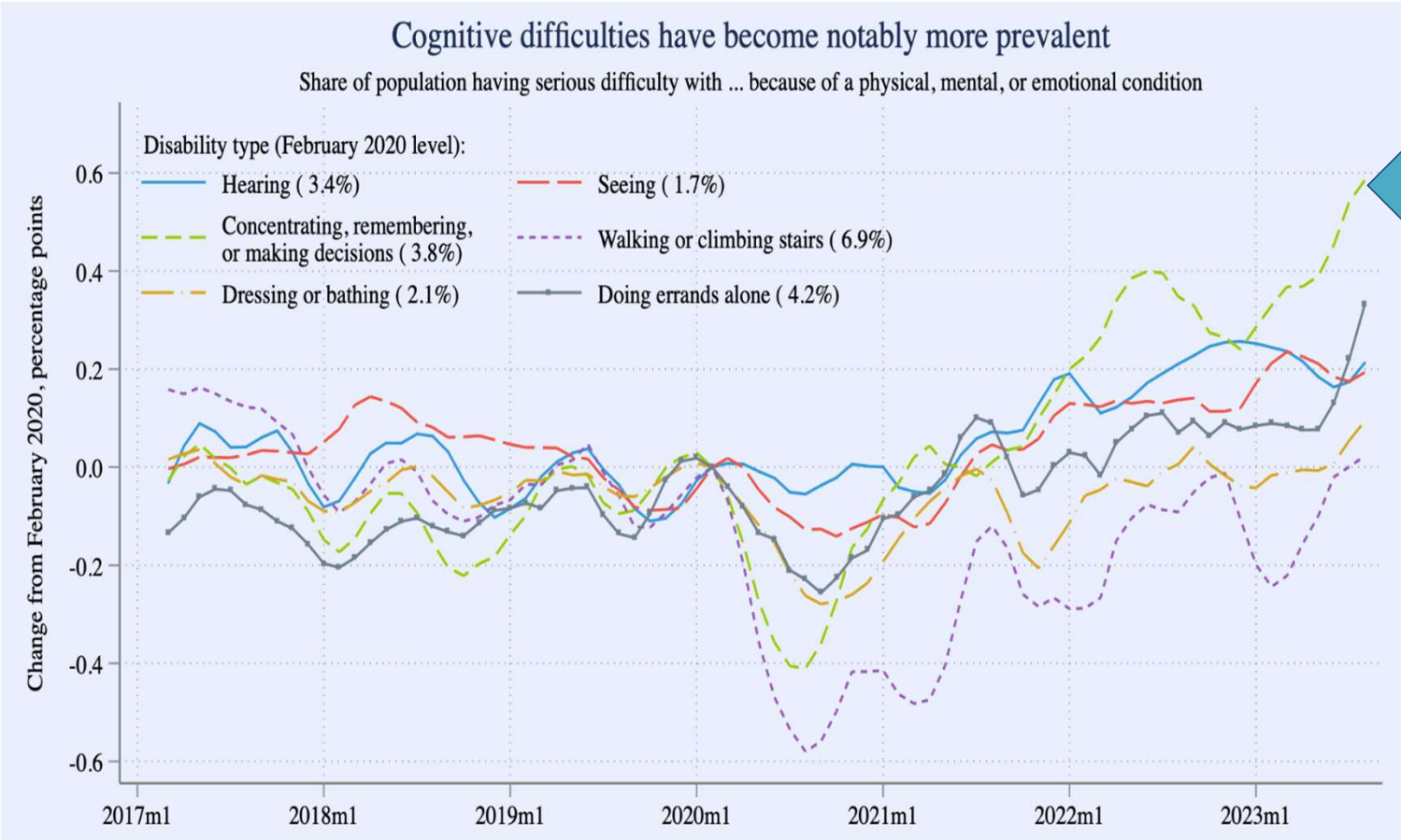
Working-age people (18-64) in U.S. reporting a disability reached its highest level in 2022, a 7.8% increase from 2019.



The share of working-age people reporting a disability increased to 11.3% in 2022, almost a percentage point increase from its 2018 level.

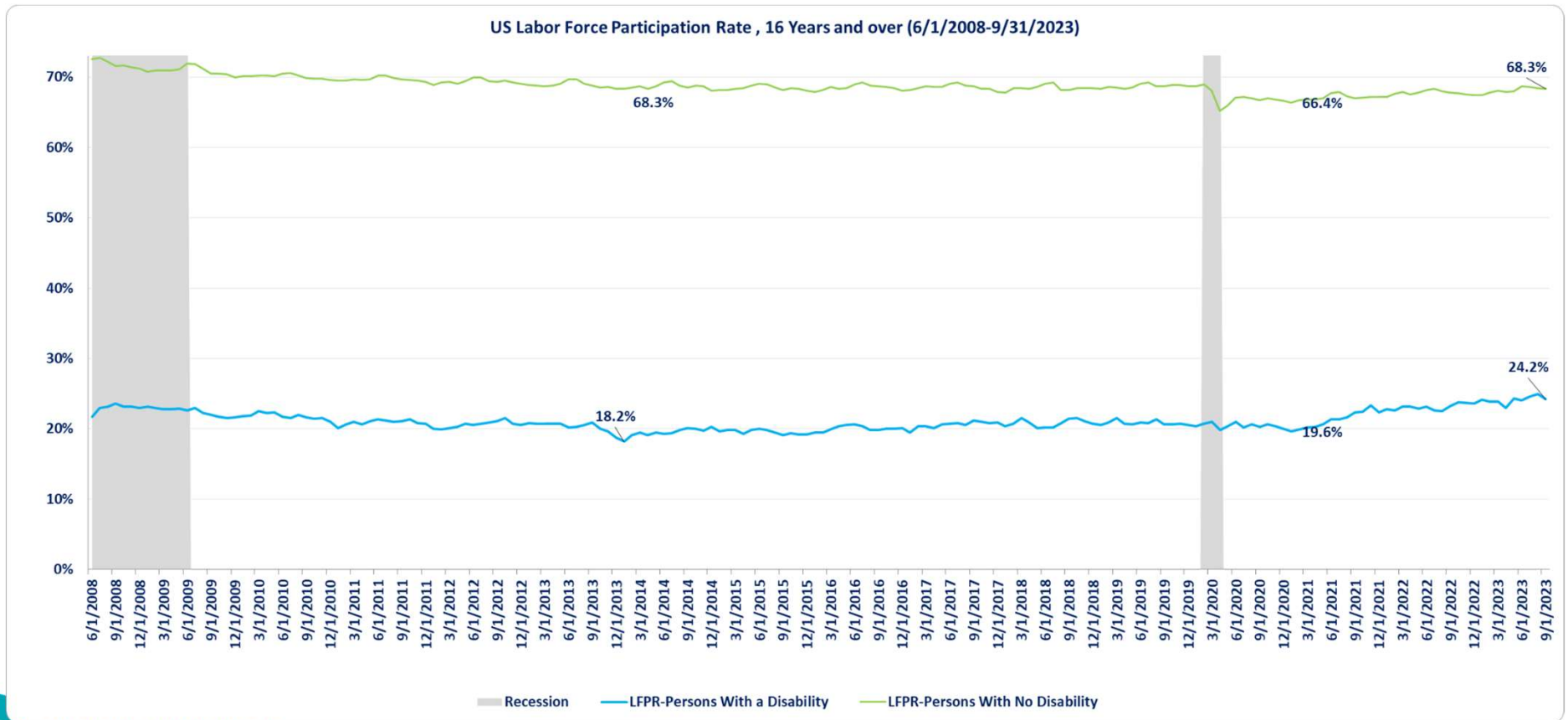


Post-pandemic increase in disability reporting is driven by increase in cognitive difficulties of concentrating, remembering or making decisions due to physical, mental or emotional condition.

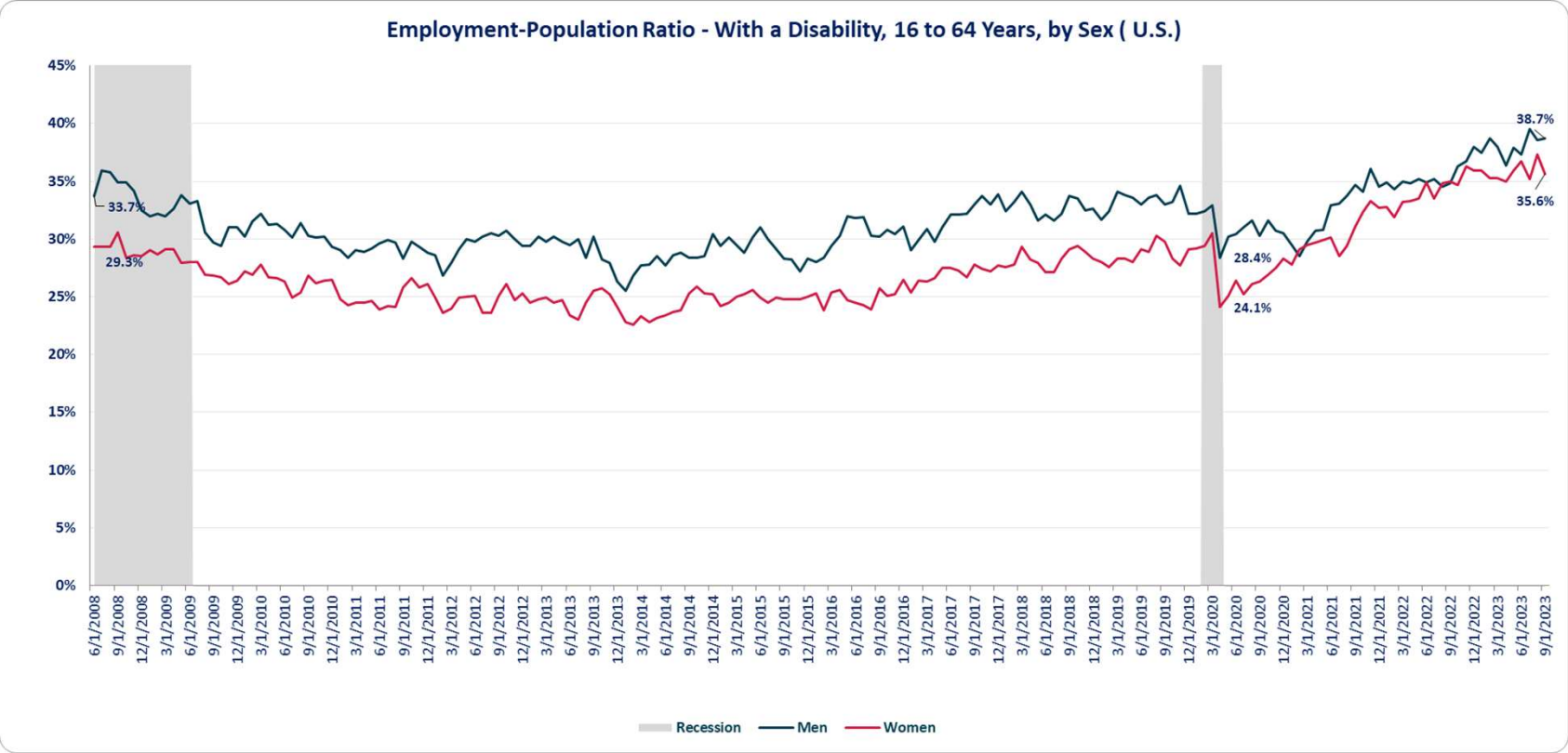


Source: Current Population Survey and Kevin Rinz, 2023 (https://www.briefingbook.info/p/disability-prevalence-is-rising-alongside?utm_source=profile&utm_medium=reader2).

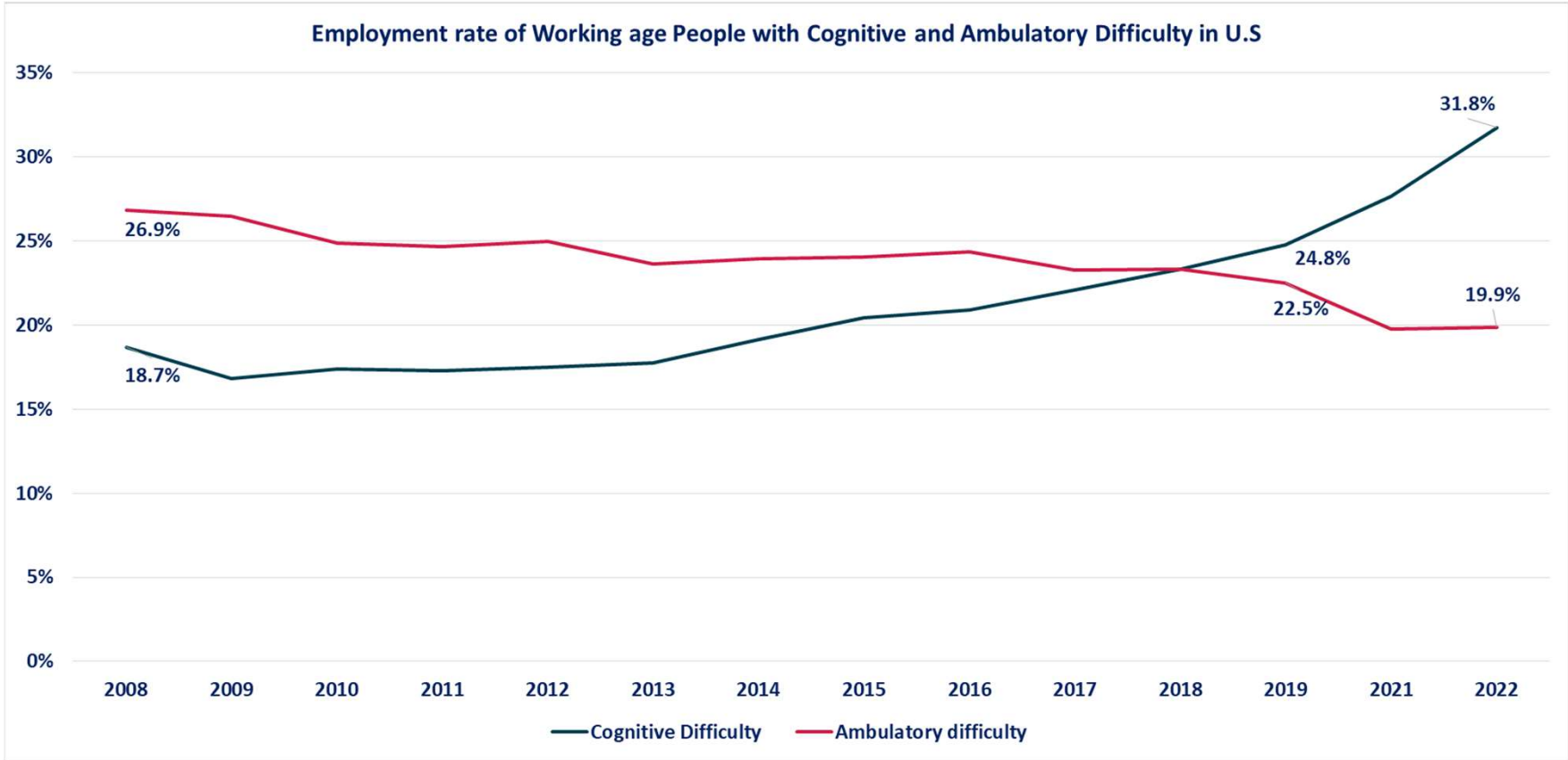
The labor force participation rate of people with disabilities was 24.2% in September 2023, but the unemployment rate of labor force participants with disabilities remains more than double the rate for people without disabilities (7.3% compared to 3.4% in September 2023).



The national share of working-age people with a disability who are employed surpassed pre-pandemic levels by the fall of 2021 and continued to rise.



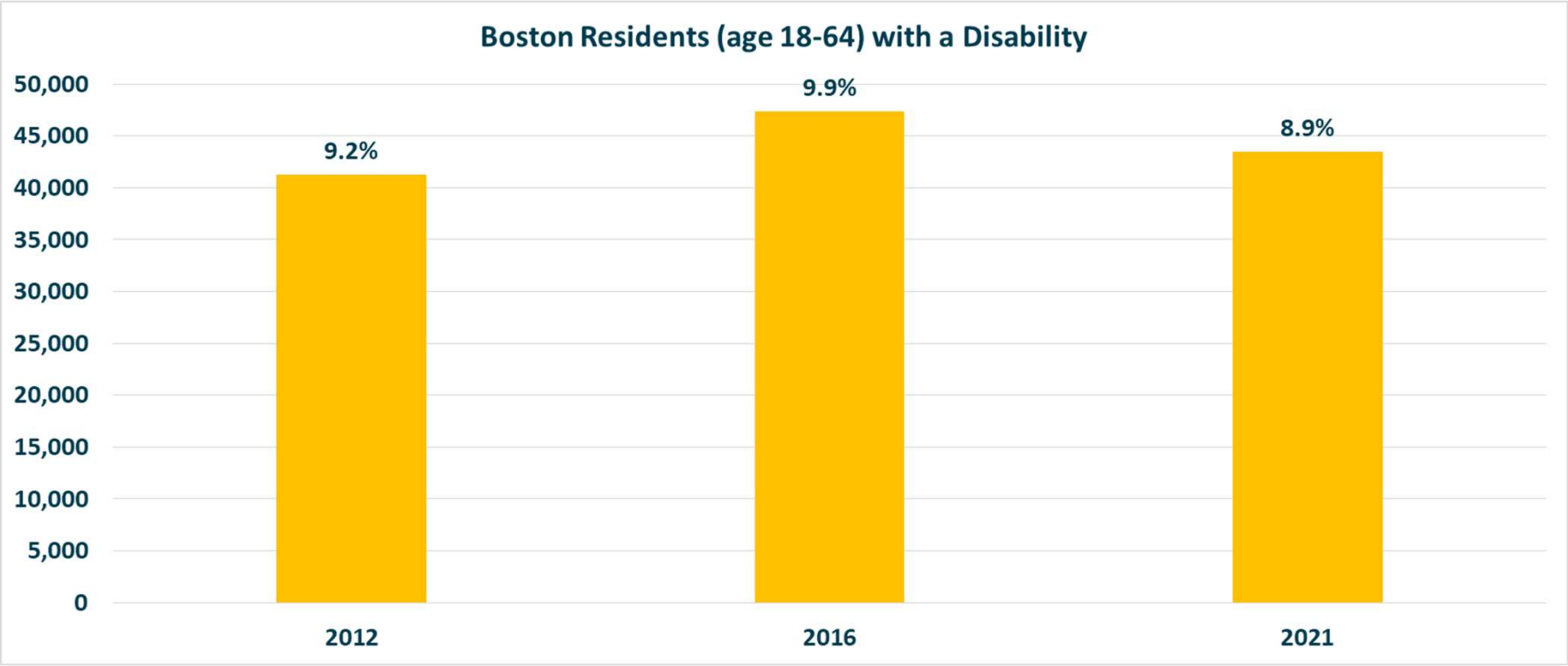
Employment of people with cognitive difficulty has been on the rise reaching almost 32% in 2022. Conversely, the employment rate of people with ambulatory difficulty has fallen to less than 20%.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 1 Year ACS (2008-2022) National. BPDA Research Division Analysis. 2020 not available

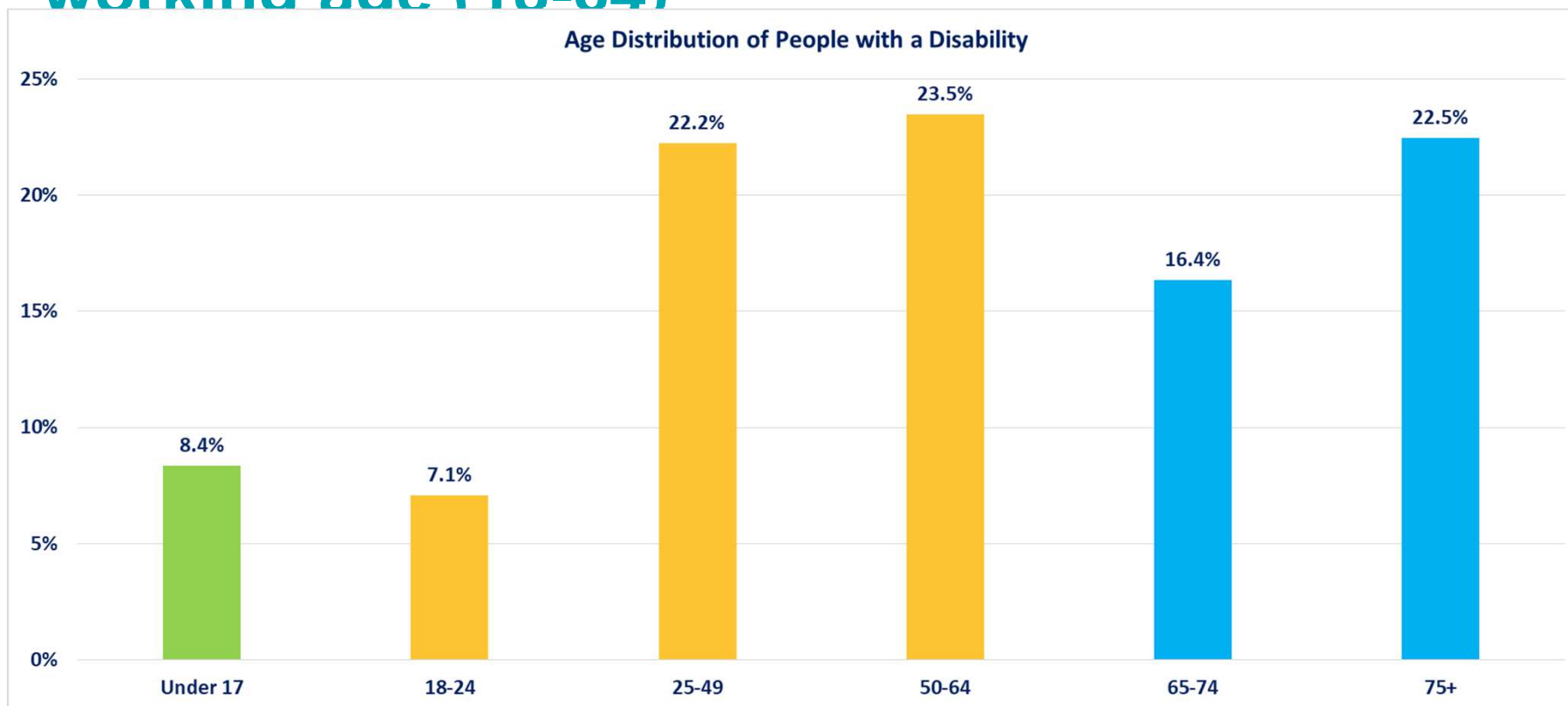
Working Age Residents of Boston with Disabilities

43,500 Boston residents aged 18-64 reported having a disability in 2021, making up 8.9% of the working age population of Boston.

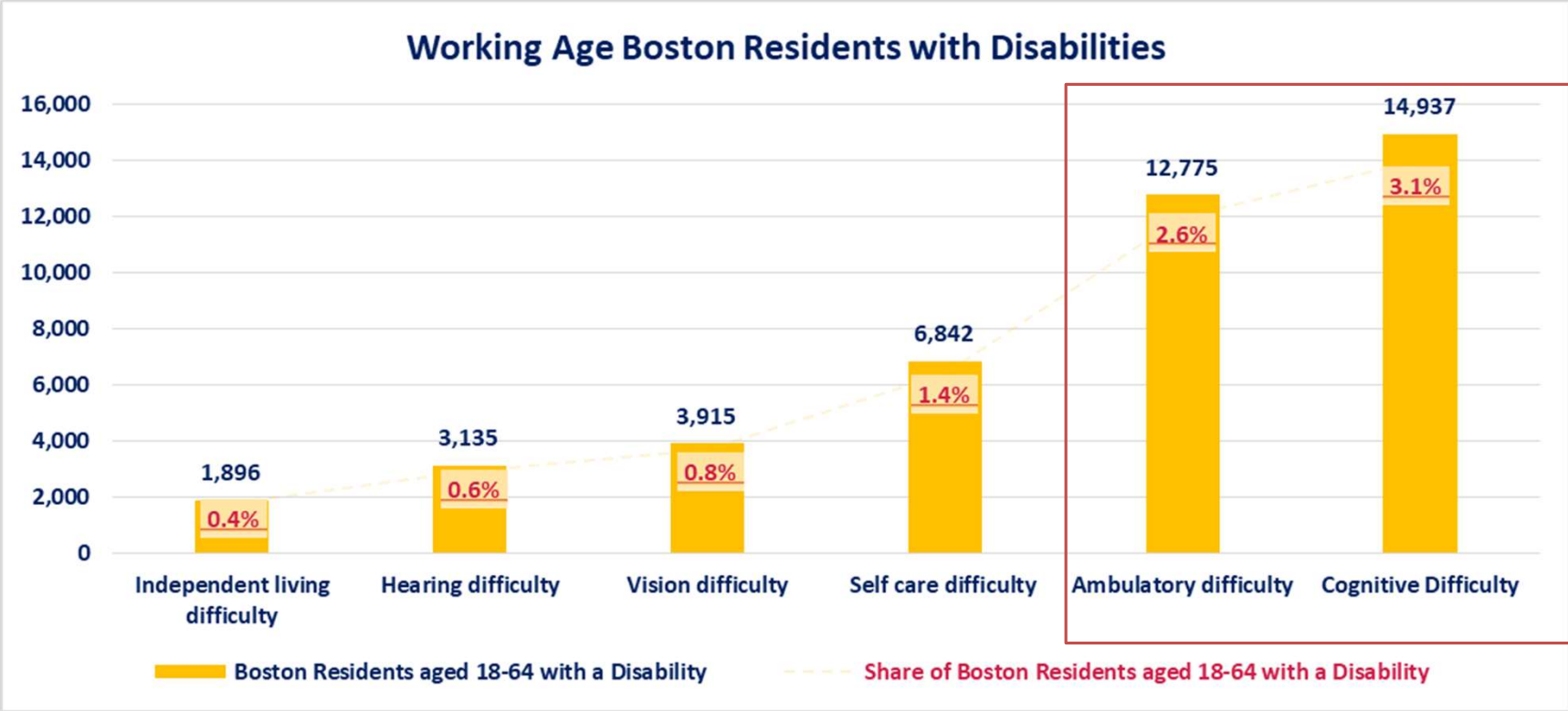


Source: US Census Bureau, 2008-2012, 2012-2016, & 2017-2021 American Community Surveys (PUMS), BPDA Research Division Analysis

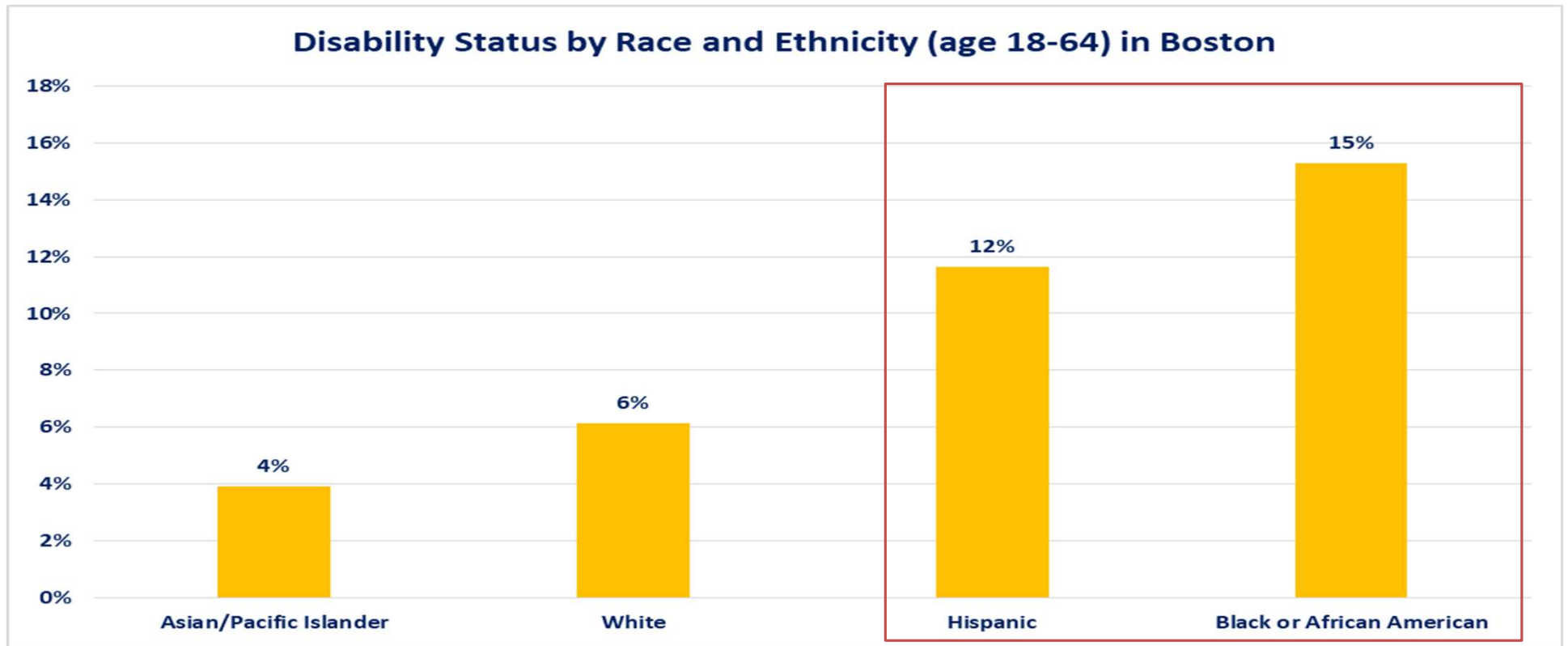
About half of Boston residents with disabilities are working age (18-64)



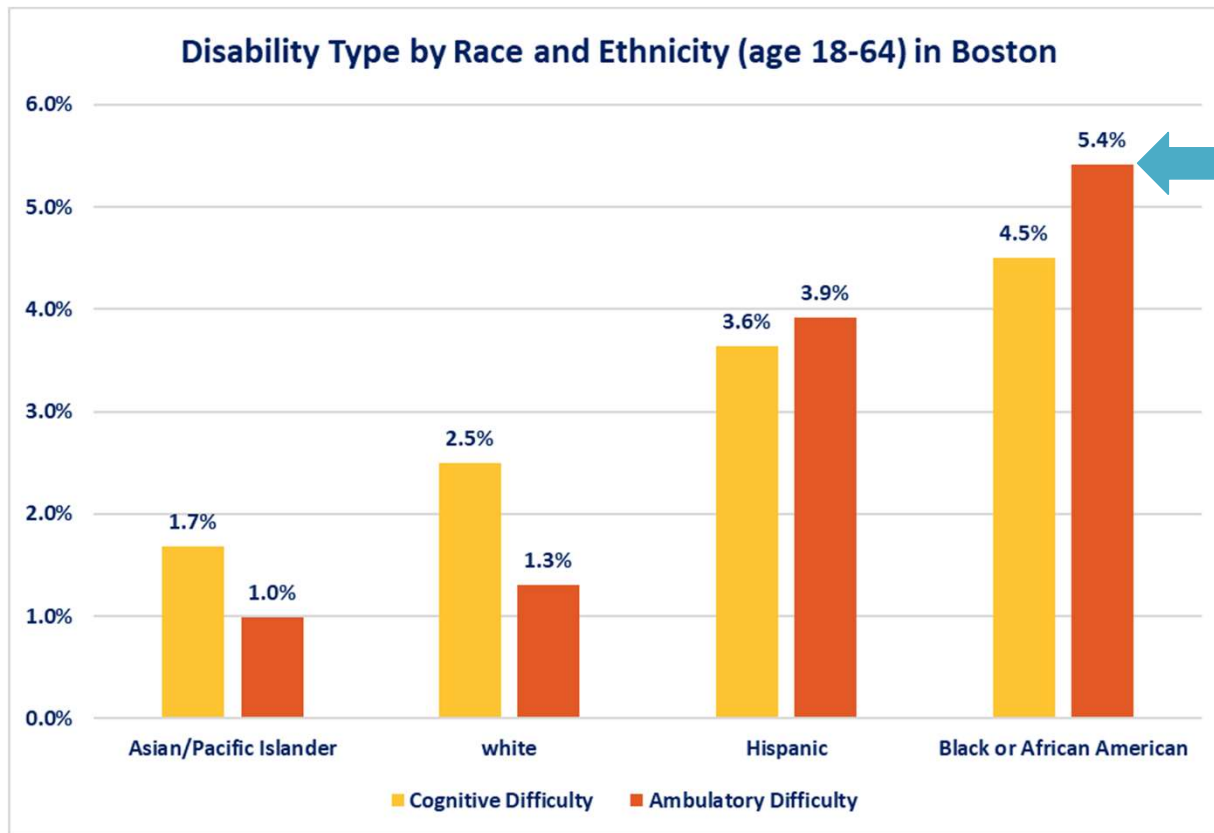
The most common types of disabilities for working age Boston residents are ambulatory or cognitive difficulties.



Black/African American and Hispanic working age residents have significantly higher rates of disability.

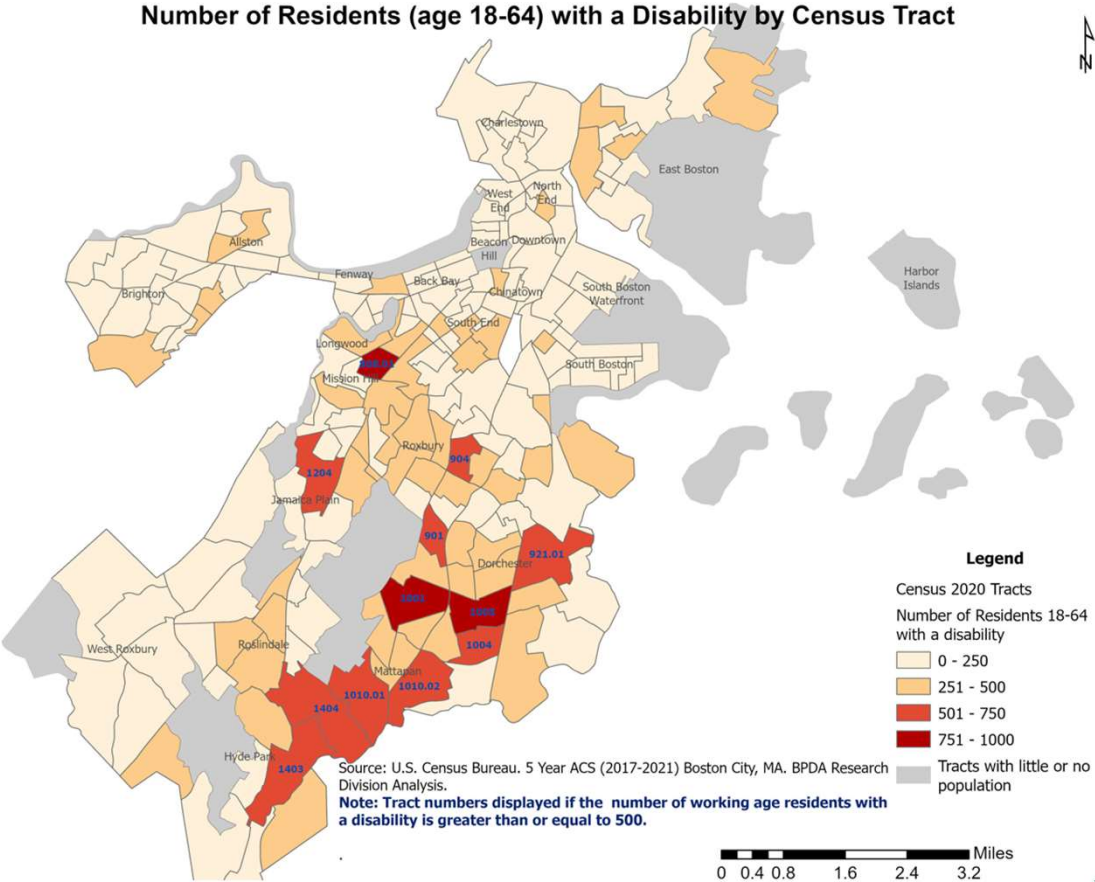


Ambulatory difficulties are relatively more common among Black/African American working age residents.

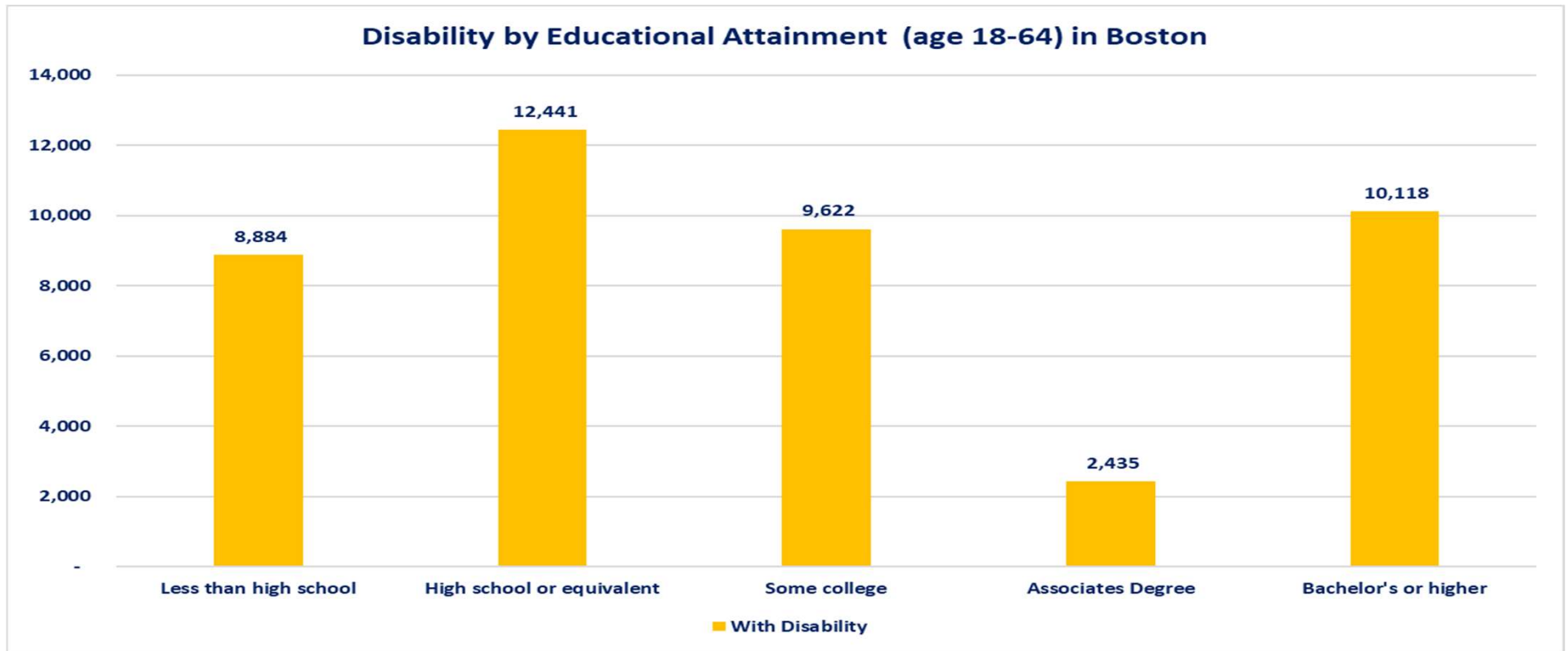


More people aged 18-64 with a disability live in Dorchester, Mattapan and Hyde Park.

- Number of people, demographic structure, and housing play a role.

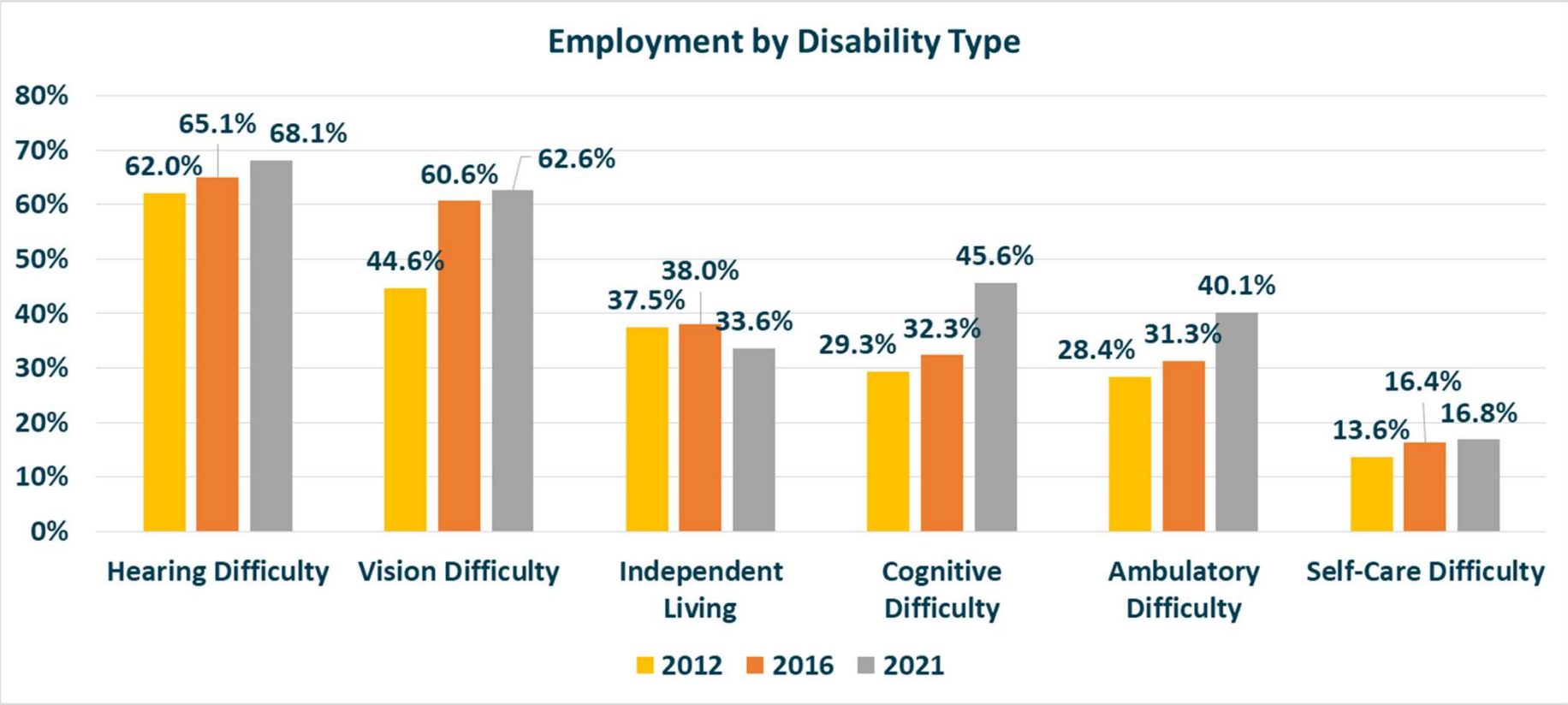


23% of Boston residents aged 18-64 with a disability have a Bachelor's degree or higher

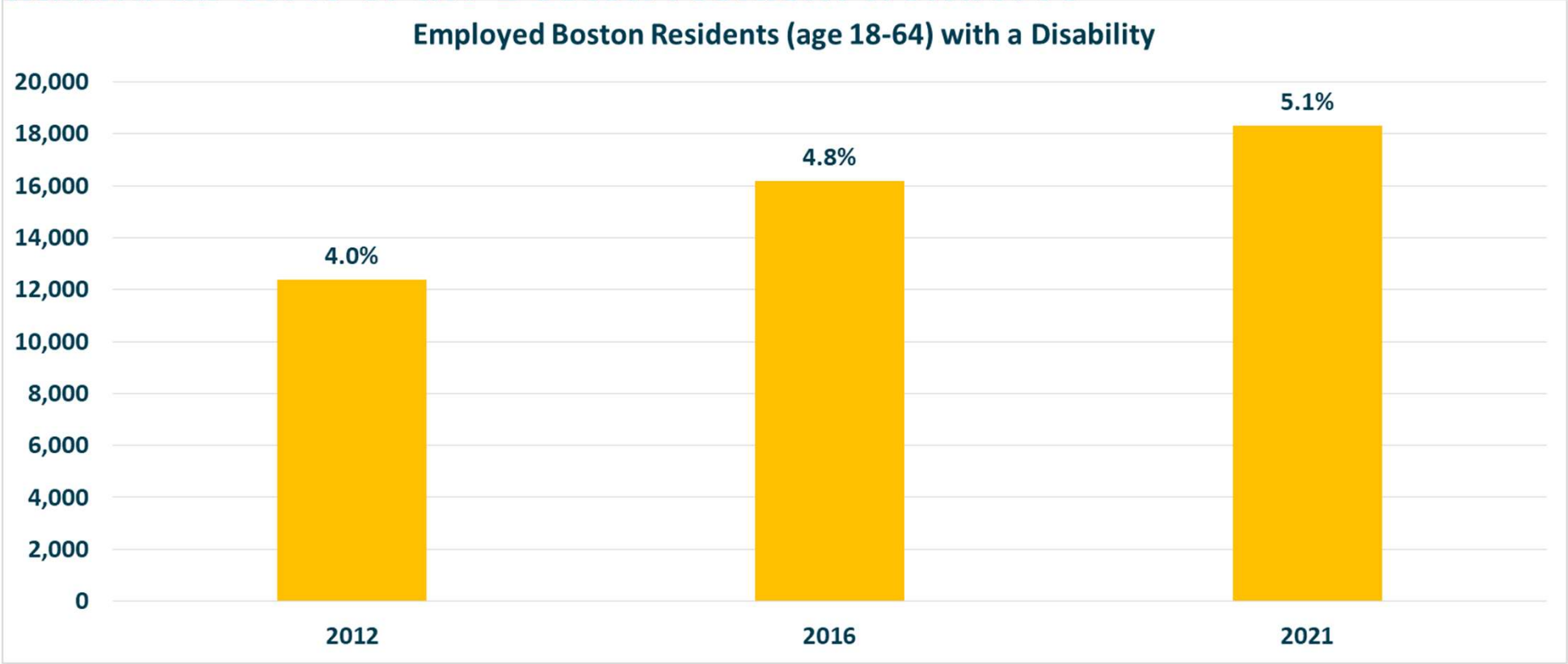


Employment of Boston Residents with Disabilities

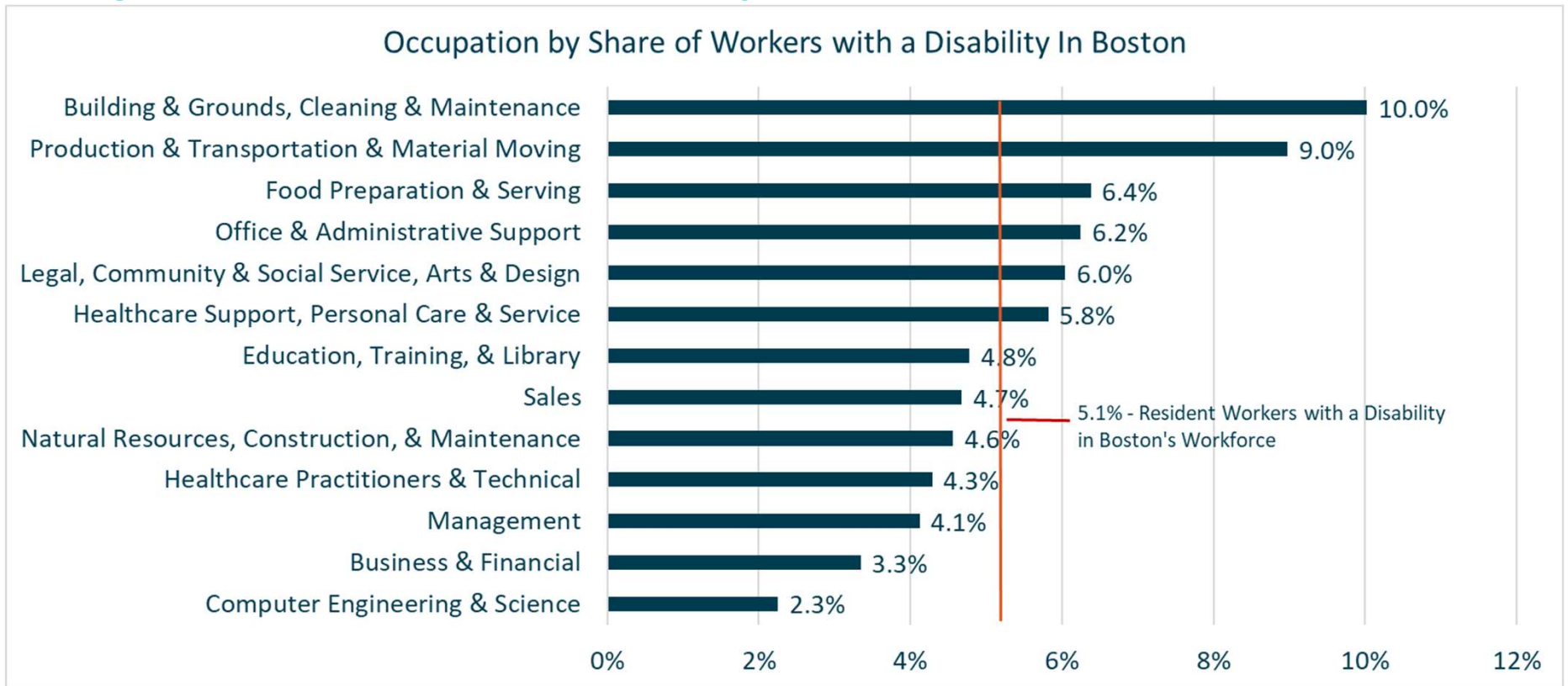
Overall, 42% of Boston residents with disabilities aged 18-64 are employed, but this share is higher for those with hearing or vision difficulties



In 2021, ~18,300 Boston residents with disabilities were employed, making up 5.1% of the Boston resident workforce



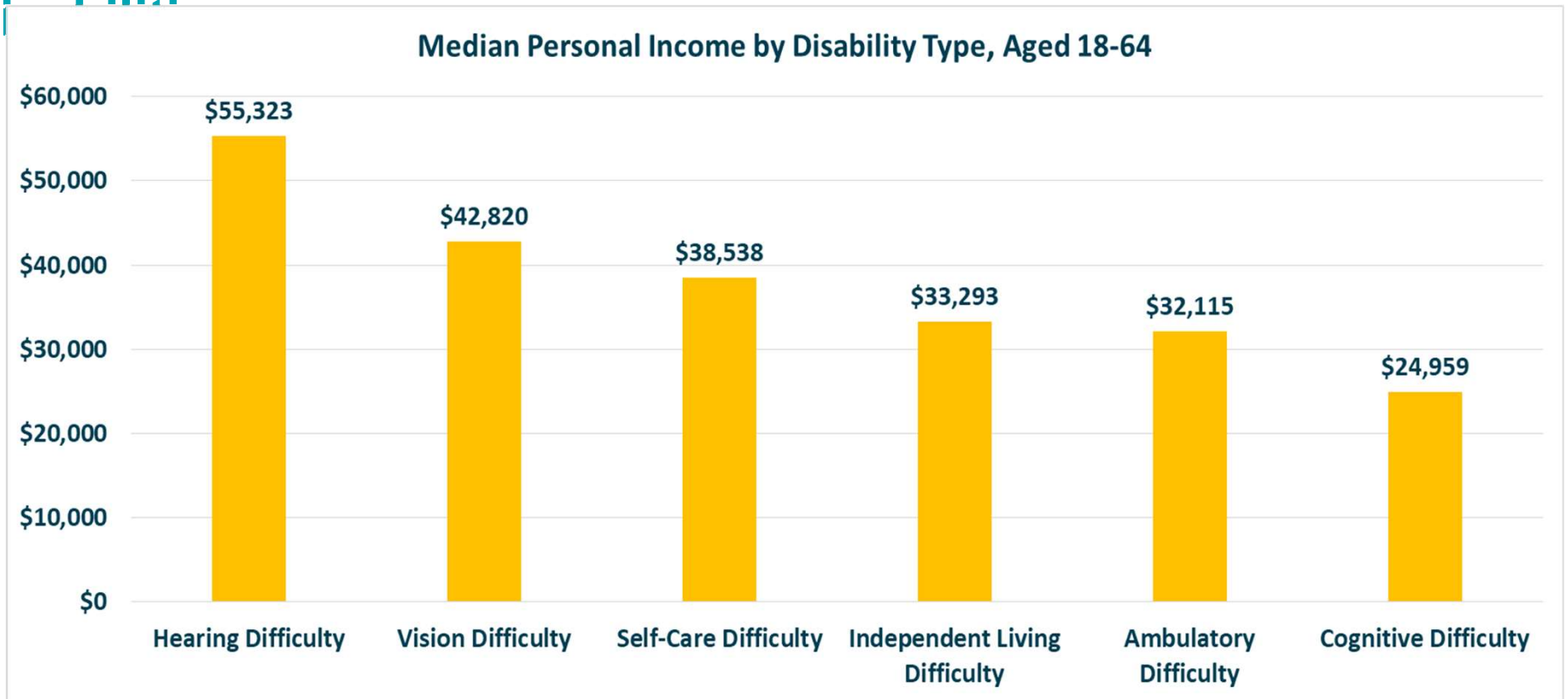
More than 9 percent of Boston resident workers in Building, Grounds, Cleaning, and Maintenance and Production, Transportation, and Material Moving occupations have a disability.



64% of Boston resident workers with disabilities earn less than \$50,000 per year, compared to 46% of workers without disabilities



The median earnings for Boston resident workers with disabilities is \$34,256 compared to \$53,526 for workers without disabilities.



Conclusion

- The number of people with disabilities is increasing and more are working. Higher demand for labor, remote work opportunities and change in composition of disability types due to the covid-19 pandemic partly explain this phenomenon.
- 8.9% of the working age population and 5.1% of the workforce in Boston report having a disability.
- Cognitive difficulty is the main driver of the recent increase in the prevalence of disabilities. It represents a third of all disabilities in 2021.
- Black or African American and Hispanic communities have a higher probability of having a disability and ambulatory difficulty is more prevalent.



**Mayor's Commission for
Persons with Disabilities**

Our office aims to increase opportunities for people with disabilities in the City of Boston by ensuring full & equal participation in all aspects of life.

We work on eliminating barriers in policies, procedures, programs and services, as well as in architecture, communication & attitudes.

City of Boston Disability Commission



On Street Accessible Parking

Our office oversees the installation of accessible parking spots in business areas and in front of neighborhood residences.



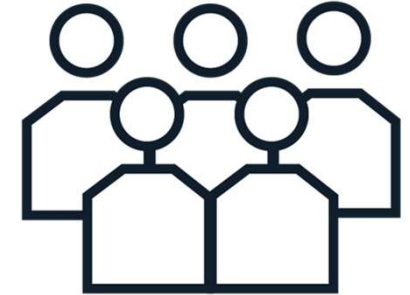
Architectural Access

We lead the City's efforts to create ideal accessibility in Boston's built environment by going beyond meeting only minimum ADA compliance.



Community Engagement

Get Involved - sign up for our email newsletter! Join us at one of our events! Contact us for disability information and referrals.



Disability Commission Advisory Board

13 Boston residents appointed by the Mayor to keep the City informed of important issues in the local disability community.

Work With City Departments

We Provide:

- Trainings on various ADA and Disability related topics.
- Accessibility Checklists for events, meetings and more.
- Technical assistance for City events, programs, etc. to ensure access & ADA/AAB compliance.
- Process complaints of ADA or disability discrimination related to City programs, policies, and built infrastructure (buildings, sidewalks, streets, parks, etc.)
- Information and referrals to other City departments and/or disability programs & services.

We Do Not Provide:

- Assistance with employment related disability discrimination or denial of accommodations. These issues should go through the City's Office of Human Resources and/or Labor Relations.
- Personal equipment to constituents, for example crutches or wheelchairs, for people to use to navigate City Hall.
- Payment for accommodations or modifications.* Many will be free or low cost; however, we do not have funding for other departments.

* The office of Language & Communication access covers the cost for some Effective Communication accommodations.



Disincentives to Work and Save

“Benefits Cliff”:

- Many people with disabilities who are not working are dependent on financial (SSI/SSDI) and medical (Medicaid) benefits in order to survive. They risk losing these benefits if they gain employment, and it is extremely difficult to get these benefit back once you lose eligibility.
- These benefits have financial “cliffs” that keep people un- or under-employed. To qualify for SSI/SSDI/Medicaid, you can't have income over ~\$1,000 per month or assets over \$2,000.
- Medicaid is the only insurer that pays for Personal Care Attendants (PCAs), who are critical providers of ADL care that allows folks with disabilities to live independently. Medicaid is tied to SSI/SSDI eligibility, so if a disabled individual gets a job with a salary that exceeds income limits, they will **lose not only** their SSI/SSDI financial benefit, they **will also lose** their Medicaid.
- The thought of risking these benefits is not only scary, it threatens people’s ability to live in the community independently, because many folks would go to nursing homes without PCA care.

Other Factors:

- Federal law allows employers to pay people with disabilities less than the minimum wage.
- Disabilities acquired on the job are often manual labor, making it difficult to keep working.
- Ableism and discrimination still exist in hiring practices and once people are employed.