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MARCH 2025

BOYS & MEN IN GREATER BOSTON

Challenges in Education,
Employment and Health



ABOUT BOSTON INDICATORS

Boston Indicators is the research center at the Boston Foundation, which works to advance a thriving Greater Boston for all residents across all neighborhoods. We do this by analyzing key indicators of well-being and by researching promising ideas for making our city more prosperous, equitable and just. To ensure that our work informs active efforts to improve our city, we work in deep partnership with community groups, civic leaders and Boston's civic data community to produce special reports and host public convenings.

ABOUT THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR BOYS AND MEN

The American Institute for Boys and Men (AIBM) is a think tank dedicated to conducting nonpartisan research on the well-being of boys and men and designing evidence-based policies to help them thrive. Founded in 2023 by Richard Reeves—a policy expert, father of three boys, and author of *Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male Is Struggling, Why It Matters, and What to Do About It*—AIBM is the first and only national research organization focused exclusively on this population. We envision a world where boys and men of all backgrounds succeed in their families and communities, one where the genders can rise together by supporting each other.

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FOREWORD

Let's address the elephant in the room straight away: a report on boys and men? Really?

Yes, really. But the question is a necessary one. Why focus attention on the challenges facing boys and men when so much work remains to be done for girls and women? The factual answer is that there are, in fact, many areas where boys and men are struggling, especially those with the least economic and social resources. The moral answer is that this is not a zero-sum game: We can do more for boys and men without doing any less for girls and women. Two things can be true at the same time. In fact, the well-being of men directly influences the well-being of women, and vice versa. It is hard to create a world of flourishing women in a world of floundering men. Prominent philanthropist Melinda French Gates [describes this](#) not as an abandonment of a commitment to equality but as an application of it:

“I am trying to change social norms. It’s not even enough to have a conversation about women’s rights in our country. We have to make sure that men and boys do well.”

Indeed, there remain urgent problems affecting women and girls: a persistent pay gap, underrepresentation in leadership, and workplaces that remain unfriendly—or sometimes unsafe—to women. These are serious concerns.

At the same time, many areas where men seem to be thriving are concentrated among the most advantaged. A closer look reveals that men further down the socioeconomic ladder, particularly Black, Latino, non-college-educated, and lower-income men, are falling behind academically and economically. By adopting an intersectional lens, we aim to better understand both the universal and specific challenges faced by boys and men across Greater Boston, focusing on the disparities shaped by race, income, and education.

Boston Indicators grew increasingly aware of these trends through recent research efforts aimed at identifying the subgroups falling furthest behind. At the same time, the newly formed American Institute for Boys and Men (AIBM) brought fresh insights to the conversation, emphasizing the importance of applying a gender lens to research that disaggregates by race and income. This approach aligns with Boston Indicators’ commitment to following the data and being entrepreneurial in analyzing emerging challenges in our region. And so, a natural partnership emerged to explore these issues more deeply at the local level.

The report is organized into four sections, and below are some topline findings from each. While many other important topics—such as incarceration and fatherhood—could have been included, we focus on areas where challenges facing men have been less well-documented. A cross-cutting theme from AIBM’s national research, which also emerges from this local analysis, is that gender gaps are especially large among those who are most disadvantaged, namely lower-income and Black and Latino populations. In some higher-income suburbs, for instance, there is almost no gender gap in educational achievement. But gaps widen significantly when we look at the same data for lower-income students of color in a place like Brockton or New Bedford. And so, across all the report sections we aimed to break out the data by race, educational attainment, and income to better identify the subpopulations being most likely to be left behind.

I. Health

- **Life expectancy:** Men in Massachusetts can expect to live to 78, whereas for women it’s 83. This gap is even larger for Latino men (8 years) and Black men (7 years). Men are at particularly high risk for cardiovascular disease and diabetes.
- **Injury and substance use:** Across Greater Boston, men are twice as likely as women to die from injury. The leading cause of accidental deaths are drug-related: In Massachusetts, men make up 72 percent of opioid overdose deaths. Overall though these deaths decreased somewhat for 2023, but they have continued to increase for Black men.
- **Health care access:** Although health insurance rates in Massachusetts are high compared to elsewhere, gender gaps remain. Men are less likely to have health insurance, with 11 percent of Latino men and 7 percent of Black men aged 18-64 being without health insurance.

II. Mental Health

- **Depression and suicide:** While girls and women experience higher rates of depression, men account for around three-quarters of suicide deaths in Massachusetts. In 2022, the death rate from suicide was almost five times higher among men than women (14 per 100,000 compared to 3 per 100,000).
- **Social Isolation:** In Massachusetts, teens of all ages and genders—including those who are nonbinary and LGBTQ—are experiencing rising rates of social isolation. However, there are no significant differences between male and female teens in this trend. Among adults, though, men tend to be more socially isolated by certain measures. For example, they generally have fewer friends than women and are less likely to rely on them for emotional support (21 percent of men versus 41 percent of women).

III. Education

- **Early struggles, especially in reading:** While boys in Massachusetts rank high compared to their counterparts in other states, they lag Massachusetts girls in 4th grade reading, a gap that widens by 8th grade. Their early advantage in math also largely erodes by middle school, with girls' scores improving and boys' declining.
- **Growing educational inequality among boys:** The gap between high-performing and low-performing boys has widened. For 4th grade reading levels, scores have improved for boys in the 75th percentile and worsened for boys in the 25th and 10th percentiles. Similarly, boys in lower-income school districts are considerably less likely to graduate from high school.
- **College enrollment and completion:** Male high school graduates in Massachusetts are less likely than girls both to enroll in (56 to 71 percent) and, to a lesser extent, to complete college.
- **Educational attainment:** While two out of three young women have completed a bachelor's degree, only 53 percent of young men have done so, including 34 percent of young Black men and 42 percent of young Latino men.

IV. Employment and Wages

- **Broad sectoral shifts and a lack of men in helping professions:** Boston's economy has shifted away from manufacturing and toward professional services, health care, and education—industries where men remain underrepresented. Many jobs in these fields offer decent middle-class pay with good benefits. However, only 24 percent of health-care roles are held by men, in part because too many men fail to view these careers as a “man's work,” leading sometimes to critical labor shortages.
- **Declining male employment:** Without the flexibility to consider careers more common in our changing economy, some men have left the workforce altogether. Prime-age employment for men without a four-year college degree in Massachusetts has dropped from 87 percent in 1983 to 78 percent today.
- **Wage stagnation and inequities:** While there is still a persistent gender pay gap, men without a degree in Massachusetts have seen stagnant wages for a quarter century. Black and Hispanic men earn 35 percent to 45 percent less than White men, and their wages have also stagnated.

To repeat: Identifying, acknowledging, and addressing these issues facing men does not, or should not, detract from efforts to tackle those largely facing women. Neglecting the real challenges of boys and men, however, leaves a dangerous vacuum in our policymaking, our community efforts, and our broader culture. The “choice” between caring about women and girls or caring about men and boys is a false one. This report is an attempt to do this important work in a forward-looking way—rooted in data, guided by empathy, and open to supporting every member of our community.

Some who observe men’s struggles believe the solution is to rewind the clock to a past era—one perceived as simpler or predictable, when men’s roles were more rigid and less scrutinized. But that approach is neither realistic nor desirable. We care about men not only because every individual deserves the opportunity to thrive, but also because when men are healthy and successful, families and communities benefit. What’s needed is an ambitious vision that supports men’s well-being without diminishing the progress women have made. In our families, communities, and workplaces, men and women can and must support one another. We rise—or fall—together.

— Richard Reeves, *AIBM* & Luc Schuster, *Boston Indicators*

A NOTE ON GENDER:

We acknowledge that this report largely assumes a gender binary by focusing on comparisons between men and women. More research is needed to analyze trends for transgender and gender nonconforming individuals. A core challenge is that most public datasets typically report outcomes only for two genders, though there has been progress in recent years toward adding more inclusive options. It’s also important to note that to the extent transgender people respond to surveys by selecting the binary gender they identify with, they are included, but without a specific analysis of any unique challenges or barriers that they may face.

PART I: PHYSICAL HEALTH

Men live shorter lives than women, something often accepted as a given and left unexplored. However, a closer look reveals health conditions that disproportionately affect men, including startling racial disparities.

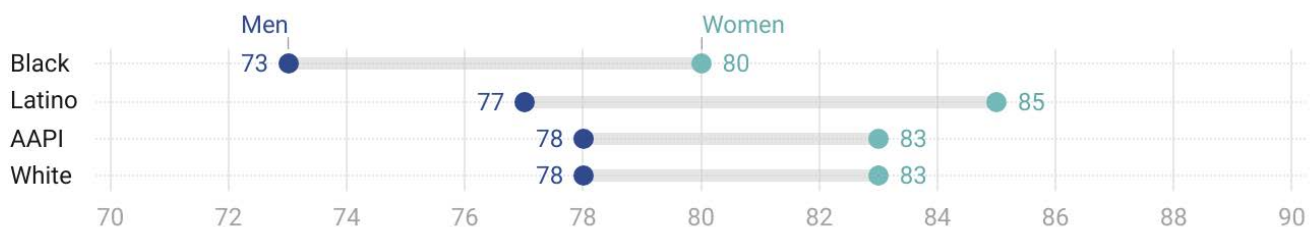
In Massachusetts, the leading causes of death among men in 2022 were cancer, heart disease, unintentional injuries, suicide, and COVID-19. In every age group, men died from these diseases at higher rates than women, underscoring the need to examine gender-specific health risks and behaviors.

Overall men in Massachusetts can expect to live to 78, whereas for women it's 83. Life expectancy disparities by gender are also stark within racial groups, with Latino men in Massachusetts living eight years fewer than Latina women and Black men living seven years fewer than Black women. Among men, racial disparities in life expectancy are pronounced, with Black men expected to live five years less than White men and twelve years less than AAPI men in the state.

Chronic diseases like cancer and heart disease are among the leading causes of death for men in Massachusetts. Men are diagnosed with and die from cancer at significantly higher rates than women. For example, in 2022, the age-adjusted mortality rate for all cancer deaths combined was 156 per 100,000 for men compared to 116 for women.

Men live shorter lives than women.

Life expectancy at birth in years. Massachusetts. 2022.



Note: Single-race alone, non-Latino. Latino can be of any race. Life expectancy at birth is based on expected age at death for a newborn infant, based upon the actual experience of mortality of the population in Massachusetts.

Chart: Boston Indicators | AIBM • Source: Massachusetts Death Report 2022 • Created with Datawrapper

White and Black men have the highest rates of chronic disease.

Age-adjusted death rates per 100,000 people. Massachusetts. 2022.

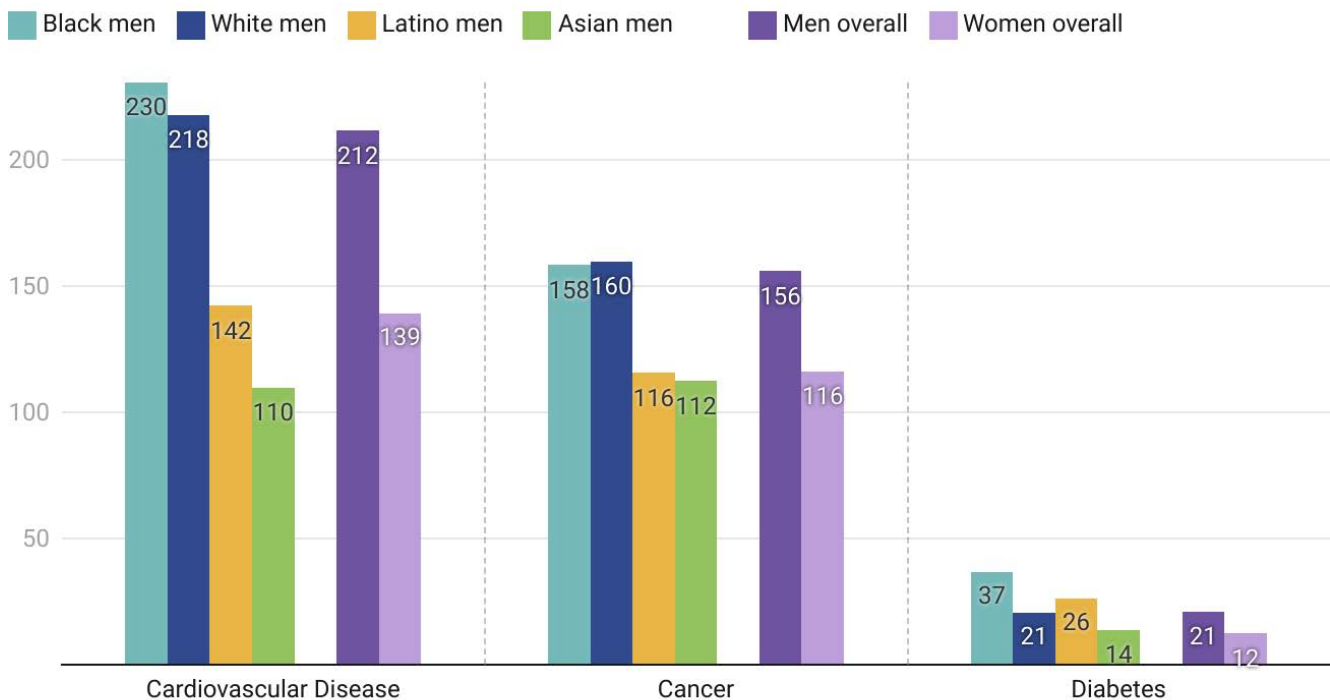


Chart: Boston Indicators | AIBM • Source: U.S. Center for Disease Control & Prevention, CDC Wonder Provisional Mortality Statistics • Created with Datawrapper

Racial disparities also reveal concerning patterns. White and Black men die of cancer at significantly higher rates than Asian and Latino men, with Black men facing particularly alarming outcomes. For example, the age-adjusted mortality rate for prostate cancer among Black men is double the rate for White men (34 per 100,000 compared to 17). These disparities highlight the need for culturally tailored prevention and treatment strategies for men.

Men in Massachusetts also die from major cardiovascular diseases and diabetes at significantly higher rates than women. According to the CDC, in 2022, men died of major cardiovascular diseases at an age-adjusted rate of 212 per 100,000, compared to 139 for women. Similarly, the age-adjusted mortality rate for diabetes was 21 per 100,000 for men, almost double the rate for women (12). Black men experience the highest cardiovascular and diabetes mortality rates.

These disparities are likely driven by a combination of behavioral factors—like higher rates of tobacco and alcohol consumption, differences in stress management, lower rates of health-seeking behavior, and poorer adherence to medical treatment—and, for some men, social determinants of health.¹ Conditions where people are born, live, work, and play can determine or limit their ability to make healthy choices and access medical care. On top of that, public health officials both nationally and at the state level tend to put less attention on men’s health, offering few official goals for men’s health and covering just one preventative measure specific to men under the Affordable Care Act.²

Injury deaths including opioids

Men in Boston have much higher rates than women of premature mortality, or death before age 65.³ In 2021, the leading cause for premature death among men was accidents. In fact, men died prematurely due to an accident at a rate of 80 per 100,000, compared to a rate of 40 for heart disease, the second leading cause of premature mortality for men. Comparatively, women died prematurely due to an accident at a rate of 27 per 100,000. This trend is true across the region, with the rate of injury deaths for men in Greater Boston at twice the rate of women.⁴

The fact that accidental injury death rates are so much higher for men is driven to a large extent by drug overdose deaths. Death from drug poisoning (which include opioid overdose deaths) accounted for more than half of the accidental injury deaths among men of all age groups in Massachusetts in 2022.

Men in Boston have much higher rates than women of premature mortality, or death before age 65. In 2021, the leading cause for premature death among men was accidents.

Accidental deaths are much more common among men.

Age-adjusted unintentional injury deaths per 100,000 people by gender. Massachusetts. 2022.

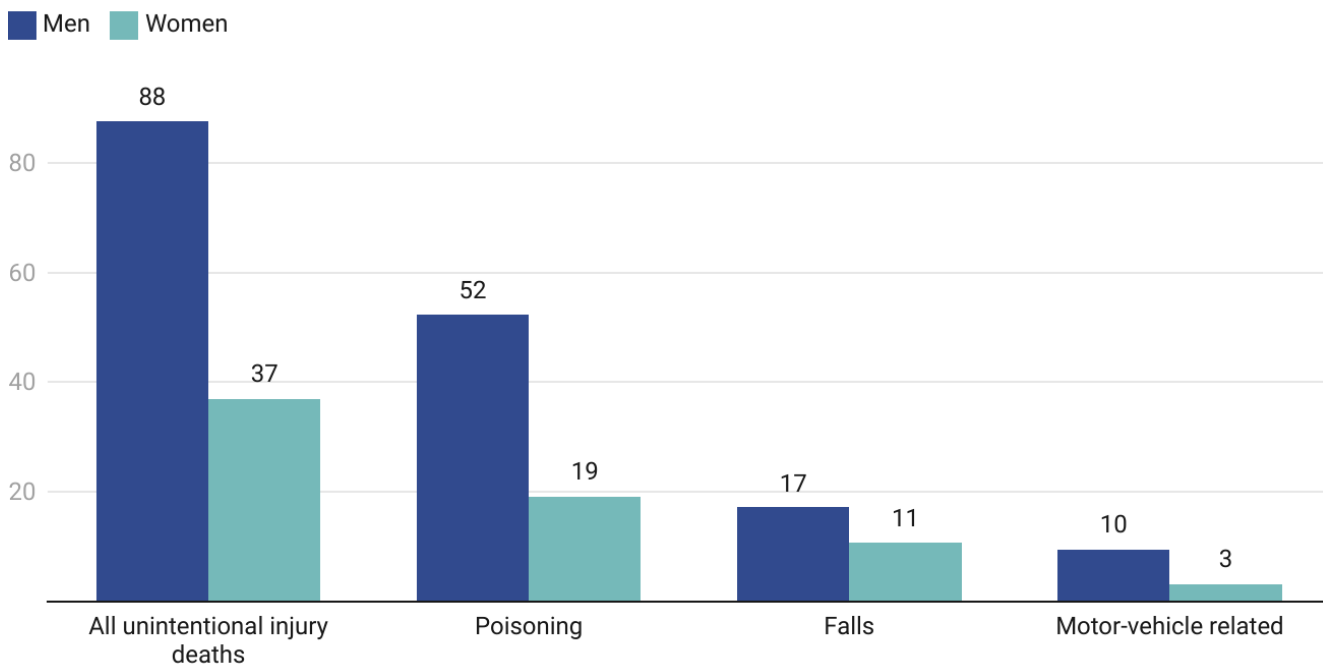


Chart: Boston Indicators | AIBM • Source: Massachusetts Death Report 2022 • Created with Datawrapper

Opioid deaths show a large gender gap.

Age-adjusted opioid-related overdose deaths per 100,000. Massachusetts.

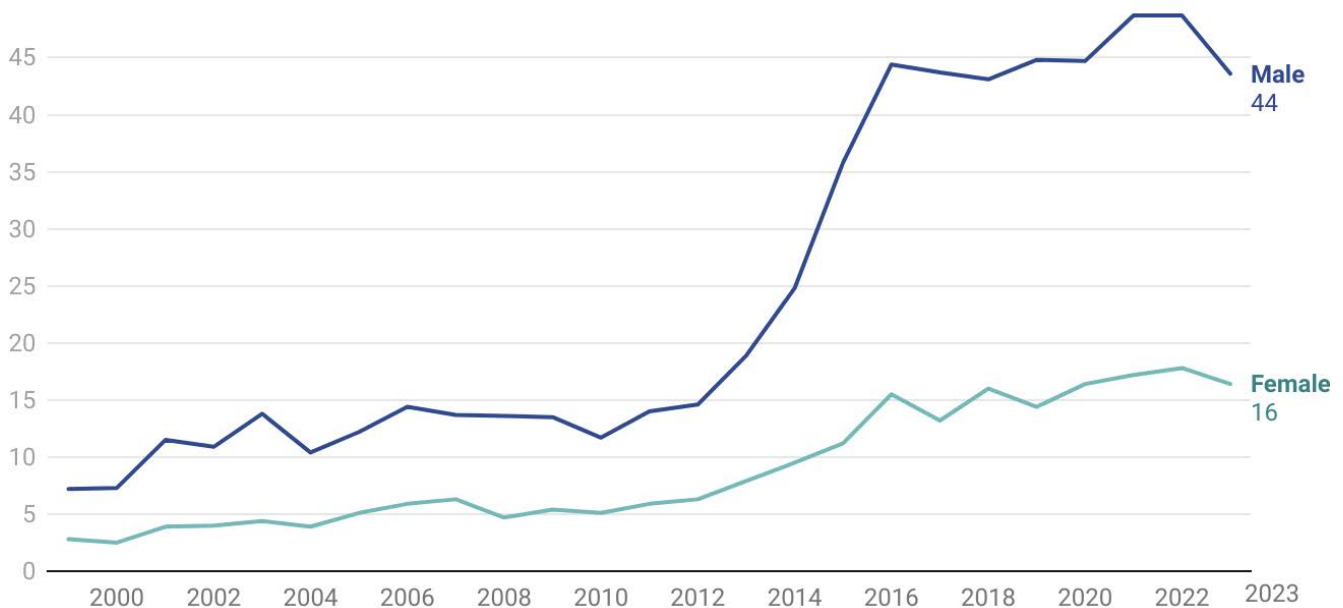


Chart: Boston Indicators | AIBM • Source: Data for 1999-2018 from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Health Statistics. Multiple Cause of Death 1999-2021 on CDC WONDER Online Database. Data for 2019-2023 from Massachusetts Department of Public Health. • Created with Datawrapper

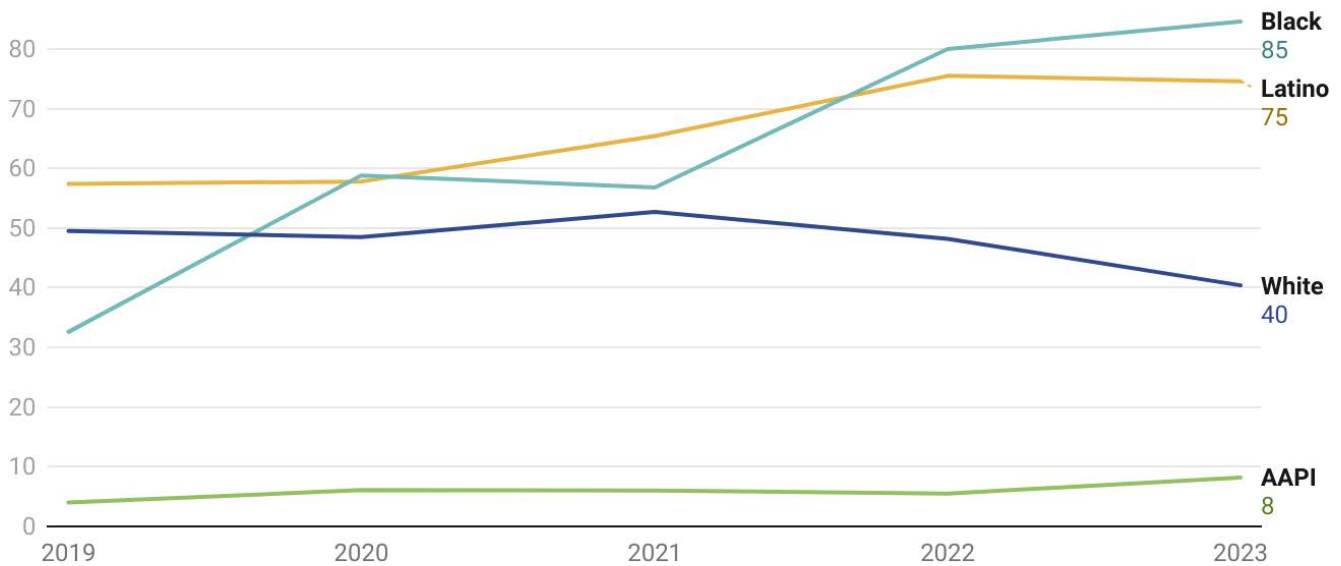
Men have consistently made up the majority of opioid-related deaths in Massachusetts, and their share of deaths has drastically increased since 2010. Though opioid-related overdose deaths among men decreased by 10 percent from 2022 to 2023 (while they decreased by 8 percent among women), men still die of overdose deaths at nearly three times the rate of women and made up 72 percent of all opioid-related deaths in 2023.⁵

Men still die of overdose deaths at **nearly three times** the rate of women and made up 72 percent of all opioid-related deaths in 2023.

Most of the recent decline in opioid-related deaths was among White men, who have benefited from targeted services to treat opioid use disorder. Even as deaths have declined among White men, opioid-overdose deaths remain high for Latino men and continue to climb among Black men, as the graph on the following page illustrates. Recent reporting from the *Boston Globe*⁶ shows that deaths are increasing at a particularly rapid rate among middle-aged and elderly Black men, who now die of overdoses at rates much higher than any other demographic group. This new trend is likely related to lasting effects of the 1980s war on drugs, financial insecurity, and barriers to non-punitive treatment and requires more targeted services tailored specifically to Black men.

While opioid deaths have declined somewhat for White men, they remain elevated for Black and Latino men.

Age-adjusted opioid-related overdose deaths per 100,000 men by race. Massachusetts.



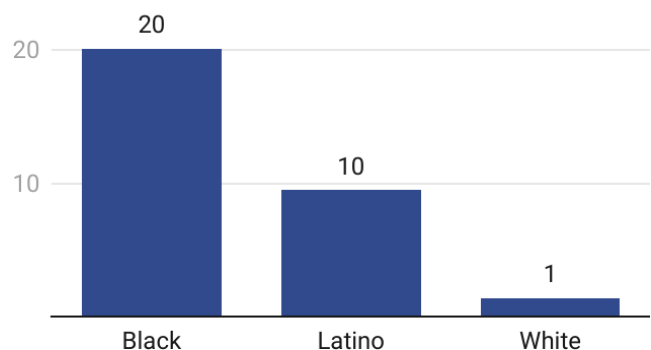
Note: White and Black groups are single race, non-Latino. American Indian rates not included due to small total numbers, but their death rates far outpace all groups at a rate of 113.1 in 2023. Includes confirmed deaths only.

Chart: Boston indicators | AIBM • Source: Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Opioid-Related Overdose Deaths, All Intent, MA Residents - Demographic Highlights, June 2024. • Created with Datawrapper

Death rates from homicide are four times higher among men, with Black men disproportionately affected, both in Massachusetts and nationally. In 2023, Black men in Massachusetts were about 20 times as likely to die from homicide as White men, and twice as likely as Latino men. However, recent trends in Boston show promising improvements, with a significant 50 percent decline in homicides from September 2023 to September 2024, highlighting the city's progress in addressing violence.⁷

Black men are far more likely to die by homicide.

Male homicide victim death rate per 100,000 by race. Massachusetts. 2023.



Note: Rates are age-adjusted. White and Black are single race, non-Latino. Latino can be of any race. Asian and Native American rates not shown due to unreliable estimates.

Chart: Boston Indicators | AIBM • Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC WONDER. • Created with Datawrapper

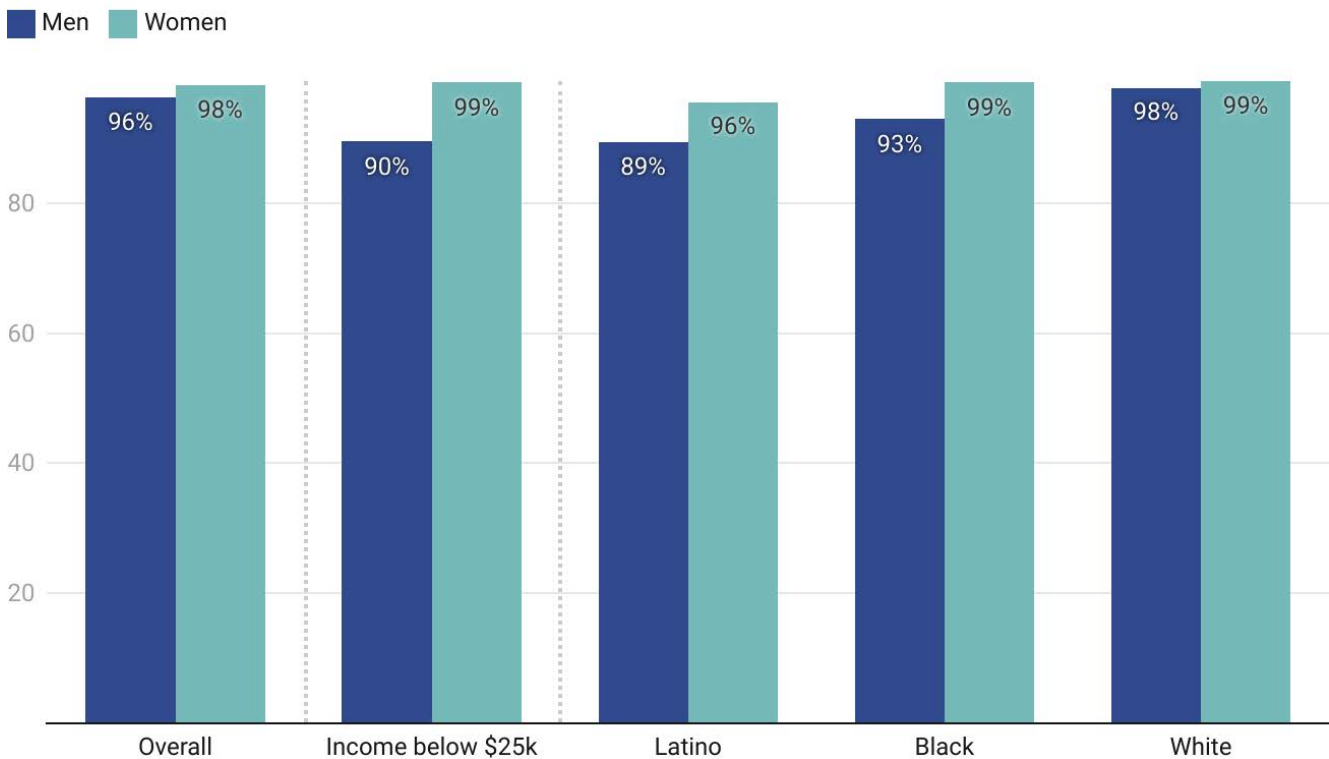
Health-care access

Overall, access to health care in Massachusetts is much better than in other states, but men are more likely to be among the few without health care. In 2022, 4 percent of men compared to 2 percent of women were without health insurance in Massachusetts. This may contribute to worse health outcomes for men.⁸

Health-care coverage also varies by race and income. Latino men aged 18-64 in Massachusetts have the lowest coverage rates, with 11 percent uninsured. Lower-income men are less likely to have health care than lower-income women. For example, 10 percent of men with an income below \$25,000 don't have health insurance, compared with just 1 percent of women with the same income.

Low-income and Latino men are less likely to have health insurance.

Share of men aged 18-64 years with health insurance overall, by income below \$25,000, and by race. Massachusetts. 2022.



Note: White and Black groups are single race, non-Latino. Latino can be of any race.

Chart: Boston Indicators | AIBM • Source: The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). • Created with Datawrapper

PART II:

MENTAL HEALTH

Men’s mental health needs are often overlooked, which can have serious effects on their well-being. While depression is more commonly diagnosed in girls and women, boys and men face a much higher risk of dying by suicide—highlighting a critical gap in mental health support. Recognizing and addressing these challenges is essential to improving mental health outcomes for boys and men in Massachusetts.

Suicide

Across all age groups, boys and men make up more than three-quarters of suicide deaths—a sobering statistic reminding us that men and boys face serious mental health challenges. Boston Indicators recently released a [research brief](#) exploring this issue, highlighting that:

- Boys and men have consistently died by suicide at much higher rates than girls and women. While suicide death rates have declined since peaking in 2018, the gender gap has widened since 2000.
- Men over the age of 85 die at the highest rates, though more men die by suicide at younger ages due to larger population sizes.
- White men in Massachusetts die by suicide at the highest rates (15 per 100,000), followed by Black men (9), Latino men (8) and Asian men (5). Nationally, American Indian or Alaska Native (AIAN) men die at by far the highest rates, but in Massachusetts, their rates are low.⁹
- Other data sources indicate that transgender and nonbinary youth report suicidal ideation and attempt at much higher rates than cisgender boys/men and girls/women, with 51 percent of transgender and nonbinary youth in Massachusetts seriously considering suicide in the past year and 15 percent attempting suicide.¹⁰ No data are available on how many gender nonconforming youth have died by suicide.

Men die by suicide at much higher rates than women.

Age-adjusted deaths per 100,000 people. Massachusetts.

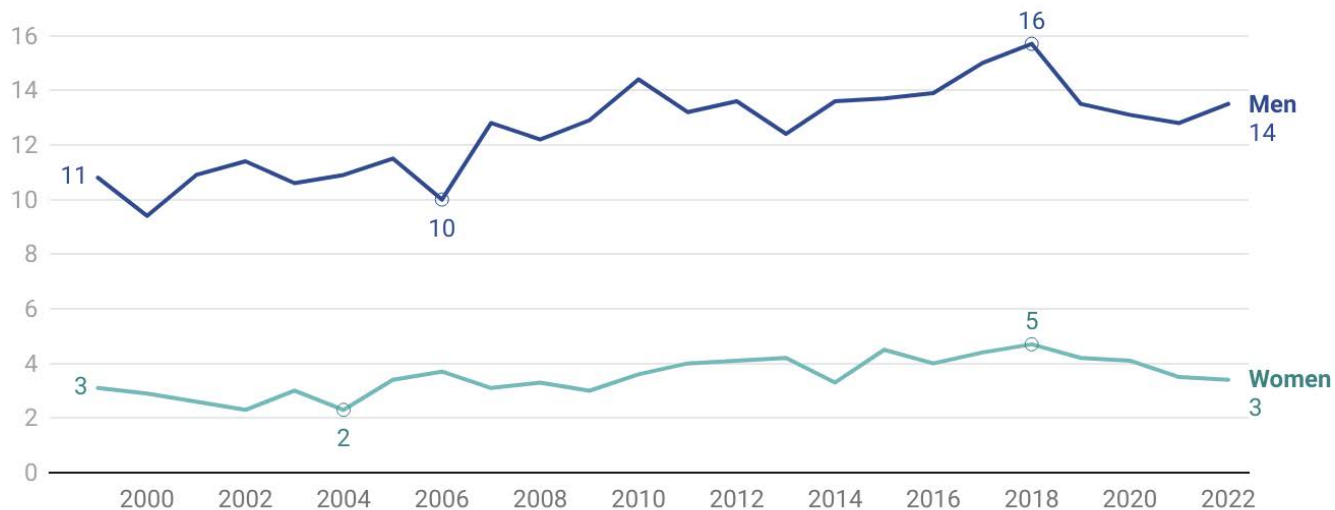


Chart: Boston Indicators | AIBM • Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC WONDER. • Created with Datawrapper

Social isolation

Though certainly not the only factor behind poor mental health among men and boys,¹¹ a lack of strong social connections, combined with limited outlets for emotional expression, can exacerbate mental health issues among men. To get a sense for social isolation among boys and men in Massachusetts, we looked at proxy measures of social connection—which also foster resilience—including participation in group activities and time spent with others.

Some indicators from the 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey of Massachusetts high school students indicate that in some ways, young men may feel more socially connected than young women. For example, boys are more likely than girls to say they have a family member to confide in (80 percent vs. 72 percent, respectively) and report having an adult at school to talk to at the same rate as girls (both 64 percent). Boys also reported feeling that they belong at school at higher rates (66 percent of boys vs. 57 percent of girls).

Though certainly not the only factor behind poor mental health among men and boys, a lack of strong social connections, combined with limited outlets for emotional expression, can exacerbate mental health issues among men.

However, high school boys participate less in activities that connect them to their community, such as organized activities and community service. We don't have access to race and gender disaggregated data for these questions, so we can't explore differences between race groups by gender. That said, the data show that Latino and Black students, regardless of gender, report lower rates of having an adult at school and an adult family member that they can confide in and report volunteering and taking part in activities at lower rates.

While boys don't appear to experience higher rates of social isolation than girls based on some indicators, both groups report pretty high absolute rates of social isolation. For example, 36 percent of high school students, regardless of gender, don't have someone at school that they can confide in, which could contribute to poor mental health.

Unfortunately, social isolation carries on into adulthood, and seems to affect men more than women at older ages. Among adults, for instance, men report receiving less emotional support from their friendships. The Survey Center on American Life found that men tend to have fewer close friends and only 21 percent of men received emotional support from a friend compared to 41 percent of women.¹² Men are also less likely than women to be involved in a religious community¹³ or to spend time volunteering.¹⁴

Social isolation can have significant impacts on the mental health of men and boys. These findings emphasize the need for targeted interventions that promote emotional expression and community involvement among boys and men, to address the risk factors contributing to mental health struggles.

Girls participate more than boys in activities that connect them to their community.

Share of high school students. Massachusetts. 2021.

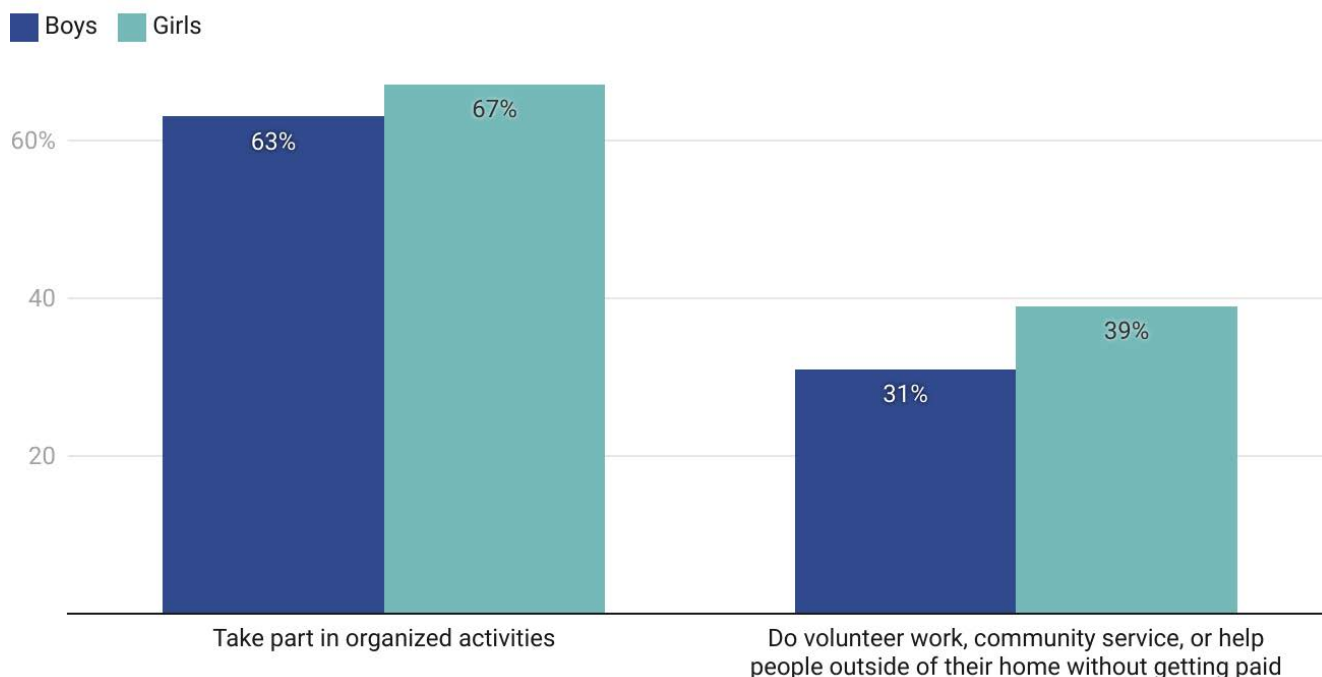


Chart: Boston Indicators | AIBM • Source: 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey • Created with Datawrapper

PART III:

EDUCATION

Quality education is a source of immense local pride in Greater Boston. The region’s public and private schools consistently rank among the nation’s best, drawing families from far and wide. Policymakers and researchers in Massachusetts are vigilant in tracking and analyzing the educational outcomes of underperforming groups, striving to address and mitigate inequities within the system. However, the academic performance of school-aged boys in the region has not received enough attention.

There is a significant gap in educational outcomes between boys and girls, in part driven by the excellent strides made in recent decades to empower girls in the classroom and beyond. For far too long, girls were excluded and discouraged from achieving academically. In 1970, American men received 57 percent of all bachelor’s degrees. By 2021, the gap had reversed to the point where men were conferred only 42 percent of all bachelor’s degrees.¹⁵ Any disparity is disheartening, as an education system that fails to fully support any group is not fulfilling its mission to equip our youth with the skills they need for their future. The academic underperformance of boys in Greater Boston is linked to long-term trends in social mobility, economic adaptability, and even mental health and interpersonal relationships.

While on average, boys in Greater Boston generally perform well on most educational measures compared to their peers nationally, significant gaps exist within the region. While high-performing boys are in some respects doing better than ever, boys that are struggling are falling further behind. The same trend is playing out at the school district level, where it is the less affluent school districts that are seeing more boys not graduate from high school. The result is a double-digit gender gap in both college enrollment and completion, as well as large disparities in educational attainment for Black men. Findings regarding early education outcomes by race are limited by the availability of cross-sectional early education data by sex and race.

K-12 education

Academic performance during the formative K-12 years is a key predictor of future educational and professional opportunities. National research from AIBM reveals that boys, on average, are lagging behind girls across multiple academic indicators, from school readiness at age five to high school GPA and SAT scores. Among high school students, boys are twice as likely as girls to rank in the bottom 10 percent by GPA, while girls are twice as likely as boys to be in the top 10 percent.¹⁶ Furthermore, disparities among boys are widening, with high-achieving (often high-income) boys pulling further ahead while their lower-achieving peers struggle—a pattern referred to as “males at the tails.”¹⁷ This polarization is evident in national SAT trends, where boys are disproportionately represented at both the highest and lowest ends of the academic distribution.

Similar patterns emerge when we look at state level data for Massachusetts. Gender-based academic gaps begin early, with boys trailing behind girls in reading by 4th grade—a gap that widens further by 8th grade. Notably, Massachusetts girls achieve the highest reading scores in the nation, but this does not negate the fact that boys in the state are underperforming relative to their potential. In math, boys initially outperform their female peers, but this advantage narrows considerably by 8th grade, reflecting a broader trend of diminishing performance differences over time.

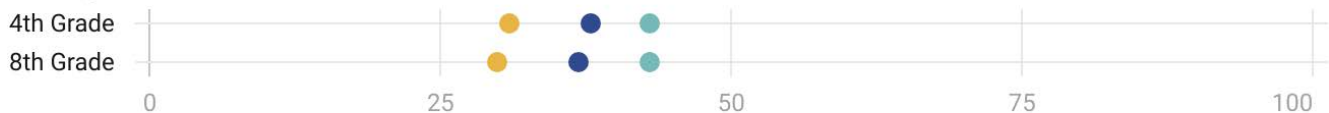
It’s important to note that Massachusetts boys do perform quite well compared to their peers nationwide. Like Massachusetts girls, they consistently rank among the top performers in both reading and math. In 4th grade, they achieve the highest scores nationally in both subjects, and by 8th grade, they maintain the second-highest scores. This strong overall performance highlights the effectiveness of the state’s educational system and suggests that targeted support for boys could further enhance their academic success, ensuring that all students reach their full potential.

Boys are behind girls in reading but ahead in math.

Percent of students at or above NAEP Proficiency Level. Massachusetts. 2024.

● MA Boys ● MA Girls ● National Average

Reading



Math



Chart: Boston Indicators | AIBM • Source: National Assessment of Education Progress • Created with Datawrapper

The national trend of widening inequality in academic achievement among boys is also mirrored in Massachusetts. Fourth-grade reading scores for boys on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) illustrate this divide: Since 1992, scores have risen for those in the 75th and 90th percentiles of the distribution but have declined for those in the 25th and 10th percentiles. As a result, the gap between the top and bottom 10 percent of testers has widened dramatically, from 73 points in 1992 to 108 points in 2022. Although girls also exhibit some degree of polarization, their decline at the lower end is far less pronounced, suggesting that fewer girls are falling behind academically compared to boys.

By high school, academic performance gaps not only persist but, in some cases, widen between boys and girls. For instance, 76 percent of boys in Massachusetts complete and pass all 9th grade courses, compared to 81 percent of girls. This disparity arises at a critical juncture in education, where students are being placed into advanced courses and introduced to postsecondary education pathways. Additionally, while 70 percent of girls enroll in and complete advanced courses in grades 11 and 12, only 64 percent of boys do. The performance gap is narrower for MassCore—the state-recommended program of study designed to align high school coursework with college and workforce expectations. However, these gaps are still significant enough to indicate that, overall, boys are not performing as well as girls in school.

The gap between high-performing and low-performing boys has widened.

NAEP reading scores by percentile for 4th grade boys. Massachusetts.

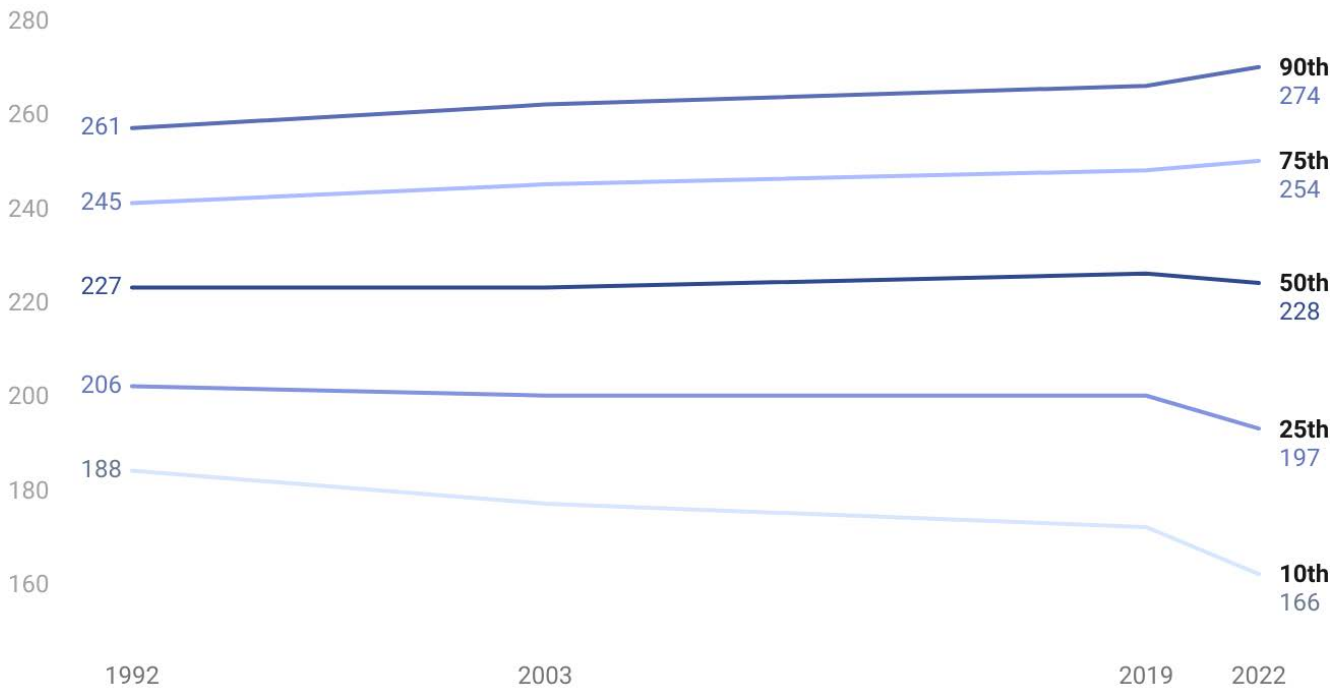


Chart: Boston Indicators | AIBM • Source: National Assessment of Education Progress • Created with Datawrapper

High school boys perform worse academically than their female peers on numerous indicators.

Massachusetts. 2024.

Boys Girls



Grade Nine Course Passing is the rate of grade nine students who completed and passed all courses by subject area. Advanced Course Completion is the number and rate of Grade 11 and 12 students completing Chapter 74 Secondary Cooperative Education programs and/or advanced courses by subject area. MassCore Completion is the percentage of Massachusetts public high school graduates who complete the MassCore curriculum.

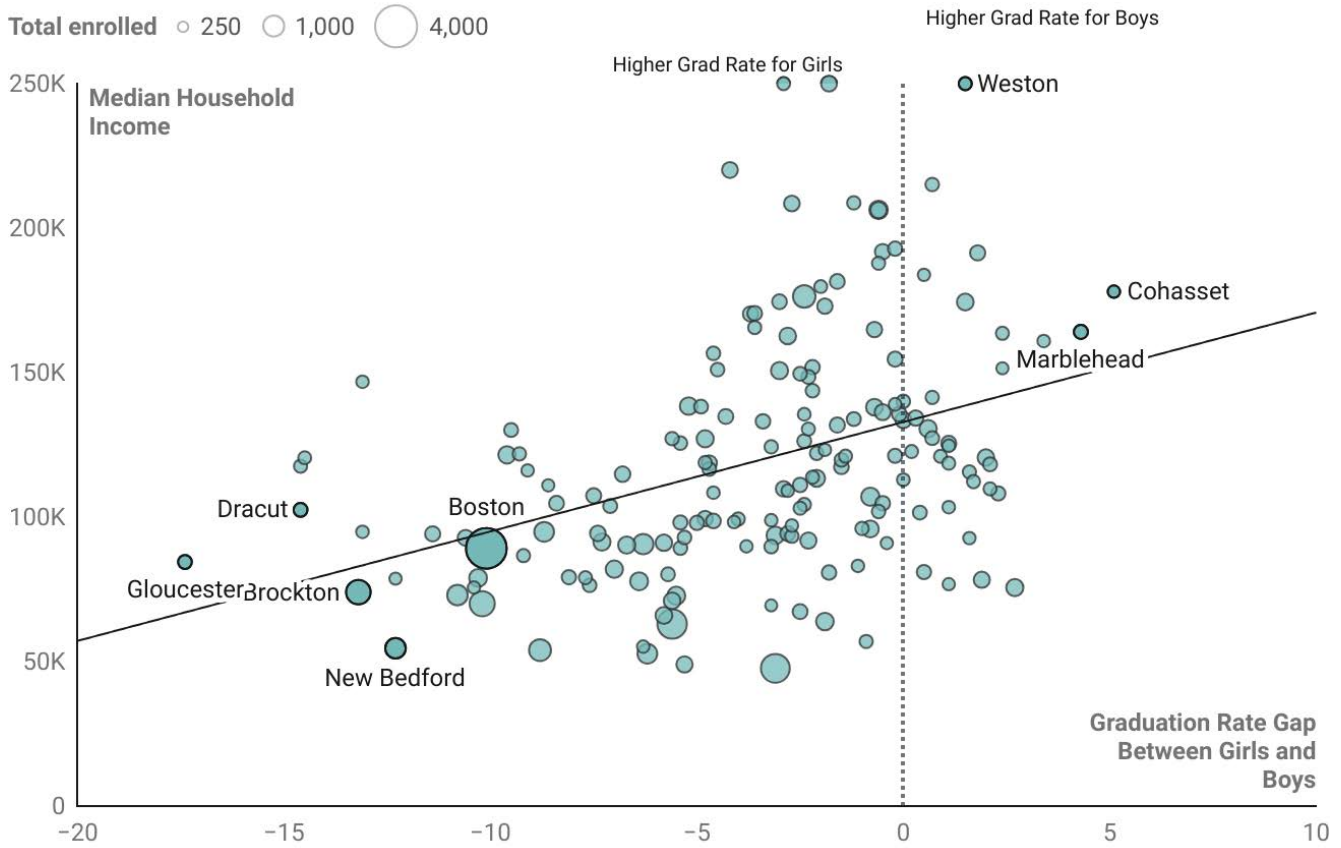
Chart: Boston Indicators | AIBM • Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education • Created with Datawrapper

Overall, boys graduate from high school at lower rates than girls, particularly in lower-income school districts. For Massachusetts as a whole, the four-year adjusted graduation rate is 91 percent for girls and 87 percent for boys, a relatively small disparity. In districts with a median household income above \$150,000, boys and girls graduate at rates within 5 percentage points of each other. However, in the remaining two-thirds of districts with a median household income below \$150,000, the graduation gap between boys and girls widens significantly. In 39 out of 151 school districts, the graduation gap exceeds 5 percentage points, and in 12 of these districts, including Boston Public Schools, the gap is greater than 10 percentage points. Among the districts with the largest disparities in graduation rates are Dracut (-16.3), and Brockton (-13.3). The districts with the lowest male graduation rates are Brockton (68%) and Chelsea (64%).

Overall, boys graduate from high school at lower rates than girls, particularly in lower-income school districts.

The gender-based graduation rate gap is worse in lower-income districts.

Selected subset of Massachusetts school districts. 2023.



The Graduation Rate Gap is the difference between the 4-year Adjusted Graduation Rate for boys and girls for the 2023 graduating cohort. The Adjusted Graduation Rate is the number of students who graduate in 4 years or less divided by the number of students that entered 9th grade 4 years earlier minus transfers out. A gap above 0 occurs when a higher percentage of boys graduate than girls. Median Household Income by School District is tabulated by the National Center for Education Statistics and includes the Household Income of all households in the school district, whether or not there are children present. It caps reported Median Household Income at \$250,000. Vocational, Charter, and other schools are omitted from the data due to a lack of data on Median Household Income. Circle size corresponds to graduating class size.

Chart: Boston Indicators | AIBM • Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, National Center for Education Statistics ACS-ED tabulations. • Created with Datawrapper

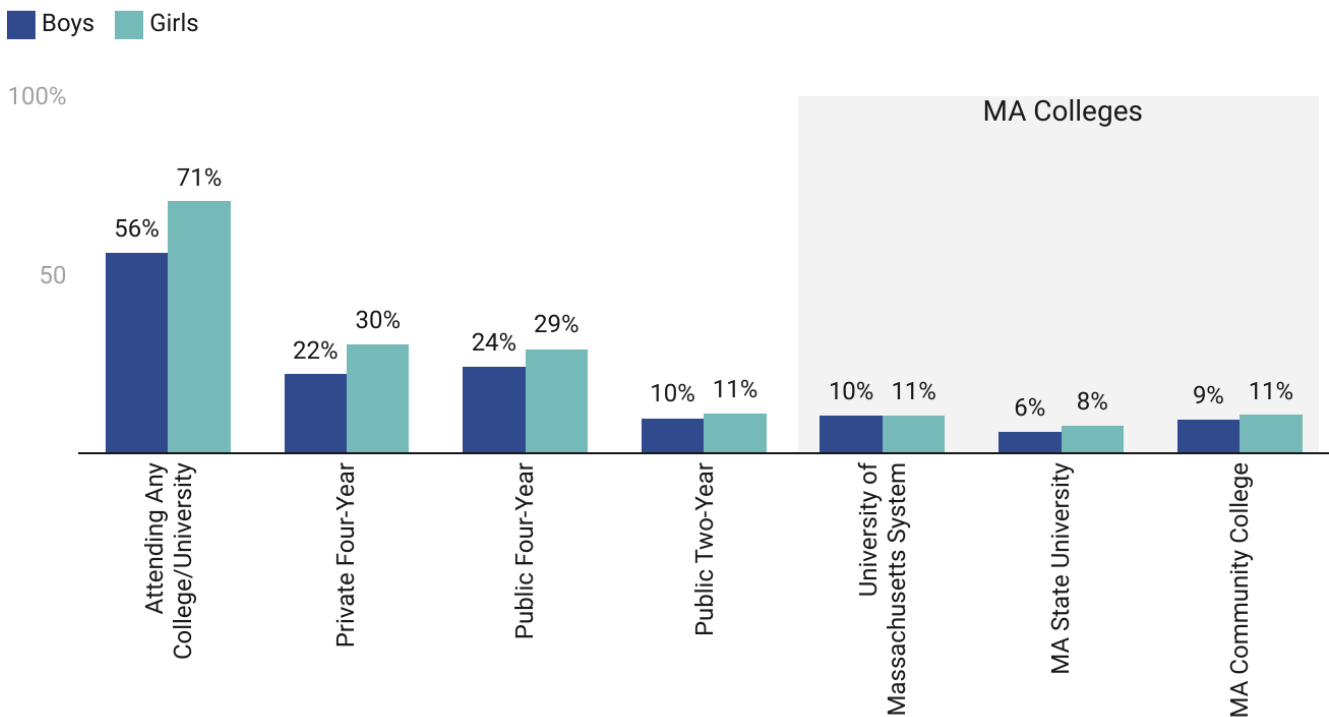
College

Gender-based gaps from K–12 education carry into, and often widen, at the college level. The four-point high school graduation rate gap (91 percent for girls versus 87 percent for boys) grows to a 15-point college entrance rate gap—71 percent of high school girls in Massachusetts enroll in college by the following March compared to only 56 percent for boys, shown in the graph below. Much of this gap comes from significant disparities in who is enrolling in public and private four-year colleges: 46 percent of male high school graduates compared to 59 percent of female graduates.

For students educated in Massachusetts, the gender gap narrows somewhat when considering college completion rates. For example, young men graduate from public 4-year colleges within six years at a rate of 69 percent, compared to 77 percent for young women. The gap for private 4-year schools is even smaller at 5 points (82 to 87 percent, respectively). While the college completion gap is not negligible, it is smaller than the college enrollment gap. In other words, once men do enroll in college, they are nearly as likely as women to finish their degrees. It is at the enrollment stage that young men in Massachusetts are not keeping pace with their female peers.

Young men are less likely than young women to enroll in college, especially private four-year colleges.

High school graduates attending college by the March following their high school graduation year. Massachusetts. 2023.

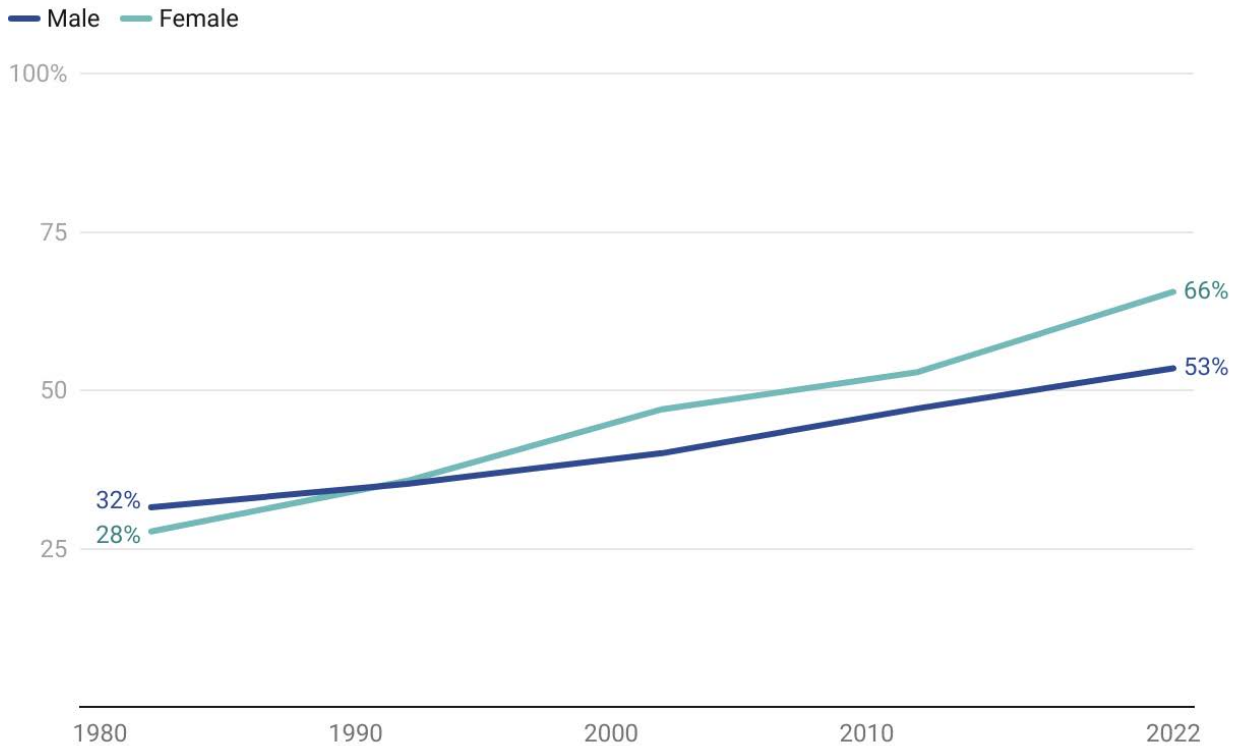


Note: Private Four-Year, Public Four-Year, and Public-Two Year categories include colleges both within and outside of Massachusetts.

Chart: Boston Indicators | AIBM • Source: National Student Clearinghouse • Created with Datawrapper

Young men are now less likely to have a college degree, and the gap is growing.

Percentage of 25- to 34-year olds with a bachelor's degree or above. Massachusetts.



Note: Three-year pooled estimates were calculated for each decade since 1980.

Chart: Boston Indicators | AIBM • Source: Current Population Survey. IPUMS University of Minnesota. www.ipums.org. • Created with Datawrapper

It's worth noting that the educational outcomes of adult men living in Massachusetts also differ from those of boys who grow up in the region's school system. The state's knowledge economy attracts many highly educated individuals to move here from out of state, resulting in a relatively high overall level of educational attainment. Even so, a persistent gap remains between men and women. Since the 1980s, both men and women have been obtaining bachelor's degrees at an increasing rate. However, the proportion of young women in Massachusetts with a bachelor's

degree surpassed the proportion of young men in the 1990s, and now two out of every three young women have a bachelor's degree compared to only 53 percent of young men. While this has been an enormous success for young women, it also suggests that boys are increasingly being left behind in the transition to higher education, which could have long-term implications for their economic prospects and social mobility. Addressing this gap is essential to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to succeed and determine their own paths post-graduation.

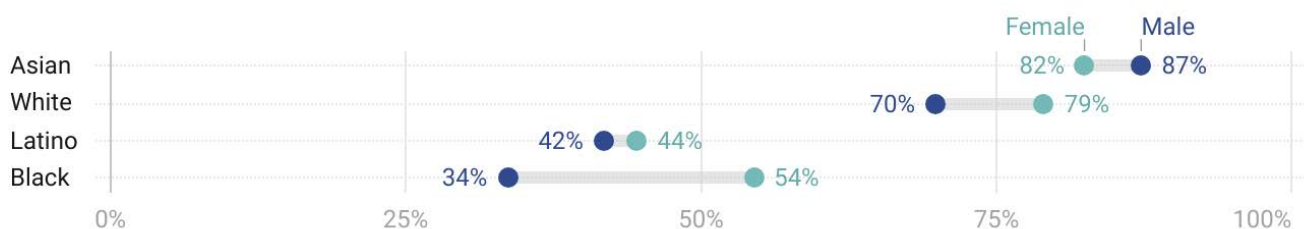
The gender gaps are particularly stark between Black men and women. Only one in every three young Black men have at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 54 percent of young Black women. White men also are considerably outperformed by White women; however, they still outperform the state average. A gender gap in educational attainment is not present in all racial groups, as Latino men and women have similar levels of education and Asian men are actually the highest performing subgroup, with 87 percent of those between the ages of 25 and 34 having at least a bachelor's degree. Young Black and Latino men are thus the least likely to have a college degree in Greater Boston.

Higher educational attainment is strongly correlated with greater civic and community involvement, including spending more time with friends, in public spaces, and participating in community organizations.¹⁸ The persistent educational attainment gap, therefore, has implications beyond the classroom and workforce. In Greater Boston, additional support for boys and young men would help foster positive academic outcomes, ensuring they have the opportunities and resources needed to succeed both in and out of the classroom.

Higher educational attainment is strongly correlated with greater civic and community involvement, including spending more time with friends, in public spaces, and participating in community organizations. The persistent educational attainment gap, therefore, has implications beyond the classroom and workforce.

The college attainment gap between young Black men and women is by far the largest for any racial group.

Percentage of 25- to 34-year olds with a Bachelor's degree or above. Greater Boston. 2023.



Note: Considers all individuals aged 25-34 with a Bachelor's degree or Master's degree and above.

Chart: Boston Indicators | AIBM • Source: Source: 2023 1-year American Community Survey. IPUMS, University of Minnesota. www.ipums.org • Created with Datawrapper

PART IV: EMPLOYMENT AND WAGES

Greater Boston’s labor market reflects a mix of progress and challenges for both men and women, shaped by significant societal and economic shifts.

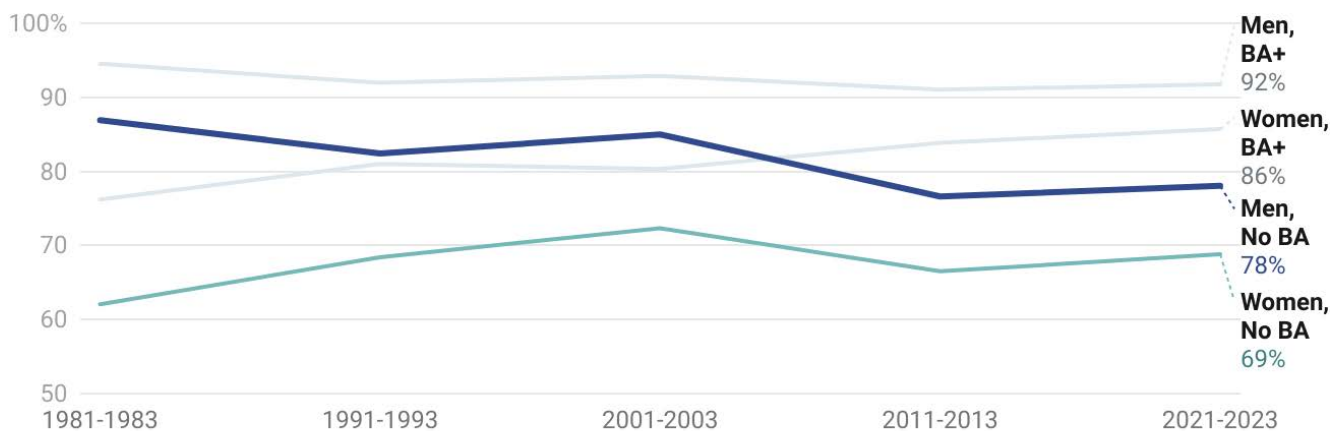
The region continues to outperform national averages in employment and wage growth, driven by its diverse knowledge economy. For women especially, the story is one of remarkable progress. Driven by decades of effective advocacy and broader societal shifts, opportunities for women have expanded dramatically, enabling them to play a much larger role in the formal economy. This transformation is

reflected in employment data: The share of prime-age women employed in Massachusetts rose from 65 percent in 1983 to 80 percent in 2023. This is not only a positive story for gender equity but also a significant contributor to the economic vitality of the region.

In contrast, male workforce participation reveals a more complex and concerning trajectory. While men in Massachusetts continue to outperform national averages in employment levels, economic mobility, and wages, prime-age male employment has declined slightly over the past four decades, falling from 90 percent in 1983 to 85 percent in 2023. This overall decline, though less dramatic than the gains made by women, becomes striking when viewed through the lens of educational attainment. For men without a

Men without a bachelor’s degree see decline in employment.

Prime-age employment rate. Massachusetts.



Note: Employment rate limited to prime-age (25-54 years old) population. Three-year pooled estimates were calculated for each decade since 1980.

Chart: AIBM / Boston Indicators • Source: Current Population Survey. IPUMS University of Minnesota. www.ipums.org • Created with Datawrapper

college degree, prime-age employment has dropped by 9 percentage points, from 87 percent to 78 percent, reflecting widespread struggles for those without a college degree in the 21st century economy—a challenge echoed nationwide. Men without a BA are now much less likely to be employed than women with a BA, a dramatic reversal of the picture just a few decades ago. By contrast, the employment for men with a four-year college degree has dropped by just 3 percentage points, from 95 percent to 92 percent (see graph previous page).

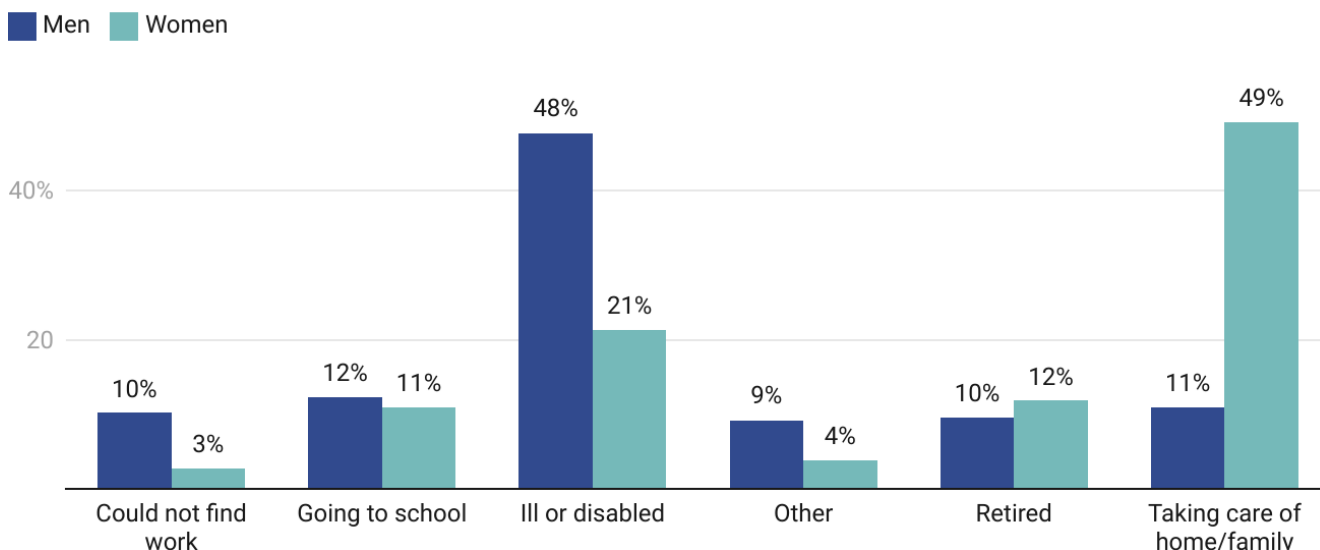
Understanding the drivers of this decline requires exploring the intersection of education, sectoral shifts, family dynamics, race and ethnicity, health, and occupational barriers. As the economy evolves, traditional industries that once provided stable employment for men without a college degree have contracted, leaving fewer opportunities.

Meanwhile, the societal changes that have propelled women into the workforce have not been mirrored by similar supports or adjustments for men facing these employment challenges. Greater Boston’s labor market trends highlight both the positive impact of increased gender equity and the pressing need to address the barriers that are increasingly sidelining some men.

People can be out of the paid labor force for a variety of reasons. They could be in education, caring for children or other family members, or in ill health. It matters not only whether people are not in paid work, but also *why* they are not. Half of the women of prime age in Massachusetts who did not work the entire calendar year say they are “taking care of home/family,” meaning that they are indeed working, but just not in the formal economy. By contrast about one in 10 non-working men cite caring responsibilities. Almost half of the non-working men (48 percent) say that they are “ill or disabled.”

For those not in paid work, women are usually engaged in caretaking, and men are likely ill or disabled.

Reasons why prime-age adults didn't work in the previous year. Massachusetts. 2023-2024.



Note: Data taken from pooled estimates from 2023 and 2024 CPS ASEC. Responses are to the given as the main reason for not working at all during the previous calendar year.

Chart: Boston Indicators | AIBM • Source: Current Population Survey. IPUMS University of Minnesota. www.ipums.org. • Created with Datawrapper

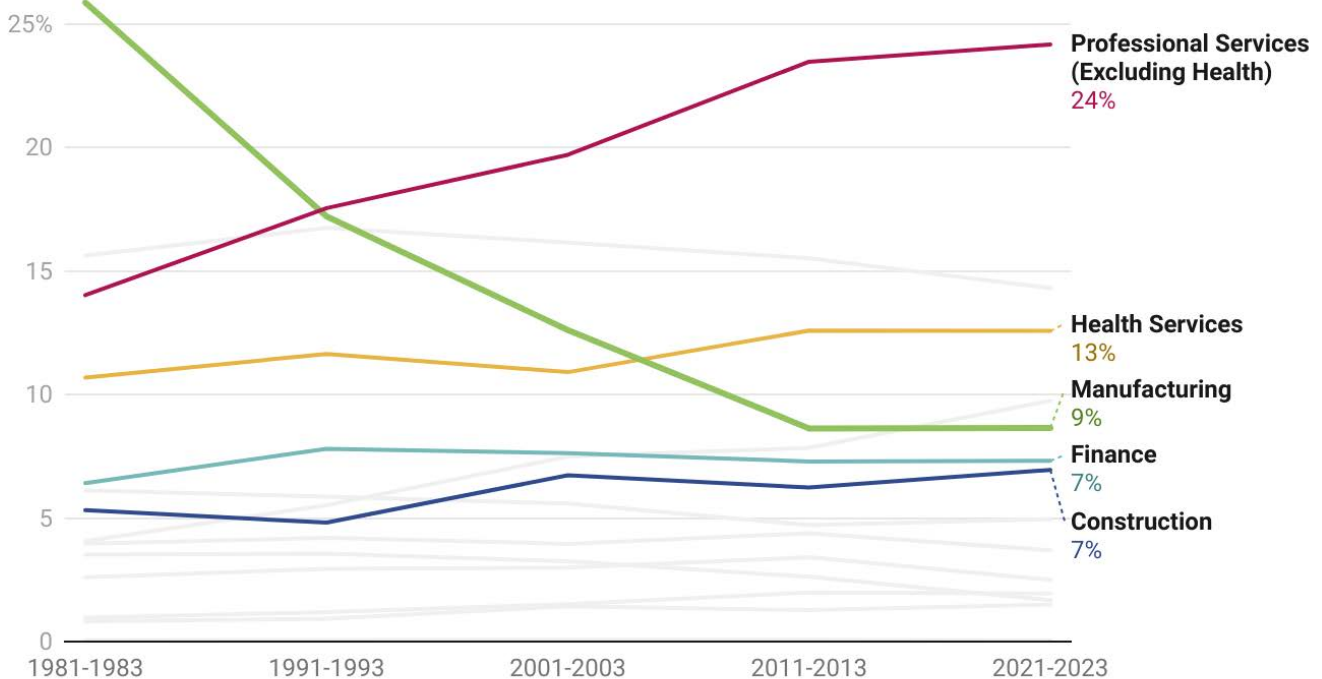
Broad economic and sectoral changes

Over the last 50 years, the types of jobs occupied by men in Massachusetts have also changed significantly. In the early 1980s, about one in three men worked in manufacturing, a sector that now employs only about one in 12 overall. Meanwhile, professional services—including education, and technical fields—have grown substantially. Today, one in four men in Massachusetts works in this sector, reflecting broader economic shifts away from blue-collar industries and toward STEM, service sector, and health-care fields.

Men remain in the majority in blue-collar jobs such as construction, utilities, and manufacturing. However, in the last decade, three of the four industries that experienced the largest job declines in Greater Boston—manufacturing, retail trade, and wholesale trade—have been male-dominated. While U.S. manufacturing added more than one million jobs during this period, Greater Boston saw a decline, with men accounting for the entire loss. On the other hand, male employment has increased in industries such as construction, transportation, finance, and insurance.

Manufacturing makes up a smaller share of total employment today.

Industry shares of total employment. Massachusetts.



Note: Employment rate limited to employed population, including both men and women. Three-year pooled estimates were calculated for each decade since 1980.

Chart: Boston Indicators | AIBM • Source: Current Population Survey, IPUMS University of Minnesota. www.ipums.org. • Created with Datawrapper

Men have lost jobs in manufacturing, but gained in professional services and construction.

Net change in number of employed individuals by industry and gender. Greater Boston. 2011-2023.

Male Female

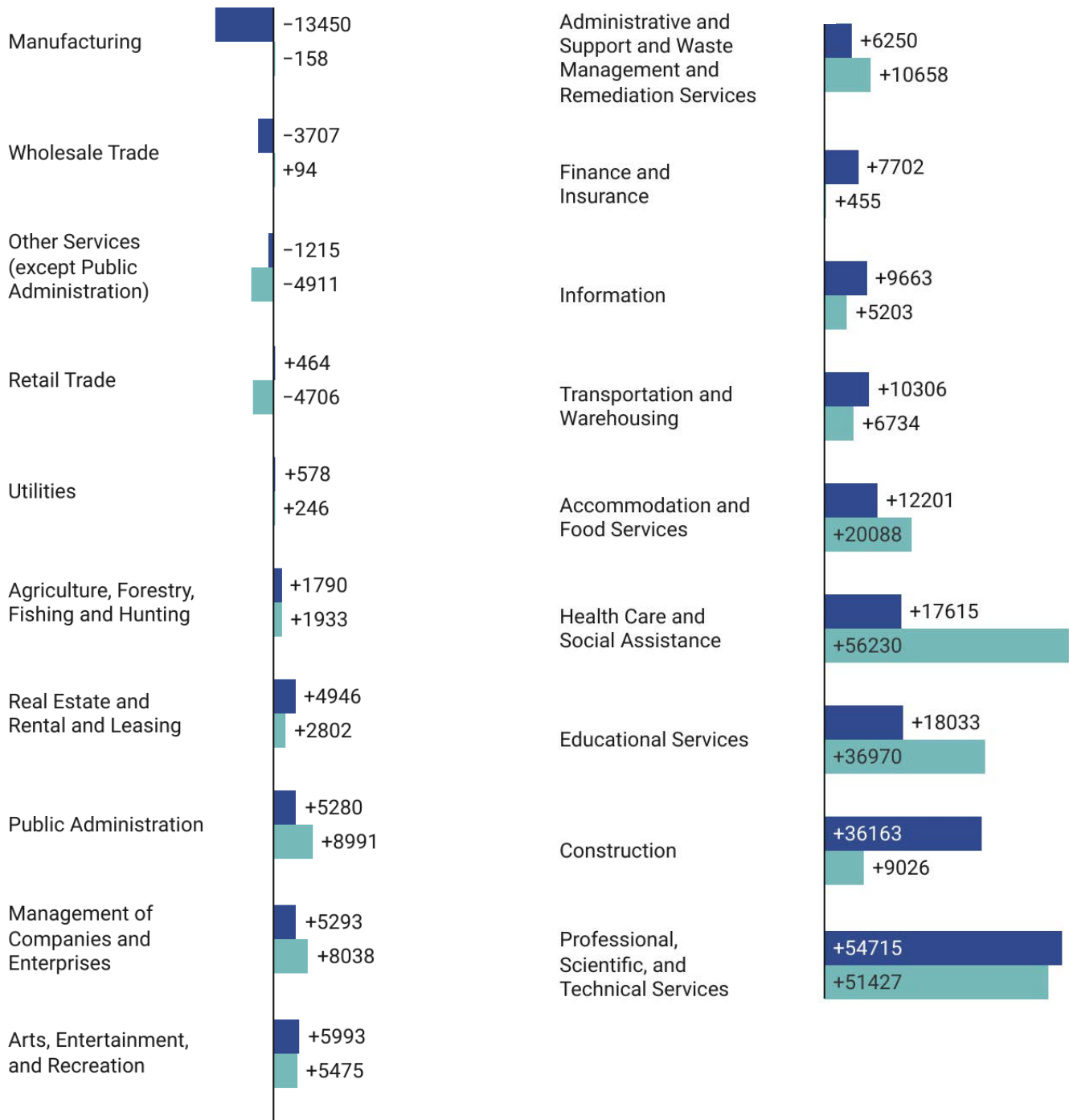


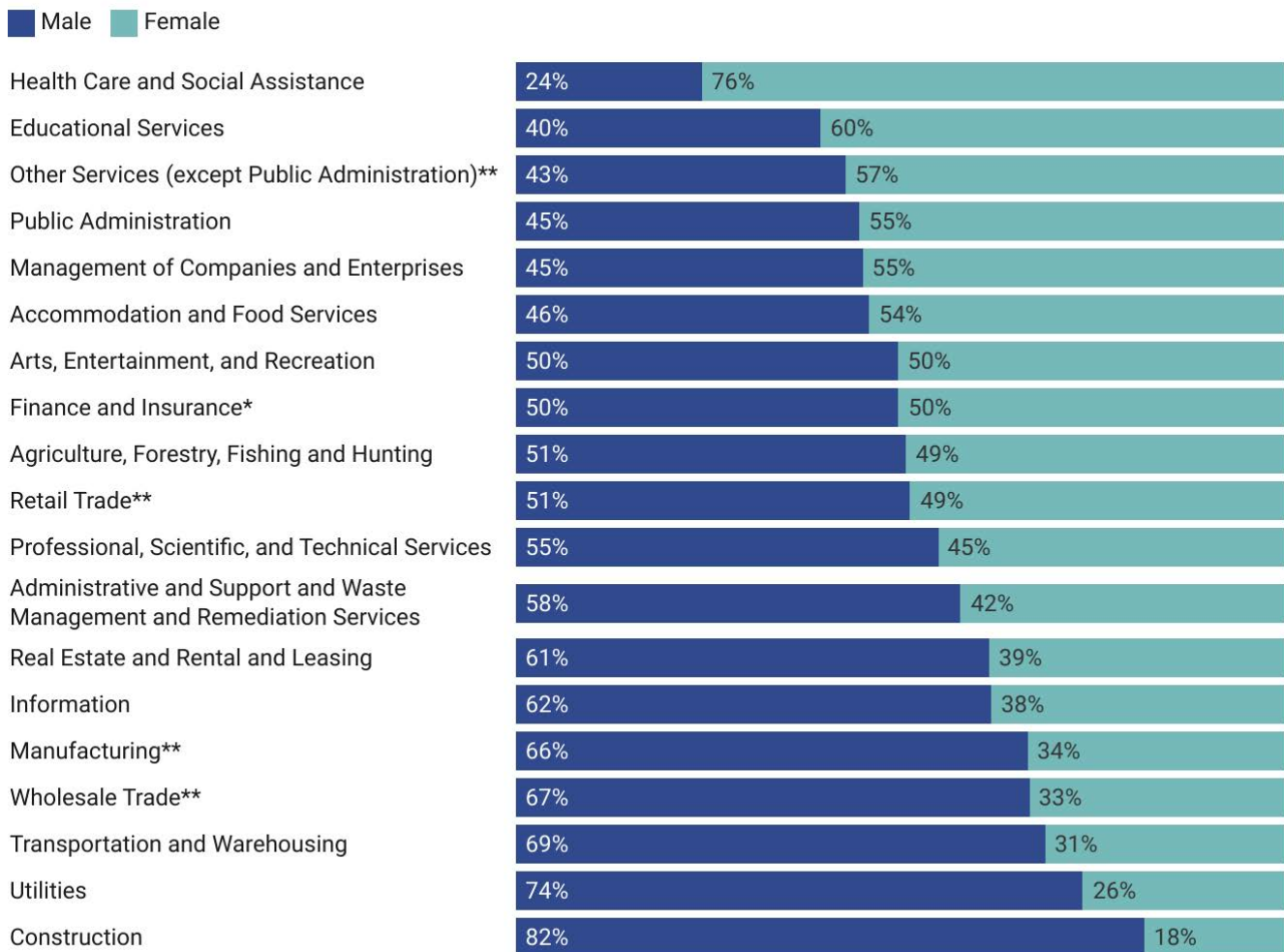
Chart: Boston Indicators | AIBM • Source: U.S. Census Quarterly Workforce Indicators • Created with Datawrapper

Men have long been underrepresented in health care and education, despite the growth of these fields in Massachusetts. These traditionally female-dominated sectors, which we call “HEAL” (Health, Education, Administration, and Literacy), are key drivers of job growth both nationally and in Greater Boston. HEAL fields offer not only opportunities for individual economic advancement but are also essential for addressing critical societal needs. There’s currently huge demand for HEAL workers.¹⁹ Filling these roles requires leveraging the full labor force, including men.

Men currently comprise just 24 percent of the health-care workforce, a figure that has remained stagnant even as the sector has grown by 22 percent since 2011. Engaging men in HEAL fields could bring additional benefits, such as encouraging mental health support among men or providing positive role models for boys in school.

Just one in four health-care jobs are held by men.

Share of industry by gender. Greater Boston. 2023.



Note: Sectors at the top are predominantly female, the middle is more evenly split, and male representation increases in sectors towards the bottom. * indicates less than 10% growth from 2011-2023. ** indicates a net loss in jobs from 2011-2023.

Chart: Boston Indicators | AIBM • Source: U.S. Census Quarterly Workforce Indicators • Created with Datawrapper

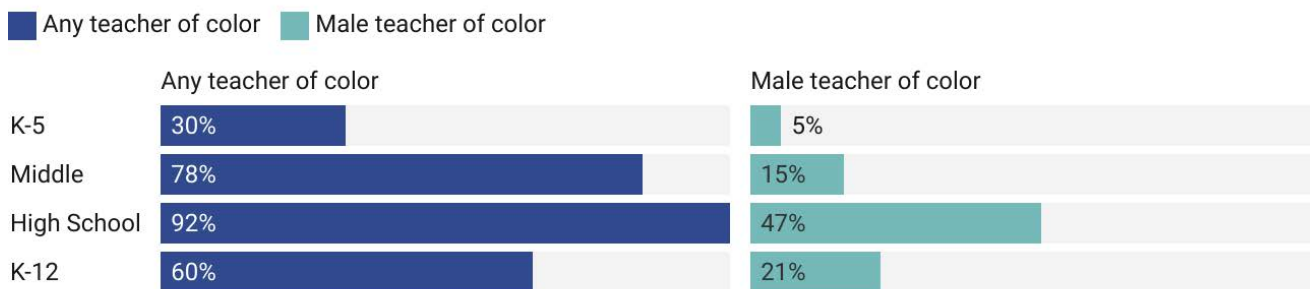
Societal stereotypes, and in particular the perception of HEAL jobs as traditionally feminine or offering lower pay, may deter men from pursuing these careers.²⁰ Many HEAL roles require advanced education or specialized training, creating barriers for men with higher education credentials.²¹ Just as significant efforts have successfully increased the participation of women in STEM fields, similar initiatives could help attract more men into HEAL careers.²²

Greater Boston's labor market shows some unique gender patterns compared to the national level. For example, while agriculture nationally is male-dominated (64 percent male vs. 36 percent female), Greater Boston achieves nearly equal male-to-female representation in the sector. Management roles at the national level are almost evenly split (49 percent male vs. 51 percent female), but in Greater Boston women are slightly more likely than men to hold these positions (45 percent male vs. 55 percent female).

Within education, only 22 percent of K–12 teachers in Massachusetts are men, close to the national average of 23 percent and lower than other states in the region.²³ The national share of male teachers has declined from 33 percent in 1980, and while equivalent local data is unavailable, it is likely that Massachusetts has experienced a similar trend.²⁴ Boys of color are especially unlikely to have teachers who look like them, which may be particularly important for their learning.²⁵ A recent [MassInc report](#) highlights that even in the more diverse school districts that make up Metro Boston—where an estimated 30 percent of teachers are people of color—the likelihood of a K–12 student being assigned to a male teacher of color in any given year is strikingly low.²⁶ In elementary school, it stands at just 5 percent. While this improves to 47 percent in high school, the K–12 average remains only 21 percent, underscoring significant gender and racial representation gaps for boys of color.

A student is highly unlikely to have a male teacher of color in elementary school.

Probabilities of assignment each year to any teacher of color versus a male teacher of color. Metro Boston. 2022.



Note: Assumes one classroom instructor per year in K-5, three in K-8, and 5 in high school, equating to 35 instructors across K-12. Also assumes male teachers make up 18 percent of the teacher of color workforce in K-8 and 40 percent in K-12.

Chart: Boston Indicators | AIBM • Source: Source: MassINC's analysis of data from the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education • Created with Datawrapper

Wage gaps and growth

Compared to the U.S. overall, men in Massachusetts are high earners, with median weekly earnings around \$1,550, about 30 percent higher than the national average for men.²⁷ Men in Massachusetts overall have also seen notable growth in their wages over time, increasing by about 20 percent in real terms over the past two decades.

It is important to note that this growth in male wages has taken place in the context of an ongoing gender wage gap,²⁸ in which overall, women in Massachusetts earn on average 86 cents for every male dollar.²⁹ This is slightly better than the national gap of 84 cents on the dollar and the gap is narrowing by a cent or two every year. Racial disparities exacerbate the issue for women of color. Native American women earn 63 cents for every dollar that a male earns, Black women earn 59 cents, and Latina women earn just 53 cents.

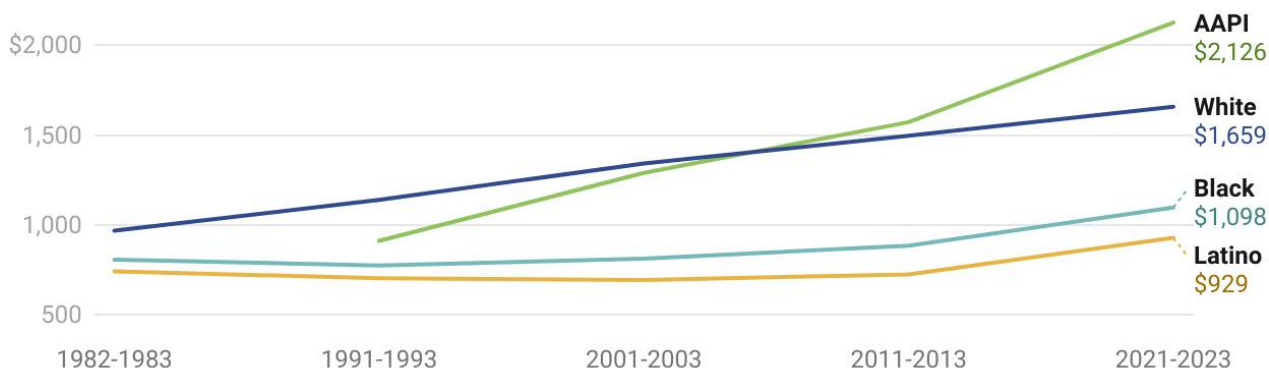
Addressing these ongoing gender disparities is crucial, as is addressing racial wage gaps among men. Black and Latino men are far behind, and over time, wages for men at the lower end of the income ladder have stagnated.

The trend in wages varies substantially by race for both men and women, however. While White and AAPI men have seen notable wage growth in Massachusetts over the last 20 years, Black and Latino men have seen far less growth. Compared to White men today, AAPI men earn about 30 percent more; Black men, about 35 percent less; and Latino men, about 45 percent less.

The growing racial wage gap is partially explained by the increasing economic returns to a college degree. In Massachusetts, men without bachelor's degrees have seen far slower wage growth since 1983—mirroring national trends—while men with a college degree or higher have experienced inflation-adjusted wage increases of 60 percent. Although men in Massachusetts earn more than their national counterparts regardless of education, the state's high cost of living must also be considered when comparing earnings.

Black and Latino men see slowest wage growth.

Median weekly full-time earnings for men, 2023 dollars. Massachusetts.

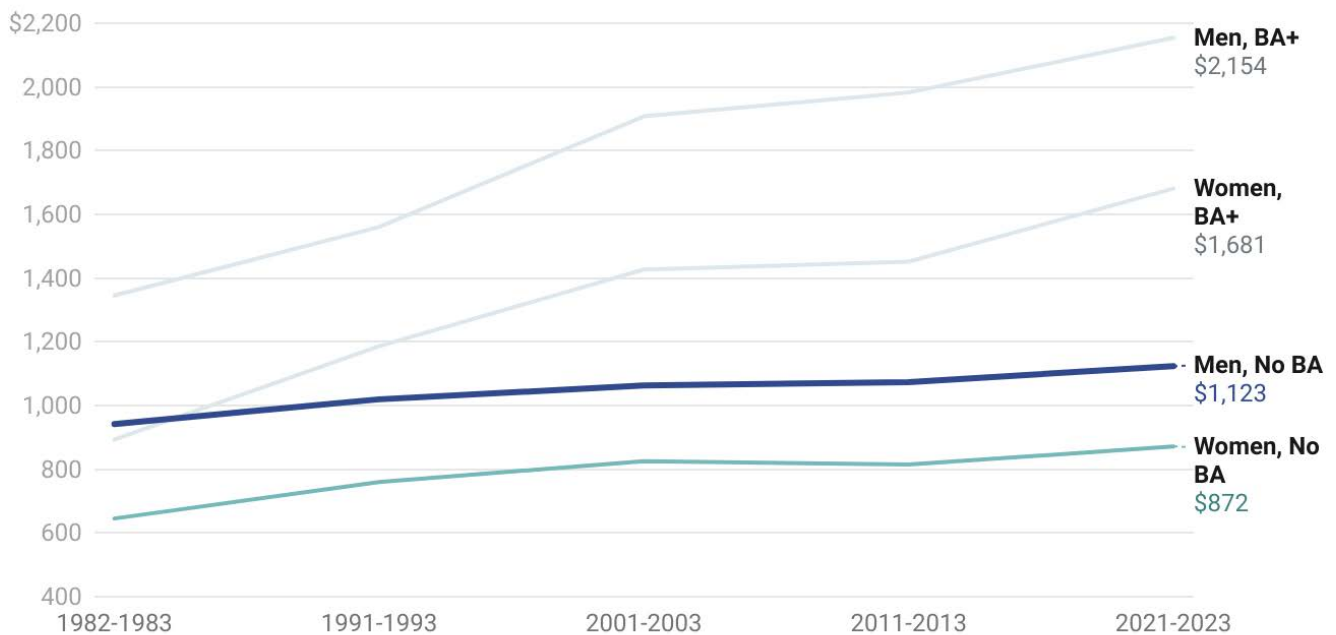


Note: Calculations were limited to full-time, employed, wage and salaried men aged at least 16 years. Three-year pooled estimates were calculated for each decade since 1990. Two-year pooled estimates were calculated for 1980. White, Black and AAPI are non-Hispanic. Latino can be of any race. AAPI data not available in 1982-1983.

Chart: Boston Indicators | AIBM • Source: Current Population Survey, IPUMS University of Minnesota. www.ipums.org. • Created with Datawrapper

Men without a bachelor's degree see wage stagnation.

Median weekly full-time earnings, 2023 dollars. Massachusetts.



Note: Calculations were limited to full-time, employed, wage and salaried population aged at least 25 years. Three-year pooled estimates were calculated for each decade since 1990. Two-year pooled estimates were calculated for 1980.

Chart: Boston Indicators | AIBM • Source: Current Population Survey. IPUMS University of Minnesota. www.ipums.org. • Created with Datawrapper

Economic mobility

Similar themes emerge when we examine economic mobility, which measures how strongly parental economic status determines their child's economic outcomes. For the most recent data, boys appear to be falling behind, and especially Black boys.

Economic mobility is relatively high for men in Greater Boston, according to data from Opportunity Insights, which collected census and tax data to analyze economic mobility over time by gender, race, and geographic region.³⁰ A boy born in a low-income family (25th percentile) in 1992 could expect to almost reach the middle of the income distribution by the age of 27, slightly above national levels. And boys born to homes at the median income in Greater Boston can expect to do slightly better than their parents, while at the national level, they do slightly worse.

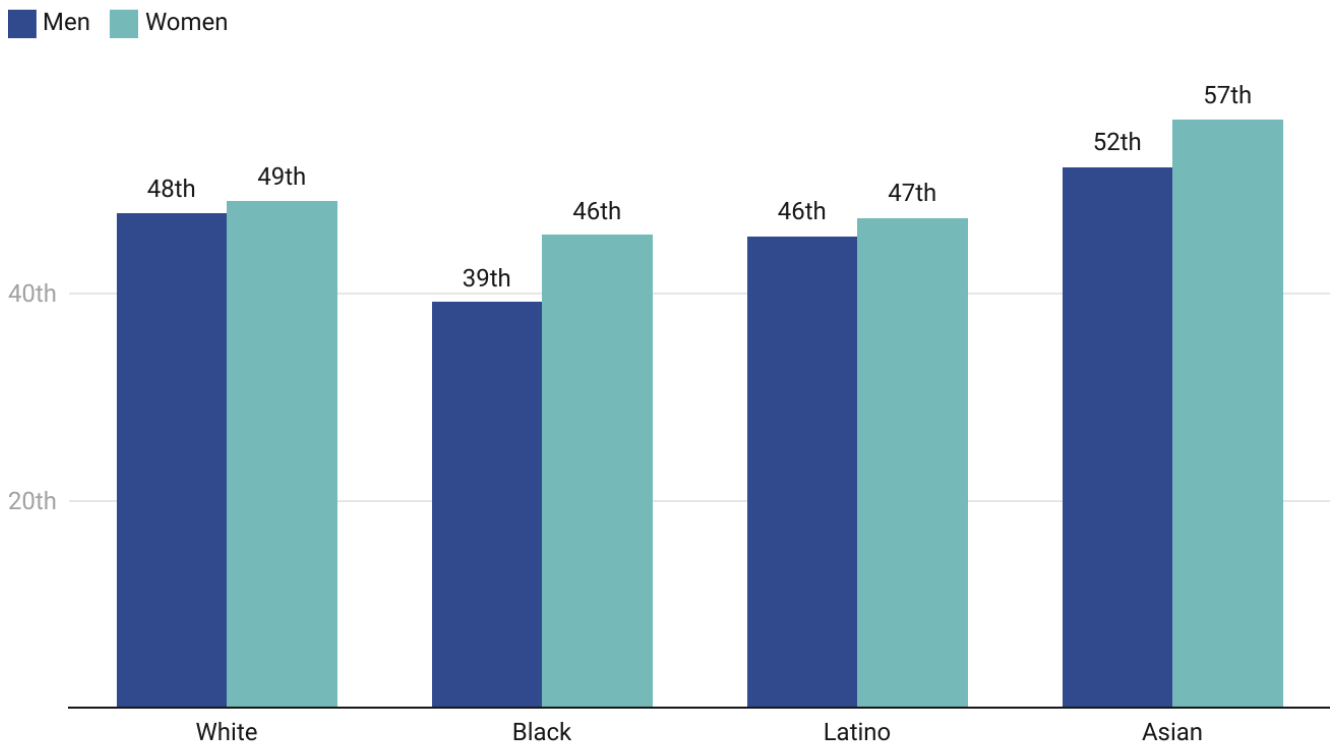
Strikingly, men have overall lower rates of upward mobility than women, but there are large differences by race. Of two boys in Greater Boston born into low-income families, the White boy reaches the 48th income percentile by age 27, while his Black peer reaches only the 39th percentile. Black girls born poor reach the 46th percentile, almost as high as White boys, and compared to the 49th percentile for White girls. This remarkable outcome for Black women born into poor families in Greater Boston has to be tempered by concern for the weak outcomes of comparable Black men.

Compounding the challenge, Black men at the top of the economic ladder also fare worse. Both White and Black boys born into high-income (75th percentile) families in Greater Boston tend to be downwardly mobile, but while such White males fall to the 62nd percentile, their Black peers tumble further, to the 49th percentile.

The lack of upward mobility and persistent downward mobility trap Black men in cycles of poverty and downward mobility, more so than any other socioeconomic group. In fact, the entire White-Black gap in intergenerational mobility is driven by gaps between Black and White men; there are almost no differences between Black and White women.³¹

Men are less mobile across race, especially Black men.

Mean income percentile at 27 years old for men and women with parents at 25th income percentile. Greater Boston. 1992 cohort.



Note: Data specifically taken from Table 1: County-Level Trends in Outcomes (1978-1992 Cohorts) by Parental Income, Race, and Gender. Weighted averages were taken for the five counties composing Greater Boston. Mean percentile ranks are relative to the national distribution of household income (i.e., own plus spousal income) measured at child age 27. White, Black, and Asian groups are single race, non-Latino. Latino can be of any race.

Chart: Boston Indicators | AIBM • Source: Opportunity Insights: *Changing Opportunity: Sociological Mechanisms Underlying Growing Class Gaps and Shrinking Race Gaps in Economic Mobility* • Created with Datawrapper

CONCLUSION

Boys and men in Greater Boston face a range of pressing challenges, including educational setbacks, wage stagnation, health inequities, and social isolation. These difficulties are especially pronounced among Black, Latino, low-income, and non-college-educated men.

At the same time, there are many areas where progress for women remains essential. For example, women comprise just 30 percent of the Massachusetts legislature.³² While the state leads in venture investments into women-led startups—more than 1,000 deals between 2018 and 2022—women represent only about 3 percent venture funding.³³ Women own a minority of small businesses in Massachusetts and hold relatively few top corporate roles.³⁴ And the gender pay gap persists. Across Massachusetts, women-focused organizations, coalitions, and networks are actively working to analyze the structural barriers facing women and coordinate advocacy efforts for change. Continuing this work can and should coexist with a serious effort to address the challenges for boys and men highlighted here.

Greater Boston has already taken important steps, so this work is not starting from scratch. Programs like the [My Brother's Keeper Initiative](#) and the City of [Boston's Office of Black Male Advancement](#) are leading efforts to improve educational outcomes, mentorship, and economic mobility for boys and men of color. Meanwhile, established community-based initiatives like [Roca](#) and the [Ten Point Coalition](#) have helped successfully reduce the homicide rate, making Boston among the very safest large cities in the nation.³⁵

There are many other ways to support men's well-being and success. Specialized health clinics can provide tailored care, while career transition programs can help men move from shrinking industries into growing fields. Reentry programs can reduce recidivism and help men reconnect with their families and communities. Efforts to support college completion—through academic guidance and financial aid—can also make a big difference in helping men graduate. And the list doesn't end there.

Now is a critical moment to revisit past initiatives, amplify what works, and invest in new approaches. While on-the-ground efforts can drive tangible change, they must also be complemented by policy reforms and shifts in cultural norms. Recent policy changes in Massachusetts—such as the 2018 adoption of the [Paid Family and Medical Leave Act](#), which extended paid leave for the birth or adoption of a child for all parents, including both men and women—illustrate how non-zero-sum policymaking can benefit everyone.

Encouraging men to seek mental health support through suicide prevention initiatives like [MassMen](#), setting public health goals specific to men's well-being, and launching recruitment campaigns for more male teachers can underscore that stereotyped thinking about male roles can—and must—evolve. Rather than clinging to old ideals, we can create a more expansive vision for men, one that embraces their full participation in family and community life.

Ultimately, investing in men is not about returning to a past era or competing with women's progress. Gender-focused work can, and should, move forward on multiple fronts at once. This is about embracing a forward-looking vision in which men are healthy, happy, and purposeful—for their own sake and for the good of families and communities across Greater Boston. By integrating effective programs with thoughtful policies, we can create a city where both men and women rise together, each contributing fully to a more equitable and vibrant future.

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