

# Food Security for an Aging Population

## Congregate Meals and Food Pantries in the Southeast Region of Massachusetts

### Introduction

This project explores the geographic distribution of seniors by community and median income in the Southeast Region of Massachusetts. It also offers a view of the proximity of seniors to two services aimed at enhancing their food security: congregate meal sites organized under the Older Americans Act and community food pantries.

By 2030, more than 21 percent of the Commonwealth's residents will be over the age of 65, an increase from 13.8 percent in 2010. Advocates for older adults predict an expansion in the need for services for this group to support "aging in place," a term for living independently for as long as is practical in one's own home and community.

Poverty and concomitant food insecurity are obstacles to independent living and are also correlated with chronic disease prevalence in older populations. Using a system for classification of food security developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service, the threat of hunger among seniors grew 88 percent in the decade between 2001 and 2011.

Congregate meal programs are a critical support system, as are privately financed food pantries. According to a 2010 study by Feeding America, more than half of older clients visited pantries at least once per month in the prior year.

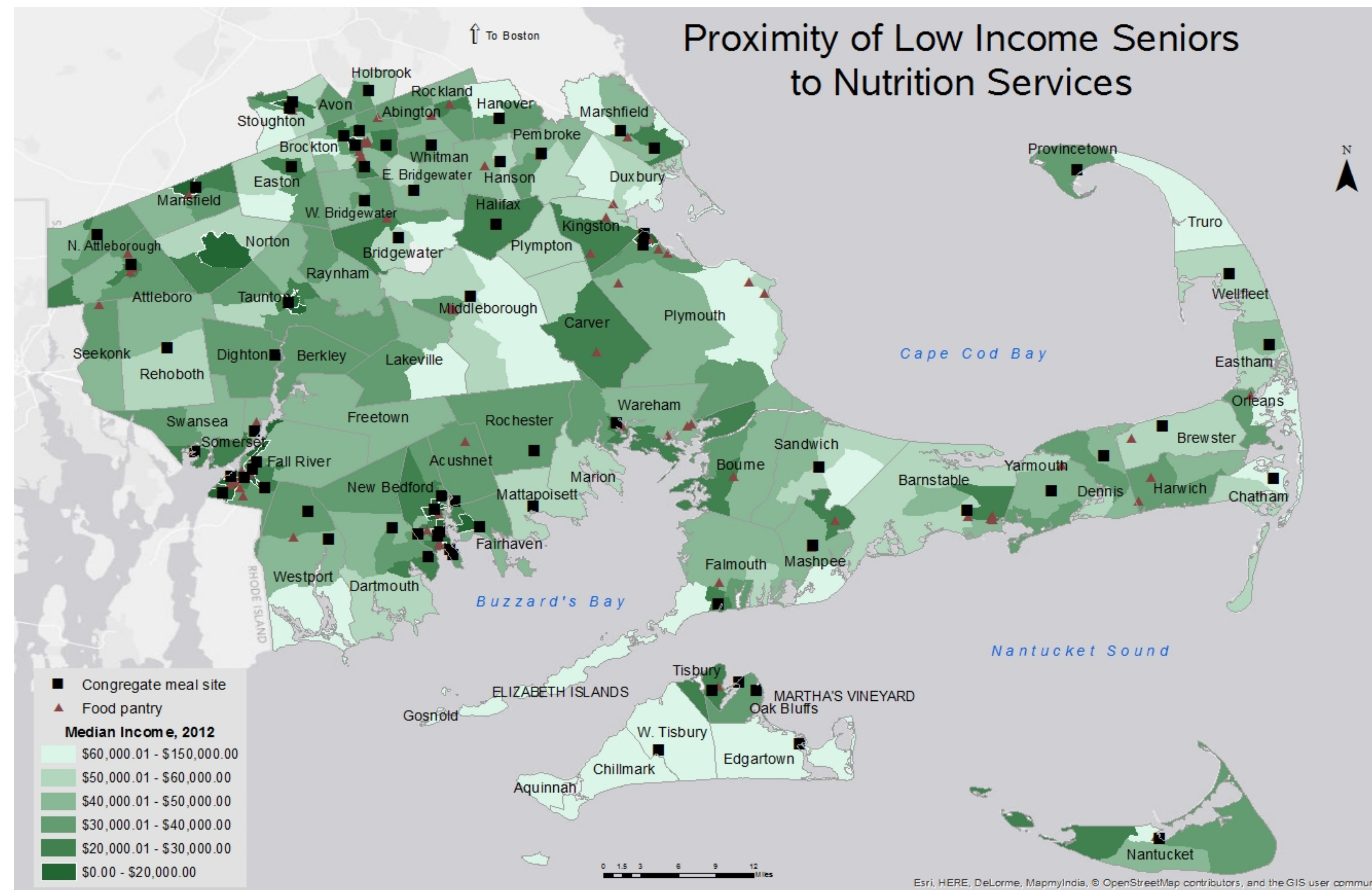
### Methods

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Resources divides the state into five service regions. The Southeast Region was selected for analysis as it includes the ethnically diverse, low-income cities of New Bedford and Fall River as well as wealthier communities attractive to retirees on Cape Cod and the Islands.

Street addresses of congregate meal sites were geocoded using tools available from Google and overlaid on a TIGER map of U.S. Census tracts. A list of food pantries in the region was compiled from information provided by the Greater Boston Food Bank and Project Bread. Only food pantries with regular, weekly hours were included in this analysis. Also excluded were sites that serve a limited clientele.

Median income was derived from the 2012 American Community Survey to demonstrate proximity of nutrition services to the lowest income seniors. Statistical tools available through ARC Map calculated the proximity of congregate meal sites and food pantries to seniors using Euclidean distance.

Ten-year changes in the proportion of seniors in the population were derived from Census data. Projections for changes in the age 65+ population to 2020 were obtained from the state's Executive Office of Elder Affairs.



Median incomes for older adults, by census tract (above) shows the disparity in wealth across the Southeast Region. Congregate meal sites serve low income cities while many suburban and exurban spaces lack sufficient coverage. The disparity between seniors' income and the city or town median is shown in the table below for communities where seniors' income is 50% or less of the household median for all age groups.

Senior households with incomes less than half the community median  
Estimates for 2012, American Community Survey

City or Town	Median income all households	Median income age 65+	Seniors' income as percentage of all households
Halifax	\$77,905	\$24,722	31.73%
Berkley	\$89,549	\$30,341	33.88%
Mansfield	\$94,512	\$33,646	35.60%
Oak Bluffs	\$76,389	\$30,035	39.32%
Dighton	\$85,070	\$34,554	40.62%
Rochester	\$97,059	\$39,583	40.78%
Raynham	\$77,604	\$34,926	45.01%
North Attleborough	\$80,510	\$36,421	45.24%
Swansea	\$71,926	\$32,698	45.46%
Bridgewater	\$90,722	\$41,397	45.63%
Attleboro	\$65,767	\$30,366	46.17%
Easton	\$95,523	\$44,825	46.93%
Fairhaven	\$59,933	\$28,184	47.03%
Norwell	\$114,213	\$54,740	47.93%
Avon	\$70,481	\$33,889	48.08%
Hanover	\$99,856	\$48,176	48.25%
Stoughton	\$75,095	\$36,303	48.34%
Carver	\$67,963	\$33,241	48.91%
Dartmouth	\$71,189	\$35,000	49.16%
Whitman	\$74,371	\$36,838	49.53%
SOUTHEAST REGION	\$73,438	\$42,896	58.42%
MASSACHUSETTS	\$66,658	\$35,600	53.41%

Coordinate system: GCS North American 1983  
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, MassGIS, Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs, Greater Boston Food Bank, Project Bread

POSTER AND CARTOGRAPHY  
M.E. MALONE 1-MAY-2014

### Findings and Implications

The 71 cities and towns in the Southeast Region will see unprecedented growth in the number of residents aged 65 and older in this decade. Senior populations will increase by almost 40 percent from 2012 to 2020. This is significantly higher than the expected state average of 30 percent.

Most seniors prefer to remain in their homes for as long as practical. This puts pressure on a number of service providers, including those offering nutritional support. Currently, 63% of seniors in this region live within one mile of a publicly-subsidized congregate meal site. More than 97% live within a 5-mile drive. About 57% of seniors make their home a mile or less from a privately-funded food pantry. Of the 32 census tracts in the region with a median income for seniors below \$20,000 annually, 14 contained at least one congregate meal site and several sites straddle the border between two adjacent low-income census tracts. However, as depicted in the map above, a number of low-income areas distant from the major cities are underserved.

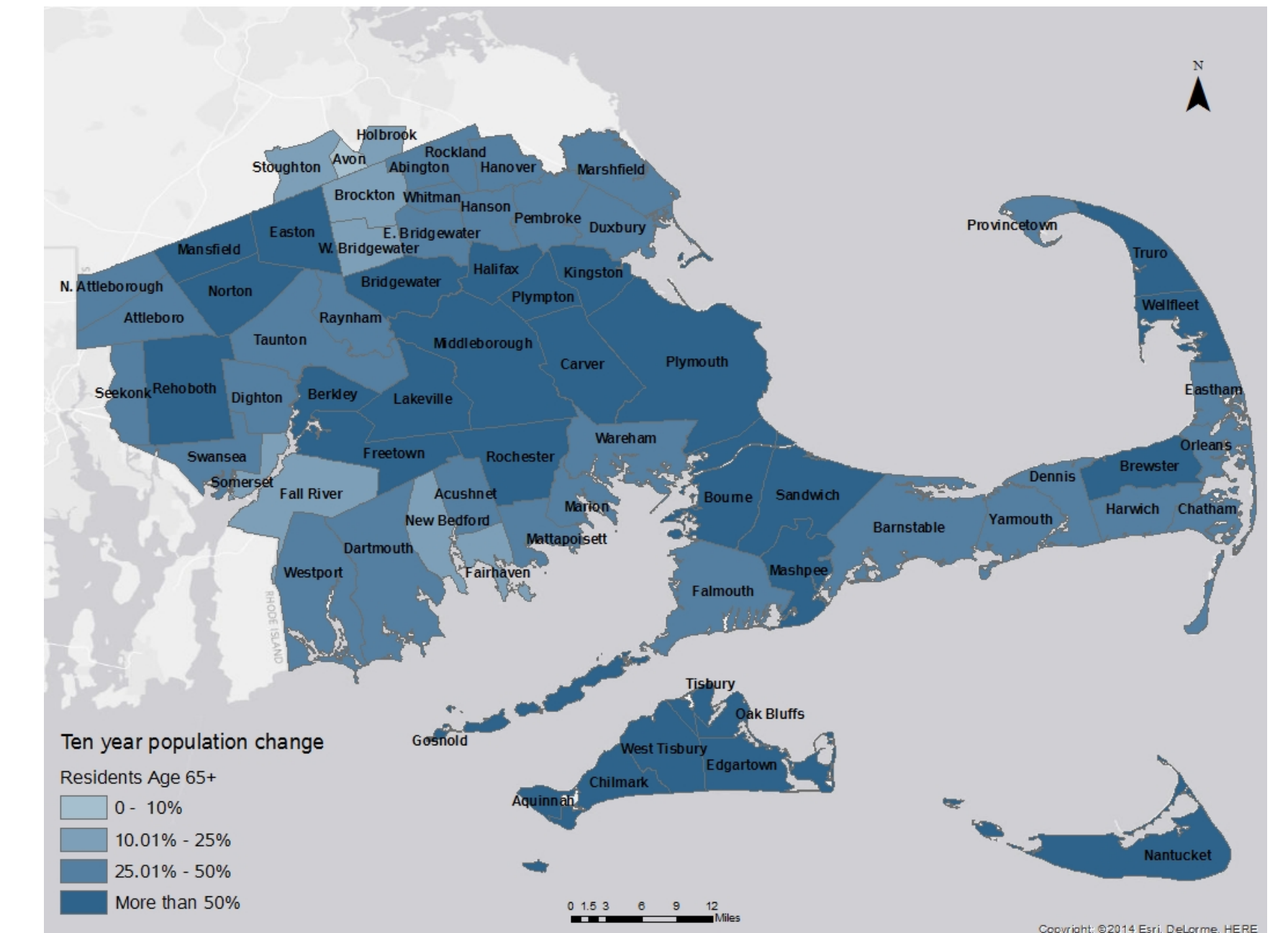
In addition, senior-headed households in 20 cities and towns in the Southeast Region have incomes that are less than half the community-wide median. This may leave needy seniors isolated without sufficient services in their neighborhood.

Rapid changes in demographics requires more vigilance to be sure services match locations where seniors are most in need of assistance.



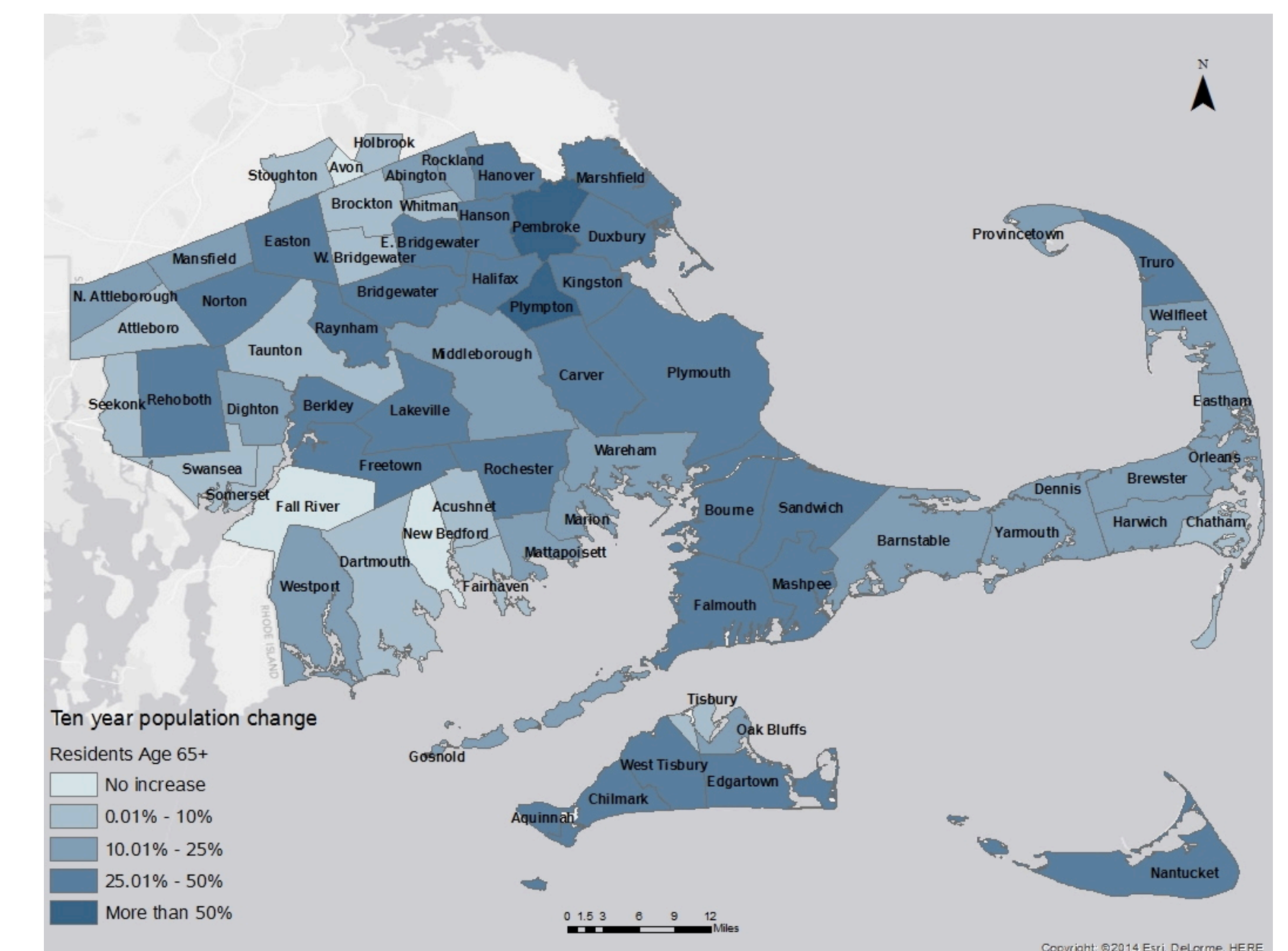
### Seniors Rising

Growth in population age 65+  
From 2010 – 2020<sup>Δ</sup>



Δ Projected

From 2000 – 2010



From 1990 to 2000

