

2022-2023 Washtenaw County Area Jewish Community Study

Executive Summary



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THE 2022-23 WASHTENAW COUNTY AREA JEWISH COMMUNITY STUDY: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2022-23 Washtenaw County Area Jewish Community Study was conducted by the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS) at Brandeis University, in partnership with NORC at the University of Chicago. This project has been commissioned by the Jewish Federation of Greater Ann Arbor, in partnership with local Jewish communal organizations and congregations. It is made possible by Jewish Federation of Greater Ann Arbor, Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Ann Arbor, The Jewish Federations of North America Research Benchmarking Project, with support from the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, Jewish Family Services of Washtenaw County, Jewish Community Center of Greater Ann Arbor, Temple Beth Emeth, Beth Israel Congregation, and other funders. The study employed state-of-the-art methods to create a portrait of the characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of the Jewish community.

The 2022-23 Washtenaw County Area Jewish Community Study provides a snapshot of today's Jewish population in Washtenaw County and considers trends and developments in Jewish life and engagement. This study is based on an analysis of a rich set of data collected from 955 eligible households between November 2022 and January 2023. In interpreting the data, it is important to bear in mind the study represents the characteristics and views of community members at that time. During that period, the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic were gradually being lifted. Data were also collected well before the Israel-Hamas war that began in October 2023 and the ensuing rise in antisemitism in the United States. It is likely that attitudes about Israel, concerns over antisemitism, and other markers of Jewish identity shifted from the time of data collection to the time that this report is being written.

Demographic Snapshot

- There are approximately 11,000 Jewish households in the Washtenaw County area Jewish community. These households include 26,300 individuals, of whom 20,000 are Jewish
- The Jewish population comprises 5% of Washtenaw County, and Jewish households make up 7% of the households of Washtenaw County.
- Compared to the US Jewish community as a whole, the Washtenaw County Jewish community has a larger share of young adults, ages 18 to 34, as well as a larger share of adults ages 50 to 64. The share who are ages 35 to 49 is smaller than among the US Jewish community.
- Thirteen percent of Jewish households include an adult or child, Jewish or not, who identifies as LGBTQ+, including 3% of households with an individual who identifies as transgender.
- Twenty-seven percent of Washtenaw County area Jewish households include a minor child. Twenty-nine percent of Jewish households include only a couple, either married or partnered. Thirty-five percent of Jewish households are people living alone or living only with unrelated roommates.
- Among Jewish adults in the Washtenaw County area, 65% are married or partnered. Of those individuals, 60% have a Jewish partner or spouse (inmarried) and 40% have a non-

Jewish partner or spouse (intermarried). Among all US Jews who are legally married, 58% have a Jewish spouse, and 42% have a non-Jewish spouse.

- In the Washtenaw County area, nearly half of Jewish adults do not identify with any particular denomination. The share with no particular denomination in the Washtenaw County area Jewish community (47%) is higher than the national share of Jewish adults in this category (32%). Of Jewish adults who *do* identify with a denomination, the largest group identifies as Reform (32%), followed by Conservative (16%).
- The proportion of Jewish *children* who are considered by their parents to be a Person of Color (8%) is considerably higher than that among Jewish *adults* (2%), suggesting that the Jewish community may become more racially and ethnically diverse in the future.
- Roughly half of Jewish adults are relative newcomers to the Washtenaw County area, with 15% having lived in the area for five to nine years, and 29% having moved to the area within the past four years
- Of Jewish adults in Washtenaw County, 27% plan to move away from the area in the next three years. Among the group that plans to leave, more than three quarters (77%) have lived in Washtenaw County for 10 years or less and came to the area to attend school.
- The majority of Jewish adults in Washtenaw County described their political orientation as liberal, either very liberal (38%) or liberal (39%). In total, more than two thirds of Washtenaw's Jews are liberal, compared to half of US Jewish adults.

Patterns of Jewish Engagement

Members of the Washtenaw County area Jewish community exhibit a variety of types of Jewish identification and means of engagement in Jewish life. Examining the ways that Jewish adults not only view, but also enact their Jewish identities, is a valuable lens for identifying ways in which Jewish life in the region can be enhanced. This chapter introduces and discusses an “Index of Jewish Engagement,” a typology of Jewish behaviors created specifically for the Washtenaw County area Jewish community.

- The Index of Jewish Engagement focuses on Jewish behaviors—the ways in which individuals occupy and involve themselves in Jewish life in the Washtenaw County area.
- There are four distinct patterns of Jewish engagement found among Jewish adults in Washtenaw County: Occasional, Personal, Communal, and Immersed. These names have been developed to suggest the differentiating characteristics of each pattern.
- The Index can be used to identify opportunities to improve communal planning based on people's different needs and interests.
- Contrary to what may be expected, Jewish engagement related to participation in communal activities and observance of Jewish ritual is stronger among younger Jewish adults than older adults. About half of the Communal and Immersed groups are ages 22 to 39, compared with 27% of the Personal group and 16% of the Occasional group. Although the youngest age cohort (22-39) represent 37% of all Jewish adults, about half of the Communal (51%) and Immersed (49%) groups are made up of individuals ages 22 to 39.
- Jewish engagement varies by geographic region. More than half (57%) of the Immersed group live in Central Ann Arbor, with the remainder spread throughout the regions. Among the Communal group, more than half (59%) live on the Westside.

- Almost half (49%) of all Jewish adults in the Washtenaw County area feel that being Jewish is “very important” to how they think about themselves, and one third (33%) say that it’s “moderately important.” While nearly everyone in the Immersed group (96%) says being Jewish is “very important,” just 17% in the Occasional group consider it very important.

Children and Jewish Education

- Of the 4,400 children who reside in Jewish households in the Washtenaw County area, 3,900 (89% of all children) are considered Jewish by their parents. Two thirds of these children are considered Jewish exclusively (2,900, or 66% of all children). Twenty-three percent of all children are considered Jewish and another religion. Of the remaining children living in Jewish households who are not considered Jewish, most are considered to have no religious identity (400, or 9% of all children).
- Nearly half of Jewish children (48%) are being raised by intermarried parents, while slightly less (44%) are being raised by inmarried parents. The remaining 8% of Jewish children are living with single parents.
- More than one quarter of Jewish children enrolled in some type of Jewish education in summer 2022 and in the 2022-23 school year. Among children in grades K-8, 35% were enrolled in Jewish education. Among high schoolers, 11% were enrolled in Jewish education.
- While nearly half (48%) of Jewish K-12 students attended summer camp in 2022, only 20% attended a Jewish camp. About one quarter of parents were considering Jewish overnight camp for the future.
- Among households that had K-12 children enrolled in part-time Jewish school or other Jewish school-year programs, nearly three quarters reported that they were somewhat (53%) or very (25%) satisfied with the Jewish education available in the Washtenaw County area. For the share who were not satisfied, the most common concerns were the perceived quality of Jewish education options and the lack of programs that met their specific needs and interests.
- Among the parents whose children were not enrolled in Jewish education, half said that Jewish education was not important to them, 28% indicated there was not a good religious fit, and 24% indicated that cost was a barrier.
- Thirty-six percent of Jewish households with at least one child ages 12 or younger attended a Jewish family program such as Tot Shabbat, synagogue-based playgroups, and family holiday programs.
- Twenty percent of households with children ages 12 and younger received PJ Library books, and an additional 41% were not aware of PJ Library.
- Fifty-four percent of Jewish children ages 12 and older have had a bar mitzvah, bat mitzvah, or b-mitzvah ceremony, and an additional 13% plan to have one in the future.
- Of Jewish teens ages 12 and older, 5% have traveled to Israel with a teen program.

Congregations and Ritual Life

- In the Washtenaw County area, 20% of Jewish households belong to some type of Jewish congregation, whether a synagogue, independent minyan or chavurah, Chabad, or another worship community.

- Among Jewish **adults** in Washtenaw County, 27% live in a household in which someone is a congregation member. Among all US Jews, 35% reside in a congregation-member household.
- The share of Washtenaw County area Jewish adults that attends services is larger than the share that belongs to congregations. Although 27% of Jewish adults reside in a congregation-member household, 67% attended a worship service at least once in the previous year. Ten percent of Jewish adults attended services at least monthly, and half attended High Holiday services in 2022.
- Slightly more than half of Jewish households from the Washtenaw County area marked Shabbat in the previous year by lighting candles or having a special meal.
- Eighty-three percent of Jewish adults lit Hanukkah candles in 2022, 80% attended or hosted a seder in 2022, and 34% fasted on Yom Kippur 2022. About one third of Jewish adults (31%) follow any kosher rules.
- In the year prior to the study, about two thirds of Jewish adults participated in at least one Jewish-sponsored program in the past year, including 28% who participated rarely, 26% who participated sometimes, and 9% who participated often. The remaining third (37%) of Jewish adults did not participate in a Jewish program. Participation was more frequent among younger adults.

Organizations and Philanthropy

- Nearly one third of Jewish households (31%) belong to a Jewish organization other than a congregation.
- In the year prior to the study, about two thirds of Jewish adults participated in at least one Jewish-sponsored program in the past year, including 28% who participated rarely, 26% who participated sometimes, and 9% who participated often. The remaining third of Jewish adults (37%) did not participate in any Jewish program. Participation was more frequent among younger adults.
- About two thirds of Jewish adults said that information about local Jewish programs, events, and other activities is somewhat (48%) or very (20%) easy to access. Among adults who did not participate in Jewish programs during the past year, only 15% said getting information is somewhat or very difficult; however, 21% said they are not interested in this information.
- One way for organizations to build connections to community members is to proactively reach out to them. Opportunities for outreach include inviting people to participate in a program or activity, soliciting financial donations, or simply finding out how they are doing. Fifty-six percent of Jewish adults said that someone from a Jewish organization personally reached out to them within the past year. Forty-four percent of Jewish adults said they were asked for a financial donation, 33% were invited to participate in a program or activity, and 15% were asked to serve on a committee and/or in a leadership role.
- Jewish adults participate in Jewish life on their own or with family and friends, as well as with Jewish organizations and institutions. Over the past year, nearly all Jewish adults (98%) discussed Jewish topics with family or friends in the past year, 90% of Jewish adults ate Jewish foods aside from Shabbat and holiday meals, and 84% read books, watched movies or TV, or listened to music that was Jewish-focused. Eighty-three percent read Jewish publications in the past year. About half of Jewish adults (53%) read or posted on social media about Jewish life and being Jewish, and just under half (47%) studied or learned Jewish texts.

- Almost half of Jewish adults (46%) volunteered somewhere in the past year, with 7% volunteering exclusively for or with Jewish organizations, 13% volunteering for or with both Jewish and non-Jewish organizations, and 26% volunteering exclusively for or with non-Jewish organizations
- Among Jewish **households**, 80% made a charitable contribution in the past year, and 47% donated to at least one Jewish organization in the past year. Nationally, 48% of US Jewish **adults** donated to any Jewish charity or cause in the past year.
- When considering causes for volunteering and donations, the greatest interest (about 60% of Jewish adults) concerned helping the vulnerable in the local community and causes related to social justice, and health and human services. Among Jewish-focused causes, combating antisemitism was cited by about half of Jewish adults as a top cause.

Community Connections

- Nearly all Jewish adults in the Washtenaw County area feel a sense of belonging to the Jewish people: either somewhat (47%) or a great deal (41%). By contrast, around one third of Jewish adults feel somewhat (29%) or a great deal (6%) of belonging to the Washtenaw County area Jewish community.
- Over half of Jewish adults (56%) are at least somewhat satisfied with the level of their participation in the Washtenaw County area Jewish community, including 23% who are very satisfied. For Jewish adults who are highly engaged with Jewish life, a high level of satisfaction indicates that they are finding the opportunities that interest them. For those who are less active in Jewish life, satisfaction may indicate that they are not looking for more opportunities to engage.
- More than four-in-ten Jewish adults in the Washtenaw County area are not at all (4%) or not too satisfied (39%) with their level of participation. This is the group that may be seeking more connection. In this context, dissatisfaction can best be understood as an opportunity—a possible sign that community members are looking to do more.
- The top barriers that limit participation in Jewish life include not knowing many people (39%) and not finding Jewish activities of interest (32%).
- Although 13% of all Jewish adults indicated that expense is a barrier to participation, 30% of financially struggling Jewish adults feel limited in their Jewish participation by cost.
- When asked what makes them feel welcome and comfortable at Jewish events, 88% of Jewish adults say they feel more welcome when they know someone, and 58% feel more welcome when they are personally invited. About half feel more welcome when they see themselves reflected in the people who attend, and half feel more welcome when people with diverse backgrounds attend.
- Although 58% of Jewish adults feel more welcome when they are personally invited, only 33% received a personal invitation from an organization in the past year. In contrast, although 7% said they feel more welcome when they are encouraged to take a leadership role, 15% received such a request from a Jewish organization.
- More than half of newcomers (53%) who have lived in the area for five to nine years describe Jewish organizations as very welcoming to newcomers, as do 40% of those who have lived in the area less than five years.
- Almost half of Jewish adults in interfaith households describe Jewish organizations as very welcoming.

- Among Jewish adults who identify as a Person of Color or live with someone who identifies as a Person of Color, 69% describe Jewish organizations as somewhat welcoming, and 12% describe them as very welcoming.
- The majority of Jewish adults are very concerned about antisemitism around the world (71%) and in the United States (69%). Significantly smaller shares are very concerned about antisemitism on college campuses (45%) or antisemitism in the Washtenaw County area, aside from college campuses (34%). Twenty-two percent of Jewish adults personally experienced antisemitism in the previous year.

Connections to Israel

- More than half of Jewish adults in Washtenaw County have been to Israel, including 25% who have visited once, 24% who have visited more than once, and 8% who have lived in Israel. The share of Washtenaw County Jews who have been to Israel (57%) is higher than among all US Jewish adults, of whom 45% have been to Israel.
- More than half of Jewish adults feel some level of emotional attachment to Israel, with 39% feeling somewhat attached and 19% feeling very attached. Taken together, the proportion who are somewhat or very attached to Israel (58%) is the same as is found among all US Jewish adults (58%).
- There is a strong and expected connection between travel to Israel and emotional attachment. Three quarters of Jewish adults (73%) who are not all attached to Israel have never visited. In contrast, among those who are very attached to Israel, 48% have visited more than once and another 25% have lived in Israel.
- Members of the Jewish community of Washtenaw County hold a wide variety of views about Israel. There is widespread agreement with the statement “I consider it important that Israel give equal recognition to Jews of all denominations” (89% agree) and the statement “Israel should exist as a refuge for the Jewish people, now and in the future” (85% agree).
- About two thirds of adults agree that “I consider Israel’s treatment of the Palestinian people to be a violation of human rights,” and about three quarters of Jewish adults agree that “I think that Israel is under constant threat from hostile neighbors who seek its destruction.”
- Political views are strongly correlated with views about Israel. About half of Jewish adults who are very liberal strongly agree that Israel should exist as a refuge for the Jewish people, compared to about three quarters of liberals and moderates and nearly all conservatives. Two thirds of very liberal Jews strongly agree that Israel’s treatment of the Palestinian people is a violation of human rights, in comparison to 37% of liberals, 17% of moderates, and < 1% of conservatives.
- Nearly half of Jewish adults somewhat (31%) or strongly (15%) agree that they often feel that their views about Israel are unwelcome in Jewish spaces. Nearly as many somewhat (31%) or strongly (11%) agree that they often feel that they do not know enough to participate in conversations about Israel.

Health and Social Service Needs

- Nearly one quarter (23%) of Jewish households in the Washtenaw County area include at least one person whose work, school, or activities are affected by a chronic health issue, special need, or disability.

- Over one third of households that are financially struggling (37%) or have enough (35%) include an individual with a health issue.
- Six percent of Jewish households with children include a child with a health issue. This share represents 1% of all Jewish households.
- Of Jewish households in which someone had a health issue, 54% received adequate services to manage the health issues, special needs, mental health issues, or disabilities of the household. Twenty percent stated that the health services received were not adequate, and 26% did not need any health services.
- Less than one third of Jewish adults think it is somewhat (27%) or very (3%) important that services be provided by a Jewish organization. About one third (35%) of Jewish adults do not consider it at all important that services be provided by a Jewish organization.
- Among all Jewish adults with an interest in learning about the services provided by the local Jewish community, about two thirds find it very (14%) or somewhat (52%) easy to find the information they need. Another third find it somewhat (30%) or very (3%) difficult to find this information.
- The need for mental health services goes beyond the 9% of Jewish households that include someone who is experiencing mental or emotional health issues that limit their daily life. One third of Jewish adults (33%) indicate a need for mental health services.
- Four percent of Jewish adults reported that in the last week, emotional or mental difficulties often or always hurt their ability to live their day-to-day life. Eight percent of Jewish adults reported that they often or always felt lonely in the previous week. More than half of Jewish adults had either no one (12%) or just a few people (42%) in their personal support network
- The youngest age cohort (22-39) had the largest share of Jewish adults who indicated they experienced loneliness in the previous week often or all the time (10%).
- When asked about plans for aging, the vast majority of Jewish adults indicated that they were hoping to stay in their current home and age in place. About half of those between ages 55-74 were also considering moving into a smaller home, condo, or apartment.
- The majority of Jewish adults ages 55 and older were somewhat or very concerned about having relatives or friends nearby to help take care of their needs, their physical and mental health, and their feelings of isolation. Their concerns about finances and estate planning were less pronounced.

Financial Well-Being

- Two percent of Jewish households reported they cannot make ends meet, and another 15% are just managing to make ends meet. About one third of households (34%) have enough money, about one quarter (23%) have extra money, and 25% described themselves as well-off.
- Seven percent of Jewish households were unable to pay for at least one necessity within the past year, and another 7% were unable to pay for at least one necessity between one to three years ago. These necessities included rent or mortgage payments; medical care of medicine that was needed; food that was needed; and payments or utilities such as water, electricity, or heat.
- Twenty percent of Jewish households had to limit or change their involvement in Jewish life due to their financial situation. In the year prior to the survey, 16% of Jewish households were unable to contribute to Jewish causes as much as they would have liked due to financial reasons, and 13% were unable to participate in some Jewish activities due to financial constraints.

- Ten percent of all Jewish adults in the community are full-time graduate students. Among Jewish adults ages 22-39, 29% are full-time graduate students. Forty percent of Jewish households include a current student or employee at the University of Michigan.
- Educational attainment among Washtenaw County Jewish adults is higher than among all US Jews and among Washtenaw County residents. Of Jewish adults ages 25 and older, 22% have earned a bachelor's degree, and another 74% have earned a graduate or professional degree.

Future Directions

Community organizations may wish to consider some of the following themes as starting points as they use study findings to plan for the future:

- **Serving and integrating multiple communities.** Given the diverse demographics of the Washtenaw County community, consider balancing the programming and activities that are available. Some can be designed to appeal to specific subgroups of the community such as younger adults, older adults, students, or newcomers, and account for their unique needs and interests. Other programs and activities with broader appeal can be designed to cross boundaries and bring diverse segments of the community together across shared interests.
- **Expand Jewish education opportunities.** Jewish schools should look at the types and quality of Jewish education that is offered to determine what improvements would make it more attractive to area families. While the half of Jewish parents who are not interested in Jewish education may not participate regardless of available options, the other half might consider enrolling their children if the type of education they were interested in were made available.
- **Align activities with community concerns.** Personal connections are one of the main drivers of participation in Jewish activities. The need for personal connections spans all age groups and all regions. Most importantly, it is shared by Jews at all levels of Jewish engagement. Extending personal invitations to attend Jewish events can be particularly important. A growing concern within the Jewish community concerns the ability to freely discuss Israel in Jewish spaces, particularly when individual views differ. Making space for diverse views about Israel and for productive conversations about Israel could help to bring members of the community together across differences.
- **Reduce financial barriers.** Twenty percent of Jewish households had to limit or change their involvement in Jewish life due to their financial situation.
- **Address social service needs.** Of Jewish households in which someone had a health issue, 54% received adequate services to manage the health issues, special needs, mental health issues, or disabilities of the household. The relationship between financial hardship and service needs is clear. Only one quarter of adults in financially struggling households (27%) did *not* need any of the listed health or social services. Forty-three percent of this group needed a service other than mental health services, and 26% needed another service and mental health services.