



# Jewish Chicago: Who We Are

**A 2020 POPULATION STUDY | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



Jewish United Fund  
TOGETHER for GOOD

 **NORC** at the  
University of Chicago

**Brandeis**

COHEN CENTER FOR  
MODERN JEWISH STUDIES  
STEINHARDT SOCIAL  
RESEARCH INSTITUTE

© 2021 Brandeis University Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies  
[www.brandeis.edu/cmjs](http://www.brandeis.edu/cmjs)

The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS), founded in 1980, is dedicated to providing independent, high-quality research on issues related to contemporary Jewish life.

The Cohen Center is also the home of the Steinhardt Social Research Institute (SSRI). Established in 2005, SSRI uses innovative research methods to collect and analyze sociodemographic data on the Jewish community.

**Lonnie Nasatir**  
*President*

Every 10 years, JUF sponsors a study to understand the unique needs of this Jewish community. Our community—and the world—faced a year unlike any other, and the 2020 Metropolitan Chicago Jewish Population Study offers a snapshot of this critical moment in time.

I want to thank NORC at the University of Chicago and Brandeis University's Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies for conducting this year's study. And I also want to acknowledge that the study was funded in part by generous grants from the Crown Family Philanthropies, Michael Reese Health Trust and the Walder Foundation.

Finally, I'd like to dedicate this report to the memory of a dear colleague and friend, Dr. Peter B. Friedman (1943-2019). Peter was a longtime Executive Vice President of JUF, whose vision led to the launch of this decennial population study and whose wisdom guided the project for 40 years. It is thanks to him that Jewish Chicago has this planning tool which has become integral to understanding our community and meeting its evolving needs.

The contents of this report help shape the ways we go forward. There are hundreds of pages ahead that go into great detail about who we are as a community, but I'd like to highlight just a few important takeaways:

First, Jewish Chicago is strong and growing—our population today stands at nearly 320,000, an increase of 3% in the last 10 years.

The diversity of our community is also growing: 9% of Jewish households include at least one person who identifies as LGBTQ and 7% include at least one person of color. Nearly 1 in 5 Jewish households includes someone with a disability or chronic health issue.

Part of Jewish Chicago's diversity is a growing number of interfaith families. Today, one-third of married and partnered adults are intermarried, up from 20% a decade ago. It is absolutely essential that JUF embraces these families and engages them with a wide menu of opportunities to connect to Jewish life.

We are striving to make JUF more responsive to—and reflective of—these differences in every aspect of our work. We are deeply committed to engaging in meaningful conversations and significant initiatives in the inclusion space.

The study also explores how our community is engaging in Jewish life today—during the pandemic 2 in 5 Jewish adults made changes to their religious life. Studying these patterns of participation in Jewish life deeply informs our work to provide points of connection for people of all ages.

As we have seen in the growing participation of Jews under 40: If our community invests with intention, we can move the needle. I'm proud to report that last year, 4 in 10 young Jews participated in a program sponsored by Jewish young adult engagement organizations like our own Young Leadership Division, Hillel, Base and Moishe House.

We've also learned about attitudes surrounding Jewish education, attachment to Israel and that the majority of Jewish adults are deeply concerned about antisemitism.

And while there is great hope on the horizon, intensified community needs resulting from the pandemic will continue for some time—1 in 5 households are struggling to make ends meet and the greatest single service need is for mental health. As one of the largest humanitarian organizations in the country, we are committed to providing these life-saving services where they are needed most.

Thank you to all who participated in the 2020 community survey. When called, you answered, helping ensure our community's future strength.

I am grateful to have such a deep, rich knowledge of our community's needs—with that knowledge we can truly make a difference.

And thank you, as always, for coming Together for Good.

Sincerely,



Lonnie Nasatir  
President, Jewish United Fund of Chicago



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## At Brandeis CMJS/SSRI

### Study Directors

Janet Krasner Aronson  
Matthew Boxer  
Leonard Saxe

### Community Studies Research Team

Harry Aaronson  
Matthew A. Brookner  
Eliana Chapman  
Matthew Feinberg  
Raquel Magidin de Kramer  
Daniel Mangoubi  
Adam Martin  
Daniel Nussbaum  
Eleora Pasternack  
Mark Rosen

### Editing

Deborah Grant  
Masha Lokshin  
Ilana Friedman

### Study Support

Allyson Birger  
Molly Kazan  
Leora Levitt  
Sofiya Nuryyeva  
Hannah Taylor  
Sasha Volodarsky

### American Jewish Population Project

Elizabeth Tighe  
Daniel Parmer

## At NORC

### Study Team

Zachary H. Seeskin  
Stephen H. Cohen  
Ned English  
David Dutwin  
Frankie Duda

### Statistics and Methodology

Katie Archambeau  
Julie Banks  
Justine Bulgar-Medina  
Becki Curtis  
Peter Herman  
Evan Herring-Nathan  
Patrick Hollick  
Andrea Malpica  
Cheryl Wiese  
Grace Xie  
Chang Zhao

### IT and Survey Programming

Katherine Bellamy  
Saira Mumtaz  
Steve Paradowski

### Telephone Support and Survey

### Operations

Warren Jones  
Ed Sipulski

## At JUF

### JUF Staff

Sabrina Townsend, Assistant Vice President,  
Evaluation and Quality Improvement  
David Rubovits, Chief Operating Officer

### Population Study Review Committee

Andrew S. Hochberg, Chair  
Steven M. Greenbaum  
Scott Heyman  
Dana Westreich Hirt  
Lisa Jericho  
Linda Kellough  
Alan P. Solow

### Funders

The 2020 Metropolitan Chicago Jewish  
Population Study was funded in part by  
generous grants from:  
The Crown Family Philanthropies  
Michael Reese Health Trust  
The Walder Foundation  
The Jewish Federations of North America  
Research Benchmarking Project, with  
support from the Harry and Jeanette  
Weinberg Foundation

### Dedication

In memory of Dr. Peter B. Friedman  
(1943-2019). Peter was a longtime  
Executive Vice President of JUF, whose  
vision led to the launch of this decennial  
population study and whose wisdom guided  
the project for 40 years. It is thanks to him  
that Jewish Chicago has this planning tool  
which has become integral to understanding  
our community and meeting its evolving  
needs.

#### Recommended Citation:

Aronson, J.K., Brookner, M.A., Saxe, L. (2021). *2020 Metropolitan Chicago Jewish Population Study*.  
Waltham, MA: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies and Steinhardt Social Research Institute,  
Brandeis University.  
[www.brandeis.edu/cmjs/community-studies/chicago-report.html](http://www.brandeis.edu/cmjs/community-studies/chicago-report.html)



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Size of the Metropolitan Chicago Jewish Community.....	2
Geography and Residence.....	2
Marital Status and Intermarriage.....	4
Key Demographic Groups.....	4
Subpopulations of Interest.....	8
Jewish Denominations.....	9
Jewish Engagement.....	9
Synagogues and Congregations.....	11
Ritual Observance.....	11
Jewish Education.....	12
Jewish Organizations and Activities.....	13
Philanthropy and Volunteering.....	14
Israel and Antisemitism.....	14
Connection to the Community and to Being Jewish.....	15
Meaning of Being Jewish.....	16
Finances, Health, and Social Service Needs.....	18
Economic Vulnerability.....	19
Health Status and Social Service Needs.....	19
Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic.....	20
Conclusions.....	21

# THE 2020 METROPOLITAN CHICAGO JEWISH POPULATION STUDY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This comprehensive study of the Jewish population of Metropolitan Chicago, sponsored by the Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago (JUF), was conducted by the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS) at Brandeis University and NORC at the University of Chicago. This study is intended to provide reliable and valid data to promote an understanding of the community and to aid strategic planning, program development, and policies to support and enhance Jewish life. Specifically, the study was designed to:

- Estimate the number of Jewish adults and children in the community and the number of non-Jewish adults and children who are part of those households
- Describe the community in terms of age and gender, geographic distribution, and other sociodemographic characteristics
- Describe health and economic conditions and vulnerabilities
- Measure participation in community programs, Jewish institutions, along with reasons for participation and barriers to increased participation
- Understand the multifaceted cultural, communal, and religious expressions of Judaism that constitute Jewish engagement
- Assess attitudes toward Jewish life and Israel

This study is based on survey data collected from 5,632 respondents from October 2020 to January 2021. This report provides a portrait of the Metropolitan Chicago Jewish community as it was in fall 2020, six months into the COVID-19 pandemic.

Developed by CMJS in close consultation with JUF, the survey included questions used in JUF's 2010 study, questions widely used by social scientists to study the Jewish community, and several questions tailored to obtain a better understanding of how the Jewish community was affected by and responded to the pandemic.

## Size of the Metropolitan Chicago Jewish Community

Since the last demographic study in 2010, the Metropolitan Chicago area has experienced both stability and growth in the Jewish population, most notably in the number of Jewish households (19% increase). The 2020 estimate of the Chicago Jewish population is 319,600 Jewish adults and children (Table 1). They live in 175,800 Jewish households. An additional 100,700 non-Jewish individuals live in these households, for a total of 420,300 people in Jewish households. About one-in-18 households in Metropolitan Chicago has at least one Jewish adult and about one-in-25 Chicagoans is Jewish.

For purposes of this study, Metropolitan Chicago consists of six counties: Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will.

**Table 1. Metropolitan Chicago Jewish population, 2020**

Total Jewish households	175,800
Total Jewish individuals	319,600
Total people in Jewish households	420,300
Adults in Jewish households (ages 18 and older)	346,800
Jewish adults in Jewish households	264,600
Non-Jewish adults in Jewish households	82,200
Children in Jewish households (under age 18)	73,500
Jewish children in Jewish households	54,900
Non-Jewish children in Jewish households	18,600

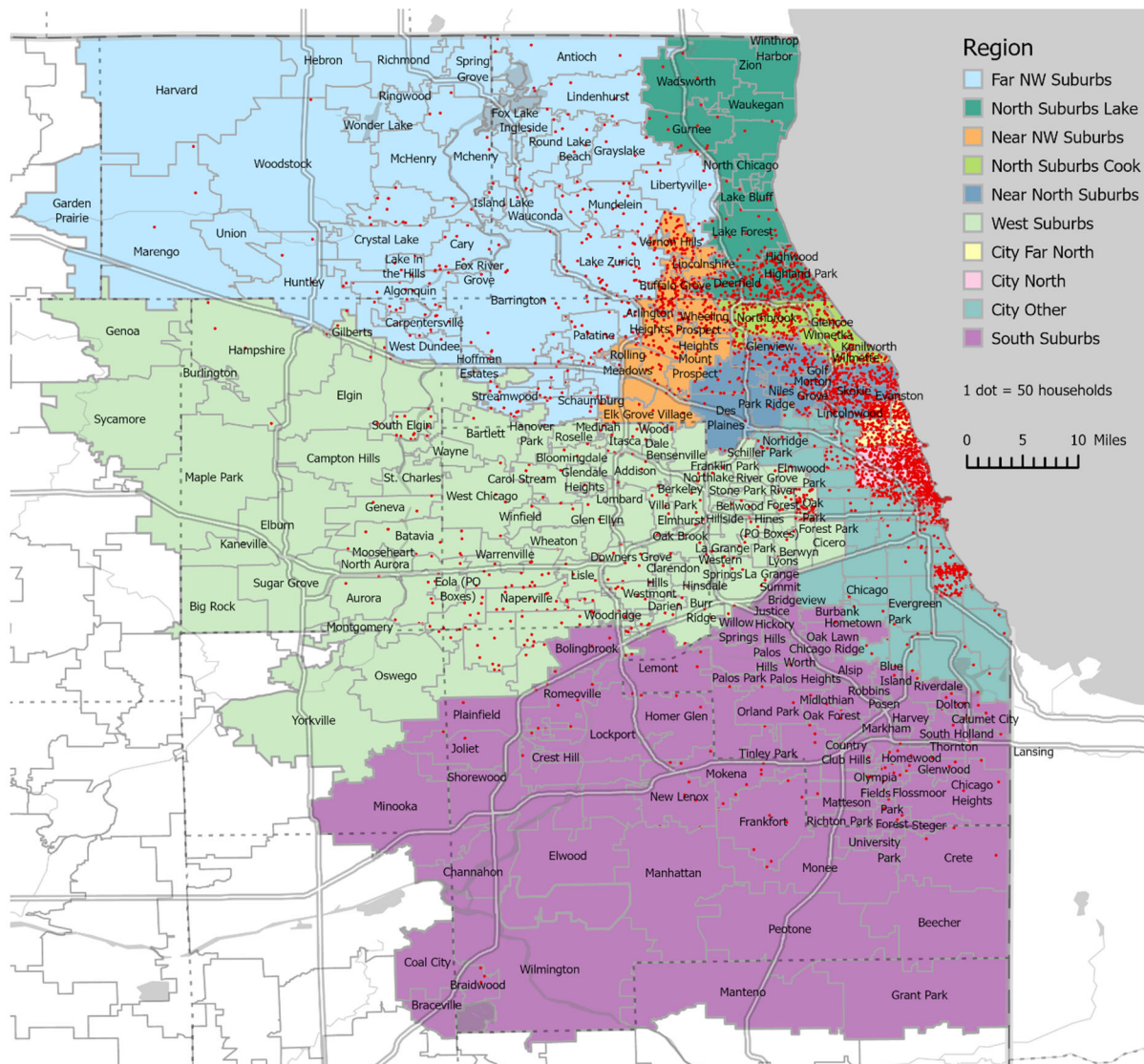
Note: Rounded to the nearest 100; discrepancies due to rounding.

## Geography and Residence

Jewish households across Metropolitan Chicago differ in their demographic characteristics and their level of Jewish engagement. Understanding these variations can guide the development of appropriate and relevant programs and services in locations that are accessible.

For this study, the city and suburbs were divided into ten regions: City Far North, City North, City Other, Near North Suburbs, North Suburbs Cook, North Suburbs Lake, Near NW Suburbs, Far NW Suburbs, West Suburbs, South Suburbs (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Map of Jewish households in Metropolitan Chicago



The largest share of Jewish households and Jewish individuals reside in City North, with 18% of households and 16% of individuals, followed by the Near North Suburbs, with 14% of households and 14% of individuals. The only region that experienced a decline in Jewish population since 2010 was the Near North Suburbs, which saw a 16% decline in the number of households.

### Mobility

While the majority of Metropolitan Chicago Jewish adults are long-time residents, 10% have moved to the Chicago area within the last ten years. As is the case with many Jewish communities, recent arrivals are primarily young, under age 40, and are moving to the city rather than to the suburbs.

About half of Jewish adults (52%) were born in the Metropolitan Chicago area. About one-in-three Jewish adults (33%) were born elsewhere in the United States and 15% were born outside of the United States.



The three city regions include the largest concentration of new residents. Eleven percent of Jewish adults in City Far North and in City North, as well as 14% of Jewish adults in City Other, have lived in Metropolitan Chicago for less than five years. The influx of new residents, who are primarily young adults, has contributed to the growth of the Metropolitan Chicago Jewish community.

Nine-in-ten Metropolitan Chicago Jewish adults have lived in the area for at least ten years. About 4% of Jewish adults who currently reside in Metropolitan Chicago have lived there less than five years, and another 6% have lived in Metropolitan Chicago between five and nine years. Almost 38% of Jewish adults have lived in Metropolitan Chicago for 50 years or more, including many who were born in Metropolitan Chicago.

## Marital Status and Intermarriage

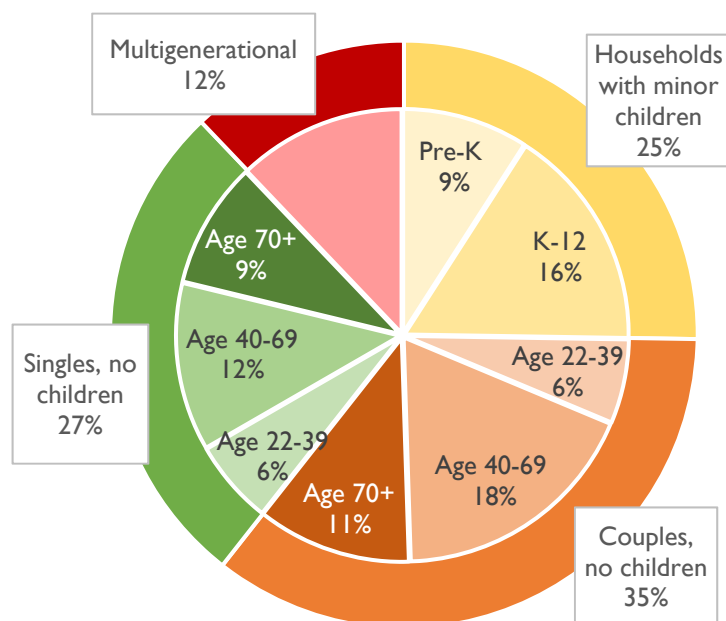
The rate of intermarriage in Chicago is substantially below that of the national Jewish population. Nearly three-in-four Jewish adults in Chicago (73%) are married or partnered. Among married and partnered Jewish adults, two thirds (67%) are inmarried, and one third (33%) are intermarried. Among US Jews who are legally married, 42% are intermarried. In 2010, 20% of married Chicago Jewish adults were intermarried.

## Key Demographic Groups

The Metropolitan Chicago Jewish community is diverse. Members differ in age, gender, household composition, race, and country of origin. Their experiences in the Jewish community, feelings of connection, and needs vary considerably. Consequently, Jewish organizations seek to understand the unique experiences of a number of key demographic groups and subpopulations in the community.

One-in-four Jewish households in Metropolitan Chicago (25%) includes minor children under age 18 (Figure 2). One third of Jewish households (35%) consist of couples without children. Slightly over one quarter of households (27%) consist of single adults without children, including households with unrelated roommates. The remaining households, 12%, are multi-generational (parents and adult children living together). This category include both adults who are living with their young adult children as well as adults living with older parents.

Figure 2. Composition of Jewish households



### Young adults

Young adult couples and singles under age 40 primarily reside in the three city regions. They are most likely to be new residents of Metropolitan Chicago. Among couples ages 22-39, about one-in-four have lived in the area for less than five years. Among singles ages 22-39, 29% have lived in the area for less than five years.

Among couples ages 22-39, more than half (56%) have no Jewish denomination, as do 48% of single adults ages 22-39. Among young adults under age 40, 40% of couples and 41% of singles have participated in a program sponsored by one or more Jewish young adult organizations, including Base Hillel, OneTable, Moishe House, Honeymoon Israel, and KAHAL.

The expressed need for mental health services is significantly higher among Jewish households with adults ages 22-39 without children, both singles and couples, compared to other households.

### Households with children

Jewish households with minor children represent one-in-four Jewish households in Metropolitan Chicago, including 9% in which the oldest child is not yet in kindergarten (Pre-K families) and 16% whose oldest child is in grades K-12 (K-12 families).

The regions with the largest concentration of Jewish Pre-K parent households are City Far North (14% of all Jewish households in the region), City Other (13%), and West Suburbs (12%). The regions with the largest share of Jewish households with children K-12 are the West Suburbs (23%), the Near NW Suburbs (20%), North Suburbs Cook (19%) and North Suburbs Lake (18%).

Of the 54,900 Jewish children in Metropolitan Chicago, 55% are being raised by inmarried parents, 36% by intermarried parents, and the remaining 9% by single parents (Figure 3). Nearly all inmarried

parents consider their children exclusively Jewish (Figure 4). Among children of intermarried parents, more than half are considered by their parents Jewish in some way: 34% exclusively Jewish and 21% as Jewish and another religion. Among children of single parents, 56% are exclusively Jewish and 12% are Jewish and another religion.

**Figure 3. Parent marriage status of Jewish children**

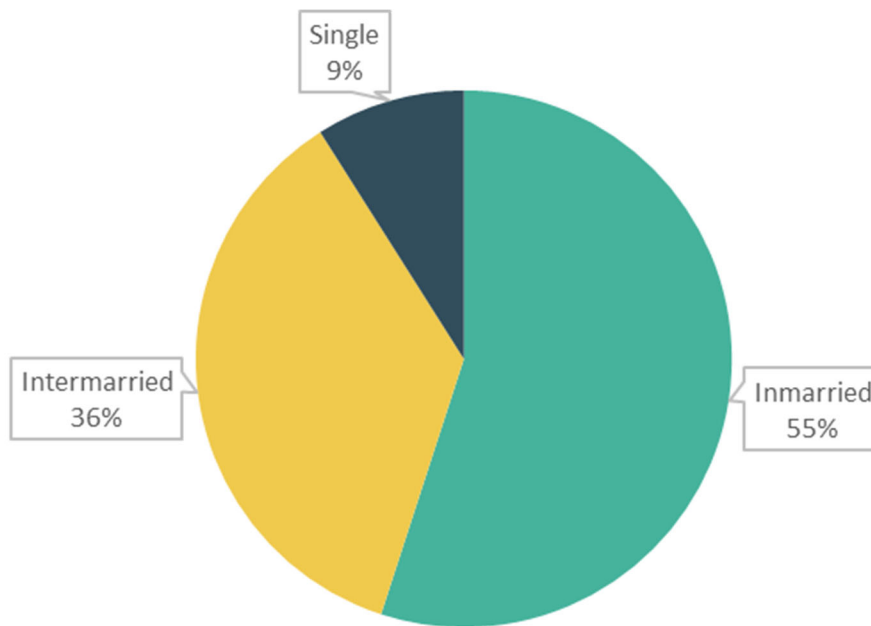
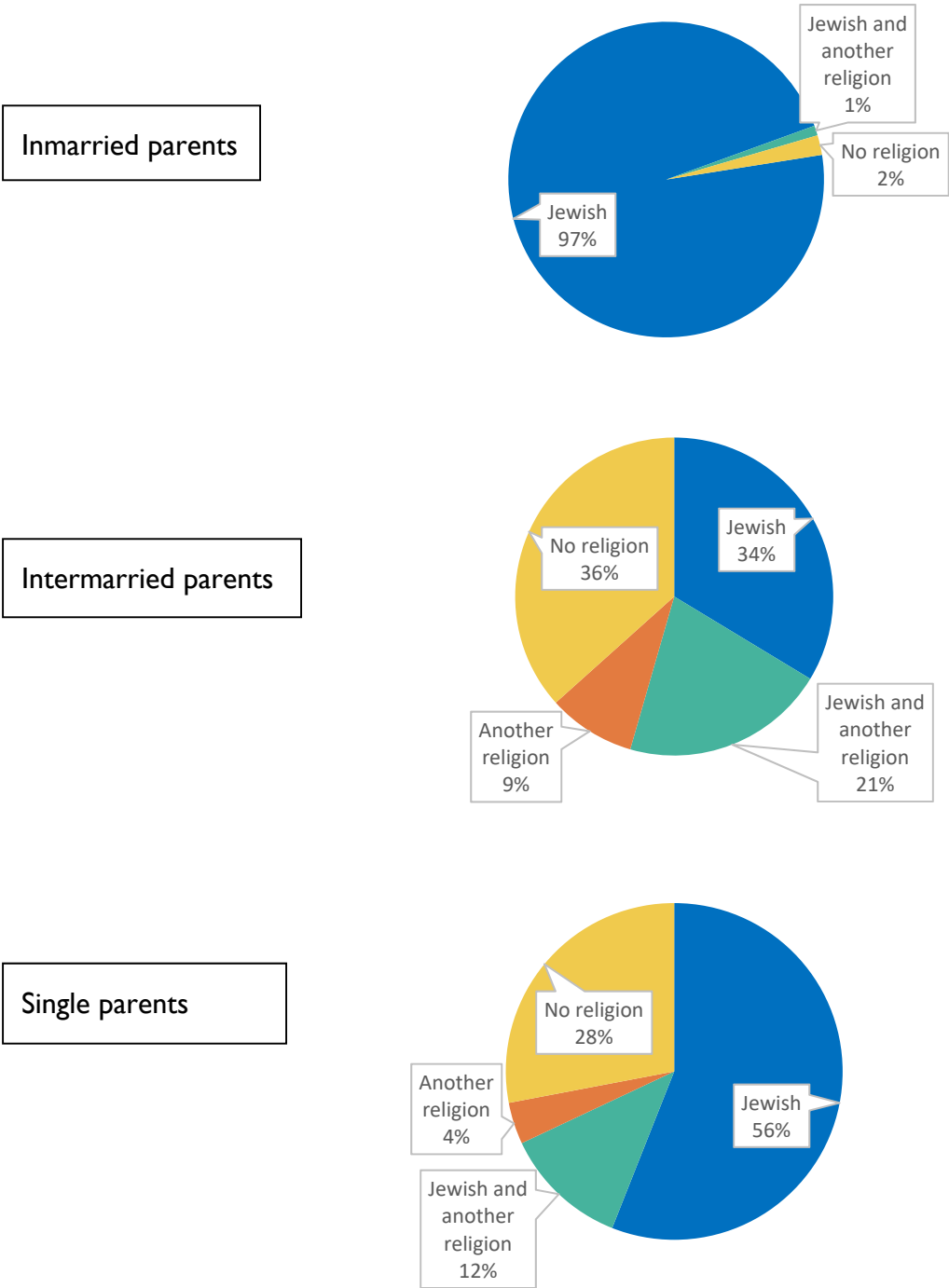


Figure 4.2. Religion of children by parent marriage type



Jewish households with Pre-K children include the largest proportion of households that are struggling financially. Of these households, 31% describe themselves as unable to make ends meet or just managing to make ends meet.

Jewish Pre-K parents include a larger share of Orthodox Jews compared to other lifestage groups. Among Jewish Pre-K parents, 24% are Orthodox. In comparison, 7% of all Jewish adults are Orthodox.

### **Older Adults**

Twenty percent of Jewish households in Metropolitan Chicago include only adults ages 70 or older; 11% are couples and 9% are single. Almost all have lived at their current residence for 20 years or longer (94% of couples and 96% of singles).

Thirty-six percent of couples ages 70 or older belong to a synagogue or congregation, in contrast with 26% of all Metropolitan Chicago households. Jewish adults ages 70 or older are more likely to donate to Jewish organizations than any other lifestage group. Among older Jewish adults, 65% of couples and 69% of singles donated to at least one Jewish organization, compared to 51% of all Metropolitan Chicago households. Among older Jewish adults, 19% of couples and 22% of singles donated to JUF, compared to 11% of all Metropolitan Chicago households.

Older Jewish adults have more Jewish friends than other lifestage groups. Among older Jewish adults, 66% of couples and 59% of singles say that most or all of their friends are Jewish, compared to 44% of all Jewish adults.

Older Jewish adults express more concern about antisemitism than other lifestage groups. Among older Jewish adults, 82% of couples and 85% of singles are very concerned about antisemitism around the world, compared to 69% of all Jewish adults.

## **Subpopulations of Interest**

### **Persons of Color**

Seven percent of Metropolitan Chicago Jewish households include an adult or child who identifies as a person of color; this individual may or may not be Jewish. Although 2% of Jewish adults are persons of color, a larger share of Jewish children, 7%, are persons of color. City Far North (14%) and City Other (14%) include the largest shares of households that include someone who identifies as a person of color.

### **LGBTQ Individuals**

Nine percent of households in Metropolitan Chicago have at least one individual who identifies as LGBTQ, and 5% of Jewish adults identify as LGBTQ. City Far North (21%) and City Other (17%) include the largest shares of households that include someone who is LGBTQ.

### **Holocaust Survivors and Descendants**

Seven percent of Metropolitan Chicago Jewish adults ages 75 and older are survivors of the Holocaust or are World War II refugees. Among Jewish adults younger than age 75, 24% are descendants of a Holocaust survivor, victim, or a World War II refugee.

### **Foreign-Born and Russian-Speaking Jews**

Fifteen percent of Metropolitan Chicago Jewish adults were born outside of the United States, including 9% in Russian or the former Soviet Union, 1% in Israel, 1% in Canada, and the remaining



4% in another country. Eleven percent of households have at least one person who grew up in a Russian-speaking home.

## Jewish Denominations

The best-known system to categorize Jewish identity is denominational affiliation. Because these labels are self-assigned, however, their meaning varies from one individual to another. In addition, an increasing number of Jews do not identify with any specific denomination. Therefore, denominational labels are limited in their ability to convey Jewish behavior and attitudes. In parallel, declining synagogue membership, long a proxy for denomination affiliation, has become less meaningful as a sole marker of affiliation.

Jewish adults in Metropolitan Chicago identify as follows: 7% Orthodox, 16% Conservative, 29% Reform, 4% other, and 44% no denomination (Table 2).

The percentages of those who identify as Reform or Conservative in Metropolitan Chicago declined over the decade since the 2010 study. Those with no denomination are now the largest group of Jewish adults, both locally and nationally.

**Table 2. Denomination of Jewish adults in Metropolitan Chicago, 2010 and 2020**

	Chicago 2010 (%)	Chicago 2020 (%)	US Jews (2020) <sup>1</sup> (%)
Orthodox	7	7	9
Conservative	30	16	17
Reform	45	29	37
Other denomination	4	4	4
No denomination	14	44	32
Total	100	100	100

Note: The estimates for Conservative Jews include those who identify as “Traditional.”

City Far North has the greatest concentration of Orthodox Jewish adults. While 7% of Jewish adults in Metropolitan Chicago identify as Orthodox, 39% of City Far North Jewish adults are Orthodox.

Denominational identification is distinct from synagogue membership, and individuals who identify with a particular denomination do not necessarily belong to congregations that align with that denomination. Some may choose not to belong to any congregation. Seventy-three percent of Orthodox Jewish adults are members of Orthodox synagogues, and 14% are members of other synagogues, including Chabad. Among Conservative Jewish adults, 48% are synagogue members, including 27% who are members of Conservative synagogues. Among Reform Jewish adults, 42% are synagogue members, including 34% who are members of Reform synagogues.

## Jewish Engagement

This study introduces a new way to categorize multiple dimensions of Jewish engagement that is designed to expand the understanding of Jewish life beyond ritual involvement, and suggest ways that Jewish engagement can be enhanced. We define Jewish engagement as participation in any

---

<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center. (2021). *Jewish Americans in 2020*. Washington, DC. Pew Research Center.

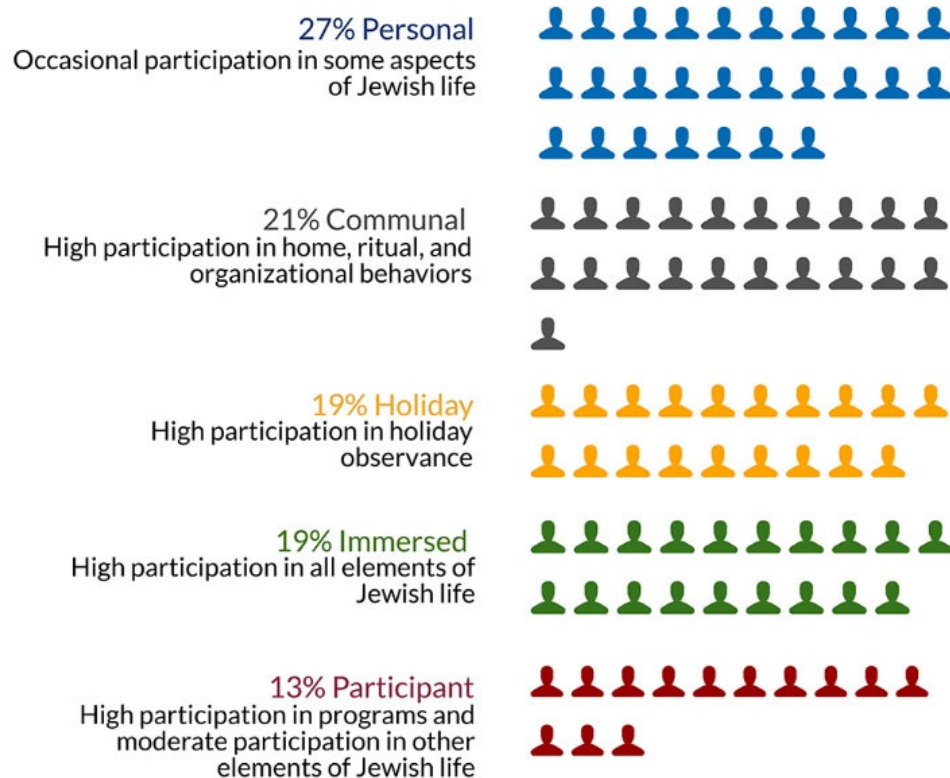
aspect of Jewish life, including ritual activities, cultural activities, and involvement with Jewish organizations. In contrast, Jewish denomination focuses primarily on ritual behavior.

The Index of Jewish Engagement, a set of statistically derived categories specifically developed to reflect the Metropolitan Chicago Jewish community, captures multiple dimensions of Jewish life. It is based on *behavior* rather than on self-identification. This Index was not used in previous studies of the Metropolitan Chicago Jewish community.

Five categories of Jewish engagement emerged from the data that describe patterns of participation in Jewish life, listed and described below from largest to smallest:

- **Personal:** Those in the Personal category, about one quarter (27%) of all Jewish adults in Metropolitan Chicago, participate occasionally in some aspects of Jewish life and tend to engage much more in home-based activities than organizational activities.
- **Communal:** Those in the Communal category, 21% of Jewish adults, are highly involved in home, ritual, and organizational behaviors.
- **Holiday:** Those in the Holiday category, 19% of Jewish adults, are highly involved in holiday observance.
- **Immersed:** Those in the Immersed category, 19% of Jewish adults, are highly involved in all elements of Jewish life.
- **Participant:** Those in the Participant category, 13% of Jewish adults, have high levels of participation in Jewish programs and moderate participation in other elements of Jewish life.

Figure 5. Patterns of Jewish engagement



Understanding the types of Jewish engagement and the demographics of community members can lead to the development of strategies for connecting with diverse segments of the community based on their interests and needs. Jewish adults of each demographic group—including geographic region and lifecycle—are part of every engagement group. Yet there are notable differences in Jewish engagement across these groups.

In City Far North, 43% of Jewish adults are in the Immersed group—the largest concentration of any region. In contrast, West Suburbs has the largest share of those in the Personal group (46%).

Jewish parents of minor children, whether Pre-K parents or K-12 parents, are more prevalent in the Immersed group than Jewish adults who are not parents. Twenty-eight percent of Pre-K parents are in the Immersed group, as are 29% of K-12 parents. In contrast, 19% of all Jewish adults are in the Immersed group.

Among singles ages 40-69, 38% are in the Personal group, compared to 27% of all Jewish adults. Among young couples ages 22-39, 36% are in the Communal group, compared to 21% of all Jewish adults.

## Synagogues and Congregations

Metropolitan Chicago has well over 100 synagogues and *minyanim* of all denominations; most of these are “brick-and-mortar” synagogues with a traditional membership structure, building, and clergy. Some synagogues do not require dues, some do not have a building, and others can best be described as independent minyanim.

Approximately one-in-four Jewish households (26%) belong to a synagogue or another Jewish worship community in Metropolitan Chicago or elsewhere. This share represents a decline from 2010, when 36% of Jewish households belonged to a congregation. Just over one third of Jewish adults (35%) in Metropolitan Chicago reside in a synagogue-member household. Nationally, the rate is the same.

## Ritual Observance

Although one third of Jewish adults live in synagogue-member households, a larger number of Jewish adults participate in various Jewish rituals, including attendance at religious services.

Just over half of Jewish adults (54%) attended some type of religious service at least once in the last six months, and 18% attended religious services monthly or more. Close to half of Jewish adults (46%) attended a High Holiday service in 2020. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, nearly all Jewish adults in synagogue-member households (90%) attended religious services at least once, whether in-person or online, and 85% attended High Holiday services. Among non-members, one-in-three Jewish adults (37%) attended religious services at least once, and more than one-in-four Jewish adults (28%) attended High Holiday services.

In the six months prior to the study, just over one third of Jewish households in Metropolitan Chicago (35%) lit Shabbat candles at least once, and 10% lit candles almost always or always. About one third of Jewish households (32%) participated in a Shabbat meal at least once, and 8% participated in a Shabbat meal almost always or always.

In spring 2020, three-in-five Jewish adults (60%) participated in a Passover seder, either in person or online. More than four-in-five Jewish adults (82%) lit Hanukkah candles in a typical year. Forty-two percent of Jewish adults fasted on Yom Kippur in 2020 for at least part of the day. Thirteen percent of Jewish households keep kosher at home.

### **Jewish Lifecycle Events for Children**

About two thirds of Jewish children (68%) had a Jewish ritual at the time of birth or adoption, including a Jewish naming ceremony led by clergy, a ceremony not led by clergy, and/or a Jewish ritual circumcision

Sixty-four percent of age-eligible Jewish children have had a bar or bat mitzvah ceremony, and another 8% will have one in the future.

## **Jewish Education**

Participation in Jewish education in early childhood, as well as kindergarten through high school, is a predictor of Jewish engagement in adulthood. In Metropolitan Chicago in 2020, 31% of Jewish children ages 3 to 5 attended a Jewish early childhood program, and 38% of Jewish children in K-12 were in some form of Jewish education.

### **Early Childhood Education**

Twenty percent of Jewish children birth to age 5 and 31% of Jewish children ages 3 to 5 attended a Jewish-sponsored early childhood program in 2020.

When selecting an early childhood program for their children, the most common reasons given by parents were the location and the program's warm and loving environment. For Jewish programs, the warm and loving environment (82%) was more important than the location (63%), but for non-Jewish programs the location (79%) was more important than the environment (65%).

Inmarried parents are much more likely to send their children to Jewish early childhood programs (33%) than are intermarried parents (8%). Intermarried parents are somewhat more likely to send their children to non-Jewish or home-based programs (39%) than are unmarried parents (28%).

Jewish early childhood education can serve as a pipeline to K-12 Jewish education. Among K-12 children who ever attended any Jewish full-time day school or yeshiva, 90% attended a Jewish early childhood program. Of students who ever attended a part-time Jewish school, 52% attended Jewish preschool. Of those who never had any formal Jewish education, 12% attended Jewish preschool.

### **K-12 Education**

About one-in-three Jewish children in grades K-12 attended a Jewish part-time or full-time school during the 2020-21 academic year. Sixteen percent of K-12 Jewish children attended a part-time congregational school, and 18% attended a day school or yeshiva. Among those Jewish children not enrolled in a formal school, 6% participated in Jewish tutoring or private classes, and 4% took classes at their synagogue.

Twenty-three percent of Jewish children were enrolled in Jewish education sometime in the past, but not in 2020-21. Thirty-nine percent of Jewish children have never participated in any type of Jewish schooling.

In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, 13% of Jewish children in K-12 attended a Jewish summer program, including Jewish day camp (9%), Jewish overnight camp (3%), or an online

summer program (2%). The total represents a decline from 2019 when 24% attended a Jewish summer program. Twenty-five percent of Jewish children attended a Jewish summer program in 2018 or earlier, but not in 2019 or 2020. Participation decreased similarly for Jewish children who attended non-Jewish summer programs.

## Jewish Organizations and Activities

### Membership in Jewish Organizations and Clubs

Twenty-two percent of Jewish households include someone who is a member of a Jewish organization, club, or informal Jewish group. Sixteen percent of Jewish households include someone who is a member of a Jewish organization or club (e.g., Hadassah, ADL, AJC, youth group, AIPAC, or J Street). Ten percent of Jewish households in Metropolitan Chicago include someone who belongs to an informal or grassroots Jewish group, such as a social *havurah* or Jewish book club. In 2010, 23% of households belonged to or regularly participated with a Jewish organization that was not a synagogue, and 8% of Jewish households were dues-paying members of a JCC.

Jewish organizational memberships are most common among Jewish households in City Far North (23%), North Suburbs Cook (24%), and North Suburbs Lake (21%). With respect to lifestage, Jewish organizational memberships are most common among those Jewish households with adults ages 70 and older, including older singles (23%) and couples (26%).

### Participation in Jewish Programs

Over half of Jewish adults (56%) participated in at least one Jewish-sponsored program in the past year. Among all Jewish adults, 23% attended a program in the previous year that could be characterized as primarily educational, like a class or lecture; 19% attended cultural programs such as concerts, theater, films, or museums; and 19% participated in religious programs other than religious services, such as holiday celebrations. Fifteen percent of Jewish adults attended primarily charitable programs, including fundraisers. Nine percent of Jewish adults attended primarily social programs such as sports leagues, bar nights, parties, or dances, and 6% attended political programs including rallies and marches. Jewish adults most frequently attended programs sponsored by congregations or synagogues (27%), the Illinois Holocaust Museum (23%), JUF (12%), and Chabad (12%).

Jewish-sponsored program participation is one of the behaviors used to create the Index of Jewish Engagement and is a defining behavior for the Participant and Communal groups. While 100% of those in the Participant and Communal engagement groups participated in Jewish programs, those in the Participant group had relatively low rates of synagogue membership (5%) and membership in Jewish organizations (16%). Among the Immersed and Communal engagement groups, participation was highest in educational (62% Immersed, 42% Communal) and religious (52% Immersed, 41% Communal) programs. The Participant group attended educational (23%) and cultural (26%) programs more than other program types.

### Individual Jewish Activities

Jewish life extends beyond organizational boundaries to activities that take place in the home, with friends, and online. Examples of individual activities include: discussing Jewish topics with family or friends; reading Jewish publications; eating Jewish foods; and participating in Jewish-focused culture and entertainment such as movies, TV, books, or music.

Almost all Jewish adults (91%) discussed a Jewish topic in the past year with family or friends, and just under one third (31%) discussed a Jewish topic frequently. Almost as many Jewish adults (88%)



ate Jewish food in the past year. More than 82% of Jewish adults engaged in Jewish-focused culture. Just under three quarters of Jewish adults (73%) read at least one Jewish publication.

Individuals in the Personal engagement group tend not to be members of Jewish organizations or attend Jewish organization-sponsored programs but did engage in Jewish personal activities. Eighty-two percent of those in the Personal engagement group discussed a Jewish topic with friends or family, 74% ate a Jewish food, 59% engaged in Jewish culture, and 41% read at least one Jewish publication.

## Philanthropy and Volunteering

Most Jewish households (80%) in Metropolitan Chicago engage in charitable giving. Just over half of households (51%) gave to at least one Jewish charity or cause in the previous year, and another 29% donated to a non-Jewish organization. Among Jewish households that donate to Jewish organizations, the top three categories were congregations and synagogues (37%, excluding dues and tuition), human services (35%), and Israel (25%).

A Jewish household's financial situation is a strong predictor of charitable giving; 94% of financially well-off households give to charitable causes. However, a majority (58%) of Jewish households that are financially struggling also give to charitable causes.

Among all Jewish households, 11% donated to the Jewish United Fund (JUF)/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago. Among households in the Immersed engagement group, 29% donated to JUF, in contrast to 2% of those in the Personal group. The Immersed group feels more connected to the Metropolitan Chicago Jewish community than other engagement groups, which may be one of the reasons for their higher level of support for JUF.

Older Jewish households, both couples and singles, were most likely to donate to JUF, including 19% of couples ages 70 or older and 22% of singles ages 70 or older.

Volunteering is less prevalent than charitable giving. Forty-three percent of Jewish adults volunteered in the past year. Sixteen percent of Jewish adults volunteered for at least one Jewish organization, including 7% who volunteered exclusively for Jewish organizations. Another 27% volunteered exclusively for a non-Jewish organization.

## Israel and Antisemitism

Sixty percent of Jewish adults in Metropolitan Chicago have been to Israel, higher than the national figure of 45%. A quarter (25%) of Jewish adults have been to Israel once, 29% multiple times, and 6% have lived there.

Among Jewish adults, the majority feel some degree of emotional attachment to Israel: 35% are somewhat attached, and 31% are very attached. The majority of respondents agreed that it is important for Israel to exist as a democratic state (90%) and as a Jewish state (80%) and feel proud of Israel's accomplishments (82%) (Figure 6). Three quarters of Jewish adults (75%) believe that caring about Israel is essential to their Jewish identity. Nearly three quarters (73%) of Chicago Jewish adults believe American Jews have the right to criticize the Israeli government. A little more than half of Jewish adults (55%) believe Israel lives up to its human rights values, and 40% self-identify as Zionist.

Figure 6. Agreement and disagreement with statements about Israel



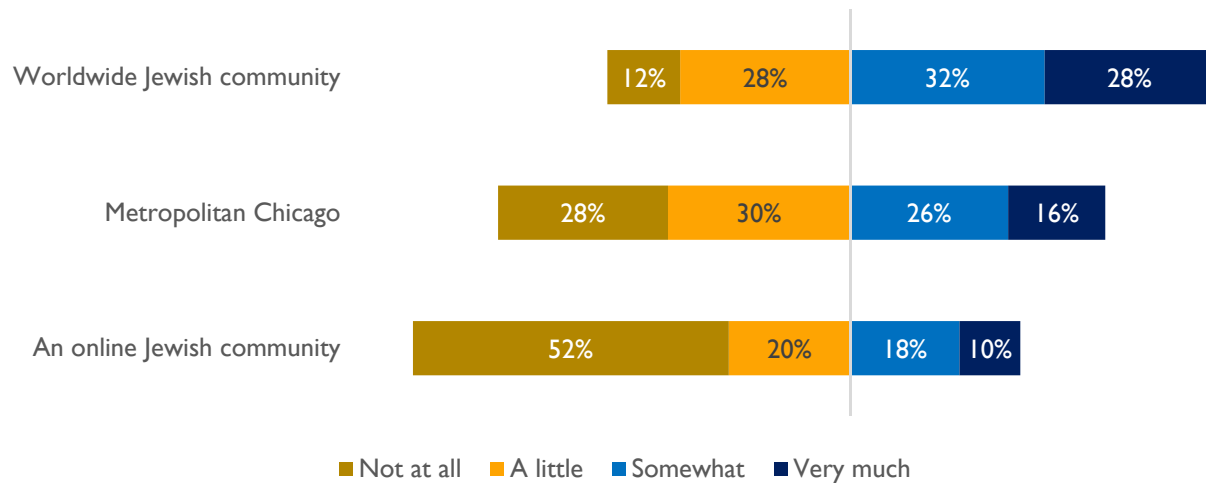
In the past year, 12% of households donated to an Israel-related cause, with 4% reporting it was their top cause.

The majority of Jewish adults in Metropolitan Chicago (69%) are deeply concerned about antisemitism around the world and in the United States. Seven percent reported that they were personally a victim of antisemitism in the past year.

## Connection to the Community and to Being Jewish

The majority of Chicago Jewish adults feel that they are part of the worldwide and Metropolitan Chicago Jewish communities, but that their connections to the worldwide community are stronger (Figure 7). This pattern, found in other communities as well, may indicate that people feel connection to smaller communities within Chicago—for example, their synagogue or neighborhood—but not necessarily feel connected to Metropolitan Chicago as a single Jewish community.

Figure 7. Feeling part of the Jewish community



More than one quarter of Jewish adults (28%) feel very much part of the worldwide Jewish community, and 32% feel somewhat part of it. In comparison, 16% of Jewish adults feel very much part of the Metropolitan Chicago Jewish community, and 26% feel somewhat part of it.

About one quarter of Jewish adults (24%) are very satisfied with their current level of connection to the Metropolitan Chicago Jewish community, 36% are somewhat satisfied, and 15% are not at all satisfied. Among Jewish adults who did not feel at all part of the Metropolitan Chicago Jewish community, more than one quarter (28%) feel very satisfied with their current level of connection. However, half of this group is not satisfied with their current level of connection, suggesting they may be looking to increase their connection.

When asked about conditions that influenced their level of connection to the local Jewish community, the three chosen most often were “don’t know many people” (19%); “haven’t found interesting Jewish activities” (18%); and the COVID-19 pandemic (18%). Among younger Jewish singles, 39% reported that not knowing many people limited their level of connection.

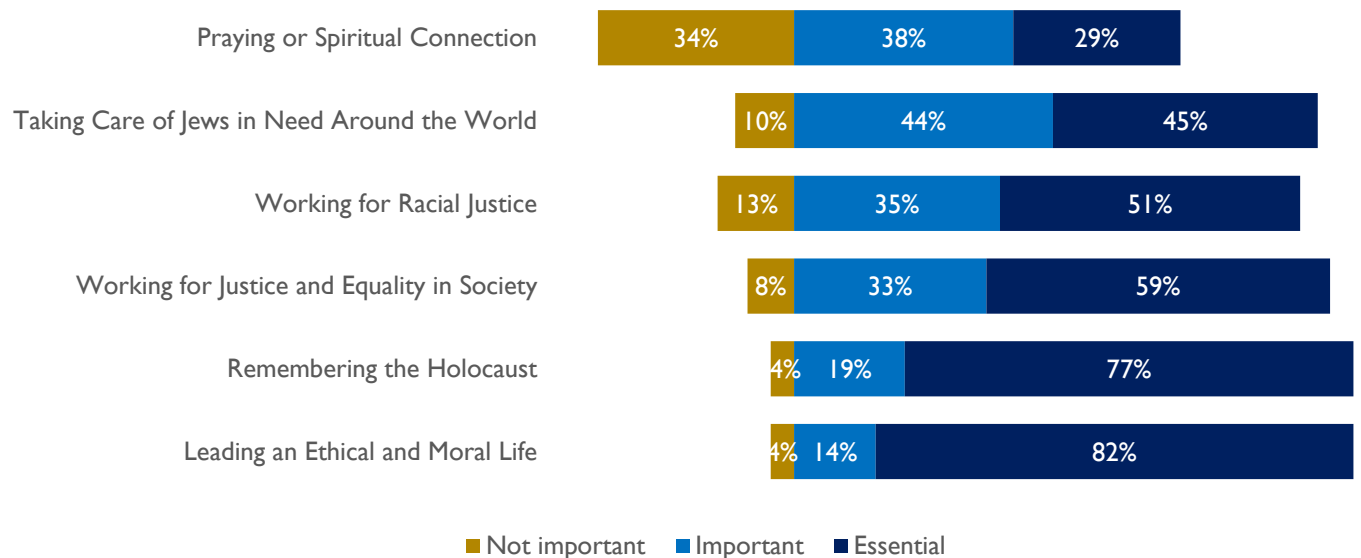
## Meaning of Being Jewish

Judaism is understood by many Jews as a combination of history, tradition, family, values, ritual, beliefs, and more. All of these aspects of Judaism can serve as points of connection to members of the community. While some features of Judaism are considered important for most Jewish adults, on other aspects there is less agreement.

Overall, 82% of Metropolitan Chicago Jewish adults feel that leading an ethical and moral life is an essential part of being Jewish, compared to 72% of US Jews (Figure 8). The majority of all engagement groups believe this aspect of Jewish life is essential. Of all Metropolitan Chicago Jewish adults, 77% feel that remembering the Holocaust is an essential part of being Jewish; this is almost identical to the share of all US Jews (76%).

Of all Metropolitan Chicago Jewish adults, 59% feel that working for justice and equality in society is an essential part of being Jewish; this is identical to the share of all US Jews (59%).

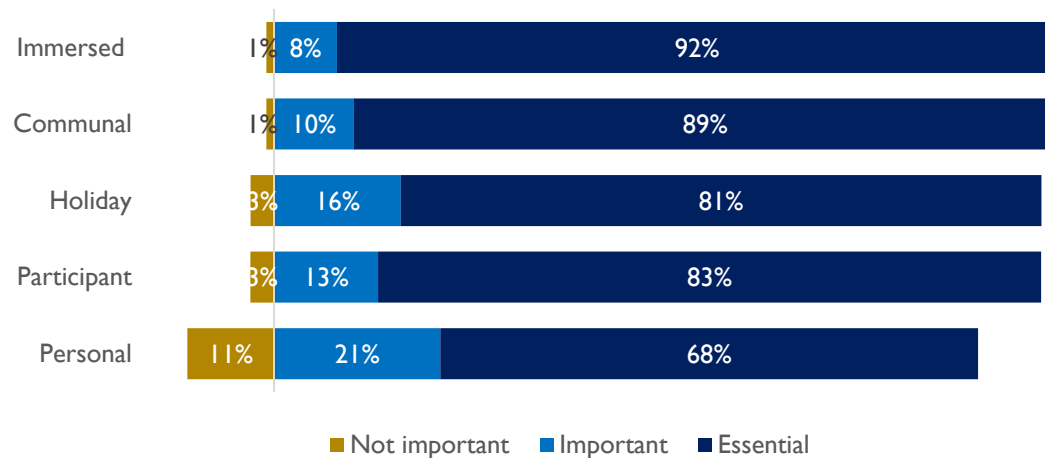
Figure 8. Importance of what being Jewish means



Question text: “How important is each of the following to what being Jewish means to you?”

Although Jewish adults across all engagement groups agree about the importance of some aspects of Judaism, for other aspects there were distinct differences. For example, the majority of all engagement groups think that leading an ethical and moral life is essential to being Jewish, although the share of the Personal group who agrees (68%) is smaller than the other groups (Figure 9). Jewish adults in all engagement groups were in agreement about the importance of remembering the Holocaust, working for justice and equality, and working for racial justice.

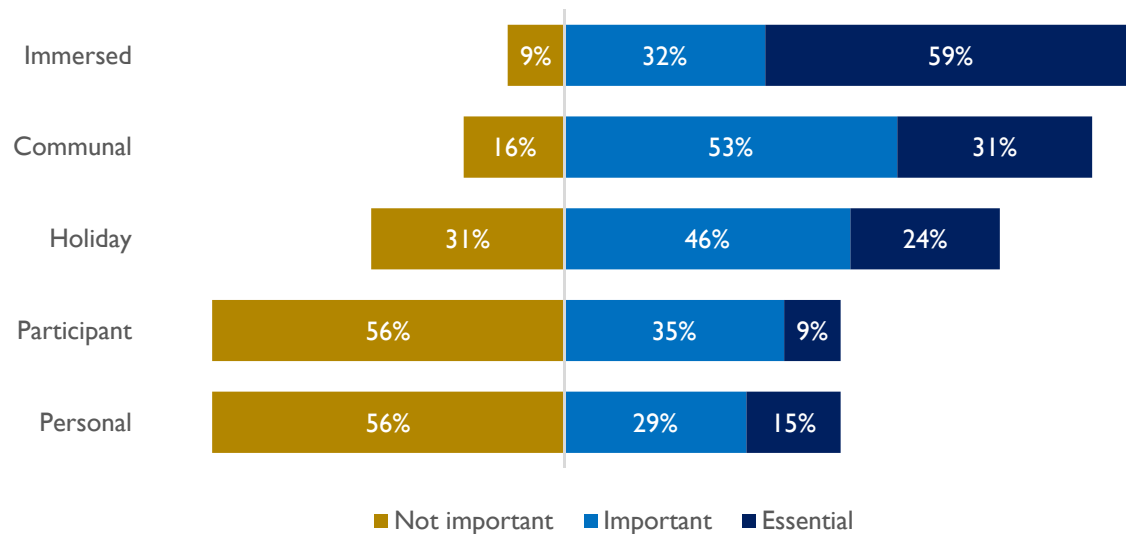
Figure 9. Importance of leading an ethical and moral life, by engagement group



Question text: “How important is each of the following to what being Jewish means to you?”

The largest variation among the engagement group is in the importance they place on praying or a spiritual connection (Figure 10). For Jewish adults in the Personal and Participant groups, more than half (56% of each group) consider this aspect of being Jewish to be unimportant. In contrast, 59% of those in the Immersed category consider praying or spiritual connection to be essential to being Jewish, and 32% consider it important.

**Figure 10. Importance of praying or spiritual connection, by engagement group**



Question text: “How important is each of the following to what being Jewish means to you?”

## Finances, Health, and Social Service Needs

Nearly four-in-five Jewish adults in Metropolitan Chicago has either a bachelor’s degree (36%) or a graduate degree (42%). Jews in Metropolitan Chicago have higher levels of educational attainment than Jews nationally: Among all US Jews, 30% have a bachelor’s degree, and 28% have a postgraduate degree.

Of Jewish adults who are not currently in high school, 62% were employed at the time of the study, 7% were unemployed, and 30% were not working. Among Jewish households in Metropolitan Chicago, 14% earn less than \$50,000 annually, and 17% earn \$200,000 or more.

Twenty-one percent of Jewish households indicated they could not make ends meet or were just managing to make ends meet, 34% had enough money, 24% had extra money, and 21% were well off. Table 2 shows comparisons with 2010. Overall, the financial well-being of Jewish adults in Metropolitan Chicago has improved over the past decade. More Jewish adults have extra money or are well-off.



**Table 2. Financial situation, 2010 and 2020**

Report Category	Response option	Jewish households, 2010 (%)	Jewish households, 2020 (%)
Struggling	Cannot make ends meet	2	3
	Just managing to make ends meet	19	18
Enough	Have enough money (2020) / Comfortable (2010)	49	34
Extra	Have extra money	15	24
Well-off	Well-off	15	21

The regions with the largest share of Jewish households that are well-off are City Other (33%), City North (28%), North Suburbs Cook (28%), and North Suburbs Lake (26%).

One third of Jewish households in City Far North (34%) are struggling financially. The largest category of Jewish households that are financially struggling (31%) are those with parents of pre-K children.

## Economic Vulnerability

Seven percent of Jewish households in Metropolitan Chicago are below 200% of the federal poverty level, including 3% who are below 100% of the federal poverty level. Among Jewish adults who are financially struggling, 21% are unemployed, and 18% are not working for other reasons.

Nineteen percent of Jewish households spend more than 30% of their income on housing costs. Nine percent of Jewish households are unable to pay in full an unexpected \$400 emergency expense with cash, money currently in a bank account, or on a credit card. Among all Jewish households, 11% lacked funds for some necessity in the approximately six-month period after March 2020.

Seventeen percent of Jewish parents are not at all confident that they would be able to afford their children's college education, and 16% are not too confident. Twelve percent of Jewish adults ages 40 and over are not at all confident they will have enough for retirement, and 13% are not too confident.

Jewish households that are struggling financially experienced the greatest financial impact from the COVID-19 pandemic. Of Jewish households that are struggling, 59% reported that their financial situation had gotten worse since the beginning of 2020. In contrast, 8% of well-off households reported that their financial situation had worsened. Among non-Orthodox Jewish households that are financially struggling, 25% reduced their participation in Jewish life for financial reasons in the past year.

## Health Status and Social Service Needs

Studies of both the Jewish and general community during the COVID-19 pandemic point to a growing need for mental health services, especially among young adults. While it is difficult to predict how this need will evolve in the future, it is clear that this is a pressing concern for many members of the Jewish community in Metropolitan Chicago.

Eighteen percent of Jewish households include at least one person whose work, schooling, or general activities are limited by a health issue such as a chronic illness, mental or emotional health problem, disability, or special need.

One third of Jewish households (34%) needed health services within the prior six months. Another 8% of Jewish households needed no health services in the prior six months but needed one or more services in the prior three years. The greatest single service need is for mental health services: approximately one quarter (24%) of Jewish households needed mental health services in the past six months. The need for mental health services is significantly higher among couples ages 22-39 (45%) and singles ages 22-39 (36%).

For all health services combined other than mental health, 17% of Jewish households needed at least one of these services. Many Jewish households needed multiple services: 7% needed both mental health and other services. Of Jewish households that needed health services, 21% did not receive any services. Eleven percent of Jewish households received services from Jewish organizations only, 55% from non-Jewish organizations only, and 13% received services from both Jewish and non-Jewish organizations.

There is a strong association between health and financial well-being. Among financially struggling Jewish households, one third (34%) include someone with a health issue, disability, or special need, a much larger share than for households that are more financially secure. Financially struggling Jewish households reported a greater needs for health and social services other than mental health services (36%), compared to households that were more financially secure.

The survey asked about unmet health and social service needs (i.e., services needed but not received). Of those listed, the greatest unmet need is for assistance in obtaining or paying for medication or medical care. Among Jewish households that needed this assistance (7% of households), 44% did not receive it.

In 15% of Jewish households, someone manages the care or personally provides care for a close relative or friend on a regular basis. The majority of these households (70%) are caring for parents. Twelve percent of these households are providing care for spouses. Others are providing care for their adult (7%) and minor (2%) children.

Older Jewish households include at least one person age 65 or older. Of older adult Jewish households, 10% reported at least one older adult needs daily help with activities such as doing housework, preparing meals, dressing and undressing, taking a bath or shower, or walking up and down stairs.

Members of the Jewish community express concern for human service needs through their charitable donations. Human services (e.g., homelessness, poverty, food insecurity, counseling, domestic abuse) is the second most frequent category of charitable giving. Thirty-five percent of Jewish donor households contributed to human service organizations.

## Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The study was conducted in fall 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and includes an analysis of the ways in which the pandemic altered the lives of Metropolitan Chicago Jewish households.

## **Impact on Jewish Life**

Jewish online offerings were considerably enhanced during the pandemic, potentially enabling many Jewish adults in Metropolitan Chicago to engage in Jewish life in new ways. Just over half of Jewish adults (52%) searched for Jewish resources and information online. Half of Jewish adults (50%) watched, listened to, or joined a Jewish religious service online. Forty-two percent of Jewish adults watched, listened to, or joined a Jewish program, class, or activity, and 29% of Jewish adults communicated with Jewish groups using social media. About half of Jewish adults (51%) participated in new online activities during the pandemic, including attending Jewish lifecycle events (33%), accessing new Jewish resources (23%), attending new programs or classes (23%), and connecting to new people (10%).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly all Jewish adults in synagogue-member households (90%) attended religious services at least once, whether in-person or online, and 85% attended High Holiday services. Among non-members, one-in-three Jewish adults (37%) attended religious services at least once, and more than one-in-four Jewish adults (28%) attended High Holiday services.

Fourteen percent of Jewish adults increased their engagement in Jewish religious life during the COVID-19 pandemic, and about one quarter (26%) decreased their participation in Jewish religious life. Eighteen percent of Jewish adults said that the pandemic was a condition that limited their participation in Jewish life.

## **Health Impacts**

At the time of the study, 9% of Jewish adults believed they had contracted COVID-19 at some point, whether or not they had been tested. Twenty-five percent of Jewish households included someone in the household who had or thought they had COVID-19 and/or was close to someone not in their household who become very ill or passed away from COVID-19. Older Jewish adults reported the lowest rates of COVID-19; 4% of single adults ages 70 or older and 2% of couples ages 70 or older reported someone in their household had COVID-19.

Two thirds (68%) of financially struggling Jewish households experienced an increase in their need for health services during the pandemic. An increase in need for services during the pandemic was experienced most by Jewish households with Pre-K parents (64%), couples ages 22-39 (59%) and singles ages 22-39 (59%).

## **Financial Impacts**

Jewish households that were struggling financially experienced the greatest impact from the financial downturn during the COVID-19 pandemic. Of Jewish households that were struggling, 59% reported that their financial situation had gotten worse since the beginning of 2020. In contrast, 8% of well-off households reported that their financial situation had declined.

## **Conclusions**

This executive summary describes some of the key findings of the 2020 Metropolitan Chicago Jewish Population Study. As indicated in this summary, the strength of the Metropolitan Chicago Jewish community lies in its size, diversity, and availability of an extensive array of organizations, programs, and activities. At the same time, the study identifies opportunities to enhance the lives of Jewish households in a variety of ways, including:

- Supporting social connections and the desire to connect with other members of the community
- Providing new opportunities for Jewish engagement, tailored to the interests of demographic groups who engage in Jewish life in a variety of ways
- Identifying and fulfilling unmet financial and social service needs

The full study [report](#) provides more information about each of the topics described here. This report, as well as the extensive dataset that was collected as part of the study, is expected to help guide the Metropolitan Chicago Jewish community in the decade to come.