

Community Portrait: A 2019 Jewish Population Study of Greater Philadelphia

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Executive Summary

The Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia is committed to addressing the Jewish communities' most critical priorities locally, in Israel, and around the world. Through the mobilization of financial and volunteer resources, the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia takes care of vulnerable individuals, engages communities in repairing the world, and energizes Jewish life and learning.

To provide an up-to-date picture of the size and socioeconomic, demographic, and Jewish engagement trends among affiliated and nonaffiliated Jewish households in the five-county Greater Philadelphia region as well as to create a resource for community planning and the allocation of resources, the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia commissioned the *Community Portrait: A 2019 Jewish Population Study of Greater Philadelphia*. Over 79,000 addresses in the five-county area were randomly selected and 2,119 Jewish households completed the 2019 study, the first area-wide Jewish population research study in the five-county Greater Philadelphia area since 2009.

Research Methods

The findings presented are based on survey and focus group responses of randomly selected residents of Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties. Survey questionnaires were completed either online or by mail. Respondents were asked about their spouse/partner and any children living in their households, if applicable. Seventeen Focus Groups were conducted in-person at convenient locations across the region.

Jewish Households¹

In the survey, a household is considered Jewish if any adult in the household considers him- or herself Jewish by religion, ethnicity or culture, or by heritage. In addition, the household was considered eligible to participate in the study if any adult was raised Jewish or had a Jewish parent and does not currently identify with another religion. This is a more inclusive definition than used in previous Greater Philadelphia area studies, reflecting the fluid nature of Jewish identification and the

¹ Population estimates refer to the non-institutionalized household population and therefore do not include Jews living in non-household living arrangements such as nursing homes, military barracks, and other institutionalized housing. Those living in housing with individually-identified units, including most assisted-living facilities and college dormitories, were eligible for inclusion.

Jewish connection of many who do not report any religion. All numbers reported in this executive summary reflect this inclusive definition.

The survey data show that the Greater Philadelphia region has 194,200 Jewish households (see Table E-1). There are 445,800 people in these households, of whom 351,200 are Jewish (79%) and the remaining 94,600 (21%) are not Jewish. There are 308,700 Jewish adults and 42,500 children who are being raised Jewish. The Jewish population is larger in all five counties, but was most pronounced in Philadelphia County where the Jewish population is double what was reported 10 years ago.

Table E-1. Jewish population estimates in five-county Greater Philadelphia area

	2019 population	95% confidence interval*
Jewish Households	194,200	(151,500-237,000)
People in Jewish Households	445,800	(347,300-544,200)
Jewish adults	308,700	(238,200-379,200)
Jewish children	42,500	(27,200-57,700)

*95% confidence intervals are presented for selected findings to provide insight into the accuracy of the point estimates.

These estimates are larger than in 2009 for three main reasons:

- An enhanced methodology in 2019 that covered all households, compared to the 2009 study which only included households that had landline telephones with local area codes;
- A more inclusive definition of Jewish households that would have been excluded by the screening questions used in 2009; and
- Population growth in the Greater Philadelphia Jewish community.

Household Composition

Half (48%) of all Jewish households include married partners, with another 11 percent comprised of unmarried, cohabitating couples. There are 76,100 children living in Jewish households, but only an estimated 56 percent of adults are raising their children as Jewish. One-third of households, 69,300, contain at least one person age 65 or older, with 50,000 of these households comprising older adults only.

Nearly half of marriages are interfaith marriages (47%). For those over 65 years of age, the intermarriage rate is 30 percent, compared to 59 percent for younger married couples (ages 18 to 39) and 54 percent for couples ages 40 to 64.

Socioeconomic Characteristics

Median annual income for Jewish households is between \$75,000 and \$100,000. Approximately 6 percent of Jewish households are at or below 100 percent of the Federal poverty level and 10 percent are below 138 percent of the poverty level, which indicates eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and 15 percent earn less than 200 percent of the poverty level.²

Fifteen percent of Jewish households are receiving public benefits, half (56%) of whom receive SNAP benefits to help with food insecurity. Ten percent of households with older adults and 11 percent of households with children receive SNAP benefits. Only 43 percent of households who are income-eligible for SNAP are receiving SNAP benefits.

Jewish Identity and Engagement

Sixty-six percent of Jewish adults identify as Jewish by religion, with another 30 percent identifying as ethnically or culturally Jewish. Additionally, 4 percent do not identify as Jewish, but had a Jewish parent or were raised Jewish and do not identify with any other religion. Respondents were asked to provide all denominations with which their household identifies (some identified multiple denominations). Approximately one-quarter of Jewish households identify as Reform (26%) and another 26 percent as Conservative. Eight percent identify as Orthodox, 6 percent as Reconstructionist, and 7 percent as something else (including 4% secular and 1% Renewal). More than four in 10 (43%) do not identify with any denomination.

To better understand the practice habits of Jewish households, we developed a scale based on current practices with six groupings that can be used to describe their form of Jewish engagement.

² These percentages are cumulative; the 15 percent includes the 10 percent below 138 percent of poverty, which in turn includes the 6 percent below 100 percent of poverty.

- Twenty-two percent are highly engaged with Judaism, but they split into one group of 5 percent who are inwardly focused only on Jewish communal activity with the other 17 percent focused on both Jewish and non-Jewish engagement.
- Two groups have more mixed levels of engagement, one (20%) engaged through traditional practices and the other (15%) engaged through Jewish communal activity.
- At the much lower engagement end of the spectrum, there is a large group (30%) that demonstrate a concern for the Jewish community, while the last group (14%) appear only connected to Judaism through participating in family events.

Respondents were shown a list of 18 ways of being connected to Judaism and were asked how important each was on a 4-point scale (very important/important/somewhat important/not important at all). The top four dimensions were:

- Leading an ethical and moral life (92% very important or important);
- Remembering the Holocaust (90%);
- Combating anti-Semitism (87%); and
- Advocating for justice and equality in society (85%).

Health Status

The majority of Jewish adults are in good/excellent health. However, slightly more than half of all Jewish households (55%) reported having someone who has been diagnosed with a physical health condition; this includes three-quarters of households living at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level (75%). The leading diagnosis is high blood pressure, found in 36 percent of Jewish households.

Forty percent of households reported having a member who has been diagnosed with a mental health, developmental, or behavioral health condition. The most common conditions were a mental health condition such as depression or anxiety (33%) and a learning or developmental disability (17%) such as ADHD, dyslexia, or an Autism spectrum disorder. Approximately 2 percent reported a household member with an Opioid addiction.

Nineteen percent of households skipped a medical procedure in the last year due to cost, including going to a dentist or a doctor, filling a drug or vision prescription, or getting preventive health screenings or a hearing aid.

Using Social Services

The study examines a wide range of social services, measuring the need in the community and how important it would be to receive such services through a Jewish agency. The primary factor that those over age 40 consider in selecting an agency for services they need is the qualifications of the agency, its staff, and their services. In general, whether or not it is provided by a Jewish agency is not a high priority except for when selecting a nursing home or assisted living.

Volunteering and Philanthropy

Slightly more than one-half (53%) of Jewish households volunteered with a charitable organization in the past year, including 18 percent who volunteered with a Jewish organization. Nearly 8 in 10 donated to charity; of these, 37 percent donated through Jewish organizations and 66 percent with a non-Jewish organization.

Anti-Semitism

Forty percent of respondents say there is a great deal or moderate amount of anti-Semitism in the five-county area, yet only half that number (19%) report similar levels of anti-Semitism in the area where they live. When asked about changes over the past 3 years, 40 percent thought it had increased compared with only 4 percent who thought it had decreased. Those over age 65 reported higher levels of perceived anti-Semitism compared to younger respondents.

Israel

Thirty-seven percent of Jewish adults have traveled to Israel and almost two-thirds reported that caring about Israel is important or very important to them. The importance of caring for Israel goes up by age cohort; just over half of those born since 1980 say it is important to them (56%) compared to three-quarters of those born before 1955.

Forty percent favor what is commonly known as a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with 16 percent opposing this solution. The remainder either did not express an opinion or did not answer the question. Support tended to be consistent across denominations, although support for a two-state solution was strongest among those who identify as Reconstructionist (75%) and weakest among those who identify as Orthodox (32%).

Political Viewpoints

Most Jews in the study tend to be liberal when it comes to domestic social policy, but lean slightly more moderate regarding domestic fiscal policy. On foreign policy, whether it is Israel or other countries in the Middle East, they lean towards moderate-to-liberal viewpoints. Only one in five express conservative viewpoints.

Households with Children

More than one-half (56%) of all children in Jewish households are being raised in the Jewish religion.³ Approximately one-fifth are being raised in another religion and the rest are split between “haven’t decided yet” and being raised without any religion.

Fifty-seven percent of Jewish children are in households with two Jewish parents, 25 percent are being raised in interfaith families, and the remaining 18 percent are being raised by a single parent who is Jewish. When both parents are Jewish, 68 percent of the children are being raised with the Jewish religion, a single Jewish parent is raising 46 percent of children Jewish, and interfaith parents are raising 28 percent of children as Jewish. It is important to remember that only 66 percent of Jewish adults consider themselves Jewish by religion.

Parents were shown a list of 10 activities and asked how important each is for their children to do. The top five rated⁴ activities were:

- Feeling positive about being Jewish 74%
- Being knowledgeable about Jewish customs and beliefs 73%
- Being committed to social action 72%
- Understanding the Jewish commitment to charitable giving 68%
- Practicing Jewish values 64%

³ We have assumed that half of the children in households where they have not decided yet will be raised Jewish. Similarly, in households where some are being raised Jewish and some are not, we assumed half are being raised Jewish. Also, we assume that half the children in households for which the respondent wasn’t the parent/legal guardian or refused to answer are being raised Jewish.

⁴ Out of a 5-point scale (Extremely important, Very important, Important, A little important, Not at all important) we are reporting the percent either Extremely important, Very important, or Important.

Seventy-six percent of Jewish families send their 5- to 17-year-old children to public school, 7 percent send their children to a Jewish day school or *Yeshiva*, and 10 percent send their children to other private schools. Nine percent of Jewish families send their children to Jewish day camps and 6 percent to Jewish overnight camp.

Approximately 16 percent of Jewish households with children are considered poor or near poor, with household incomes at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. Eleven percent receive SNAP, while one in five (19%) households with children are at risk for food insecurity.

College Students

Approximately 8 percent of Jewish households in the Greater Philadelphia area include an adult who is currently enrolled in or attending classes at a college, university, or vocational/technical school. Fifty-five percent of college students think of themselves as Jewish by religion and another 42 percent by ethnicity or culture.

Nine percent of students identify as gay or lesbian, bisexual, or some other sexual orientation.

A slightly higher percentage of college students have volunteered compared to all Jewish adults 18 years of age and older (59% vs 53%, respectively). Not unexpectedly, a lower percentage of college students have donated to charity compared to all Jewish adults 18 years of age and older (55% vs. 79%, respectively).

Like the general population, one-third of college students have been to Israel. College students tend to be less certain of their views on Israel but, similar to the overall population, are more likely to favor a two-state solution.

Six in 10 college students said they were aware of anti-Semitism on their campus, pointing most often to social media and to slurs, slander, hate speech, and threats on campus.

Older Adults

An estimated 93,900 Jewish residents in the five-county area are age 65 or older, including 83,800 who are between 65 and 84 years of age and another 10,100 who are aged 85 or older. This older adult population is much more likely to identify as Jewish by religion (84%) and to consider themselves Conservative (33%) or Reform (30%).

Older adults are more likely to have connections to a synagogue, temple, or shul (46%) and even belong to one (32%). They are also more likely to participate in many Jewish activities such as attending High Holiday services, attending Passover *Seders*, praying, lighting Chanukah candles, and attending a Jewish class or lecture.

Not surprisingly, older adults are more likely to have been diagnosed, as well as being in treatment, with a physical health condition, but they report lower levels for mental/developmental/behavioral health. They are also twice as likely as those under age 40 to be providing care for someone age 65 or older.