

Informational Brief - Exploring the Addition of a “Jewish” Category to REALD

Background:

- **Community Advocacy & Current REALD Data:** Jewish community members in Oregon have expressed a desire to explore adding a “Jewish” category to the race and ethnicity categories in REALD. Past analysis of the initial open text question on the REALD questionnaire from the repository shows that “Jewish” was written in for at least 323 individuals.¹
- **Large and Growing Community:** The Jewish community in Oregon generally, and Portland and Lane Counties specifically is growing. In Portland, there are estimated to be 75,500 individuals and 31,100 households that identify as Jewish.² In Lane County, there are estimated to be 6,000 individuals and 2,900 households that identify as Jewish.³
- **Widespread & Increasing Antisemitism:** As the Jewish community in Oregon has grown, so has antisemitism. Reports of antisemitism in the Pacific Northwest were up 22% in 2022 and the Anti-Defamation League Pacific Northwest recorded 40 incidents of antisemitic hate in Oregon in 2022, the most ever recorded.⁴ In Lane County in 2023, there were 3 incidents of antisemitic flyers being publicly distributed.⁵ This rise in antisemitism prompted the Oregon legislature to pass House Bill 2095 during the 2023 session which would add people of Jewish descent to an existing requirement that schools teach the histories and contributions of marginalized or underserved people.⁶
- **Evidence of Impact of Structural Oppression on Health:** The Jewish community faces increased mental health struggles caused by discrimination, antisemitism, generational trauma from the Holocaust and other historical traumas, stigma, and a lack of culturally competent care.⁷ Dominant US White culture is historically rooted in Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture which has historically discriminated against Jewish people.⁸ Antisemitic incidents have been found to incite anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorder for some and may create a sense of insecurity and instability for others.⁹ In Portland, Oregon, the most common health issue cited by Jewish community members was mental or emotional health problems (18% of all Jewish households; 63% of Jewish households with any health issue).¹⁰ Forty-two percent of Jewish households indicated that someone in the household needed health services with the most commonly needed service being mental health services (34% of households needing health services).¹¹
- **Need for Empirical Data:** There is almost no nationally or state level representative data that measures the health of the US Jewish community. In their analysis of the National Jewish Population Survey 2000-2001, the found that controlling for socioeconomic position, the self-rated

¹ From analysis of open text question, December 2022.

² Boxer, M., Brookner, M.A., Bankier-Karp, A., Chandler, A., Levine, D., Martin, A., Magidin de Kramer, R., Friedman, I., Feinberg, M., Aronson, J.K., & Saxe, L. (2023). 2022-23 *Greater Portland Jewish Community Study*. Waltham, MA: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies and Steinhardt Social Research Institute, Brandeis University.

³ Boxer, M., et al. (2023). A Portrait of the Jewish Community of Lane County: Supplement to the 2022-23 Greater Portland Jewish Community Study

⁴ <https://www.opb.org/article/2023/03/23/reports-of-antisemitism-up-63-in-the-pacific-northwest-in-2022-resistance-is-up-too/>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2023R1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/HB2905>

⁷ https://omh.ny.gov/omhweb/cultural_competence/spotlight-on-jewish-americans.pdf

⁸ Pearson, J. & Geronomus, A.T. (2011). Race/Ethnicity, socioeconomic characteristics, coethnic social ties, and health: Evidence from the National Jewish Population Survey. *American Journal of Public Health*, 101, 7.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Boxer et al. p.92.

¹¹ Ibid.

health of Jews converged with that of Blacks and was significantly worse than non-Jewish other Whites.¹²

- **Context of Addition of MENA Category to US Census:** While a Middle Eastern or North African (MENA) category will likely be added to the next US Census, it is likely that the MENA category will not address the concerns Jewish communities have for representation on surveys.¹³ While most American Jews identify as white, others identify with races such as non-Hispanic Black, Hispanic, and “Other Race”.

Considerations Regarding Adding “Jewish/Jew” Category to REALD:

- **Potential Strengths & Benefits:**
 - The value of the categories is based on the perceived value of the respondent. We have evidence of the perceived value through the self-identified write ins in the REALD & SOGI forms.
 - Adding nuance by allowing those who are Jewish to self-identify outside of the white category
 - Proxy for exposure to antisemitism, a specific form of white supremacy
 - Even communities who are well-resourced in some ways deserve culturally responsive care that accounts for intergenerational trauma (i.e., epigenetic effects of the Holocaust)
 - The impact of historical and structural racism that Jewish community has experienced and its effect on health is understudied because we have not collected the demographic data on this group.
- **Potential Challenges:**
 - Would be more complicated than other categories due to the transnational and often religiously affiliated nature of Jewish identity
 - Jewish identity refers to “something that is current as well as historical” which contrasts with the census model that is based on historical origins¹⁴
 - The issue of single and mixed race or ethnicity is more complicated since “the meaning of single and mixed origins will become vastly harder to parse when we reach (as we soon will) the third and later generations of young adults who have grown up in a context of prevalent Jewish out-marriage.”¹⁵
 - Higher community visibility could raise issues of safety and anonymity among Jewish community amidst rising antisemitic hate crimes

¹² Pearson & Geronimus (2011).

¹³ <https://forward.com/news/534377/proposed-us-census-categories-race-ethnicity-jewish-identity/>

¹⁴ Perlmann, J. (2017). Single and mixed origins in the census and in American Jewish sociology: A comment on Bruce A. Phillips's Sklare Lecture. *Contemporary Jewry*, 37.3. p. 395

¹⁵ Ibid.