

Overview

 **PERSPECTIVES ON THE ORANGE COUNTY
JEWISH COMMUNITY**

Insights from the Orange County Jewish Demographic Study »





Foreword

On Behalf of the Samueli Foundation

Henry and Susan Samueli moved to Orange County in 1995, delighted to set down deep roots for their young family. They immediately sought to make connections in the Jewish community, carrying on the traditions they were both raised with.

As the Samuelis' financial resources grew, they found themselves in the most fortunate position to engage in *tzedakah* at scale, funding multiple projects and organizations that serve the local Jewish community. These projects have ranged from the small to the very large, including purchasing and then donating the land that would become the site of the Merage Jewish Community Center of Orange County, and purchasing the building that would become the only congregation in South County, Temple Beth El. In total, the Samuelis have donated approximately \$87M to support Orange County Jewish Life.

It has been, and remains, one of Henry and Susan's greatest priorities to ensure that Orange County can have a thriving, safe, joyful, and enduring Jewish community for generations to come. We

at the Samueli Foundation are humbled by their trust to carry out this mission.

The Samueli Foundation is not a "Jewish organization" per se, but we are deeply committed to funding the future of Jewish life in Orange County as part of our overall vision of well-being for all. We approach our work from a place of values, but as a philanthropic capital allocator, it is essential that we make our investments from a place of values *plus* evidence. This requires guarding against making decisions from or being overly influenced by cultural lore, past practices, or squeaky wheels.

Our funding must evolve in lockstep with community need—as expressed by the community itself. So, we went out into the community looking for the data we would need to make our next set of transformative investments in support of local thriving Jewish life.

In conversations with Jewish communal and lay leaders in Orange County, a common theme emerged: While everyone is interested in working to protect and strengthen Jewish life in

the County, no one had strong, accurate data to use about the size, characteristics, locations, or current needs of the Jewish community. A community built off intuition alone risks misplacing its finite resources (both time and money), all the while missing opportunities to invest in efforts that would mean the most to the community as it exists today.

For nearly a century,¹ Jewish communities across America—finding themselves in the same place—have undertaken formal demographic studies to create this data set. Orange County has never had the benefit of such a research effort, depriving the community—and particularly the organizations that serve the community—of vital information that allows for more strategic decision-making, responsive resource allocation, creative program development, and cross-

organization collaboration.

We decided to remedy this absence of data by engaging The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS) at Brandeis University to

conduct a study of the Orange County Jewish community, in partnership with NORC at the University of Chicago, an innovative independent research organization. CMJS is a renowned research institute dedicated to the study of American Jewish life and religious and cultural identity. Over the past decade, CMJS has worked with more than thirty Jewish communities like ours to develop local community studies, using its cutting-edge methodology to illustrate the characteristics, attitudes, and

behaviors unique to each place. *(You can read more about their approach at brandeis.edu/cmjs/community-studies/.)*

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OUR GOALS FOR SUPPORTING THIS RESEARCH WERE:

- Give the widest set of Orange County Jewish community members an opportunity to reflect on their needs, practices, and opinions on existing Jewish community resources and the issues that most impact their lives
- Provide the entire community, and those who support it, with evidence driven by the community itself. This in turn would ensure all Orange County Jewish service and religious organizations are operating from the same, data-driven, actionable understanding of our entire community
- Demonstrate a new model for community collaboration by working in broad partnership across Orange County Jewish organizations
- Inform our future giving in response to community-driven insight
- Give the community knowledge and tools to proactively design its future

Phase One Survey Design & Administration

Jewish demographic studies are typically driven by the local Jewish Federation, or a group of Jewish organizations. We appreciate that it is unusual for a private family foundation to undertake this type of project on behalf of its community. In complete candor, we had no idea how much work we were signing up for—but we felt it was a responsibility we could not shy away from.

It turns out that private foundations are well-positioned in many ways to be natural partners for doing this type of work. We are neutral, in the sense that we have no agenda other than helping the Jewish community be the best version of itself it can possibly be.

We have the capital and ambition to undertake a demanding project like this. We can be creative in how we design an inclusive process—such as giving participation grants to local Jewish partner organizations who helped us. And most importantly, we can go about a project like this with a sense of urgency, unencumbered by politics or governance structures that can slow efforts down. Our independence allows us to call out things that warrant the community's collective attention. We are here to surface facts, not take sides.

Our first step was to convene a Steering Committee—composed of Scott Braswell, then-CEO of Merage JCC; Tamy Cohen, Executive Director of OC Hillel; Rabbi David Eliezrie, of Congregation Beit Meir Ha'Cohen; Erik Ludwig, then-CEO and President of Jewish Federation of Orange County; Lindsey Spindle, President of the Samueli Family Philanthropies; and Rabbi Rick Steinberg, of Congregation Shir-Ha-Ma'alot—who worked with the Samueli Foundation and the research team to shape the survey. The majority of questions were taken from other Jewish community surveys,

allowing data to be compared across communities; several new sections were developed for the specific needs of the Orange County study.

We are deeply grateful to the **31** Orange County Jewish organizations that partnered with us to launch the study and the more than **1,300** members of our community that participated in the study between November 2024 and March 2025. We appreciate the time and care you took to complete the survey—sharing openly about your experiences and hopes for the Jewish community. None of this would be possible without you.

This research represents an important milestone for and investment in the Orange County Jewish community. It reflects broad participation, unprecedented collaboration, and a collective commitment to learning and growth. We are excited to share the results and are hopeful that they will be used not as an endpoint but as a catalyst for thoughtful dialogue, strategic action, and continued partnership—an enduring asset that will strengthen Jewish life in Orange County for the decade ahead.

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A FEW NOTES ON HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

The findings presented here draw on both quantitative and qualitative survey responses.* We've integrated them to offer a more complete and nuanced understanding of the community, but please note that the qualitative insights do not carry the same statistical significance as the quantitative results do.

All percentages in this report are rounded to the nearest whole number. As a result, totals in some tables and figures may not equal exactly 100 percent.

Throughout the report, we reference different population groups. Readers should note the population being referenced when interpreting each statistic. In each data chart, we will indicate the reference population in italicized text beneath the title:

- "OC Jewish households": OC households with at least one Jewish member
- "OC Jewish adults": OC individuals ages 18+ who identify as Jewish
- "Younger OC adults": OC individuals ages 22–44
- "U.S. Jewish population": data on the national Jewish population
- "OC general population": data on the OC general population, including but not specific to the Jewish population

* The following two open-response questions were asked at the end of the survey: "What are the strengths and gaps of the Orange County Jewish community?" & "What should be the priorities of the Orange County Jewish community?" In addition, some questions had open-response options when an "Other" category was indicated.

Phase Two Report Goals & Approach

Since the study closed, we have been hard at work analyzing the data we collected. That has resulted in two complementary reports capturing our learnings. One, authored by the research team at the CMJS at Brandeis University, provides a comprehensive, detailed presentation of the methodology, data, and key findings (*You can find it at OCJewishStudy.org*). The other—this report—was developed by our team at the Samueli Foundation in partnership with the Bridgespan Group. It is intended to offer a more thematic analysis focused on synthesis, interpretation, and potential application of the study's findings. (*Note: Some findings appear in this report but not in the Brandeis report, and vice versa. However, both draw on the same study results*).

In this report, our goal is not simply to present the data, but to help the community make sense of it. Organized around key themes, the report weaves findings together and, where possible and helpful, situates them in context and comparisons to other communities. We intentionally focused on areas of alignment across our diverse community and opportunities for action.

Throughout, we ask not only *what* the data tell us, but *so what*—and, ultimately, *now what*. We hope to use this to build toward an **understanding agenda** and an **action agenda**: a shared grasp of what we know about our community today and a clearer sense of how that knowledge might inform planning, programming, learning, and collaboration.

This report is divided into four sections. What you are reading now—the **Overview**—is a good place to begin. After outlining the study’s guiding principles and methodology, it presents an infographic previewing the key demographics of the Orange County Jewish community, including its size and composition across key dimensions such as age and family structure. Readers are then invited to engage more deeply with the topic-specific sections to which they feel most drawn, including:



Daily Life, which explores the financial circumstances, health and well-being, and patterns of residents in Orange County



Jewish Life, which dives into personal Jewish identity and connection, ritual practices, and institutional engagement



Hot Topics, which addresses perspectives on politics, antisemitism, and Israel

Each section is designed to stand on its own and also to be read together—in certain places, we have repeated data or referenced other sections for clarity.

But this study—and these reports—are just the beginning. We see them as a **starting point** for ongoing learning, conversation, and collaboration across the Orange County Jewish community. We invite readers to explore the data, consider how it reflects the experiences of you and your neighbors, and imagine how these findings could apply to Orange County’s organizations, programs, and community. We hope that shared insights can help facilitate shared priorities and spur individual and collective action in support of our community. We look forward to partnering to forge a stronger, safer, and vibrant Jewish community for years to come.

Lindsey Spindle

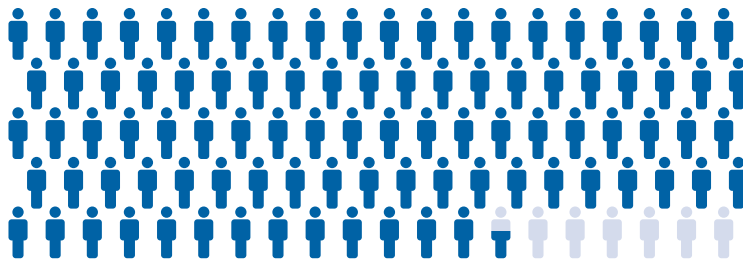
President, Samueli Family Philanthropies

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Orange County Jewish Demographics at a Glance

Size


= 1,000



There are approximately 93,500 Jewish individuals and 56,600 Jewish households in Orange County.

The Orange County Jewish community is home to approximately 56,600 households. These households include over 124,000 individuals, of whom 93,500 are Jewish. The Jewish population comprises 3% of the total Orange County population, and Jewish households make up 5% of all households of Orange County.

Gender



Race, ethnicity, and history

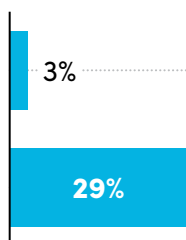
Twelve percent of Jewish adults in OC identify with a racial identity other than white or as Hispanic.

Racial diversity is higher among OC Jewish children: 42% of Jewish children are identified as a racial identity other than white or as Hispanic by their parents, which suggests that racial diversity among the community may increase in the future.

Fifteen percent of OC Jewish adults identify as Israeli American, 15% identify as Russian-speaking, and 7% identify as Latin American.

3% of OC Jewish adults are Holocaust survivors or World War II refugees.

29% are descendants of a Holocaust victim, survivor, or World War II refugee.

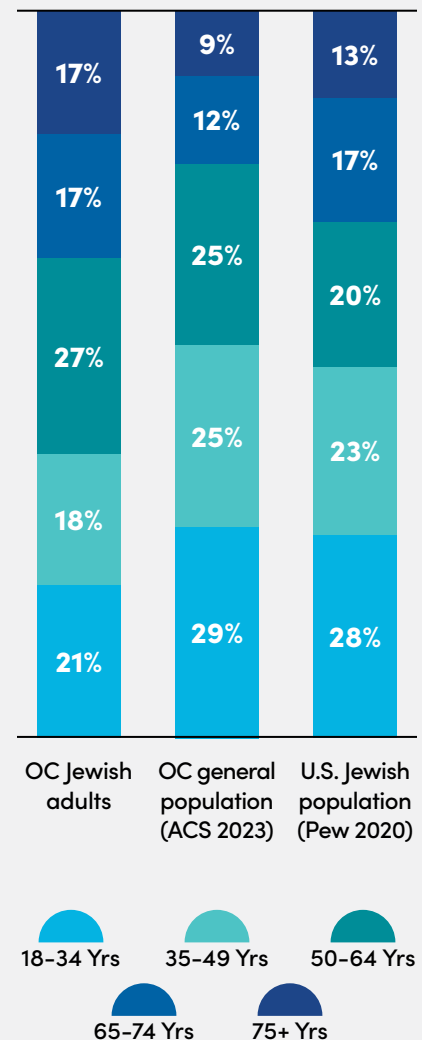


Age



The OC Jewish community skews older than the general OC and the U.S. Jewish populations as a whole.

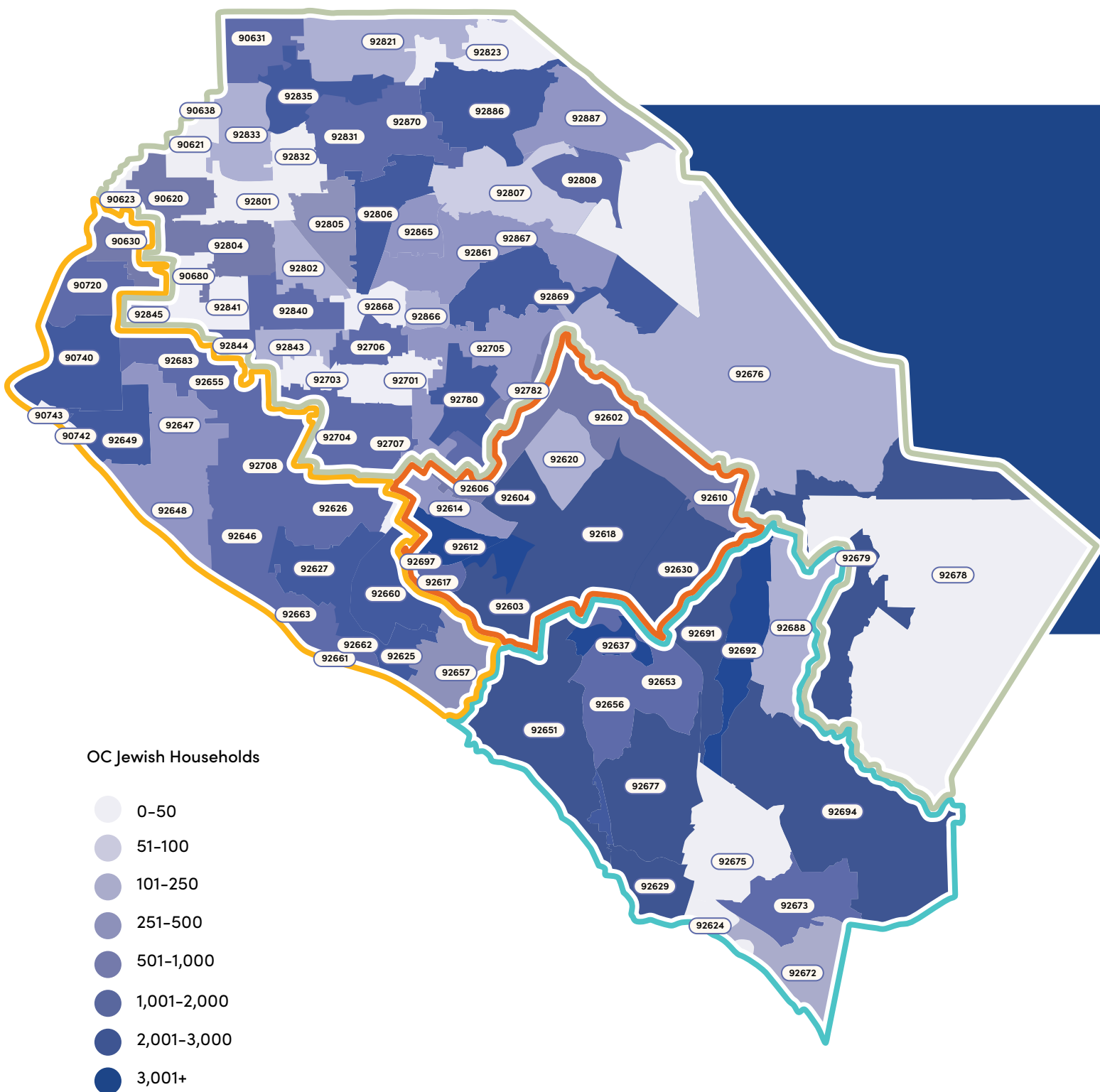
The OC Jewish community has a larger share of seniors than the County overall: While 9% of all OC adults are ages 75+, 17% of all Jewish adults are 75+. Only 39% of Jewish adults in OC are under age 50—compared to 54% of Orange County and 51% of U.S. Jewish adults.



Geography

Note: Geographic analyses in this study are based on ZIP code of residence.

For the purposes of this study, Orange County can be divided into four geographic regions:



While there are members of the Jewish community living in each of these regions, the number of Jewish households are not evenly distributed across them.

Nearly half (47%) of all Orange County households are located in the Central/North Orange County region, but just over one-third (34%) of Jewish households reside there. By contrast, the South Orange County region is home to one-quarter of Jewish households, despite accounting for only 17% of all Orange County households, and Irvine is home to nearly one-fifth of Jewish households, despite accounting for only 13% of all OC households.



1. The Central/North Orange County region (Inland)



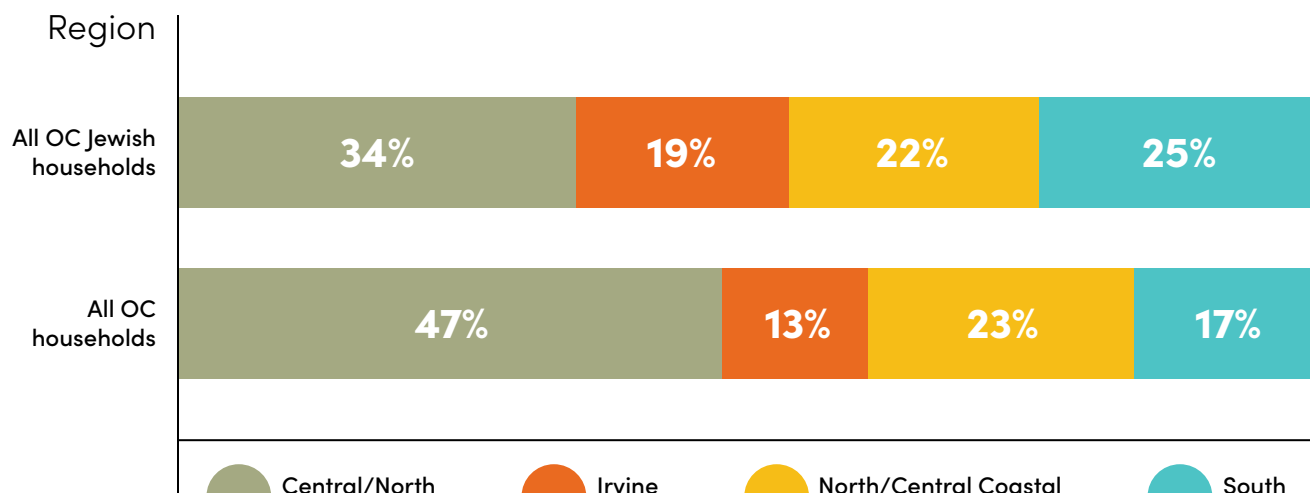
2. The North/Central Coastal Orange County region (stretching from Seal Beach to Newport Beach)



3. The Irvine region (including the City of Irvine and neighboring Lake Forest)



4. The South Orange County region (from Laguna Beach, Laguna Woods, and Mission Viejo to San Clemente)

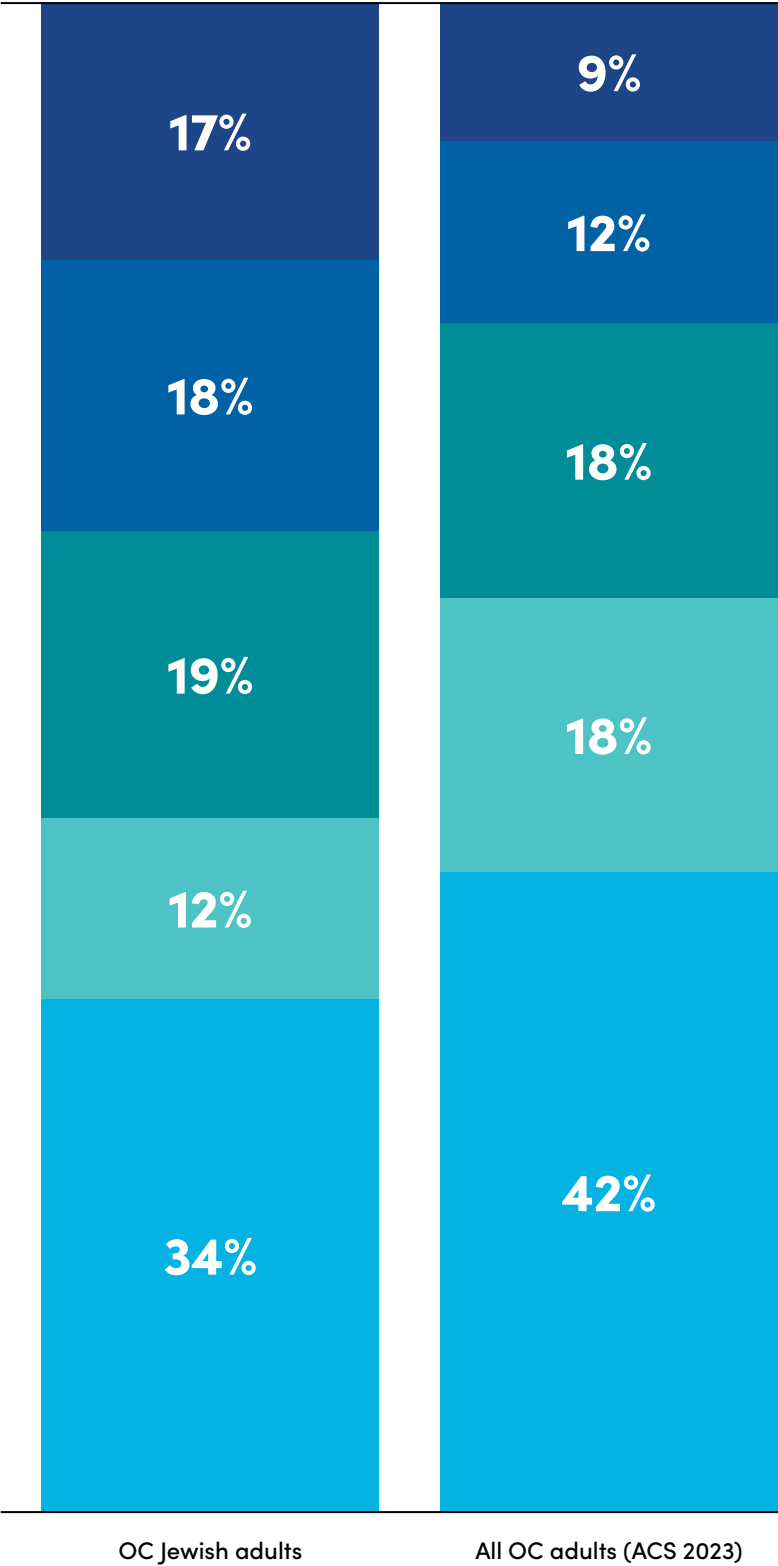


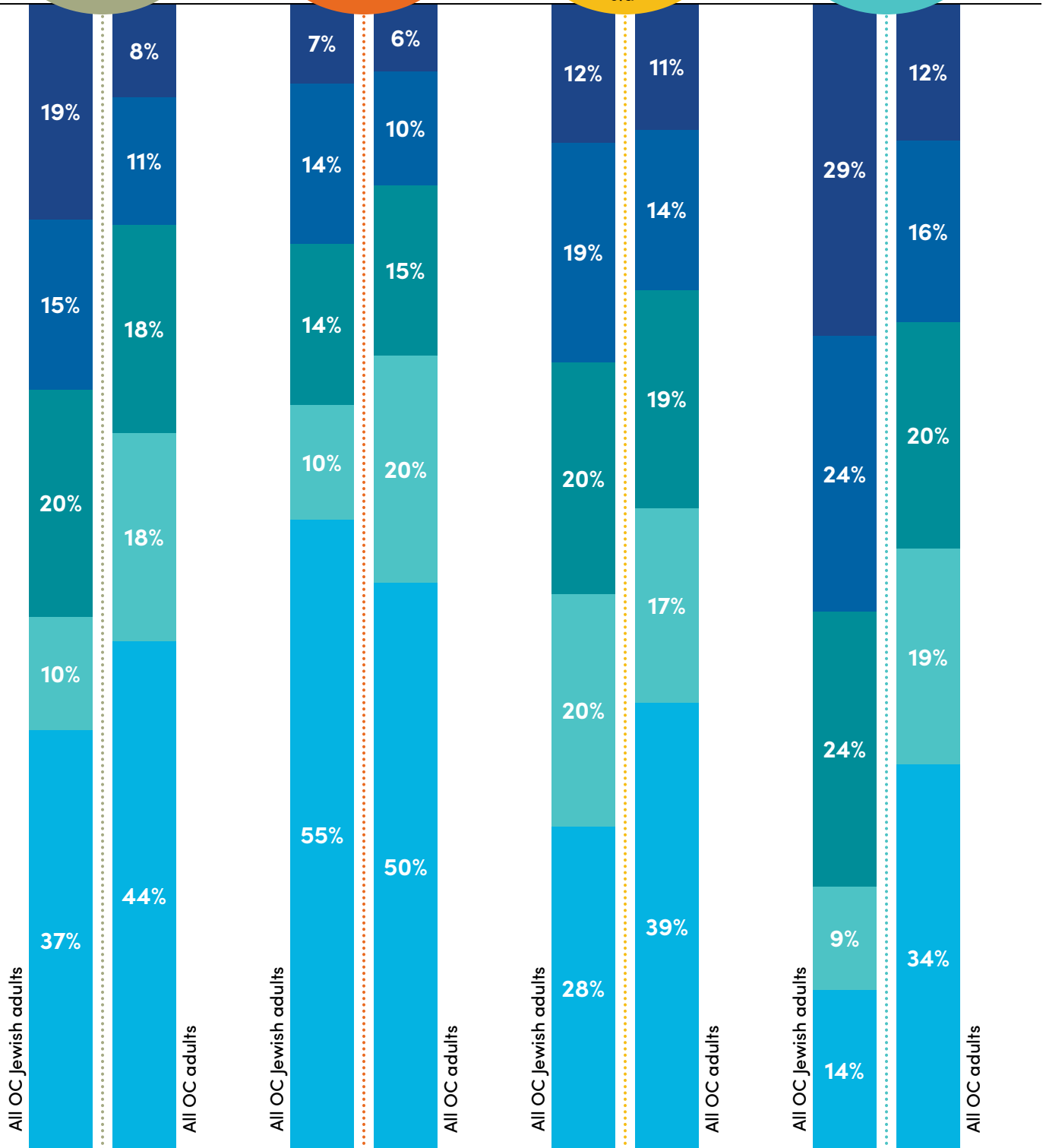
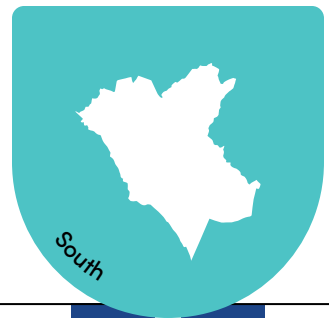
There are also some key demographic differences across the regions:
The Central/North Orange County and Irvine regions are younger than the North/Central Coastal Orange County and South Orange County regions.
These differences are true, to a lesser extent, for the OC general population as well.



These regional patterns provide important context for understanding how Jewish life is experienced across Orange County—and for considering where community resources, programs, and services may be most needed or most effectively expanded.

Region by age





22-44 Yrs

45-54 Yrs

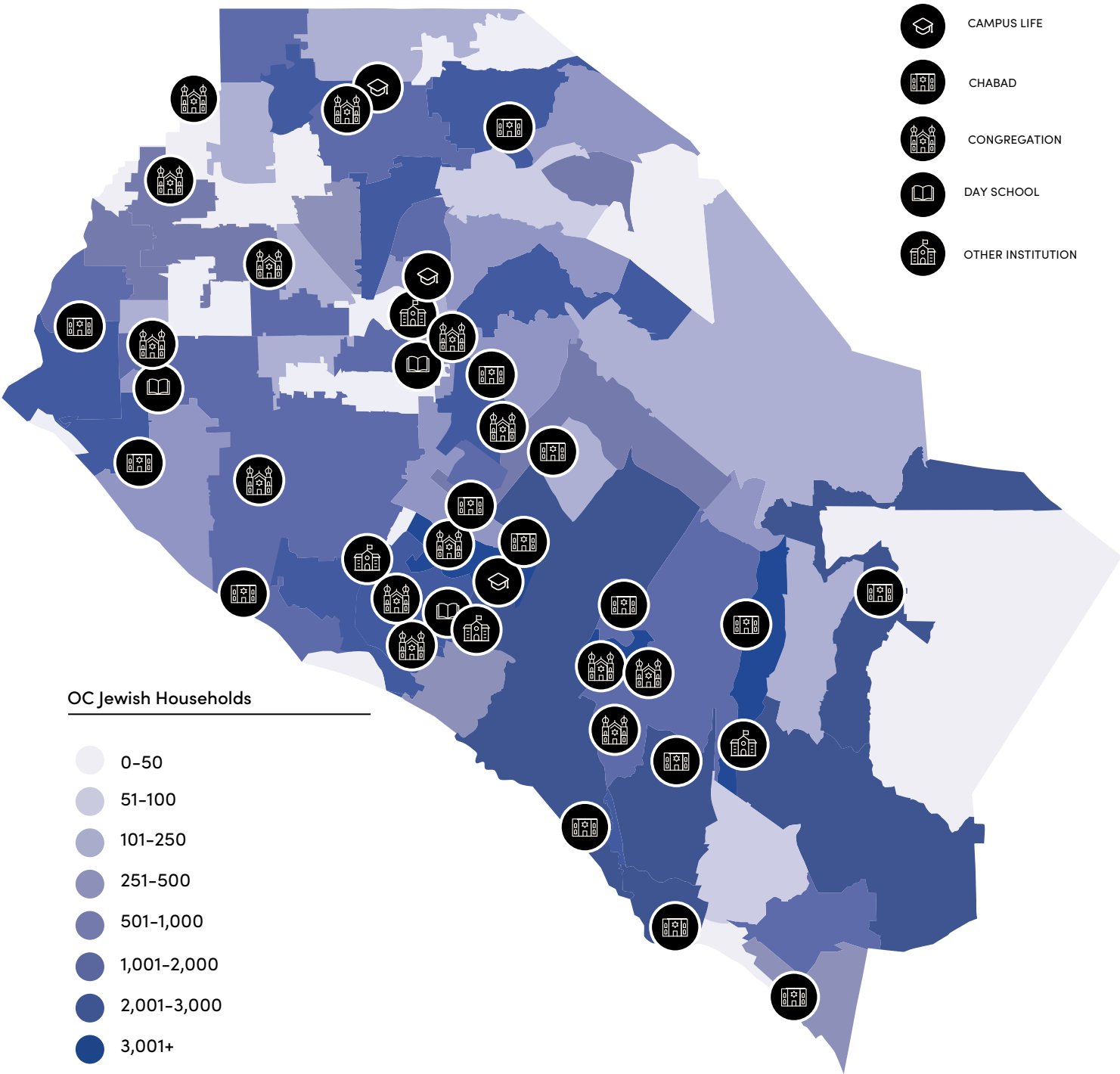
55-64 Yrs

65-74 Yrs

75+ Yrs

Some Jewish households live in areas with ready access to existing Jewish institutions...

Together, the five ZIP Codes with the largest Jewish household representation (92604 and 92612 - Irvine, 92625 - Corona Del Mar, 92637 - Laguna Woods, and 92692 - Mission Viejo) account for roughly one-fifth of all Jewish households in Orange County. Nearly half of the county's ~50 religious and/or communal brick-and-mortar Jewish institutions are located either within these areas or in immediately adjacent ZIP codes.

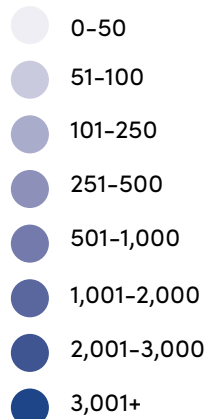


... but the data also point to parts of Orange County where Jewish presence is meaningful but local infrastructure is limited.

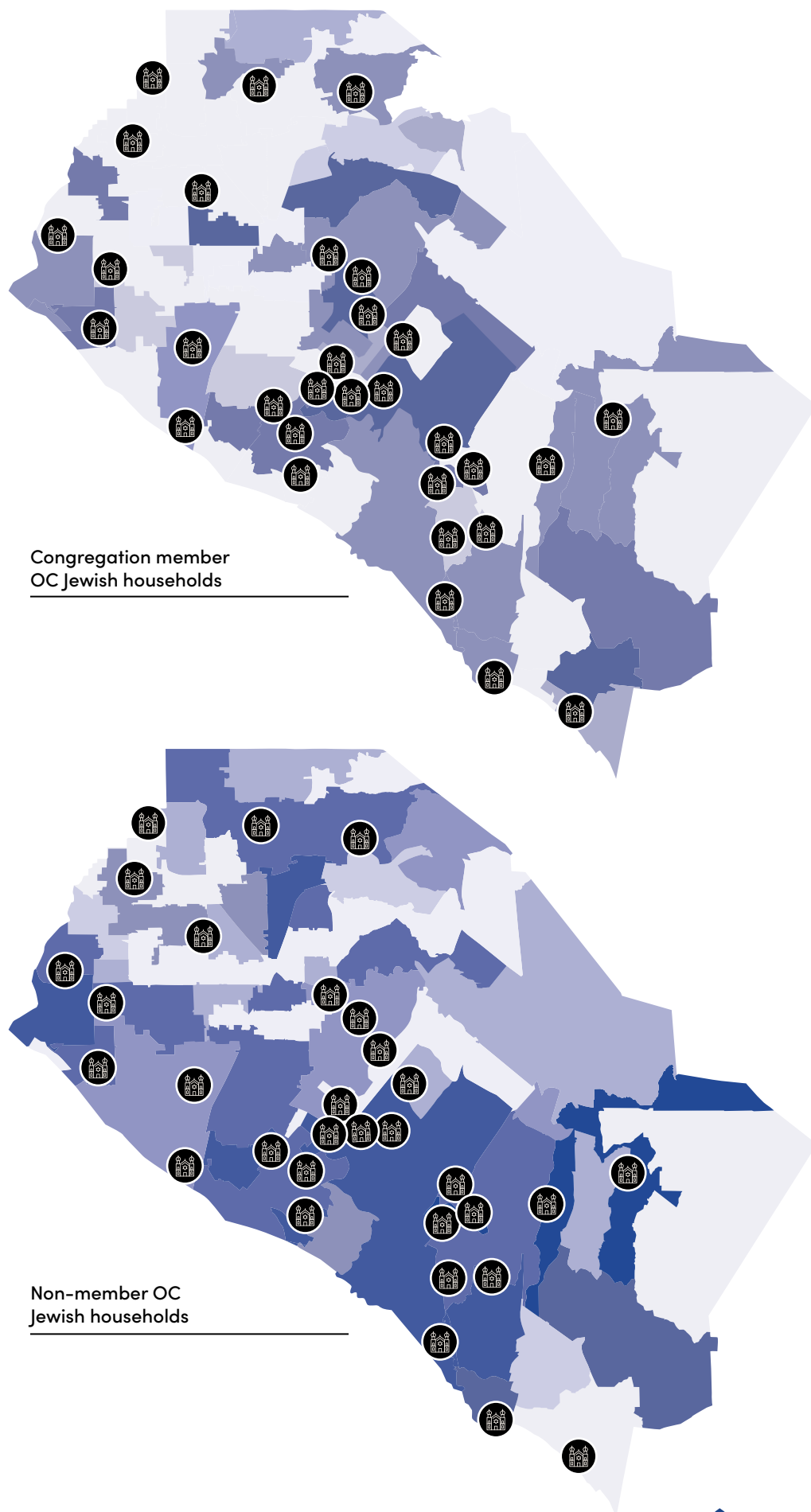
Several areas—including San Clemente, Dana Point, Coto de Caza, and Yorba Linda—have substantial Jewish populations, yet communal institutions are relatively sparse.

In or near other areas—including Seal Beach, La Habra, Fullerton, and Newport Beach—congregations exist but a comparatively small share of local Jewish households belong to a congregation, suggesting that geographic proximity alone does not ensure engagement.

OC Jewish Households



CONGREGATION

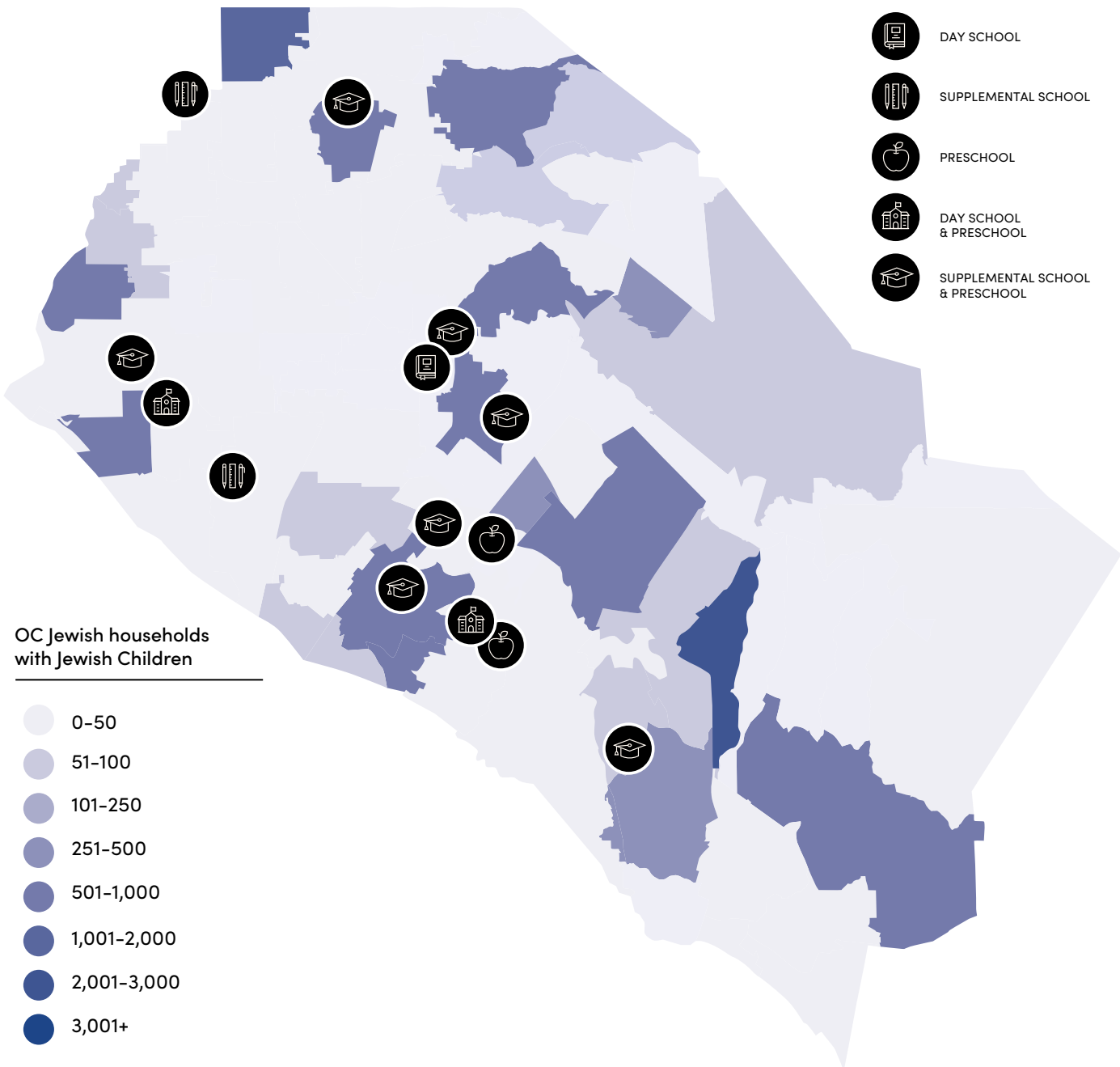




The same dynamics exist when focusing on OC Jewish households with children.

The distribution of Jewish households with children shows some variation from overall household patterns, with additional areas of relative presence across north and central Orange County. There are Jewish schools near many of these areas, shaping families’ access to Jewish education and programming.

In the area of the county south of Irvine, there are limited schools and preschools despite the presence of significant numbers of Jewish households with children.



Household and family composition

Most OC Jewish households are made up of couples and single adults without children. Fewer than one in five are households with children.

The nearly 57,000 Jewish households in OC include married or cohabitating couples without children at home (39%), adults living alone or with unrelated roommates (33%), families with children under 18 (17%), and multigenerational families (11%).

The intermarried rate in Orange County is lower than national trends.

72% of all Jewish adults in Orange County are married, engaged, or partnered. Of these couples, 69% are married to another Jewish person and 31% have a non-Jewish partner or spouse. Among all U.S. Jewish adults who are legally married, 42% have a non-Jewish spouse.² The intermarriage rate in OC is higher among those under age 45.



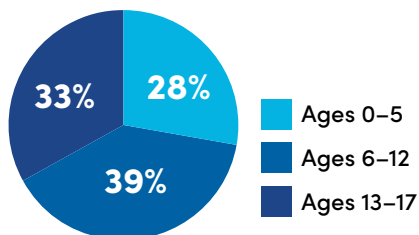
Children demographics

Note: To assess the religious identity of children in Jewish households, parents were asked if they considered their children to be Jewish.

Seventeen percent of Jewish households in Orange County include a minor child.

Nationally, 25% of Jewish households include a minor child.³ Almost half of Orange County Jewish children (47%) are being raised by two Jewish parents, while 36% are being raised by one Jewish parent and one non-Jewish parent and 16% are raised by single parents.

Children are relatively evenly distributed across age groups...



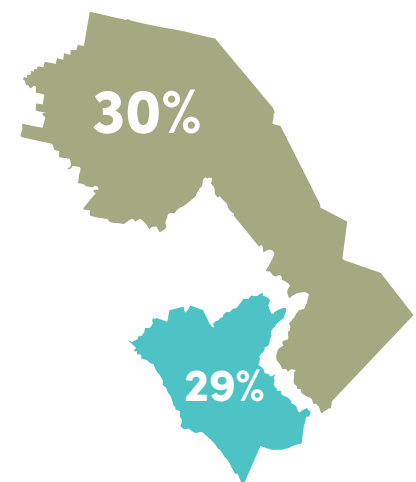
77%

Of the 17,200 children who reside in Jewish households in Orange County, three in four are considered Jewish (77%), including two in four considered Jewish exclusively and one in four considered Jewish and another religion.

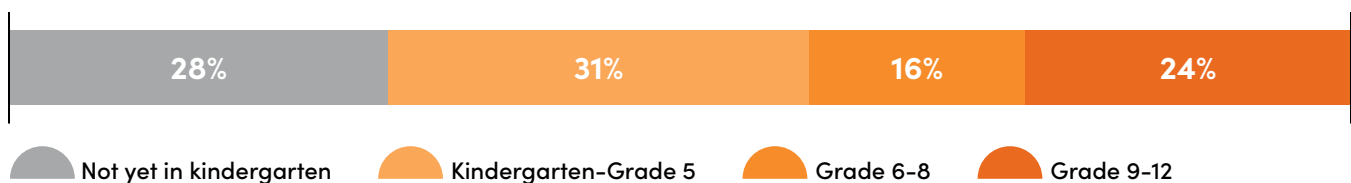
Among those not considered Jewish, about half have no religion, while the other half have another religion. Nationally, 80% of children in Jewish households are considered Jewish, including 69% who are considered exclusively Jewish and 12% who are considered Jewish and another religion.⁴

Most children live in either the Central/North Orange County region (30%) or the South Orange County region (29%).

The rest of the children live in the North/Central Coastal Orange County region (23%) and the Irvine region (18%).

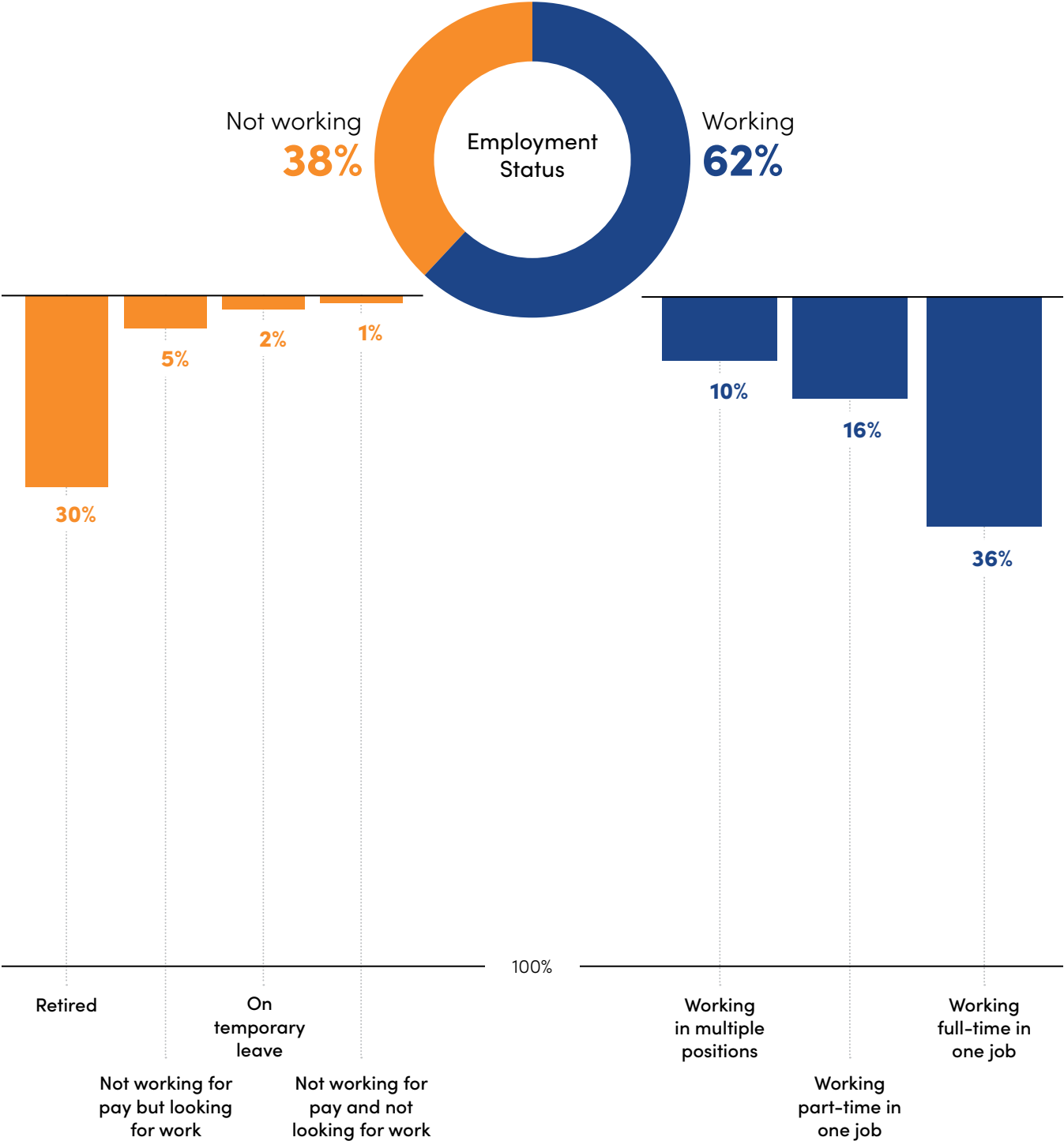


... and grades.



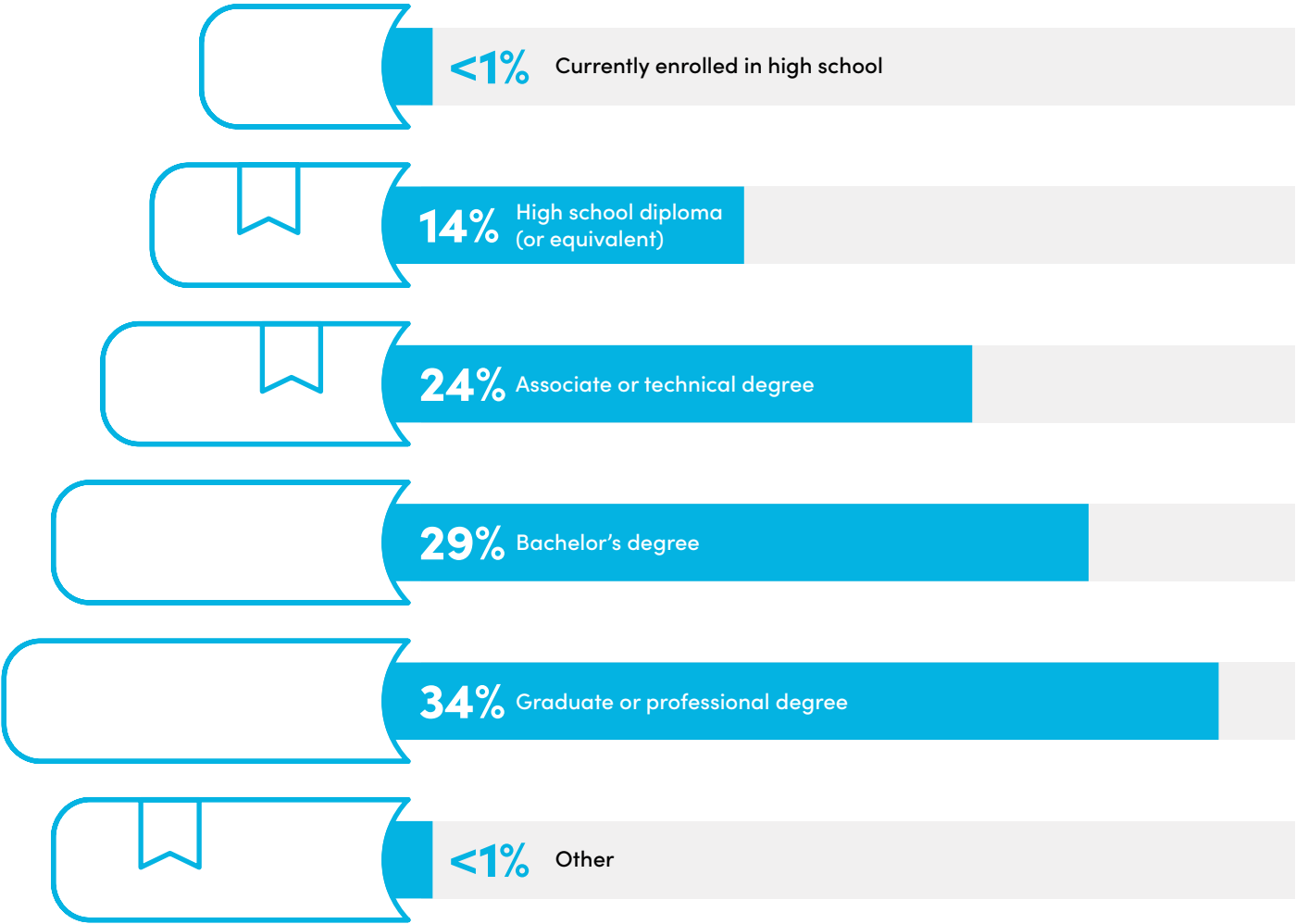
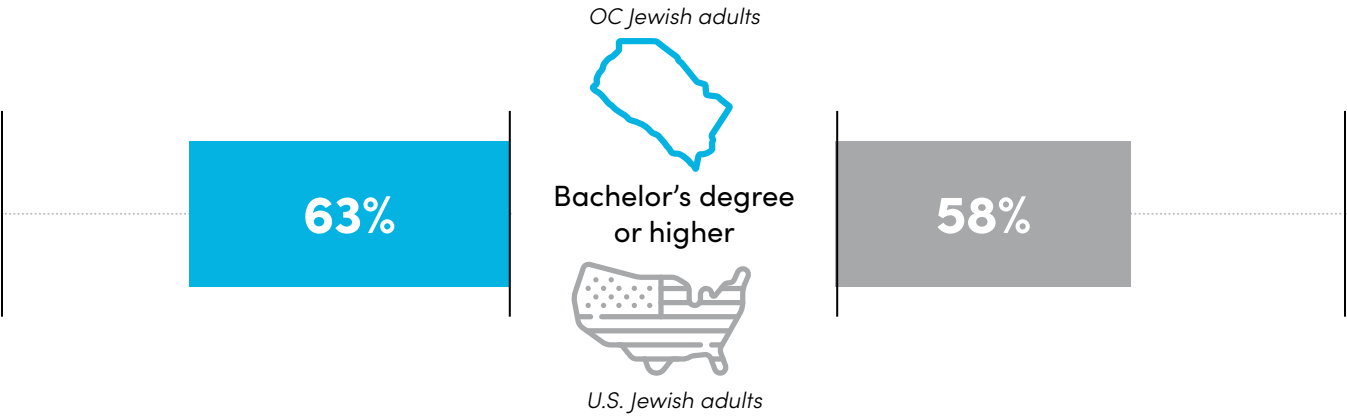
Employment
and educational
attainment

Almost two-thirds (62%) of OC Jewish adults⁵ are employed, similar to the employment rate among U.S. Jewish adults overall (64%).⁶
Thirty percent of OC Jewish adults are retired, higher than the national rate (24%).
The remaining 8% of OC Jewish adults are not working or on temporary leave.



Orange County has high rates of higher educational attainment.

Almost two-thirds (63%) of OC Jewish adults ages 25 and older have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher, including 34% with a graduate or professional degree. Both shares are higher than among U.S. Jewish adults overall (58% and 28%, respectively).⁷



Discussion Questions

These demographic findings ground us in who makes up the Orange County Jewish community today, and offer an opportunity to test assumptions, notice patterns, and surface new questions.

At the end of each section of this report, we include brief reflection prompts like these—inviting you to pause, consider what stands out, and think about what the data may mean for the community moving forward.

As you reflect on this overview—and as you read the sections that follow—consider:

1

What feels consistent with your understanding of the community?

2

What surprises you? Are any groups larger, smaller, or more diverse than you expected? What common assumptions do these findings challenge or confirm?

3

What has been newly clarified about the community's composition or trajectory?

4

What questions does this raise that you might want to explore further, or potentially act on?

Endnotes

¹The earliest studies date back to the 1920s, though “modern” studies have been conducted since the 50s-60s.

² Pew Research Center, “Jewish Americans in 2020.”

³ Aronson, J.K., & Magidin de Kramer, R. (2026). CMJS Combined Dataset: Benchmark Report. Waltham, MA: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University.

⁴ CMJS Combined Dataset (CDS).

⁵ This figure excludes high school students, even if they are age 18 or older.

⁶ CMJS Combined Dataset (CDS).

⁷ CMJS Combined Dataset (CDS).



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