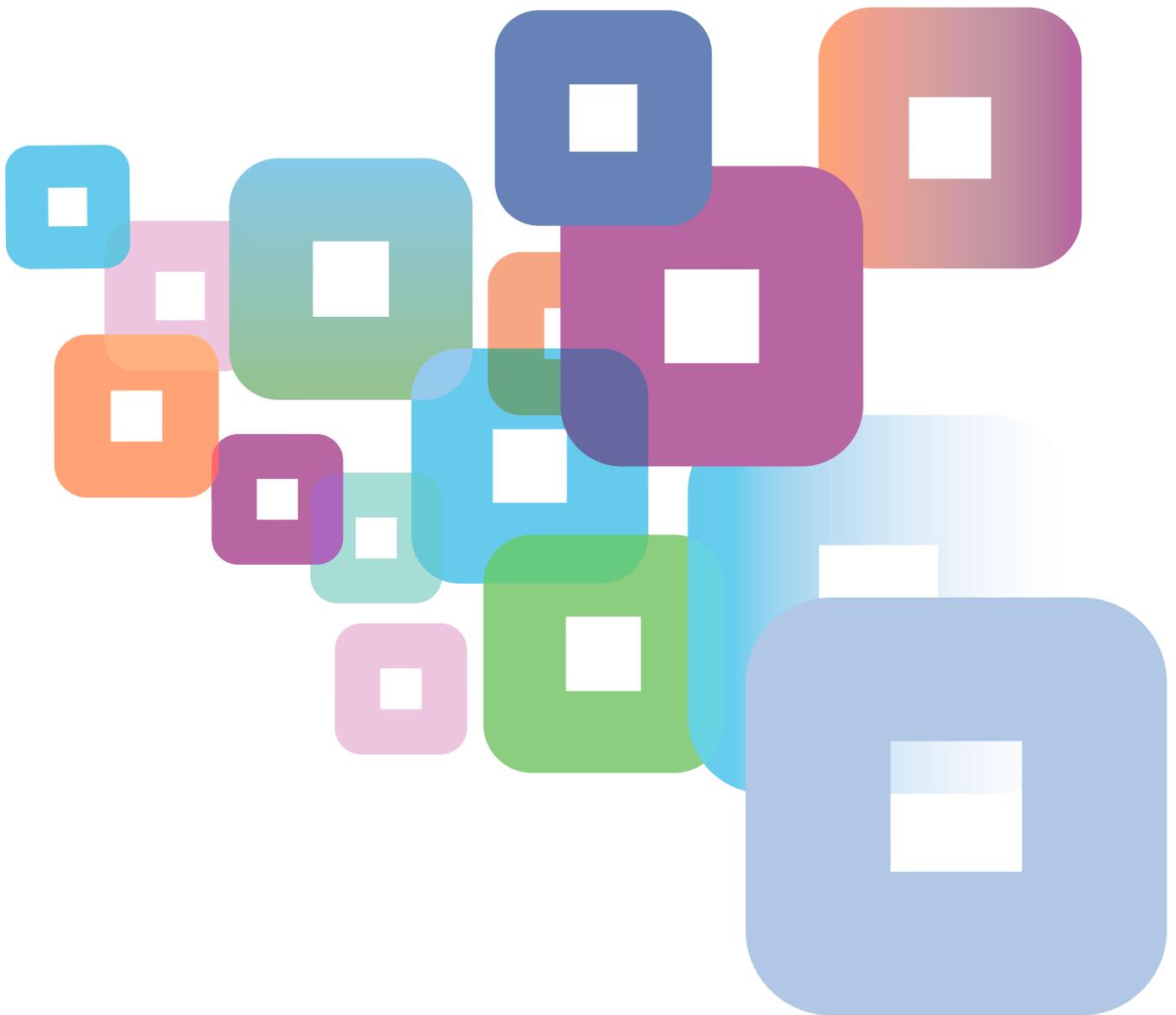




Department of **Local Government,
Sport and Cultural Industries**
Office of **Multicultural Interests**

Culture and Religion Information Sheet

Judaism



Aim

This information sheet aims to raise awareness and understanding of Jewish religious and cultural practices to assist service providers in the government and not-for-profit community sectors to improve service development and delivery.

Introduction

Western Australia is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multicultural society. Religious freedom and mutual respect for all religions are integral parts of our shared culture and are important underlying principles of multiculturalism and democracy.

There are a number of international treaties and national laws that recognise freedom of religion and belief as fundamental human rights, such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948*, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966* and the *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986*.

In Western Australia it is unlawful under the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984* to discriminate against a person because of their religious conviction in certain areas of public life including employment, education, the provision of goods, services and facilities, in accommodation, clubs and in application forms (see the Equal Opportunity Commission website <http://www.eoc.wa.gov.au/Index.aspx>).

The information contained in this Office of Multicultural Interests (OMI) information sheet is made available in good faith, is derived from sources believed to be reliable and accurate at the time of release and does not necessarily reflect the views of OMI. All efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy of the material; OMI cannot accept responsibility for any omissions or errors. If you would like to give feedback, please contact OMI on harmony@omi.wa.gov.au.

Service providers and employers who recognise, value and promote cultural and religious diversity can address more fully the needs of their clients and staff, thus providing services based on good practice. Respecting the roles of religion in various cultures is part of courteous, ethical and professional behaviour, which promotes a just and equitable society.

History of Judaism in Western Australia

Early records indicate that approximately 1600 Jews settled in Australia between the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 and the gold rush of 1851.

Jews were associated with WA from early settlement in the 1820s although it was not until 1887, in Fremantle, that the first Jewish community was formed. The Perth Hebrew Congregation was founded in 1892 and opened its synagogue in 1897. Synagogues were also built in the gold rush towns of Kalgoorlie and Coolgardie.

The major Jewish centres in Australia are in Melbourne and Sydney, although there is a significant Jewish population in Perth.

Demographics

According to the 2011 Census, approximately 5882 Jews live in Western Australia, representing an increase of 10.5 per cent compared with the 2006 Census. They live mainly in the metropolitan area and originate from Europe, the United Kingdom, Israel and South Africa.

Between the 2006 and 2011 Censuses the number of people affiliated with Judaism in Australia increased by 8507 to 97,336, an increase of 9.7 per cent.

Judaism: background and origins

Judaism originated with the biblical patriarch Abraham (approximately 1800 BCE [Before Current Era]).

Abraham established a covenant with God that was confirmed with the reception of the Torah (the Law including the Ten Commandments) from God through Moses to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai approximately 3500 years ago.



Key beliefs

For those who subscribe to the orthodox belief in Judaism, the central text is the Torah: the five books of Moses—the Law, containing 613 commandments expounded on by the Talmud, the Oral or Rabbinic Law. The Law can never be changed.

Jews believe that God is one and has no form. He created the world, is eternal and is still actively involved in world affairs. Moses is the main prophet.

In Judaism, there is defined reward and punishment. There is an afterlife and, when the Messiah eventually comes, there will be a resurrection of the dead.

The great majority of the Western Australian Jewish community is affiliated to orthodox Judaism which is the subject of this information sheet. A smaller number in the community is associated with the reform or progressive practice of Judaism. This diverges from orthodox practice in a number of respects.

Language and communication

Jewish people usually speak the language of the country in which they live, although the language of prayer is Hebrew.

Body language and behaviour

Non-verbal communication has a powerful effect on relationships and effective service provision. Non-verbal signals acceptable in one culture may be completely unacceptable or even offensive in another.

All body language and behaviour should be modest and proper among observant Jewish people.

Greeting

The following sensitivities need to be observed on greeting or introduction:

- Some observant orthodox Jews do not shake hands with members of the opposite sex. Some, when a hand is offered, will shake hands to avoid embarrassment to the person offering.

Names and titles

Although Jewish people are given Hebrew names at birth, for example David ben (son of) Abraham or Sarah bat (daughter of) Abraham, most Jewish people use their given names followed by their family name or surname.

Jewish clerics are addressed with the title Rabbi followed by their family name.

Dress and appearance

The following dress codes apply:

- Although in Australia the vast majority of Jews look and dress like other Australians, some observant men will be bearded and wear a kippah (skullcap) or hat at all times.
- Some married orthodox Jewish women also cover their hair with a sheitel (a wig), a hat or scarf.
- Jewish women observe a code of modesty. Generally, observant orthodox Jewish women do not wear trousers, and wear dresses to below the knees and blouses that cover the elbows.

Seating

The following sensitivity needs to be observed in seating arrangements for interview purposes or hosting official functions:

- Observant orthodox Jews should not be seated between two members of the opposite sex.
- Observant Jews also prefer not to be placed in a situation where they are alone with a member of the opposite sex in a closed room.

Food, drink and fasting

Recognising appropriate foods and beverages is essential in responding to the needs of religious communities. When hosting people from different religious and cultural backgrounds, always serve a selection of vegetarian and meat foods on separate trays as a matter of good practice.

A variety of non-alcoholic drinks should also be available at any official function.

The following issues relating to food, drink and fasting should also be understood:

- Orthodox Jewish dietary laws require that only ritually slaughtered (kosher) meat may be eaten.
- Only fish that have both fins and scales may be eaten.
- Any food that contains substances extracted from forbidden meats or fish, for example oil and gelatine, is prohibited.
- Observant orthodox Jews do not mix meat and milk (or any dairy product).
- Observant Jews have a number of fasts during the year associated with various festivals and historical events.

Family and marriage

The differing family characteristics of different religious groups should be appreciated. These include the following:

- The family is an extremely important unit in Jewish life. Respect for parents and grandparents is stressed. Many of Judaism's rituals reflect this emphasis.

It is Western Australian Government policy to provide competent interpreting and translating services to clients who are unable to communicate effectively in spoken or written English.¹

Government agency staff can contact the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on telephone 131 450.

1. The Western Australian Language Services Policy, 2008, Office of Multicultural Interests, Western Australian Government.

Religious festivals and days of significance

The following key religious festivals and significant cultural and religious days are celebrated:

- Observant orthodox Jews will not undertake secular activities on the Sabbath (from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday). No travelling by any vehicle is allowed except for the saving of life.
- The same applies to the first two and last two days of the eight-day festival of Passover-Pesach (in March or April), the two days of Pentecost Shavuot (in May/June), the two days of Jewish New Year Rosh Hashana (in September/October), the Day of Atonement Yom Kippur and the first two and last two days of the eight-day festival of Tabernacles Succot (usually occurring in October).
- During Passover, observant Jews eat only specially prepared food and have even stricter dietary requirements than the rest of the year.

Medical

When matters of health are involved, particularly where there is a danger to life, most of Judaism's rituals are set aside in the interests of the patient's wellbeing.

Counselling/interviews

It does not matter if the interviewer is not of the same gender as the interviewee, however, if they are of different genders, the interviewer should ensure that the door of the interview room is kept open.



Death and related issues

Death and the grieving process are significant for all religious communities. Some sensitivities include the following:

- For the Jewish faith, the body at death must be treated with the utmost reverence as it was the body that housed the soul in life.
- The Jewish Burial Society, known as the Chevra Kadisha (Jewish Brotherhood), carries out the holy task of preparing the body for burial.
- Out of respect for the dead, autopsies should be avoided and the body should be buried as quickly as practicable.
- Orthodox Jews do not permit cremation.
- Where possible, it is important that the Jewish dead are handled only by members of the Jewish faith.

Further enquiries

This information sheet has been produced by the Office of Multicultural Interests with the support of the Jewish Community Council of Western Australia.

Correspondence can be forwarded to:

President
Jewish Community Council of Western Australia (Inc)
PO Box 659
North Perth WA 6906
Phone: 0401 999 579

Email address: jccwa@bigpond.com