



Community Consultation Report

Jewish Care Victoria
August 2024

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Acknowledgement

We would like to express our thanks to each individual who contributed to this report and acknowledge their strength in sharing experiences that are often painful and distressing. While each story is unique and these reflections are therefore not representative, thematically they offer some insights into shared experiences across the diversity of our community. Though it is difficult to do justice to the hours of conversation that took place, we hope this report captures the reflections that were so generously shared.

Background

This consultation report forms part of a larger endeavour to support the mental health needs of Jewish and Israeli community members in the wake of the October 7 attacks and ensuing unrest in the Middle East ('October 7'). Funded by the South Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network (SEMPHN), the consultation process sought to gather diverse perspectives to better understand the varied and ongoing mental health impacts of October 7 and inform the development of resource- and education-based offerings.

Process

Representatives from various community organisations and settings were engaged for consultation. While best efforts were made to support inclusion and diversity, we acknowledge that the consultation process was not academic in nature and participants were not wholly representative of the Jewish communal landscape. In particular we focused on engaging highly affected groups, such as first responders and young people, as well as cohorts that may be particularly marginalised or whose experiences are less well understood or represented.

Consultations took place throughout May, June and July 2024, both in person and virtually, and comprised a mixture of 1:1 conversation, small group interviews and larger focus groups. Consultations were informal in nature and invited participants to share their thoughts around two key questions/topics:

1 Can you tell me about some of the impacts on mental health and wellbeing during this time?

- *(For yourself? People you know? Your organisation? The community more broadly?)*
- *(How has this been experienced in school/uni? Work? Family? Community life?)*

2 Do you have any thoughts as to what kind of activities/resources might help to support mental health and wellbeing?

- *(Are there particular literacy gaps, challenges or areas of interest for your organisation?)*
- *(Are there any barriers or enablers that come to mind in terms of delivery?)*

Participants were invited to share reflections both on behalf of the organisation or group they were representing and based on their own experiences.

Though it was not an intended outcome of the consultation, in addition to eliciting information aligned to the above themes, it became clear throughout the process that for many participants, this 'deep listening' was itself experienced as a respectful and supportive mental health offering.

Participants

Participants were engaged across a range of organisations and settings including youth, education, faith and communal leaders, and frontline responders. Outside of the structured consultation process, findings were further informed by conversations with Jewish-identifying staff members from across Jewish Care Victoria's Social Services, Jewish Life and Community Relations teams; informal conversations with community leaders; feedback from program participants; and participation in relevant community activities.

Thematic reflection

While the reflections shared throughout the consultation process were as varied and diverse as the community itself, a number of broadly consistent or aligned themes were apparent. Without seeking to homogenise individual experiences, the key impacts described in the participant reflections could be broadly organised or clustered into two discrete themes:

1. **trauma-based impacts;** and
2. **identity-based impacts.**

We note that some experiences have intersections across both; these have been categorised into the group with which they were most strongly or consistently aligned.

Part 1: Trauma-based impacts

The below describes reflections that were consistently shared throughout the consultation and are aligned to the theme of **trauma-based impacts**.

▶ General post-traumatic effects (acute and ongoing)

The majority of participants described the experience of acute post-traumatic effects in the immediate aftermath of October 7. Symptoms described included feelings of intense shock, horror, grief and/or numbness; the experience of nightmares or intrusive thoughts; a compulsive or consuming need to engage with media, or inability to switch off/look away from distressing content (described by many as the need to 'bear witness'); issues with concentration and memory; and significant difficulty engaging in usual activities, such as work, study, parenting and/or self-care.

For many, this initial impact has been followed by ongoing or chronic effects, such as increased hypervigilance; emotional dysregulation; social withdrawal; sleep disturbance; compulsive or harmful engagement with media; and relationship difficulties.



'For the first few days, I couldn't get out of bed, I couldn't go to uni; it was like waves of shock and grief, I was just crying all the time. Now it feels more like there's this constant fog – you function, you do 'normal' things, but it's always there.'



'I feel so angry all the time. Like on social media, I know I should stop reading the comments, that I should just scroll past, but I can't. I look at other people and I don't know how to connect with them. At work my non-Jewish colleagues try to make small talk like normal, and I just want to scream at them, 'don't you get it? How can I be normal right now?'



'It feels like I haven't taken a breath in 9 months.'

▶ Hypervigilance and safety concerns

Many participants described an increased level of hypervigilance and heightened concerns regarding physical safety. Some described making conscious decisions to limit or change their movement in the community - for instance, avoiding the CBD and northern areas of Melbourne; avoiding or limiting attendance at events, both Jewish and general; or preferring to remain only within the Caulfield area.

A small number of participants described having undertaken substantial life changes as a direct result of this concern, including moving house due to preferring to live in within the Jewish community; only attending classes online, or changing universities altogether; taking their children out of public school and enrolling them in Jewish schools; and resigning from paid or volunteer roles due to concerns about, or direct experiences of, antisemitism.

Others described feelings of trepidation associated with appearing 'visibly Jewish' in public, or making choices about where, when, whether and with whom to disclose their Jewish identity.

» *'I'm embarrassed to say it but I don't wear my kippah when I'm walking down the street anymore. At first I did but earlier this year I had some people scream at me from a passing car. I'm Orthodox and I kind of hate myself for taking it off. I wish I was one of those strong, defiant people, but I feel too unsafe.'*

» *'My sister goes to a Jewish school and for a few months after [October 7] Mum wouldn't let her wear her school uniform on the tram or on the walk to school, she only changed into it once she got to school. It's such a weird feeling.'*

» *'I feel like I am constantly choosing whether or not to share my Jewish identity with someone – at work, or uni, just generally as I go about my life. Having to constantly censor myself, always making that decision, considering 'is it safe?' – it's exhausting. And at the same time, I feel guilty because I know I'm "lucky", because I can hide if I want to – I don't have a Jewish name, I don't "look Jewish", so it's my choice whether I share that with someone. There are others who don't have that option.'*

» *'I'm lucky because most of my classes are online. For my friends in the Arts faculty, having to walk into that building every day when the encampments were there - that was horrible.'*

» *'It's like I'm always on alert. Growing up with Holocaust survivor grandparents, it was always hammered into me that we weren't safe. I always thought they were just being overprotective but now I understand. I was so naïve before – it [October 7] has completely taken that away. It's hard to describe other than I can just feel it: the fact is, as Jews we aren't safe.'*

» *'My partner is 'visibly Jewish' and works in the CBD. In those early months I worried so much about him being in the city, going on public transport. I would beg him to work from home, not to wear a yarmulke.'*

» *'I got special permission from my boss to work from home. For months I didn't feel okay to go into the office – safety-wise, but also in terms of just not being okay, I was teary all the time, couldn't concentrate. I'm lucky that she was understanding. She's not Jewish but one of the first things she asked [after October 7] was whether there was anything I needed.'*

» *'It probably sounds dumb but there's all these changes that I've made to try to make myself feel safer. Like changing to a Jewish GP, things like that. It upsets me because I always had a very mixed group [of friends], but now I only really feel comfortable with my Jewish friends.'*

» *'One of the first conversations people I knew were having was: do you have a valid passport?'*

For some participants, their concerns related not only to their own safety, but that of family and friends based in Israel.

» *'My mum is Israeli and her siblings still live there, some of them are on kibbutzim. Those early hours [of October 7], waiting to hear if they were okay, if they were alive – it was agonising.'*

» *'We have kids in the army. Even now, 10 months later, my partner has to have the news on 24/7 - it's constant. Every night I fall asleep to the sound of it. I haven't slept properly since it happened.'*

» *'My niece and nephew live near the border. They're in and out of bomb shelters all the time. Being so far away – it feels so helpless. And then I feel like a coward, because I'm not okay – but what right do I have not to be okay when I think of what they're going through?'*

» *'Most of my family are in Israel. Every time my phone pings it's like my heart stops.'*

» *'My daughter is in the army. The anxiety is constant – every minute I am scared for her safety. I feel sick all the time. To the outside world you're expected to go on as normal but I can barely eat, concentrate. It doesn't stop. I feel like a ghost.'*

▶ Onset or exacerbation of mental ill health

A number of participants described either a worsening or relapse of existing mental ill health, or the first-time onset of mental illness.

» *'It took a few months to realise that I really wasn't coping. I was crying all the time, completely unable to function. I started therapy and my doctor got me on medication which has helped a bit. This is very new for me, as I had never experienced mental illness before now.'*

» *'My PTSD had been under control for years until this. Now I feel like I'm right back where I started – flashbacks that I can't control, constant triggers, intensive therapy.'*

» *'I've had three [psychiatric inpatient] admissions since October 7. It's never been this bad.'*

» *'The anxiety is consuming and constant. I feel like a completely different person than I did [before October 7].'*

Some participants also described how October 7 influenced their engagement with mental health and other health services.

» *'When I go in [to the psychiatric hospital], it's always like – are they [clinicians] going to be able to get it? Some of them have kind of glossed over it, or don't really understand how central this is to my mental health right now. I need space to talk about it but multiple times I've been told that I shouldn't be so impacted by it, that Israel is far away, it has no bearing on what's happening for me here in Australia. Non-Jewish clinicians can't understand that for me, it IS home.'*

» *'For weeks I was scared to talk to my therapist about this. She's not Jewish and it was like: is she going to judge me, is she going to be able to hold space for this? I was honestly terrified that a five-year therapeutic relationship was going to go down the drain if she didn't respond in the way I needed her to. Thankfully it was okay – but I still don't feel like I can be as fully open as I want to be, that she completely gets how much this is consuming my life and impacting my sense of self.'*

» *'Queer spaces feel completely inaccessible to me right now. I went to a [mental health] peer support space awhile ago – totally secular - and the facilitator opened with a 'free Palestine' acknowledgement. Instantly I felt like I couldn't be there.'*

► Grief and loss

Along with more abstract feelings of grief associated with loss of identity, community and belonging, which are detailed in Part 2, some participants described acute experiences of grief related to direct or personal experiences of loss.

» *'My cousin was taken into Gaza. We still don't have his body, don't know what happened to him. How are we supposed to grieve or move forward?'*

» *'A friend I met on Shnat was killed. I feel like I don't have the right to grieve; it's not like we were best friends. But I still think about it a lot.'*

» *'In such a small community it's impossible not to be affected. Everyone knows someone [who has been directly impacted or killed].'*

» *'One of the hostages was my chavruta at yeshivah years ago. I think of his family all the time.'*

» *'It's not just the grief and loss, but the potential of it, if that makes sense - the survivor's guilt, the what-if's. My nephew was meant to be at Nova but missed his train. He lost so many friends. Sometimes I think about what the other families are going through, how it could have been him, and it comes out – you walk around like normal and then some days it just hits you, at work, at shul, at Coles.'*

▶ Exposure to distressing content

The impact of exposure to distressing content was a clear theme throughout the consultations. For some, this related to exposure to visually graphic or horrific content depicting acts of terror or war; for others, it referred to the cumulative impact of viewing antisemitic content, whether online or in the community.

» *'Initially when it was unclear what was happening [on October 7] we were combing through footage - videos and images of the attacks that were coming out of Israel. This was all raw and unfiltered, things no one should ever have to see. Some [of the team] saw people they knew in that footage. And it was happening in real time, when we weren't yet sure if there was a local threat as well. It was terrifying. How are you meant to process something like that?'*

» *'Some of that stuff I'm never going to be able to forget, but at the time it was so hard to look away. I felt like I had to watch. And even if you were trying not to look, early on there was so much that was sent around without warning - you'd open up Whatsapp and see these awful things. And even if you didn't see that, people would be talking about it, whether you wanted to hear it or not. It's mostly faded now but sometimes I'll still have nightmares.'*

» *'To me it's important to bear witness to Palestinian suffering as well, so I make sure I read articles, watch videos. The images, the sounds - it breaks my heart. I just cry and cry. It's impossible to get out of my head, but I feel obligated not to look away.'*

» *'We had to start pre-moderating our social media. 90% of the comments we receive are unpublishable. It's every single day, every post, for months. Even the most innocuous posts - nothing to do with Israel, just the fact that we're a Jewish organisation - attract the most vile, hateful responses. 'F*ck the Jews'. The other day someone posted a video of dogs p*ssing on the Israeli flag. I've tried to take over some of the moderation duties from my manager, because I can see how much it hurts her. It's understandable; she's Jewish, it's too close to home, it takes a toll. I'm not Jewish, so while it's still horrible to read, it doesn't impact me in the same way as it does for her.'*

» *'Online it just feels like you can never escape it. It's not even only on Jewish content! You open Instagram and you see, like, a cooking video or something - and then you look at the comments and there are hundreds of people talking about Israel and Jews, saying the most horrible things. It's exhausting, seeing it all the time... I know I shouldn't look but sometimes I can't help myself.'*

» *'I've gotten into so many arguments online. I know I should just scroll past, but I can't - I see people saying these terrible things about Israel, about Jewish people, and I feel like I have to stand up for us - it's the fear of what will happen if we don't speak up. It definitely takes a toll though. I'm just so angry, all the time.'*



'Every day on my way to work I see new graffiti around our building: 'f-ck Israel'. It's particularly unsettling because our office isn't even located in the main part of the Jewish community, so it feels very targeted. Having to walk past that every day is pretty rough.'



'I was out walking with my kids a few weeks back and we passed a power pole that said "gas the Jews". Thank G-d they're not old enough to read. They could see I was shaken though.'

▶ *Impacts of rising antisemitism*

Managing the impacts of rising antisemitism was apparent throughout the consultation process. Some of this is also captured in the previous commentary – for instance, with respect to increased vigilance and heightened safety concerns; anxiety about whether to openly identify as Jewish; and changes to personal circumstances and practices such as school, work, housing and service-seeking.

Many participants described how consuming and ever-present the threat of antisemitism feels. The belief that they would be safer in Israel than Australia was frequently stated.



'Honestly? I know it's a war zone, but I'd feel safer in Israel than in Melbourne.'



'It's like I'm constantly scanning for safety. I feel paranoid and hypervigilant in a way I never have before. Part of me feels like I'm crazy – and then you see something or read something and realise you're not. I'm not confident we would be protected here, that police could keep us safe.'



'As a young person, the biggest impact on my mental health is the antisemitism stuff. It seems like broadly there has been this desensitisation towards Jewish issues, Jewish people, a lack of care about whether or not we face discrimination. Whether that comes from the far left or from neo-Nazis – we're not in a good position either way. The accidental antisemitism stuff hurts too. I have non-Jewish friends who are pro-Palestinian activists who say really antisemitic things, without even realising it. It's not malicious, just uninformed - the misinformation is scary. I'm really frightened, to be honest.'



'We were in Israel recently and felt much more settled there. Yes, having to run to shelters is awful, and there are lots of other challenges too – but at least you don't feel alone there. You aren't afraid of your fellow citizens like you are here; you're not in the minority, you're not the "other". My friends living in Israel say the same thing – 'I've seen what's happening in Melbourne, it must be so hard for you' - they actually feel sorry for us.'



'A lot of people I know are contemplating aliyah, trying to work out how to move to Israel – and soon, while they can still afford to – everyone thinks prices are going to go up there because people are desperate to leave the diaspora, they don't feel safe.'



'It feels like under the guise of anti-Zionism people have been given permission now to voice all the antisemitic things they believed but weren't allowed to say before.'



'On October 8 we made our safety plan. I know that probably sounds ridiculous to someone who isn't Jewish, if you're looking at this without the trauma-informed lens of knowing the persecution we've faced throughout history, the intergenerational trauma stuff; it would sound insane, but it's true. For post-Holocaust Jewry, [October 7] is the worst thing we have ever experienced. I know where we'll go, who would hide us – I already asked them. On days when the anxiety feels out of control I remind myself that I have that option and it helps me to breathe.'



'It sounds awful to say this, but I'm glad my Holocaust-survivor mother was gone before October 7. She survived the camps, she thought Australia was safe, that her children would have a good life here. All of the discourse right now, the scapegoating, the media narratives... it's an echo of history. We've been here before; we know how this ends for us.'

▶ Role impacts for frontline responders

Faith leaders reported a substantial increase in requests for pastoral care post-October 7. This is believed to be a function of i) the persistence of stigma around mental health service-seeking in parts of the community, meaning that some people experiencing distress will prefer to seek support from a faith leader than a mental health clinician; and ii) the increased need for spiritual care given the particular communal and identity-based impacts associated with a collective, cultural trauma.



'Along with the general pastoral care requests - people crying in my office every day, the fear and grief and confusion - I've received far more questions about mental health and Orthodox practice [since October 7] than in all my time as a Rabbi.'

Other frontline responders also described the challenges associated with managing the impacts associated with their role or navigating the dual identity of community member and community professional.



'Working in a Jewish organisation at this time has been hard in some ways. I feel safer here than I would [in a non-Jewish organisation] and it's purposeful to be able to support my community - but at the same time you're supporting people through things that are similar to what you yourself are going through as well. It can be a lot to hold.'



'Both working and living in the Jewish community – it can feel like there's no respite, that the impacts [of October 7] are ever-present. You don't get a break; there's no distraction from it.'



'There are so many impacts [in our roles]. It's getting harder and harder to carry that burden. You have to do a lot of compartmentalising. You feel very vulnerable; the fear is very, very real. There's always risk but right now it's so acute. It's a relatively new feeling - to be wondering to yourself 'is tonight the night we don't go home to our families?' It's very emotional. We're just exhausted.'



'There are relationships that are really feeling the strain. Where one person feels the need to stand up and protect their community, and the other just wants their partner safe at home. Children who are seeing less of their parents, asking them not to go [on shift]. It tears you apart.'



'We are not the same organisation that we were on October 6. We are bigger and stronger; more capable, more determined. But we are also tired. We are traumatised, anxious and in pain. It's hard to know where to even begin to explain how much this hurts.'



'I'm not Jewish, but I work in a Jewish organisation. It's worse now [since October 7] but even before that. I've lost friends over it: "why would you work there, that must be awful." The worst was "Aren't you ashamed to work at Jewish Care?" Antisemitism is alive and well.'

Part 2: Identity-based impacts

The below describes reflections that were consistently shared throughout the consultation and are aligned to the theme of **identity-based impacts**.

► Questions of identity and ideology

Many participants described wrestling with ideological, existential or identity-based questions, and resultant feelings of distress, destabilisation, disconnection and isolation. These reflections were most commonly voiced by participants who identified as left-leaning, progressive or secular. The impacts of these concerns on mental health and wellbeing were particularly pronounced for young people in educational leadership roles, those who commonly have social and other connections beyond or outside the Jewish community, and those with pre-existing mental health issues.

» *'I'm too left for the Jewish community. Too 'Zionist' for my non-Jewish friends. I'm stranded in the middle. I feel like no one speaks for me. Politically I feel homeless. It is so painfully lonely.'*

» *'There has been so much wrestling – experiencing this differently to my family or my Jewish friends, and at the same time feeling so far away from my non-Jewish friends. Swinging back and forth, not knowing what is true, what to believe. It's like you don't even know what you think or feel yourself. [Youth movement] has been my safe space, I really wouldn't have gotten through this without it – but as a madrich how am I meant to teach kids to reckon with Judaism and Israel when I don't even know myself?'*

» *'I'm a "northside Jew". LGBTIQ settings were previously my safe place, but not anymore – it's palpable, I'm not welcome there. I feel like I've had to choose between being queer and being Jewish. It's a complete headf**k, these two inextricable parts of myself. And it's so lonely.'*

» *'My friendship circle is very mixed and left-leaning, and I'm generally the only Jewish person there – so you're expected to be the spokesperson for all Jews. You're constantly tasked with having to defend or explain Israel's actions, getting in all these 'but what about..?' arguments. It's completely exhausting. And that's without even considering that I don't have the answers for that myself. I'm so lost right now. I feel differently to most of the mainstream Jewish voices; I'm critical of Israel and the settlements, I want Palestinians to live in safety and freedom. But to the outside, people just see you as "Jew" and instantly make all these assumptions. It feels like there's no safe space for me.'*

» *'Knowing that to many people right now, "Jew" is synonymous with oppressor, aggressor, coloniser, violent... To know that, while simultaneously having grown up hearing about my zayde's experiences in the camps, to know that Jews have been persecuted throughout history virtually everywhere we go, having experienced antisemitism myself – it's almost like being gaslit. You doubt your own reality, think 'how can this be happening?'*



'I don't know how to reconcile being Jewish right now. I feel sick at the suffering in Gaza; I hate what is being done in my name. I feel guilty, culpable. And at the same time I'm scared that there will be a day when Israel doesn't exist anymore.'



'It's a weird time to be left. The news outlets I would normally align to, every headline or perspective feels unbalanced. It's bewildering to hear these right-wing voices – people that I normally abhor – seeming to be the only ones that are speaking for the Jewish community. Politically-speaking, like identity wise – it's been very destabilising. I'm lost.'



'It's the expectation. There's this enormous pressure to take a stance, to hold a binary position – are you for or against? Prove yourself, state your case! But there's so much pain and grey in all of this. I don't even know who I am right now.'



'How can faith exist through all this? What kind of Hashem would let this happen? To the hostages? To the Palestinians? To us? The suffering is unbearable. I have been religious all my life but I can't believe anymore.'



'I wouldn't admit it to anyone [in my community] but since October 7 I break Shabbat to check the news. It's too hard to spend those hours not knowing, not being able to contact family in Israel. I feel guilty about it though. I hope Hashem understands.'

▶ Experiences of belonging in the Jewish community

Many participants described the impacts of October 7 on their experience of belonging in the Jewish community. Negative impacts were particularly apparent among those who identified as left-leaning or socially progressive; who did not consider themselves Zionist; who were not halachically Jewish or were not engaged with traditional or formal Jewish communal structures such as Jewish schooling, leadership or youth movements. Consistent themes emerged regarding the lack of 'safe spaces' to voice or explore divergent views; concerns regarding how they might be perceived by community; and the impact this had on identity and sense of self.



'I'm Jewish by patrilineal descent; I didn't grow up very connected to the community. To the Jewish community I'm seen as "not really" Jewish. It's like - do I even have the right to be affected by this? But to the external community I'm Jewish enough for it to have had very real impacts on my life. I've lost work and income, I've faced awful antisemitism. And yet at the same time I don't have a "home" in the mainstream Jewish community to help me through it.'

» 'I don't know where I fit in the community right now. I'm not what I would call stridently Zionist, but I'm very deeply Jewish. I feel like I cop it from both sides. To the outside I'm a "Zionist dog" and held to account for Israel's actions. To the Jewish community I'm "self-hating", doing Judaism wrong. All of this is bewildering to me - much of my family lives in Israel. Israel matters to me, it just isn't the sum total of what my Jewish identity is organised around. But because of that right now it feels like there's no place for me, or I have to hide things about myself - I can't speak openly. Lately I feel very far away [from the Jewish community].'

» 'I am anti-Zionist. It's terribly lonely. I have lost all my friends. I have no place in the Jewish community. I don't feel seen anywhere. There are days where I am ashamed to be Jewish.'

» 'It doesn't feel like there's any safe place for me to voice criticism, to express grief at the loss of life in Gaza, to ask the big questions that keep me up at night. I need to talk about it but I don't know where.'

» 'I feel alienated by so many of the voices I see. But the alternative [Jewish Council] doesn't speak for me either. I know there must be others in the same boat, who feel similarly, but it's hard to know where to find those spaces or voices. Every time I hear someone describe an experience like my own it's like a weight off my shoulders; just the most immense relief, it feels like I can breathe.'

Conversely, many participants described a strengthened or renewed connection with the Jewish community and the positive impact this had brought. Others spoke to the desire to support greater cohesion and unity within different settings across the community. The role and importance of safe Jewish spaces was also apparent.

» 'I feel so much more connected to the community. I've been going to so many more events, activities than I normally would, observing chagim more. It's been nice to reconnect with this part of myself.'

» 'Places like this [Jewish youth program] have been amazing. Being in spaces where you can just connect and have fun being Jewish, even if you're from different backgrounds or don't see things the same way.'

» 'We try to be really responsive to the different things [the kids] are bringing. For some, this is their only place to talk about Israel. For others, this is the place where they can get respite from it all and just relax and connect. Both groups say that this is their safe place. It feels special that we've been able to provide that. It can be hard to support though, especially when there are different viewpoints, or helping to navigate really challenging conversations.'

» 'The silver lining is that our community has come together. We are strong, we are survivors.'

» 'The lines between us seem so meaningless now. Progressive, Orthodox – we're all Jews.'

► Experiences of belonging in the Australian community

Some participants described feelings of 'othering' or disconnection from the broader Australian community. Feelings of anger and abandonment at the perceived lack of response or action on antisemitism from government and other leadership were also apparent.

» *'No one is speaking for us. We can only rely on ourselves.'*

» *'[October 7] has fundamentally changed my view of who I am; of what it means to be a Jewish Australian. I, and so many others, feel deeply and irretrievably betrayed – by our leadership, by our institutions, by fellow citizens. So many that we thought were allies have fallen away. I don't believe there is a place for me in this country anymore.'*

» *'I came to Australia [from Israel] to make a life for my family, because I didn't support the government there, because I thought Australia was a safe and inclusive place. But no one here spoke for us [on October 7]. No one speaks for us now. Where are the voices calling for peace? I can't breathe. I live outside the Jewish "bubble" and honestly, I'm scared to say I'm Israeli. My kids don't even know that we are. I tell them they are Australian; to say Mum, not Ima.'*

» *'It might sound like a small thing, but there's that continued experience of seeing yet another public figure or account that you follow, that you've maybe admired or looked up to, sharing something unbalanced or anti-Israel. Feeling this distance from other Australians, having that continued heart-sinking feeling of 'oh...' Like you're not seen, we don't matter.'*

» *'It feels like the curtain has been pulled back. To walk around, knowing so many Australians feel this way about us... I don't think it will ever be the same again.'*

» *'I'm not strongly connected to the Jewish community; most of my friends aren't Jewish. We're all very left. They'll make remarks about Israel, antisemitic kinda stuff, and then say 'you feel the same way, right?' 'Cause you're not really a Jew; you're not like them.'*

► Relationship conflict and disharmony

Participants described a range of challenging impacts on family and social relationships, both within and beyond the Jewish community - in particular, where there were diversities of opinion or viewpoint. This was especially pronounced with respect to intergenerational differences within families; many participants described major and sustained rifts, and the significant and ongoing distress associated with that.

» *'There's been a total breakdown in the ability to have respectful dialogue; to agree to disagree. I mean even within the Jewish community. When people are passionate, when people care deeply, are hurting – it's hard to speak evenly. I know lifelong friends who haven't spoken in months. They don't see any way to come back from this. It's so sad.'*



'I've lost so many friendships. I've seen life-long friends share anti-Israel things online; they do it without a second thought, like they have no idea how much it hurts me – or maybe they just don't care. Sometimes I call it out, other times I don't even know what to say. They're not Jewish or Muslim. I want to scream, 'it's easy for you – you have no skin in the game.' Even the friends that haven't said anything, the hypervigilance you have to constantly hold just isn't worth it; it's too exhausting walking on eggshells all the time.'



'The ruptures within families are heartbreaking. A lot of it is generational. Maybe partly because the younger people haven't seen what we have; why Israel came to exist. It's understandable, I don't blame them - for many of them this will be the first time in their life that they've experienced antisemitism. But the divides it has created in families... it's devastating.'



'Parents are seeing their teenage or young adult children go in different directions to them – for some families it is creating really serious and enduring rifts. They need help to manage, to know what they can do when their children are aligning themselves [differently], before relationships are irreparably damaged.'



'I have friends who haven't spoken to their adult children in months. Holocaust survivor grandparents who are heartbroken by their grandchildren. Young people who are so angry at their parents, who are turning their back on community because they feel so unseen and alienated. Families who can't sit around a table together because it is so impossibly painful.'



'[I have close people in my life who are] very anti-Israel. It feels like I can't talk about things – or like when I want to celebrate the chagim, they say nasty things about Israel... It's the same at my [non-Jewish] school, there are lots of pro-Palestinian kids and it's like they see all Jews as evil. It makes me so sad because being Jewish was one of the things I liked most about myself, but now I can't talk about it with anyone.'



'I've just accepted that I can't talk about this with my kids. I don't want to lose them. So I keep shtum.'

► Professional impacts

Some participants experienced acute mental health impacts arising from the loss of livelihood after October 7 – for instance, financial distress following lost income or work due to antisemitism – or direct threats of exposure or doxing. Others described feelings of betrayal, discomfort or disillusionment within their sector, and the impact this had on their professional identity.



'My whole life has been in the creative industry. It's not just what I do, it's who I am – but I can't be in this space now. Not just because the opportunities suddenly disappeared [after October 7] – because it feels actively unsafe. Antisemitism has always been rampant in the arts. They're just allowed to say it out loud now.'

» *'My name doesn't sound Jewish, I don't look Jewish. As a result I get to witness hideous comments at work from colleagues who aren't aware of my background. Sitting in a grant review panel and hearing senior leaders say 'no, don't fund that one – they're Jewish' with a disgusted tone of voice.'*

» *'Industry colleagues, mentors, partners that I've collaborated with on projects, considered close friends, my "people" – have disappeared. Well, at best they've disappeared – at worst they've formally disavowed our friendship.'*

» *'I went into the break room at work and there were these signs: 'Nurses for Palestine!' 'Health workers against apartheid!' They were taken down fairly quickly but it's had a serious impact in terms of how I feel at work. Health shouldn't be political.'*

» *'I work at a Jewish organisation and in my line of work I often collaborate with other multicultural organisations. Awhile ago I was in a focus group, on multicultural experiences of family violence – it was just the facilitators, myself and another participant, who was Palestinian. At the end of the session, they said to the facilitators: "you should be more careful putting these groups together - in case you haven't noticed, there's a war going on. I should never have had to sit here with a Jew." I felt like I'd been slapped. I felt awful – that they had felt unsafe, and that they had looked at me and seen only "Jew". The facilitators – a peak body in my sector – said nothing. I got off the call and sobbed at my desk.'*

» *'I know of colleagues [in this sector] who've deliberately distanced themselves to get by, who don't talk about or acknowledge being Jewish. They feel like they have no choice if they want to get ahead in their field – and at the same time it tears them apart, having to hide who they are.'*

» *'My teen has wanted to be a doctor her whole life, has worked so hard for that dream. She's reconsidering now – everyone says it's an unspoken rule that the panel are restricting numbers [of Jewish students in medicine], that they don't want Yidden at [university].'*

» *'Life after October 7 is painful enough. Trying to navigate that grief and loss, while at the same time being unable to pay your bills because you've lost work as a result - or wondering if you have a future in the profession you've spent your whole life working towards? Mental health-wise, it's been pretty rough, to say the least.'*

► Concerns for the future

Most participant reflections focused on current experiences, however a small number referred to future-based concerns. These predominantly related to the shifting political landscape of the community and the future of Israel.

» *'The [Jewish community's] shift to the political right terrifies me. I think it's going to have huge impacts one, two generations down the line. And yet at the same time I understand it. As a young person I'm scared for the future of our community here, what it will look like.'*

» *'I'm deeply concerned about the future of Australian Jewry. It feels like the writing is on the wall.'*

» *'My kids are scared that World War Three is coming. I don't know what to tell them – maybe it is.'*

» *'I went to a talk by a soldier and someone in the audience asked a question about mental health and how they cope. He said that 'coping comes 'after' – and we're nowhere near "after"'. The mental health impacts are surely going to be huge; as a community how are we supposed to make sense of all this trauma?'*

» *'It scares me to think that there might come a day where Israel doesn't exist. It's meant to be this refuge, our homeland; you grow up knowing it's the place we can run to if we're unsafe. All of the Holocaust education you do as a kid, you hear 'but we're okay, we have Israel now!' Do we, though?'*

» *'It just feels like – when is this going to end? At what cost? And how will the world perceive us when that happens?'*

Conclusion

While not representative of the community's entirety, the above summarises the key themes that emerged throughout the consultation engagement, providing a snapshot of the myriad and ongoing mental health impacts experienced across the Victorian Jewish community post-October 7. These valuable insights will guide the development of education- and resource-based offerings for identified target audiences.

We again wish to express our sincere thanks to the participants who contributed so generously.

Support

We acknowledge that the reflections contained within this report may be distressing. If you or someone you know is in need of support, please reach out.

Jewish Care is providing supports to community members affected by the ongoing crisis. For more information or to self-refer, visit www.jewishcare.org.au/israelmhsupport or phone the Front Door on **(03) 8517 5999**.

For 24 hour support, contact Lifeline on **13 11 14**. In a medical emergency, contact Hatzolah on **1800 613 613** and call **000**.

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