



An Economic Snapshot of the Greater Jackson Heights Area

Highlights

- Taxable business sales grew by 72 percent in the Jackson Heights area between 2009 and 2017, faster than in Queens and in the City.
- Private sector employment reached 20,900 in 2018, 23 percent higher than in 2009.
- The unemployment rate fell from a peak of 10.3 percent in 2010 to 4.2 percent in 2017.
- Median household income grew by 31 percent between 2012 and 2017, faster than in Queens and the City. Still, the median (\$56,600) was lower than in Queens overall (\$64,500).
- In 2017, 63 percent of working-age residents held jobs or ran their own businesses, higher than in the City and the nation.
- Immigrants represented 90 percent of self-employed in the area, the highest share among the City's 55 neighborhoods.
- The poverty rate fell from 20 percent in 2010 to 13 percent in 2017, significantly lower than the citywide rate and the second-largest decline among the City's 55 neighborhoods.
- Almost two-thirds of households devoted at least 30 percent of their incomes to rent in 2017, up from 54 percent in 2009.
- Less than half (49 percent in 2017) of the residents were proficient in English, lower than the citywide share (77 percent).
- Three-quarters of the residents aged 25 and over had a high school diploma, but only one-fifth had at least a bachelor's degree.
- Seventeen of the 19 traditional elementary and middle schools were overcrowded.

The greater Jackson Heights area in the northwestern portion of Queens (which includes East Elmhurst and North Corona) is one of the most diverse communities in New York City, with immigrants from around the world.

Immigrants represented 60 percent of the area's population in 2017, much higher than the citywide and national shares. Immigrants also made up more than three-quarters of employed residents, the second-highest share among New York City's 55 Census-defined neighborhoods.

Since the end of the recession, businesses have been coming to the Jackson Heights area in large numbers. There were 3,300 businesses in 2018, 660 more than in 2009. Many businesses in the area are small retail shops and restaurants that reflect the neighborhood's diversity.

Jobs have increased along with new businesses. Since 2009, the neighborhood has added 4,000 private sector jobs, creating opportunities for residents.

Many believe the U.S. Census undercounted the population of Jackson Heights in 2010. An accurate count in 2020 will be important because the results will determine the distribution of federal funds and representation in Congress.

The greater Jackson Heights area's large, vibrant immigrant community is the driving force behind the local economy. With its cultural diversity, strong entrepreneurial spirit and proximity to Manhattan, the neighborhood continues to attract new residents and visitors. While significant advances have been made over the past decade, there are still challenges, including the need for more affordable housing.

Introduction

The greater Jackson Heights area is one of 55 neighborhoods in New York City as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. The neighborhood is located in northwestern Queens and is coterminous with Community Board 3. The area borders LaGuardia Airport, Grand Central Parkway, Roosevelt Avenue and the Brooklyn Queens Expressway (see Figure 1).

Jackson Heights was the nation's first garden-apartment community in 1916. The historic districts, which include clusters of garden apartments and single-family homes, range from 93rd Street through 69th Street between Northern Boulevard and Roosevelt Avenue.

The neighborhood is multicultural, with concentrations of residents and businesses from many different Latin American and South Asian countries. The main retail thoroughfares include 37th and Roosevelt avenues and 73rd, 74th, and 82nd streets. The area is also known for its street vendors, particularly food carts.

Jackson Heights has a large LGBTQ community and is home to the Queens Pride Parade, the second largest Pride celebration in the New York metropolitan area.

The Roosevelt Avenue subway station is the second busiest in Queens and a short ride to

Manhattan. The neighborhood is home to the Lexington School and Center for the Deaf, which was established in 1865, and the Bulova Corporate Center. While the neighborhood lacks green space, it is close to Flushing Meadows Corona Park, the second-largest park in the City.

Demographic Trends

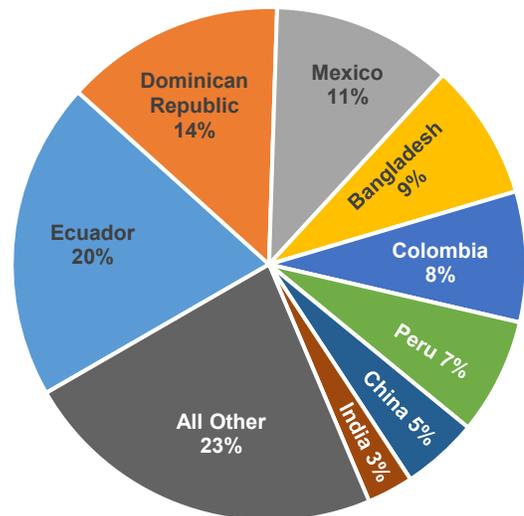
According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population in the greater Jackson Heights area was 170,200 in 2017.¹ Immigrants made up 60 percent of the population, much higher than their citywide (37 percent) and national shares (14 percent). It was also the second-highest share among the City's 55 neighborhoods.

There were 102,300 immigrants in the Jackson Heights area. Ecuadoreans were the largest group (see Figure 2), representing one-fifth (20,800) of the immigrant population. Dominicans were the second-largest group (14,400), followed by Mexicans (11,800). Bangladeshis, Colombians, Peruvians, Chinese and Indians also made up significant shares. Among the City's neighborhoods, the Jackson Heights area had the second-largest number of immigrants from Ecuador, Mexico, Bangladesh and Colombia.

FIGURE 1
The Jackson Heights Area



FIGURE 2
Immigrants in the Jackson Heights Area by Country of Origin



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-year file; OSC analysis

In 2017, more than 60 percent of residents (both native born and immigrants) were Hispanic, 19 percent were Asian, 12 percent were White and 5 percent were Black or African American. The average household size was three people, larger than the citywide average (2.5 people).

The median age in the greater Jackson Heights area was 38, similar to the citywide median (37). However, the median age varied by neighborhood, ranging from 31 in North Corona to 40 in Jackson Heights proper.

In North Corona, children made up a larger share of the population (28 percent) than citywide (22 percent), while seniors made up a larger share of the population in Jackson Heights (15 percent) than citywide (12 percent).

Most residents in the area spoke a language other than English at home (81 percent), much higher than the shares citywide (49 percent) and in the nation (22 percent). Less than half of the residents were proficient in English, lower than the citywide share (77 percent). Of the City's 55 neighborhoods, the Jackson Heights area ranked 54th in English proficiency. However, the proficiency rate among children between the ages of 5 and 17 was much higher (84 percent).

Three-quarters of the residents in the area who were age 25 and over had a high school diploma, lower than the citywide share (82 percent). In North Corona, only half (54 percent) had a high school diploma.

Similarly, while one-fifth of area residents (21 percent) had at least a bachelor's degree, the share was lower than citywide (37 percent). Only 8 percent of the residents in North Corona had a college degree.

According to the NYU Furman Center, more than 10 percent of households in the greater Jackson Heights area were severely overcrowded, second only to the adjacent Elmhurst-Corona area.

Business Trends

In 2018, there were nearly 3,300 businesses in the Jackson Heights area, 660 more than in 2009. This represents an increase of 25 percent, which was faster than the growth rate in Queens (22 percent) and the City (17 percent). Despite strong growth, there has reportedly been high turnover in response to increasing rents.

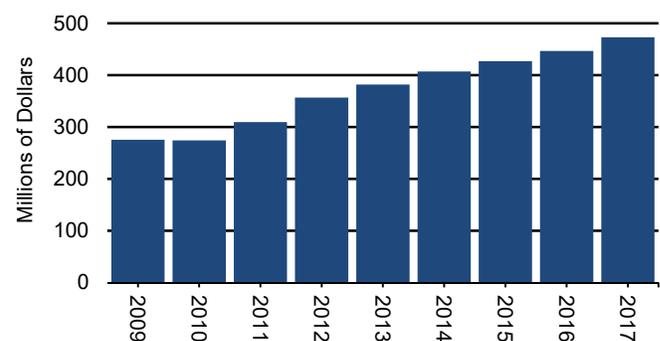
Retail stores accounted for more than one-fifth of all businesses, a higher share than in Queens or citywide. The number of restaurants increased the most, with more than 100 new establishments. There were also significant increases in the numbers of construction firms, grocery stores, and hair and nail salons.

Nearly three-quarters of businesses had fewer than five employees, and 88 percent had fewer than 10 employees. Only seven firms had 250 or more employees.

Taxable business sales increased by 72 percent since 2009 to reach \$473 million in 2017 (the most recent year for which data are available; see Figure 3).² This growth was faster than in Queens (54 percent) and citywide (50 percent).

A controversial project that would bring new commercial and retail businesses (including Target) to 82nd Street was recently approved. There are concerns, however, that the development could displace neighborhood businesses and accelerate gentrification.

FIGURE 3
Business Sales in the Jackson Heights Area



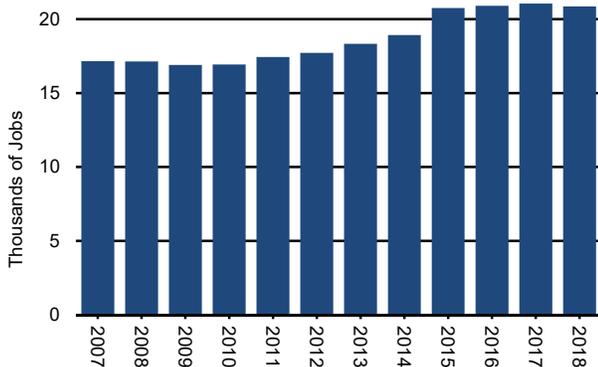
Note: Annual taxable sales data for the period beginning March 1 to the end of February in the next calendar year.

Sources: NYC Department of Finance; OSC analysis

Employment Trends

Private sector employment in the Jackson Heights area increased by nearly 23 percent between 2009 and 2015. Although job growth slowed over the next two years and declined slightly in 2018, the neighborhood has added 4,000 private sector jobs since 2009, pushing employment to 20,900 (see Figure 4). This represents an increase of 23 percent, only slightly less than the citywide growth rate during this period. Two-thirds of the jobs added were in retail, construction, and leisure and hospitality.

FIGURE 4
Private Sector Employment

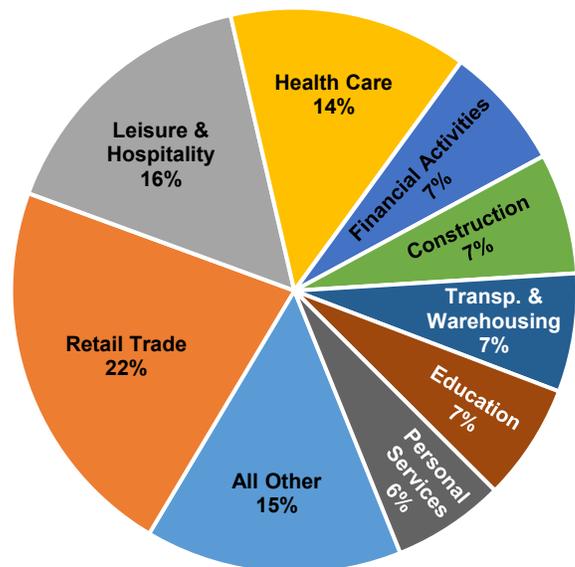


Sources: NYS Department of Labor; OSC analysis

Total wages (which reflects both average salaries and employment) rose by 42 percent since 2009 to reach \$885 million in 2018. The average private sector salary rose by 15 percent to \$42,400 during this period. Although faster than the growth rate in Queens, the average salary in the Jackson Heights area was still lower than the average salary in Queens (\$50,300).

Retail trade (with 4,600 jobs and an average salary of \$34,100) was the largest employment sector in the Jackson Heights area, representing more than one-fifth of all private sector jobs (see Figure 5). The sector increased by 45 percent and added more jobs than any other sector between 2009 and 2018, growing by more than 1,400 (see Figure 6, next page). More than three-quarters of the jobs added were in food, electronics and clothing stores.

FIGURE 5
Distribution of Employment, 2018



Sources: NYS Department of Labor; OSC analysis

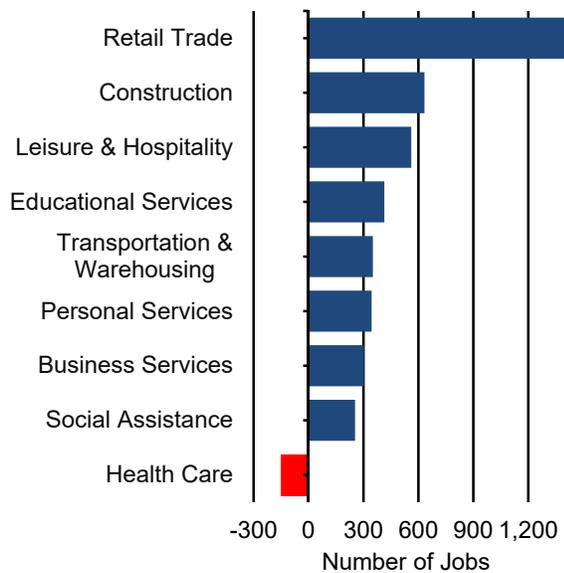
The leisure and hospitality sector (with 3,300 jobs and an average salary of \$27,300) was responsible for 16 percent of private sector employment. Most of the jobs were in restaurants. The sector added 560 jobs between 2009 and 2018, an increase of 20 percent.

Health care (with 2,900 jobs and an average salary of \$47,200) was responsible for 14 percent of private sector employment. More than three-quarters of the jobs were in ambulatory health care services, which includes doctor and dentist offices, diagnostic laboratories and home health care services.

While the neighborhood lost 450 health care jobs between 2015 and 2017, 38 percent of the jobs were regained in 2018. NYC Health + Hospitals will be building a community health center in Jackson Heights, which will provide comprehensive, one-stop ambulatory services.

The financial activities sector (with 1,500 jobs and an average salary of \$40,900) was responsible for more than 7 percent of private sector employment. Most of the jobs were in banking, real estate and car rental services. The sector has experienced very little growth since 2009.

FIGURE 6
Major Changes in Employment in the Jackson Heights Area, 2009-2018



Sources: NYS Department of Labor; OSC analysis

The construction sector (with 1,450 jobs and an average salary of \$57,240) was responsible for 7 percent of private sector employment. The industry added 1,200 jobs between 2009 and 2017, but half of the gains were erased in 2018.

The transportation and warehousing sector (with more than 1,400 jobs and an average salary of \$74,300) was also responsible for 7 percent of private sector employment. Half of the jobs were in private bus companies, and more than one-quarter were in air transportation. The sector added 350 jobs between 2009 and 2018, an increase of 33 percent.

The educational services sector (with 1,400 jobs and an average salary of \$44,600) added more than 400 jobs between 2009 and 2018, an increase of 42 percent. Most of the jobs were in private elementary and secondary schools, and specialized schools.

The personal services sector (with 1,300 jobs and an average salary of \$33,200) includes dry cleaners, auto repair shops, and hair and nail salons. The sector added more than 300 jobs since 2009, an increase of 34 percent.

Spotlight on LaGuardia Airport

LaGuardia Airport, located to the north of the Jackson Heights area, is the busiest airport in the nation without nonstop service to Europe. A significant number of the jobs in the Jackson Heights area are due to its proximity to LaGuardia. In addition, the airport offers employment opportunities for local residents.

Employment at the airport totaled 12,700 jobs in 2018, an increase of 83 percent since 2009. The jobs at the airport pay well, with an average salary of \$82,000. According to the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, LaGuardia accounted for more than \$18.7 billion in regional economic activity.

The airport is undergoing a much-needed renovation. Private financing is expected to cover 80 percent of the \$8 billion cost of redevelopment.

Work began in 2016 on the modernization of the Central Terminal Building (Terminal B). By December 2018, 11 of the 18 gates had opened. A new parking garage, with 3,100 public parking spaces, opened in February 2018. The remaining seven gates (along with pedestrian bridges and additional concourses) are scheduled to be completed in 2020. In 2017, work began on the Delta Airlines renovation of Terminals C and D, which will redevelop and combine the terminals.

The LaGuardia Redevelopment Team attends community board and other local meetings to keep residents informed about the project. The Council for Airport Opportunity recruits daily at LaGuardia and John F. Kennedy airports for employment opportunities in aviation.

The Port Authority has budgeted \$1.5 billion for developing a LaGuardia AirTrain that will connect the airport to the New York City subway and the Long Island Rail Road at Willets Point. The AirTrain will provide a 30-minute rail connection to Midtown Manhattan.

Residents in the Work Force

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 63 percent of the working-age population in the greater Jackson Heights area (85,530 residents) held jobs or ran their own businesses in 2017, a higher share than in Queens (61 percent) and the City (60 percent). Immigrants made up more than three-quarters (77 percent) of employed residents, the second-highest share of the City's 55 neighborhoods.

Most residents (86 percent) worked in Manhattan or Queens. The average commute time was 44 minutes, similar to the Queens average but nearly twice the national average (27 minutes). More than half of the workers commuted by subway. The area is served by the E, F, M, R and No. 7 subway lines. Residents in East Elmhurst rely more on cars and buses, and have slightly longer commutes.

Area residents worked in a wide variety of occupations. The most common jobs were construction workers, housekeepers, janitors, taxi drivers, retail workers, restaurant workers, administrative assistants and office clerks.

Residents who worked full-time earned an average of \$47,000. More than two-thirds (68 percent) earned less than \$50,000 annually, a higher share than in Queens overall (52 percent). Only 8 percent of area residents earned \$100,000 or more, lower than the share in Queens (13 percent).

The Jackson Heights area had the highest share of self-employed residents (15 percent) of any neighborhood in Queens, and the sixth highest in the City. Of the 12,650 self-employed residents, 90 percent were immigrants, the highest share among the City's 55 neighborhoods.

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that the unemployment rate in the greater Jackson Heights area fell from the recessionary peak of 10.3 percent in 2010 to 4.2 percent in 2017, lower than the rate in Queens (5.2 percent) and the City (6.4 percent).³ However, the unemployment rate in East Elmhurst was higher than the average in the greater Jackson Heights area.

Household Income

The median household income in the greater Jackson Heights area fell by 16 percent between 2009 and 2012, the largest decline of the City's 55 neighborhoods. Since 2012, household income has rebounded strongly, rising by 31 percent to \$56,600 in 2017 (much faster than in Queens and the City).

Despite the strong growth, household income was still below the 2009 level on an inflation-adjusted basis and below the median in Queens (\$64,500). In addition, median household incomes were lower in East Elmhurst and North Corona than in Jackson Heights.

The household poverty rate fell from 20 percent in 2010 to 13 percent in 2017, significantly lower than the citywide rate and the second-largest decline among the City's 55 neighborhoods. The decline represents 15,200 fewer people in poverty.

While the five-year poverty rate in Jackson Heights proper (12.7 percent) was also significantly lower than the citywide rate, the poverty rates in East Elmhurst (18.8 percent) and North Corona (19.5 percent) were similar to the citywide rate.

The five-year child poverty rate in Jackson Heights (16.6 percent) was much lower than the citywide rate (27.8 percent). However, the child poverty rates in East Elmhurst (26.9 percent) and North Corona (27.8 percent) were similar to the citywide rate.

In 2017, 13 percent of households in the area received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits (SNAP, also known as food stamps). While similar to the share in Queens, this was lower than the citywide share (20 percent). A higher share of households in the Jackson Heights area (41 percent) relied on Medicaid than in Queens (31 percent) or the City (34 percent).

Housing

In 2017, there were 49,500 occupied housing units in the Jackson Heights area. More than three-fifths were rental units. The rental vacancy rate was 0.7 percent (lower than the citywide rate of 3.5 percent), reflecting the popularity of the area. There is also evidence that higher income households are moving into the neighborhood. For example, there were nearly 1,400 renting households with incomes over \$150,000 in 2017, more than twice the number in 2005.

Since 2009, median rent has grown by 26 percent, nearly three times faster than the growth in household income (10 percent). The median rent was \$1,500 in 2017, similar to the Queens median.

Nearly half the apartments in the area are unregulated and rent at market rates. According to Zillow Market Research, market-rate rents in Jackson Heights increased by 32 percent between 2011 and 2016, and have averaged almost \$2,200 since then (see Figure 7).

Almost two-thirds of rental households devoted at least 30 percent of their incomes to rent, up from 54 percent in 2009. Almost 35 percent of the households in the Jackson Heights area faced a severe rent burden, devoting at least half of their incomes to rent.

The NYU Furman Center reported 23.6 serious housing code violations per 1,000 rental units in the area in 2017. While less than half the citywide rate (51 serious violations), this was slightly higher than the rate in Queens (20.6 serious violations).

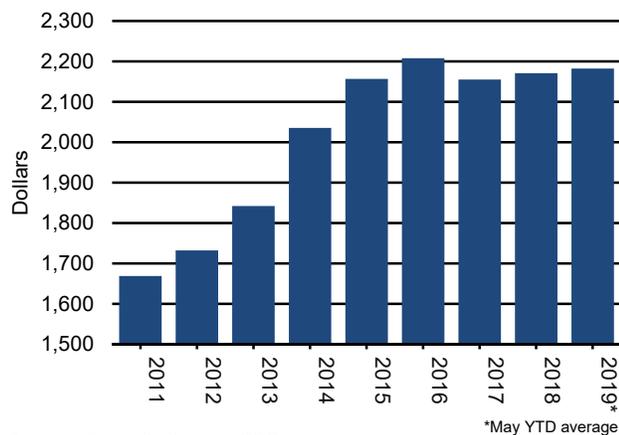
About 38 percent of the households in the area own their homes, higher than the citywide home ownership rate (33 percent). Nearly half live in single-family homes, and most of the others live in cooperative apartments.

According to Zillow Market Research, the value of single-family homes fell by 21 percent between 2006 and 2010, reflecting the impact of the recession. The value of condominiums and cooperatives did not fall as sharply (see Figure 7), but values were depressed for an extended period.

Values began rising in 2013 and quickly exceeded the prerecession level. By 2018, the median value of single-family homes had risen to \$861,700, surpassing the value in 2006 by 31 percent. The median value of condominiums and cooperatives reached \$488,600, 47 percent higher than the 2006 value.

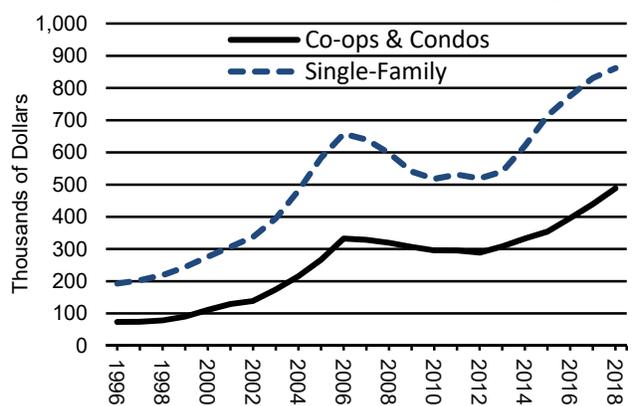
FIGURE 7

Market-Rate Rent in Jackson Heights



Sources: Zillow Rent Index; OSC analysis

Home Values in Jackson Heights



Sources: Zillow Home Value Index; OSC analysis

Neighborhood Schools

The Jackson Heights area has 21 public elementary and middle schools (covering parts of three school districts) that served nearly 20,200 students in school year 2017-2018. There are 19 traditional elementary and middle schools, and two charter schools. While school capacity has grown in recent years with the addition of four new schools since 2010, school overcrowding remains a concern.

Seventeen of the 19 traditional elementary and middle schools were operating beyond their capacities in 2018. Seven schools were operating at more than 125 percent of capacity, including four at more than 145 percent. An additional eight schools were operating at between 110 percent and 125 percent of capacity.

New York City's capital plan calls for the construction of 1,464 additional classroom seats in the Jackson Heights area and closely surrounding neighborhoods over the next five years, which is significantly less than needed to solve school overcrowding.

The number of students in grades 3 through 8 who ranked as proficient on statewide English exams rose from 25.9 percent in 2014 to 45.7 percent in 2018 (similar to the citywide share). Math proficiency was 44.6 percent, higher than the citywide rate (42.7 percent).

Jackson Heights is home to the Aerospace Science Magnet School, as well as the Vaughn College of Aeronautics and Technology, which specializes in the fields of engineering, technology, management and aviation. The Louis Armstrong Middle School emphasizes STEM and arts programs. It ranks among the top 10 percent of all New York City public schools.

Crime

In the 115th Precinct, which covers the Jackson Heights area, the number of reported major felonies (i.e., murder, rape, robbery, assault, burglary, grand larceny and auto theft) declined by 45 percent between 2000 and 2018, similar to the decline citywide.

In 2018, there were 9.7 major crimes per 1,000 residents, lower than the citywide crime rate (11.1 per 1,000). However, the numbers of complaints of felony assault and grand larceny were higher in 2018 than 10 years earlier. There has also been a marked increase in the number of reported sex-related crimes and in gang-related activities.

Health Issues

According to the New York City Department of Health, life expectancy in the Jackson Heights area is slightly above the citywide average and the area ranked low in premature deaths from cancer and heart disease. Still, 28 percent of the residents lack access to health insurance, more than twice the citywide share and higher than the share in Queens.

While teen pregnancy has declined across New York City, the rate of teen mothers is 45 percent higher in the Jackson Heights area than citywide. Childhood obesity is above the citywide average, but adult obesity is lower. While the rate of new HIV diagnoses is one-third higher in the Jackson Heights area than citywide, the rate of new hepatitis C reports is half the citywide rate.

¹ All population and demographic data for the greater Jackson Heights area were drawn from the American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year file for 2017. Sub-neighborhood data were drawn from the ACS 5-year file for 2013-2017.

² The New York City Department of Finance reports annual taxable sales data for the year ending February 28. The Office of the State Comptroller attributes the data to the calendar year that includes the most months.

³ The unemployment rates from the U. S. Census Bureau in this discussion are different from the unemployment rates reported by the New York State Department of Labor because they utilize different surveys.