

**MIGRANT INFORMATION CENTRE (Eastern Melbourne)  
Multicultural Equity and Access Program**

## Muslim Profile

**PLEASE NOTE:** This religious profile provides an overview of the range of beliefs and practices that may apply to individuals who practice this religion. This description may not apply to all people as individual experiences may vary. However this profile can be used as a guide to some of the issues that may concern your clients. This is an update of the profile in the Home and Personal Care Kit developed by the MIC in 2004.

### Introduction:

- The word 'Islam' in Arabic means peace, submission and obedience; it is a way of life not only a religion.
- Islam is the second largest religion in the world after Christianity and encompasses many different cultures and nationalities.
- Muslims in Australia come from a number of countries and are influenced by different cultural contexts and experiences.
- It is important to note that not all Arabs are Muslims and not all Muslims are Arabs. There are two main sects of Islam, the Shi'a and Sunni. Most Muslims in Australia and worldwide are Sunni; Shi'a are predominately from Iran, Iraq, Bahrain and Lebanon.

### Migration:

- Muslims have a long history of migration to Australia, dating back to the 1800's when Afghan camel drivers played an important role in opening up Australia's vast arid inland areas.
- Post World War II between 1947 and 1971 saw the first significant arrival of European Muslims, in Australia, mainly Cypriot Turks.
- In 1975, with the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon, larger numbers of Lebanese migrants arrived in Australia, many of whom were Muslims.
- Recent Muslim arrivals are from the Horn of Africa, Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq.
- Australian Muslims come from over 68 different countries.

### Local Demographics: Number of Muslim residents in the Eastern Region

Local Government Area	Total Number of Muslims	% of total Population
City of Boroondara	1072	0.7
City of Knox	1516	1.0
City of Manningham	1888	1.7
City of Maroondah	443	0.4
City of Monash	2626	1.6
City of Whitehorse	1135	0.8
Shire of Yarra Ranges	244	0.2
<b>Eastern Region</b>	<b>8924</b>	<b>6.4</b>

(ABS Census 2006)

- 36.5% of Muslims in Australia were born in Australia.
- The top ten countries of birth for people who are Muslim are Australia, Lebanon, Turkey, Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Pakistan, Indonesia, Iraq, Bangladesh and Iran.

## Language:

- The holy book, the Qur'an, and the traditions, the Hadith, are written in Arabic and have been translated into many different languages. Not all Muslims are fluent in Arabic, as only 18% of Muslims are Arabs.
- More than 80% of Muslims in Australia speak English or have good proficiency in English.
- 86% of Muslim Australians speak a language other than English at home.
- Muslims speak different languages, but for religious practice they recite prayers in Arabic.

## Religious Practices:

### Beliefs:

- Followers of Islam are called Muslims.
- Muslims believe in a single God (Allah). The Arabic word for God is 'Allah'.
- Muslims believe in the life hereafter, in the angels created by God and in a day of Judgement when God will reward individuals for good deeds and punish the evil.
- Muslims believe in the prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) and the prophets before him (e.g. Abraham, Moses and Jesus) through whom his revelations were sent to humankind. Muhammad is considered the greatest and the last (the Seal) of all Prophets.
- Muslims believe in all the holy books, the Qur'an and the books that came before it (that is the Torah, the Psalms and the Gospel).
- Central to the life of the Islamic community are the five Pillars of Islam:
  - Declaration of Faith – (Shahadah) – 'There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his Prophet'
  - Praying 5 times a day – (Sallat)
  - Giving donations to the poor – (Zakat)
  - Fasting during Ramadan – (Saum)
  - Pilgrimage to Mecca – (Hajj)
- Muslims are required to recite blessings whenever the name of the Prophet is mentioned or written. The letters *pbuh* are often written after the Prophets name standing for 'peace be upon him'.
- Muslims may use the phrases 'God willing' and 'In the name of Allah the compassionate, the merciful' prior to meaningful activities or medical procedures to assure God's benevolence. The phrase 'God willing' is more commonly used.

### Worship:

- Prayer is obligatory and occurs five times a day: dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and evening. These five daily prayers contain verses of the Qu'ran.
- Prayer is conducted in Arabic.
- When praying, Muslims turn and face towards the Ka'ba, the grand mosque in Mecca.
- Prayers are performed on a prayer rug with ritual washing of hands, face and feet prior to prayer.

- A sick person is allowed to combine noon and afternoon and sunset / evening prayers.

### ***Places of Worship:***

- Worship occurs in a Mosque, especially the congregational prayer on Friday. Although it is preferable to pray in a Mosque, a Muslim may pray almost anywhere, provided the surface is clean.
- Muslims face Mecca to pray.

### ***Religious / Community Leaders:***

- A Mufti is the closest that Muslims get to an authoritative leader, the Mufti provides religious advice to the community and mediates disputes, giving rulings on matters of religious interpretation. The Mufti is usually appointed by the Government of the day.
- In Australia there is honorary Mufti appointed by the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, which is the national umbrella body of the Muslim communities of Australia.
- The Leader of a Mosque is known as the Imam. The congregation and community leaders usually choose the Imam. The Imam conducts formal services and provides religious, social and welfare guidance to the congregation.
- In the absence of an Imam a knowledgeable person from amongst the congregation can conduct religious services.

### ***Icons / Statues / Symbols:***

- Religious objects such as the prayer rug, the Qur'an, and amulets or prayer beads should be treated with due respect.
- The Qur'an should not to be touched by anyone who is ritually unclean. Nothing should be placed on top of the Qur'an and it should be kept dry and in its place.

### ***Scriptures:***

- The holy book is the Qur'an. The Qur'an is a record of the exact words revealed by God through the Angel Gabriel to Prophet Muhammad. Muslims are guided by the teachings of the Holy Qur'an, and the sayings and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad.
- The Qur'an is a comprehensive guide to living. It includes chapters on morality, code of conduct, nutrition and dress code.
- Recorded teachings of the Prophet Muhammad outside of the Qur'an (the 'Hadith') are also regarded as valid religious teachings by the Sunni's.

### ***Clothing:***

- Modesty and dignity is highly valued.
- Certain parts of the body are to be covered (Awrah). For men, the parts of the body are from the navel to the knee. For women, the whole body should be covered except the face and hands. But among other Muslim women or with men whom you cannot marry i.e. married men, women are only required to cover themselves from chest to knees, excluding arms.
- Some Muslim women may wear Hijab (head dress). Not all Muslim women wear Hijab. Reasons for wearing Hijab include cultural traditions or religiously informed choices.
- Some Muslim women may wear veils that cover their whole face, except for the eyes, the 'Chador' or 'Burka.' This is more cultural than religious.

### **Food:**

- Muslims are required to observe dietary laws; they are permitted to eat only certain foods that have been slaughtered in the prescribed way. This is called Halal.
- Forbidden food that is not approved is called Haram. Pork or animal fat is prohibited.
- Toxins and the consumption of harmful products including drugs and alcohol are prohibited.
- Consumption of wholesome food and leading a healthy lifestyle are seen as religious obligations.
- Some Muslims use Kosher (Jewish ritually prepared) foods since these meet the requirements of Islam.

### **Holy Days:**

- Friday is a religious day. It is compulsory for men but optional for women to attend the mosque.
- For other Holy Days see key Islamic Festivals (below) and significant observances.
- During the holy days of Ramadan (29 or 30 days), neither food nor drink is taken between sunrise and sunset, though the frail and the ill, pregnant or lactating women and young children are exempt.

### **Customs / Values:**

- Education is highly valued for both men and women. It is obligatory for all Muslims to seek knowledge and improve their own condition.
- It is recommended by the Prophet that all Muslims should seek education from cradle to grave.
- Cleanliness and hygiene are highly valued.
- Modesty and dignity are highly valued as reflected in the dress code.
- The family is the foundation of Islamic society.
- Marriage and parenthood are important.

### **Health Beliefs and Practices:**

- Allah is seen as in control of the beginning and end of life, and therefore complaints and expression of powerlessness are rare since it is all seen as in God's hands.
- Western medicine is generally accepted.

### **Belief about Ageing:**

- Caring for one's parents is considered an honour and blessing and an opportunity for spiritual growth. In Islam, serving one's parents is a duty second only to prayer; it is the parent's right to expect it.

### **Belief about Disability and Mental Illness:**

- Disability is viewed, as God's will.
- Disability is not seen as a curse or punishment.

## **Belief about Death:**

- There are no elaborate rites performed when a person is dying.
- A person's body must be handled with care and respect.
- It is best if burial of a body takes place within 24 hours after death. Cremation is generally prohibited.

## **Communication Styles:**

- Handshaking is acceptable between the same sex but not acceptable between male and females.
- Looking down and crossing arms is a sign of respect for older people.
- Direct eye contact between males and non-family member females may be considered inappropriate.
- Communication styles may differ according to cultural background.

## **Naming Conventions:**

- This is more dependent on the cultural background of the individual.

## **The Role of the Family / Women:**

- Islamic beliefs include the father as being responsible for the family. The eldest son is usually responsible for the family in the absence of the father.
- Islam fosters a strongly united family and members of the family usually remain together until marriage.
- Women, whether single or married, are seen as individuals in their own right by Islam.
- Men and women are equal in the eyes of God, although they have different roles and responsibilities within the family and society.

## **Key Islamic Festivals / Significant Dates:**

- Islamic Holy Days are based on the lunar calendar.
- All Muslims are required to observe fasting for one whole month every year during the Islamic Lunar month of Ramadan. No food or drink is consumed from sunrise to sunset. Fasting increases one's spiritual status and gains a true sympathy for those who are hungry.
- The two main Islamic Festivals are:
  - Eid ul Fitr - a feast day commemorating the end of Ramadan
  - Eid ul Adha - marks the close of Hajj (Pilgrimage to Mecca) which is celebrated with prayers and the exchange of gifts

\* To search for exact dates of key cultural and religious events, festivals and national days for this year, visit: <http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/a-diverse-australia/calendar-australia/>

## Local services useful for Muslim residents in the Eastern Region

### Mosques

#### **Doncaster Mosque**

Address: 72 George Street, Doncaster East, 3109  
Ph: 9842 6491

#### **Lysterfield Mosque (located in the ISOMER complex)**

Address: 1273 Wellington Road, Lysterfield, 3156  
Ph: 9752 9977

### Residential Care

#### **Isomer Retirement Home**

Address: 1273 Wellington Road, Lysterfield, 3156  
Ph: 9752 9455

### Support Services

#### **Islamic Council of Victoria**

Address: 66-68 Jeffcott Street, West Melbourne, 3003  
Ph: 9328 2067

[www.icv.org.au](http://www.icv.org.au)

The Islamic Council is a coordinating body that considers the needs of the Islamic community and provides assistance to Muslims of all ethnic backgrounds. Referral to appropriate services and limited counselling are also available.

#### **Islamic Society of Victoria**

Address: PO Box 537, Pascoe Vale, 3044  
Ph: 9470 2424

The Islamic Society of Victoria provides services and activities to many diverse communities that access its facilities: counselling, community building, education programs, settlement, disability services and aged and family services.

#### **Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria**

Ph: 9481 3000

[www.islamicwomenswelfare.org.au](http://www.islamicwomenswelfare.org.au)

The Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria is a community welfare organisation established and managed by Muslim women for Muslim women.

#### **Network of Australian Muslim Women**

Address: 12 Romsey Rise, Doncaster East, 3109  
Ph: 9434 3207  
Peak body representing Muslim women in Victoria.

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