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

## **Cambodian Cultural Profile**

**PLEASE NOTE:** This profile provides an overview of some of the cultural information relating to the diverse groups of Cambodians who live in the Eastern Region of Melbourne. 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:

While a small number of Cambodians settled in Australia in the 1950's and 1960's, the largest migration of Cambodians occurred in the late 1970's through to the 1980's. These arrivals came through the Humanitarian program as refugees fleeing persecution and war, trauma and torture in Cambodia due to the Pol Pot regime. (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008)

The majority (approximately 90%) of the Cambodian-born population are Khmer with the remaining 10% identifying with Chinese or Indo-Chinese ancestries (Vietnamese, Thai, Lao). Approximately 10% of the population lives in the capital city Phnom Penh, with the remainder living in rural areas.

In 2006, there were 9,791 Cambodia-born persons in Victoria (39.9% of Australia's total), increasing by 8.8% from 9,003 persons in 2001 (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008).

## Migration:

- Before 1976, the Cambodian-born community in Australia numbered around 500.
- Over one-third (35.3%) of the Cambodia-born in Victoria arrived in Australia prior to 1986 (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008).
- By 1986 the Cambodian-born population of Australia rose to approximately 13,500 survivors of the Pol Pot regime, increasing to almost 23,000 in 2001 due to sponsorship of families under the Humanitarian Program. In 2006, the total population rose to 24,526.

## Local Demographics: Cambodian-born residents in the Eastern Region

Local Government Area	Total Cambodian- born Population	50-59 years	60-69 years	70-79 years	80 years and over	Total number of Cambodian- born people aged 65 and over	People aged 65+ as a % of the Cambodian- born population
City of Boroondara	41	6	3	3	0	6	15%
City of Knox	536	80	39	18	5	45	8%
City of Manningham	78	10	13	3	0	9	12%
City of Maroondah	171	32	16	4	0	11	6%
City of Monash	341	58	30	9	6	22	6%
City of Whitehorse	505	107	40	20	10	50	10%
Shire of Yarra Ranges	28	4	0	0	0	0	0%
Eastern Region	1700	297	141	57	21	143	8%

(ABS Census 2006 & MAV Data 2006)





- At the 2006 Census, there were 9,791 Cambodian-born persons in Victoria (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008).
- The median age of the Cambodian-born population is 39 years compared to 37 years for the total Victorian population (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008).
- 86.5% of the Cambodia-born hold Australian Citizenship (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008).

## Language:

- The national language of Cambodia is Khmer. 68.3% of the Cambodian-born population in Victoria speak Khmer at home (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008).
- Others may speak Teo Chew, Cantonese, Mandarin and other languages.
- English proficiency in the Cambodian community, particularly among the older generation, is very low. 34% of the Cambodian-born population in Victoria identified as speaking English 'not well' and 7.9% spoke English 'not at all' (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008).
- 21.1% of the Cambodian-born population in Victoria assessed themselves as speaking English 'very well' and 30.8% as 'well' (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008).
- Many older Cambodians have had no formal learning in Cambodia and as a result many are not literate in their own language.

## Religion:

The Cambodian-born population in Victoria identified as the following religions at the 2006 Census (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008):

- Buddhism 79.4% (7,771)
- Western Catholic 2.9% (285)
- Baptist 2.6% (257)
- Christian 1.4% (141)
- Uniting Church 0.9% (89)
- Other religions 1.7% (165)
- No religion 7.2% (706)

## **Attitudes and Issues with Ageing:**

- In Cambodia, children and family members traditionally care for the elderly.
- Isolation is an issue for many Cambodian elderly in Australia, due to low levels of English and the lack of transport.
- Grandparents play an important role in caring for grandchildren.
- Intergenerational conflict can occur between elderly Cambodian-born parents and their children when they feel they have no role, or if they feel that they are a burden to their children.

## **Attitudes to Disability and Mental Illness:**

 Cambodian-born people regard disability as shameful and a strong cultural stigma is attached to mental illness in particular.





Cambodian-born people may be unfamiliar with disability and mental health services, as they
were not available in their own country. They may be reluctant to utilise mainstream services
due to language and cultural barriers such as beliefs and being unfamiliar with modern
medicine.

#### Attitudes to Death and Palliative Care:

• For further information please see resource:

Palliative Care for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities: Cultural profiles to assist in providing culturally sensitive Palliative Care, 2009, Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne), http://www.miceastmelb.com.au/documents/pdaproject/Palliative care resource for workersAug2009.pdf

#### **Customs / Values:**

- Traditional Cambodian values include a strong family identity and loyalty.
- Cambodian-born people have a respect for culture and older people. Cambodian families tend to be very private and reluctant to discuss family issues or conflict with non-family members.
- Stoicism is a highly valued Cambodian character trait, reducing the tendency to complain about their health or services they are receiving.
- Modesty, particularly for women, is very important.
- Visitors to Cambodian-born people's homes are often expected to remove their shoes, however they might not ask.
- Accepting of food and refreshments when offered may break down barriers, open communication and build trust.

## **Communication Styles:**

- Cambodian-born people regard touching people on the head or pointing feet or shoes at them as offensive. Cambodians consider it impolite to make eye contact with someone who is older or considered a superior.
- Cambodians have a tendency not to question instructions or authority.
- 'Yes' may be an ambiguous response to a question or request, and does not necessarily indicate agreement. Reponses that might mean 'no' include; no response, changing the subject, or statements such as 'it's OK' or 'no problem' or even an unconvincing 'yes'.
- It may take time to develop working relationships, trust and rapport.
- Loud or over-familiar behaviour towards others is generally not favoured. Cambodians tend to avoid showing anger or getting involved in confrontation.

## **Naming Conventions:**

- Cambodians prefer to be addressed using their correct title. For example Mr, Mrs and Dr.
- Women traditionally retain their own family names on marriage or they may have two surnames. Cambodian names are traditionally written with the surname first, followed by the given name. Some Cambodians have adopted the Australian style of naming.
- Cambodians may not recognise their names if they are pronounced incorrectly.
- Cambodians may not always address people by their name.





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

- Cambodians have traditionally dealt with illness through self-care and self-medication.
- Spiritual healers may be sought for illnesses thought to be caused by spirits.
- Herbal remedies may be used in conjunction with, or as an alternative to, western medicines.
  Pinching, or rubbing (also known as coining) are common remedies for a range of ailments.
  They can result in bruises or marks on the forehead, the abdomen and the base of the nose, between the eyes and on the neck, chest or back. It is important not to mistake these marks as a sign of abuse.
- Many Cambodians have suffered enormous physical and psychological trauma in their country of origin. This may result in jumpy reactions to sudden noises, memory and concentration problems, and extreme reactions to minor stresses.

## **Greetings:**

English Greeting	Khmer	Closest English Pronunciation	
Hello	jchum reip suer	CHUM REAP SUER	
Goodbye	chum reap lhear	CHUM REAP LEAR	
Yes	cha (female) / baht (male)	JA (female) / BAA (male)	
No	They	TH'E	
Thankyou	Or kun	OR KUN	

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

Cambodians traditionally follow the Lunar Calendar.

Retreat of the Monk (Buddhist)
 September (a number of weeks)

Chaul Chanam (Cambodian New Year)
 13<sup>th</sup> April (lasts for 3 days)

Bonn Phchum Ben (Ancestor's Day) late September/early October

Lunar New Year (ethnic Chinese)
 1st day of the 1st Lunar Month

# Local services useful for Cambodian-born residents in the Eastern Region

#### **Settlement Services**

Provide information, referral and casework for refugees and family migrants who arrived in the last five years.

Name	Address	Contact
Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne)	Suite 2, Town Hall Hub, 27 Bank Street, Box Hill, 3128	Ph: 9285 4888
New Hope Migrant and Refugee Centre	18 Chester Street Oakleigh, 3166	Ph: 9563 4130





<sup>\*</sup> 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/

## **Aged Care & Disability Support Services**

Name of Organisation & Contact Details	Venue	Time / Day
Wesley Do Care Social Support Address: Suite 1, 168 Boronia Road, Boronia, 3156 Ph: 9762 5211 For Khmer seniors	Suite 1, 168 Boronia Road, Boronia, 3156	Every second Friday

#### Migrant Information Centre Aged Care & Disability Services

Address: Suite 2, Town Hall Hub, 27 Bank Street, Box Hill, 3128

Ph: 9285 4888

The aged and disability team aims to increase access to aged care and disability services for CALD communities in the EMR through working with CALD communities to promote those services, provide information and referral and supporting organisations to provide culturally appropriate care. The team also receives funding for specific projects in this area.

#### **Other Support Services**

### **Cambodian Association of Victoria**

Address: 52 Queens Avenue, Springvale, 3172

Ph: 9546 3466

Provides welfare and support for Cambodian migrants in Victoria. Also provides other services such as education programs and community jobs programs to the wider Cambodian community in Victoria.

#### Cambodian Buddhist Association of Victoria Inc.

Address: 159 Clarke Road, Springvale South, 3172

Ph: 9546 2432

#### Cambodian Chinese Friendship Association of Victoria

Address: PO Box 404, Springvale, 3171

Ph: 9872 6382

#### Khmer Community of Victoria

Address: 462 Springvale Road, Springvale South, 3171

Ph: 9574 1343

Provides information to Cambodian community members to help them settle in Victoria. Also provides information such as health, income support and services for older Cambodians.

#### **Cambodian Community Welfare Centre**

Address: 16-20 Silver Grove, Nunawading, 3131 or 186 Foster Street East, Dandenong, 3175

Ph: 9791 8344 (available Monday only)

Provides information and referral services to the Cambodian community and assists Cambodians in Victoria to access education, welfare and employment services.





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