

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

Iranian Cultural Profile

PLEASE NOTE: This profile provides an overview of some of the cultural information relating to the diverse groups of Iranians 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:

Iranians are of several ethnic groups. Most are Persian, followed by Azerbaijani, with lesser numbers of Arab, Turkmen, Kurdish and other ethnic groups.

Migration:

- Before the 1979 revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, most of the migration between Iran and Australia was by service workers, particularly in the oil industry.
- In 1981 Australia began a special humanitarian assistance program for Bahá'í people seeking to escape religious persecution in Iran.
- Migration to Australia increased during the war between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s.
- In the late 1980s and 1990s many professionals started to leave Iran to settle in Australia for economic and political reasons.
- People continue to settle in Australia under humanitarian, skilled/business and family reunion visas.

Local Demographics: Iranian-born residents in the Eastern Region

Local Government Area	Total Iranian-born Population	50-59 years	60-69 years	70-79 years	80 years and over	Total number of Iranian-born people aged 65 and over	People aged 65+ as a % of the Iranian-born population
City of Boroondara	197	34	19	7	6	23	12%
City of Knox	251	34	12	6	7	19	8%
City of Manningham	725	147	58	17	13	48	7%
City of Maroondah	141	27	11	5	0	8	6%
City of Monash	296	52	16	3	3	16	5%
City of Whitehorse	376	45	31	27	0	37	10%
Shire of Yarra Ranges	33	4	6	0	3	3	9%
Eastern Region	2019	343	153	65	32	154	8%

(ABS Census 2006 & MAV Data 2006)

- There were 4,431 Iranian-born persons in Victoria at the last census (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008). 46 % live in the Eastern Region of Melbourne and 16% in Manningham.
- The median age of the Iranian-born population is 39 years compared to 37 years for the total Victorian population (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008).

Language: Persian-speaking (excluding Dari) people in the Eastern Region

Local Government Area	Total number of people speaking Persian at home	50-59 years	60-69 years	70-79 years	80 years and over	Total number of Persian speaking people aged 65 and over	Persian speaking people aged 65+ as a % of the Persian speaking population
City of Boroondara	220	33	12	3	6	15	7%
City of Knox	334	38	12	9	9	24	7%
City of Manningham	843	142	58	24	6	53	6%
City of Maroondah	145	26	12	0	0	3	2%
City of Monash	430	52	22	9	3	25	6%
City of Whitehorse	457	42	19	27	3	38	8%
Shire of Yarra Ranges	29	6	6	0	0	0	0%
Eastern Region	2458	339	141	72	27	158	6%

(ABS Census 2006 & MAV Data 2006)

- The official language in Iran is Persian/Farsi. The alphabet has 32 characters and it is written from right to left in the Arabic script with several modifications.
- Other languages spoken may include Kurdish, Luri, Arabic and Turkish.
- Farsi is also spoken in Afghanistan (known as Dari) and Tajikstan.
- 12.5% of the Iranian-born population in Victoria identified as speaking English 'not-well' and 3.1% spoke English 'not at all' (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008).
- 42.8% of the Iranian-born population in Victoria assessed themselves as speaking English 'very well' and 31.5% as 'well' (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008).

Religion:

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

- Islam - 35.4% (1,567)
- Baha'i - 26.6% (1,178)
- Western Catholic - 6.1% (271)
- Uniting Church - 1.2% (53)
- Zoroastrianism – 1.2% (51)
- Other religions - 9.2% (408)
- No religion – 11.9% (527)

Attitudes and Issues with Ageing:

- It is often considered the responsibility of the children to care of ageing parents in the Iranian culture. Traditionally the younger members of the extended family care for the elderly.
- Older Iranian-born people are respected within the Iranian community. Age is viewed positively and is thought of as a sign of wisdom. Older people are often asked for advice and provide emotional and financial support. For most Iranians, families are central to everyday life. Families provide emotional, social and financial support.

- Disrespect of older members of the family will bring shame upon the family.

Attitudes to Disability and Mental Illness:

- Iranians do not view disability as a punishment from God.
- Iranians are generally protective of people with a disability within their community.
- Mental illness can often be hidden within the family.

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:

- Iranian-born people consider family issues as private.
- Iranians value education, culture, intelligence and wisdom. Education for children is considered very important, and there can be pressure on children to succeed academically.
- Iranians do not stress punctuality over the needs of individuals, who are more important than schedules.
- The nuclear family is the norm in Australia.
- Traditionally Iranian culture is male-oriented culture. The male is the head of the family and household.
- Iranians dress formally and conservatively in public. Modesty is highly valued.
- Personal cleanliness is important.

Communication Styles:

- A handshake is the customary greeting in Iran. A slight bow or nod while shaking hands shows respect. A man does not shake a woman's hand unless she offers it first.
- Iranians generally stand when someone (especially an older or more prominent person) enters the room for the first time and again when someone leaves.
- Crossing one's legs is generally not acceptable. Slouching or stretching one's legs in a group is offensive. The soles of the feet should not point at anyone.
- Objects are passed with the right hand or both hands, but not with the left hand alone.
- To tilt the head up quickly means 'no' and to tilt it down means 'yes'.
- Visitors to Iranian homes are often asked to remove their shoes before entering carpeted areas.
- Traditionally children should not make eye contact with their elders.
- When Iranians greet each other they take their time and converse about general things.

Naming Conventions:

- Formal titles and family names are important to show respect. Older Iranians may prefer to be addressed using their title and surname.
- Only close friends and family call each other by their first names.

Health Beliefs and Practices:

- Iranians generally have respect for Western medicine. Some traditional Iranians attribute the cause of health problems to superstitions, such as the 'evil eye', emotional and spiritual distress, winds and drafts. What they mean by 'evil eye' is a positive event could provoke jealousy and envy in others, giving the eyes of the envious party the power to inflict an illness or negative event on the fortunate person or family. To protect from the evil eye people donate money to charity, burn incense, or wear amulets with blue beads and say prayers.
- Food and other substances are believed to play a role in health and illness. Iranians usually eat fresh foods and avoid canned or frozen food to prevent illness. There is a belief towards the nature of 'hot' and 'cold' foods - honey and walnuts are 'hot', cucumbers and yogurt are 'cold'- people who believe in this theory avoid eating incompatible foods at the same meal. Inappropriate or inadequate diet is seen to cause weakness or illness.
- Personal cleanliness is extremely important to Iranians.

Greetings:

English Greeting	Farsi	Closest English Pronunciation
Hello	سلام	SALAM
Goodbye (May God protect you)	اخ دحافظ	HODA - HAFEZ
Yes	بله	BALLEH
No	نه	NA
Thankyou	ممنون	MAM NOON

Key Iranian Festivals / Significant Dates:

- Zoroastrian Era (Fire Festival) *Tuesday night before 21st March*
- Norouz (Iranian New Year) *21st of March*

This is a 12 day period where families visit each other and children are given gifts. It is customary to visit the family elders on the first day of Iranian Norouz. There is often a large celebration on the 12th day.

- Mehregan (End of Harvest Festival) *October*

* For other significant dates related to religious observances, refer to the Muslim and Bahá'í religious profiles.

* 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 Iranian-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

Aged Care & Disability Support Services

Migrant Information Centre Aged Care & Disability Services

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

Ph: 9275 6905

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.

Senior Citizens Groups

For more information please contact local councils or the Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne) on 9275 6905.

Name of the Club	LGA	Venue	Time / Day
Iranian Seniors' Society of Victoria	Manningham	Senior Citizens Centre 901 Doncaster Rd Doncaster East, 3109	10:00am – 5:00pm 1st Sunday of the month 10:00am – 2:00pm every Friday of the month

Other

Iranian Society of Victoria

Address: P.O. Box 1161, Doncaster East 3109

Ph: 9894 2644

References:

Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, *Census of Population and Housing*, viewed 1 March 2010, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/d3310114.nsf/home/census>>.

Collins, J., Mondello, L., Brehencey, J. & Childs, T., 2001, *Cosmopolitan Melbourne: Explore the World in One City*, Big Box Publishing Pty Ltd, Sydney, pp. 318-321.

Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services ACT, 2003, *The Cultural Dictionary*, viewed 20 April 2010, <http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/5282/Cultural_Dictionary.pdf>, pp. 88-90.

Ghaffari-Nejad, A., Pouya, F. & Kashani, M., 2003, *Superstitious Beliefs Among Psychiatric Patients in Kerman, Iran*, Archives of Iranian Medicine, Vol. 6, No. 3, viewed 20 April 2010, <<http://www.ams.ac.ir/AIM/0363/007.htm>>.

Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), 2008, *Seniors from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds*, Demography on the 50 years plus Victorian population from the 2006 census, Victoria, Australia.

Victorian Multicultural Commission, 2008, *The Iran-Born Community in Victoria*, Fact Sheet No. A-30, viewed 20 April 2010, <<http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/images/stories/pdf/iranfs-24apr08.pdf>>.