

## Arabic Speaking Communities Profile

**PLEASE NOTE:** This profile provides an overview of some of the cultural information relating to the diverse groups of Arabic speaking population 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. We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Victorian Arabic Social services (VASS) in preparing this profile.

### Introduction:

The Arab world refers to Arabic-speaking countries stretching from the Atlantic Ocean in the West to Arabian Sea in the East, and from the Mediterranean Sea in the North to the Horn of Africa and Indian Ocean in the South East.

The Arabic Speaking population represents 1.4% (321,728 people) of the total Australian population (ABS Census 2016). The Arabic speaking communities in Australia are diverse and include people from 22 countries. The 'Arab World' is where Arabic is either an official language or it is spoken by a significant portion of the population (VASS 2015). The Arab speaking community not only share common language, but history and heritage.

### Countries that make up the Arab World:

Algeria	Jordan	Oman	Syria
Bahrain	Kuwait	Palestine	Tunisia
Comoros	Lebanon	Qatar	United Arab Emirates
Djibouti	Libya	Saudi Arabia	Yemen
Egypt	Mauritania	Somalia	
Iraq	Morocco	Sudan	

(VASS 2015)

The countries that make up the Arab world can be further divided into the geographical areas of Middle East, Gulf countries and Northern African countries.

### Migration:

- Many of the people from Arabic Speaking countries have migrated or come to Australia as refugees or displaced persons.
- The Lebanese community are the largest overseas-born Arabic people living in Australia (ABS Census 2016).
- Lebanese migrants came in three waves:
  - 1) Before and after World War 1 (economic factors contributed to this)
  - 2) World War Two
  - 3) Immediate effect of civil war in Lebanon in 1975
- Egyptian born migrants who settled here after WWII between 1947-1971 were largely Coptic Christians. In smaller numbers, Muslim Egyptians arrived between 1970 and 1980s.

- Iraq's involvement in two gulf wars and "War on Terror" (2001 – Present) has influenced migration of Iraqis to Australia.
- Approximately 95% of Sudanese migrants have arrived under the Refugee and Humanitarian program in recent years.
- Migration from a particular Arabic country may not indicate the ethnicity, religion or language spoken at home of a particular migrant. Nationalistic or sectarian terms may be referred to for one's identity, for example, an Egyptian migrant may identify as Coptic (religious term) and not necessarily an Egyptian or Arab.

## Local Demographics: Arabic-Speaking residents in the Eastern Region

Local Government Area	Total Arabic-Speaking Population	65-69 years	70-74 years	75-79 years	80 years and over	Total number of Arabic-Speaking people aged 65 and over	People aged 65+ as a % of the Arabic-Speaking population
City of Boroondara	906	21	24	15	20	80	9%
City of Knox	1,131	60	65	32	26	183	16%
City of Manningham	1,805	94	63	41	61	259	14%
City of Maroondah	351	9	13	3	8	33	9%
City of Monash	1,323	70	48	38	49	205	15%
Shire of Yarra Ranges	561	3	8	4	0	15	3%
City of Whitehorse	213	26	18	7	21	72	34%
Eastern Region	6290	283	239	140	185	847	13%

(ABS Census 2016)

## Language:

- According to the 2016 census, Arabic was the second most spoken language at home (other than English) in Australia with 1.4% of the population speaking Arabic at home.
- The large number of Australian-born who can speak Arabic reflects that despite the community being in Australia more than 20 years, the language has been maintained through the generations.
- In Victoria, Arabic ranks as the fifth most common language spoken at home (ABS Census 2016).
- Arab migrants speak a common mother tongue, Arabic, however their speech may be specific to a locality, a dialect or a vocabulary, all of which mark a more specific identity (Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia 2009).
- More Arabic educated migrants would also know one or two European languages, in particular, French, English, Italian or Greek.
- The elderly lack English proficiency due to social isolation and lack of social networks outside community.
- When professionals are communicating with the Arabic speaking community it is preferable to use interpreters who can speak the same dialect.
- English proficiency amongst the educated migrants and Australian born is high while limited with uneducated migrants from the Arab world.

- In more recent years there has been an increase in refugees coming from Iraq and Sudan. Wars and other civic strife in the Middle East have affected the flow of migration to Australia.

### Language: English Proficiency among Arabic-Speaking residents in Eastern Region

Arabic Community	Speaks English very well or well	Speaks English not well or not at all	Not stated
City of Boroondara	731	166	13
City of Knox	1,015	99	6
City of Manningham	1,661	139	11
City of Maroondah	319	36	0
City of Monash	1,181	128	5
City of Whitehorse	489	67	5
Shire of Yarra Ranges	191	17	3
Eastern Region	5587	652	43

(ABS Census 2016)

### Religion:

- The Arab world largely follows Islam. Arabic is the language of the Al Qur'an (Koran), the Holy Book of Muslims. For further information about the Muslim community please refer to the Muslim Community Profile.
- The majority of the Arabic Speaking population in Victoria are Muslim. There are also a number of Christians, particularly among the Egyptian-born community who are largely Coptic (The Coptic Orthodox Church is one of the earliest Christian churches).
- Other religions include Catholic, Orthodox Christian, Chaldean, Coptic and Maronite.

### Attitudes and Issues with Ageing:

- The majority who migrated in the First and Second World War wave of migration used to be factory workers, while more recent migrants in the 90s and now rarely worked and were sponsored by their children. Latter groups are more accepting of social welfare services than those in previous waves.
- Elders are highly regarded. Their opinion is respected and valued.
- There is high expectation that the family will care for elderly parents at home. Caring for the elderly is sometimes considered a religious duty.
- Some Elderly are becoming isolated, lonely and depressed due to families having their own struggles to meet economic needs.

## Attitudes to Disability and Mental Illness:

- Mental illness is largely stigmatised in the Arab speaking community. This greatly influences reluctance to access mental health services.

## Customs / Values:

- Traditionally patriarchal social structures are the norm in the Arab world, although this is being challenged today.
- It is customary to wear black when in mourning.
- An essential part of hospitality is offering food and drink to guests.
- When offering a service to the Arabic speaking community it is important to consider gender issues and the preference of people from the same gender to be matched in service provision.
- Trust in the community is built from personal relationships with workers and service providers.

## Courtship, Marriage and Child-rearing:

- Many of the Arabic nationalities still value arranged marriages.
- It's often considered important to marry within the family's religion and nationality and gain parental approval before marriage.
- It is common in Arab culture for multiple family members to help care for, teach and discipline children.

## Communication styles:

- Generally speaking, the Arabic speaking community like to express their emotions quite openly. They are understood to be quite expressive.
- Although they may not use the word 'please' when asking for something, politeness will be evident in their tone of voice.
- Arabic people are very social and will commonly gather together as a family and visit with each other.
- Appreciation for a service may be expressed with words of blessing from the recipient.
- It is appropriate to shake hands when greeting people of the same gender. Some Muslims may refrain from shaking hands with people of the opposite gender. If greeting a Muslim, it is advisable to wait for the Muslim to initiate the move.
- Communication is preferred through personal contact with someone who can speak the same dialect.

## Naming Conventions:

- Older Arabic people prefer to be addressed by the term "UM" for women and "ABU" for men. It is always advisable to check with the elder person on how to address them, otherwise terms such as Mr. and Mrs. or if a doctor, Dr. are acceptable.

- Younger generations refer to older relatives as Aunty or Uncle as a sign of respect.

## Health Beliefs and Practices:

- Both Western medicine and herbal remedies or traditional healing practices are accepted in the Arab world.
- Due to illiteracy among the older generation, the elderly may experience difficulty to read health information and materials in Arabic.
- Medical diagnosis should be given to the closest family member, preferably an older son or daughter. Doctors and medical professionals are well accepted and respected in the Arabic speaking community.
- It is not uncommon for health professionals to be sought for advice on a number of health matters including areas not related to their field of expertise.

## Greetings:

English Greeting	Arabic	Closest English Pronunciation
Hi	سلام	SALAM
Good Morning	الخير صباح	SABAH EL KHEER
Goodbye	السلامة مع	MA'A SALAAMA
Yes	نعم	NA'AM
No	لا	LAA
Thankyou	شكرا	SHOKRAN

## Key Arabic Festivals / Significant Dates:

- Independence dates for each of the Arabic countries are celebrated according to the respective national calendar.
- Most other celebrations are based around religious occasions. For further information about these please refer to the different religious profiles.

## Local services useful for Arabic Speaking 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 <u>and</u> 18 Bond Street, Ringwood 3134	Ph: 9285 4888 (Box Hill) 9870 1351 (Ringwood)
New Hope Foundation	Grattan Gardens Community Centre 40 Grattan Street, Prahran 3181	Ph: 9510 5877
Victorian Arabic Social Services	C1, 1-13 The Gateway, Broadmeadows 3047	Ph: 9359 2861

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

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

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

Ph: 9275 6901

Email: [wzhang@miceastmelb.com.au](mailto:wzhang@miceastmelb.com.au)

Website: <http://miceastmelb.com.au/our-services/elderly-people-younger-people-disabilities-carers/>

The Access & Support Program provides short term support to help people access aged care and other services so they can continue living at home independently. The Program provides information, referral, support and monitoring. The aged and disability team generally 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.

### **Victorian Arabic Social Services (VASS) (Head Office)**

Address: C1, 1-13 The Gateway, Broadmeadows VIC 3047

Ph: (03) 9359 2861

Email: [mail@vass.org.au](mailto:mail@vass.org.au)

Website: [www.vass.org.au](http://www.vass.org.au)

The Victorian Arabic Social Services is dedicated to addressing the social, cultural and welfare needs of the Arabic speaking background communities in Victoria.

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