PLEASE NOTE: This profile provides an overview of some of the cultural information relating to the diverse older Afghani people who live in the S.E. 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. Information about relevant services & activities is also included.

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of various Afghan workers & community leaders in producing this document. References also used include:

- *Origins-Immigrant Communities in Victoria- Museum Victoria Australia www.museumvictoria.com.au*
- *Refugee Health Research Centre- LaTrobe University for the Department of Human Services Victoria 2005*
- *Afghan Community Profile- South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre 2009*

Introduction:

Afghanistan is a South Central Asian nation. The country is situated between the Middle East, Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent along the ancient "Silk Route". Afghanistan has been described as a highway connecting East and West. Its strategic location has attracted migration, encouraged trade and caused several waves of invasion.

- Islam is the dominant religion in Afghanistan. The majority being Sunni.
- Recent estimates suggests that the population is over 32 million
- Afghanistan is ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse with more than 20 ethnic groups
- The people of Afghanistan are Afghans (not Arabs). They consist of different ethnicities, but they are united as Afghans.

Ethnicity:

- **Pashtuns** constitute the majority of the country's population (42%) and have been dominant in the country's political sphere
- **Tajiks,** (27%) trace their ancestry to the Greco-Bactrian and Mongol dynasties .Tajiks speak various dialects of the Persian language.
- **Hazaras**, (9%) suggested to be descendants of the Mongols. Hazaras form a native community of Afghanistan residing mainly in the central region known as Hazarajat.
- **Uzbeks,** (9%) are divided between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan. They sought refuge in Afghanistan during the 1920s and 1930s
- **Turkmen,** (3%) are divided between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, originating from the Turkic tribes of Central Asia.

Circumstances of displacement

Over the last 30 years, Afghanistan was subject to various conflicts & wars:

- The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan & the resistance to this occupation 1979;
- The fight against the communist government by the "Mujahedeen" (local resistance militia) who had military support from the West.
- The intertribal conflict amongst the "Mujahedeen" themselves ,
- The rise of "Taliban" movement in 1994 & taking control of Afghanistan in 1996, by the "Taliban" led to the "War against Terror" by the Western powers,
- All of this caused the Afghan people to flee and to seek refuge in several countries like Iran, Pakistan and Australia.
  As a result:
  - Over 5 million people fled the country between 1979 and 1986, seeking protection in camps in Pakistan and Iran.
  - The fight amongst the tribal faction of the "Mujahedeen", forced many Afghans into exile for the second time

- Under the rule of "Taliban", civilians from tribes in the north were persecuted and several thousand were forced to flee to neighbouring countries.
- Following the US invasion in 2001"War on Terror", and the formation of the interim authority and the subsequent new government, nearly 2 million refugees have returned to Afghanistan. However, refugees still continue to come to Australia.

Migration:

- The first Afghan immigrants to Australia (1859) worked as camel drivers for the early explorers and numbered about 300.
- Between 1980 and 1992 was the second wave of migration and the number of Afghan immigrants mostly from Pashtun background, rose from 500, to reach 1000.
- During the rule of the Taliban since 1996, several hundred refugees arrived by boat and were sent to immigration detention centres. They were later granted asylum and given Temporary Protection Visas.
- Afghanistan-born entrants to Victoria since 1996 have settled mostly in the LGAs of Greater Dandenong, Casey, Greater Shepparton, Mildura & Swan Hill. The majority of the recent immigrants are from Hazara background.

Local Demographics: Afghan residents in the South East Region.
(ABS 2006 & Department of Immigration & Citizenship Settlement Database 2008)

	City of Greater Dandenong	City of Kingston	City of Casey	Cardinia Shire
Total population of LGA	125,520	134,622	214,961	57,116
Total number of residents born in Afghanistan	2,370	63	2,118	15
Total number of residents born in Afghanistan, 55+ years	67	4	151	0
Total number of Dari speaking residents	2,028	59	1,878	12
Total number of Dari speaking residents - 55+ years	54	4	122	0
Total number of Pashtu speaking residents	332	18	543	0
Total number of Pashtu speaking residents- 55+ years	9	4	22	0

Language:

- Main languages spoken by Afghanistan-born immigrants across Australia, according to 2006 census are: Dari 66.1% , Persian (excluding Dari) 16.2 %, Pashto 7.6 % and English 3.0 %
- Pashtu & Dari (a dialect of Persian) are the two official languages in Afghanistan. Majority of people speak at least one of them, some speak another dialect too.
- Dari is a dialect of the Persian/Farsi language. Pashtu & Persian/Dari/Farsi use Arabic script but they are different languages than Arabic.

- Hazaragi is a dialect of Dari language spoken by Hazara people in Afghanistan. Although there is shortage of interpreters in Australia who can speak the Hazaragi dialect of the Persian/Dari language, it is still preferred by many clients.

Religion:

- Islam is the dominant religion in Afghanistan with Sunni Muslims 85% (Pashtuns and Tajiks communities) and Shi'a Muslims 15% (Hazara community).
- Hindus, Jews, Sikhs and Bahais were persecuted during Taliban rule and most left the country
- Religious practices are well observed, such as fasting during Ramadan for Muslims
- Muslims pray five times a day at specific times (at dawn, noon, mid afternoon, sunset and evening). Friday lunch prayer for men is preferably performed in their local mosque.
- Wearing the traditional Hijab (head scarf) for Muslim women is a noted practice amongst Afghan community.

Attitudes and issues with ageing:

- Afghani society is guided by a legal code of social order. According to this code, male elders are in charge of making decisions.
- Respect for parents and elders is strong, with older men having the final say on all family and community matters.
- Parents live with their sons who, together with their wives, are expected to care for their wellbeing in every aspect. They rely often on their children for transport and translation
- Inability or unwillingness to care for one's elderly relatives is deeply shameful, and it is seen as a failure in their responsibility and obligation to support and care for their elders
- Community leaders are proud that very few Afghans are in nursing homes.
- Grandmothers will sometimes assist with childcare, but older men are not expected to undertake any domestic duties.
- Family and community conflict occurs when the younger, more integrated generations, disagree with community elders.

Attitudes to disability and mental illness

- A strong cultural stigma is attached to mental illness. Many mental illnesses are not considered as such, eg. Depression and dementia, therefore people may be reluctant to access mental health services.
- There is a strong stigma attached to men being sick as it is seen as sign of weakness; admitting to having depression causes the person to be ashamed
- Many families often have insufficient knowledge and information on a variety of health issues, both physical and mental.
- Because women were deprived during the Taliban regime of health services they particularly lack important health information eg. the need for pap smears
- There is now fortunately more awareness about health issues amongst the newer migrants, reflecting the changes in awareness back in the homelands.
- Due to several military conflicts, physical disability is noticeable in the Afghan community.
- There is a fear in the community that interpreters won't abide by confidentiality requirements

Health beliefs and practices

- Doctors are held in very high regard.
- Due to financial hardship there were major shortages in health care, especially in rural areas. As a result, medical herbs & plants have been relied on to treat various illnesses.
- Elders in particular prefer traditional treatments to modern medicines

Customs /Values

- Afghan people, have a moral and legal code of social order and responsibility which emphasizes honour, solidarity, mutual support .A patriarchal social structure is the norm. Elderly members of the family have a strong role in family decision making, but this is changing with Australian born and new migrants
- Family relationships between the nuclear and extended family are very important, family being central to life.
- Family honour is an important cultural value, and extremely important for people who migrated from rural background.
- It is considered impolite to turn your back to anyone, especially the elderly.
- If someone dies in the family, people go and see the family personally, rather then sending cards or flowers.
- According to the mourning rules, if the deceased is someone close, family & friends visit at least three times:-: for: the burial , the ceremony at the mosque, and to the home. Then every Thursday they continue to visit the home of the deceased until the 40th day.
- Inter-marriage between various religious groups, eg. Shia and Sunni, and ethnic groups eg.Tajik and Pashtu , happens but is not the common practice

Gender issues

- Daughters are seen as the future members of another people's family whilst sons are considered the fruit of the family.
- Daughters marry *out* of a family; emotional and financial investment is focused *on* sons.
- Although older men play a pivotal role in the community, many are reported to have found the transition to life in Australia difficult due to the problems of finding employment.
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that women and children have, sometimes, found integration and English language acquisition easier than men.
- In general, females are in charge of house duties. It is uncommon for men and young males to take part in that duty.
- Men in Afghanistan have been predominantly in charge of family finances, but here women may share this responsibility causing some social problems and power shifting.

Communication Styles:

- People are very sociable. Family visits and gathering are very common.
- It is normal that people from the same gender (men/men, women/women) shake hands and kiss on the cheek.
- With Muslim women who are wearing hijab and Muslim men, there may be reluctance to shake hands with the opposite gender. It is advisable that workers do not initiate the move and leave it to the Muslim person to decide what's appropriate.
- Afghani people might show their appreciation in return for a service provided to them by expressing lots of blessing words.
- Personal relationships are very important in building trust of services or workers.

Naming Conventions:

- Out of respect, Afghanis don't call their older persons by their given name.
- The following titles are used to address older people: "Baba" for Dad, "A'de "for Mum, "Kaka" for brother of the father, "Mama" for the brother of the mother, "khala" for the sister of the mother, "Ama" for the sister of the father
- In general all women are called "Khore".

Greetings in Pashtu

English Greeting	Closest English Pronunciation	Pashtu
Hello	Salam	سلام
Good Morning	Sa'har mo pa khair	سهار مو په خير
Greeting for midday	Goodnoon	غرمه مو په خير
Good afternoon	Maaspo'neen mo pa khair	ماسپښين موپه خير
Goodbye	Da Allah pa a;man	دخدای په امان
Yes	Bali or OK	أوکی
No	Na	نه
Thank you	'ma nana	ننه

Greetings in Dari

English Greeting	Closest English Pronunciation	Dari
Hello	Salam	سلام
Good Morning	Sob bakhair	سوب بخير
Goodbye	khoda hafiz	خدا حافظ
Yes	bale	بلي
No	Nakhair ne	نخير ني
Thank you	Tashakor	تشکر

Key Afghani Festivals /Significant dates:

- The Solar Hejri calendar is the official calendar in Afghanistan
- Nooroz (Nowruz) on 21st March, marks the first day of Spring in Gregorian calendar/Western calendar , and the beginning of the year in the Solar calendar .
- 28th April Victory of the Muslim nation
- 4th May Remembrance Day for Martyrs and Disabled
- Moharram is the first month in the Islamic Calendar
- Independence Day 19th August (celebrating independence from Britain)
- Ramadan 9th Month of the Islamic Calendar
- Eid ul-Fitr (or Id-ul-Fitr), 10th Month of the Islamic Lunar Calendar often abbreviated to Eid: This is a Muslim holiday celebrated after the end of Ramadan fasting.
- A lunar year is 11 days shorter than a solar year, so Islamic holy days including Ramadan shift by about 11 days each year.

Services & Activities useful for older Afghani people in the South East Region*

Organisation/Contact	Services/Activities
Wellsprings for Women Inc. 79 Langhorne Street Dandenong Vic 3175 Phone: (03) 9701 3740 Contact person: Monira Email: monira@wellspringsforwomen.com	**Afghani Women's Group** • Social support for women all ages including seniors (Varied Activities) • Tuesdays
Afghan-Australian Women & Youth Association (AAWYA) C/- SERMRC, 60 Webb St Narre Warren VIC 3805 Contact: Nazifa Nader Ph. 9704 1583	• Provide social support for Afghan women and young people • All ages women's groups • Meet weekly at Narre Warren for sewing class.
Bunurong Community Care 4th Floor ,229 Thomas St Dandenong Vic 3175 Phone: (03) 8792 2209 Fax: (03) 8792 2351 Contact: Margaret Edwards	**Afghan Lifelong Movers- Carers Program** • Thursdays 1pm - 3pm • Physical activity program for carers of people with disabilities & the frail aged • Ages 18 plus: Carers Venue: Endeavour Hills Leisure Centre 10 Raymond McMahon Boulevard, Endeavour Hills. *Eligibility:* Greater Dandenong, Casey or Cardinia
ADEC (Action on Disability in Ethnic Communities) 175 Plenty Road, Preston. 3075 Phone: (03) 9480 1666 Fax: (03) 9480 3444 Email: shaima@adec.org.au Contact Name: Shaima Shahbaz	**Afghan Carers Group** • Every 4th Friday of the month • Eligibility criteria: Carers of any age living in the Southern region. Venue: Greater Dandenong Community Health Service 229 Thomas St. Dandenong
South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre Level 1 314 Thomas Street Dandenong 3175 Ph: 9706 8933 Fax: 9706 8830	• Multicultural PAG core Monday Dandenong and Friday Doveton • Multicultural PAG high Tuesday Noble Park • Multicultural PAG core-high Wednesday Noble Park • Carer Support Program • Volunteer Visiting Program *Eligibility: Greater Dandenong, Casey & Cardinia*

*** This resource list of services (other than Council HACC), has been prepared for aged care staff in the Council areas of Kingston, Greater Dandenong, Casey and Cardinia. Some services and activities listed are in fact available to residents beyond these four municipalities.**

Other useful contacts for service providers

Afghan Australia Philanthropic Association Inc
Contact Ph: 9706 2787 Mob.0409 553 304 and Fax: 9706 2677
Contact: Dor Aschna

Afghan Khodaye Khedmat Garran Inc
Office Ph & Fax: 9700 2902
Contact: Toba Keshtiar

(The) Association of Hazaras in Victoria Inc
Phone: 0438 199 170
Public Relations Officer: Aris Fayazi Ph: 877 22069

Hazara Australian Community Association of Victoria
Contact Ph. 0402 361 705 (Chairperson, Ali Behsudi)

Afghan Australian Welfare Association (AAWA) Inc
Mobile: 0402 473 948 Phone: 9704 7071,
Contact: Ajmal Mirrinay

Afghan Australian Association of Victoria Inc
Contact Ph: 9794 9133 or 9562 1289 AH (Chairman, Khaliq Fazal)

Afghan Women's Group (Pashto)
Ph: 877 46776
Contact Wagma Hashemi
Email: mzack@y7mail.com