

# Filipino Cultural Profile –older people

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**PLEASE NOTE:** This profile provides an overview of some of the cultural information relating to the diverse groups of older Filipinos who live in the South 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 contribution of the Centre for Philippine Concerns Victoria (CPCA ) for their assistance. Information about local relevant services & activities is also included.

## Introduction:

The Republic of the Philippines is a country in South East Asia comprised of more than 7,000 islands in the western Pacific Ocean. The three main Philippine island groups are Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao. The Philippines have had visitors who were discoverers, migrants and traders since the dawn of history. Due to long periods of colonization from the Spanish and American as well as the Japanese invasion, inter-ethnic marriages have resulted in much cultural diversity.

## Population:

The population in Philippines currently is 88,574,614 (2007 Census) and average life expectancy for the whole population is 70.8 years.

## Migration:

In the early 1900's the number of Filipino immigrants was limited by the Australian immigration policies.

- After 1940's Japanese invasion, Filipino nursing students were allowed to enter Australia and were granted permission to stay after graduation.
- Australia started to recruit skilled workers/tradesmen and professional Filipinos in the early 1950's.
- Filipino migration increased in numbers between 1970's-1990's because of more lenient immigration laws.
- 1980's marked the significant arrival of Filipino women spouses and fiancées of Australian residents under the Family Reunion Program.
- Migration of Philippine-born elders rapidly grew from 1985 to date through Family Reunion Parents Migration Program.
- There are a significant number of Filipino elderly migrants living in the South Eastern Region of Victoria.

## Local Demographics: Filipino residents in the South East Region (ABS 2006)

	City of Greater Dandenong	City of Kingston	City of Casey	Cardinia Shire
<b>Total population of LGA</b>	125,520	134,624	214,962	57,115
<b>Total no. of residents born in the Philippines</b>	1,152	1,049	2,092	106
<b>No. of residents born in the Philippines, 55 years and over</b>	172	165	253	19
<b>Total no. of Tagalog/Filipino speaking residents</b>	901	816	1,753	61
<b>Total No. of Tagalog/Filipino speaking residents, 55 + yrs.</b>	125	125	219	15

## Language:

## Filipino Cultural Profile –older people

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- Two official languages are used in the Philippines - Filipino and English, in the business and education settings. English is also the medium in commercial and legal transactions.
- The national language was Tagalog, but now it is Filipino, which is based upon Tagalog. Some of the Tagalog words originated in Spanish and Arabic languages. There are also traces of Indonesian & Polynesian words in the Filipino language.
- There are eight (8) major regional languages spoken by the Filipinos, but over 100 known provincial ones.
- Filipino seniors, here in Australia, may speak Tagalog, Cebuano or Visayan.
- Many seniors may understand English but certainly not all depending on previous access to education.

### **Religion:**

- Highly religious community, with about 90% of Filipinos identifying themselves as Christians, (81% being Catholic 5% Protestant denominations, approximately 5% are Muslims).

### **Attitudes and issues toward ageing:**

- Philippine Senior Citizen's Act, a law that gives benefits and privileges to people who have reached the age of 60, is evidence that Filipinos value their seniors.
- The extended family role to care and support the elderly with respect is embedded in their culture.
- It is customary for three generations of Filipino families to live together in the same house. It is shameful to set parents apart from their children and grandchildren.
- There is no such thing as "emptiness" in the Filipino household.
- Filipino seniors expect to spend the remaining days of their lives with their children and grandchildren looking after them.
- Conservative Filipino elders expect their children to greet them by saying "mano po" as the children kiss their hands or place the senior's hand to their foreheads.
- The children are expected to financially support their parents as they age.
- Grandparents are expected to fulfill their role as the housekeeper to clean the house, do laundry, pick-up grandchildren from school & cook dinner for everyone.
- Filipinos are usually sociable and prefer to be with their family/relatives, church groups & social clubs rather than be alone.
- Filipino organizations and church groups in Australia actively support and care for their seniors.

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

- Filipinos from rural background have misconceptions of mental & emotional disabilities due to their lack of knowledge of causes and origins of the illness.
- Filipinos are reluctant to access mental health services from a health professional because of the associated stigma and shame.
- The family typically remains centrally involved in the primary care of the child with a disability. Parents thus expect their older sons and daughters to continue to provide the primary care for a family member with a disability.
- The family will prevent a family member with a disability to be exposed to social criticism.

### **Responding to Professional Care and Services:**

## Filipino Cultural Profile –older people

---

- Filipinos lack full understanding of the aged care system.
- Accessing assistance and support from service providers is a foreign idea to many Filipino seniors.
- Provision of HACC services may be resisted by Filipino elders until they decide (and convince themselves) that they need the assistance.
- It is normal for Filipino seniors to consult with their children prior to accessing the services.
- Filipino seniors have strong preference for family to assist them with home care and personal care. They are ashamed to seek help in fear of the social stigma of losing their independence and the social stigma for their children who can be labeled as people who cannot look after their seniors.
- Filipino elders can be reluctant to express their opinions or inner thoughts because of shame or shyness (hiya).
- Filipino elders feel more comfortable with a bilingual Filipino worker.
- Building trust between the Filipino elders and service providers can reduce the reluctance of the Filipinos to sign the SCTT forms.
- Families with children who understand the aged care system are more receptive to seek assistance from HACC services for their parents.
- Filipino seniors and their children will expect you to say “yes” when they offer tea or coffee as sign of accepting & understanding the Filipino hospitable culture.
- Filipino seniors will often smile and nod their heads even if they not in agreement with you, out of politeness. They say “yes” and nod their heads as their sign of listening to what you are saying even though they do not understand you.
- It is important to ask a Filipino senior to paraphrase/relay back what you just explained to them, to check for understanding.
- Using professional interpreters with Filipino seniors will ensure full understanding and better communication.
- Many Filipino seniors may prefer to speak Filipino or Tagalog in a gathering i.e. Filipino PAG, rather than speak English in a multi-cultural gathering.
- Many elders are now breaking the stereotype attitude of being ‘shy, lacking confidence, dependent’ and are now persons of zest and confidence, ever busy with religious and social activities, embracing their future with confidence and assets to their community.

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

- People from rural Philippines are knowledgeable regarding home remedies, traditional healing techniques, and faith healers.
- Those from urban areas rely more on Western medical intervention and over-the-counter medicines.
- Filipino people will travel overseas or interstate to seek miracles from a patronized saint or preacher whom they believe possesses a healing power.
- Filipino people treat doctors and other health professionals with high respect and authority.
- Filipinos in Australia are still inclined to use alternative therapies such as getting a traditional massage or “hilot” as well as taking the doctor’s prescribed medications.
- Filipino people are shy to openly express their pains or hardships; they are more inclined to persevere.

### **Customs/Values:**

## Filipino Cultural Profile –older people

---

- “Pamilya” – The family is the center of the social structure and includes the nuclear family, aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins and honorary relations such as godparents, sponsors, and close family friends often called aunts “tita” and uncles “tito” though they are not related.
- “*Hiya*” is shame and is a motivating factor behind behavior. It is a sense of being socially appropriate and conforming to societal norms of behaviour. Filipinos believe they must live up to the accepted standards of behaviour and if they fail to do so they bring shame not only upon themselves, but also upon their family.
- “*Bahala na*” is a kind of fatalistic resignation (come what may) which represents a withdrawal from engagement or crisis or shirking of personal responsibility.
- “*Utang na loob*” – reciprocity or debt of gratitude or honor is of primary importance in the Filipino value system.
- “*Pakikisama*” is the Filipino value of belongingness and loyalty to one’s in-group. To belong to a group demands a spirit of cooperation, an attitude of give and take, and sensitivity to the feelings of others.
- “*Respeto sa nakatatanda*” or respect for seniors is a highly esteemed value of the Filipinos. For example, Filipinos show respect to the elders in conversations by using words such as “ho” “po” and “opo” at the end of a greeting.
- Hospitality to a guest or neighbor is also a famous value of the Filipinos. For Filipinos, serving other people the best of what they have, leaves them an honor and a promise of true friendship.

### Communication Styles:

- Filipinos will often warmly greet each other with a kiss on both cheeks followed by “kumusta” (How are you?)
- It is important to maintain eye contact when speaking to a Filipino.
- Filipinos may freely display their emotions by unconsciously touching the arm of the person they are speaking with while talking or laughing with them.
- Some Filipinos may interpret assertiveness as aggressiveness.
- For Filipinos a western style handshake is acceptable for both men and women.

### Naming Conventions:

- Most older Filipino names are of Spanish descent, and some are derived from names of patron saints.
- Filipino names are traditionally written with the given name first followed by the surname.
- Many Filipinos have adopted foreign names dropping the traditional common first name “Maria”.
- Filipino seniors generally prefer to be addressed by their surname with their title (e.g. Mr., Mrs.) by those outside the family or friendship circle, as mark of respect.
- Filipinos often have nicknames.
- Older Filipinos are often addressed in the conversation as Auntie “Tita” or Uncle “Tito” or Mother “Nanay” out of respect even if they are not directly related.

### Useful Greetings:

English Greeting	Filipino/Tagalog Greeting	Phonetics/Pronunciation
Good morning	Magandang umaga	Maa-gun-dung oo-mu-gaa

## Filipino Cultural Profile –older people

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Good afternoon	Magandang hapon	Maa-gun-dung hop-pawn
How are you?	Kumusta po kayo? (formal/polite)	Koo-moos-ta po caa-yo
	Kumusta ka? (informal)	Koo-moos-ta caa
Goodbye	Paalam	Paa-ah-lum
Thank you	Salamat po. (formal/polite)	Sal-la-mut po
	Salamat. (informal)	Sal-la-mut
You are welcome	Wala pong anuman. (formal/polite)	Wal-laa pong ah-noo-man
	Walang anuman. (informal)	Wal-lung ah-noo-man
Yes	Opo/ oho. (formal/polite)	Oh-po
	Oo (informal)	Oh-oh
No	Hindi po/ho (formal/polite)	Heen-dee po/ho
	Hindi (informal)	Heen-dee

### Key Filipino Festivals / Significant Dates:

Christmas Day 25<sup>th</sup> December

New Years Day 1<sup>st</sup> Jan

Easter Season + other significant Catholic religious observations

Labour Day 1<sup>st</sup> May

Independence Day 12<sup>th</sup> June

Patron Saint Feast Days

Services and activities useful for older Filipino people in Kingston, Greater Dandenong, Casey and Cardinia

Organisation/Contact	Services/Activities
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## Filipino Cultural Profile –older people

<p><b>Centre for Philippine Concerns Australia (CPCA)</b></p> <p>186 Foster St East, Dandenong Vic 3175 Ph 9791 8366 Mobile 0416 860 440 Website: <a href="http://www.cpcavictoria.org.au">www.cpcavictoria.org.au</a> Office operates every Mondays &amp; Wednesdays Contact: Norminda Villanueva</p>	<p><b>Services provided include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information and referrals</li> <li>• HACC Friendly Visiting Program</li> <li>• Links to social clubs and networks</li> <li>• Social Support Program providing small group outings</li> <li>• Providing support to different seniors clubs/organisations</li> <li>• Volunteer Training</li> </ul>
<p><b>South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre</b></p> <p>Level 1, 314 Thomas Street, Dandenong Vic 3175</p> <p>Contact: Sylvia Wan Ph 9706 8933 Fax 9706 8830</p>	<p><b>Filipino PAG held every 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursdays</b></p> <p><i>Venue:</i> Oakgrove Community Centre 89-101 Oakgrove Drive Narre Warren Vic 3805</p> <p>Eligibility: City of Casey</p>
<p><b>Pilipino Elderly Association for the South Eastern Region (PEASER)</b></p> <p>Clarinda Community Centre 24 Sundowner Avenue, Clayton South 3169 Contact: Fely Roxas. Ph 9551 5416</p>	<p><b>Seniors Club Activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This group meets every Sunday 2pm-5pm</li> <li>• Social support caters for all family.</li> <li>• Singing, dancing, games, Karaoke,</li> <li>• Kultura – cultural dance group performers</li> </ul>
<p><b>Young Generation Filipino Senior Citizens Club of the South East</b></p> <p>John Pandazopoulos Hall 78 Power Road, Doveton Vic 3177 Contact: Demetria Reyes. Ph 9794 5084</p>	<p><b>Seniors Club Activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meets every 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday</li> <li>• Social gathering/support</li> <li>• Angklung Bamboo Band Cultural Dance entertaining the community and various multi-cultural events</li> </ul>
<p><b>Salaginto</b></p> <p>East Burwood Community Centre 1063 Burwood Highway, Ferntree Gully Contact: Consejo Chavarria Ph 9764 4227</p>	<p><b>Seniors Club Activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This group meets every second Thursday to attend PAG</li> <li>• Social &amp; recreational programs</li> <li>• Support for seniors</li> <li>• Organising Charity Dinner Events</li> </ul>
<p><b>United Filipino Elderly Group, Inc</b></p> <p>Springvale Neighbourhood House 1 Osborne Avenue, Springvale Vic 3171 Contact: Lina Ward Ph:9528 4228</p>	<p><b>Seniors Club Activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The group meet every 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday of the month to attend a Catholic Mass, hold a meeting and share lunch together.</li> <li>• Currently forming a dance group</li> <li>• The group raise funds for charity .</li> </ul>