



Papua New Guinean Cultural Profile

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PNG Cultural Profile

Thanks are given to:

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as well as to all those persons who have provided comment about this profile.

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Disclaimer

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Please note there may be costs associated with some of the resources and services listed in this directory.

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Papua New Guinea Cultural Profile

Introduction	3
Background	4
Migration Experience	4
Customs in Everyday Life	6
Greetings	6
Communication Styles	6
Values	7
Wantok System	7
Reciprocity	7
Keeping Time with the Sun	7
Taboos	8
Family	9
Family Structure	9
Attitudes to Residential Care	10
Personal Hygiene	11
Bathing and Grooming	11
Pensions	12
Leisure and Recreation	13
Social Groups	14
Television	15
Radio	15
Newspapers	15
Books	15
Newsletters	15
Religion	16
Important Days	
Food and Diet	17
Meals	17
Health	18
Attitudes to Illness and Pain	18
Perceptions of Health Professionals	18
Death and Dying	19
Palliative Care	19
Death and Dying	20
Language	21
Central Regions	21
Additional Resources	22
Bibliography	23
Correction / Addition Form	24

This profile of the Papua New Guinean (PNG) cultural community is one of the projects undertaken by the Home and Community Care Multicultural Advisory Service (HACC MAS) Program, funded by the Queensland Department of Communities.

One of the aims of the HACC MAS Program is to provide resources for the home and community care service providers to better meet their clients' needs from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. This booklet is about ensuring that needs of older people from a Papuan New Guinean background are met.

This profile is intended to provide some insights into the Papua New Guinean culture. Two things are important to notice. First, each person is unique and has his/her own individual necessities which need to be considered when planning care. Second, most people from a Papuan New Guinean background have lived for decades in Australia. They have settled into Australian society very well. Papua New Guinean culture in Australia differs a lot from the Papua New Guinean culture in modern Papua New Guinea, and features from both cultures are evident in Australia today.

The profile provides useful information about a range of topics and resources including books, articles, visual aids and services.



This symbol is used to indicate a “tip”, which you, as the caregiver of a person who was born in Papua New Guinea, may find useful in your day-to-day support of that person.

In an effort to maintain the accuracy of this profile and improve its contents for all stakeholders, we encourage readers to complete the feedback form on the last page to inform us of any inaccuracies or other resources available. It is considered that this feedback will assist us to maintain a user-relevant profile and a quality resource.

Yours sincerely

Vivienne McDonald

Director

Amanda Moffatt

Consultant

Papua New Guinea is approximately 462,840km² in area. It occupies the eastern half of the island of New Guinea which borders the Indonesian province of West Papua (Irian Jaya) to the west. To the north and east are the islands of Manus, New Britain, New Ireland and Bougainville. Much of the country is covered by tropical rainforest and its two major rivers are the Sepik and the Fly. A central spine of mountains, the Owen Stanley Range, dominates the country with many peaks over 4,000 metres. Papua New Guinea has a monsoonal climate with a hot and humid wet season from December to March and dry season from May to October. Papua New Guinea has 20 provinces which are divided into four regions: Highlands, Island, Momase and Papua Region.



NB: People identify very strongly with their region and each community has its own distinct cultural customs including language, food and beliefs. It is important to ask your client about their region and particular cultural needs when considering multicultural appropriate care.

Migration Experience

People from Papua New Guinea arrived in Australia in small numbers in the 1870's. These people visited Australia as boat crew members and mission sponsored villagers. By the 1880's this number increased to more than 3,000 as Papua New Guinea-born people were employed as labourers in the Queensland sugar fields. However, very few of these workers migrated to Australia permanently with most preferring to return home at the completion of their service.

Although entry was restricted under the Immigration Restriction Act 1901, an average of 450 Papua New Guineans came to Australia each year under an exemption for pearl fisheries during the period 1905 – 1928.

In 1954 there were 1,723 Papua New Guinea-born people living in Australia. Numbers grew due to the granting of movement for traditional purposes in 1975. By 1976 there were 15,562 Papua New Guinea-born people living in Australia.

Australia was responsible for administering the British territory of Papua from 1906-1949. After World War One a new territory combining German New Guinea and Papua was formed and mandated to Australian administration. The territory of Papua and New Guinea was granted independence by Australia in 1975 and renamed Papua New Guinea.

Many Papua New Guinea-born people living in Australia are the children of Australian citizens who have worked in Papua New Guinea over the years. In 1986, indigenous Papua New Guineans made up approximately 9% of the Papua New Guinea-born community in Australia.

According to the 2006 census, 76.8% of Papua New Guinea-born people in Australia arrived prior to 1996. 5.6% arrived between 1996 and 2000, and 11.3% arrived during 2001 and 2006. Most Papua New Guineans have come to Australia through marriage or to join fellow family members here.

Australian Statistics

The 2006 census recorded 24020 PNG born people in Australia, with Queensland having the largest number with 12590 people, followed by NSW (5250), Victoria (2360) and WA (1310)

- 5.9% are aged over 65 years
- 44% are males and 55% females
- 8655 Queenslanders identified their ancestry as Papua New Guinean, 216 as Melanesian Papuan (NFD) and 126 as Melanesian Papuan. 23% of those who were born in PNG identified they had Australian ancestry
- 73% are employed in a skilled occupation
- 9837 Papua New Guinea-born people speak English at home (79.7%), 886 spoke Tok Pisin, 747 spoke Cantonese and 296 people spoke Motu. Other languages spoken in the home include Dutch, Japanese and Torres Strait. 93.7% of PNG born people speak English well or very well
- Papua New Guinea-born people live throughout Queensland with the largest populations in Brisbane, Cairns, and the Gold Coast

(SOURCES: Queensland Health. *The health of Queensland's Papua New Guinean population 2009*. Division of the Chief Health Officer, Queensland Health. Brisbane 2011. Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2006, *Community Information Summary: Papua New Guinea-born*, Commonwealth DIAC, Canberra.)



Greetings

For many Papua New Guinea-born people it is customary to greet by shaking hands and to ask, “How are you?” (Yuorait?) in Melanesian Pidgin. Sometimes people will greet, take each other’s hands and hold them against their chest as a sign of friendship and respect. Handshaking is common in many situations; however, sometimes a nod of acknowledgment will suffice. Men and women of different ages may clasp hands or clasp each other around the waist. For others, when they know a person well, it is appropriate to hug, and kiss on the cheek when greeting them. If greeting a person of official status, it is important to use the appropriate title and their full name.

Communication Style

The general Papua New Guinean communication style is relaxed and open. The relationships between older and younger generations are easy, and men and women socialise together openly. Couples do not openly express affection in public but friends of the same sex may hold hands while walking. In some Papua New Guinean cultures it is customary amongst friends and family to stroke each other’s arms and calves while talking. Generally, in Papua New Guinea cultures it is not rude to stare. Personal space is also relaxed as it is acceptable to crowd one another at a counter or to stand very close to others. However, when communicating, men and women who are not familiar with each other should remain at arm’s length. Papua New Guinean people often smile openly and direct eye contact is valued. Avoiding eye contact can be seen as negative or sly. Papua New Guinea-born people tend to communicate directly on general topics; however, they are culturally very sensitive and are easily shamed, so a more indirect style is common when it comes to sensitive issues.



It may be helpful to communicate with family or close family friends about issues that may be of a sensitive nature for your client including health and ageing matters such as dementia and incontinence.



Traditional Papua New Guinean society consists of a multitude of cultures defined by regional boundaries each with its own customs and values. The three main values that underpin all Papua New Guinean cultures are: the Wantok system, reciprocity, and keeping time with the sun.

Wantok System

The cultural divide by region or area is traditionally categorised by the Wantok system. Wantok is Tok Pisin, meaning “someone who speaks my language”, and refers to someone from the same village or nearby. It refers to the sense of duty and obligation that Papua New Guinea-born people have to their Wantoks. The Wantok system, particularly in the village setting, provides a sense of security as wealth and responsibilities are shared. The Wantok system works closely with the belief of reciprocity.

Reciprocity

The Papua New Guinean reciprocal system is characterised by values such as assistance is given with the understanding that equal value is owed and should be returned. It is also seen in the sharing of food and being hospitable to guests and unexpected visitors knowing that they will share their food with you in time. In modern day PNG culture reciprocity is still expected but not always possible due to financial differences putting a barrier between some individuals and those on different income levels.

Keeping Time with the Sun

Traditionally, Papua New Guinean village life was timetabled by the sun and this has led to a more relaxed approach in timekeeping and punctuality. Generally, Papua New Guinea-born people are not offended if you are running late and will often offer their time freely, expecting you will do the same.



Taboos

Each community has its own taboos surrounding class, status, and custodianship of areas, and this differs between each village. The passing down of cultural artefacts, skills and customs is also very complex and there are intricate rules around taboos and beliefs.

General taboos include never stepping over food as it is considered extremely rude. Pointing at someone especially when in conversation can be perceived as gossiping about that person. Most people point with their chin - not their finger.

There are many taboos in Papua New Guinean cultures around gender and sexuality. Homosexuality is illegal in Papua New Guinea.

It is considered rude to say hello to someone and not stop for a chat. This can be seen as being mean with your time.



Beliefs and taboos can be a sensitive subject for Papua New Guinea-born people. However, it may be important to discuss this when devising and implementing an individual's care plan with clients and their families. It may help to have a community representative present to help facilitate discussions of this nature.



Family Structure

In Papua New Guinea extended families traditionally live in the one house. Family ties and sense of duty are very strong with the beliefs of family obligation and reciprocity being fundamental to Papua New Guinean society. It is traditional that younger family members, especially women, care for elderly relatives. For many Papua New Guinea-born Australian residents, the expectation is that they return home to provide this care.

In traditional Papua New Guinean society women have less status than men. Women cannot challenge men in public and once married are seen to exist to serve men. Women are often given the responsibility of gardening, childcare and tending animals.

Many Papua New Guinea-born people are expected to send money and goods back to their families in the villages as part of their obligation. They are also expected to return to see family and friends regularly, although this becomes harder as people age.



Attitudes to Residential Care

There are no nursing homes in Papua New Guinea as families care for their older relatives. This care occurs in the family home. Many older Papua New Guinea-born Australians may be reluctant to receive help from someone outside their family or culture. They may require someone from their community to introduce care workers and stay with them for the first few visits, until trust is built.

A lack of knowledge about care services may also prevent Papua New Guinea-born people from accessing aged care services.



Bathing and Grooming

The routines and preferences surrounding personal hygiene activities greatly impact on the person's sense of self, pride, dignity and confidence. In Papua New Guinean cultures it is very important that women only provide women with personal care. Women, however, can give men personal care as women are considered mothers to everyone and all males are born of a mother.

It is important for Papua New Guinea-born people to be well dressed although older people tend to dress more casually. Women will usually wear dresses that modestly cover their thighs.

Papua New Guinean people have traditionally used coconut oil to condition and moisturise hair and skin. The oil was prepared by grating and boiling the coconut flesh. Today many Papua New Guinean people still use coconut oil as part of their daily hygiene routine. Coconut oil can be purchased at pharmacies or in skin product shops.



It is important that each client's preferences with their dress, bathing, grooming etc, are established as part of their care or support plan.



Australia may have reciprocal arrangements in place with Papua New Guinea regarding the payment of pensions. If such an agreement is in place, the Australian Government supplements that payment if it falls below the level of the Australian pension. Problems with Centrelink can arise for the person if he/she fails to notify Centrelink of any increase in the foreign pension amount. In this situation the Australian supplement is reduced according to the increased amount. Failure to notify Centrelink can result in a debt and a fine being imposed by Centrelink. For information on claiming a pension from another country, call Centrelink on 13 1673.



As a people, Papua New Guineans tend to be very active, hard working and sociable, especially the women, and this is reflected in the way they spend their leisure time.

Many Papua New Guinea-born people maintain the traditional leisure activities they enjoyed in their homeland. These activities include gardening, especially food gardens with traditional vegetables and medicinal plants, fishing, and socialising with fellow Papua New Guinean people. They also keep their traditional culture alive by participating in cultural activities such as dancing, weaving and woodcarving.

Many women create string figures, and decorative bands and bags using handmade string. The patterns of the strings tell stories such as how to dig out yams or carry meaning for a particular cultural group. There are many traditional rules governing which people from which culture can create what artefacts.

Sitting and story telling is an important leisure activity for many Papua New Guinea-born people. Many men, and some women, also enjoy playing cards or making useful items such as billum bags or weapons.

A very important part of Papua New Guinean culture is the chewing of betel nut or *Buai*. For many Papua New Guinea-born people chewing betel nut is part of their daily routine and social activity. When the Buai or betel nut is mixed with lime (kambang) leaves or powder it has a chemical reaction that turns the mouth red and gives a mild stimulant feeling.

Due to the close proximity of Australia to Papua New Guinea many people return home regularly to visit friends and family. For them this forms part of their leisure and holiday time.



Social Groups

The Papua New Guinea-born population is spread out across Queensland with the largest groups of people living in Cairns and Townsville. The two main social groups are found in these locations. In Brisbane and the South Eastern parts of Queensland social groups tend to be smaller and less formalised.

There is also a connection and affiliation with other Pacific cultures such as the South Sea Islanders. Papua New Guinean people often associate with these cultures in Queensland.

There is a Papua New Guinea festival held once a year in Brisbane. This is held around the Independence Day celebrations on 16th September. Bringing together all the various cultural groups, the festival is an opportunity to share the various cultural traditions with each other and the broader community.

PNG Cultural Groups include:

Townsville Papua New Guinea Logohou

Maggie Baison

130 Abbott Street, Oonoonba, 4811

Support for PNG visitors & immigrants & patients staying in Townsville.

Activities: Regular social events & craft stall at multicultural events.

Phone: (07) 4778 2615

Phone: (07) 0415 129 776

Fax: (07) 4778 2615

Contact: Ms Lvania Martin P

Phone: (07) 4729 0806

PNG Logohu Cultural Group Inc (Cairns)

Mrs Morea Anderson

Activities: Cultural activities, social, welfare, community service

Phone: (07) 4055 9332

Contact: Mrs Theresa Boers

Phone: (07) 4055 0086

Television

There are no known television programs for Papua New Guinea-born people.

Radio

ABC's Radio Australia's Tok Pisin broadcasts can be downloaded at the following website:

<http://www.abc.net.au/ra/tokpisin/>

Newspapers

Papua New Guinea has two daily newspapers, both in English, The Post- Courier and The National and both of these are available on line at the websites:

<http://www.postcourier.com.pg/>

<http://www.thenational.com.pg/>



If the client is unable to use a computer, you can access the internet and download these newspapers and print all or some of the pages and give to the client to read at their leisure.

Books

Every council library in Queensland borrows from the Queensland State Library. The State Library has Papua New Guinea resources which your local library can arrange to borrow for a small fee. You can search the State Library resources (which will list the resource, type of resource, and call number) at the following web address:

<http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/find/cat>

For people in North Queensland, search the Townsville or Thuringowa City Council library catalogue for Papua New Guinean subjects at the following website:

<http://www.townsville.qld.gov.au/libraries/spydus.asp>

<http://library.thuringowa.qld.gov.au/>

Newsletters

'Nuispepa Bilong' - Australia Papua New Guinea Association (Inc)

W: www.apngassociation.com

E: hb.cosgrove@bigpond.com

Important Days:

At the 2006 Census the major religious affiliations amongst Papua New Guinea-born people were Catholic (7820 persons), No Religion (3640 persons) and Anglican (3220 persons). Of the Papua New Guinea-born, 15.1 per cent stated 'No Religion'. This was lower than that of the total Australian population (18.7 per cent). 5.5 per cent of Papua New Guinea-born people did not state a religion.

Religious people from Papua New Guinea enjoy attending church services and appreciate visits from their local priest.

There are a variety of special events celebrated in Papua New Guinea.

Festivity	Month/Day	Customary Practice
New Year	1 January	A big celebration to say goodbye to the old year and welcome the new year in. This may be celebrated in the village with drumming.
Good Friday	March or April	There may be fasting before Good Friday. For many it is important to attend a Church service. Afterwards groups of family and friends may have a feast. No meat is eaten. There may also be a street procession with someone carrying a cross through the village/streets.
Easter Sunday		Attending a church service is important. Often there is a feast after the service.
Independence Day	16 September	Celebrates Independence from Australia in 1975. This is celebrated with a great feast and dancing.
Christmas	25 December	Christmas is a significant celebration and attending Church is important, as is sharing meals and exchanging gifts and being with family and loved ones.
Boxing Day	26 December	A day for family and loved ones to gather together, share food and have a 'sing song'.

Food plays an important part in the various Papua New Guinean cultures although particular foods and their preparation vary greatly depending on the regional location and availability of local produce. Food is always shared freely amongst friends and family even if there is only a small amount available.

Traditional cooking is quite plain and important foods are coconut, fish, sago, bananas, PNG cabbage, taro, cassava and sweet potato, but these are dependent on the different geographical areas. The various villages in Papua New Guinea were very protective of their region and people would not access food or resources beyond the borders of their territory without inciting conflict.

In many areas of Papua New Guinea meat and vegetables are cooked in clay pots or used layers of hot stones and banana leaves. Throughout many villages pigs are raised and eaten at feasts.

In Australia, most Papua New Guinea-born people grow their own traditional vegetables including taro, cassava and PNG cabbage so as to maintain elements of their traditional diet, and herbal medicines. Papua New Guinea-born people in Australia have adapted to the Anglo diet alongside their traditional staples. Many enjoy eating breads, cheeses, vegetables, meat, fish and fruits. Sharing food is still important as it ensures that you do not overeat.

Meals

Breakfast: Often consists of either Weetbix; scones; boiled bananas; taro or sweet potato

Lunch: Lunch is very important and common foods include coconut, cabbage, shallots, and tomatoes

Afternoon Tea: Afternoon tea often consists of a cup of tea or perhaps lemon or grass tea, followed by chewing betel nuts

Dinner: Dinner is the main meal and is hearty



It is important to establish each person's food preferences, cooking style (e.g. fried versus poached), quantity, the timing of meals, and to record this information as part of their care plan.



Attitudes to Illness and Pain

There is a traditional belief for many Papua New Guinean communities that evil spirits or a sorceress can make people sick and even kill them, with only a medicine man able to make the person recover.

Papua New Guinea-born people may be very vocal with their pain. Although pain relief is traditionally in the form of herbs, it is quite acceptable to use Western medicine for pain relief.

Perceptions of Health Professionals

Today, Papua New Guinea-born people are comfortable visiting a doctor or other health professionals.

However, there are many traditional herbs sourced from the bush or garden that Papua New Guinea-born people use to cure fevers and other illnesses and these may be used if Western medicine fails.



Palliative Care

It is important to Papua New Guinea-born people that a constant vigil is maintained when a person from their culture is ill.

Often more than one person stays with the sick in hospital or nursing homes. These people take turns to visit, give massages and keep the person company.

The disease 'cancer' was not known traditionally in Papua New Guinea. People are very scared of this disease. If a person is diagnosed with cancer that person is not told of the diagnosis, and all relatives are contacted so they can visit the ill person before they pass away. If a family member dies of cancer only their family would know this information as it would not be discussed outside the family. Some Papua New Guineans believe that you can tell a person is about to die by the look in their eyes and that only God, and not the health professional, knows when death will occur.



Death and Dying

20

Once a person has passed away it is customary to straighten the limbs. Funerals are an important part of Papua New Guinea-born people's culture.

There is usually a very large attendance at funerals with all relatives and friends attending. Each Papua New Guinea-born person who knew the deceased is expected to contribute money towards the cost of the funeral. Cremations are common, with burials being seldom done.

For coastal-born Papua New Guinean people it is important to wear black when a person from your immediate family passes away.

Also, black mourning beads are worn and are not removed until all relatives can meet together and have a feast. This feast lasts for three to seven days and involves sharing food and dancing. The feast signals the end of mourning, and the mourning beads are removed and people are allowed to dance and celebrate again. For up to one year a person in mourning may continue to cover their head with a black cloth when outside their home.

Fewer than 80% of Papua New Guinea-born people in Queensland speak English at home. The official language of Papua New Guinea is Tok Pisin, also known as Melanesian Pidgin; however, it is important to note that there are approximately 715 indigenous languages spoken across the country, many of them unrelated. Other common languages amongst Papua New Guinea-born people include Dutch, Japanese and Torres Strait Creole.



You need to be aware that just because a person once spoke English, this does not mean:

- a) he/she necessarily spoke it fluently or extensively OR
- b) he/she has retained these skills as he/she aged OR
- c) that it is their preferred language as speaking English can be tiring to the elderly.



Additional Resources

22

Various language guides (including Pidgin) targeted at health and everyday activities is available at a cost from:

HENDRIKA (Health and Rapport Interactive Kommunikation Aid)

P O Box 326, Beaudesert, Qld 4285

Ph: (07) 5544 6606

Diversicare

www.diversicare.com.au

Queensland

www.health.qld.gov.au/multicultural

New South Wales

www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au

Victoria

www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au

Victoria PICAC (Partners in Culturally Appropriate Care)

www.culturaldiversity.com.au

Federal Government

<http://www.health.gov.au/>

<http://www.healthinsite.gov.au/>

www.ageing.health.gov.au/publicat/multilin.htm

www.ageing.health.gov.au/publicat/pubindex.htm

Alzheimer's Australia

www.alzheimers.org.au/content.cfm?categoryid=14

Alzheimer's Australia NSW

www.alzheimers.org.au

Queensland Health – Multicultural Health Publications

www.health.qld.gov.au/multicultural/health_workers/support_tools.asp

Queensland Transcultural Mental Health Centre

www.health.qld.gov.au/pahospital/qtmhc/multilingual_resources.asp

1. "Background"

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_Papua_New_Guinea

<http://www.new-ag.info/en/country/profile.php?a=886>.

2. Statistics

Queensland Health. *The health of Queensland's Papua New Guinean population 2009*. Division of the Chief Health Officer, Queensland Health. Brisbane 2011. Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2006, *Community Information Summary: Papua New Guinea-born*, Commonwealth DIAC, Canberra.

Correction/Addition Form

24

PNG Cultural Profile

Please complete the following page if you are aware of either incorrect details or you know of additional resources that should be included.

Correction	
Listed Item	Correction
Title	
Page:	
Additional Resources / Contact	
Contact Details	Description of Resource
Title:	(include whether Personal contact, Book, Tool, Video, Article, Course)
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Phone:	
Website:	
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