



Cultural Fact Sheet SOMALIA

Location & Climate

- Located on the horn of Africa
- Somalia has a semi-arid, desert climate
- Boasts the longest coastline of the African mainland
- 2012 Somalia became a federation and regained a Federal Government
- The majority of the population are Sunni Muslim
- Many Somali people come from a nomadic traditional culture



Migration

- Australia has seen a 31.8% increase in its Somalia-born population between 2006 to 2011
- Began in 1988, but increased in 1990s due to civil war
- 80% arrived under refugee and humanitarian programs
- Many arrived later under the family reunion program
- It should be noted many Somali people in Australia have experienced trauma and hardship in their journey to Australia
- The 2011 Census showed Queensland has the third largest Somalia-born population behind Victoria and Western Australia



Language & Communication

- The official languages of Somalia are Somali and Arabic
- As with all aspects of Somali culture, gender segregation is important (male to male, female to female)
- Open and confident communication style is appropriate
- Respectful humour and touch are common
- Eye contact is encouraged



Greetings

- Respectful but don't bow
- Handshakes between same gender
- Senior members of the community may be called Mumma, Aunty or Grandma/Uncle or Father
- Official titles such as Sheikh or Haji are important

Family

- Traditionally extended family lived together, this is changing as modern families adopt more Western lifestyles
- Somali culture sprang from nomadic traditions and a communal lifestyle
- Traditionally aged care was the responsibility of the family and broader community
- Strong gender roles, although this is slowly becoming more flexible

Daily Routine

- In Australia Somali people spend much of their time indoors
- Generally Somali people in Australia don't garden
- Prayer is an important part of the daily routine
- Women traditionally prepare all the meals and do the housework
- Men often like to play chess

Food and Diet

- Halal diet
- Camel milk and meat are very important
- Rice as a staple
- Vegetables and some fruit
- Many Somali source their food from African food suppliers in Queensland



Religion

- The majority of Somali are Sunni Muslim
- Performing ablutions prior to prayer is important
- Prayer occurs at specific times throughout the day and will need to be considered in aged care
- The Somali community observes Ramadan, where food and beverages are not consumed during daylight hours for a period of one month. This is a very important period in the Somali calendar
- Ramadan is followed by the festival Eid
- This is a time to share food with the community, including visitors to the house



Cultural Customs

- As a Muslim culture, women wear the traditional head scarf called a *shash*
- Some women also wear a traditional shawl called a *gabasaar*
- Henna is an important fashion item for Somali women



Cultural Considerations / Taboos

- It is considered rude to wear shoes in a Somali house
- After a person has performed their ablutions for prayer, they are clean and should not be touched
- It is not appropriate for anyone to touch a client's religious artefacts including their Quran
- Many Somali people have experienced trauma and hardship. Talking deeply about these experiences is taboo
- Interactions between men and women is limited in Somali culture and needs to be carefully considered



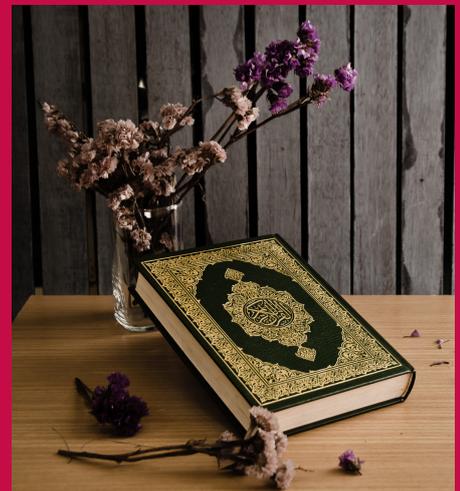
Aged Care Considerations

- One of the challenges for aged care is the prevention of isolation and depression while the family is occupied during the day
- Traditionally the responsibility of caring for the elderly fell to families and the broader community
- There is a preference for Somali care workers with an understanding of the language and culture
- The community is working towards training the younger generations to provide this care



Health & Illness

- Illness is accepted as Allah's Will
- Reading the Quran is the first step in health care
- Traditional herbal medicine is also used



Death & Dying

- When a person is terminally ill, they are never alone- the family takes turns to sit with the person and read the Quran
- After death, family members of the same gender wash the body, dress them in white and apply perfume
- They place cotton between the fingers, it is believed this will turn to gold in the afterlife
- The body is then passed to the men of the community to bury as only men bury the dead
- Crying is not allowed as it is seen as a dissatisfaction with Allah's Will

