



# Greeks

## *A Guide for Health Professionals*

This profile provides an overview of some of the cultural and health issues of concern to Greeks who live in Queensland, Australia. This description may not apply to all Greeks as individual experiences may vary. The profile can, however, be used as a pointer to some of the issues that may concern your client.



# Greeks

## Introduction

Australian Greeks originate from mainland Greece and the Greek islands, many with their own dialect and customs. Many Greeks arrived in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s and have been long-term residents. In Queensland, there are approximately 4,500 who were born in Greece (according to the 1996 census). Very few have arrived recently except for aged relatives. Most of the younger generation of people who identify themselves as "Greek" or "Greek Australian" are born in Australia.

## Patient Interaction

Greeks tend to express their emotions, and use gestures and vocalise to express joy, sadness and grief more openly and freely than average Anglo-Celtic Australians. For Greek people, a high level of physical contact is natural and normal.

Older people may be intimidated by technical jargon and sophisticated English, and so may not admit that they do not fully understand what you have said.

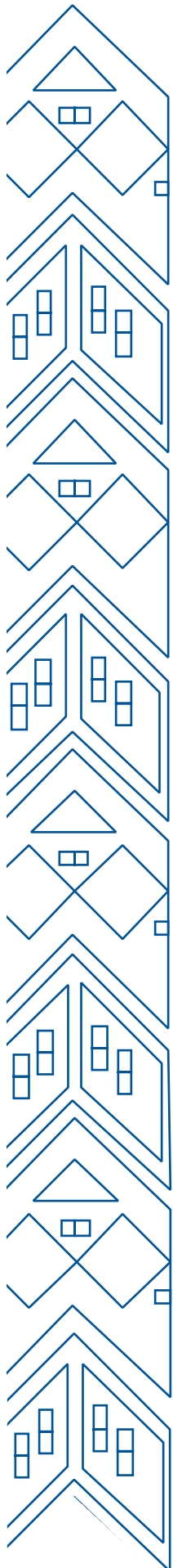
- Take care to explain the diagnosis and treatment to your client (through interpreters rather than members of family).



- Translated information on particular health problems and topics is available from Queensland Health. A video explaining diabetes in Greek has been funded by Queensland Health and others may be available.
- Generally, it is important to communicate fully with your client's family, as they are a vital support system, and may be the mainstay of a home treatment program.
- With a new cancer diagnosis, your client's relatives may prefer that you discuss the diagnosis with them before telling your client.

## Health in Australia

The main health issues in the Greek community are diabetes and its sequelae, and heart disease. The prevalence of heart disease, hypertension, obesity and high cholesterol is equal to or higher than in other Australians. There is an increasing incidence of heart disease and cancer especially among women. Genetic and cultural factors (such as the social significance of food) may predispose Greek people to weight problems. There is a significant fear of cancer. Awareness of women's health issues is poor,



but generally better in the younger age groups. There are relatively low rates of alcoholism among Greeks. A high percentage of men smoke.

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## Utilisation of Health Services

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- ⦿ When Greek patients are in hospital, their relatives visit and stay with them as long as possible. They generally prefer home treatment but hospitals and doctors are more readily utilised here than in Greece.
- ⦿ Limited English may be a barrier to using all health related services.
- ⦿ Many have come from rural areas where health services were rudimentary. Therefore, speech or occupational therapy and other allied health services may be unfamiliar and treated with some scepticism.
- ⦿ Greeks prefer known health providers, as a personal relationship is very important.
- ⦿ Women, particularly the older generation, prefer female health providers. Men may have difficulty accepting care from female health workers, particularly young ones, especially if undressing is required.

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## Health Beliefs and Practices

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**T**he obligations Greeks have to their family are returned by support, particularly when they are sick. Traditionally, families were involved in the illness and offered folk explanations, group diagnosis and herbal remedies as a first step. In Australia, folk remedies are used much less. They will usually look for a

recommended health provider or hospital, and preferably consult someone who understands their language and culture.

Cupping, a traditional remedy for fever, is still practiced among Greek migrants in Australia, and produces typical rounded bruises.

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## Psychosocial Stressors

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**T**here is still cultural discrimination and stereotyping. A high proportion of overseas-born Greeks either have not attended school or left by age 12. The older generation has often worked hard, for long hours in poor conditions. Aging is an increasing stress for the Greek community.

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## Health Care of the Aged

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**T**he elderly are traditionally cared for at home, regardless of their level of independence. Many elderly, especially those with poor English, do not accept mainstream health services, including community services. It may be possible to arrange culturally appropriate services through the Greek Welfare Centre.

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## Mental Health

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**M**ental illness is stigmatised. Those with mental illness are generally not accepted by the older generation. The younger generation is much more supportive. Lack of awareness, and the stigma associated with mental illness, are some barriers to accessing mental health services.

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## Resources

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*Queensland Ethnic Affairs Directory 1997.*  
Department of the Premier and Cabinet.  
Office of Ethnic and Multicultural Affairs.

Greek Welfare Centre  
Tel: (07) 3844 3669

Brisbane Migrant Resource Centre  
Tel: (07) 3844 8144

Ethnic Community Council of Queensland  
Tel: (07) 3844 9166

Logan City Multicultural  
Neighbourhood Centre  
Tel: (07) 3808 4463

Ethnic Communities Council Gold Coast  
Tel: (07) 5532 4300

Multicultural Information Network Service  
Inc. (Gympie)  
Tel: (07) 5483 9511

Migrant Resource Centre Townsville-  
Thuringowa Ltd.  
Tel: (077) 724 800

Translating and Interpreting Service  
Tel: 131 450

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hom.htm and the Queensland Health INTERNET <http://qhin.health.qld.gov.au/hssb/hou/hom.htm>. The full profile contains more detail and some additional information. It also contains references to additional source material.

Material for this profile was drawn from a number of sources including various scholarly publications. In addition, Culture & Health Care (1996), a manual prepared by the Multicultural Access Unit of the Health Department of Western Australia, was particularly useful.

