

Filipino Australians

- At the turn of the 20th century, there were approximately 700 Philippines-born people in Australia. By 1947, during the period of the *White Australia Policy*, the number of Philippines-born people in Australia had decreased to 141².
- In the 1950s, the population of Philippines-born people in Australia began to increase due to the arrival of significant numbers of students and skilled workers.
- From the 1960s to the 1990s, the Philippines-born population was one of the fastest growing overseas-born populations in Australia, with the population doubling between each Census (every five years)². By 1991, there were 73,673 Philippines-born people in Australia⁴.
- From 1972 to 1981, the President of the Philippines Ferdinand Marcos imposed martial law which resulted in an increase in migration to Australia². During the 1970s, many Philippines-born women migrated as spouses of Australian citizens². Since that time, most Philippines-born people migrating to Australia have been sponsored by a family member².
- **Ethnicity:** The main ethnic groups in the Philippines based on a 2000 census are:
 - Tagalog – 28.1 per cent
 - Cebuano/Bisaya/Binisaya – 20.7 per cent
 - Ilocano – 9 per cent
 - Hiligaynon Ilonggo – 7.5 per cent
 - Bikol – 6 per cent
 - Waray – 3.4 per cent^{5,6}.
 - Other ethnic groups make up the remaining 25.3 per cent of the population⁵.

Population of Philippines-born people in Australia (2006 Census): 120,540¹

Population of Philippines-born people in Queensland: 18,712¹

Population of Philippines-born people in Brisbane¹: 9869¹

Gender ratio (Queensland): 34.7 males per 100 females¹

Median age (Australia): The median age of Philippines-born people in 2006 was 40.3 years compared with 46.8 years for all overseas born and 37.1 for the total Australian population².

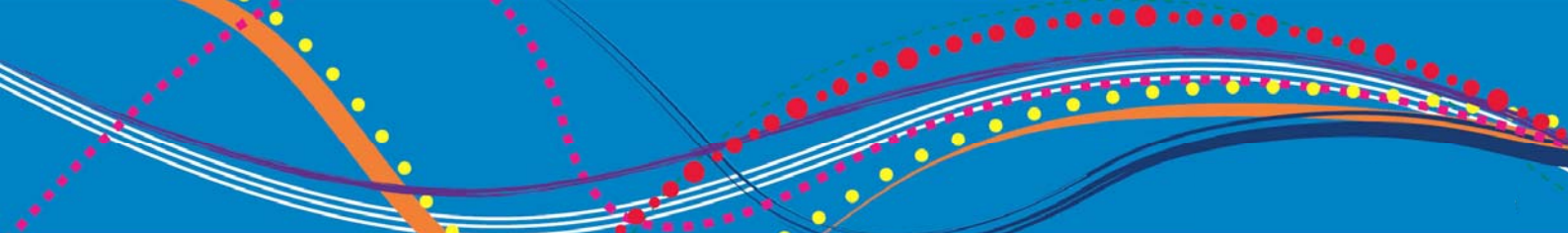
Age distribution (Queensland)¹:

| Age | Per cent |
|-------|----------|
| 0-19 | 12.4% |
| 20-39 | 34.9% |
| 40-59 | 44.9% |
| 60+ | 7.8% |

Arrivals – past five years (Source – Settlement Reporting Database³)

| Year | Australia | Queensland |
|------|-----------|------------|
| 2006 | 6405 | 971 |
| 2007 | 7763 | 1301 |
| 2008 | 9139 | 1625 |
| 2009 | 9037 | 1581 |
| 2010 | 5568 | 946 |

- **Language:** Filipino and English are the official languages of the Philippines and both are spoken by many in the Philippines^{5,7}. Filipino is based on the language Tagalog which is a South-



Asian language influenced by Spanish, Chinese, Malay and Arabic^{5,7,8}. In addition, there are eight major dialects spoken: Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilocano, Hiligaynon or Ilonggo, Bicol, Waray, Pampango, and Pangasinan⁵. There are also more than 70 other regional dialects spoken in the Philippines⁸.

- **Religion:** Catholics comprise 80.9 per cent of the Philippines population⁵. Muslims make up 5 per cent of the population, Evangelical 2.8 per cent, Iglesia ni Kristo 2.3 per cent, Aglipayan 2 per cent and other Christians, 4 per cent⁵. Religion is deeply embedded in Filipino culture⁹.

Ancestry, language and religion in Australia (2006 Census for Philippines-born)²

- The top three ancestryⁱⁱ responses of Philippines-born people in Australia were:
 - Filipino – 80.9 per cent
 - Spanish – 5.8 per cent
 - Chinese – 3.5 per cent².
- The main languages spoken at home by Philippines-born people in Australia were:
 - Tagalog – 38.8 per cent
 - Filipino – 28.7 per cent
 - English – 27.0 per cent².
- The main religions of Philippines-born people in Australia were:
 - Catholic – 80.1 per cent
 - Christian – 2.6 per cent
 - Pentecost – 2.6 per cent
 - Baptist – 2.5 per cent².

Communication

- The word *Filipina* refers to a woman from the Philippines; *Filipino* may refer to a person from the Philippines in general, or a man from the Philippines.
- Nicknames are common and may be very different from Christian names¹⁰.
- Older Filipino Australians prefer to be addressed by their title (e.g. Mr, Mrs)

and surname¹¹. People are familiar with using titles for professionals such as doctors in the Philippines and may be uncomfortable using first names⁶.

- People of both sexes greet each other by bowing or shaking hands⁸. A firm handshake with a smile and eye-contact is appropriate⁹.
- Filipinos take special care to avoid confrontation in any type of communication⁸. Filipino Australians may be reluctant to show disagreement and may say *yes* even when they do not agree⁸. They may maintain a smile when disagreeing or when feeling embarrassed and may say *maybe* or *I don't know* when they really mean *no* or *I can't*⁸.
- Prolonged eye contact can be considered rude and provocative, especially if it involves people of different status or occurs between a man and a woman^{8,12}. Brief and frequent eye contact is recommended between health care providers and Filipino Australians⁹.
- Although many Filipinos can communicate in English, many prefer to speak their native language, particularly when ill or when in other high stress situations⁹. However, sensitivity is required in introducing the need for an interpreter as many Filipinos take pride in their ability to speak, read and write English and may feel offended⁹.
- An important cultural value of Filipinos is *hiya*, which can be roughly translated as embarrassment, shame or face. It has been described as a kind of anxiety, a fear of being left exposed, unprotected and unaccepted. Having *hiya* means that people may feel very sensitive to social slight and as a result are very careful of the feelings of others^{10,12}.
- Questions such as *Do you understand?* or *Do you follow?* may be considered disrespectful. It is more appropriate to ask *Do you have any questions?*^{9,10}.

Health in Australia

- Average life expectancy in the Philippines is 71.7 years (male 68.7, female 74.7) compared to 81.7 years for all people living in Australia (male 79.3, female 84.3)⁵.
- There is limited research on the health of Filipino Australians.
- Major illnesses and causes of death of Filipino American adults include cardiovascular disease, cancer, stroke, chronic lower respiratory disease and asthma, and diabetes mellitus⁹.
- Filipino Americans have been shown to have a higher incidence of diabetes and hypertension compared to Caucasian Americans^{9,13,14}.
- Rates of breast, lung and liver cancer have been shown to be higher for Filipino Americans⁹. Survival rates for cancers including breast, lung, colon, rectal, gastric and bladder cancer have been shown to be poor⁹.
- Prevalence of mental illness and mental distress in Filipino Australians does not appear to be higher than in the Australia-born population¹⁵.

Health beliefs and practices

- Filipino Australians originating from rural areas in the Philippines are often knowledgeable about home remedies, traditional healing techniques and faith healers^{9,11}.
- Filipino Australians originating from urban areas may be more likely to rely on Australian medical treatments and over-the-counter medicines^{9,11}.
- Traditional therapies such as *hilot* (traditional therapeutic massage), herbals, nutritional supplements and home remedies may be used in conjunction with Australian medical treatments and prescribed medications¹¹.
- Filipino Australians may classify and explain illnesses using concepts of *hot* and *cold*. Foods, medicines and temperature/weather conditions are classified according to their heating or

cooling quality and their effects on the body. Sudden changes in body temperature may be perceived as harmful. Beliefs about the relationship of water and bathing to health differ substantially. Bathing can be associated with a draining of strength from the body, particularly if a person is already ill^{9,12}.

- Filipino Australians may believe in *anitos* (spirits) alongside their Christian faith⁸. *Anitos* are sometimes seen as the cause of illness and, in certain areas of the Philippines, healers may be consulted to perform rituals to appease the invading spirits⁸.
- There is considerable variation in beliefs among Filipino Australians, including between earlier migrants and those who migrated more recently⁹. It is recommended that health practitioners acknowledge these variations and seek the preferences of patients and their families⁹.
- Many Philippines-born people cope with illness with the help of family and friends, and by faith in God⁹. Filipino families can greatly influence a patient's decisions about health care⁹.
- In general, Philippines-born people treat doctors and other health professionals with high levels of respect and authority¹¹.

Social determinants of health

- In 2000, the overall literacyⁱⁱⁱ rate in the Philippines was 92.6 per cent (men 92.5 per cent, women 92.7 per cent)⁵.
- Proficiency in English^{iv} in Australia (2006 Census)¹:
 - 97 per cent of Philippines-born men and women reported that they spoke English well or very well
 - 3 per cent of Philippines-born men and women reported that they did not speak English well
 - Less than 1 per cent of Philippines-born men and women reported that they did not speak English at all.

- At the time of the 2006 Census, 64.9 per cent of Philippines-born people aged 15 years or older had some form of higher non-school qualification compared to 52.5 per cent of the total Australian population².
- The participation rate in the workforce (2006 Census) was 73.1 per cent and unemployment rate was 5.2 per cent compared to the corresponding values of 64.6 per cent and 5.2 per cent in the total Australian population². The median weekly income for Philippines-born people in Australia aged 15 years or older was \$538 compared to \$466 for the total Australian population².
- A 2009 large-scale audit discrimination study based on job applications using ethnically distinguishable names showed that people with Asian sounding names were subject to discrimination in applying for jobs. People with Asian sounding names have to apply for more jobs to receive the same number of interviews as people with Anglo-Saxon sounding names and those with names of more established migrant groups such as Italian, even if they have the same work history and education¹⁶.
- A Queensland study has shown that the loss of close family ties and the transition from a collectivist to an individualist society are related to emotional distress in Filipinas¹⁷.
- Filipinas in Queensland have been shown to experience financial stresses including the loss of income associated with full time study to achieve recognition of overseas qualifications, financial pressure of remittances and under-employment¹⁷.
- Power imbalances in relationships can in some cases escalate to domestic violence^{12,18}. Catholic beliefs and values may influence some women's decisions to remain in abusive relationships despite personal cost^{12,18}. Women's options for domestic violence services are limited in many parts of Queensland^{12,18}. In addition, women may be reluctant to seek help if they think that other Filipinas will find out about their marital difficulties, and they may not feel comfortable discussing issues of domestic violence with service providers^{12,18}.

Utilisation of health services in Australia

- Filipinos generally expect their families to care for them and to be with them when they are sick. Fear of isolation from families is one reason for delayed presentation to hospitals and health care providers¹².
- Other barriers to accessing health services may include difficulties making the initial contact, cultural issues associated with asking questions, practical constraints and differing perceptions of health risk¹².
- Many Filipino Australians may not be willing to accept a diagnosis of mental illness. This can lead to the avoidance and underutilisation of mental health services because of the associated stigma and shame^{9,11,17}. The use of traditional practices and healing methods have been shown to be an additional barrier to the use of mental health services by Philippines-born people¹⁹.

References

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics. CDATE Census 2006. Available: <https://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/CDATAOnline>. Accessed 20/05/2011, 2010.
2. Department of Immigration and Citizenship. *Community Information Summary: Philippines-born*. Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra; 2006.
3. Department of Immigration and Citizenship. Settlement reporting database. Available: <http://www.immi.gov.au/settlement>. Accessed 07/12/2010, 2010.
4. Migrant Resource Centre. *Philippines born*. Migrant Resource Centre: Melbourne; 2004. Available: www.vtput.org.au/.../Philippines%20born%20profile-%20NW%20MRC.doc.
5. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). *The world fact book*. CIA; 2010. Available: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>.
6. Hassell C. *Review of Cultural Diversity Profile- Filipino Australians*. Personal communication; 25 May 2011.
7. Daniel K. *SBS World Guide: The complete fact file on every country*. Sixteenth Edition ed. Prahan Victoria: Hardy Grant Books; 2008.
8. Anti-Racism MaNIACV, O M, Vemuri, S. *Philippines: A cultural profile*. Anti-Racism, Multiculturalism and Native Issues (AMNI) Centre, Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto: Toronto; 2002. <http://www.cp-pc.ca/english/philippines/index.html>.
9. Dela-Cruz MT, Periyakoil VJ. *Health and health care of Filipino American older adults*. eCampus Geriatrics, Stanford University School of Medicine, Department of Medicine: Stanford, CA; 2010. Available: <http://geriatrics.stanford.edu>.
10. Centre for Philippine Concerns Australia. *We are Filipino: A practical guide to promoting HACC services to Filipino seniors*. Centre for Philippine Concerns Australia: Melbourne; 2003. Available: www.miceastmelb.com.au/documents/pdaproject/PilipinoKami.pdf.
11. South Eastern Migrant Resource Centre. *Filipino cultural profile- older people*. South Eastern Migrant Resource Centre: Melbourne; 2010. Available: www.sermrc.org.au/.../Filipino%20Cultural%20Profile%2021-06-10.pdf.
12. Allotey P, Manderson L, Nikles J, Reidpath D, Sauvarin J. *Cultural diversity: A guide for health professionals*. Queensland Government Press: Brisbane; 1998.
13. Araneta MR, Wingard DL, Barrett-Connor E. Type 2 diabeters and metabolic syndrome in Filipina-American women: A high-risk nonobese population. *Diabetes Care* 2002;25:494-499.
14. Cuasay LC, Lee ES, Orlander PP, Steffen-Batey L, Hanis CL. Prevalence and determinants of type 2 diabetes among Filipino-Americans in the Houston, Texas metropolitan statistical area. *Diabetes Care* 2001;24:2054-2058.
15. Thompson S, Hartel G, Manderson L, Woelz-Stirling N, Kelaher M. The mental health status of Filipinas in Queensland. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 2002;36:674-680.
16. Booth A, Leigh A, Varganova E. *Does racial and ethnic discrimination vary across minority groups? Evidence from a field experiment*. Australian National University: Canberra; 2009.
17. Thompson S, Manderson L, Woelz-Stirling N, Cahill A, Kelaher M. The social and cultural context of the mental health of Filipinas in Queensland. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 2002;36:681-687.
18. Woelz-Stirling NA, Kelaher M, Manderson L. Power and the politics of abuse: Rethinking violence in Filipina-Australian marriages. *Health Care for Women International* 1998;19:289-301.
19. Sanchez F, Gaw A. Mental health care of Filipino Americans. *Psychiatric Services* 2007;58:810-815.



© State of Queensland (Queensland Health) 2011.

This document is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 2.5 Australia licence. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.5/au>. You are free to copy, communicate and adapt the work for non-commercial purposes, as long as you attribute Queensland Health.

ⁱ Brisbane is defined as Local Government Area of Brisbane in ABS Census data

ⁱⁱ At the 2006 Census up to two responses per person were allowed for the Ancestry question, count is therefore total responses not person count.

ⁱⁱⁱ Literacy is defined as those aged 15 and over who can read and write.

^{iv} Missing and not-stated responses to this question on the census were excluded from the analysis.

It should be noted that there is great diversity within communities and people do not fit into a pre-determined cultural box or stereotype. The information presented here will not apply to all Filipino Australians and this profile should be considered in the context of the acculturation process.