



Samoa's Tongans &

A Guide for Health Professionals

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

Samoans Tongans &

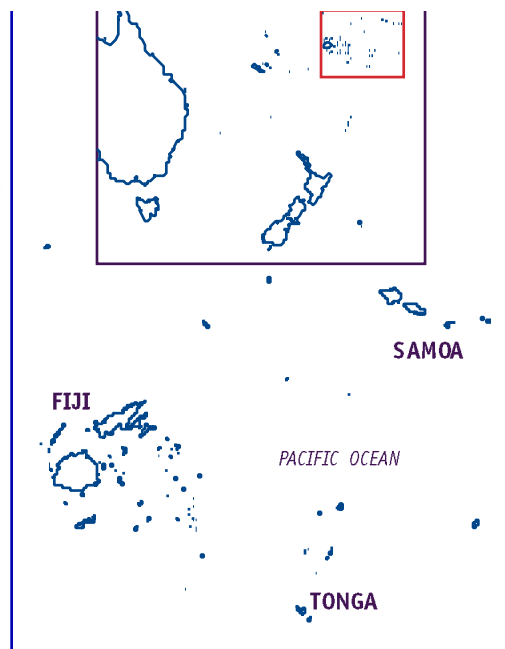
Introduction

Samoans and Tongans are both Polynesians, however, there are many differences between the two groups. There are approximately 2500 Samoans and 800 Tongans in Queensland according to the 1996 census.

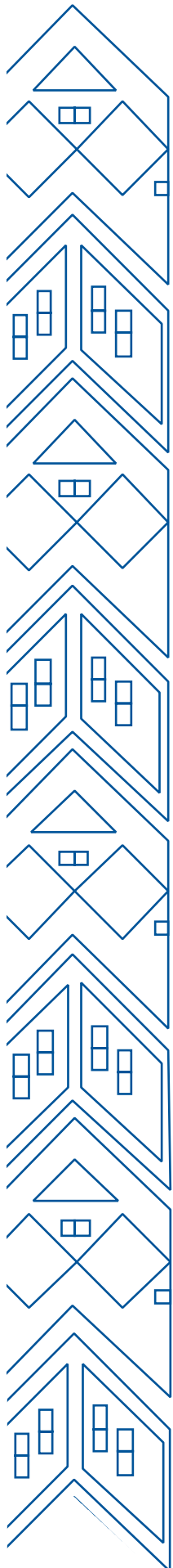
Most people from Samoa and Tonga speak English, although new immigrants and older people may not be very proficient, and an interpreter may be required.

Patient Interactions

- ⊙ It is appropriate to address Tongans by their first name; "Mr" and "Mrs" are not used in their culture. This does not apply to Samoans.
- ⊙ Samoans and Tongans tend to be shy, and tend not to ask questions or question a health professional's authority.
- ⊙ They tend to say they understand even if they don't, so you may need to check a patient's understanding.
- ⊙ Encourage them to ask questions.
- ⊙ Among both men and women, a high level of body contact is natural and normal.



- ⊙ Samoans and Tongans are very respectful of health workers, however, they may feel uncomfortable and need reassurance.
- ⊙ Ask if they need an interpreter or assistance to fill in forms, especially the elderly. An interpreter should be a trained professional, not a family member.
- ⊙ Explain clinical terms simply and slowly.
- ⊙ Rephrase questions if they don't understand. Avoid questions phrased in the negative, such as "You didn't go to hospital, did you?" which they may answer with "yes" when they mean "no".
- ⊙ A visual explanation of the problem may be more effective than written or oral explanations.
- ⊙ They may not be aware that they have a choice of treatment options, so it may be necessary to make the alternative treatments explicit.
- ⊙ The gender of the health provider may be an issue for Samoans, particularly the younger generation, and women may appreciate being asked if they mind being seen by a male doctor.



- ⦿ When explaining a serious illness, check first with the patient - they may prefer to have at least one family member present, and preferably the whole family. It may be preferable to explain the diagnosis first to a close family member and then both tell the patient together.
- ⦿ In hospital, both Samoans and Tongans like to have relatives and friends staying there too, and feel discriminated against when they can't. If this is not possible, then an explanation of your reasons will help them.
- ⦿ It may be useful to link up patients with someone from their community who understands the hospital system.

Health in Australia

Mortality rates for those born in the Pacific Islands are higher than for other Australians.

Traditionally there was a very active way of life but urbanisation, lack of exercise, smoking and dietary changes have taken their toll. Significant problems among Tongans and Samoans include obesity and its associated conditions, cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Asthma is also a problem for the Samoan community.

Utilisation of Health Services

In Queensland Samoans are often isolated from and experience lack of information regarding health services. Long waiting times for public hospitals discourage their attendance. There is also a general feeling that hospitals need to use interpreters more.

Community services are not often utilised by Samoans and Tongans, although they will generally go to the hospitals.

Health Beliefs and Practices

Traditionally, there has been a belief among both Samoans and Tongans that the more they eat, the better their status. This has naturally had major implications for their health, but is changing as their awareness of healthy eating habits increases.

- ⦿ Some Samoans may believe that illness is caused by spirits, or retribution for not helping the family in Samoa enough.
- ⦿ If Western medicine is perceived as ineffective, then Samoans may use traditional healers.
- ⦿ Queensland's climate allows the growth of many plants used for traditional medicine in Samoa, some of which are readily available.
- ⦿ For many Samoans, prayer is a very important element of the healing process.
- ⦿ Tongans will tend only to use traditional medicine if the illness is terminal and they can find the right plant to use locally.

Psychosocial Stressors

education

Few overseas-born Samoans and Tongans are educated beyond basic secondary level. The younger generation, who were born here, are able to take advantage of Australia's educational opportunities.

unemployment

Unemployment is generally high and many of those who are employed are in unskilled and low income occupations.

Racial discrimination

This is experienced by many people at school, at work and in the wider community, and creates feelings of anger and frustration, inadequacy and fear.

Isolation

Isolation can be a problem, in particular for the older generation and single parents, especially those who face language difficulties and lack of transport.

Health Care of the Aged

The Samoans are an aging community. Both Samoans and Tongans prefer to care for aged relatives at home, and generally regard it as an insult to place them in a nursing home, where their language, wisdom and history would be locked away.

Mental Health

Because of shame and stigma, mental health problems are not easily talked about outside the family, with consequent delays in seeking professional help. Your clients need to know that there is treatment available and to be encouraged to seek help early.

Women's Health

Amongst Tongans, awareness and utilisation of women's preventive health services such as Pap smears and mammography has been low. However, following a recent community awareness program this is increasing, although there is still some reluctance to attend. Although most Samoan women have heard of these

services, they may need to be encouraged to utilise them, particularly when they are attending a health service for some other reason.

Maternal and Child Health

- Both Samoans and Tongans tend to have many children.
- They may need to be strongly encouraged to attend antenatal care, and the importance of this needs to be explained to them.
- Samoan families feel it is important that children are spoken to in their own language.
- Child rearing is not restricted to natural parents.

Resources

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

Samoan Advisory Council Inc. (Logan City)
Tel: (07) 3808 7395

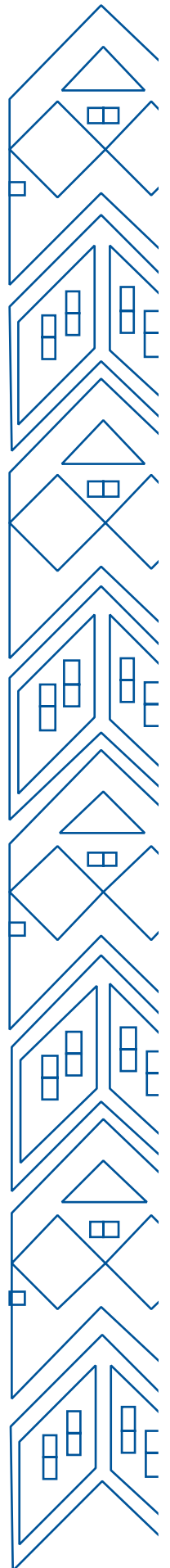
Brisbane Migrant Resource Centre
Tel: (07) 3844 8144

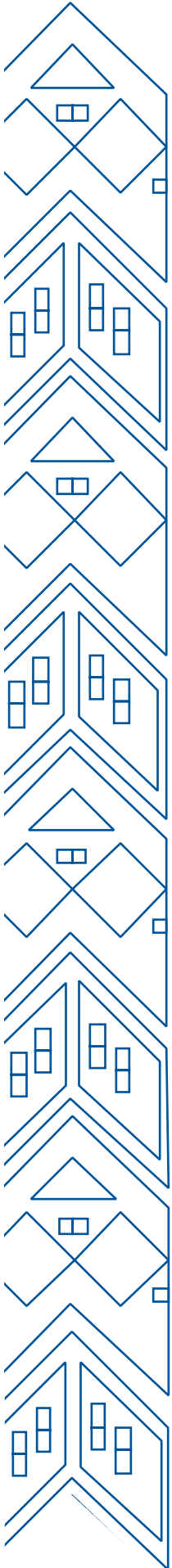
Ethnic Community Council of Queensland
Tel: (07) 3844 9166

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

Acknowledgments

This profile was developed by Pascale Allotey, Lenore Manderson, Jane Nikles, Daniel Reidpath and Jo Sauvarin at the Australian Centre for International and Tropical Health at the University of Queensland, on behalf of Queensland Health. It was developed with the assistance of community groups and health care providers. We would like to thank the Samoan Advisory Council for their input.

This is the condensed form of the full profile which may be found on the Queensland Health INTRANET - QHiN <http://qhin.health.qld.gov.au/hssb/hou/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, Ethnomed, a web-site developed by the Medical School at the University of Washington and devoted to health issues of ethnic communities, was particularly useful. The latter can be found at URL:

[http www.hslib.washington.edu clinical ethnomed.](http://www.hslib.washington.edu/clinical/ethnomed)