

# Samoaan Australians

- The majority of Samoans in Australia come from the Independent State of Samoa, previously known as Western Samoa<sup>4</sup>.
- During the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a small number of Samoa-born people migrated to Australia for commerce, education and missionary purposes<sup>2</sup>. The 1921 Census recorded 110 Samoa-born people in Australia<sup>2</sup>.
- During the 1970s, educational programs sponsored by the Australian Government resulted in increased numbers of Samoa-born people migrating to Australia<sup>2</sup>. A number of Samoa-born people have also migrated from New Zealand to Australia for work and study<sup>5</sup>.
- At the time of the 2006 Census, there were 15,239 Samoa-born people in Australia and 39,992 Australians who identified as having Samoan ancestry (13,536 in Queensland)<sup>1,6</sup>.
- **Ethnicity:** The main ethnicity is Samoan (92.6 per cent)<sup>7,8</sup>. Other ethnicities include Euronians (persons of European and Polynesian ancestry) (seven per cent), Europeans (0.4 per cent).
- **Language:** Samoan and English are both official languages of Samoa<sup>7,8</sup>. Samoan (Polynesian) is the main language spoken. Many people from Samoa also speak English<sup>9</sup>.
- **Religion:** Most Samoans are Christian. Religions in Samoa based on a 2001 census include:
  - Congregationalist – 34.8 per cent
  - Catholic – 19.6 per cent
  - Methodist – 15 per cent
  - Latter-Day Saints – 12.7 per cent
  - Assembly of God – 6.6 per cent

Population of Samoa-born people in Australia (2006 Census): 15,239<sup>1,i</sup>

Population of Samoa-born people in Queensland: 4868<sup>1</sup>

Population of Samoa-born people in Brisbane<sup>1</sup>: 4341<sup>1</sup>

Gender ratio (Queensland): 92.2 males per 100 females<sup>1</sup>

Median age (Australia): The median age of Samoa-born people in 2006 was 41.6 years compared with 46.8 years for all overseas born and 37.1 for the total Australian population<sup>2</sup>.

## Age distribution (Queensland)<sup>1</sup>:

Age	Per cent
0-19	10.1%
20-39	33.3%
40-59	45.3%
60+	11.3%

## Arrivals – past five years (Source – Settlement Reporting Database<sup>3</sup>)

Year	Australia	Queensland
2006	60	20
2007	50	12
2008	67	19
2009	89	22
2010	55	14

- Seventh-Day Adventist – 3.5 per cent
- Worship Centre – 1.3 per cent
- Other Christian – 4.5 per cent
- Other – 1.9 per cent

### Ancestry, language and religion in Australia (2006 Census for Samoa-born)<sup>2</sup>

- The top four ancestry<sup>iii</sup> responses of Samoa-born people in Australia were:
  - Samoan – 66.9 per cent
  - Not stated – 7.4 per cent
  - English – 6.8 per cent
  - German – 4.1 per cent<sup>2</sup>.
- The main languages spoken at home by Samoa-born people in Australia were:
  - Samoan – 82.7 per cent
  - English – 13.7 per cent<sup>2</sup>.
- The main religions of Samoa-born people in Australia were:
  - Catholic – 22.7 per cent
  - Latter-Day Saints – 13.7 per cent
  - Uniting church – 10.9 per cent
  - Pentecost – 9.8 per cent
  - 42.9 per cent of Samoa-born people reported their religion as *other*<sup>2</sup>.

### Communication

- The handshake is a common greeting for Samoan Australians and appropriate for both men and women<sup>10</sup>.
- Prolonged direct eye contact is not common during conversation<sup>10</sup>. Brief and frequent eye contact is recommended<sup>10</sup>.
- Samoan Australians may say *yes* when they do not necessarily understand or agree with what is being said<sup>5,9</sup>.
- Some Samoan Australians, particularly women, may be reluctant to discuss health issues openly with a health practitioner<sup>11</sup>.
- The gender of the health provider may be an issue for Samoan Australians, particularly for younger people, and women may appreciate being asked if they have a prefer a female health care provider<sup>9</sup>.

- Samoan Australians are very family oriented<sup>5</sup>. When explaining a serious illness, a patient may prefer to have at least one family member present, or their whole family<sup>9</sup>. It may be preferable for a health care provider to explain the diagnosis first to a close family member and then both tell the patient together<sup>9</sup>.
- Although English is spoken widely in Samoa, some Samoan Australians, particularly the elderly, may require an interpreter or assistance when filling in forms<sup>9</sup>.

### Health in Australia

- There is limited research on the health of Samoan Australians.
- Average life expectancy in Samoa is 72.4 years (male 69.6 and female 75.4) compared to 81.7 years for all people living in Australia (male 79.3 and female 84.3)<sup>7</sup>.
- Samoa-born people have high rates of overweight, obesity, Type 2 diabetes and hypertension<sup>6</sup>.
- The Samoa-born population in Queensland has a mortality rate 1.5 times higher for total deaths and two times higher for avoidable deaths than the total Queensland population<sup>12</sup>. The rates of hospitalisation of Samoa-born Queenslanders are between two and seven times higher<sup>12</sup>.
- Samoa-born people living in New Zealand have been shown to have a higher risk of cardiovascular disease compared to other ethnic groups<sup>13</sup>.
- In Hawaii, Samoa-born people have been shown to have higher rates of cancers including nasopharynx, liver, prostate and thyroid in men, and liver, thyroid and blood in women, than native Hawaiians<sup>14</sup>.
- In New Zealand, tuberculosis levels are relatively higher in Samoan and other Pacific Islander people<sup>15</sup>.
- There is little mental health research on Samoan communities in Australia, New Zealand and the United States<sup>6</sup>.

## Health beliefs and practices

- Some Samoan Australians believe that illness (including cancer, musculoskeletal and neurological problems) is caused by spirits, or retribution for not adequately helping family members in Samoa<sup>6,11</sup>.
- If Australian medicine is perceived as ineffective, Samoan Australians may use traditional healers<sup>6,11</sup>.
- Queensland's climate allows for the growth of many plants used for traditional medicines<sup>11</sup>. Some of these plants are readily available<sup>11</sup>.
- Prayer is an important element of the healing process for many Samoans<sup>11</sup>.

## Social determinants of health

- The overall literacy rate<sup>iv</sup> in Samoa is high. In 2001, the literacy rate was 99.7 per cent (men 99.6 per cent, women 99.7 per cent)<sup>7</sup>.
- Proficiency in English (2006 Census)<sup>v,1</sup>:
  - 85 per cent of Samoa-born men and 88 per cent of Samoa-born women reported that they spoke English well or very well
  - 14 per cent of men and 10 per cent of women reported that they did not speak English well
  - One per cent of men and two per cent of women reported that they did not speak English at all.
- At the time of the 2006 Census, 35.2 per cent of Samoa-born people aged 15 years and older had some form of higher non-school qualifications<sup>vi</sup> compared to 52.5 per cent of the total Australian population<sup>2</sup>.
- The participation rate in the workforce (2006 Census) was 63.6 per cent and unemployment rate was 9.4 per cent compared to the corresponding rates of 64.6 per cent and 5.2 per cent in the total Australian population<sup>2</sup>. The

median weekly income for Samoa-born people in Australia aged 15 years or older was \$450 compared to \$466 for the total Australian population<sup>2</sup>.

- Research suggests that domestic violence may be more prevalent in Pacific Islander communities in Australia, New Zealand and the United States<sup>6</sup>. There is some evidence to suggest that living conditions away from Samoa may increase the occurrence of domestic violence as a result of changes in gender roles with increased opportunities for education and employment for women and decreased opportunities for men, and an absence of extended family buffering and social support<sup>16</sup>.
- The loss of close family and social ties and increased family financial obligations, including remittances, may be sources of additional stress for Samoan Australians<sup>6</sup>.

## Utilisation of health services in Australia

- There are no published studies of health service utilisation of Samoa-born people in Australia.
- Samoan Australians are likely to underutilise health services because of the lower emphasis placed on health prevention and health promotion behaviours<sup>6</sup>. Other major barriers to health service usage among Samoa-born people include education level and type of occupation<sup>6</sup>.
- Church-based mobile health prevention programs including breast and cervical cancer screening programs, have proved effective in increasing cancer screening in Samoa-born women in the United States<sup>17</sup>.
- Because of shame and stigma, mental health problems are not easily talked about with people from outside of the person's family, with consequent delays in seeking professional help<sup>9</sup>.

## References

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<sup>i</sup> Samoan Australian community representatives say that the Census data underestimates the true size of the population of Samoan Australians and that the actual number of Samoan Australians living in Brisbane is considerably higher than the number reported based on Census data.

<sup>ii</sup> Brisbane is defined as Local Government Area of Brisbane in ABS Census data

<sup>iii</sup> At the 2006 Census up to two responses per person were allowed for the Ancestry question, count is therefore total responses not person count.

<sup>iv</sup> Literacy is defined as those aged 15 and over who can read and write.

<sup>v</sup> Missing and not-stated responses to this question on the census were excluded from the analysis.

<sup>vi</sup> Non-school qualifications are awarded for educational attainments other than those of pre-primary, primary or secondary education.

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 Samoan Australians and this profile should be considered in the context of the acculturation process.