



A Provider's Guide to Muslim Aged Care

“ Together we have worked to link spiritual care to everyday aged care support. ”



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Planning for Muslim Aged Care

Building relationships and co-designing services with the Muslim community is a critical starting point in developing trust and delivering culturally appropriate aged care options for Muslims.

Major barriers confronting Muslims in accessing formal services include complexity of navigating the system; language; too few culturally and religiously appropriate aged care services available; and concern by family members that they are neglecting their responsibilities by allowing their aged relatives to be cared for by others.¹

An important first step in planning for Muslim aged care is knowing the demographics of the Muslim community in your area. This will provide you with valuable data to develop targeted approaches to plan, design and deliver services, as well as address equity and access issues existing within the community.

Muslims usually make major decisions in consultation with family members or significant others such as Imams or religious scholars. The next step, therefore, is identifying key community representatives. Their support will be crucial in

getting access to the community, getting your messages and services promoted, and working together to address cultural and other barriers preventing people from using services.

To improve access by Muslims to aged care services you need to:

1. Increase the quality and appropriateness of your services
2. Enhance the cultural competency of your staff²

Developing cultural sensitivity and an understanding of issues impacting the community will provide a firm basis for productive engagement with community members.

If other organisations are providing services to the community, take care to reduce potential or unwarranted duplication. Rather, find out from the community what their priorities and access issues are, and address unmet needs wherever possible.



¹ Ahmad, Mahjabeen and Shamsul Khan, Muslims in Australia and their Aged Care Needs: An Exploratory Study with Special Reference to South Australia (updated), Islamic Information Centre of South Australia (IICSA), Adelaide, 2015

² Pe-Pua, Rogelia, Sandra Gendera, Ilan Katz, and Alison O'Connor, Meeting the Needs of Australian Muslim Families: Exploring Marginalisation, Family Issues and 'Best Practice' in Service Provision, Final Report, Prepared for the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales: 2010

Partnering with Community Organisations

All partners need to be actively involved in decision-making and be prepared to commit to community participation and involvement.

Successful community engagement requires the active support and cooperation of Muslim community organisations and key people. Muslim community partners need to be active and strong partners; advocate robustly for their community; encourage the community to know about and engage with the aged care industry, be visible, and have their voices heard; and help provider organisations to build cultural competency.

It is important to recognise that Muslim communities within Australia are ethnically diverse. No one individual Muslim or group can represent the entire community. Another key point to remember is that community leaders or organisations do not always or necessarily represent the entire community; effort must be made to connect directly with a cross-section of community members to ensure that services meet their needs.

Participation in Events and Festivals

An effective way to meet your local Muslim community is to attend and/or participate in community events.

The Australian Muslim community celebrates several religious and ethnic festivals and most are open to the general public.

The two major religious festivals are Eid-ul-Fitr celebrated at the end of Ramadan, and Eid-ul-Adha which commemorates Prophet Abraham's supreme obedience to God and marks the end of Hajj or the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.

The Mosque Open Day is hosted by a different mosque in each state and territory annually and offers an opportunity to meet mosque leaders. Guided tour of the mosque is available, stalls showcase the rich Islamic heritage, and questions from the visitors are answered by an expert panel.

The Al-Salam or Peace Festival, held annually in Adelaide, aims to specifically bring together Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Australia.



Mosque Leaders and Committees

Mosques have either a full-time or a part-time Imam who leads congregational prayers.

Some mosques have formal committees that are involved in operational decision-making and day-to-day administration, while others don't.

It is important to get to know the Imam and mosque committee members in an effort to get them to work with you in the community to build awareness and acceptance of services, to host information sessions, and to provide a valuable link between you and the community.

Language and Communication

Language is a potent tool. If used in a culturally sensitive manner, it can break down barriers; if not, it will aggravate existing barriers.

Important information needs to be drafted in the relevant ethnic language, and cultural meanings and nuances must be carefully considered.

Avoid industry jargon as well as certain words or phrases that may have negative connotations. Instead of 'aged care' use expressions such as 'support for your parents' or 'support for our elders'.

Words such as 'customers' or 'clients' may not work well in a collectivist culture. These could

be substituted in favour of other words, such as 'service user', 'care recipient' or 'consumer.'

Images that portray or support interdependence - for example a younger person holding the hand of an older person - resonate better than images of independence, such as an older person in a gym on their own.

Community based communication channels are likely to be most suitable in reaching the local community. These include ethnic magazines, newsletters, and newspapers, or community radio and TV channels, and community websites.

Dedicated/Trained Advisor/Coordinator

A dedicated Muslim staff member handling initial contacts greatly contributes to building trust and reducing fear and anxiety about the aged care system and the provider. He or she can be a very significant 'culture broker' as they facilitate service delivery and look out for any red flags.

A non-Muslim staff member who is trained in cultural sensitivity and has a basic knowledge about Muslim cultural traditions and faith practices could be an effective second-in-line.

³ Ahmad, Mahjabeen, "Cultural Safety in Muslim Aged Care: Taking the Bull by the Horns", Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging (review completed; revisions to be submitted for forthcoming publication)

Cultural Assessment

Cultural assessment of the individual seeking care needs to be an integral part of the service plan. Information gathered will lead to effective planning, designing and delivery of services that are responsive to cultural needs.

An enabling and supportive environment needs to be provided to help people feel 'culturally safe' and have the confidence to voice their priorities, preferences, and spiritual needs.³

Training of Care Staff

The backgrounds of care workers should ideally be matched as much as possible with those of care recipients.

Care workers need to be supported to build cultural understanding and use it to deliver better services.

A culture data base or modifying existing staff data bases will capture the cultural diversity elements required to match the backgrounds of care workers and care recipients.

While it is true that people generally feel more comfortable with people who are from the same or similar background, it is also true that for intimate personal care, such as showering, older people may feel more at ease with people who are from outside their own community. This highlights the importance of cultural training for care staff.

Residential Care – Practical Requirements

Accommodating the following will aid in the development of a comprehensive plan for residential aged care for Muslims.

Prayer Space:

- An aged care home near a mosque would be an advantage to those who are able to attend congregational prayers.
- A prayer room for Muslims within the facility would be considered a necessity by most Muslims entering an aged care facility, especially if they are too frail to attend a mosque. An acceptable prayer room would be a small, clean and largely unadorned space with an ablution facility in close proximity. If a

separate room is not possible, a corner or a partitioned area in a multi-faith space would be required. Prayer rugs should be available for Muslims to place on the floor during prayers. A chair is required for praying Muslims who are unable to prostrate on the prayer rug. Muslims believe in absolute monotheism and as such, no images or icons or any representation of idolatry can be visible anywhere within the prayer space.

- A sign pointing out the direction to Qibla, the direction that should be faced when a Muslim prays, would be helpful. The direction marks Kaaba, a building in the centre of Islam's most sacred mosque, Al-Masjid al-Haram in Makkah (Mecca), Saudi Arabia.

Physical Layout

- Beds should be placed so that the feet do not face the Kaaba.
- Toilets should have adequate washing arrangements as it is essential for Muslims to cleanse every time after using the toilet. Use of toilet paper is acceptable, but washing with water is still needed for purity. If a bidet is not available, at least a small water container or beaker should be provided.
- Toilets must not face the Kaaba. A Muslim must not either face or have one's back toward the Kaaba when using the toilet.
- Bathrooms must include a hand shower to wash one's feet during ablution.

Diet

- Halal food is not a choice or a preference for a Muslim, but a need that must be addressed if culturally appropriate services are being offered or promised. It may prove a challenge to cater to the halal dietary needs of a tiny number of Muslims, sometimes just one, in a care facility. But, this should in no way deprive someone from receiving needed care. In some instances, it may be necessary to collaborate with community organisations to meet the dietary needs of the person in care.



ACH Group is partnering with the Islamic Society of SA (ISSA) and the Islamic Arabic Centre to offer aged care services to Muslims.

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Founded in 1952, ACH Group is a not-for-profit community organisation promoting opportunities and services to support good lives.



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