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Acknowledgments

Cambodian-Australian Welfare Council Inc. would like to thank the many CALD workers, Khmer Elderly Group and community workers for their contribution to this resource development.

Cambodian-Australian Welfare Council Inc’ Community Partnership Program would like to thank the CPP advisory committee, previous CPP staffs, Transcultural Aged Care Service, PICAC who have shared their information and ideas to develop this booklet.
Overview

From 2009 to 2012, Cambodian-Australian Welfare Council NSW Inc received funding from the Department of Health and Ageing under the Community Partnership Program. The booklet is the one of activities outcome in 2010 to increase and promote understanding about aged care information and aged care services for Khmer community. This resource aims for the services providers to work effectively with Khmer community in order to provide the appropriate service in regarding to Khmer culture and attitude.

This booklet has been developed by researching from existing documents, internet sources and some Khmer history and cultural handbooks as supporting documents for aged care service providers who have worked with Khmer communities to better understand some Khmer Culture and attitudes towards health.

Based on the resource documents from Previous CPP workers regarding the Cambodian Cultural Information booklet, Khmer cultural briefings, Factsheets, and website, CAWC itself has a lot of information in Khmer cultural window. Internet resources play a big part in developing this booklet and all the pictures are also downloaded from the website.

This resource is divided into three parts:

**An Overview of Cambodia Culture**

**Attitudes towards Health and Ageing**

**Khmer Elderly People’s Challenge in Australia**

In the first part is an overview of Cambodian Culture. This part provides general information on Khmer with regard to Cambodian geography, migration patterns, religion, family, food, fruit and Greetings.

The second part is attitudes of Khmer towards Health. Everyone is aware that Khmer are very involved in beliefs and practices. The beliefs and practices still have strong influence on Khmer lives both in the country and people living overseas.
The third part looks at the challenges for Khmer elders who have been living in Australia. They are those who witnessed war and suffered from war and have had very difficult life experiences in the past.

We hope that this booklet will bring you the relevant knowledge of Khmer culture, behaviour and practice which still influences Khmer society and also help you to work with the wider Khmer community in an appropriate understanding about Khmer people.
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### III Khmer Elders Challenges in Australia

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I General of Cambodia

Cambodia’s Geography and Population

Cambodia is a small country which has its own language, alphabet, culture, tradition and custom. Cambodia is approximately 181,035 sq Km. The country was divided into 23 provinces and 1 city; Phnom Penh is the capital city. Most of the country consists of a low-lying alluvial plain that occupies the central part of the country.

It borders Thailand on the North-West, Laos on the North-East, and Vietnam on the South-East and also touches the sea at the South.

In the Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey (CIPS) 2004, the population was estimated at 12.824 million. 80-90% of the population were Cambodians and 10-20% was Chinese, Vietnamese and Cham. Between the years of 1975-1979 nearly 2 million Khmer people were killed during Pol Pot regime. Cambodia is well known as the country of the Killing Fields.

Migration pattern

The first Cambodian family migrated to Australia in the 1940s. In 1976, 500 Cambodians were living in Australia. The majority of the Cambodian-born community has been in Australia for a relatively short period of time. Small numbers of Cambodian refugees began arriving in Australia after Pol Pot gained power in 1975, numbers peaked in the 1980s. Between April 1975 and June 1986, 12,813 arrivals were sponsored under the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program. Family stream migration increased the numbers of the Cambodia-born in Australia to over 20,000 by the mid-1990s. By 2001, the Cambodian population had risen to 22,979. According to the August 2006 census, there were around 24,530 Cambodian-born people resident in Australia.

Khmer traditional classic band in Site 2 refugee camp in Thailand
Religion & Language

In Cambodia, 96.4% follow Theravada Buddhism compared to other religions. It is the usual religion of ethnic Khmer. Theravada Buddhism originated from North India and Nepal in the Sixth century. The principle and philosophy behind Theravada Buddhism is tolerance and non prescription. They don’t believe in a supreme being. According to the fundamental belief it says each individual takes full responsibility for their own actions and omissions.

Buddhist monks have a special place in a Khmer’s life. They are given great respect and everyone must move out of the way of monks, and only men are allowed to touch them. Some families invite the monks to their homes for ceremonial events.

In Cambodia, Buddhism has official sanction. Among Vietnamese and Chinese communities Mahayana Buddhism is widely practiced as a religion.

In Cambodia, Khmer is the official language of administration which has its own alphabet consisting of 24 vowels and 33 consonants. There is a slight difference in accent, pronunciation and in the usage of some words from province to province, particularly in the northern part of Cambodia.
Buddhist monks play an important role in Cambodian life by transmitting the Khmer culture and values. Monks set a good example for the Buddhists to follow through their good behaviour. They act as educators to temple servants novices and newly ordained monks. It was said that monks used to be the only literate people in the rural communities.

Monks participate in ceremonies, marriages and funerals but do not lead the ceremony. The monk’s main role is to pray of blessing whereas the ACHAR or culture master of ceremonies will lead the ceremonies. Traditionally monks were the healers or practitioners; their role was closest to that of modern psychologist.

Buddhism is still strong among the Cambodians living overseas, especially among the elderly. Most Cambodians believe in a supernatural world. They seek supernatural help when falling ill or in times of crisis. Traditionally, Cambodians would enlist help from a practitioner whom they believe that he / she was able to obtain help from spirits. It is believed that spirits may be found in houses, Buddhist temples, along roads, in forests and in a variety of objects. There are several types of spirits eg, ghosts, nasty demons and spirits of people who die violently, evil spirits, spirits residing in inanimate objects, guardians of the house, ancestral spirits etc. all spirits must be given respect. The living people can show respect for the spirits by providing food for the spirits, if food is not provided, misfortune may befall.
Khmer Family

The family is important to the Khmer people. The average family has four children and live together or near one another. In a Khmer family, grandparents live together with their grandchildren. The elderly are cared for by their children. This is a Khmer cultural attitude. When dealing with problem, family members will consult with the elders to discuss it. The extended family collectively celebrate success, weddings, births, deaths, festivals, disappointments, mourning for death and any other special occasions.

Generally, men are the head of the household, however due to the human loss and internal displacement after the war, many households are headed by widowed, divorced, or separated women.

Extended families usually are headed by an older parent or grandparent. However, the change after migration has shifted the powers and responsibilities more towards younger family members.
Khmer Food

Traditionally, Cambodians eat together as a family usually three times a day. A spoon and fork are most commonly used to eat.

Noodle dishes maintain a unique Khmer variation, some elements of noodle dishes were influenced by Chinese cooking.

Rice and noodles are the main components of Cambodian diet. People eat rice and fish every day in Cambodia. Almost every meal includes a bowl of rice. In Australia, rice and fish are also popular. Bread is usually only for breakfast. People like steamed rice, fried rice, or rice noodles. Sticky rice is used more in desserts with fruit like durian.

Eating rice noodles shows the influence of Chinese cuisine whereas curry dishes show the influence of Indian cuisine, although the curry base is quite different.

Fish are cooked fresh, or eaten dry or salted called salted fish.

Cambodians like seasonings such as hot peppers, lemon grass, ginger and various mints. Cambodians also use fish sauce. Fish sauce is used as a dipping sauce, is also used in soups, and stir-fried cuisine.

The main ingredient of many Khmer curries and desserts are coconut milk.

Cambodians like sweet desserts which are made from either fruit or rice. Now in Australia they eat less sweet food to reduce the sugar level. Cambodians also drink tea and coffee with condensed milk which was introduced by the French.

Cambodians use forks, spoons but sometimes when eating noodle soup, they use chopsticks. Chillies are a favourite for some Khmer people.
Typically Cambodians have at least 2 or 3 separate dishes for every meal. Each dish has a different taste, sweet, sour, salty or bitter.

Some of the Cambodian dishes are:

- Amok, people steam catfish with curry in banana leaf cups.
- Somlor Korko - soup which mixes many kinds of vegetable and vegetable’s leave and fish.
- Sngao chruok mwun - sour chicken soup with herbs and lemon juice.
- Sieng khtih - fermented soy bean dip served with fresh vegetables.
- Sngao Ngum Ngu: Soup made with chicken and flavoured with pickled lemons (small dried, salted marinated).
- Sumlor mchou kroeung sut ko – spiced beef in sour soup
- Sngao mreah – soup with bitter melon gourd stuffed with minced pork and bean thread.
- Num sangkhya lpeou – pumpkin filled with custard made from egg yolks, palm sugar and coconut milk.

Num Chak – Sticky rice and coconut grilled in Chak leaf.

In most cases Cambodian Elderly prefer their own ethnic food. They are not very comfortable tasting new cultural food. During meetings and in a residential care environment it is important to provide them with their own ethnic food. Cambodian Elders often consider having their own ethnic food is a very important aspect of their life. Among Khmer Elders, rice porridge and sour fish soups are popular.
Mangoes/Bananas/Jackfruit/Ramputan/Lychees/
Durians/Pineapple/Pomegranate/Tamarind/Mangosteen/Rockmelon

In Cambodia, jasmine tea is a national drink, due to the heat and humidity in the climate they often have lots of fresh juices, fruit shakes and soft drinks. Very few Cambodians are vegetarian.

Khmer Fruits
Greeting and Gesture

Cambodians greet each other by placing both hands together in a prayer position at the chest level without touching the body. The higher the hands are placed, the greater the sign of respect, although they should never be held above the level of the nose. This gesture is accompanied by a slight bow to show respect for persons of higher status or age. This gesture is accompanied by a slight bow to show respect for persons of higher status or age. Persons holding or carrying something may simply bow their heads slightly. Shaking hands is not common in Cambodia. Although there are many terms used in greeting, one common greeting is

Chum Reap Suo - Sok Subai.

Rules governing gestures come from Buddhism. While sitting, one should not point the feet towards a Buddha image or any person. To Buddhists, The head is the most sacred part of the body. One does not touch another person’s head (even a child’s), and one generally avoids sitting or standing on a level more elevated than that of an older person. Raising the voice is a sign of a bad personality. It is very improper to embarrass another person in public. Waving the hand is a friendly gesture, as is an “open” or friendly face, good friendly face, good eye contact, or a smile. In communication, one must be careful to clearly distinguish between a “yes” that a person is listening, and a “yes” meaning the person understands.

Khmer Greeting Style
Clothing

Traditional public dress for women consists of a skirt “Samput” and a blouse. Men wear trouser, shirts and sweaters. A traditional Cambodian multi-purpose garment is the checkered scarf called “Krama”, which may be used as a shawl, turban, sarong, a towel or even carrying bag. In Australia they wear traditional dress at home, but in the work place they wear the same as western dress.
II Attitude towards Health and Ageing

Health Belief and Practise

In general, the Khmer elders are comfortable with cosmopolitan or western medicine and with traditional or indigenous healing practices, both spiritual and medicinal (and often both). Traditionally Cambodian elders dealt with their illness through their own self care and self-medication. Due to the cost factor and limitation of health care facilities in Cambodia (especially in rural areas) many of them try home remedies/treatment before seeking assistance from health practitioners.

Herbal medicine

While a lot of people all over the world are turning to modern medicine to treat diseases, some Cambodians still use Khmer traditional medicine, because it is cheap and effective, or merely old habits dying hard.

Cambodians usually deal with illnesses through both modern and traditional medicine, often self-medicating and inevitably using more than one treatment for the same illness. However, those who use traditional medicine can in fact save themselves money. In Cambodia, there is access to over-the-counter-drugs at low cost, since most are often produced in the region. Western produces medication is available in urban areas but the costs are relatively higher.

Khmer traditional medicine is a form naturopathy and combines differing roots, barks, leaves of various trees, some minerals and other natural ingredients. In total this branch of medicine can treat more than 100 different diseases. Practitioners of this therapy are known as Kru Khmer (traditional healer). According to Mr. Yeay Ysreng, Deputy Director of National Centre of Traditional Medicine, “about 40 to 50 percent of the population in remote areas are using traditional medicine because
they are poor and it is cheaper than Western medicine. It also cures them of their ailments all the same.”

The ancient Khmers first formulated this medical lore, during and around the Angkor period. From the turn of the first millennia until the present day, this system of the treatment has served the people of Cambodia.

“At that time, they only had traditional medicine to treat illness—they did not have hospitals yet,” said Yean Ysreng. They also didn’t have microscopes and they dealt with illness by guessing the disease. For example, when they saw someone coughing they would guess that was tuberculosis.”

In Cambodia, herbs are often grown in a home garden or in the forest or bought at the herbal shop. They can discuss with the seller about the herb because most of the sellers are traditional healers. There are many way of treatment by herbs. Some herbs are used in different ways: swallowed (pill), boiled, steamed, smoked, or rolled (rubbed) on the skin.

**Khru Khmer** (traditional healer), can be a person who specialises in medicinal practice with a spiritual component. Other Kru Khmer specialize in magic with medicinal component such as for snake bite, nervous breakdown, and washing (Sroit Tuk) the patient – Water is thrown over the patient. They always carried out their procedure with prayer and spiritual activities. The normal diseases, fever, cold, cough, sexual transmitted, and women’s diseases are also treated by Kru Khmer.

Kru Khmer specialize in broken bones, Khmer people who live in the countryside believe in the Kru khmer when they have accidents or broken bones. They believe it can be healed effectively, by using herbs and magic from spirits. Most of the Kru Khmer learn from each other especially within their own family. Now the Cambodian government also has a program for people who want to a traditional healer. The Traditional Doctor are receiving recognition and training from the government at The National Centre of Traditional Medicine.
Spirit Traditional Healer Known as Kru

Kru Khmer Treat by Spirit Possession, herbs, prescribe manner to the broken bone person
**Spiritual Healing Practices**

Cambodian Elders from rural villages have a strong belief in spirits and spirit influence in individual lives. Sometimes they believe illness or sicknesses are caused by spirit possession or evil spells. They seek support from spiritual healers known as “Kru’ if they believe illness is caused by spirit possession. The amulets are pieces of string, commonly worn around the neck of children or around the waist by adults and Elders for their better health, and to be free from spirits. Types of amulets include a small piece of metal inscribed with sacred words written in Pali and rolled around a string. These amulets are kept in the prayers to attain power. Some amulets are big for house building. They are put under the pillar or on the main beam of the house. They believe that the whole family will then have good health. Other spiritual or magical means of treating illness include blowing on the sick person’s body in a prescribed manner and showering or rubbing with lustral or blessed water.

Pray for the outside spirit when they have problem in family or one of their members fall sick

The sample of bodyguard in front of the gate door to prevent family from bad spirits
Yuan (magical picture)

Yuan are the magical thing, written in ancient script (Pali). It is placed on the door, in the house, or kept in the pocket for travelling purpose. The majority of Khmer population believe that Yuan can protect and help them to have better health and avoid problems from all enemies.

Kru prescribed manner and spell the magic on the water for the people
Tattoos

Khmer elderly people believe on tattoos means to protect them again harm or illness. That is the arts of designs and magical on the body wherever necessary following the common law. The inscription on the body mention about the power to protect them from enemies, produce spirit power and avoid all of evil spirits.

The arts on the body have many times

This is a Buddhist Pali incantation written in Khmer script, the language of Cambodia. It is there to protect her and her adopted Cambodian son Maddox from bad luck.

Here's the translation:

May your enemies run far away from you.
If you acquire riches, may they remain yours always.
Your beauty will be that of Apsara.
Wherever you may go, many will attend, serve and protect you, surrounding you on all sides.
Meditation and Prayer

Among Cambodian elderly, temple worship is highly valued; they also have an altar at home for prayers. Temple worship is led by one or more of the monks. Elderly people participate in worship through chanting and meditation. When you visit Buddhist temples you can see Khmer elders participating in group meditation and prayer activities. During meditation they use breathing (Buddhist dictionary - Anapana Sati) techniques to calm their mind.

Most Cambodian Buddhist Elders have their own chanting books for prayers. Many Elders feel through participating in these activities they feel relaxed and inner harmony is achieved.

Sroit Tuk (Washing or Showering)

Washing is done by traditional healers, known as Kru, when they find a person has been affected by spirit possession or evil spirits or doing wrong with their own guardian spirit. This showering can also be done by a Monk, or respected elderly people living in the temple. They can help the sick people or ordinary people to have good luck and good health and be protected from bad spirits.

During the showering, the Kru prescribes his own manner, showering, blowing his own breath, and rubbing to the people. A gift is also offered to the Kru, according to what each Kru guardian requires. The patient must respect the Kru’s guardian or they can’t treat them because Kru has to respect his guardian, so that the Kru won’t become either severely sick or believe no affect on the treatment.

Things on the altar at home for worship
Monks in Cambodia still play an important part in the treatment in the same traditional way as a traditional healer. Many people are very involved with the temple when they get sick either emotional physical, they are looking for the monk to do showering to them. The gift for the monk should be offer up to the sick person.

Health regarding to delivery practice

Khmer traditional practice after giving birth is very important not only for the countryside but also for the city population as well. Traditional Birth Attendants are popular for people living at the remote area. TBAs practiced bathing the newborn baby either with lukewarm water, fresh water and use soap.

“Roasting” the woman has to stay in the bed, approximately 1 meter above the ground under which a charcoal fire is placed. This practise could last 2-3 days. They believe that the women can lose a lot of energy, so it may restore her energy back. The traditional wine, with mixture of bark trees is a very commonly used as a medicine after delivery. During the “roasting” they apply the traditional herbs on the body and only certain food is eaten and this has to be mixed with lot of pepper as they believe that can help to quickly restore energy and beauty.

The sesame, tea, other varieties of the tree roots, leaves and barks was used as the herbal base in making tea to drink. They believe that the drinks make the birth passage slippery. The pregnant woman prepares the herbs from the beginning of the pregnancy or in the 4th or 5th month of pregnancy.
During the three days after the delivery, they believe that the baby belongs to the world spirit, so in those three days is very important for them to look after the baby with great care. After this, the Kru Khmer or family have to prepare food and fruit offerings to the spirit. They always put some of these things on the baby bed head like scissors, a knife, cotton string, amulets, yuan, or a wild life horn to protect the baby from evil spirits.

Khmer are very fearful after delivery. In the traditional way there are many taboos in regarding food, carrying, working, exposure to rain and wind or having sexual intercourse in the first 3 months. They believe breaking taboos can cause sickness. Taboos are in effect for almost 3 to 6 months based on the health of each woman.

**Coin Rubbing**

Khos Khjol is the Cambodian term for coining or coin rubbing, meaning literally that one can use a coin to rub away the wind. Coining is done to draw off excess wind in the body as it is believed that fever, muscle aches, low energy and coldness are caused by the excessive amount of wind entered the body. So to restore the body balance, coining is done to release the excessive wind. It is one of the Cambodian valid cultural practices of rubbing the skin with a coin. In the Cambodian culture, “catching a cold, or fever” is referred to as “catching the wind”. This relates to the Chinese principle of ying and yang; everything in the universe is inter-related.

Coin rubbing is to alleviate symptoms of sickness. And by using khos khjol on the person, it is believed that the wind illness can be removed from the body. In some cases people with a headache would also want coining as a way to treat the headache. The common sites of application are the back, shoulder, neck and chest. It is a well-known procedure and no complications are known. It is a common remedy in Cambodia and for overseas Cambodians.

Marks left after coining is an indication of whether the imbalance is mild or strong. If the person has a small excess of wind, the marks left after coining are light. If the person has a large excess of wind, the marks are darker.

Releasing the excess wind by coining will restore the natural balance between yin and yang in the body, and improve health. Coining and massaging are designed to balance the yin and yang forces, eliminate illness and discomfort. Massaging with warm oils helps the muscles.

This practice can be easily confused with possible abuse because after the coin rubbing has been done to someone, the skin turns red, it leaves marks on the
person and it looks like some form of violence has happened to the person. Many Cambodians feel that if they are not coined when they are sick, they would not get better.

Before coining begins, the person lies down on a bed and a massage will be given using essential oils. Since Khos khjol treatment involves a coin and essential oils, medicated oils or vicks vapour rub.

Research has shown that Physicians have publicized the harmless nature of coining; it is not known to be harmful. Although the marks on the skin look painful, they are not. It is helpful to understand its traditional therapeutic value and make a distinction between marks of coining and signs of abuse. After coining, people feel a sense of relief.

Coining is commonly used to

- Reduce fever
- Treat fatigue
- Treat headache, muscle injuries, stiffness, pain, immobility

**Cupping**

Cambodians also practice cupping. It is done by heating a series of glasses and then placing the open mouth of the glass on the skin of a sick person’s back. This forms a suction that leaves a red circular mark. Cupping procedures may be done between three and four times down the back on both sides of the spine, resulting in between six to eight circular contusions on the back. This application is done to draw out the bad forces.

Similar to coining, cupping leaves distinctive marks on the skin but the practice is harmless.

This is done by placing hot cups on the skin until the skin turns red. It is similar to the Chinese method of cupping. According to Dr. Sheftall, American Medical Centre, Phnom Penh Post, 2007 as quoted by [IRA], “coining and cupping reroutes the blood flow by opening up the arterials near the skin surface cooling the blood and in turn it can reduce fever.”
Pinching (Chap Khjol)

According to some interpretation, pinching is a form of massage applied to relieve a headache. It can be done to alleviate a headache, pinching the skin forms a dermabrasion and this allows the bad force to leave the body. It can be a painful massage when it is done so hard that the skin will turn red and stay red for several days.

Pinching is done by rubbing the temples, pulling forward to the eyebrow and nose, it includes pinching.

Steaming or Vaporige (Spoong)

Khmer traditional steaming, called spoong, is very popular for many centuries and even now most families still use it after they have delivered a baby. They also found that, it can help them to rebuild energy balance, and make skin more healthy and beautiful.

Sometime steaming is used to treat people who have a skin problem on the face and people who always have a headache, cold and Flue

Prepare a mixture of herbs/Put them in a pot/Place it somewhere safely/Use a towel and drape it over your head/Position your face just above the basin of hot water and Make sure the towel or blanket covers the basin.
Breathe in the steam clear nasal passage. This is done to draw out the bad forces.
Medicated Oils or Balms

Medicated oils or balms are used to rub over the skin and also used for breathing when they fell ill with headache, fever or pain.

Medicated oils or Balms are used for a minor problem as a temporary need or first aid thing and we always found that many of Asian people keep it in their pocket all the time.

Massage

There are many types of massage in Cambodia, some by the traditional healer. Some of them use oil or some not based on the healer. They can look at specific pain area on the body or the whole of the body. The massage is used to relax or treat the pain, it also follow the body’s energy lines from the feet to the head. The body movement and stretching are interpreted.

They believe that the massage will improve the blood circulation, motivate smooth body movements in accordance to the natural function. This also relieves pain form joints and muscles and mind.

Khmer Massage
Western Medicine

Generally Cambodians are comfortable with western medicine. However it is likely that they will try home remedies first before visiting a doctor. Cambodians view western health care as a way to relieve the symptoms. When they see a doctor, they expect that they will be prescribed with something that can cure their illness immediately. When they feel that they no longer experience a symptom or the symptom disappears, they will be likely to stop using the prescribed medicines. This is due to the belief that if they don’t experience the symptom, there is no illness. It is advisable that health practitioners discuss in detail with a client if she/he needs a long-term treatment and to use preventive, long-term medications. It is also common for Cambodians to save some quantities of half-used prescribed medicine, this is because of the belief that if the symptom disappears, there is no illness, they keep half-used prescription drugs because they think that they might need it again in case they fall sick with the same symptoms, and besides it is a way to save money. Therefore the health practitioner needs to discuss at length that the full course of anti-biotic must be followed. Some also believe that western medicines, especially oral medication can throw the body out of balance, because it has chemicals and for this reason, compliance is a barrier. For these reasons Cambodians may use alternatives such as a balm as it may better meet the person’s need and their cultural values.

In some cases, Cambodians believe that western medicines are developed for westerners; the dosages are strong for their cultural body build, so they might readjust the dosage to meet what they regard as correct for their body build.

Generally speaking, to get the maximum health benefits Cambodians will combine elements of treatment from resources.

It is also important to note that Buddhism plays an important part in the Cambodian culture and has a great influence over people’s thinking, may Cambodians view an illness as something outside their own control, as a bad karma, a result from a bad deed that they did in a previous life. Therefore health providers need to consider this when educating Cambodian Australians about risk factors for an illness, for example, fatty diet is a risk factor for heart disease, Cambodians will appreciate guidance from health care providers related to health issues.

Caring for Cambodian Elders

In most circumstances, Cambodian elders traditionally live with their children. Children feel it is their responsibility and duty to care for their parents. In situations such as when elders don’t have children then they live with their other relatives.
After the migration process, many Cambodian families are facing difficulties in caring for their Elders due to a new life style and changes in responsibilities. These changes are challenging some of their traditional values and roles. Therefore choosing residential care as an option is still a huge challenge for many Cambodians.

Many Cambodians feel uncomfortable, guilt and shame in sending their Elders to residential care. They are keener to work with home care services and other alternative support systems before considering residential care.

Dying and death

Cambodian Elder’s lives are often filled with religious and spiritual principles. These principles and life values assist them towards a harmonious ageing journey and peaceful dying process.

Many are Elderly migrants (lived more than half of their life time in another land and escaped from the Cambodian Holocaust) and dying in another country can sometimes cause a wide range of emotional suffering. Such emotions can be like survivors guilt and guilt over decisions made during the Holocaust.

In Cambodia, dying mostly happens at home (the body may be kept at home for one to three days). This offers family members an opportunity to share grief and sadness collectively. At the same time this provides opportunities for visitation and religious ceremonies. In the process of treatment withdrawal it is important for medical professionals to consult with family members about these issues.

Generally the funeral ceremony happens according to the families’ religious practices. Family members collectively make decisions about funeral proceedings. After the death, the body should be washed and prepared by the family. The hands are placed in the prayer position. Candles and incense are placed in the hands. Some families sometimes place a coin in the mouth of the deceased. In most circumstances cremation is preferred in Cambodian culture though some may have different preferences (e.g. Chinese-Cambodian). Ceremonies are usually held in day 7 after the death and again at 100 days after the death and follow by every anniversary.

According to Cambodian culture after the funeral ceremonies, friends and family members visit the family and make a financial contribution.
III Khmer Elderly Challenges in Australia

Language

Many Cambodian elderly lack adequate English skills and that is the one of the biggest challenges for them. Cambodian is a war torn country, prolonged over nearly two decades with civil war, this factor is the cause of Cambodians falling into poverty, illiteracy rates rising, and traumatizes diseases. They have no opportunity to study English since they were in their homeland. They always need an interpreter or own children to help in most cases.

According to a study developed by SW Sydney HACC Multicultural Access Project, Bankstown Area Multicultural Network Inc. in partnership with members of the Khmer Interagency Working Group for Frail Aged, Younger People with a Disability and their Carers highlighted a high proportion of older people from the Cambodian community, more than 98% of participants aged between 36 and 87 have little or no English spoken skills while about 75% of the forty-five participants cannot read English.

Lack of knowledge about service

Due to language difficulties and late age migration many elders have very little knowledge about current social care systems especially about age care services. In most situations they prefer to work with Khmer workers or interpreters when dealing with any social service or governmental departments for any support.

Transport support

Khmer Elders face difficulties in accessing social groups and support services due to a lack of transport support. They have difficulty accessing public services due to language difficulties. The lack of transport support creates social isolation, marginalization and dependency problems among Khmer Elders.

Minority group

The Cambodian community is still a minority community compared to other immigrant communities. Therefore they are a minority whose voices and needs are not represented fully the mainstream sector. Equally the community also faces a lack of resources, in participating or contributing to current social planning. As a minority group Cambodian Elderly issues are not heard or represented adequately in the mainstream sector.
**Past trauma effect and memories loss**

Most Cambodians over the age of 35, have lived through the regime of Pol Pot. Therefore they have experienced dislocation, torture and trauma, rape, starvation, solitary confinement and forced separation from families. For many older people these past experiences can still be painful or not really dealt with. As they move into old age, these unresolved memories and issues affect their memory and resurface again.

**Cambodian Elders challenges in residential care services**

Many Cambodian Elders have very limited English language skills therefore they feel they will be more isolated in a residential care setting. Most Elders prefer to live in a very similar cultural environment, where they can enjoy the last part of their life time.

Food is another important element in a Cambodian Elders’ life they often, find it very difficult to taste or accept ethnic food. Most of these community members are not familiar with residential care services therefore there is an unknown fear and taboo around this issue. In this community, the cost of services is a factor which works as a barrier towards accessing residential care services.
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