

FILIPINO COMMUNITY

Note: Not all the template categories may be covered in this profile by the community writer—some categories may not have been relevant to this culture.



INTRODUCTION

- The term ‘seniors’ in the Filipino community pertains to people aged from 60 and above.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- The first Filipino in Canada had arrived by 1931. From 1956 to 1964, more Filipino immigrants entered the country through the U.S., mostly as temporary residents or visitors on tourist visas.
- Currently, Filipinos make up one of the largest group of immigrants in Canada. The Philippines ranks fourth on a national scale and first in the province of Alberta (Statistic Canada) among the top 10 countries of origin for immigrants.
- There were 10,495 Filipinos in Edmonton, as of the 1996 census, making them the fifth largest ethnic group in the city.

LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Languages spoken, written and alphabet used

- There are approximately 150 languages spoken by different ethno-linguistic groups all over the Philippine Islands. Three of these languages serve as “lingua franca”: Ilokano in the northern region and some central parts of Luzon; Tagalog in the central part and southern regions of Luzon, including most parts of Palawan; and Cebuano in the Visayas, Mindanao and some areas of Palawan.
- The national language is called Pilipino. Pilipino is primarily Tagalog, the language spoken by a minority of people in the Manila region. It is highly structured grammatically and has a rich vocabulary, with words invented or borrowed from Spanish, English and other native dialects. More than half of the population understands Tagalog.
- There are eight major languages and these are Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilokano, Hiligaynon/Ilonggo, Waray, Bikolano, Pangasinense and Kapampangan.
- Almost all Filipinos can speak at least one official language, with 95% able to carry on a conversation in English.

Communication styles

- Filipinos find it difficult to maintain eye contact when talking to a superior or someone from a high position or social status. This cultural behaviour could be misinterpreted by others to imply lack of confidence or mistrust. This behaviour is rooted in Hiya, which could also explain why some Filipinos find it difficult to ask for further explanation or ask questions. They would rather remain silent, even when they need more information.
- Generally Filipinos do not question the authority of professionals such as doctors and nurses, whom they hold in high esteem. Hence the tendency to remain silent or to be readily agreeable with what has been said. This should not be interpreted as failure to understand the issues involved.
- When consulting a doctor, the sons or daughters often accompany the elderly people and speak on their behalf. While this may be seen as loss of autonomy, some elderly people feel more comfortable talking about their ailments to someone familiar rather than to a health professional.
- Respect for parents and elders among children is of uttermost importance to Filipino adults. Discipline for some children can only be enforced through scolding, spanking or pinching, which could be perceived as forms of abuse in other cultures.
- Filipinos typically employ formality and honourable language that conveys proper respect for authority, status and position, as indicated by the terms and titles used to address people. For example, a lawyer will continue to be addressed as “attorney” by clients, friends and colleagues well after more personalized and informal relationships have been established.

- Filipinos may also find it impolite or embarrassing to decline social invitations or to respond directly to a request where they might want to give a negative answer or contrary opinion.
- When Filipinos are opposed to an issue or question at hand, they generally will make an ambiguous statement rather than say “no.” They will say “maybe” or “I don’t know”. They find it hard to reject or disagree, especially when conversing with someone considered superior.
- When they feel the truth will offend or embarrass someone, they answer indirectly. The purpose of an evasive reply is not to deceive but to please or avoid confrontation.
- Filipinos have a highly developed sensitivity to the non-verbal aspect of communication. Filipinos are considerably less dependent on spoken words than are Europeans and Americans. They watch their listeners carefully and identify body language cues to assess what the person is feeling.

EDUCATION

- Seniors who are capable and have the motivation can access adult education. But there are factors that would constrain them, such as transportation, time, language barrier and money.
- Education is seen as a path for upward mobility, and 90 per cent of the population over 10 years of age is literate. Education is compulsory until the age of 12. Statistics indicate that children from the poorest 40 per cent of the population do not attend school. Status is further integrally linked to the level of education.
- Filipinos view education as a passport to a good job, economic security, social acceptance and an easy way out of a cycle of poverty and lower class status, not only for their children but for the whole family.
- Education, then, is not an individual but a family concern, and considered to be an economic investment towards which family members must contribute significant effort and often personal sacrifice.

RELIGION AND FAITH GROUPS

- For the Filipinos, there is the adage “Health is wealth”. Very often they will assert that as long as they are in good health, they can bravely overcome seemingly insurmountable odds. With religious fervour, many Filipinos believe that health is a blessing: a grace that comes from faith in the Divine. That is why seeking medical attention is usually interspersed with the healing of prayer or an invocation of a patron Saint.

- The majority of Filipino immigrants are Christians. Most are Roman Catholics, but some are Protestants. A few belong to other religious denominations and about 2% are not affiliated with any religious groups.
- Religion has a profound influence on the well being of Filipinos. Many participate in church-related activities such as retreats and bible camps. Religion is seen as helping them maintain their spiritual, social, emotional, psychological and physical well-being.
- Rooted in religious faith, healing may take the form of a healing service provided by a church minister or priest. It may also be prayers by a group or offering a special prayer called “novena” for the sick.
- Disability in a child may represent a divine punishment for sins that were committed by the parents or their ancestors, or moral transgression against God. This spiritual retribution induces a shared sense of shame (Hiya) that affects the entire family.
- Religious beliefs also are employed to account for various disabilities. The traditional deep faith in God and belief in “Bahala Na” may reinforce a fatalistic orientation whereby a disability is accepted as God’s will.

FOOD AND DIETARY GUIDELINES

- Filipinos do not consider it a meal if rice is not served. Plain rice is the basis of the diet. Salt water and freshwater fish are eaten daily and are served either fresh or salted. Fish, chicken and pork are usually fried, although people are becoming health conscious and often choose alternative methods of cooking.
- Garlic is added to food because it is considered healthy. Filipino food is not spicy. All food is cooked on gas burner or wood or charcoal fires.
- Table knives are not used. Forks and spoons are used for dining. The traditional method of placing food on a banana leaf and eating with one’s hands is also used throughout the country. It is acceptable to eat food with one’s hands at restaurants as well as in the home.
- Lechon, a suckling pig that has been roasted until the skin forms a hard brown crust, is served at important occasions. The importance of the host and the occasion are measured by the amount of Lechon served.

FAMILY STUCTURE

- Filipinos regard the family as a bastion of strength and support, and a haven which they can always turn to without any fear or doubts about being accepted back, for example from a broken marriage.
- Most families of immigrants from the Philippines are closely knit. In 1991, 81% of those aged 15 to 64 lived with their immediate family.

- The extended family is cherished in Filipino culture. Hence, seniors from this group are more likely to live with their immediate family. As grandparents, they are considered members of the immediate family and most often caregivers for their grandchildren.
- Men are still generally considered as head of the household, with the expectation that they serve as the economic providers. The Filipino women generally assume the responsibility of managing the homes and taking care of the family. However, coping with the economic demands of a modern society like Canada, Filipino couples, especially those who are both working, tend to share household and family responsibilities.
- Children, including older siblings, are taught early on to respect and obey their elders. When parents are old, children are expected to take care of them. Hence, the idea of spending the remaining years in an institution or nursing home is still not embraced by many Filipinos.
- Parental respect is a cherished Filipino cultural value. That is why Filipino parents continue to live with at least one of their children.
- Seniors who are left alone in the homes of their children feel isolated and alienated. They long for the care and support of family members back home and dread the idea of a nursing home. Such feelings of homesickness, isolation and alienation could develop into more serious problem for the elderly.
- Some Filipino seniors deplore the behaviour of the young. Although it may not be the intention, the way some young people talk has been considered offensive by some elderly, who find such behaviour unacceptable. This could cause stress for the elderly whose expectations are quite different from what they experience.
- While families desire male children, females are welcome to provide help in the house and provide a home when the parents get old. The eldest daughter is expected to provide money for the education of younger siblings and for the needs of aging family members. Women are responsible for managing the family's finances.
- Divorce is illegal, but annulment is available for the dissolution of marriage. Reasons for annulment may include physical incapacity and physical violence or pressure to change one's religious or political beliefs. Marriage between people of different faiths is rare.
- Traditionally, the elderly are treated with love and respect. Grandparents play a significant role in the Filipino family. They are consulted on family matters and participate in decision making. Because they have accumulated wealth of experience and wisdom, their advice is followed. Grandmothers who are still in good health help with childrearing and household chores. And next to the parents, they are a major influence on the children's development.
- It is common for children, in a tradition known as "Mano", to kiss the right hand or put the right hand of the elderly on their forehead as a way of showing respect. These elderly could be parents, grandparents, uncles or aunts.

- When children embark on their own lives, elderly couples or widowed parents do not live alone. Such individuals belong to an extended family that supports and cares for aged parents and grandparents.

HEALTH BELIEFS, CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON HEALTH AND HEALING

- Health is associated with strength, being active, a sense of well-being and the absence of discomfort or pain. Filipinos have endurance or a high degree of tolerance to pain. A headache or slight fever may be brushed aside, which explains why they still manage to work even when they do not feel well.
- Filipinos have a tendency not to seek medical attention immediately. The fear of being isolated from their families, which staying in a hospital would entail, drives them to put off visiting a physician and avoid going for medical check-ups.
- For newcomers and seniors, making the initial contact with those who provide health services could be difficult and filled with anxiety, especially when they go there alone. Although most Filipinos are able to carry on a conversation in English, they are often seized with the fear of not being able to ask or answer the right question or of being understood. Since some immigrants were told not to ask questions as they grew up, they are prone to agree even if they would not want to, just to get out of a situation.
- Doctors are regarded with very high esteem in the Philippines. The information they provide has the authoritative stamp of being adequate and the patient is restricted by *Hiya* (in Filipino culture this is translated as embarrassment or shame). Filipinos will not ask for alternative forms of treatment unless it is voluntarily offered. In many cases, Filipino patients need the presence of a family member when consulting a physician to give strong boost to an otherwise tense and worried sick person.
- Practices such as standard isolation procedures and visitor restrictions in a hospital are rules that Filipinos usually find difficult to imagine and to comprehend. A companion of a Filipino patient ministering to her needs in a hospital ward or a visitor staying for long hours is not an unfamiliar sight.
- Like the health professionals, traditional healers play an important role in the well being of Filipinos. They offer alternative ways to treat illnesses and to promote health.

Traditional medicine, herbal medicine and home remedies

- Filipinos, even in Canada, cling to their traditional healing practices, claiming the efficacy of “grandma’s medical wisdom”. The use of oil, water and herbs to alleviate pain, to check the spread of skin rash, to contain a swelling or to treat a boil or wart has become common procedure, taken as a matter of fact after having been handed down from generation to generation. Aloe vera extract is used to treat burns while the soothing effect of oregano leaves prevents swelling.

- Among the more traditional forms of self medication are certain Chinese oils or ointments, which serve as a “cure for all” in relaxing, heating, and comforting the muscles or providing relief from dizziness, colds, headache, sore throat and so forth.
- Other self-medication may include the use of folk healing techniques. For example, a technique called “ventosa” is used for treating joint pain, which is believed to be caused by the presence of “bad air”. This technique consists of wrapping a coin with cotton, wetting the tip with alcohol, lighting it and placing the coin on the aching joint area, then immediately covering it with a small glass or cup. The fire is extinguished as soon as it is covered, creating a vacuum that will suck the bad air out of the joint.
- The various types of healers common throughout the Philippines include midwives, masseurs and specialists for ailments caused supernaturally. Although these types of healers each have native labels, there is no traditional word for “faith healers”, which is the newest and increasing genre of Filipino folk healers.
- Some Filipinos believe in Kulam (witchcraft). They believe that illness and bad luck are caused by witchcraft and people resort to faith healers and prayers to get well

How seniors perceive Western medicine

- The health care system in Canada is highly valued by the Filipino seniors who live here, because the health and welfare of seniors is a priority. Health services and health providers are easily accessible. In the Philippines, only those who can afford to pay can access health services.

SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL ISSUES

Change of roles in family life

- Seniors in Canada who are physically able to work look for jobs. They want to be independent and not depend on their children for financial support. Others don’t want to be a burden to their children so they offer to take care of their grandchildren, without asking for any payment. This makes them feel valuable because they are also contributing something to the family. Other seniors babysit other children in their homes as a form of income.
- Elder abuse exists in the Filipino community. Although it is not being reported, it is very common. Some examples of abuse include seniors used as caregivers without being financially compensated. Also, parents needing to go to social functions, instead of hiring a caregiver or bringing grandma with them, leave grandma to babysit. There is no break for grandma, especially when the parents work double jobs. Some kind of verbal abuse is also common.

Financial situation

- Some are receiving Old Age Pension, but others who do not qualify for pension are being supported by their families. Others who are capable and able to work support themselves. Only a few of the seniors have a pension in the Philippines.
- Most of the seniors live with a family member and a small percentage lives independently because of their own choice.

Transportation

- Usually seniors get around when a member of the family drives them to their appointments, to buy groceries or to visit other places. They also get transportation when a community member or a friend offers to pick them up. Only a few seniors get around by bus. They are scared of getting lost if taking the bus.

Access to recreation and enjoyment activities

- Seniors are more likely to go to a recreational facility when accompanied by others, or when there is transportation.

SOCIALIZATION AND HOSPITALITY

- Filipino people pride themselves in hospitality. They readily go out of their way to help visitors or take them to their destination. It is of great importance to recognize the position of others, and use full titles and full names when introducing or referring to people.
- Among family and friends, Filipinos tends to find authority for action in group-consensus. The preference is for decision making within the group or for solicitation of advice from someone senior.
- Filipinos are linked to the identity of groups to which they belong, as well as shared experiences. They are also defined by these criteria. This translates into a communal spirit (Bayanihan) that enables Filipinos to come together and help each other at a moment's notice.
- Within the family, age determines a hierarchical system of authority that flows downward from the eldest to the youngest. Outside the family, other factors such as social class, professional status, official government affiliation and ecclesiastical position may supersede age as the determining factor in the locus of authority

Cultural celebrations and their significance

- Filipinos love to have fun and it is obvious from the way they celebrate fiestas or festivals. Fiestas, or any community celebrations for that matter, usually feature music, dancing and food feasts, and they are considered special opportunities for people to extend hospitality and friendship to one another. The following are different forms of celebrations,

1. **Religious Celebrations:** Feast of Three Kings, Feast of Black Nazarene, Ati-Atihan, Carabao Festival, Mayohan sa Tayabas, Christmas, Lent, Hari-Raya
 2. **Tribal Festivals:** Kalibongan Festival, T’Boli Festival, Lem-lunay
 3. **National Celebrations:** New Year’s Day, Labour Day, Independence Day, All Saints Day, Bonifacio Day
 4. **Cultural Festivals:** Jeepney King Festival, Kalibongan Festival, Binirayan Festival
 5. **Christmas:** Filipinos are proud to proclaim their Christmas celebration the longest and merriest in the world. It begins formally on Dec. 16 with attendance at the first of nine pre-dawn or early morning masses, known as “Simbang Gabi,” and continues until the first Sunday of January “Feast of the Three Kings”, which marks the official end of the season.
- The Philippines is the only Asian country where Christianity predominates. Since the majority of the people are Roman Catholic, Christmas is an extremely important and revered holiday for most Filipinos. It is a time for family gatherings, sharing, giving, and time for food, fun and friendship.
 - In general, the centre of a family Christmas gathering is the “lola”, the endearing term used for a family matriarch or grandmother who is deeply respected, highly revered and always present. Filipinos remember how their lola had children form a line and step up to receive a small gift of some coins. The older the child, the more coins she/he received.
 - The bamboo “Parol” (pah-role) or star lantern is a symbol of Christmas in the Philippines, representing the guiding light: the star of Bethlehem. It emits warmth unparalleled among holiday adornments and is unique to the Philippines.
 - It is a tradition for children to visit godparents and elderly relatives on Christmas Day. Children show their respect by taking their godmother or elder’s right hand and putting it on their forehead. In return, they receive a blessing or a gift.
 - Christmas Eve, in the Philippines, is one of the traditions most families celebrate. It is a night without sleep and of continuous celebration, moving right into Christmas day. As Dec. 24 dawns, the last mass of “simbang gabi” is attended, then the preparation begins for the Noche Buena, which is a family feast that takes place after midnight.
 - The Noche Buena is very much like an open house celebration. Family, friends, relatives and neighbours drop by to wish every family member “Maligayang Pasko” (Merry Christmas). Food is in abundance, often served buffet style. Guests or visitors partake of the food prepared by the host family (even if they are already full or bloated).
 - Baro’t Saya is the national dress of the Philippines and is worn by women. The name is the contraction of the Tagalog words Baro and Saya, meaning blouse and skirt. Some types of the national women’s dress are the Maria Clara, having an “alampay” or “panuelo”, a large kerchief wrapped around the shoulders, and the “Temo”, having the butterfly sleeves.

- A Barong Tagalog, or simply Barong, is an embroidered formal garment of the Philippines. It is very lightweight and worn untucked over an undershirt. It is a common wedding and formal attire for Filipino men as well as women.

DEATH AND DYING

Rituals and rites at time of death and after death

- A 24-hour vigil is held at the deceased person's home and the body is escorted to the cemetery after a religious ceremony. The tradition is for the mourners to walk behind the coffin.

Mourning period after death

- Mourning dress is worn for six weeks after the death of a family member. It may consist of a black pin on a blouse or shirt of the mourner, or a black cloth. Mourning dress is put away after one year. A meal or party is provided for family members and close friends one year after the burial to commemorate the deceased member.
- All Saints Day (Nov. 1) is a national holiday to honour the dead. Gravesites are cleared of debris and repaired. Families meet at the cemetery and stay throughout the 24 hours. Candles and flowers are placed on the graves. Food and memories are shared and prayers are offered for the soul of the dead.
- A nine-day novena is observed either from the day the person dies or the day the person is buried. Everyday during that period, a group of people prays before the rosary, using the prayer for the dead. Then food is prepared by the family to be shared with the group on the ninth day.
- A 40th day death celebration is also observed. Religious belief is that the person's soul leaves the earth on the 40th day. The family celebrates by prayer and food is prepared.

DO'S AND DON'TS

- Smiling is a form of greeting and indicates friendship
- Show respect for age. Use the proper titles to address elders and relatives.
- Speak slowly, even though most of the Filipino seniors can understand the English language.
- When inviting people, try at least three times. Local residents are taught that it is proper to refuse the first time or two. To them, insistence is a clear sign that the offer or invitation is genuine.
- Don't call them by their first name. It is acceptable to call them "Lola" (grandma) or "Lolo" (grandpa). It is a sign of respect.

- Don't use the common sign of O.K. In the Filipino community, it means money. A thumbs-up sign is more polite.
- Don't use your forefinger upward to call a Filipino. It is considered somewhat degrading. One way of calling is to beckon with the hand in a gentle downward motion. "Pssst" is another popular way to get someone's attention. As a rule, however, it is preferred to call the person by name. It is even better to use nicknames, because these are reserved for close friends.
- When attending a special occasion, avoid wearing sandals. Wearing proper shoes is a sign that the event is important to you.

COMMUNITY AND MEDIA RESOURCES

- **Filipino Seniors Organizations**
- FSCA - Filipino Senior Citizen of Alberta
- FRAA – Filipino Retiree Association of Alberta
- MCFSC - Meadowlark/ Castledown Family Sports Club
- FPIG – Filipino Pioneers Interest Group