



30 May 2025

## Guidance on Religious Accommodation for Muslim Students in Health and Education Settings

To Whom It May Concern,

The Australian National Imams Council (ANIC), as the peak representative body of Imams, Islamic scholars, and the leading Islamic religious authority in Australia, respectfully writes to address the importance of ensuring appropriate religious accommodations for Muslim students undertaking clinical placements and health-related education within Australia's healthcare and university systems.

Muslim students across the country are actively contributing to the healthcare sector through their academic and clinical training, driven by a deep commitment to serving patients and the wider community. In doing so, they observe essential religious obligations integral to their daily lives. We respectfully request that the following considerations be formally acknowledged and supported in both clinical and academic settings, including teaching environments, labs, and workshops.

### 1. Facilitation of Friday (Jumu'ah) Prayers for Male Students

Jumu'ah (Friday congregational prayer) is a weekly religious duty for Muslim men, typically observed between 12:00 PM and 2:00 PM. It generally lasts up to one hour and requires participation in a congregation, often off-site, with additional travel time. We request that Muslim male students be given the opportunity to attend this prayer. Institutions are encouraged to provide flexible lunch breaks or make minor academic or placement schedule adjustments where necessary.

### 2. Consideration for Female Students in Rural or Remote Placements

In line with Islamic teachings, Muslim women are generally not permitted to undertake extended travel without the presence or support of a Mahram (male guardian). We request that this be considered when assigning female students to rural or remote placements involving long-distance travel or overnight stays, unless appropriate arrangements can be made to support this requirement.

### 3. Respect for Gender Interaction in Clinical and Academic Settings

While Muslim students are dedicated to providing compassionate and professional care, they observe religious guidelines regarding physical contact and the performance of intimate procedures with patients or peers of the opposite gender. We request that, where feasible, students be permitted to work with same-gender patients or peers or be offered alternative learning formats as needed. This also includes sensitivity around handshaking, physical contact, and being alone in a closed space with a member of the opposite gender without the presence of a third person.



#### 4. Religious Obligation for Forearm Covering by Muslim Women in Clinical Settings

In Islam, Muslim women are religiously required to cover their entire body except for the face and hands up to the wrists. The forearms are part of the 'Awrah (modesty boundaries) and must remain covered in public and professional settings. This is a unanimous ruling across all recognised Islamic legal schools and is not open to reinterpretation for convenience or policy compliance. Forearm exposure is only permitted in situations of genuine necessity, such as life-threatening emergencies with no viable alternative. Therefore, routine clinical duties, including policies like "Bare Below the Elbows" (BBE), must be approached with sensitivity and flexibility. Institutions are encouraged to provide safe and hygienic alternatives, such as secure, disposable sleeves, that uphold infection control standards while respecting religious obligations. This has already been successfully implemented in some parts of Australia, such as New South Wales.

These religious commitments are widely practised and well understood among Muslim students across disciplines. However, we have been informed that such accommodations are not always consistently supported. We encourage institutions and placement providers to review their policies and systems to ensure that students are not placed in situations where they must compromise their religious obligations to fulfil academic or clinical requirements.

We believe accommodating these religious commitments fosters inclusion and contributes to a more respectful and supportive learning environment. It also enhances students' professional growth and reflects the principles of equity and cultural safety.

Should your institution require further guidance or collaboration on pathways for religious inclusion, the Australian National Imams Council is available to support this process. We also encourage engagement with your campus Muslim Student Associations (MSAs), which can offer valuable insights and on-the-ground support.

Thank you for your cooperation and ongoing commitment to equity, diversity, and religious inclusion within Australia's health and education sectors.

Yours sincerely

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President  
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