



UNIVERSITY OF  
TORONTO

# LUNAR NEW YEAR

Inclusive Employer Guide

# What is Lunar New Year?

Lunar New Year—also known as Chinese New Year, the Spring Festival, Tết in Vietnam, Seollal in Korea and Losar in Tibet—falls on the first day of the first month of the lunar calendar. In 2021, Lunar New Year falls on February 12.

Each year of the lunar calendar is associated with one of the twelve animals of the zodiac, and 2021 is the Year of the Ox in the Chinese and Korean zodiacs, and the year of the Buffalo in the Vietnamese zodiac. Both are associated with positive characteristics such as being hardworking and honest.

The Lunar New Year marks the first new moon of the lunisolar calendars traditional to many East Asian countries, which are regulated by the cycles of the moon and sun.

## How is it celebrated?

This traditional holiday is a time to reflect on the past year and celebrate the coming year with festive activities and celebrations. It is also an important time for connecting with family and friends. Many people will travel significant distances for family gatherings, and some may perform ceremonies or share stories to honour their origins and their ancestors.

For many, it is also a time to share food with those less fortunate and to participate in charitable activities. In some celebrating cultures, it is spiritually important to clean the house in readiness for the new year.

In cities across Canada, people of various backgrounds and religions take part in Lunar New Year festivities. Dances and fireworks are prevalent throughout the holiday. As of June 2016, this celebration has been recognized as an official holiday in Canada, and since 1997, Canada Post has issued stamps featuring the astrological sign of the current year.

# HOW CAN WE CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT?

1

**Get Educated.** Ensure staff who supervise those who celebrate Lunar New Year are aware of it and how they can be supportive.

2

**Intentional planning.** Avoid booking meetings and scheduling events during Lunar New Year, if possible.

3

**Be flexible.** Accommodate requests for time off for cultural observances. If shift work is the norm, staff may want to swap shifts to observe Lunar New Year. Look for solutions that suit all parties.

4

**Don't make assumptions.** For personal reasons, not all who celebrate Lunar New Year will do so in the same way. Some may take time off, others may not.