



UNIVERSITY OF  
**TORONTO**

# **RAMADAN IN THE WORKPLACE**

Inclusive Employer Guide

**EQUITY · DIVERSITY · INCLUSION**

# WHAT IS RAMADAN?

The word 'Ramadan' simply refers to the name of the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. It is a month of introspection and reflection as well as a time to focus on spirituality and charity.

In 2021, the holy month is recognized from April 13 to May 12, during which fasting is observed by some 1.6 billion Muslims all over the world.

## HOW IS IT OBSERVED?

The basic requirement is for Muslims to fast from sunrise to sunset every day for the month, meaning no food, water or anything else past the lips. The meal eaten each evening or night to break the fast is called *iftar* and is often taken with family and friends. *Suhoor* is a meal taken just before sunrise, before the day of fasting begins. Some Muslims may not be able to fast (e.g. due to health reasons) or choose not to, but might still observe other aspects of Ramadan.

The end of the fasting month is marked by the sighting of the new moon which is called *Eid al-Fitr* – 'festival of breaking the fast'. This is a holiday (ranging from 1 to 3 days) where Muslims gather with family, visit and exchange gifts with friends, and give to charity. Charity, or *zakat*, is one of the five pillars of Islam, and particularly significant during Ramadan.

Common greetings for Ramadan and Eid include "*Ramadan Mubarak*" – blessed Ramadan, "*Ramadan kareem*" – happy/generous Ramadan, "*Eid Mubarak*", meaning "Blessed Eid", or "Happy Eid".

# HOW CAN WE CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT?

- 1 Get Educated.** Ensure staff who supervise self-identified Muslim colleagues are aware of Ramadan, what fasting entails and how they can be supportive.
- 2 Intentional Planning.** To be more inclusive, try to be mindful of your language to avoid terms like “Lunch and Learn” or “Coffee Chats” when scheduling remote meetings. Avoid booking meetings for the afternoon or evenings.
- 3 Be Flexible.** Accommodate the employee if they prefer to alter their 9-5 work hours, consider flex time options. If shift work is the norm, they may want to swap shifts or alter their hours. Look for solutions that suits all parties. Make special allowances for Muslim colleagues to take a break at sunset if still on shift, to break their fast, pray and eat.
- 4 Be Thoughtful.** During fasting, Muslim colleagues are not allowed to have water. If colleagues are required to deliver lengthy presentations, please be considerate about this.
- 5 Don't make assumptions.** For personal reasons, not all Muslim colleagues will take the time off or fast, but they may still observe in various ways.