

Cultural Competency

What is cultural competency?

Culture: The integrated pattern of thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions associated, wholly or partially, with racial, ethnic, or linguistic groups as well as religious, spiritual, biological, geographical, or sociological characteristics. Culture is dynamic in nature, and individuals may identify with multiple cultures over the course of their lifetimes.¹

- **Racial and ethnic** groups include those defined in the U.S. census but may include other communities.
- **Linguistic** characteristics include language(s) spoken, written, or signed; dialects or regional variants; literacy levels; and other related communication needs.
- **Religious and spiritual** characteristics include beliefs, practices, and support systems related to the manner in which an individual finds and defines meaning in his or her life.
- **Biological** characteristics include age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and physical ability or limitations.
- **Geographical** characteristics include the locality in which one resides; whether it is urban, rural, or suburban; one's country of origin; or one's environment and surroundings.
- **Sociological** characteristics include socio-economic status, degree of acculturation, generation, political beliefs, perceptions of family and community, perceptions of health and well-being, perceptions/beliefs concerning diet and nutrition, occupational groups, military affiliation, education level, and family and household composition.

Cultural competency is: A developmental process in which individuals or institutions achieve increasing levels of awareness, knowledge, and skills along a cultural competence continuum. Cultural competence involves valuing diversity, conducting self-assessments, avoiding stereotypes, managing the dynamics of difference, acquiring and institutionalizing cultural knowledge, and adapting to diversity and cultural contexts in communities.¹

What is linguistic competency?

The capacity of individuals or institutions to communicate effectively at every point of contact. Effective communication includes the ability to convey information - both written and oral - in a manner that is easily understood by diverse groups, including persons of limited English proficiency, those who have low literacy skills or who are not literate, those having low health literacy, those with disabilities, and those who are deaf or hard of hearing.¹

Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Oral Health Care and Services: Oral health care and services that are respectful of and responsive to individual cultural health beliefs and practices, preferred languages, health literacy levels, and communication needs and employed by all members of an organization (regardless of size) at every point of contact.¹

National CLAS Standards²

The National Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) Standards in Health and Health Care, developed in 2001 and revised in 2010, are intended to advance health equity, improve quality and help eliminate health care disparities by establishing a blueprint for health and health care organizations to:

Principal Standard

1) Provide effective, equitable, understandable and respectful quality care and services that are responsive to diverse cultural health beliefs and practices, preferred languages, health literacy and other communication needs.

Governance, Leadership and Workforce

2) Advance and sustain organizational governance and leadership that promotes CLAS and health equity through policy, practices and allocated resources.

3) Recruit, promote and support a culturally and linguistically diverse governance, leadership and workforce that are responsive to the population in the service area.

4) Educate and train governance, leadership and workforce in culturally and linguistically appropriate policies and practices on an ongoing basis.

Communication and Language Assistance

5) Offer language assistance to individuals who have limited English proficiency and/or other communication needs, at no cost to them, to facilitate timely access to all health care and services.

6) Inform all individuals of the availability of language assistance services clearly and in their preferred language, verbally and in writing.

7) Ensure the competence of individuals providing language assistance, recognizing that the use of untrained individuals and/or minors as interpreters should be avoided.

8) Provide easy-to-understand print and multimedia materials and signage in the languages commonly used by the populations in the service area.

Engagement, Continuous Improvement and Accountability

9) Establish culturally and linguistically appropriate goals, policies and management accountability, and infuse them throughout the organizations' planning and operations.

- 10)** Conduct ongoing assessments of the organization’s CLAS-related activities and integrate CLAS-related measures into assessment measurement and continuous quality improvement activities.
- 11)** Collect and maintain accurate and reliable demographic data to monitor and evaluate the impact of CLAS on health equity and outcomes and to inform service delivery.
- 12)** Conduct regular assessments of community health assets and needs and use the results to plan and implement services that respond to the cultural and linguistic diversity of populations in the service area.
- 13)** Partner with the community to design, implement and evaluate policies, practices and services to ensure cultural and linguistic appropriateness.
- 14)** Create conflict- and grievance-resolution processes that are culturally and linguistically appropriate to identify, prevent and resolve conflicts or complaints.
- 15)** Communicate the organization’s progress in implementing and sustaining CLAS to all stakeholders, constituents and the general public.

Think Cultural Health: Cultural Competency Program for Oral Health Professionals, Office of Minority Health, US Dept of Health and Human Services³

The *Cultural Competency Program for Oral Health Professionals* e-learning program represents the Office of Minority Health's participation in the HHS Oral Health Initiative. This program aims to provide all members of the dental team with the basic knowledge and skills related to cultural and linguistic competency to provide higher quality care to all.

- Course 1 Fundamentals of Culturally & Linguistically Appropriate Oral Health Care
- Course 2 Providing Culturally & Linguistically Appropriate Oral Health Care
- Course 3 Culturally & Linguistically Appropriate Communication and Messaging

This program is built upon the *National Standards on Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health and Health Care* (the *National CLAS Standards*) from the HHS Office of Minority Health.

References:

1. Think Cultural Health: Cultural Competency Program for Oral Health Professionals, Office of Minority Health, US Dept of Health and Human Services
<https://oralhealth.thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/Content/Toolkit/Glossary1.asp>. Accessed 7/10/14.
2. The National Class Standards. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health. (2001). <http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/templates/browse.aspx?lvl=2&lvlID=15>. Accessed 7/10/14.
3. Think Cultural Health: Cultural Competency Program for Oral Health Professionals, Office of Minority Health, US Dept of Health and Human Services. <https://oralhealth.thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/>. Accessed 7/10/14.