

## Why is Cultural Competence Important? Professional Associations Statements on Cultural Competence

### National Association of Social Workers: Diversity & Cultural Competence

Two recent events have made the need for “cultural competence”— understanding the specific cultural, language, social and economic nuances of particular people and families—more important than ever. One is the civil rights movement that began in the 1950s, in which African Americans, women, gays and lesbians, people with disabilities and other minority groups alerted the country to their distinct identities and long histories of oppression. The other is the growing number of new immigrants to this country, who bring with them unique cultural, language, religious, and political backgrounds. Histories of internal displacement within their own countries, torture, political oppression, and extreme poverty abound among immigrant communities. Melding these backgrounds with the history, experiences, and expectations of U.S. born ethnic and diverse populations creates both challenges and opportunities for social workers.

It is fair to say that both helping professionals and society at large have a long way to go to gain cultural competence. Fortunately, social workers represent a group of service providers with a longstanding history of understanding both people’s differences and the impact of social injustices on their well being. Today, many social workers are adding cultural competence to these already existing strengths and values, making them particularly well-equipped to deliver culturally competent care. Many schools of social work now include curricula on cultural competence, and the National Association of Social Workers recently developed standards that require social workers to strive to deliver culturally competent services to their increasingly diverse clientele.

It is no exaggeration to say that a culturally competent provider can mean the difference between a person “making it” or “falling through the cracks.” Here is an extreme example. Latina social worker Josie has a brother with schizophrenia who speaks only Spanish. When her brother failed to receive culturally competent care over a 20-year period, he was hospitalized 162 times. When he finally did receive culturally competent care, he was hospitalized only once in 15 years.

Language differences affect both majority and minority populations. For example, a refugee from war-torn Bosnia doesn’t understand English, and he lacks both material and financial resources. If he doesn’t get help, he faces many potential dangers that result from poverty and an inability to access the system. A social worker trained in culturally competent care connects him with a range of social services—the traditional assistance provided by social workers. In addition, she introduces him to a group of other Bosnians who have undergone similar experiences thus, providing an added support that she’s aware of because of her extra training.

Another example of how a culturally competent social worker can have an impact on people’s lives is in the area of international adoptions. Social workers trained in cultural competence can help adoptive parents understand their adopted child’s cultural heritage and create activities to keep the child’s culture alive. Adding this dimension to the child’s assimilation can foster the youngster’s sense of identity and make the adoption experience a smoother and happier one for both parents and child.

For Asian Americans, families are their primary source of support; thusly, they tend to keep problems inside the family rather than sharing them with others. A social worker who is culturally competent will therefore provide brief, task-oriented therapy that respects their privacy and helps them achieve concrete goals, instead of providing traditional Western-style therapy that is more individualistic and analytical. Similarly, African Americans often come from backgrounds that include extended-family bonds and a strong, community-oriented spiritual life. Trained social workers will make sure these cultural realities become an integral part of therapy by often times including other family members in therapy.

Culturally competent services are needed beyond race and ethnicity. Culturally competent social workers are also better able to address issues of gender and help persons with disabilities, older adults, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people. A working knowledge of these groups’ cultures and values helps social workers tailor care so it is effective and appropriate for their clients’ needs.

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It can be persuasively argued that effective care is impossible without a working knowledge and understanding of a person's or group's culture and background. As we move into an ever more pluralistic and multicultural society, social workers are among those best-equipped to deliver that care and to empower people from all backgrounds to lead connected, healthy lives.

[http://www.socialworkers.org/sections/credentials/cultural\\_comp.asp](http://www.socialworkers.org/sections/credentials/cultural_comp.asp)

[http://www.helpstartshere.org/kids\\_and\\_family/schools\\_and\\_communities/current\\_trends/schools\\_and\\_communities\\_trends.html](http://www.helpstartshere.org/kids_and_family/schools_and_communities/current_trends/schools_and_communities_trends.html)

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### National Education Association: Why Cultural Competence?

#### To Help Educators Close Achievement Gaps

American classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse. As NEA President Dennis Van Roekel has noted, "Educators with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to value the diversity among students will contribute to an educational system designed to serve all students well."

Cultural competence is a key factor in enabling educators to be effective with students from cultures other than their own.

Cultural competence is having an awareness of one's own cultural identity and views about difference, and the ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms of students and their families. It is the ability to understand the within-group differences that make each student unique, while celebrating the between-group variations that make our country a tapestry. This understanding informs and expands teaching practices in the culturally competent educator's classroom.

The "Cultural Competence: What Does it Mean for Educators?" video, an interview with six educational scholars, explains why cultural competence is a salient issue in American public education today. These scholars emphasize the need for educators to provide an environment of respect and reciprocity of ideas. They illustrate how the ability for educators to learn how to teach students from different backgrounds is critical to the success of the educational system.

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The researchers presented in this video offer their insights into the impact cultural competence can have on closing achievement gaps.

They recognize how student outcomes can be improved by incorporating racial and ethnic minority contributions in curriculum and diversifying pedagogical practices. They see cultural competence as both a moral and ethical responsibility to create a welcoming environment for students to succeed. The impact of having educators who have the ability to challenge and motivate diverse student populations can dramatically improve our educational system and student outcomes.

### Useful Links:

- *“Cultural & Global Competence: CULTURAL COMPETENCE: The Nuts & Bolts of Diversity & Inclusion”* by Mercedes Martin and Billy Vaughn  
For a general view of cultural competence that is common non-educational professionals, this article offers a working definition of cultural competence, characterizes its components, and describes its utility in diversity education.
- *Communicating Cross-Culturally: What Teachers Should Know* by Yvonne Pratt-Johnson  
A brief and effective look at the opportunities for communicating with diverse students and their families that goes beyond bridging language differences to truly understanding where students are coming from.
- *“Using Multicultural Literature in Gifted Education Classrooms”* by Donna Y. Ford, Tyrone C. Howard, and J. John Harris III  
In a discussion of identifying appropriate multicultural materials for gifted minority students and for exposing white students to diversity concepts and issues, these authors also reference James Banks’ four-level model for integrating culturally competent material into the curriculum.
- *Culturally Competent Schools: Guidelines for Secondary School Principals* by Mary Beth Klotz  
Do you think cultural competence is only for the primary grades? Take a look at this guidance for incorporating culturally competent strategies for a school-wide approach to student success.
- *Teaching Tolerance: Sonia Nieto. Teaching Diverse Students Initiative*  
These NEA-supported videos are of noted teacher preparation and cultural competence scholar, Sonia Nieto, produced as part of a broader professional development effort sponsored by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

### [National Institutes of Health: Cultural Respect](#)

**What is Cultural Respect?** Culture is often described as the combination of a body of knowledge, a body of belief and a body of behavior. It involves a number of elements, including personal identification, language, thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions that are often specific to ethnic, racial, religious, geographic, or social groups. For the provider of health information or health care, these elements influence beliefs and belief systems surrounding health, healing, wellness, illness, disease, and delivery of health services. The concept of cultural respect has a positive effect on patient care delivery by enabling providers to deliver services that are respectful of and responsive to the health beliefs, practices and cultural and linguistic needs of diverse patients.

### Questions and Answers

Why is cultural respect important? Cultural respect is critical to reducing health disparities and improving access to high-quality health care, health care that is respectful of and responsive to the needs of diverse patients. When developed and implemented as a framework, cultural respect enables systems, agencies, and groups of professionals to function effectively to understand the needs of groups accessing health information and health care—or participating in research—in an inclusive partnership where the provider and the user of the information meet on common ground.

What is NIH doing to promote cultural respect? The NIH recognizes the challenge presented by the health care needs of a growing number of diverse racial and ethnic communities and linguistic groups, each with its own cultural traits and

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health challenges. The NIH recognizes the need to apply research advances in such a way as to ensure improved health for all Americans. Current efforts through NIH research and that done by other groups and agencies contribute to identifying further potential links between reductions in health disparities and appropriate delivery of health information and health care. NIH communications offices develop and disseminate resources they have designed with communities and using public engagement norms.

- [List of selected NIH-funded projects](#)

Can cultural respect make a difference? Cultural respect benefits consumers, stakeholders, and communities and supports positive health outcomes. Because a number of elements can influence health communication—including behaviors, language, customs, beliefs, and perspectives—cultural respect is also critical for achieving accuracy in medical research. Poor planning in medical research, planning that does not take into account principles of cultural respect, may yield inaccurate results.

What are the National CLAS Standards? The National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health and Health Care (the National CLAS Standards) are intended to advance health equity, improve quality, and help eliminate health care disparities by providing a blueprint for individuals and health and health care organizations to implement culturally and linguistically appropriate services. Adoption of these Standards will help advance better health and health care in the United States.

### **List of the National CLAS Standards**

See the [National CLAS Standards Fact Sheet \(link is external\)](#) for more information.

### **Where can I learn more about cultural respect?**

- [National Center for Cultural Competence \(link is external\)](#)  
Much of the information widely used concerning cultural respect derives from groundbreaking series of monographs on development of a culturally competent system of care called, *Towards a culturally competent system of care: A Monograph on Effective Services for Minority Children Who Are Severely Emotionally Disturbed* (Terry L. Cross *et al.*, 1989).
- ["Practice Transformation for Physicians and Health Care Teams," National Diabetes Education Program](#)
- ["Cultural Competency," Multi-Cultural Resources for Health Information available from the National Library of Medicine](#)
- [Office of Clinical Research and Bioethics Policy](#)

### **National Alliance to End Homelessness: Integrating Cultural Competence into Everyday Practices**

NAEH Annual Conference: ENDING HOMELESSNESS: THE TIME NOW!!!!

By Amie Parikh, MA; Corporate Compliance Officer, MTI Residential Services, Inc.

And Miriam E. Delphin, Ph.D. Yale University Program for Recovery and Community Health

Culture Counts: A Call To Action

- Mental Health: Culture, Race and Ethnicity, Supplement to the Surgeon General's Report (2001)
- Institute of Medicine: Unequal Treatment (2002)
- The President's New Freedom Commission Report on Mental Health (2003)

Behavioral Health Disparities:

Findings of the Surgeon General (2001)

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### Ethnic & Racial Minorities:

- Less access to, & availability of, behavioral health services
- Less likely to receive needed behavioral health services
- Less likely to receive high quality behavioral health care
- Experience a greater burden of disability

### Media Response to the IOM Unequal Treatment Report (2002).

*New York Times*, March 22, "Subtle Racism in Medicine"

"... a disturbing new study by the Institute of Medicine has concluded that even when members of minority groups have the same incomes, insurance coverage and medical conditions as whites, they receive notably poorer care. Biases, prejudices and negative racial stereotypes, the panel concludes, may be misleading doctors and other health professionals."

### The President's New Freedom Commission Report on Mental Health (2003)

- The Commission declared "...the mental health delivery system is fragmented and in disarray ... lead[ing] to unnecessary and costly disability, homelessness, school failure and incarceration."
- "The system has neglected to incorporate respect or understanding of the histories, traditions, beliefs, languages and value systems of culturally diverse groups."

### The President's New Freedom Commission Report on Mental Health (2003)

- "Striking disparities in mental health care are found for racial and ethnic minorities."
- Goal # 3: Disparities in mental health services are eliminated.

### Cultural Competence



*that match the individual's culture and increase both the quality and appropriateness of health care and health outcomes (Davis, 2003).*

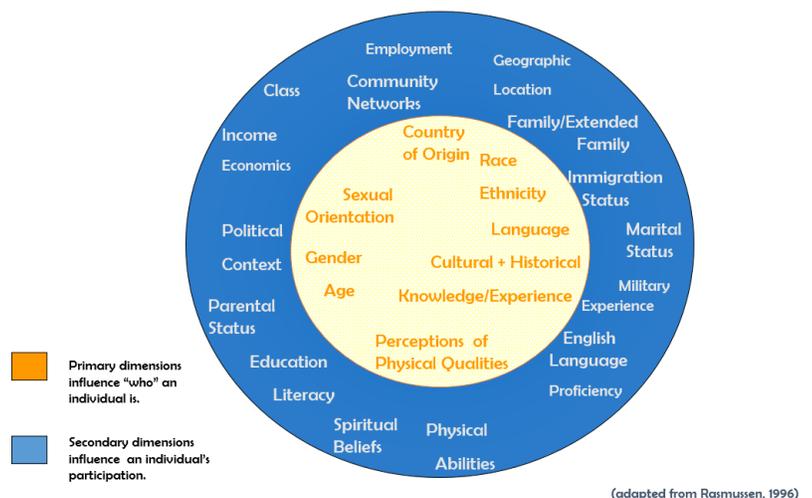
## Cultural Considerations

### Developing a Culturally Competent System of Care

#### Multi-dimensional/multi-level process

- System Level
- Organization Level
- Program Level
- Individual Level

### Who am I?



### Cultural Competence: Individual Level

- Training and Education (films, festivals, forums, books)

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- Multidimensional, culturally relevant assessments
- Assessment tools (set-up role playing luncheons)
- Office Environment (posters, art, magazines, etc.)
- Flexible roles and boundaries
- Maintain an Asking Stance
- Awareness of differences in cultural norms
- individualism vs. collectivism
- Role of the community
- Resources of help and healing
- Willingness to relinquish control and foster consumer direction
- Consumer assessment of provider cultural competence

### Domains in Program Level

- Administration
  - Human Resources
  - Training and Education
  - Data collection
- Services- Identifying Current and Emerging Needs
- Health Promotion and Prevention
- Defining the Service Need
- Delivering the Services

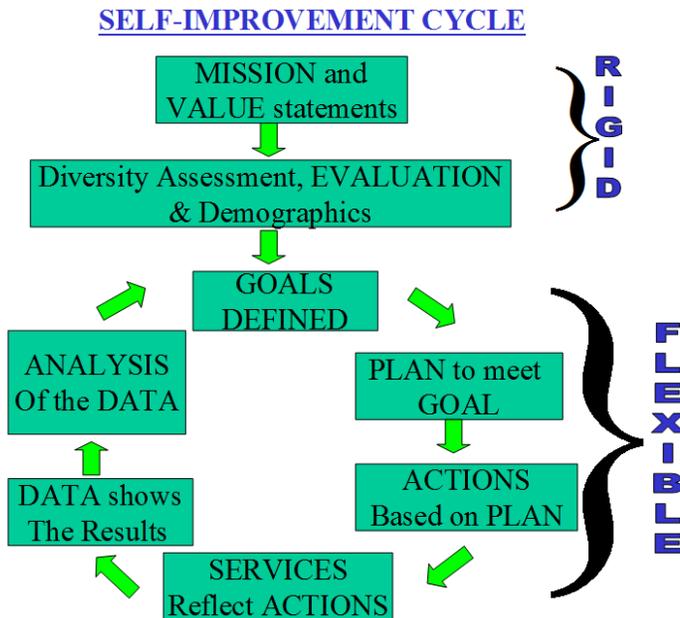
### Cultural Competence: Program Level

- Access – decentralized, flexible hours, natural supports, peer mentors, linguistic competence, program advisory board, formal partnerships
- Meaningful involvement of consumers, community members and family members
- Inclusion of family members as preferred
- Holistic Programming
  - Beyond symptom reduction!!!!
  - employment, housing, health, spirituality, purpose
  - Family and Consumer Driven in a Strength based Approach
- Program diversity policies and practices
- Maintain a comprehensive and up-to-date environmental scan
- Culture Specific Approaches
- Outcome Assessment



**Personal Theory of Change to Effect Organizational Change to Advance Cultural and Linguistic Competence**

Context/ Population	Strategies	Outcomes
<p><b>Context:</b> <i>What problem do you want to solve?</i></p> <p><b>Population of Focus:</b></p>	<p><b>CORE VALUES:</b></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 10px auto; width: 80%;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>STRATEGIES</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>How will you reach your goal?</i></p> </div> <p><b>ACTION PLAN GOALS:</b> <i>What do you want to accomplish?</i></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 10px auto; width: 80%;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>RESOURCES REQUIRED</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>What resources do you need to accomplish you goal (human, organizational, political, financial, time, others)?</i></p> </div> <p><b>EVALUATION:</b> <i>Evaluate effectiveness- how?; support movement toward cultural and linguistic competence</i></p>	<p><i>What will success look like if you attain it?</i></p> <p><b>Evaluation Utilization:</b> <i>How will you use evaluation data to support your change agenda?</i></p>



SOURCE: WWW.CCSI.ORG



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### Culturally And Linguistically Appropriate Services Standards [Clas] (Dhhs, 2000)

- Culturally Competent Care
- Legal Responsibility to Provide Language Assistance Services
- Organizational Supports for Cultural Competence

#### Cultural Competence: Organizational Level

- Board of Directors & Executive level support & responsibility
- Organizational Infrastructure/ Resources
- Monitor utilization & outcomes by diverse communities
- Organizational & Program cultural competence plans
- Organizational cultural competence assessments
- Human Resources/ culturally diverse staffing
- Staff development & supervision
- Connections to community & natural supports
- Service/ Interventions includes Linguistic Competence

#### Cultural Competence: System Level

- Monitoring utilization & outcomes by diverse communities
- Cultural competence system assessments
- Workforce Development
- Standard Setting
- Contracting
- Policy Alignment
- Fiscal Alignment
- Consumer Input & Direction
- Involvement of Grassroots Providers & Natural Supports

#### Cultural Competence: Future Directions

- Measure Development and Refinement
- Outcome Research
- Feedback Loops
- Evidence-based for Whom?



integrating cultural diversity in social work practice, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) developed standards and policy statements that provide direction in this area. Standards provide comprehensive definitions of culture, competence, and cultural competence, and may be used as a foundation for professional practice.