

Culturally appropriate care: supporting better health outcomes for diverse populations

Improving health outcomes begins with understanding the unique needs of the populations we serve. Cultural beliefs, preferred languages, health literacy levels and social factors can significantly influence a patient's ability to access care, communicate with providers, understand treatment recommendations and achieve positive health outcomes.

Providing culturally and linguistically appropriate care helps ensure that all patients receive equitable, high-quality healthcare. By recognizing and responding to cultural differences, providers can improve communication, build trust, reduce barriers to care and support better engagement in treatment plans and preventive services.

Research continues to demonstrate that culturally appropriate care contributes to improved patient experiences, greater adherence to treatment recommendations, increased utilization of preventive services and reductions in health disparities among diverse populations.

Strategies to support culturally appropriate care

Providers can help improve outcomes by:

- Using qualified interpreter services such as Language Line, when language assistance is needed.
- Offering patient education materials in preferred languages whenever available.
- Assessing cultural, linguistic and health literacy needs during patient interactions.
- Engaging patients in shared decision-making that respects their values, beliefs and preferences.
- Considering social determinants of health and other factors that may impact access to care and treatment adherence.
- Encouraging open, respectful communication and avoiding assumptions about cultural backgrounds or healthcare beliefs.

These practices support equitable care delivery and help ensure that patients receive information and services in ways that are understandable, meaningful and actionable.

Supporting health equity through provider education

Ongoing education helps providers better understand the diverse populations they serve and equips them with strategies to address cultural and linguistic barriers that may affect health outcomes. The following resources offer evidence-based training and tools:

- **Think Cultural Health (HHS Office of Minority Health)** – Training on cultural competency, implicit bias, health equity, and the National CLAS Standards.
<https://thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/>

- **National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS)** – A framework for advancing health equity and improving quality of care. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4498546/>
- **Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)** – Resources to support patient-centered communication and culturally responsive care. <https://www.ahrq.gov/>
- **American Hospital Association (AHA)** – Guidance for healthcare organizations seeking to reduce disparities and improve equitable care delivery. <https://www.aha.org/reducing-disparities-health-outcomes>
- **AHRQ Patient Safety Network (PSNet)** – Resources exploring the connection between cultural competence, patient safety, and quality outcomes. <https://psnet.ahrq.gov/perspective/cultural-competence-and-patient-safety>

By incorporating culturally and linguistically appropriate practices into everyday care, providers play a vital role in advancing health equity and improving outcomes for all patients.