HOW-TO-GUIDE

ENSURING CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY APPROPRIATE CRISIS COMMUNICATION



Culturally and linguistically appropriate services (CLAS) are services that are respectful of and responsive to individual cultural health beliefs and practices, preferred languages, health literacy levels, and communication needs. The HHS Office of Minority Health offers a set of action steps for operationalizing CLAS called the National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health and Health Care, or the National CLAS Standards.

Providing CLAS during a public health crisis or emergency is critical to ensuring everyone receives clear, trustworthy, and useful information. Here are suggested CLAS strategies for ensuring culturally and linguistically appropriate crisis communication.

IDENTIFY THE CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC GROUPS IN YOUR SERVICE AREA[1]

- Create or refer to a demographic profile of the service area, including languages spoken, socioeconomic status, age, race and ethnicity, and nationality[2,3]
- Identify sources of risk (e.g., low sources for credible information in the language of the group)[4]
- Use these data to identify or prioritize the groups most at risk
- Recognize the norms, behaviors, and needs within each population group

ENGAGE WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO INFORM DEVELOPMENT AND DISSEMINATION

- Start from a place of openness, respect, empathy, and collaboration.
- Identify, build, and leverage relationships with trusted messengers from the community
- Learn about each group's priorities, concerns, information gaps and barriers, communication preferences, cultural factors, and sources of mistrust
- Develop strategies for building trust
- Offer community members the opportunity to co-create messaging and materials
- Gather feedback on draft messaging and materials (including language translations) to ensure cultural and linguistic appropriateness, accuracy, clarity, and trustworthiness
- Collaborate with trusted messengers to disseminate information and materials

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DEVELOP WRITTEN AND DIGITAL MATERIALS TAILORED TO CULTURE, LANGUAGE, AND LITERACY[5]

- Write and design materials according to plain language principles[6]
- Develop visual, video, and/or audio messaging for people with limited literacy
- Consider cultural context (e.g., incorporate social values and health beliefs; include relevant photos, images, and colors; use appropriate vocabulary and expressions)[7]



- Include a phone number to call or text for further information. Ensure that you have the resources to answer any questions in the person's language
- Develop materials in, or translate them into, different language(s) (i.e., hire a bilingual content creator or trained translator) and verify translation accuracy and appropriateness through community testing[8]
- Consider availability of digital materials to people with disabilities[9]

COMMUNICATE VERBALLY IN A CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY APPROPRIATE WAY[5]

- Set a tone of openness, respect, and collaboration
- Speak clearly and at a moderate pace
- Use plain language,[10] including terms that the individual or their cultural group use
- Listen without judgment or interruption
- Invite questions



- Check understanding (e.g., employ the Teach Back method[11])
- Ask everyone for their preferred language. If that language is not English, arrange for interpreter services. Ensure the competence of individuals providing interpreter services

USE BOTH VERBAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATION TO REINFORCE MESSAGING

- If having a conversation, provide a handout that the individual can take home to review and share with household members and neighbors
- If distributing written materials, review them verbally with the individual and check understanding
- Engage and train trusted messengers to build community engagement and share messaging

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ENGAGE TRUSTED MESSENGERS TO SHARE INFORMATION

- Form agreements to post written information on the marquees of banks, churches, grocery stores, community centers, and other local businesses and buildings
- Collaborate with local first responders, health departments, and hospitals to share key messages
- Use local media channels (such as radio, television, newspapers, and social media). Local reporters are likely to be trusted messengers, and local media often reflect the community's cultural values, know the community's resources and structures, and use the languages spoken in the community



LEARN MORE

1. CDC's Reaching At-Risk Populations in an Emergency
2. U.S. Census Bureau Data
3. U.S. Census Bureau Community Resilience Estimates
4. OMH's Minority Health Index
5. OMH's Guide to Providing Effective Communication and Language Assistance Services
6. Federal Plain Language Guidelines
7. Culturally CAPABLE Translations
8. LEP.gov's Language Access Planning
9. Usability.gov's Accessibility Basics
10. Plain Language in Spoken Communication
11. AHRQ's Teach-Back: Intervention