

Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services, cultural competency, and cultural awareness

You can improve your quality of care by understanding, respecting, and responding to a patient's experiences, values, beliefs, and needs. Several concepts can help us understand how to do this: CLAS, cultural competency, and cultural awareness.

Culturally and linguistically appropriate services (CLAS) refers to services that are respectful of and responsive to individual cultural health beliefs and practices, languages, health literacy levels, and communication needs. CLAS can be employed by all members of an organization (regardless of size) at every point of contact. CLAS helps you meet the aims for improving health care quality: the delivery of care that is safe, effective, patient-centered, timely, and efficient.

At the provider level, providing CLAS means practicing cultural competency and cultural awareness.

Cultural competency is a developmental process in which one achieves increasing levels of awareness, knowledge, and skills along a continuum, improving one's capacity to work and communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations. Strategies for practicing cultural competency include:

- Learning about your own and others' cultural identities
- Combating stereotypes
- Respecting others' beliefs, values, and communication preferences
- Adapting your services to each patient's unique needs
- Gaining new cultural experiences

Cultural awareness involves a process of self-awareness to account for our background and life experiences as a framework to better understand people around us. Strategies for practicing cultural awareness include:

- Practicing self-reflection, including awareness of your beliefs and values
- Recognizing what you don't know and being open to learning as much as you can
- Being open to other people's characteristics and empathizing with their life experiences
- Acknowledging that the patient is their own best authority, not you
- Learning and growing from people whose beliefs, values, and worldviews differ from yours

Sources:

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