

Think Cultural Health

May 2023 Newsletter

This newsletter highlights Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) in Action. CLAS is a way for health and health care professionals to provide respectful and responsive services, improve quality of care, and advance health equity. To guide organizations in providing CLAS, the HHS Office of Minority Health (OMH) developed a set of 15 action steps called [the National CLAS Standards](#).

Recognizing Black Maternal Health Week



Every April 11-17th is dedicated to Black Maternal Health. Founded by the [Black Mamas Matter Alliance](#) in 2018, [Black Maternal Health Week](#) is aimed at raising awareness of maternal health issues faced by Black women and birthing people and calls attention to the significant inequities in maternal health outcomes between Black women and women of other racial and ethnic identities.

One critical issue in Black maternal health is maternal mortality. Non-Hispanic Black women are nearly three times more likely to die of pregnancy-related causes than non-Hispanic White women.^[1] Such stark disparities may be due to physician implicit and explicit racial bias, structural racism and sexism, lack of access to affordable and quality health care, and lack of social support.^[2]

Providing CLAS is an important strategy for ensuring the delivery of the highest quality of care to all people and for improving maternal health outcomes. The [National CLAS Standards](#) offer a blueprint for organizations to provide CLAS, including action steps to collect and use data to better identify disparities (Standards 10-11), to ensure language access (Standards 5-8), and to support a diverse workforce (Standard 3). Health organizations providing maternal health care can apply the National CLAS Standards to improve their ability to address disparities. Providers can also take Think Cultural Health's free, accredited, two-hour e-learning program called [Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Maternal Health Care](#), which is designed for providers and students seeking knowledge and skills related to cultural competency, cultural humility, person-centered care, and combating implicit bias across the continuum of maternal health care.

Other federal, state, and local efforts have aimed to promote CLAS to address unacceptable maternal health outcomes. For example, to improve access to services that contribute to positive maternal health outcomes for racial and ethnic minority women, the HHS Office of Minority Health anticipates funding for a [grant initiative](#) to demonstrate the effectiveness of innovative or enhanced payment models for community-based maternal support services. The California Omnibus Act includes provisions to improve data collection and access to care to help address racial disparities in birthing outcomes for Black mothers and other people of color.

Are you a maternal health care provider? Learn how to better understand, respect, and respond to your patients with Think Cultural Health's [free, accredited, 2-hour CLAS in Maternal Health Care e-learning program](#).

[Visit TCH's Maternal Health Care Program](#)

^[1]Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). Maternal mortality rates in the United States, 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/maternal-mortality/2020/maternal-mortality-rates-2020.htm>

^[2]Bond, R. M., Gaither, K., Nasser, S. A., Albert, M. A., Ferdinand, K. C., Njoroge, J. N., Parapid, B., Hayes, S. N., Pegus, C., Sogade, B., Grodzinsky, A., Watson, K. E., McCullough, C. A., Ofili, E., & Association of Black Cardiologists (2021). Working agenda for Black mothers: A position paper from the Association of Black Cardiologists on solutions to improving Black maternal health. *Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes*, 14(2), e007643. <https://doi.org/10.1161/CIRCOUTCOMES.120.007643>

Improving Cultural and Linguistic Competency to Provide Better Care



Despite similar rates of mental illnesses among Black Americans as the general public, Black Americans often receive lower quality of care.^[1] Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are three times less likely to use mental health services than their white counterparts,^[2] often due to a lack of cultural competency among service providers.^[3]

Cultural competence training can help providers learn how to provide more effective care to culturally diverse patients, and therefore address disparities related to the lack of culturally competent care. In fact, National CLAS Standard 3 calls on organizations to educate and train governance, leadership, and workforce in culturally and linguistically appropriate policies and practices on an ongoing basis.

[Think Cultural Health](#) offers [free online training](#) dedicated to helping health professionals increase their cultural and linguistic competency. [Improving Cultural Competency for Behavioral Health Professionals](#) is one of Think Cultural Health's e-learning programs and is accredited for counselors, nurses, psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers.

Many state health departments and boards have cultural competency training requirements for healthcare professionals and use the free Think Cultural Health trainings. For example:

- [The New York State Department of Health approved the use of all Think Cultural Health trainings for providers to fulfill their annual cultural competency training requirements.](#)
- [In Maryland, the Board of Nursing recommends that nurses take the free \[Culturally Competent Nursing Care: A Cornerstone of Caring\]\(#\) training.](#)
- [The Cultural Competency Program for Oral Health Providers is included in the Oregon Health Authority's list of approved cultural competence continuing education trainings.](#)

These states, and others, understand that cultural competency training helps equip health care providers with the skills and knowledge necessary to provide high quality, culturally competent care.

Interested in learning more about cultural competency in healthcare? Check out Think Cultural Health's [e-learning programs](#). To learn whether your state requires cultural competency training, check out [Think Cultural Health's Tracking CLAS map](#).

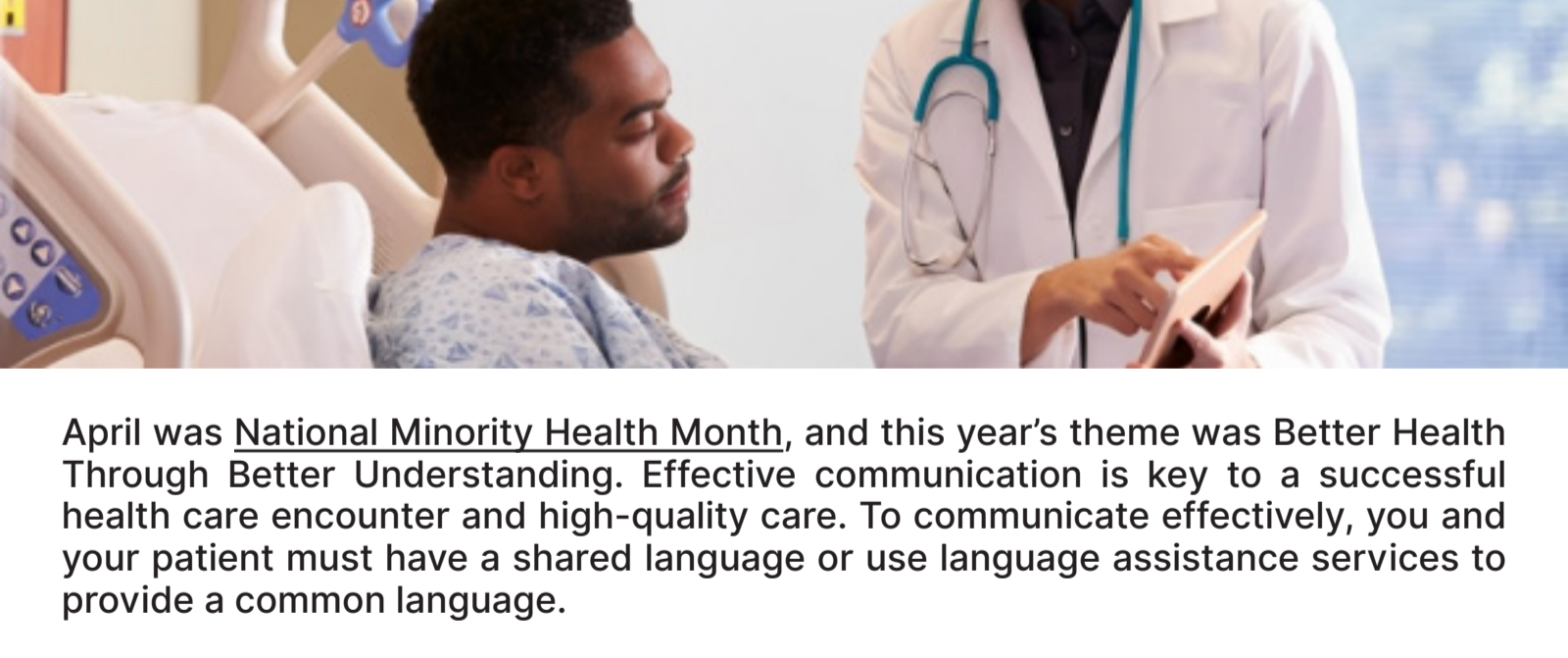
[Visit TCH's Cultural Competency Programs](#)

^[1]Primm, A. B., Vasquez, M. J., Mays, R. A., Sammons-Posey, D., McKnight-Eily, L. R., Presley-Cantrell, L. R., McGuire, L. C., Chapman, D. P., & Perry, G. S. (2010). The role of public health in addressing racial and ethnic disparities in mental health and mental illness. *Preventing Chronic Disease*, 7(1), A20. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2811515/>

^[2]Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2014). Results from the 2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/results-2012-national-survey-drug-use-and-health-summary-national-findings>

^[3]Iwamasa, G. Y. (2012). Recommendations for the Treatment of Asian-American/Pacific Islander populations. *Psychological Treatment of Ethnic Minority Populations*. <https://www.apa.org/pi/oema/resources/ethnicity-health/asian-american/psychological-treatment>

Why is Language Assistance Important?



April was [National Minority Health Month](#), and this year's theme was Better Health Through Better Understanding. Effective communication is key to a successful health care encounter and high-quality care. To communicate effectively, you and your patient must have a shared language or use language assistance services to provide a common language.

[National CLAS Standards 5-8](#) relate to communication and language assistance. In particular, Standard 5 calls on organizations to offer language assistance at no cost to the patient, and Standard 7 calls on organizations to ensure the competence of individuals providing language assistance.

What is language assistance?

Language assistance services are mechanisms used to facilitate communication with individuals who do not speak English, those who have limited English proficiency, and those who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

What are some types of language assistance?

- **Interpretation:** This means your organization provides a qualified interpreter to facilitate verbal communication with a patient with limited English proficiency, a patient who is Deaf or hard of hearing, or a patient with any other characteristics that make it hard for them to understand oral English communication. You should not rely on a patient's minor child or adult relative to serve as an interpreter. [Learn more about working with an interpreter here.](#)
- **Written translation:** This means your organization offers translated written materials, translated by qualified translators into languages other than English, for patients with limited English proficiency. Materials can include intake forms, consent forms, education materials, and assessment and diagnostic tests.

What else should you know about language assistance?

- Some people who are normally able to converse in English may not be able to find the words in English in health care situations, such as when they are scared or feeling sick.
- Some providers who grew up speaking, or who have training, in a foreign language may still lack the language skills needed to communicate effectively in that language in a clinical setting.
- Beyond language, culture influences how we communicate (for example, how direct, open, formal, or warm we are). Try to understand communication preferences and cues from your patient's perspective. [Learn more about communication styles here.](#)
- Recipients of federal financial assistance are required to take reasonable steps to make their programs, services, and activities accessible by eligible persons with limited English proficiency. [Learn more about the requirements here.](#)

[Visit TCH's Communication Guide](#)

For more information, visit Think Cultural Health's [Resource Library](#).

ABOUT THINK CULTURAL HEALTH

Think Cultural Health is a website of the Office of Minority Health at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that provides health and healthcare professionals with information, continuing education opportunities, resources, and more to learn about culturally and linguistically appropriate services, or CLAS.