

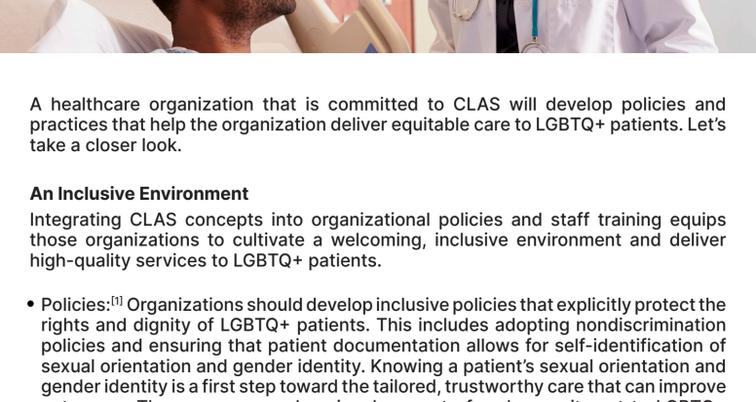


# Think Cultural Health

September 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.

## Affirming Care for LGBTQ+ Patients



A healthcare organization that is committed to CLAS will develop policies and practices that help the organization deliver equitable care to LGBTQ+ patients. Let's take a closer look.

### An Inclusive Environment

Integrating CLAS concepts into organizational policies and staff training equips those organizations to cultivate a welcoming, inclusive environment and deliver high-quality services to LGBTQ+ patients.

- **Policies:**<sup>[1]</sup> Organizations should develop inclusive policies that explicitly protect the rights and dignity of LGBTQ+ patients. This includes adopting nondiscrimination policies and ensuring that patient documentation allows for self-identification of sexual orientation and gender identity. Knowing a patient's sexual orientation and gender identity is a first step toward the tailored, trustworthy care that can improve outcomes. These measures also signal respect of and commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusivity, helping LGBTQ+ patients feel welcome and valued.

- **Staff Training:**<sup>[2]</sup> Organizations should offer comprehensive training on LGBTQ+ cultural competency. This includes understanding proper terminology, communicating respectfully, and understanding unique healthcare needs. By providing ongoing education, organizations can ensure that staff members are well-equipped to provide affirming care.

### Patient-Provider Relationships

Care that is affirming and respectful of each person's unique context fosters a sense of safety, trust, and collaboration, which can improve quality of care and patient outcomes.

- **Respectful Communication:**<sup>[3]</sup> By practicing cultural humility, using proper terminology, and avoiding assumptions about a patient's sexual orientation or gender identity, providers can create an environment in which patients feel comfortable discussing their healthcare needs.
- **Patient-Centered Care Planning:**<sup>[4]</sup> A respectful, trustworthy connection with LGBTQ+ patients paves the way for those patients to actively participate in their care planning process. This includes acknowledging their unique health concerns and incorporating them into treatment decisions. By tailoring care plans to individual needs and preferences, providers can deliver more effective care.

### A Call to Action

Think Cultural Health encourages healthcare leaders and professionals to use the National CLAS Standards as a framework for ensuring equitable care through practices such as fostering an inclusive environment and improving patient-provider relationships. How can you help meet the needs of LGBTQ+ patients and deliver the best healthcare possible? Visit [Think Cultural Health](#) for CLAS resources.

[Visit Think Cultural Health](#)

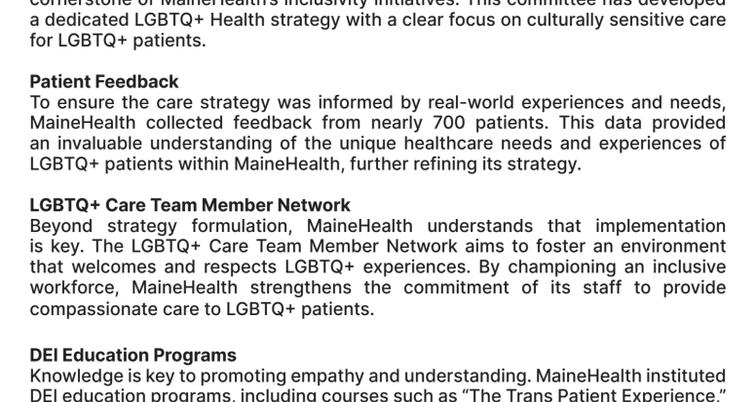
<sup>[1]</sup>Goldhammer, H., Smart, A. C., Kissock, L. A., & Keuroghlian, A. S. (2021). Organizational strategies and inclusive language to build culturally responsive health care environments for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved* 32(1), 18–29. doi:10.1353/hpu.2021.0004.

<sup>[2]</sup>Pratt-Chapman, M. L., Eckstrand, K., Robinson, A., Beach, L. B., Kamen, C., Keuroghlian, A. S., Cook, S., Radix, A., Bidell, M. P., Bruner, D., & Margolies, L. (2022). Developing standards for cultural competency training for health care providers to care for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual persons: Consensus recommendations from a national panel. *IGBT Health*, 9(5), 340–347. <https://doi.org/10.1089/igbt.2021.0464>

<sup>[3]</sup>Ross, K. A., & Castle Bell, G. (2017). A culture-centered approach to improving healthy trans-patient-practitioner communication: Recommendations for practitioners communicating with trans individuals. *Health Communication*, 32(6), 730–740.

<sup>[4]</sup>Kano, M., Silva-Bañuelos, A. R., Sturm, R., & Willging, C. E. (2016). Stakeholders' recommendations to improve patient-centered "LGBTQ" primary care in rural and multicultural practices. *The Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine*, 29(1), 156–160.

## Promoting LGBTQ+ Inclusivity and Equity: A Case Study



**MaineHealth**, an integrated health system operating in Maine and New Hampshire, stands as a leading example of how healthcare organizations can work towards creating a more inclusive and respectful environment for LGBTQ+ patients. This case study presents the efforts taken by MaineHealth to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in its healthcare delivery, aligned with the National CLAS Standards.

### LGBTQ+ Health Steering Committee

The implementation of a multidisciplinary LGBTQ+ Health Steering Committee is the cornerstone of MaineHealth's inclusivity initiatives. This committee has developed a dedicated LGBTQ+ Health strategy with a clear focus on culturally sensitive care for LGBTQ+ patients.

### Patient Feedback

To ensure the care strategy was informed by real-world experiences and needs, MaineHealth collected feedback from nearly 700 patients. This data provided an invaluable understanding of the unique healthcare needs and experiences of LGBTQ+ patients within MaineHealth, further refining its strategy.

### LGBTQ+ Care Team Member Network

Beyond strategy formulation, MaineHealth understands that implementation is key. The LGBTQ+ Care Team Member Network aims to foster an environment that welcomes and respects LGBTQ+ experiences. By championing an inclusive workforce, MaineHealth strengthens the commitment of its staff to provide compassionate care to LGBTQ+ patients.

### DEI Education Programs

Knowledge is key to promoting empathy and understanding. MaineHealth instituted DEI education programs, including courses such as "The Trans Patient Experience," to help care team members understand the unique healthcare needs of transgender individuals. These educational initiatives have helped shape a more knowledgeable and empathetic care team.

### Inclusive Language Guide

Understanding the power of words to shape experiences, MaineHealth introduced the Inclusive Language Guide. This guide provides clear direction on the use of inclusive language, such as preferring "parents, adults, family" over heteronormative terms, and advises on commonly used pronouns for gender identity. These steps further cultivate a respectful environment for LGBTQ+ patients.

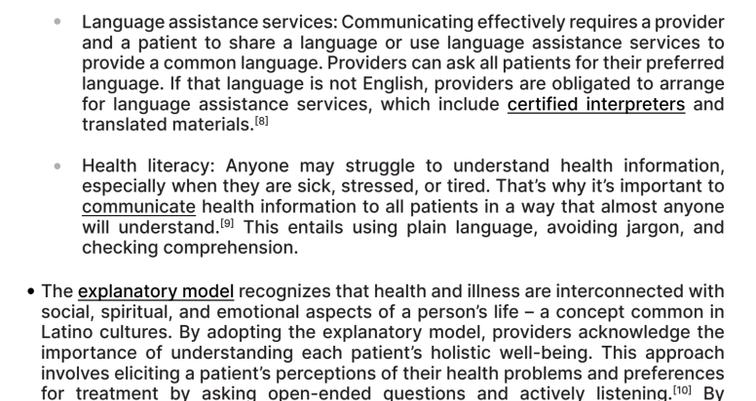
### DEI Council and SOGI Data Collection

The DEI Council at MaineHealth is committed to identifying and eliminating disparities in care delivery. To inform these efforts, MaineHealth initiated sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) data collection in 2018 at its largest hospital, Maine Medical Center. Plans are currently underway to expand this data collection across the MaineHealth system.

*"The National CLAS Standards provide an invaluable blueprint for healthcare systems in the pursuit of eliminating health care disparities. By leveraging the standards to inform strategy, health care systems have the guidance they need to truly advance health equity for the patients and communities they serve."*

Dr. Ryan Polly, Vice President of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion at MaineHealth

## Providing CLAS for Latino Patients



In celebration of **Hispanic Heritage Month**, let's discuss why and how to deliver CLAS when caring for Latino patients. The Latino community encompasses a rich diversity of backgrounds, races, lived experiences, cultural beliefs, and language characteristics. Culturally responsive care helps Latino patients feel respected and valued, understand their conditions and treatment options, and make informed decisions about their healthcare.

How can providers deliver equitable care to Latino patients? Three starting points are self-awareness, effective communication, and the explanatory model.

- **Self-awareness** is the foundation of culturally competent care.<sup>[5]</sup> When providers recognize their own beliefs and values, and how their life experiences have shaped who they are, they can better appreciate the uniqueness and complexities of each patient. Self-awareness helps providers approach each patient with empathy and respect, understand each patient's needs, and provide unbiased care.

- **Effective communication** is essential to high quality care. Patients of all backgrounds enter the healthcare system with varying communication styles, language ability, and health literacy levels.<sup>[6]</sup> When providers do not account for these differences, they cannot provide high quality care.
  - **Communication style:** Providers can work to understand communication preferences and cues from each patient's perspective. With Latino patients, preferences may include active listening, longer patient visits, and shows of respect.<sup>[7]</sup> Creating a welcoming and trustworthy environment encourages patients to express their priorities and concerns without fear of judgment.
  - **Language assistance services:** Communicating effectively requires a provider and a patient to share a language or use language assistance services to provide a common language. Providers can ask all patients for their preferred language. If that language is not English, providers are obligated to arrange for language assistance services, which include certified interpreters and translated materials.<sup>[8]</sup>
  - **Health literacy:** Anyone may struggle to understand health information, especially when they are sick, stressed, or tired. That's why it's important to communicate health information to all patients in a way that almost anyone will understand.<sup>[9]</sup> This entails using plain language, avoiding jargon, and checking comprehension.

- The explanatory model recognizes that health and illness are interconnected with social, spiritual, and emotional aspects of a person's life – a concept common in Latino cultures. By adopting the explanatory model, providers acknowledge the importance of understanding each patient's holistic well-being. This approach involves eliciting a patient's perceptions of their health problems and preferences for treatment by asking open-ended questions and actively listening.<sup>[10]</sup> By integrating cultural practices, religious beliefs, and social support systems into the care plan, providers can offer tailored care that resonates with each patient's unique needs.

Hispanic Heritage Month serves as a reminder to honor the rich cultures of the Latino community and make sure each patient receives the care they deserve by implementing CLAS practices such as self-awareness, effective communication, and the explanatory model. Understanding, respecting, and responding to patients' needs and preferences is an important way to ensure the provision of the highest quality of care to all patients. For actionable information about CLAS, visit Think Cultural Health's Resource Library.

[Visit TCH's Resource Library](#)

<sup>[5]</sup>Younas, A. (2020). Self-awareness: A tool for providing culturally competent care. *Nursing*, 50(2), 61–63. <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.NURSE.000051628.71776.b3>

<sup>[6]</sup>Ali, P. A., & Watson, R. (2018). Language barriers and their impact of provision of care with limited English proficiency: Nurses perspective. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 27, e1152–e1160. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.14204>

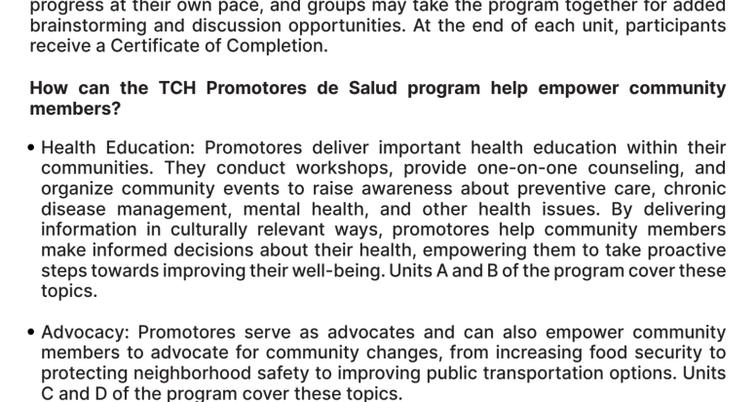
<sup>[7]</sup>Park, L., Schwei, R., Xiong, P., & Jacobs, E. A. (2018). Addressing cultural determinants of health for Latino and Hmong patients with limited English proficiency: Practical strategies to reduce health disparities. *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*, 5(3), 536–544. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-017-0396-3>

<sup>[8]</sup>Squires A. (2018). Strategies for overcoming language barriers in healthcare. *Nursing Management*, 49(4), 20–27. <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.NUMA.0000531166.24481.15>

<sup>[9]</sup>Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. (2015, February). *Health literacy universal precautions toolkit*, 2nd edition – *Communicate clearly: Tool #4*. <https://www.ahrq.gov/health-literacy/quality-resources/tools/literacy-toolkit/healthlitoolkit2-tool4.html>

<sup>[10]</sup>Kleinman, A., Eisenberg, L., & Good, B. (1978). Culture, illness, and care: Clinical lessons from anthropologic and cross-cultural research. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 88(2), 251–258. <https://doi.org/10.7326/0003-4819-88-2-251>

## Empowering Communities through the TCH Promotores de Salud Program



As trusted members of their communities, promotores de salud and community health workers are uniquely positioned to empower community members. Promoting Healthy Choices and Community Changes, a free Think Cultural Health (TCH) e-Learning program, aims to build the capacity of promotores to promote individual-level and community-level changes toward good health.

Available in Spanish and English, the program is comprised of four units that offer strategies for equipping community members to make healthy choices and changes, both individually and as a community. The strategies discussed are applicable across health issues and cultures, with examples that are especially relevant for those working in Latino communities and/or working on issues related to nutrition.

The program offers case studies, opportunities for self-reflection, and pre-tests and post-tests to assess knowledge gained. The e-learning format allows for learners to progress at their own pace, and groups may take the program together for added brainstorming and discussion opportunities. At the end of each unit, participants receive a Certificate of Completion.

### How can the TCH Promotores de Salud program help empower community members?

- **Health Education:** Promotores deliver important health education within their communities. They conduct workshops, provide one-on-one counseling, and organize community events to raise awareness about preventive care, chronic disease management, mental health, and other health issues. By delivering information in culturally relevant ways, promotores help community members make informed decisions about their health, empowering them to take proactive steps towards improving their well-being. Units A and B of the program cover these topics.
- **Advocacy:** Promotores serve as advocates and can also empower community members to advocate for community changes, from increasing food security to protecting neighborhood safety to improving public transportation options. Units C and D of the program cover these topics.

This TCH program equips promotores de salud and other community health workers to empower community members to take control of their health and their community's well-being. By communicating in culturally appropriate ways, promotores can offer health and advocacy education in ways that are understood and accepted by community members. This approach helps bridge the gap between healthcare and social service organizations and marginalized populations. Visit the TCH Promotores de Salud Program today.

[Visit TCH's Promotores de Salud Program](#)

## TCH Oral Health Program: Small Group Learning Materials

Think Cultural Health (TCH) offers a free e-learning program for oral health professionals that offers continuing education credits for dentists, dental hygienists, and dental assistants. The program provides knowledge and skills in CLAS that can help oral health providers:

- Deliver a higher quality of care;
- Help patients meet their oral healthcare goals while honoring their beliefs and practices;
- Decrease clinical errors that may arise from cultural and communication barriers;
- Expand their patient base by providing better care to a wider diversity of patients; and
- Gain tools to help recognize and lessen the disparities that persist in oral health.

In addition to the e-learning program format, the website offers materials to support small group learning – for example, Lunch & Learn sessions at a private practice. The materials equip providers to guide colleagues through the program content in interactive sessions of 6-12 people. The materials include slides, talking points, discussion questions, activities, handouts, and video case studies.

We invite you to check out TCH's Cultural Competency Program for Oral Health Providers to improve your CLAS skills. To access the small group learning materials, click on Toolkit on the left side of the page once you're logged in.

[Visit TCH's Oral Health Program](#)

## 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.