

Think Cultural Health

December 2023 Newsletter

The [Think Cultural Health](#) 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](#).

[Visit Think Cultural Health](#)

Celebrating 10 Years of the Enhanced National CLAS Standards



This year marks the 10th anniversary of the release of the enhanced [National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health and Health Care \(National CLAS Standards\)](#). The Standards have guided countless healthcare organizations in implementing inclusive, equitable policies and practices. The HHS Office of Minority Health (OMH) would like to thank you for your efforts to build a healthcare system that respects and responds to everyone's unique beliefs, values, and needs.

Roslyn Moore advised the enhanced National CLAS Standards' development from 2010 to 2013, and she continues to guide their use and evaluation as OMH's Deputy Director for Programs. She shared the following reflections on the Standards' past, present, and future.

"The National CLAS Standards occupy a unique space in the narrative around health equity and health promotion. The original Standards, published in 2000, were built on the understanding that culture and language matter in health and healthcare. The Standards' history now spans over two decades of efforts to hone and elevate strategies that integrate cultural and linguistic appropriateness into healthcare services. In the face of ongoing disparities in healthcare delivery, the Standards strive to advance the healthcare industry's understanding of how culture and communication influence healthcare experiences and outcomes and how CLAS can improve quality.

"In the years to come, the National CLAS Standards will continue to inform conversations around health equity and the interventions and investments necessary to deliver equitable services. As the national healthcare landscape becomes increasingly complex and fraught, and as health inequities persist, it is more important than ever to commit to the transformational change the Standards can foster around quality and equity.

My sincere gratitude to everyone who has shared or worked to implement the National CLAS Standards at their organization. Together, we are advancing health equity nationwide."

Join us in celebrating the National CLAS Standards' 10th anniversary! Visit [Think Cultural Health](#) today for resources to support your organization's CLAS journey.

[Visit the National CLAS Standards](#)

High and Low Context Communication in Healthcare



The ability to communicate effectively across cultures is essential to the provision of inclusive and equitable healthcare. One factor to consider in cross-cultural communication is high-context and low-context communication.^{[1][2][3]}

In **low-context communication**, meaning is in the words. Messages are expressed and understood at face value. Good communication is precise, simple, and clear. In **high-context communication**, meaning is in the context. Messages are often implied but not plainly expressed. Good communication is sophisticated, nuanced, and layered.

Certain groups of cultures and countries tend to fall predictably onto certain places along the low-to-high context communication spectrum. For example, people of European descent in English-speaking countries (e.g., Canada, Australia, and the U.S.) typically employ low-context communication. In contrast, people in many Asian countries (e.g., China, Japan, and Korea) and American Indians and Alaska Natives in the U.S. tend to employ high-context communication. People in the dominant cultures of Romance-language countries (e.g., Italy, France, Brazil) often land somewhere in the middle.

Understanding and navigating the differences between high- and low-context communication can make your services more respectful and effective. Let's explore more, starting with a fictional clinical scenario.

Mr. Begay, from a high-context communication culture, visits Dr. Clark, who is used to low-context exchanges. Mr. Begay says, "Sometimes, I have trouble sleeping," while glancing at his stomach. Expecting Dr. Clark to probe deeper, Mr. Begay is surprised when Dr. Clark instead prescribes sleep aids. Feeling unheard but not wanting to push, Mr. Begay leaves, but his problem persists. Upon follow-up with Dr. Emezi, who understands high-context communication cues, Mr. Begay's glances and hints are recognized, leading to a diagnosis of gastritis.

You can use this information, not to stereotype, but to improve your awareness of different communication styles and cues to watch out for. For patients employing high-context communication, providers can pay attention to nonverbal communication cues (such as tone and body language), silences, and indirect meanings.

When you're aware of the cultural contexts for communication and adopt a stance of openness and curiosity, you have equipped yourself to communicate more effectively and respectfully with your patients. This helps you assess and diagnose patients more accurately, and it helps your patients understand their diagnosis and next steps.

Think Cultural Health is here to guide you in building your communication skills. Please visit our [resources](#) for improving cross-cultural communication skills.

[Visit TCH's Resource Library](#)

^[1]Trompenaars, F., & Hampden-Turner, C. (2021). *Riding the waves of culture: Understanding diversity in global business*. (4th ed.) Irwin Professional Publishing.

^[2]Meyer, E. (2014). *The culture map: Decoding how people think, lead, and get things done across cultures*. PublicAffairs.

^[3]Ladha, T., Zubairi, M., Hunter, A., Audcent, T., & Johnstone, J. (2018). Cross-cultural communication: Tools for working with families and children. *Paediatrics & child health*, 23(1), 66-69. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pch/pxx126>

Resource for Small Group Learning: TCH Behavioral Health Program Facilitator's Guide



Think Cultural Health's [behavioral health e-learning program](#) offers free continuing education credits to counselors, nurses, psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers. The program presents knowledge and skills in CLAS to help behavioral health professionals better respect and respond to their clients' unique cultural and communication needs.

Learner Feedback

More than 100,000 people have completed all or part of this e-learning program. What did they think of it? Over 85% of learners agreed or strongly agreed that each course is an effective tool to increase knowledge of cultural and linguistic competency, and over 95% of learners would recommend it to a colleague. Here's what they're saying.

- "I loved learning the content and then applying it to case studies, examples, vignettes. That is how I learn best!"
- "Clear, concise information. Easy to understand. Great examples and case studies. Good material to check out."
- "The use of many different methods – case studies, videos, etc. – kept my attention and helped me understand."
- "This was the most comprehensive course I have seen on cultural competency and implementing this into practice. The case studies and mini-questions were helpful to see how this would look in real-world situations."

Small Group Learning

In addition to the e-learning format, the TCH website offers materials to support small group learning. This small group learning option gives you the opportunity to guide your colleagues through the course content during, for example, a Lunch & Learn session.

The materials equip you to facilitate an interactive learning experience for groups of 6-12 people. The materials include slides, talking points, discussion questions, activities, handouts, and video case studies. In this way, you can engage your colleagues in rich discussions and activities to apply the course content to your specific work context.

We invite you to check out TCH's [Improving Cultural Competency for Behavioral Health Professionals](#) to improve your CLAS skills. Once you've completed the program, consider delivering it to your colleagues! Find the small group learning materials by logging in to the e-learning program and clicking on Resources at the top of the page.

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

Stay Tuned! A New, Accredited E-learning Program for Nurses

We are excited to announce the upcoming launch of an all-new e-learning program for nurses. *CLAS in Nursing* will be available in early 2024 with free continuing nursing education units. It will present strategies for improving self-awareness, practicing cultural competency and cultural humility, and communicating effectively. The program offers four courses of one hour each, as well as a Resource Library with additional information and tools.

Follow the [Office of Minority Health](#) on social media to be the first to know when the new program is available!

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.