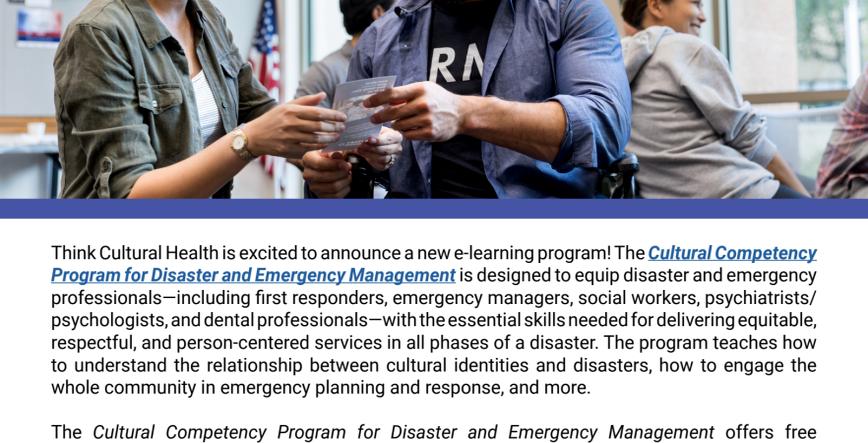# Think Cultural Health
November 2024 Newsletter

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.

New E-Learning Program for Disaster and Emergency Professionals

Think Cultural Health is excited to announce a new e-learning program! The Cultural Competency Program for Disaster and Emergency Management is designed to equip disaster and emergency professionals—including first responders, emergency managers, social workers, psychiatrists/psychologists, and dental professionals—with the essential skills needed for delivering equitable, respectful, and person-centered services in all phases of a disaster. The program teaches how to understand the relationship between cultural identities and disasters, how to engage the whole community in emergency planning and response, and more.

The Cultural Competency Program for Disaster and Emergency Management offers free continuing education credits, EMT/First Responder credits by the Commission on Accreditation for Prehospital Continuing Education (CAPCE), and certificates of completion for students and volunteers. Participants will be introduced to culturally and linguistically appropriate services (CLAS), enhancing their ability to serve diverse communities effectively. Understanding, respecting, and responding to the needs and preferences of those affected by disasters enables disaster and emergency professionals to provide the highest quality of services during disaster preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery.

We invite all emergency and disaster professionals and students to join us in our mission to promote health equity through the provision of CLAS. Enroll in the Cultural Competency Program for Disaster and Emergency Management today!

Visit the Disaster and Emergency Management Program

Respecting Indigenous Knowledge: Integrating Traditional Practices in Disaster Risk Reduction

Written by John C. Scott, Past President of the Center for Public Service Communications. Mr. Scott is a member of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska. This article is adapted from the article "Indigenous Knowledge View and Disaster Risk Reduction", originally published in 2021.

Indigenous Knowledge is a valuable resource in disaster management. Indigenous Knowledge refers to the wisdom, practices, and beliefs of Indigenous communities passed down through generations. It emphasizes a close relationship with nature and sustainable living. Indigenous Knowledge offers important lessons for disaster management about how to care for the environment and manage resources responsibly.

Effective disaster management in Indigenous communities honors and integrates Indigenous Knowledge to support sustainable practices, reduce environmental risks, and preserve valuable wisdom. When disaster managers and personnel know how to meaningfully and respectfully engage the whole community, they can gather valuable insights, develop culturally responsive strategies, and ensure an inclusive response process.

One example of Indigenous Knowledge in disaster management is cultural burning, an Indigenous method of improving ecosystem health and preventing large wildfires by using controlled, low-intensity fires. In California, a recently enacted law (California Senate Bill 310) supports the practice of cultural burning by California tribes and acknowledges their authority to manage their lands using traditional ecological knowledge. By enacting this law, California aims to integrate Indigenous land stewardship techniques into its wildfire prevention strategies and acknowledge the critical role of Indigenous Knowledge in sustainable land management.

Incorporating cultural competence in disaster preparedness improves community resilience by aligning strategies and services with the community's unique needs and values. Learn more with TCH's free e-learning program, Cultural Competency Program for Disaster and Emergency Management.

Read the entire article: Indigenous Knowledge and Disaster Risk Reduction

Challenges in the Use of the "Assess and Refer" Policy During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Written by Daniel R. Gerard, MS, RN, NRP, Immediate Past President of the International Association of Emergency Medical Services Chiefs.

The "Assess and Refer" policies adopted by Emergency Medical Services (EMS) agencies across the country during the COVID-19 pandemic led to significant challenges for vulnerable populations. These policies were intended to mitigate emergency department overcrowding by allowing EMS to evaluate patients in the field. If the patient's conditions were deemed non-critical, EMS provided instruction on what to do if their condition worsened or referred them to alternative care facilities, like clinics, instead of transporting them to hospitals.

As EMS agencies across the country began implementing "Assess and Refer" during the COVID-19 pandemic, they reported numerous challenges with service delivery:

- Many marginalized groups lacked nearby clinics or regular primary care providers. People in rural or underserved urban regions faced delays in care due to a shortage of accessible health care.
- Limited operating hours for clinics meant that clinics were often closed during evenings, weekends, and holidays, forcing patients to either delay care or seek treatment in overcrowded emergency rooms, undermining the policy's purpose.
- The pandemic's disruptions to public transit services and the health risks of using crowded buses or trains deterred people without cars from seeking care.
- Due to inadequate language services provided by EMS, people with limited English proficiency struggled to follow health guidelines or access care efficiently, resulting in poor patient outcomes.
- Patients were given pulse oximeters that often overestimated oxygen saturation levels in patients of color, particularly Black, Latino, and Asian patients, leading to delays in seeking critical medical treatment.

Overall, "Assess and Refer" policies, though well-intentioned, point to the need for more equitable healthcare solutions in future emergency responses.

What lessons can we learn? Improving communication and trust with diverse populations requires the delivery of culturally and linguistically appropriate services. Learn more about how communication and understanding the community can impact disaster preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery with TCH's free e-learning program, Cultural Competency Program for Disaster and Emergency Management.

Visit the Disaster and Emergency Management Program

Community Spotlight: Black Resilience Network
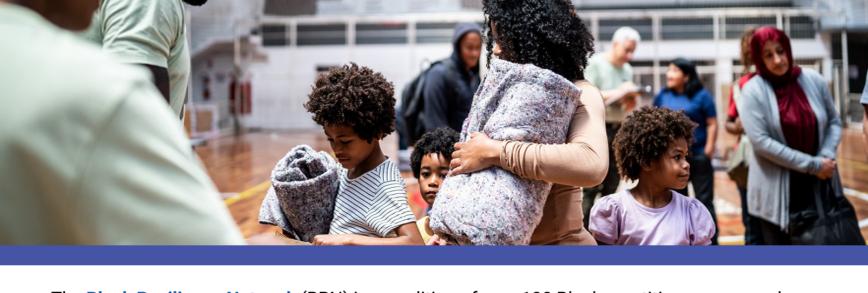
The Black Resilience Network (BRN) is a coalition of over 100 Black practitioners, researchers, businesses, towns, and community organizations focused on disaster and climate resilience. It prioritizes historic and cultural preservation; disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery; and workforce and organizational development. It aims to catalyze leadership development, collaboration, and investments for disaster resilience. Recognizing that Black communities have historically been bypassed in disaster response and recovery, BRN seeks to hold agencies accountable to their commitments to provide supports and resources that disaster-affected Black communities deserve.

BRN's members across 23 states are working hard to center equity and social justice in disaster recovery efforts, including the long road to recovery following Hurricanes Helene and Milton. One example of a BRN member's response to a disaster is the Mississippi Urban League. They lead the Hinds County Long-Term Disaster Recovery Committee, which coordinates efforts among social services, faith-based groups, housing agencies, and other organizations to address the unmet needs of Hinds County residents during disasters. By engaging the whole community, they encourage an inclusive recovery process. Their role was pivotal in the response to the Jackson Water Crisis, and they continue to spearhead recovery efforts for the 2023 tornadoes and severe storms.

Another BRN member, Unity in Disasters, has supported more than 17,000 families and facilitated the redistribution of in-kind relief supplies. In addition to providing essential supplies, Unity in Disasters has played a key role in disaster recovery by offering case management services to survivors of various disasters, including hurricanes. This work reflects emphasizes the importance of coordinating with community organizations to address diverse needs. By working with local partners and redistributing critical resources like food and supplies, Unity in Disasters ensures that aid reaches families in culturally appropriate ways.

The efforts of BRN and its partners align closely with key concepts presented in TCH's free e-learning program, Cultural Competency Program for Disaster and Emergency Management.

Learn More About the Black Resilience Network

Think Cultural Health's 20th Anniversary

As we celebrate Think Cultural Health's 20th anniversary, we're reflecting on two decades of promoting health equity, cultural competence, and language access in healthcare. Over the years, our e-learning programs have empowered over a million healthcare professionals to provide more respectful, inclusive, and effective care to diverse populations.

To mark this milestone, we're reaching out to our community of learners to help us tell the story of this journey. We want to hear from you! If the Think Cultural Health Program has impacted your work or patient care, we invite you to share your experiences with us. We will share selected quotes with our learner community to help inspire others to continue advancing CLAS.

Please share your stories by emailing us by December 5th.

Email Think Cultural Health

New Multifactor Authentication for Think Cultural Health Programs

As part of our ongoing effort to ensure cybersecurity and protection of personal information, we have added a Multifactor Authentication (MFA) process for Think Cultural Health e-learning programs. MFA adds an extra layer of security to your account by requiring identity verification. The next time you log into a TCH e-learning program, you will be prompted to set up your MFA information. As more personal and professional activities move online, safeguarding sensitive information is crucial. Implementing MFA helps prevent unauthorized access, even if your password is compromised, by requiring additional verification, such as a one-time code sent via mobile device or email.

Visit the MFA Support Page

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.

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