

## **Definitions of Cultural & Linguistic Competency**

DMHMRSAS defines culture in the broad sense, as there are other things in addition to race, language, and ethnicity that contribute to a person's sense of self in relation to others. These may be more specific or more general subgroups based on attributes (such as gender or sexual orientation), or shared life experiences (such as survival of violence and/or trauma, education, occupation, or homelessness). Multiple memberships in these subgroups contribute to an individual's personal identity and sense of own "culture". Understanding how these factors affect how a person seeks and uses behavioral health, as well as their culture group's historical relationship to behavioral health is important to providing culturally competent care.

### **Cultural competence requires that organizations:**

- have a defined set of values and principles, and demonstrate behaviors, attitudes, policies and structures that enable them to work effectively cross-culturally.
- have the capacity to (1) value diversity, (2) conduct self-assessment, (3) manage the dynamics of difference, (4) acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge and (5) adapt to diversity and the cultural contexts of the communities they serve.
- incorporate the above in all aspects of policy making, administration, practice, service delivery and involve systematically consumers, key stakeholders and communities.

Cultural competence is a developmental process that evolves over an extended period. Both individuals and organizations are at various levels of awareness, knowledge and skills along the cultural competence continuum. (adapted from [Cross et al., 1989](#))

## **Culturally Competent Guiding Values & Principles**

### **Organizational**

- Systems and organizations must sanction, and in some cases mandate the incorporation of cultural knowledge into policy making, infrastructure and practice.
- Cultural competence embraces the principles of equal access and non-discriminatory practices in service delivery.\*

### **Practice & Service Design**

- Cultural competence is achieved by identifying and understanding the needs and help-seeking behaviors of individuals and families.
- Culturally competent organizations design and implement services that are tailored or matched to the unique needs of individuals, children, families, organizations and communities served.

- Practice is driven in service delivery systems by client preferred choices, not by culturally blind or culturally free interventions.
- Culturally competent organizations have a service delivery model that recognizes mental health as an integral and inseparable aspect of primary health care.

### **Community Engagement**

- Cultural competence extends the concept of self-determination to the community.
- Cultural competence involves working in conjunction with natural, informal support and helping networks within culturally diverse communities (e.g. neighborhood, civic and advocacy associations; local/neighborhood merchants and alliance groups; ethnic, social, and religious organizations; and spiritual leaders and healers).
- Communities determine their own needs.
- Community members are full partners in decision making.
- Communities should economically benefit from collaboration
- Community engagement should result in the reciprocal transfer of knowledge and skills among all collaborators and partners.

### **Family & Consumers**

- Family is defined differently by different cultures.
- Family as defined by each culture is usually the primary system of support and preferred intervention.
- Family/consumers are the ultimate decision makers for services and supports for their children and/or themselves.

### **A DEFINITION OF LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE**

Definitions of linguistic competence vary considerably. Such definitions have evolved from diverse perspectives, interests and needs and are incorporated into state legislation, Federal statutes and programs, private sector organizations and academic settings. The following definition, developed by the National Center for Cultural Competence, provides a foundation for determining linguistic competence in health care, mental health and other human service delivery systems. It encompasses a broad spectrum of constituency groups that could require language assistance or other supports from an organization, agency, or provider.

**Linguistic competence** - The capacity of an organization and its personnel to communicate effectively, and convey information in a manner that is easily understood by diverse audiences including persons of limited English proficiency, those who have low literacy skills or are not literate, and individuals with disabilities. Linguistic competency requires organizational and provider capacity to respond effectively to the health literacy needs of populations served. The organization must have policy, structures, practices, procedures, and dedicated resources to support this capacity. This may include, but is not limited to, the use of:

- bilingual/bicultural or multilingual/multicultural staff;
- cross-cultural communication approaches
- cultural brokers;
- foreign language interpretation services including distance technologies;
- sign language interpretation services;
- multilingual telecommunication systems;
- videoconferencing and telehealth technologies;
- TTY and other assistive technology devices;
- computer assisted real time translation (CART) or viable real time transcriptions (VRT);
- print materials in easy to read, low literacy, picture and symbol formats;
- materials in alternative formats (e.g., audiotape, Braille, enlarged print );
- varied approaches to share information with individuals who experience cognitive disabilities;
- materials developed and tested for specific cultural, ethnic and linguistic groups;
- translation services including those of:
  - legally binding documents (e.g., consent forms, confidentiality and patient rights statements, release of information, applications)
  - signage
  - health education materials
  - public awareness materials and campaigns; and
  - ethnic media in languages other than English (e.g., television, radio, Internet, newspapers, periodicals).

*This information is adapted from the National Center for Cultural Competence at <http://www11.georgetown.edu/research/gucchd/nccc/index.html>*