

The Case for Providing Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS)

The Importance of CLAS

Culturally and linguistically appropriate services (CLAS) ensure that the services you and your organization provide are respectful and responsive to each patient's culture and communication needs.

CLAS Standards are Part of Your Organization's Health Equity Journey

The CLAS standards are a part of your organization's journey to achieving health equity and are embedded in CMS' priorities to advance health equity – without addressing language barriers, low health literacy, or cultural considerations, we cannot achieve health equity.

CMS Framework for Health Equity¹

CMS' framework for health equity includes four priorities, one of which is to advance language access, health literacy and the provision of culturally tailored services which the CLAS standards incorporate.



Priority 1: Expand Collection, Reporting, and Analysis of Standardized Data



Priority 2: Access Causes of Disparities Within CMS Programs, and Address Inequities in Policies and Operations to Close Gaps



Priority 3: Build Capacity of Health Care Organizations and the Workforce to Reduce Health and Health Care Disparities



Priority 4: Advance Language Access, Health Literacy, and the Provision of Culturally Tailored Services



Priority 5: Increase All Forms of Accessibility to Health Care Services and Coverage

The Business Case for CLAS²

In addition to the important focus of implementing CLAS standards to promote health equity, there is also a business case to be made for CLAS with the following benefits:

- Provides an approach on addressing disparities in care, and preferred language is an important way to stratify healthcare outcomes.
- Emphasizes patient-centered care that accounts for patients' needs and preferences which can help improve patient satisfaction.
- Highlights the organization's efforts to better serve its communities and populations by involving them in participatory efforts.
- Accounts for the changing demographics of the U.S. population with more than 20 percent of the population speaking a language other than English at home.
- Improves health care outcomes and contributes to patient safety efforts because communication is key to reducing medical errors, and it is important to communicate in a person's preferred language.
- Supports legislative (e.g., state legislation on cultural competency training), regulatory (e.g., Title VI of Civil Rights Act of 1964 on providing competent interpreter services) and accreditation mandates (e.g., The Joint Commission).

Case Studies Highlighting the Use of CLAS

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health has highlighted several organizations that are implementing the CLAS Standards.³ Below is a synthesis of the ways these organizations implemented CLAS Standards and the benefits:

- Provide advocacy staff to discuss patient rights, language services, and other concerns which has provided an avenue to get patient feedback on their care.
- Institute competency assessments for internal bilingual staff which has promoted reductions in length of stay and lower costs for interpreter services.
- Create signage in multiple languages and staff providing services in those languages which has become part of the organizational culture and promotes respect for the communities being served.
- Conduct a needs assessment on a roadmap to improve access and delivery of equitable care which includes consideration of cultural, linguistic, and health literacy needs, and ultimately promote health equity by building staff capacity, and engaging and collaborating with the community.

Sources:

1. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, [CMS Framework for Health Equity 2022–2032](#)
2. The Case for the Enhanced National CLAS Standards
<https://allianceforclas.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/CaseForEnhancedCLASStandards1.pdf>
3. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, [An Implementation Checklist for the National CLAS Standards](#)