

Tool: Getting Started with CLAS

A step-by-step guide to implementing Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) standards.

- 1. Involve the entire organization**, including clients, in your planning. Ensure the participation of leadership, governance, different departments, and staff at all levels; each one brings a valuable perspective.
- 2. Assess your organization's ability to offer services that are respectful and responsive to diverse cultures and languages** by completing an implementation checklist. Tool: [CLAS Checklist](#)
- 3. Know the populations you serve.** Collect appropriate data on race, ethnicity, language, disability status, socioeconomic status, gender and sexual orientation.
- 4. Become familiar with your clients' cultures.** Seek to understand the needs, cultural beliefs, values, practices, and attitudes about health and treatment options that exist among key populations in your service area. Incorporate data on race, ethnicity, language, disability status, income and sexual orientation into your records. Observe patterns. Make improvements based on these patterns.
- 5. Plan and evaluate.** Incorporate a process to increase levels of culture awareness, knowledge and skills into your organization's goals and operations. Use ongoing cultural assessments and data to benchmark.
- 6. Adopt policies that promote equity** in hiring, retention, and promotion practices, benefits offered, non-discrimination policies, and grievance procedures.
- 7. Make services accessible to diverse populations.** Offer adaptive services and interpretation. Ensure access for clients with disabilities. Address literacy needs. Simplify written materials and translate them into key languages. Create a welcoming environment by posting non-discrimination notices, universal signs and inclusive symbols. Use sensitive, gender-neutral language.
- 8. Match services to needs.** Use data and client knowledge to offer services that meet real cultural, health, literacy, access and communication needs of clients.
- 9. Reflect community diversity in your workforce.** Adopt policies to hire, promote and retain staff who reflect the cultural, racial and linguistic backgrounds of existing and potential clients.
- 10. Offer diversity training.** Improve the capacity for team members to work and communicate effectively in cross cultural situations. These trainings could be offered as part of staff meetings, employee orientation and ongoing evaluations.
- 11. Involve the community.** Use community members and partner organizations as cultural brokers or bridges to link different groups or people of different cultural backgrounds. Seek joint funding. Involve the community in your board.
- 12. Monitor your progress.** Use data gathered in the assessment process to guide changes in policy and practices; review and document changes on an annual basis; establish a monitoring system. See: Chapter 3 in [Evaluation of the National CLAS Standards: Tips and Resources](#).
- 13. Share what you've learned.** Share your progress made in improving cultural awareness, knowledge and skills with staff, colleagues, and the community, include data, best practices, and successes.

Reference: The Getting Started with CLAS Tool is adapted from the following:

- 1) "Making CLAS Happen." Massachusetts Department of Public Health (2013). Available at: <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dph/programs/admin/health-equity/clas/making-clas-happen.html>