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# Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Responses



Individuals who have experienced trafficking come from all walks of life. They have a variety of cultural backgrounds and speak different languages. To be able to work with such a diverse population, you should be prepared to use culturally and linguistically appropriate services. The [Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services](#), or CLAS, Standards were developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Minority Health as a way to improve the quality of services provided to all individuals and works to reduce health disparities in order to achieve health equity.

The CLAS Standards broadly define culture as the integrated pattern of thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions associated, wholly or partially, with racial, ethnic, or linguistic groups as well as religious, spiritual, biological, geographical, or sociological characteristics. Culture is dynamic in nature, and individuals may identify with multiple cultures over the course of their lifetimes.

This applies to individuals who may have experienced trafficking. Do not assume that individuals who have experienced similar exploitation and trauma will have the same questions or responses to care. Each of them has their own cultural identity.

- Any two individuals within the same culture may be distinctly different because of other cultural affiliations.
- Some cultural characteristics will be more important to one person than to another member of the same culture because of other cultural identities.
- Within any given culture, the differences between two individuals may be more pronounced than their similarities.

Elements of culture can include:

- Age
- Cognitive ability or limitations
- Country of origin
- Education level attained
- Environment and surroundings
- Family and household composition
- Gender identity
- Sexual orientation
- Generation
- Health practices
- Linguistic characteristics (languages spoken, literacy levels, other communication-related needs)
- Political beliefs
- Residence (urban, rural, or suburban)
- Norms
- Values
- Race
- Ethnicity

## Cultural and Linguistic Competency

Cultural competence involves valuing diversity, conducting self-assessments, avoiding stereotypes, managing the dynamics of difference, acquiring and institutionalizing cultural knowledge, and adapting to diversity and cultural contexts in communities.

Linguistic competency is the capacity of an organization and its personnel to communicate effectively and convey information in a manner easily understood by diverse audiences, including persons of limited English proficiency (LEP), those who have low literacy skills or who are not literate, and individuals with disabilities.

Linguistically competent organizations are able to provide individuals with readily available and culturally appropriate oral and written language services through such means as bilingual/bicultural staff, trained medical interpreters, and qualified translators.

The intent of cultural competency is not that you become an expert in every culture or fluent in every language. Rather, culturally and linguistically competent organizations adopt and implement strategies that support the needs of a diverse population.

## Practical Application of CLAS Standards

The [National Standards for CLAS in Health and Health Care](#) are a set of 15 action steps intended to advance health equity, improve quality, and help eliminate health care disparities by providing a blueprint for individuals and organizations to implement CLAS. The [Blueprint for Advancing and Sustaining CLAS Policy and Practice](#) offers practical tips, strategies, and tools on how to apply CLAS.

## Related Resources

- SOAR Online's module on [Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services](#) helps professionals build their understanding and capacity to deliver services to individuals who may have experienced trafficking.
- [Think Cultural Health](#) provides extensive resources to agencies and staff about how to practically apply culturally and linguistically appropriate programs.
- The National Center for Cultural Competence developed a [Self-Assessment Checklist](#) to assess primary health care practitioners' attitudes, knowledge, and skills that are integral to culturally and linguistically competent care.

Check out our [additional resources](#).

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SOAR

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