

Cultural Competency:

BRIDGING THE COMMUNICATION GAP



What Is Cultural Competency?

Cultural Competency encompasses Iowa Total Care's beliefs, values and behaviors. It is the ability to interact effectively with people from different cultures and backgrounds.

Why Is Cultural Competency Important?

Better cross-cultural and linguistic communications can play a role in reducing health disparities, which are prevalent throughout the state of Iowa. Iowa has seen as many as 140 spoken languages, which also presents numerous opportunities for misunderstanding regarding health conditions or medications. The ability to communicate successfully across barriers in healthcare can directly affect a patient's treatment and/or the outcome of the treatment.

What Can You Do To Become More Culturally Competent?

As an organization, Iowa Total Care uses the National Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (C.L.A.S.) standards from the Office of Minority Health to guide our efforts to become more culturally competent. Here are a few standards to guide you:

- 1. PRINCIPAL STANDARD:** Provide effective, equitable, understandable and respectful quality care and services that are responsive to diverse cultural health beliefs and practices, preferred languages, health literacy and other communication needs.
- 2. GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND WORKFORCE:** Recruit, promote and support a culturally and linguistically diverse governance, leadership and workforce that are responsive to the population in the service area.
- 3. COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE:** Offer communication and language assistance to individuals who have limited English proficiency and/or other communication needs, at no cost to them, to facilitate timely access to all healthcare and services.
- 4. ENGAGEMENT, CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY:** Establish culturally and linguistically appropriate goals, policies and management accountability, and infuse them throughout the organization's planning and operations.

What Is Health Literacy?

Health Literacy is the capacity to obtain process and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate decisions. A patient's level of health literacy can impact how and when they take their medications, their understanding of their health conditions, attendance at their appointments and the choices they make regarding treatment. Low health literacy has been linked to poor health outcomes, such as higher rates of hospitalization and less frequent use of preventive services.

Signs of Low Health Literacy

- Noncompliance with medication regimens, lab tests or appointment attendance.
- An incomplete or inaccurately completed registration form.
- Inability to explain the functions, timing and names of their medications.
- Saying they “forgot their glasses” if they cannot read something.

What Can You Do?

The American Medical Association Foundation has compiled six steps to improve interpersonal communications with low health literacy patients.

- **Slow down** – Sometimes a little extra time is needed so the patient can process the information better.
- **Use plain, non-medical language** – Use terms like “high blood pressure” instead of “hypertension” or “skin doctor” instead of “dermatologist”.
- **Show or draw pictures** – Visual imagery can improve the patient’s recall of ideas.
- **Limit the amount of information and repeat it** – Sometimes it can be overwhelming for a patient to receive too much information all at once.
- **Use the “teach-back” method** – Confirm that the patient understands by asking them to repeat back your instructions. It may be helpful to say something like, “I want to make sure I told you everything correctly. Can you please tell me what you’re going to do to take care of your foot?”
- **Create a shame-free atmosphere that encourages questions** – Make patients feel comfortable asking questions. Use the patient’s family and friends in promoting understanding.
- **Be positive and empowering** – Encourage questions from the patient after every main point.

Resources for Your Practice: Complimentary Interpretation Services

Iowa Total Care provides interpretation services for Iowa Total Care members at no cost to them or our providers. To schedule an in-person interpreter, call Member Services. To obtain access to a telephonic interpreter, follow these steps:

1. Call Iowa Total Care Member Services: 1-833-404-1061.
2. Tell the representative that you need an interpreter and the desired language.
3. When connected, use the speakerphone function to communicate with the patient.

For more tips on how to work effectively with an interpreter, communicating across language barriers, identifying & addressing health literacy issues, trainings and much more, please visit [The Industry Collaboration Effort's Better Communication, Better Care: Provider Tools to Care for Diverse Populations \(ICE Toolkit\)](#), [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services A Physician's Practical Guide to Culturally Competent Care](#) or our provider website (click [here](#) and go under, ‘Cultural Competency/Humility Toolkits’).

Contact Information

For other questions or concerns regarding cultural or linguistic needs for Iowa Total Care members, email us at C&L@IowaTotalCare.com.