



**STATE OF TENNESSEE
BUREAU OF TENNCARE**

**CULTURAL COMPETENCY
AND
LITERACY IN HEALTH CARE**

**PROVIDED BY: THE BUREAU OF TENNCARE IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE TENNCARE PARTNERS -
CULTURAL COMPETENCY/HEALTH CARE LITERACY GROUP**

CULTURAL COMPETENCY IN HEALTH CARE

Values and Attitudes

Culture shapes how people experience their world. It is a vital component of how services are both delivered and received. Cultural competence begins with an awareness of your own cultural beliefs and practices, and recognition that people from other cultures may not share them. This means more than speaking another language or recognizing the cultural icons of a people. It means changing prejudgments or biases you may have of a people's cultural beliefs and customs.

CULTURAL COMPETENCY IN HEALTH CARE

Values and Attitudes

It is important to promote mutual respect. Cultural competence is rooted in respect, validation and openness towards someone with different social and cultural perceptions and expectations than your own. People tend to have an “ethnocentric” view in which they see their own culture as the best. Some individuals may be threatened by, or defensive about, cultural differences. Moving toward culturally appropriate service delivery means being:

- Knowledgeable about the cultural differences and their impact on attitudes and behaviors;**
- Sensitive, understanding, non-judgemental, and respectful in dealings with people whose culture is different from your own; and**
- Flexible and skillfull in responding and adapting to different cultural contexts and circumstances.**

CULTURAL COMPETENCY IN HEALTH CARE

Intervening Factors

The cultures of patients and providers may be affected by:

- **Educational level**
- **Income level**
- **Geographic residence**
- **Identification with community groups**
- **Religious or moral preferences**
- **Individual experiences**
- **Place of birth**
- **Length of residency in the US**
- **Age**

CULTURAL COMPETENCY IN HEALTH CARE

GLOSSARY

Cultural competency in health care – The effective integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific standards, policies, practices and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the quality of health care, thereby producing better health outcomes.

- **Culture** - The integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations. The customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group. Also the characteristic features of everyday existence (as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time (i.e. popular culture, southern culture). The set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization.
- **Cultural knowledge** - Familiarization with selected cultural characteristics, history, values, belief systems, and behaviors of the members of another ethnic group.
- **Cultural awareness** - Developing sensitivity and understanding of another ethnic group. This process involves internal changes in terms of attitudes and values. Cultural awareness also refers to the qualities of openness and flexibility that people develop in regards to others. Cultural awareness should be supplemented with cultural knowledge.
- **Cultural sensitivity** – Knowing that cultural difference as well as similarities exists, without assigning values (i.e. better or worse, right or wrong) to those cultural differences.

LITERACY IN HEALTH CARE

WHAT IS LITERACY?

Literacy can be defined as a person's ability to read, write, speak, and compute and solve problems at levels necessary to:

- Function on the job and in society**
- Achieve one's goals**
- Develop one's knowledge and potential**

The term "illiteracy" means being unable to read or write.

A person who has limited or low literacy skills is not illiterate.

LITERACY IN HEALTH CARE

WHAT IS HEALTH CARE LITERACY?

Health care literacy is the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.

Health literacy is dependent on individual and systemic factors:

- Communication skills of lay persons and professionals
- Lay and professional knowledge of health topics
- Culture
- Demands of the healthcare and public health systems
- Demands of the situation/context

LITERACY IN HEALTH CARE

The lack of literacy in health care can affect an individual's ability to:

- **Navigate the healthcare system, including filling out complex medical forms and locating providers and services.**
- **Share personal information, such as health history, with providers.**
- **Engage in self-care and chronic-disease management.**
- **Understand mathematical concepts such as probability and risk.**