



# NCFH

National Center for Farmworker Health, Inc.



## **A Guide to Implementing Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services**

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## Introduction

Thank you for making a strategic effort to incorporate Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) into your organization.

Health care organizations must demonstrate understanding and compassion in the care of patients from all cultures, races or ethnicities. Federally funded health centers are tasked with addressing the many health inequities that exist among their patient populations and CLAS provides an effective framework to fulfill this important part of the mission.

CLAS implementation adds value to the organization in the following ways:

- CLAS organizations respond to changing demographics which results in the elimination of disparities in the health status of people of diverse racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
- CLAS can improve the quality of services that a health center provides which can result in better health outcomes for their patients.
- CLAS organizations meet legislative, regulatory and accreditation mandates which can result in decreased liability and malpractice claims.

## Defining CLAS

Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) is defined as services that are respectful of and responsive to individual cultural health beliefs, practices, preferred languages, health literacy levels and communication needs.



The CLAS Standards were developed by the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health](#). They consist of fifteen action steps for providing CLAS and serve as a guide to becoming a healthcare organization that fosters health equity for all patients regardless of their culture or socio-economic factors.

The fifteen CLAS Standards begin with Standard one, referred to as the Principal Standard, which is to 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. While there are fifteen standards, standard one drives the implementation of all standards which are organized by theme.

## Enhanced National CLAS Standards' Themes



## CLAS Themes and Standards

### **Theme 1: Governance, Leadership, and Workforce**

This theme emphasizes that the leadership team is ultimately responsible for implementing CLAS. In addition, implementing CLAS also requires the support and training of all individuals within an organization.

Standards for Theme 1:

2. Advance and sustain organizational governance and leadership that promotes CLAS and health equity through policy, practices, and allocated resources.

3. Recruit, promote, and support a culturally and linguistically diverse governance, leadership, and workforce that are responsive to the population in the service area.

4. Educate and train governance, leadership, and workforce in culturally and linguistically appropriate policies and practices on an ongoing basis.

### **Theme 2: Communication and Language Assistance**

This theme broadens the understanding and application of appropriate services to include all communication needs and services, including sign language, braille, oral interpretation and written translation.

Standards for Theme 2:

5. Offer 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 health care and services.

6. Inform all individuals of the availability of language assistance services clearly and in their preferred language, verbally and in writing.

7. Ensure the competence of individuals providing language assistance, recognizing that the use of untrained individuals and/or minors as interpreters should be avoided.

8. Provide easy-to-understand print and multimedia materials and signage in the languages commonly used by the populations in the service area.

### **Theme 3: Engagement, Continuous Improvement, and Accountability**

This theme emphasizes the importance of establishing both individual & organizational responsibility for implementing CLAS. Effective delivery of CLAS demands action across the organization.

Standards for Theme 3:

9. Establish culturally and linguistically appropriate goals, policies, and management accountability, and infuse them throughout the organization's planning and operations.

10. Conduct ongoing assessments of the organization's CLAS-related activities and integrate CLAS-related measures into measurement and continuous quality improvement activities.

11. Collect and maintain accurate and reliable demographic data to monitor and evaluate the impact of CLAS on health equity and outcomes & to inform service delivery.

12. Conduct regular assessments of community health assets and needs and use the results to plan and implement services that respond to the cultural and linguistic diversity of populations in the service area.

13. Partner with the community to design, implement, and evaluate policies, practices, and services to ensure cultural and linguistic appropriateness.

14. Create conflict and grievance resolution processes that are culturally and linguistically appropriate to identify, prevent, and resolve conflicts or complaints.

15. Communicate the organization's progress in implementing and sustaining CLAS to all stakeholders, constituents, and the general public.

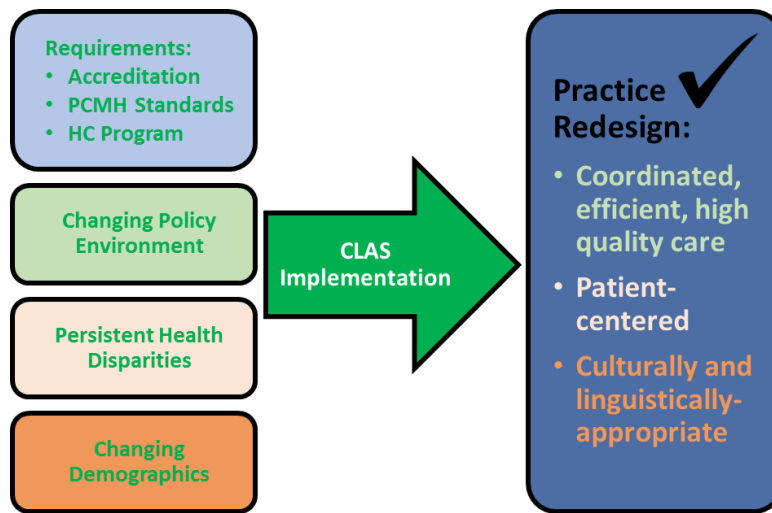
Click [here](#) for a brief 2 page snapshot of the Standards or visit [www.thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/](http://www.thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/).

## Key Benefits

To ensure the success of your organization's CLAS initiative, it is critical to have policies, procedures and resources in place to support efforts. Leadership will play a key role in setting the direction so that the infrastructure is in place and that staff is engaged and able to put the policies into practice. As a result of your efforts, the following short term and long-term benefits can be achieved:

- Improves efficiency of care and services by decreasing barriers that slow progress
- Improves patient satisfaction and self-reported quality of care measures
- Improves patient compliance
- Improves patient safety and reduces medical errors
- Improves risk management
- Improves workplace and team communications
- Builds a respectful environment
- Reduces preventable service utilizations
- Increases cost savings (↓number of patient treatments; ↓hospital length of stay; ↓number of medical errors)
- Reduces excess hospital costs of health disparities in the patient population
- Reduces avoidable 30-day hospital readmissions
- Reduces risk of sanctions and penalties

Having a CLAS initiative in place, also supports additional goals and requirements you may be required to fulfill such as Patient Centered Medical Home Certification or achieving Health Center Program Requirements. Keeping abreast of the changing policy environment, the demographics and the community needs informs your CLAS efforts therefore helping you to redesign service delivery as illustrated below.



## Overview of this How-to-Guide

The purpose of this guide is to provide an overview of how to integrate a CLAS initiative into your organization. It is important to note that while many organizations are already implementing many of these standards, the intent of this guide is to assist an organization in developing and documenting a strategic approach that will add value to the work already being done to support your health equity efforts. The accompanying tools will help an organization be able to critically assess if CLAS services are being provided, identify areas for improvement, and provide guidance in creating an action plan with specific steps to meet identified goals. At first glance the fifteen CLAS Standards can appear overwhelming and, in some cases, overlap with others; however, we hope this guide and the tools included will help you be able to work through them and streamline the process.

Keep in mind there is no single, correct way to implement the Standards. Using these tools will bring awareness to what your organization is already doing in regards to CLAS, help to identify gaps, and help you prioritize and set measurable goals. CLAS has been shown to improve health outcomes which is a goal of all health organizations. The resources in this guide will help organizations move towards the goal of providing culturally and linguistically appropriate services.

## CLAS Tools

In collaboration with a CLAS Learning Collaborative consisting of Health Centers (HCs) and Primary Care Associations (PCAs), NCFH created these tools for health centers and other organizations to use and guide implementation of CLAS in their organizations.

There is a total of four tools to be utilized in the CLAS Process explained below. Each tool is described in detail in the next pages.

- Organizational Self-Assessment (a tool to determine areas in which CLAS is being addressed/achieved)
- Implementation Planning Template (a planning template that documents the specific strategies being implemented per standard and areas where CLAS needs to be addressed)
- Action Planning Template (a tool designed to outline action steps needed to achieve strategies)
- CLAS Standards & Strategies Reference Sheet (includes CLAS Standard descriptions, key words, and examples of strategies)

***These downloadable tools serve as a guide, can be adapted to meet your organizational needs, and can be customized with your logo. Below you will find the links to access each tool.***

## The CLAS Process

### Five Step Process- Steps for your Strategic Approach

Follow these steps:

1. Organizational Self-Assessment, snapshot of current efforts
2. Implementation Planning, identify areas to work on
3. Action Planning, set concrete steps to accomplish your goals
4. Team Engagement, staff training
5. Quality Improvement, measuring success and modifying as needed





## Step 1: Complete the Organizational Self-Assessment Tool

Self-assessment is the first step in the process and best when completed as a team. Consider bringing a multi-disciplinary team together representing different departments in your organization, supervisory and non-supervisory staff. If you have a performance improvement committee, this could also be a place to complete the assessment. This tool is designed to guide team members to carefully assess which standards are being addressed. Once completed, the assessment provides a snapshot of the work that is currently being done and informs the areas to be addressed. [Click here to download the organizational self-assessment tool.](#)

***This self-assessment tool has been divided up into sections for ease of use as follows:***

Section 1 consists of questions about your organization and ***patient demographic information***. This section will help you identify your patient base and inform services needed by the community you serve.

Section 2 consists of multiple-choice questions relating to ***governance, leadership, and workforce***. This section will help you identify your organization's mission, values, policies and procedures to determine if they reflect a commitment to providing services that are culturally and linguistically appropriate.

Section 3 consists of questions about ***communication and language assistance***. This section will help you confirm that you are utilizing translation services and materials written in the languages that reflect the communities that you serve.

Section 4 consists of questions about ***engagement, continuous improvement, and accountability***. This section will help you build partnerships with other organizations in your community which will result in the sharing of demographic information and provide transparent communication around CLAS efforts.

## Step 2: Implementation Planning

The next step following the assessment, is documenting the specific strategies currently being addressed per standard. This exercise will allow members of your team to acknowledge the work being already being done around each CLAS Standard, identify areas that need to be modified based on current environment changes or you may realize there are Standards that have not been addressed. Think of this step as an overall view of your CLAS efforts. Achieving CLAS is an ongoing process and should be viewed as a journey of continuous improvement. Planning is key! It is recommended that you strive to work on at least 2-3 standards at a time. During this process you also need to consider human and financial resources available to guide your efforts.

An added benefit of this process is that you have one document to show your efforts. This tool can be very useful in demonstrating your strategic approach to accrediting agencies, funding organizations and to communicate your efforts to the community being served as well as key stakeholders and partners.

Click here to download the [Implementation Planning Template](#).

Use the [CLAS Standards & Strategies Reference Sheet](#) to see examples of strategies to implement.

### **Step 3: Action Planning**

During this step, you will have the opportunity to dive deeper into each standard and identify the steps to put into action in detail. Be as specific as possible, assign a staff member to drive that action, and include a date for completion if appropriate. The action plan identifies the specific task, responsible parties, and timeline. Think of the action planning step as the roadmap which will get you to your destination.

[Click here to download the Action Planning Template](#).

### **Step 4: Team Engagement and Training**

To ensure successful implementation of CLAS, staff engagement and buy-in is key. It is important to inform staff of your efforts and keep them engaged throughout the process. All staff should be involved in action planning and implementation. One way to involve staff and keep them engaged is through the formation of a CLAS committee made up of members from different areas of the organization to work collectively to support the CLAS initiative and to ensure CLAS efforts are integrated throughout the organization. You can also consider identifying Champions. Champions can be instrumental in driving the initiative throughout the organization. Identify staff members at all levels that are passionate and committed to rallying their coworkers to keep health equity at the forefront of all the work being done.

In addition to these steps, having a well-trained staff will enhance your efforts. Once you complete your Organizational Self-Assessment, you may find that training is an area that may need improvement. Think about ways you can provide training for both staff and board members in person, virtually or through your e-learning platform. Prepare for initial training as well as on-going opportunities that will support their role in providing services.

Consider these areas for a Starting Point for CLAS Training

- Overview of CLAS governing laws
- Cultural Competency 101/Cultural Humility in Practice
- Gaining cultural knowledge on communities being served
- Awareness of diverse health beliefs and behaviors

- Health Literacy 101
- Resolving conflicts and respecting differences
- Empowering clients to be active partners in the medical encounter
- Cross-cultural communication skills

## **Step 5: Evaluate your Efforts- On-going Quality Improvement**

It's good practice to evaluate how well the organizations CLAS efforts are going. Commit to regular communication regarding progress to staff, board, and the community for continued engagement and commitment of all. Think about a quarterly check-in. Review action plans and reflect if the strategies that were implemented worked. If they worked, choose a new Standard from the Implementation Plan as a new priority. If the strategy was not effective in meeting your goal, look at other strategies to try.

It is important to communicate what your organization is doing regarding CLAS to all staff, key stakeholders, and the community through your normal channels of communication. Sharing best practices and data with community organizations allows collaboration towards how to best serve members of the community. Additionally, sharing progress and accomplishments around CLAS efforts shows the organizations commitment to CLAS and helps to build trust between the organizations within your community and the populations you serve.

Keep in mind ... "CLAS is a way to improve the quality of services provided to all individuals, which will ultimately help reduce health disparities and achieve health equity. CLAS is about respect and responsiveness: Respect the whole individual and Respond to the individual's health needs and preferences."

*[www.thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/clas](http://www.thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/clas)*

## Resources

There is a plethora of resources to help you reach your organization's CLAS goals. To broaden your knowledge, here are just a few to get you started:

1. The Blueprint is an implementation guide to help you advance and sustain culturally and linguistically appropriate services within your organization.  
[CLAS Blueprint](#)
2. [National Center for Cultural Competence](#)
3. [HRSA \(Culture Language and Health Literacy\)](#)
4. [A Practical Guide to Implementing the National CLAS Standards](#)
5. [Planning Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services](#) developed by AHRQ
6. [Policy Brief 1- Rationale for Cultural Competence in Primary Health Care](#) developed by National Center for Cultural Competency

This project was supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under cooperative agreement number U30CS09737, Training and Technical Assistance National Cooperative Agreement for \$1,433,856 with 0% of the total NCA project financed with non-federal sources. This information or content and conclusions are those of the author and should not be construed as the official position or policy of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by HRSA, HHS or the U.S. Government.