
Addressing Health Disparities Through a Cultural Lens

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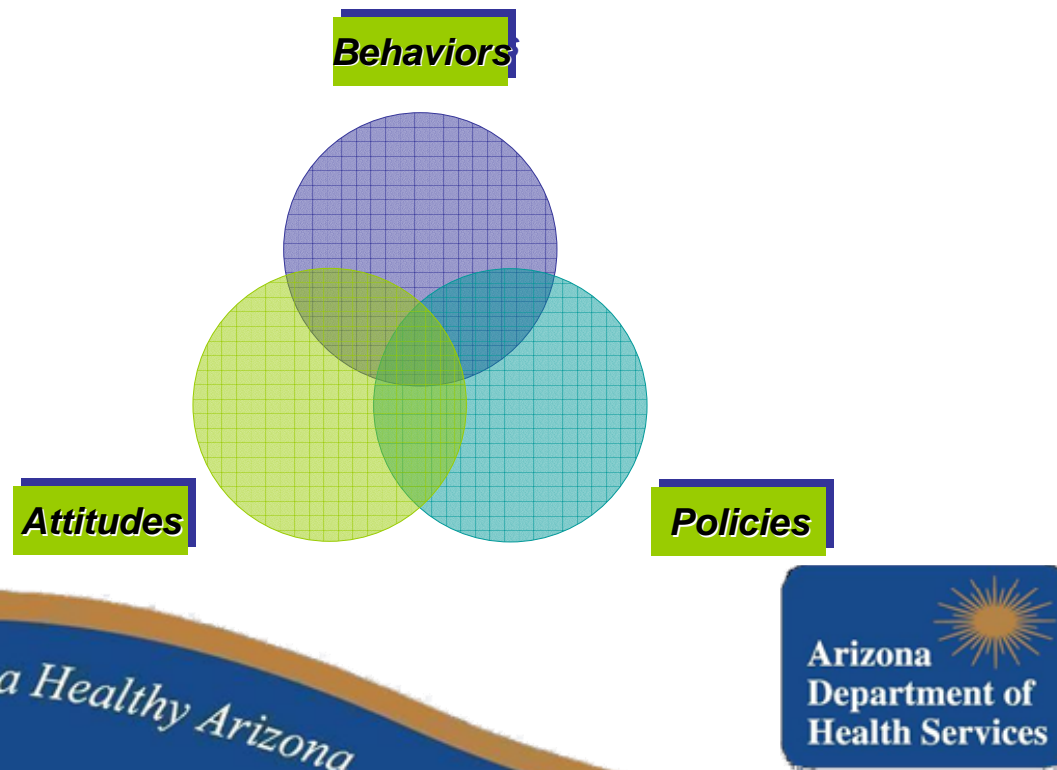


Objectives

1. Gain awareness of the components of cultural and linguistic competence.
2. Develop understanding of the interconnection between cultural competency, health literacy, social determinants of health, health disparities, and health equity.
3. Identify multi-disciplinary strategies that address health disparities and health equity through improvements in cultural competence.

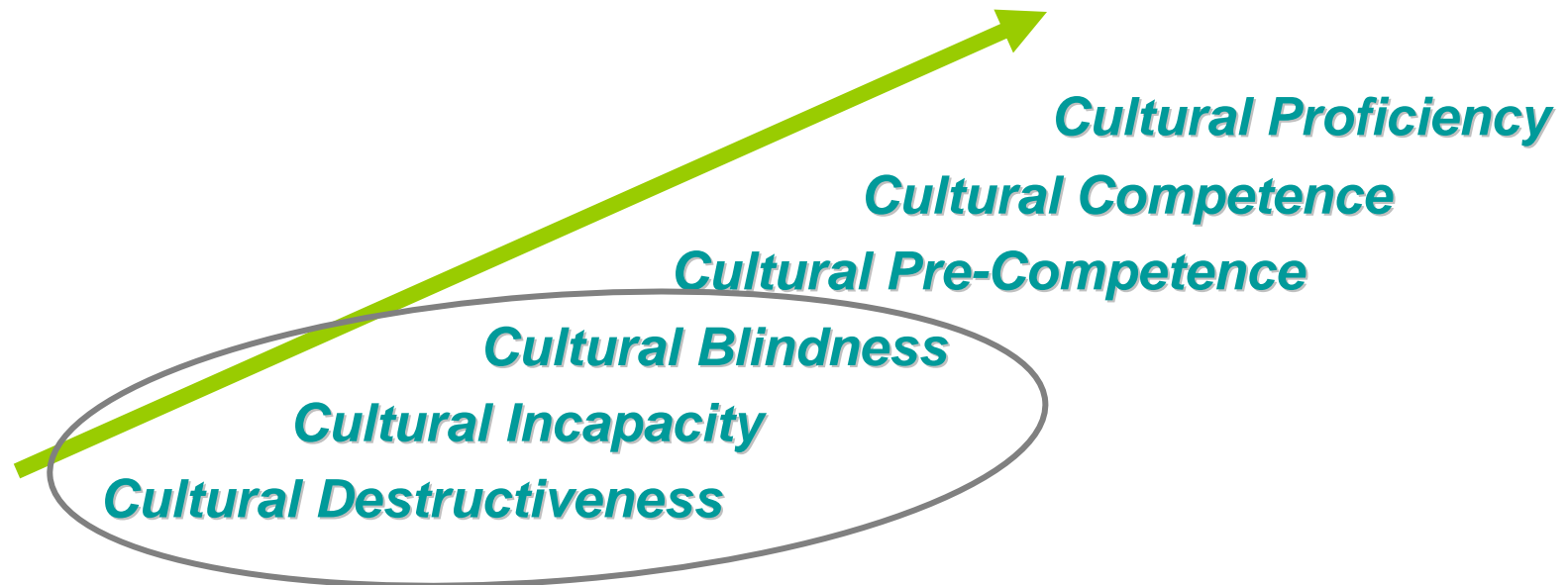
What is Cultural Competence?

- Set of behaviors, attitudes, policies that fit together in a system, agency, or among professionals enabling effective work in cross cultural situations



Cultural Competency Continuum

- Individuals and organizations are at various levels of awareness, knowledge, and skills along a continuum



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Compelling Need for Cultural Competence

- Respond to current and projected US demographic changes
- Eliminate long-standing disparities in health status
- Improve quality of services and health outcomes
- Meet legislative, regulatory and accreditation mandates
- Gain a competitive edge in the market place
- Decrease likelihood of liability/malpractice claims

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Linguistic Competence

- Health literacy
 - Ability to read, write, understand & use information essential to managing one's health & healthcare
 - Not exclusively an issue for those with low education

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The Challenge of Health Literacy

- For the 93 million adults with limited literacy skills, health literacy an even greater challenge
 - Less knowledge about and poorer adherence to medication & self-care regimens for chronic conditions
 - Less knowledge & less likelihood of getting specific preventive tests & exams, **even with equal access to care**
 - Poorer self-reported health & poorer health outcomes
 - Increased hospitalization & costs
- Literacy abilities decline progressively with age

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Cultural & Linguistic Competence

- Health promotion approaches respect cultural values, beliefs, & practices of intended audience
- Critical to providing high quality healthcare & prevention services
- A main ingredient in closing the disparities gap
- Services respectful of and responsive to needs of diverse populations can lead to positive health outcomes

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Operating with CLAS

- Cultural and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS)
- Developed by the Office of Minority Health
- Intended to be inclusive of all cultures
- Guidelines to ensure that all people entering the healthcare system receive equitable and effective treatment

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CLAS Standards

- Three themes
 - Culturally competent care
 - Language access services (mandates)
 - Organizational supports

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The Culturally Competent...

- Community Based Organization
- Healthcare System
 - Culturally & Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS)
- Healthcare Provider
 - Cultural competency continuing education
 - Patient/provider communication

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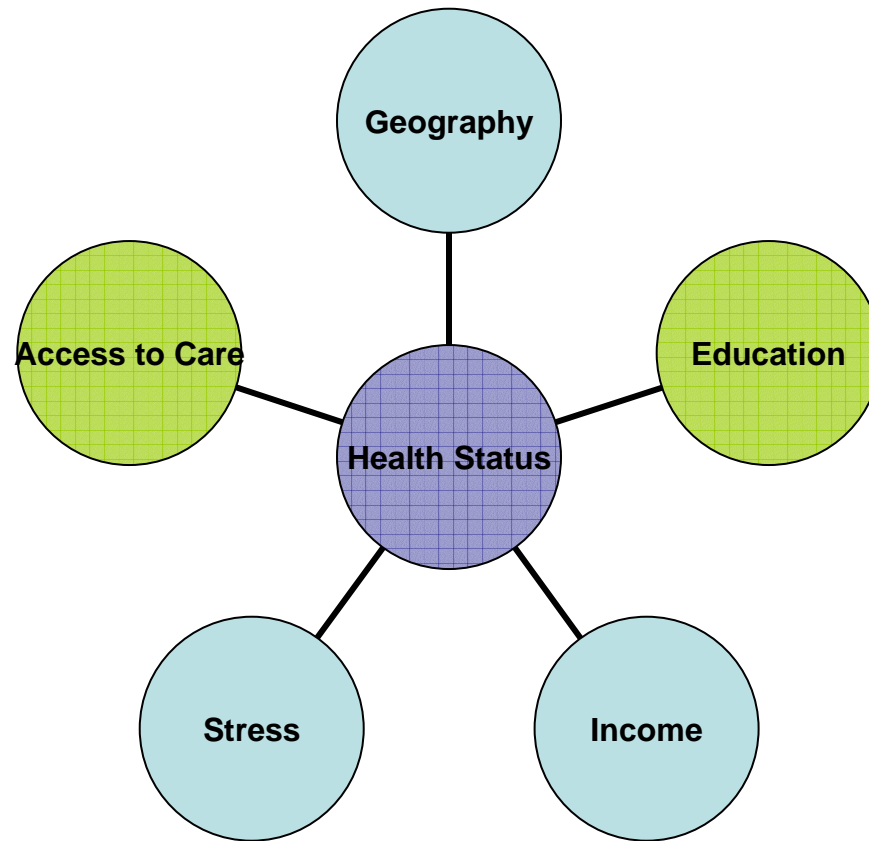
The Culturally Competent...

- Public Health/Community Health Professional
 - Cultural competency continuing education
 - Cultural tailoring of interventions/programs
- Policy Maker
 - Policies supporting cultural & linguistic competence
 - Understanding of community needs in a cultural context
- Researcher
 - Ethical, responsible, inclusive research design
 - Recruitment of community, underrepresented groups in research (i.e., clinical trials)

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Social Determinants of Health



Health Equity

- Differences in population health that can be traced to unequal economic and social conditions
 - Systemic and avoidable
 - Inherently unjust and unfair
- The “causes of the causes”

The Vicious Cycle

- Despite efforts, health disparities continue to exist
- Most efforts do not take social determinants of health into account

A Few Reasons Why

- Delivery of message
 - Not enough to say “eat better, move more”
- Lack of culturally appropriate, evidence-based programming
 - Sustainability, evaluation, funding
 - Lack of understanding of cultural context of a community
- Policies that serve as barriers to culturally appropriate services
- Limited “translation” of research to practice
- Lack of focus on health equity

Delivery of Message

Challenges:

- Health literacy
 - The need to access & use health-related information across multiple media, topics, environments
 - Unfamiliarity of vocabulary & concepts in health and medicine
 - Complexity of our healthcare system
 - Increasing demand on consumers to prevent and manage health conditions



Strategy Solutions

- One response is using **plain language**
- What plain language is:
 - Clear language
 - Language that facilitates reading ease and audience understanding
- What plain language is not:
 - Short words/sentences
 - “Dumbed down” ideas
 - Low reading language
- Examples

Lack of Culturally Appropriate Programs/Services

Challenges:

- Most implemented as pilot programs with limited funding
- Often believe we need separate initiatives to address disparities
- How well trained are staff to be able to deliver culturally appropriate services?

Challenges

- Is there a structure of accountability for all staff to commit to cultural competency?
- What mechanisms are in place to ensure health literacy of materials & programs?
- How often is the community involved in the development of an intervention or strategy
- How well do we evaluate culturally based programs?

Strategy Solutions

- Increasing number of public health professionals from diverse cultural backgrounds
- Improving the cultural proficiency of public health professionals
 - Learning & development opportunities at all levels
- Developing culturally-based, culturally-appropriate services and programs
- Cultural Tailoring
- Cultural Brokering
- Cultural Intelligence
 - Understanding the history of a culture
 - Not just about knowing an individuals racial/ethnic background
 - Understanding the culture of their **life** (social, economic, physical, emotional & political impact)

Policy Barriers

Challenges:

- Organizational policies that don't support cultural and linguistic competence
- Legislative mandates/legislation that does not support health equity

Strategy Solutions

- Adoption of sound health literacy policies and procedures within organizations
 - Involving community members in development of programs, materials, outreach efforts
 - Improved hiring practices to reach out to diverse applicants
 - Promote professional development that includes cultural competency
 - Review of brochures/pamphlets in a health literacy and cultural context
- Developing and passing legislation that supports healthy communities & healthy individuals
 - Zoning regulations limiting unhealthy fast food
 - Promoting healthier options in grocery stores
 - Participate in neighborhood revitalization efforts crime prevention
 - Work to improve transportation options

Limited Translation from Research to Practice

Challenges:

- Little initial research on the community and cultural strengths is conducted, much less developed as basis for a study or program design
- Principles of applied research are not often integrated into public health infrastructure
- Most programs addressing disparities are based on negative aspects of a community or culture
 - Sets a tone for the future of the program and engagement of community
 - Learned helplessness & pessimism may result as part of an intervention as an unintended consequence
 - Often present problems in context of blame rather than a context of motivation

Strategy Solutions

- Community based participatory research (CBPR)
- Emphasize motivating factors for behavior change
 - Empowerment
- Broaden scope of research to include social determinants of health
- Work with public health agencies to improve infrastructure to facilitate translation of research findings

Focus on Health Equity

Challenges:

- Relatively new idea for most people
- Many people feel health disparities are “unfortunate but not necessarily unfair”
- Requires widening our lens to bring into view how working conditions, housing, education, political power and social inclusion influence individual and community health

Strategy Solutions: Reframing the Questions

Conventional Questions

- How can we promote healthy behaviors?
- How can we reduce disparities in the distribution of disease?

Health Equity Questions

- How can we target dangerous conditions, reorganize land use and transportation policies to ensure healthy spaces and places?
- How can we eliminate inequities in the distribution of resources and power that shape health outcomes?

Quantifying the Intangibles

Challenges:

- Racism and discrimination
- Hopelessness
- Inability to see a future
- Distrust
- Stress
- Our own biases

Thank you!

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