

# Cultural Competency

## Bridging the Communication Gap

### What Is Cultural Competency?

Cultural Competency encompasses Carolina Complete Health'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 North Carolina. North Carolina has seen as many as 15 spoken languages, which also presents numerous opportunities for misunderstanding regarding health conditions or medications. The ability to communicate successfully across barriers in health care can directly affect a patient's treatment and/or the outcome of the treatment and/or the outcome of the treatment.

### What Can You Do to Become More Culturally Competent?

*As an organization, Carolina Complete Health 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:*

#### Principle 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.

#### 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.

#### 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 health care and services.

#### 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 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 seven steps to improve interpersonal communications with low health literacy patients.

1. **Slow down** – Sometimes a little extra time is needed so the patient can better process the information.
2. **Use plain, non-medical language** – Use terms like “high blood pressure” instead of “hypertension” or “skin doctor” instead of “dermatologist.”
3. **Show or draw pictures** – Visual imagery can improve the patient’s recall of ideas.
4. **Limit the amount of information and repeat it** – Sometimes it can be overwhelming for a patient to receive too much information all at once.
5. **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?”
6. **Create a shame-free atmosphere that encourages questions** – Make patients feel comfortable asking questions. Use the patient’s family and friends in promoting understanding.
7. **Be positive and empowering** – Encourage questions from the patient after every main point.

## Resources for Your Practice: Complimentary Interpretation Services

Carolina Complete Health provides interpretation services for Carolina Complete Health members or providers at no cost.

1. To schedule an in-person interpreter, call Member Services at **1-833-552-3876 (TTY 711)**.
2. To obtain access to a telephonic interpreter, follow these steps:
  - a. Call Carolina Complete Health Member Services at **1-833-552-3876 (TTY 711)**.
  - b. Tell the representative that you need a telephonic interpreter in the desired language.
  - c. When connected, use the speakerphone function to communicate with the patient.

## Additional Resources

For more tips on how to work effectively with an interpreter, communicating across language barriers, identifying and addressing health literacy issues, trainings and much more, please visit:

- [Better Communication, Better Care: Provider Tools to care for Diverse Population \(ICE Toolkit\)](#)
- [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services A Physician’s Practical Guide to Culturally Competent Care](#)
- [Carolina Complete Health Cultural Competency-Humility Toolkits](#)

## Support

We are committed to the care and well-being of our members. We are also committed to working with you as a partner to develop the best possible treatment plans for all patients. Please view the Provider section of our website at [network.carolinacompletehealth.com](https://network.carolinacompletehealth.com) for additional tools and resources. You may also contact a Provider Relations or Quality Improvement Specialist for assistance at **1-833-552-3876 (TTY 711)**.