

National CLAS Standards: A Quick Guide for DSD Staff

The National CLAS Standards are 15 standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services, issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health. They help health and human services reduce disparities by making sure services respond to each person's culture, language, and communication needs.

Content

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There is one Principal Standard and 14 supporting standards, grouped into three themes.

- The Principal Standard: provide services that are effective, equitable, understandable, and respectful, and that fit each person's cultural beliefs, preferred language, health literacy, and communication needs.
- Governance, leadership, and workforce: make CLAS a leadership priority, build a workforce that reflects the people we serve, and train staff on an ongoing basis.
- Communication and language assistance: offer language help at no cost, tell people it is available in their language, use qualified interpreters (never children or family members), and provide easy-to-understand materials in the languages people use.
- Engagement, improvement, and accountability: build CLAS into planning and operations, collect demographic data, partner with the community, and report progress.

How to use CLAS in your work.

- Ask about and record language preference, and arrange a qualified interpreter as soon as a need shows up.
- Plan translation and interpretation into the budget and timeline from the start, not as a special request later.
- Test materials at a plain-language reading level and offer them in the languages your service area uses.
- Bring community members in as partners early, not as reviewers of a near-final draft.

CLAS is not a checklist you finish once. It is a standard you keep, because the people we serve speak many languages and hold many cultures, and equitable service means meeting them there.

For the full standards, see the HHS Office of Minority Health at thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/clas.

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Test materials at a plain-language reading level and offer them in the languages your service area uses.

Connect the guidance to the person's goals, program rules, access needs, and follow-up using National CLAS Standards: A Quick Guide for DSD Staff.

Confirm the current purpose, audience, and decision authority before using National CLAS Standards: A Quick Guide for DSD Staff to connect the guidance to the person's goals, program rules, access needs, and follow-up.

Choose the sections of National CLAS Standards: A Quick Guide for DSD Staff that match the situation; do not apply unrelated guidance as a blanket rule.

Document the action taken from National CLAS Standards: A Quick Guide for DSD Staff, the people affected, unresolved questions, and the responsible follow-up owner.

For community engagement staff, use National CLAS Standards: A Quick Guide for DSD Staff to connect the guidance to the person's goals, program rules, access needs, and follow-up; plan accessible participation, make influence visible, and close the feedback loop with community partners. Start by ask about and record language preference, and arrange a qualified interpreter as soon as a need shows up.

Do not replace official legal, policy, clinical, supervisory, program, or Tribal authority.

Do not infer an individual's identity, preferences, needs, or experience from group-level information.

State uncertainty, use current authoritative sources, and escalate when the decision exceeds the user's role.

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