

# CULTURAL COMPETENCE: WHAT AND WHY

The term “culture” is used to imply the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communication, actions, customs, beliefs, values and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group. Culture is all-inclusive, not just the music or art of a particular group, or the religious beliefs or the family traditions and superstitions, but the whole of all of these things acting together.

**Cultural Competence** means the capability and will of a provider or service delivery system to respond to the unique needs of an individual, particularly considering the diverse culture of the person. Further, it means:

- The **attainment of knowledge** regarding beliefs, cultural values, and usual preferences regarding interventions to meet a person’s needs and goals before and continuing through the building of the relationship between individual and service provider.
- The **ability to communicate** effectively for the thorough and accurate exchange of information, perception, instruction, and preferences with regard to the individual’s needs, related history, and preferred interventions.
- **Skills and behaviors** that enable practitioners and systems to provide appropriate care for the diverse populations they service.
- Ability to **use the individual’s culture** as a resource or tool to aid in the intervention to address the identified human need.
- The capacity to **provide equal access** to individuals from each cultural and linguistic population serviced, based on an understanding of their distinct needs.

