



## **HEALTHCARE DISPARITIES**

We understand that in order to help improve the quality of life of our members, we must take into account their cultural and linguistic differences. For this reason, addressing disparities in healthcare is high on our leadership agenda. We believe a strong patient-provider relationship is the key to reducing the gap in unequal healthcare access and healthcare outcomes due to cultural and language barriers. We are continuously working to close the gap in health outcomes by focusing on education and prevention.

In addition, we have cross-cultural education programs in place to increase awareness of racial and ethnic disparities in healthcare among our employees, members and providers. We are an active partner in the community through many outreach and community based activities.

Some of these activities include:

- Participation in community events and sponsorships and provide assistance to community and social agendas that also serve a high-risk, vulnerable population.
- Partner with and inform individuals and organizations through the Health Literacy Initiative. The goal of this initiative is to develop and implement programs that positively impact health and well-being by helping people better understand and navigate the healthcare system.

## **Effective Communication**

In alignment with Federal and state law, Highmark Wholecare requires that healthcare providers arrange for ways to interface with patients who have communication disabilities. This includes providing language access interpreter services to individuals with limited English proficiency, and communication aids for patients who are blind and deaf. Aids can include the use of Braille, large print documents and/or qualified sign language interpreters. Effective interface serves as a means by which to avoid any unclear or inadequate communication that could lead to an adverse consequence.

## **Who Can Serve as a Health Care Interpreter?**

Trained bilingual staff, on-staff qualified interpreters, contact interpreters, telephone interpreters and trained volunteers can serve as interpreters. The following people, however should never serve as health care interpreters: patients' family and friend, children under 18 years of age, other patients or visitors and untrained volunteers.

## Cultural Competence

**Georgetown University National Center for Cultural Competency** is a comprehensive resource which provides continuing education opportunities, resources, and more for health care professionals to learn about culturally and linguistically appropriate services.

<https://nccc.georgetown.edu/index.php>

Culturally competent programs maintain a set of perspectives that advance positive and effective interactions with diverse cultures. Practicing cultural competence to honor and respect diversity involves understanding the core needs of a patient and designing services and materials that meet those needs. It is important to regularly and honestly evaluate your organizational and operational practices by ensuring you're:

- \* Acknowledging the complexity of cultural identity.
- \* Recognize the dynamics of power.
- \* Recognize and eliminate bias in language.
- \* Employing cultural appropriate options.

As the digital age continues to grow, and computer applications make it easier to document and track care needs, good communication with your patient remains a high priority. Eye contact and personal interaction go a long way in making a patient feel more comfortable and more engaged during an appointment.

We have assembled some resources and web based tools to assist you and your office staff in providing care that is sensitive to the cultural and linguistic differences of your patients. The Provider Cultural Resource Toolkit includes:

- National Partnership for Action to End Health Disparities / Toolkit for Community Action

[https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/npa/files/Plans/Toolkit/NPA\\_Toolkit\\_092617.pdf](https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/npa/files/Plans/Toolkit/NPA_Toolkit_092617.pdf)

- Think Cultural Health is a comprehensive resource with tips for using interpreters and addressing literacy issues with a toolkit where practices can earn up to 9 CME credits for completing any one of the courses. [www.thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov](http://www.thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov)

-The Center for HealthCare Strategies, Inc. is another excellent resource that focuses exclusively on the Social Determinants of Health <https://www.chcs.org/topics/social-determinants-of-health/>