

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Racial and ethnic health disparities are linked to poorer health outcomes and lower quality care. Language and cultural issues can have a significant impact on these disparities when not addressed by health care organizations [1]. As the diversity of our nation continues to grow, hospitals are encountering more patients with language and cultural barriers [2]. The multiplicity of languages, dialects, and cultures can be overwhelming to hospitals and their staff. The *Hospitals, Language, and Culture* (HLC) study set out to better understand how the challenges associated with cultural and language (C&L) barriers are being addressed at 60 hospitals across the country.<sup>1</sup>

The goal of this report is to build upon *Exploring Cultural and Linguistic Services in the Nation's Hospitals: A Report of Findings (HLC Report of Findings)* [3] to provide a framework for hospitals to develop and employ practices for meeting diverse patient needs. There is no “one size fits all” solution, and the road map to organizational cultural competence is unique for each hospital. While this report does not provide all of the answers for meeting the needs of diverse patient populations, it can help organizations overcome some of the challenges they face when providing safe, quality health care in an increasingly complex system. Chapter 8: Tailoring Initiatives to Meet the Needs of Diverse Populations: A Self-Assessment Tool contains a tool that hospitals and other health care organizations can use to promote discussion around their current practices and guide efforts to address the C&L needs of the populations they serve.

## Methodology

Purposive sampling was used to select the 60 hospitals in this study. Data were collected during one-day site visits at each hospital. Each site visit consisted of a series of semi-structured interviews with CEOs, administrative and clinical leaders, human resources staff, and C&L services staff such as chaplains, interpreters, and community outreach managers. “Promising” practices were identified as those practices that appeared to be effective

for improving cultural competence within hospitals and/or directly meeting the C&L needs of diverse patient populations as reported by interview participants. These practices were reviewed by the HLC Technical Advisory Panel. The practices were then reviewed to identify common themes. Together, the four themes that emerged constitute a framework that provides a systemic method for hospitals to think about how they provide health care that is culturally and linguistically appropriate.

## A Framework for Establishing Practices to Meet the Needs of Diverse Populations

The thematic framework presented is derived from *current practices* that hospitals are employing to provide care and services to their diverse patient populations. As the themes are based on practices that HLC study hospitals are already carrying out, organizations may find, as they read this report, that they are already implementing some of these same practices. Additionally, as hospitals likely face many of the same challenges and constraints in meeting the needs of diverse populations, there may be some practices within each theme that organizations can establish without allocating substantial resources. However, each individual practice is not meant to be a stand-alone solution. A range of practices spanning all four themes must be adopted in a systemic manner that is aligned with patient needs and organizational resources. While the practices identified in this report were implemented in hospitals, many of them may be relevant to other health organizations.

**Theme 1: Building a Foundation** Establishing a foundation of policies and procedures that systemically support cultural competence is a crucial component of meeting the needs of diverse patient populations. The role of leadership is inherent to these types of activities — leadership support is required to recognize, prioritize, and often drive efforts that establish policies and procedures to improve care and to better meet patient needs.

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the *Hospitals, Language, and Culture* study, including the *HLC Report of Findings*, please visit [www.jointcommission.org/PatientSafety/HLC](http://www.jointcommission.org/PatientSafety/HLC).



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Integrating C&L considerations into organizational policy and procedure requires a demonstration of commitment. Without an organizational commitment to cultural competence and subsequent action at the policy and procedure level, these initiatives can often be overshadowed by other organizational priorities. In order to resolve challenges such as lack of funding and resources for C&L services, it is important for organizations to clarify their commitment to providing culturally competent care by creating a supportive infrastructure of policies and procedures that help staff put these ideals into action.

***Theme 2: Collecting and Using Data to Improve Services*** The collection and use of community- and patient-level data is essential to developing and improving services in health care, including services developed to meet the needs of diverse patient populations. Instituting practices to systematically collect data allows the effectiveness and utilization of C&L services to be monitored, measured, and evaluated. This can be useful for planning so that services can be designed to meet the specific needs of the organization.

While many hospitals across the United States already collect community- and patient-level data, few hospitals have developed systems for using them to guide service development and improvement. A thorough understanding of the need for C&L services, dependable information regarding the use of those services, and the usefulness of those data to improve C&L services can all contribute to a hospital's ability to identify and monitor health disparities and provide safe, quality health care to culturally and linguistically diverse patients. The data collected may also be used to inform short- and long-term organizational planning, help develop C&L-specific services and programs, and identify limitations in staffing and resources that collaborative partnerships may alleviate.

***Theme 3: Accommodating the Needs of Specific Populations*** Accommodating the needs of specific populations includes practices aimed at providing safe, quality

care and decreasing health disparities for particular populations in the service community. Accommodations targeted to the needs of specific populations evolve as hospitals search for solutions to the challenges of providing care to their diverse patients.

To ensure organizations meet changing staff and patient needs, the development of services and activities tailored for specific populations should be a continuous process. While the practices outlined in this chapter show positive steps toward the delivery of culturally and linguistically appropriate care, they also indicate the complicated reality of the long road ahead. Although knowledge, field experience, and technology have improved the delivery of C&L services, hospitals need to consider the balance between convenience, cost, patient safety, and quality.

***Theme 4: Establishing Internal and External Collaborations*** Collaborative practices encompass those that bring together multiple departments, organizations, providers, and individuals to achieve objectives related to culturally and linguistically appropriate care. Within each hospital, different stakeholders should be brought together to develop, implement, evaluate, and improve initiatives aimed at meeting the needs of diverse patients. External collaborations can help hospitals engage their community and share information and resources.

Collaboration, whether internal or external, may provide new avenues for hospitals currently undertaking cultural competence initiatives. There is no doubt that collaboration needs to play a role in all the practices outlined in this report. Building active relationships with cultural brokers, traditional healers, chaplains, religious leaders, and other individuals may enhance and extend the hospital's existing C&L services. While collaborative efforts come with their own challenges, building partnerships that bring together the champions of culturally and linguistically appropriate care has the potential to move the entire field forward.



### **Tailoring Initiatives to Meet the Needs of Diverse Populations: A Self-Assessment Tool**

The self-assessment tool can be used to engage members of the organization in discussions about the needs, resources, and goals for providing the highest quality care to every patient served. The tool is intended to address the main issues that emerged from the HLC study, and the questions are designed to promote discussion around an organization's need to improve or expand current C&L services.

The authors hope that this report will be a useful guide for hospitals and other health care organizations to develop and improve practices that address the needs of diverse patients. The framework presented in this report can help organizations assess their current practices and take action to provide high quality care to the populations they serve in order to achieve optimal patient outcomes.