

Meeting the Linguistic and Cultural Needs of Family PACT Clients

As a Family PACT provider, you want to ensure that your services and programs meet the health care needs of the communities you serve. The Family PACT program recognizes the importance of addressing cultural issues in the provision of health services and requires that providers meet standards for linguistic and cultural competence, as set forth in the Policies, Procedures and Billing Instructions (PPBI) manual.

Now providers can use the Family PACT Linguistic and Cultural Competency Toolkit to assess the degree to which they meet these requirements and to help them develop a plan to continue these efforts. The Toolkit is available on the Family PACT website at www.familypact.org.

What is Linguistic and Cultural Competence?

Linguistic and cultural competence is the ability of Family PACT providers to understand and respond effectively to the linguistic and cultural needs brought by the clients to the health care encounter. This requires recognizing and addressing how culture affects the reproductive health care of clients.

- Culture includes clients' behaviors, values, practices, attitudes, and beliefs. It refers not only to racial and ethnic groups, but also to cultural groupings by age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc.
- Culture continually changes. Therefore, staff knowledge and skills in communicating with clients of different cultural groups should be addressed on an ongoing basis.

Why is Linguistic and Cultural Competence important?

Being linguistically and culturally competent is a win-win situation, as it helps both the clients you serve and your agency.

- When clients feel their cultural beliefs and practices are honored, they feel more comfortable. This makes them more likely to return for services and to recommend them to others in their community.
- When your communication with clients improves, you will have better health outcomes.
- Your agency will also become more accessible to new Family PACT clients.

Assessing your agency's Linguistic and Cultural Competence

An important first step in improving the linguistic and cultural competence of your agency is to assess how well your systems, programs, services, resources, and staff meet the needs of the communities you serve. You can do this by using the Self-Assessment Survey included in the Family PACT Toolkit.

- The survey is easy to use and includes instructions on how to administer it.
- The Toolkit describes how to tally the results and what your score means.
- The results will help you identify your agency's strengths, as well as where your services could be improved.
- The results can be used to formulate a strategic plan for improving your services and programs.

What can you do?

In developing a strategic plan for improving linguistic and cultural competency, consider the following:

- What languages do your staff members speak? If they don't speak all the languages spoken by your clients, consider contracting with a language line or a translation service. Encourage staff to record clients' preferred language in their charts. Plan ahead to use translators so family members or friends do not interpret for you.
- Display signs and posters in the languages your clients read. Make sure the pictures and décor in your waiting room are welcoming for people of various cultural groups.
- Evaluate the reading level and cultural appropriateness of forms and client materials. A Community Advisory Board can give you feedback on the materials you use in your office. Materials generally should be written at the 5th grade level or lower so most clients can read them. To order free reproductive health materials in multiple languages, view the online catalog and download the order form from the Family PACT website at www.familypact.org. You can also download multilingual materials directly from the website.
- How connected are you with cultural, ethnic, and religious groups in your community? Visit their organizations and see what services they provide. Make a list of resources in your community and share the list with your staff.
- How often does your staff attend linguistic and cultural competency training? Consider providing an on-site training or in-service. Advertise outside trainings to all your staff. Be flexible with schedules to allow staff to attend trainings.
- How well do your staff and board members reflect the population you serve? Evaluate your hiring practices.

Use the Toolkit to find additional suggestions and resources you can use to effectively serve patients from a variety of backgrounds. Increasing linguistic and cultural competence will improve health care access and service delivery for all of your clients.