



Administrative Policy 7.22

Subject: Cultural Competence

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Authorizing Source: [DSHS Administrative Policy](#)
Administrative Policy 7.01 - American Indian Administrative Policy
Administrative Policy 7.02 - Equal Access to Services for Individuals with Disabilities
Administrative Policy 7.20 - Communication Access for Persons Who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deaf Blind and Speech Disabled
Administrative Policy 7.21 - Access to Services for Clients Who are Limited English Proficient (LEP)
Administrative Policy 14.10 - Accessible Meetings
Administrative Policy 18.26 - Reasonable Accommodation Services
Administrative Policy 18.81 - Nondiscrimination in Direct Client Services
Administrative Policy 18.66 – Discrimination and Harassment Prevention

Washington State Rule
[Chapter 388-271 WAC](#) – Limited English Proficient Services

Governor's Order
[Executive Order 96-04](#)

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
[\(EEOC\) Guidelines](#)

Effective Date: September 22, 2011

Revised: April 13, 2021¹ Housekeeping 5/15/2025

Approved By: Original signed by Lori Melchiori
Senior Director, Office of Policy and Rules

Purpose:

To create and maintain an environment within the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) that values and supports cultural competence and embraces respect for the individual differences of our employees and clients. DSHS recognizes that everyone has a culture and we have a commitment to promote respect and understanding of diverse cultures, social groups, and individual attributes. Each DSHS administration will ensure cultural competence is integrated into the overall organizational culture and ongoing business.

Scope:

This policy applies to all administrations and employees of the Department of Social and Health Services.

Definitions:

Culture: Means culture in a broad sense, to include values, beliefs, experiences and cultural attitudes contributing to a person's sense of identity. It is the values, attitudes, beliefs, experiences and customs shared and transmitted by a group of people. It is "knowledge and collective experience" shared across generations within a family or community.

Cultural Competence: A set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals which enables individuals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. It promotes respect and understanding of diverse cultures and social groups and recognizes each individual's unique attributes.

Cultural Responsiveness: Cultural responsiveness is the capacity to respond to the cultural differences and issues of a diverse work group, especially within an organization. Those differences may include such subtle items as communication style, problem solving, values, conflict resolution styles, etc.

Diversity: For the purposes of this policy, diversity includes and is not limited to the following dimensions listed alphabetically:

Age	Military experience
Class	Organizational background
Communication styles	Organizational level
Educational background	Parental status
Ethnicity	Physical abilities and qualities
Family status	Race relationships and group affiliations
Gender	Religious beliefs
Gender identity	Sexual orientation

Gender expression

Geographic location

Group identity

Job classification, job function

Language

Marital status

Socioeconomic status

Thinking styles

Work experience

Intersectionality: A framework for conceptualizing a person, group of people, or social problem as affected by a number of discriminations and disadvantages. It takes into account people's overlapping identities and experiences in order to understand the complexity of prejudices they facilitate.

Policy:

Using the DSHS cultural competence planning guide each administration will develop action plans that support and guide staff delivering DSHS services in a culturally competent manner by:

1. Training all employees on the relevance of cultural competence in the work environment and providing tools to aide employees in achieving cultural competence.
2. Continually seeking potential improvements and best practices to provide culturally competent and responsive services and identifying ongoing training needs.
3. Building and maintaining partnerships that promote cultural competence by inviting clients, partners, stakeholders, and communities to participate in planning, delivering, and evaluating services.
4. Ensuring recruiting, hiring, performance management, and retention practices achieve a diverse and culturally competent workforce.
5. Conducting outreach efforts to department employees, sovereign partners, and the communities we serve throughout the state.
6. Providing bilingual staff resources and support to remain qualified and appropriately certified.
7. Including the requirement to provide culturally competent and responsive services in the performance contracts with service providers.

While each administration is responsible for developing and implementing their individual plans to enhance and support cultural competence as it pertains to their specific workforce, the office of diversity and inclusion is responsible for creating guidelines to enhance and support cultural competence within DSHS. The office of diversity and inclusion will ensure standardization by reviewing each administration's plan and providing feedback regarding the thoroughness and implementation strategy of each administration's action plan. All levels of management are expected to implement and support activities that enhance the cultural competence of their staff.

****NOTE: "good faith effort"**

Employees are responsible for complying with all applicable state and federal regulations.

Employees are also responsible for reporting harassment or discrimination to their supervisor, or to someone in the employee's chain of command if they are not comfortable disclosing the harassment or discrimination to their supervisor.

¹ Removed link to outdated guide and removed links to individual APs, linked to AP SharePoint.