



Who is this guide for?

This guide is for team members within the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP), Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) and the Medicare Improvement for Patients and Providers Act (MIPPA) programs. The guide provides an overview of the concept and practices of cultural humility.

What is culture?

Culture is any identity or characteristic that is important to a person. Culture can include race, ethnicity, religion, body size, socioeconomic status, sexual identity, gender identity, age, family constellation, caregiver status, citizenship status, addiction history, trauma survivorship, disability identity, and more.

What is cultural humility?

Cultural humility is an active, self-reflective, lifelong process. It involves:

- Continuous exploration of cultural identities and beliefs, and an awareness of one’s own biases.
- Treating others with respect, openness, and empathy.
- Reducing power imbalances within relationships and communities.

What is the difference between cultural humility and cultural competence?

Cultural competence is focused on actively learning about other cultures and their practices and traditions to adapt services and supports to be more responsive to people and communities. **Cultural humility** acknowledges that people experience culture in their own unique ways, and no one can ever become an expert in a specific culture or cultures.

Why is cultural humility important to the work I do as a SMP, SHIP, or MIPPA program team member?

Cultural humility helps you to build trust and develop relationships with the people you support. This can ultimately lead to better health and life outcomes and reduce disparities.

How can I practice cultural humility?

1

Continuously explore cultural identities and beliefs, and stay aware of your own biases

- Ask people about their cultural background, traditions, practices, and preferences.
- Think about how culture may influence lifestyle decisions about nutrition, healthcare, wellness activities, and end of life.
- Whenever possible, make time to hear people’s experiences and stories.
- Avoid stereotypes and don’t make assumptions. People practice culture in their own ways.
- Use language that reflects that kinship can extend beyond the nuclear family (e.g., chosen family, extended family, loved ones).
- Make time for self-reflection about your cultural identities, beliefs, and biases.
- Remember that norms are cultural; what you consider “normal” may not be “normal” for others.
- Learn about local cultural traditions. Explore culturally specific resources in your community and incorporate them into service recommendations.
- Focus on what you and the person have in common, instead of your differences.

2

Treat others with respect, openness, and empathy

- Share your pronouns when introducing yourself.
- Clarify the pronunciation of a person’s name to ensure you are saying it correctly.
- Ask questions to demonstrate that you are listening.
- Repeat or paraphrase what you hear to be certain you fully understand.
- Pay attention to nonverbal communication such as body language, eye contact, vocal intonations, and level of personal distance.
- Depict a variety of cultures in brochures, documents, videos, artwork, and office decorations.
- In virtual and in-person spaces, ask what you can do to make the person more comfortable.
- Keep in mind that trust/mistrust matter. Take every opportunity to build trust by following through on promises and using respectful language.

3

Reduce power imbalances within relationships and communities

- Take time to explain the reason for policies and procedures.
- Screen for language-access needs and use professional translation and interpretation to make things more accessible.
- Develop and use plain language materials. The Self-Advocacy Resource and Technical Assistance Center has created a list of [resources](#) for plain language.
- Keep aware of current events (global conflicts, acts of hate speech or violence in the local community) and think about how they may cause stress.
- Learn about bias, discrimination, microaggressions, trauma, and historical and structural inequities.
- Ask about and include people’s supporters in discussions (e.g., someone may wish to communicate about their health through a family member).
- Set up rooms to reduce power imbalances, such as having chairs and tables at the same height.
- Treat people as the experts of their own experience.