



# National Center on Advancing Person-Centered Practices and Systems

## Ensuring Linguistic Competence in Person Centered Practices and Systems

Summary of a webinar from May 20, 2020

### Introduction

This webinar is on linguistic competence. Linguistic is a word people often use for language. The speakers talked about what linguistic competence is. This includes the laws and standards for language access and linguistic competence. The webinar covered why linguistic competence is important in person-centered practices.

Many different languages are spoken in the US. For example:

- In New York, at least 192 languages are spoken at home
- According to the U.S. Census, 12 primary languages are spoken in the US (Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Russian, Arabic, Tagalog, Polish, French, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, Japanese).
- Alaska, Arizona, and New Mexico are home to half of the nation's Native American language speakers

### Definition of Linguistic Competency

The Georgetown University National Center on Cultural Competency (NCCC) has Guiding Values and Principles for linguistic competence.

- Services and supports are delivered in the preferred language.
- Written material is translated, adapted, and provide in alternative formats.
- Interpretation and translation services comply with federal, state, and local mandates.
- Stakeholders are involved in evaluation of language access services and other services to ensure communication.

There are many definitions of linguistic competence. The NCCC definition goes beyond interpretation and translation. It includes other communication needs people may have. To support linguistic competence an organization must have the structures, policies and practices in place. Along with the fiscal resources (money), personnel resources (people), and equipment needed carry it out.

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Tawara says, "We just can't say it. We have to really look at the home for linguistic competence and what it will cost both in dollars and also in personnel."

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## Laws and Standards for Linguistic Competency

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 says that you can't discriminate against anyone because of their race, color, or national origin (this includes language.). This law applies only to those organizations that receive federal funds. Title VI applies to everyone – not just US citizens. Many people do not know they have a right to language access and assistance services. Organizations receiving federal funds are required to have a language access and implementation plan.

The National Standards on Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health and Health Care (CLAS) are a good resource. To learn more visit: <https://thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/clas>

## Linguistic Competence and Person-Centered Practices

Language is the primary way a person communicates. Language tells us what a person prefers, needs, and thinks. Linguistic competence in person-centered planning is having the skills to address all forms of communication during the planning process.

## Linguistic Competence in Mental Health, Aging, and Disability Services

There is a mental health crisis in the U.S. We do not have a good system in place to offer mental health care. Minority populations face many barriers to services. They might be cautious in accessing care because of a history of lack of cultural understanding along with inadequate mental health services. It is important for the mental health workforce to be multicultural and multilingual (Be able to speak many languages). Multicultural means staff from diverse racial, ethnic, and other cultural groups. Multilingual means the ability to speak two or more languages.

One thing states can do is adopt the National CLAS Standards. According to a report, only 8 states have adopted all National CLAS Standards.

Some families with undocumented members may decide not to access services. This is because they fear negative consequences. There are barriers to accessing technology as well, especially for Hispanic older adults. Families are important for Latinos and other diverse populations. For example, people have better diabetes control when they have support from families at home. Certain institutions are trusted in the community. To be linguistically competent, it is important to meet people where they are in, the language they prefer.

## Person-Centered Thinking

In person-centered thinking there is a basic value that anyone can learn. The focus is on supporting people, rather than fixing them. In the disability community, we are moving from a "Service Life" to a "Good Paid Life" to a "Community Life". A big part of person-centered principles is understanding the "important to" and "important for" the person. The goal is to aim for a balance between the two.

Matthew says, "Help people get better lives, not just better paper."



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The speakers on this webinar were:



**Tawara Goode** is the Director of the Georgetown University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. She is also the Director of the National Center for Cultural Competence with a mission to increase the capacity of health care and mental health care programs to design, implement, and evaluate culturally and linguistically competent service delivery systems to address growing diversity, persistent disparities, and to promote health and mental health equity.



**Mathew McCollough** is a Filipino American with developmental disabilities, he is currently the Director for the District of Columbia Office of Disability Rights, the Americans with Disabilities Act compliance office for the District Government. Mr. McCollough is recognized for his communications and training expertise in education, health care, diversity and sensitivity, cultural competency, and disability issues.



**Octavio N. Martinez, Jr.**, MD, MPH, MBA, FAPA is executive director of the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health and Senior Associate Vice-President within the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement at The University of Texas at Austin. Additionally, he is a Professor of Psychiatry at the Dell Medical School and Clinical Professor at the Steve Hicks School of Social Work.



**Dr. Yanira Cruz** is the President and CEO of the National Hispanic Council on Aging. She focuses on providing the Latino perspective on public health, older adult and caregiver issues to increase policy-maker and public understanding of the needs impacting vulnerable sectors of our society and to encourage the adoption of programs and policies that equitably serve everyone.