

# Achieve Health Equity Through Culturally Competent Care for BIPOC Patients

*You can foster health equity and close gaps in care by being aware of disparities that exist for patients from diverse communities and populations*

## What is BIPOC?<sup>1</sup>

“BIPOC” stands for Black, indigenous and people of color. BIPOC is a newer term that calls attention to a wider range of groups that have historically experienced systemic racism. It also uses terms of reference that people prefer to use for themselves. BIPOC avoids terms that could be seen as degrading or stigmatizing like “marginalized,” “minorities,” “undocumented,” etc.

- **“Black”** and “African American” are mistakenly used interchangeably. Black can include all people of African, Latin American, United States and Caribbean backgrounds.
- **“Indigenous”** includes indigenous people from the U.S., Canada and Latin America, as well as indigenous groups from around the world.
- **“People of color”** broadly refers to anyone who is not white. It includes a wide range of cultural groups that have their own rich values and histories, such as the many cultures found throughout Asia, Latin America, West Asia and the North African Mediterranean region.



## BIPOC communities experience many health inequities

historical trauma + bias + discrimination  
+ racism + poverty + lack of culturally  
informed services



**Negative  
health  
outcomes**

BIPOC communities have unique cultural values, histories, experiences and strengths. Having an enhanced understanding of these strengths will support you in building trust and stronger interactions with your patients and can result in the delivery of equitable care.

*(continued)*

<sup>1</sup>Very Well Mind. (2020). What Does the Acronym BIPOC Mean? Retrieved from <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-bipoc-5025158>.

## Culturally competent approaches for BIPOC patient interactions

These approaches are not exhaustive but offer some best practices and culturally appropriate approaches you can use in your daily work with patients.

- ✓ **Use culturally appropriate forms of address when greeting patients.** Ask patients their preference on how they would like to be addressed.
- ✓ **Translate and post patient wait time instructions.** Place them in the clinic waiting room and have out-of-office messages available in major languages patients speak.
- ✓ **Use language identification posters and professional interpreters.** Language identification posters displayed next to patient check-in locations help your front office staff identify the language needs of patients from the first visit.
- ✓ **Use Community Connect (Aunt Bertha).** This online search tool helps connect patients to local low-cost or no-cost health resources. These can include faith-based groups, community health workers, promotores and patient navigators who understand and serve BIPOC populations.
- ✓ **Provide trainings to ensure cultural awareness and humility.** Offer trainings on implicit bias, discrimination and cultural humility to all levels of the organization.



## How to advance health equity for BIPOC patients

Consider using the tips below to advance health equity and support improved patient health outcomes.

Black	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Use motivational interviewing</b> skills like active listening to gather feedback in real time. Ask open-ended questions to better understand your patient's needs. Doing so can build patient confidence that you are working to provide the best care possible.</li><li>• <b>Use a self-check process</b> to find out when implicit bias may be guiding your assumptions, reactions or responses. Take the Harvard implicit bias test on race to learn more at <a href="https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/">https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/</a>.<sup>2</sup></li><li>• <b>Include exploratory questions</b> on your patient intake forms. They can help you identify central cultural values that may impact patient care. For instance, Black patients may value the centrality of family or spirituality.</li></ul>
Indigenous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Don't be afraid of silence.</b> For example, some Native American patients use silence to convey respect.</li><li>• <b>Earn trust.</b> Be aware that many BIPOC patients may distrust health care providers. For instance, over time, many indigenous people have experienced loss of sacred lands or forced assimilation. This has led to distrust.</li><li>• <b>Express understanding and respect</b> for cultural preferences while also encouraging what is best for your patient's health outcome. Assessment tools can help identify the impact of intergenerational trauma on your patient. Foster cultural safety by being cautious about making assumptions about the importance of cultural identity for individual patients.</li></ul>
People of color	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Many of the same strategies as above are also effective at building trust</b> during patient care with people of color. People of color include people from many different cultural backgrounds.</li><li>• <b>Use a qualified interpreter.</b> Trained health care interpreters are aware of cultural nuances in communication and can relay that to you without bias.</li><li>• <b>Make sure culturally preferred treatments or practices aren't contraindicated.</b></li><li>• <b>Hire staff from BIPOC communities.</b> A diverse workforce should reflect the community served.</li></ul>

For more information and resources, contact [Cultural.and.Linguistic.Services@healthnet.com](mailto:Cultural.and.Linguistic.Services@healthnet.com).

<sup>2</sup>Harvard Implicit Association Test – Harvard University. (2011). Retrieved from <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>.