



Legal Aid Of Nebraska

CULTURAL COMPETENCE –PROVIDING
CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE SERVICES

Legal Aid of Nebraska
ElderAccessLine®
1904 Farnam St. Suite 500
Omaha, NE 68102
1(800) 527-7249 - toll free
(402) 827-5656 - in Omaha

TREATING
OTHERS HOW
THEY WISH TO BE
TREATED.



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This toolkit was prepared by Legal Aid of Nebraska to be used by staff members of aging service agencies to assist them in their work with people from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds which represent vulnerable, underserved elders. Based on the 2008 US Census estimates, 325,406 persons age 60 and over live in Nebraska – representing 18.2% of the state’s population (US Census Bureau 2009). The celebrated longevity of our citizens has placed Nebraska 12th nationally in percentage of population over 65, 6th in the over 75 age group and 4th in the over 85 age group (SRF Consulting Group 2005).

In order to be more effective and proactive in assisting elders with their legal issues it is imperative for staff to be sensitive to the unique needs of the individuals they are helping. Sensitivity to these cultural and ethnic issues is also important in not only the provision of legal services, but also for all help providers give. An over arching goal of Legal Aid’s ElderAccessLine® is to assist service provides in addressing cultural, economic, health and care-giving nuances among older adults who are African American, Latino, American Indian, New Comer, low- or non-English proficiency, or geographically isolated.

This toolkit is provide with the intention of better serving our elders with compassion for cultural and ethnic issues and differences.

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Definitions

Culture - the shared values, traditions, norms, customs, arts, history, folklore, and institutions of a group of people. Culture is complex and dynamic, and can change over time.

Cultural competence - a set of cultural behaviors and attitudes integrated into the practice methods of a system, agency, or its professionals, that enables them to work effectively in cross-cultural situations.

Diversity—differences among people with respect to age, class, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, spiritual practice, and other human differences.



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How can we develop Cultural Competency?

- Self Awareness of our own culture
- Open attitude toward cultural differences
- Knowledge of other cultures, worldviews, values and practices
- Skills and ability to communicate and interact with others from other cultures
- Awareness that cultural information may be helpful in improving communication and effectiveness, but it is not a predictor of the values or behavior of any particular person.



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Our Concept of Self is Developed by Our Culture

Individualist based culture

- Focus on individual
- Self sufficiency valued
- Children must learn to make their way in the world
- Reliance on group/others - but not essential to success.
- Individual endeavor – essential.
- “Toot your own horn” or no one will do it for you.

Group based culture

- Relationships are essential
- Sense of self is derived from group membership (family, social group, work team, friends)
- Support and success of the group enables well being of individuals
- Deep trust, reliance on other group members
- Dependence and reciprocity in times of need are key.



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Different Cultures have different Priorities

Individualist Based Culture

- Telling the truth, facts more important than feelings
- Honesty is always the best policy
- Efficiency in communication highly valued
- Time is money – Don't waste time
- Valuing other's time through straight forward, quick communication.
- Telling the truth clearly and accurately will help move toward best outcomes.
- Highly admire people who fix or overcome issues and/or help others.

Group Based Culture

- Relationships more important than achieving tasks.
- Preserving dignity and harmony is very important
- Showing respect and “giving face” through compliments and affirmations is best for relationships
- “Face” is very important. Preserving harmony and bonds of friendship more important than strict telling of facts and truth.
- Communication style is influenced by relationship and position.
- “Always time to be polite”



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The Appropriate Degree of Directness Depends on Culture

Individualist Based Culture

- Words carry most of meaning.
- People “Say what they mean and mean what they say.”
- Quickly get to the point of the conversation.
- Only small need to second guess or “read between the lines”
- Clear speech highly valued.
- “Yes” means yes. “No” means no.

Group Based Culture

- What is said is subtle, must often “read between the lines” – not what you say but how you say it.
- Conversations begin with generalities, pleasantries – before slowly moving toward the point.
- What is not said is often as important as what is said. Implied meaning highly valued.
- Direct talk can be damaging – causing loss of face, rude.
- “Soft yes”, silence, changing subject, etc. – usually indicate “no”



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Diversity

- Value Diversity – you can't become culturally competent unless diversity is valued.
- It is not enough to avoid “bias” and to treat everyone in the same way. We must take the next step to be aware of how to effectively help each individual.
- Recognizing and addressing differences between people is necessary to successfully meet the needs of diverse communities.
- Each person has a different set of abilities, resources, cultural references, and relationships.
- Be aware of your own culturally influenced way of thinking.
- Willingness to serve a client who is different from you is the first step.
- Personal qualities that reflect genuineness, empathy, appropriate warmth and a capacity to respond flexibly to a range of possible solutions will help bridge cultural gaps.



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Referring cases to the ElderAccessLine

Legal Aid of Nebraska provides legal advice and brief services to Nebraska residents over 60 years of age through our ElderAccessLine®. We can help our callers write letters, send information and give advice over the phone.

Refer clients to the ElderAccessLine® for:

- Collection/ bankruptcy
- Medicaid
- Grandparent Rights
- Power of Attorney
- Living Wills
- Housing questions
- Other Legal Concerns

Our publications are available at our website
<http://www.legalaidofnebraska.com/>

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Resources

Beyond Bias: Cultural Competence As A Lawyer Skill by Nelson P. Miller

US Administration on Aging – A Toolkit for Serving Diverse Communities

http://www.aoa.gov/AoARoot/AoA_Programs/Tools_Resources/DOCS/AoA_DiversityToolkit_full.pdf

National Hispanic Council on Aging

www.nhcoa.org

National Asian Pacific Center on Aging

<http://www.napca.org/>

Toll Free Helpline Numbers

-Chinese 1-800-582-4218

-Korean 1-800-582-4259

-Vietnamese 1-800-582-4336

-English 1-800-336-2722

National Indian Council on Aging

www.nicoa.org