Valuing Diversity in the Workplace

VBCMH Training - 2025

Introduction

This training highlights the importance of recognizing and valuing diversity and cultural competency in the workplace.

Our differences are our strengths, as we all work together toward the same goal. When we value diversity, we recognize that all of us have something to contribute, and that those contributions are worthy.

Understanding and valuing an individual's unique culture and the diversity in our service community, improves the effectiveness of our work.

Awareness of, respect for, and attention to the diversity of people with whom we interact (customers, families, caregivers, colleagues and the community) should be reflected in organizational values, structures, policies and our services, as well as individual attitudes and behaviors.

What is Diversity?

- The word diversity typically refers to a range of differences among individuals and represents a variety of dimensions from personality and work style to social and cultural identities. It's about recognizing differences, accepting them, and allowing them to change our perceptions.

- For many people, the idea of addressing diversity means addressing race, ethnicity and gender. However, there are a great deal more dimensions of diversity that may be very important to how we see ourselves and each other. Some of the dimensions most often addressed include:

Race	Ethnicity
Gender	Marital or Parental Status
Gender Identity/Expression	Age
Sexual Orientation	Physical Ability
Mental Ability	National Origin
Economic Status	Religion

Understanding Diversity

- Dimensions of diversity in the workplace also include things like:

- Big picture thinker/Detail oriented thinker

- Introvert/Extrovert

- Liberal/Conservative

- Assertive/Passive

- Spontaneous/Cautious

Seniority, experience, position level, salaried/exempt, union/non-union, education, and training are also aspects of diversity that impact our workplace and customer/provider relationships. The key is to understand how to go about learning ways to work together most effectively with those who may have different perspectives than our own.

Our certification by the state as a CCBHC will require additional trainings on aspects of diversity including veterans, older adults and Native Americans.

Stereotypes

- Some of the messages we received and retained about people who are different from us were misinformation.

- Some of the misinformation constituted **stereotypes.**

- Stereotypes affect what we think and feel about people who are different from ourselves. Stereotypes affect how we respond to people who are different from us. Those responses became automatic. As adults, many of our responses are still on automatic.

Implicit Bias

• Even though we may not like to admit that we stereotype people, we all do it. Stereotypes help us organize our thinking and manage massive amounts of information. Once in place, stereotypes are difficult to undo.

• To help us move away from stereotypes or automatic responses and begin to value differences, we need to develop awareness of our automatic responses.

• Thoughts and feelings are "implicit" if we are unaware of them or mistaken about their nature. We have a bias when, rather than being neutral, we have a preference for (or aversion to) a person or group of people. Thus, the term "**implicit bias**" describes when we have attitudes towards people or associate stereotypes about them without our conscious knowledge.

Implicit Bias

- Implicit biases are attitudes or stereotypes that *unconsciously* affect our actions, decisions, and understanding.
- Implicit biases **can be positive** (a preference for something or someone) **or negative** (an aversion to or fear of something or someone).
- Implicit biases are **different from known biases** that people may choose to conceal for social or political reasons. In fact, implicit biases often conflict with a person's explicit and/or declared beliefs.
- Implicit biases are **formed over a lifetime** as a result of exposure to direct and indirect messages. The media plays a large role in this formation process.
- Implicit biases are **pervasive**: everyone has them.
- Implicit biases are **changeable**, but research shows that this process takes time, intention, and training.

Implicit Bias

Why it matters:

• Studies have found that most of our actions occur without our conscious thoughts, allowing us to function in our extraordinarily complex world. This means, however, that our implicit biases often predict how we'll behave more accurately than our conscious values.

What can be done about it:

• Social scientists are in the early stages of determining how to "debias" ourselves. Instituting specific procedures of decision making and encouraging people to be mindful of the risks of implicit bias can help us avoid acting according to biases that are contrary to our conscious values and beliefs. **Implicit bias is a universal phenomenon, not limited by race, gender, or even country of origin.**

From https://perception.org/research/implicit-bias/

For research based implicit bias quizzes, see:
https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html

Awareness

- Recognize that everyone has automatic responses that are not accurate.
- Recognize differences as diversity rather than abnormal behavior or inappropriate responses to the environment.
- Respect the benefits of diverse values and behaviors to people and to the organization.
- Understand the effect that historic distrust has on present-day interactions.
- Have a clear sense of your individual culture.
- Recognize your own ethnocentricity—the ways in which you stereotype, judge, and discriminate, and your emotional reactions to conflicting cultural values.
- Recognize the similarities that are shared across the human culture, regardless of the differences that exist among individual cultures and groups, such as the desire for:
  - safety,
  - good health,
  - education and well-being of our children,
  - love and belongingness,
  - self-esteem (feeling of worthiness), and
  - the ability to pursue and achieve our potential.

Culture

- It is difficult to discuss human diversity without including the concept of culture.

- Culture includes the learned beliefs, traditions, values, and behaviors common to a large group of people. A culture may include shared language and folklore, communication styles, and ideas and thinking patterns. Members of a culture have similar expectations of life.

- Culture serves as a road map for both perceiving and interacting with the world.

- Culture is not a definable entity to which people belong or do not belong.

- Within a nation, race or community, people belong to multiple cultural groups and negotiate multiple cultural expectations on a regular basis.

Cultural Competence

- SAMHSA* notes that cultural competence reinforces the values of diversity, flexibility, and responsiveness in addressing current and changing needs of clients and communities.

- Cultural competence is more than discrete skills or knowledge base—it requires self evaluation, awareness of one's own assumptions and biases, and striving to understand how these assumptions affect one's ability to work with team members and customers.

SAMHSA-federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Agency

Cultural Competence

Curiosity, empathy, respect, and humility are some basic attitudes that foster positive relationships with coworkers and customers.

- *Acknowledge cultural/ generational differences and historical injustices without becoming defensive.*
- *Respect others' opinions.*
- *Be open to learning about other cultures and ideas.*
- *Don't stereotype.*
- *Don't judge others by your own cultural standards.*
- *Don't assume your culture's way is the only way.*
- *Don't talk down to anyone; communicate effectively.*
- *Acknowledge, without blame or judgment, that we all have some implicit bias and commit to work to identify these biases and not act on them through word or action.*

Effective Communication

To understand another person's diverse point of view or culture and to share our own views requires communication skills.

- **Communication Style** - Openness, active listening, & respectful language.
- **Think before you speak** – Be sensitive to others. If you do accidentally offend someone, apologize immediately.
- **Listen more** – People who are listened to usually appreciate the person who is doing the listening and are more likely to cooperate with the person.
- **Be alert to non-verbal cues** – Remember, body language impacts a great deal of how we communicate. By developing your awareness of the signs and signals of body language, you can more easily understand other people, and more effectively communicate with them.
- **Avoid generalized language** – Refrain from using words, images, and situations that suggest that all or most members of a particular group are the same. You can avoid stereotyping by asking questions to understand each person better.
- **Be careful with humor** - Even if you don't intend to hurt others, your comment or behavior may be interpreted in a way you didn't intend – apologize and clear up any misunderstanding. At the same time, recognize other people's intentions when they speak. We wouldn't feel so threatened by diversity if we allowed ourselves to chuckle at our own – and others' – shortcomings.

Integrate Not Assimilate

Diversity is not about becoming *like* one another. It is not about melting into one multi-cultural population. Nor is it about requiring people to like one another.

When we value diversity, we seek to integrate, not assimilate our differences.

We do not assume that an individual person represents or embodies any group. Diversity is about allowing differences and respecting differences until the differences don't make a difference anymore.

Benefits of a Diverse Workplace

- Improves understanding of those you work with.
- Creates a work environment that allows everyone to reach their full potential.
- Provides multiple perspectives on problem solving.
- Boosts employee morale.
- Improves customer relations.
- Reduces complaints and grievances.
- It's doing the right thing!

At VBCMH, valuing the differences of those around you helps eliminate discriminatory practices, improves staff morale, reduces stress-related illnesses, and enhances performance by using different perspectives.

Other Important Concepts and Terms

- **Health Equity -** The state in which everyone has the opportunity to attain full health, and no one is disadvantaged from achieving this because of social position or any socially defined circumstance like socioeconomic status, neighborhood they live in, race, disability status, or educational attainment.

- **Inequity -** Measurable differences between different population groups arising from social conditions that are avoidable and unjust.

- **Disparity -** A measured difference between groups. Disparities exist and are associated with worse health outcomes and shorter life spans.

- **Inclusion -** The action or state of including or of being included within a community. Inclusion involves a sense of belonging and empowered participation.

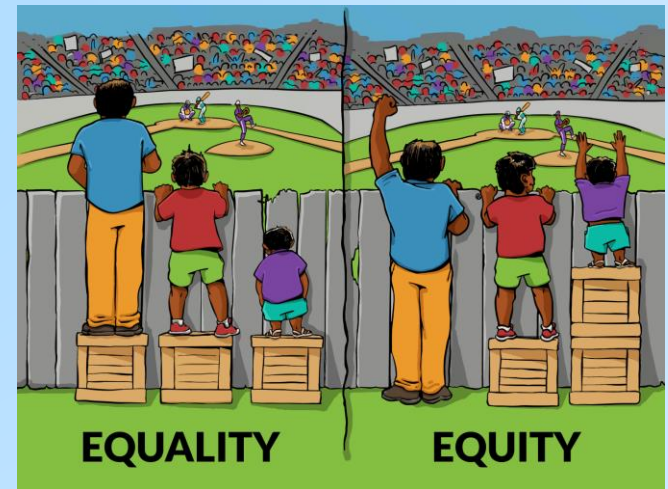# Other Important Concepts and Terms

- **Racism -** The concept of racism is widely thought of as simply personal prejudice, but, in fact, it is a complex system of racial hierarchies and inequities. Beyond the individual level of racism, we consider the broader more societal concepts of institutional and structural racism.

- **Anti-Racism -** Working to become actively conscious about race and racism *and* take actions to end racial inequities in our daily lives. Being antiracist is believing that racism is everyone's problem, and we all have a role to play in stopping it.

- **Micro-Aggressions** - subtle verbal or nonverbal insults or demeaning messages communicated toward a marginalized person, often by someone who may be well-intentioned but unaware of the impact their words or actions have on the target. Often microaggressions are the result of unconscious bias. Microaggressions can be based on any aspect of a marginalized person's identity (for example, sexuality, religion, gender or ableness/disability). Individual microaggressions may not be devastating to the person experiencing them; however, their cumulative effects over time can be large.

Other Important Concepts and Terms

Equality is different than Equity -

Equality means each individual or group is given the same resources or opportunities.

Equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome.

EQUALITY   EQUITY

Other Important Concepts and Terms

- **Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)-** Conditions in the environments in which people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks. Resources that enhance quality of life can have a significant influence on population health outcomes. Examples of these resources include safe and affordable housing, access to education, public safety, availability of healthy foods, local emergency/health services, and environments free of life-threatening toxins.

- For a variety of reasons, low-income individuals, people of color, and residents of rural areas in the United States experience a significantly greater burden of disease and lower life expectancy relative to their higher income, White, and urban counterparts.

- A new requirement for certified CCBHC's includes screening every customer for "social needs" or the individual level resource needs related to the social determinants of health.

- VBCMH is beginning to implement a 10-question standardized **social needs screening** developed by CMS. This screening is currently found on the Chart Links page of Viewpoint in the Assessment section and is called AHC HRSN Core Screening.

Impact on Customers

As community mental health providers, we have long been aware of the impacts of bias, prejudice, and social determinants of health on our customers and have worked to facilitate access to health care, education, and safe and affordable housing despite the barriers they have faced as people with disabilities. Our customers and potential customers deal with stigma and bias against persons with disabilities as well as prejudices against other groups to which they belong.

VBCMH, in partnership with the state and SWMBH, continues to assess and work toward overcoming factors and barriers that make it harder for persons of racial minorities to access our services when they need them. It is important to consider what actions we can take to assist those facing barriers in contacting, accessing, and being able to follow through with VBCMH services.

Impact on Customers

- In 2023, VBCMH formed the IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility) committee. The purpose of the committee is for staff, clients, and community members of all backgrounds and demographic characteristics to feel welcomed, respected, and supported when they connect with VBCMH, and to provide a safe and inclusive environment in which people can work well together.

- If you are interested in joining the IDEA committee or know someone who is, please contact Debbie Hess or Kyleen Gray.

For More Information

This brief overview only scratches the surface on the important topics of Diversity, Equity, and Cultural Competence. Staff are encouraged to explore other resources and trainings. Some training links are provided below for those interested in additional training opportunities. **Thank you!**

- Racial Equity and Cultural Diversity: https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/global-mhttc/racial-equity-cultural-diversity

- Community-Defined Evidence: A Culturally-Appropriate Approach to Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Diverse Populations: https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/pacific-southwest-mhttc/product/community-defined-evidence-culturally-appropriate-approach

- How Implicit Bias Affects Our Work: https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/pacific-southwest-mhttc/product/how-implicit-bias-affects-our-work-starting-individual

- Delivering Mental Health Services Through A Cultural Lens: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqugrcWfJP8

- Relias e-learning training: Cultural Competency