

Introduction to Collecting Race, Ethnicity and Primary Language

Why is it important to collect race, ethnicity and language?

This data allows us to know who we are serving, to ensure access and the best possible care for all MassHealth members. Did you know that...

- Massachusetts has the 7th largest immigrant population in the U.S.
- Nearly ¼ of Massachusetts children are immigrants or children of immigrants.
- There are differences (disparities) in access, use and outcomes in behavioral health services based on race, ethnicity and language.

Only by collecting data can we work to ensure that all children and families have access to services and the best possible care.

What is best practice for collecting race, ethnicity and language data?

1. All participants should be asked about their race, ethnicity and language. Never make assumptions based on appearance.
2. Always ask the person to self-identify.
3. Start with a brief introduction, for example “We collect information about the race, ethnicity and language to learn more about the families and communities we serve. This information will only be used to give all families the best possible care.”
4. Have a printed list of options to help people make a choice. (The list of Race, Ethnicity and Language Options is available at the CBHI website. Go to www.mass.gov/masshealth/cbhi, click on CANS and then click on Clinical Guidance on the CANS)
5. Anticipate that many families have multiple racial and ethnic identities.
6. Be prepared for questions. (“Best Practice on Race Ethnicity and Language Data Collection” is available at the CBHI CANS web site. Go to www.mass.gov/masshealth/cbhi, click on CANS and then click on Clinical Guidance on the CANS.
7. ‘Golden Rule: You only have to collect it once, if you collect it correctly.

What if...

- **a client identifies more than one race or ethnicity?**
Show the client the list of options and ask her/him to select up to 3 races or ethnicities.
- **a client identifies as belonging to a race or ethnic group that does not appear on the list?**
Select “other”
- **a client does not want to self-identify with a particular race or ethnic group?**
Select “Chooses Not To Self-Identify”.