

## Tool 6. Cultural considerations

There is a large gap in cultural understanding between patients and health care providers. In order to improve minority health, it is important for medical professionals to understand that cultural beliefs play an important role in health care. A 2004 report from the National Resource Center on Native American Aging provides a summary of strategies for health care professionals to improve communication with their patient. Their advice is as follows:

From the health care professionals:

- Plan what to say in logical order one step at a time
- Define health care terms and explain acronyms
- Verify understanding: rephrase message and have the patient explain instructions back to you (teach-back method)
- Adjust to patient needs
- Encourage participation
- Pay attention to non-verbal communication: What is the patient not saying?

From the Elders:

- Provide more time and allow for interaction
- Help Elders to form questions: What would you want to know if you were in their shoes?
- Be positive. Native healers are positive and supportive that a remedy will work. Often, non-Native providers indicate that a remedy should be tried and if it does not work, then the patient can return and try something else.
- Define anatomy using patient-friendly terms.
- Deal with biases, e.g., fear of doctors, denial, anger, etc.
- Be attentive to non-verbal communication (e.g., silences, gestures). Eye contact may be considered rude.

[Full Report](#) of the 2004 report from the National Resource Center on Native American Aging

