

## **2-19 Diversity Policy**

**Effective Date: October 1, 2008**

### **Policy**

The Lake County Health Department and Community Health Center recognizes its talented and diverse workforce as a key competitive advantage. The success of the services we offer is a reflection of the quality and skill of our people. We recognize that each employee brings their own unique capabilities, experiences and characteristics to their work. Our diversity encompasses differences in ethnicity, national orientation, gender, language, age, sexual orientation, religion, abilities, experience, socio-economic status, and education.

As an agency, we strive to value the differences of our diverse population, respect the individuality of all employees and customers. Our goal is to maintain a climate in which everyone is treated with the utmost respect and dignity. A positive and supportive environment is the foundation on which we build continued relationships with our patients, our partners and communities.

The Health Department regularly monitors community demographics and health outcomes to ensure our strategic planning and outreach activities are meeting the needs of our diverse community. Our diverse leaders, supervisors, care givers and policy makers are both culturally competent and culturally sensitive. By inwardly reflecting the perspectives of our diverse community at all levels, we can more easily demonstrate that we truly value the community we serve.

### **RESPONSIBILITY TO PROVIDE CULTURALLY COMPETENT CARE TO AN ETHNICALLY DIVERSE PATIENT/CLIENT POPULATION**

The Lake County Health Department and Community Health Center supports and requires that patient care, client care and overall customer service be provided in a culturally competent and ethnically sensitive manner. Communication and interactions with all customers of the Health Department should be delivered in a culturally sensitive manner.

Knowledge and skills related to cultural diversity can strengthen and broaden health care delivery systems. Other cultures can provide examples of a range of alternatives in services, delivery systems, conceptualization of illness, and treatment modalities. Culturally diverse groups often utilize traditional health care providers, identified by and respected within the group. Concepts of illness, health, wellness and treatment modalities are part of the total cultural belief system. Culture is one of the organizing concepts upon which patient and client care is based and defined.

Becoming culturally competent is an ongoing educational process. The Lake County Health Department and Community Health Center will make relevant information accessible to employees in an effort to enhance their understanding of the following:

- How cultural groups:
  - understand life processes;
  - define health and illness;
- What cultural groups:
  - do to maintain wellness
  - believe to be the causes of illness;
- How healers cure and care for members of cultural groups
- How the cultural background of the employee influences the way in which care is delivered.

It is important for employees to consider specific cultural factors impacting individual clients. Recognizing that intra cultural variation means that each client must be assessed for individual cultural differences can be invaluable when providing quality care.

### **DIVERSITY COMMITTEE**

The Health Department's commitment to diversity is represented by the Diversity Committee. This group of supervisory and non-supervisory employees represent all Service Areas. The cooperation and support of all employees and supervisors in the diversity efforts is essential to assuring the success of any initiatives.

The mission for the Diversity Committee is: To inspire cultural diversity and competency through equal opportunity, respect, and the understanding of staff, clients and community.

**The Diversity Committee consists of three subcommittees:**

#### **Policy subcommittee**

The role of this subcommittee is to identify opportunities for the agency to advance diversity awareness and inclusion processes by reviewing current internal policies and procedures that may need to be enhanced or developed.

#### **Events subcommittee**

The role of this subcommittee is to develop ways of incorporating diversity themes into agency wide employee events and other community events and fairs. The methods developed could be used as tools to help committee members and other appropriate staff to address culturally sensitive issues that employees, patients, and clients might encounter.

#### **Staff Training subcommittee**

The role of this subcommittee is to help raise diversity awareness in staff meetings, through diversity newsletters and coordinating agency wide trainings. Committee members work in pairs to facilitate short experiential exercises, trivia games, and other methods of training that could be used to increase awareness of diversity and its influence in the workplace and community.

## *Employee Policies and Procedures*

### **RESPONSIBILITY OF EMPLOYEES AND SUPERVISORS**

The Lake County Health Department and Community Health Center is committed to creating an environment that encourages employees to develop and perform at their maximum potential.

Workplace harassment is a type of employment discrimination that can include sexual harassment as well as harassment based on an employee's race, color, religion, age (40 and over), national origin, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability or any other legally protected characteristic.

Any employee who experiences or observes harassing or offensive conduct based on any of the above legally protected characteristics or believes that they have been treated in an unlawful, discriminatory manner, is required to immediately report the incident to their supervisor, Service Area Director, the Director of Human Resources or to the Human Resources Manager. Employees may report allegations directly to their Service Area Director or to Human Resources without first reporting the allegations to their direct supervisor. Such conduct should be reported even if the individual to whom the conduct was directed does not complain or otherwise protest the behavior. (See LCHD/CHC Harassment Policy Section 2-14)

The law prohibits retaliation against an employee who, in good faith, reports harassment, assists or cooperates in the investigation or a harassment complaint. Any threat of retaliation or attempt to do so should be reported immediately to the Director of Human Resources, the Human Resources Manager or the employee's Service Area Director.

One of the most critical skills in addressing diversity challenges such as workplace harassment is the ability to effectively solve problems. Our agency believes that by providing diversity awareness and other training opportunities to our employees, they will have a better understanding of what constitutes unethical conduct, negative treatment based on differences, and take responsibility for safeguarding our agency's culture.