

The Women's Initiative

Cultural Humility Commitment

CULTURAL HUMILITY COMMITMENT

Cultural humility works to address the assumptions, values and biases that lead to health disparities and inequality. The Women's Initiative commits to a cultural humility approach throughout our organization in order to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion, with a specific focus on antiracism efforts. Our goal is that this commitment supports us in building authentic and healing relationships across difference with our clients, the communities we serve, and our colleagues *in order to fully realize our mission, vision, and values*. We specifically envision that this approach will improve health access and outcomes, thereby reducing health disparities.

Background

Founding Mission

The Women's Initiative was founded in 2007 with the mission to *provide women with effective counseling, social support and education so they can transform life challenges into positive change and growth*. Recognizing the disparate impact of violence, trauma and gender-based societal roles on mental health, we created programs and services to support women's healing and recovery. In doing so, we proactively addressed barriers to care, such as cost and accessibility and created a safe and welcoming mental health care organization that recognizes the inherent strength of each client.

Trauma-Informed Care

From our inception we have embodied the trauma-informed care approach, realizing the widespread impact of trauma and understanding potential paths for recovery; recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; responding by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and seeking to actively resist re-traumatization. Approximately 90% of our clients are survivors of trauma. And while sexual and physical violence against women are the most prevalent, we also treat many women who experience culturally based trauma, such as daily experiences of racism, homophobia

and poverty or traumas related to immigration and acculturation. Therefore, we recognize that one of the most important components of trauma-informed care is the importance of addressing the intersectionality of identity and the various ways that people are harmed in order to create services that can support healing and resilience. In other words, there can be no trauma-informed care without “culturally informed care.”

Cultural Humility

The cultural humility approach was established in 1998 by Melanie Tervalon, MD, MPH and Jann Murray-Garcia, MD, MPH as a way to reduce health disparities and institutional inequities in the field of medicine. The philosophy is now widely recognized as an effective tool for addressing inequality throughout the health care system and beyond. As it applies to our work, we define cultural humility as an ongoing process of:

1. Cultivating critical self-reflection and learning about our own beliefs and cultural identities in order to understand underlying assumptions, biases and values.
2. Recognizing and mitigating power imbalances, including between therapist and client; service provider and community; board member and staff; and supervisor and supervisee.
3. Holding ourselves accountable to this work at the institutional level.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Embedded in our cultural humility approach are the organizational goals related to diversity, equity and inclusion, which we define* for the purposes of our work as:

- **Diversity:** The presence of a variety of social and cultural identities and beliefs among our staff, Board, volunteers, community partners, and clients.
- **Equity:** The presence of justice and fairness across those differences with regard to the procedures, processes and distribution of resources (time, expertise, money) in our organization.
- **Inclusion:** The full engagement of individuals sharing power at all levels of our organization. Inclusion supports a diverse workforce, and is an intentional demonstration that counters the historical exclusion of underrepresented communities.

**Definitions adapted from the Michigan Nonprofit Association [Diversity, Inclusion and Equity Toolkit](#).*

Antiracism

Our cultural humility approach encompasses self-critique and learning across all aspects of cultural identity and belief. At the same time, we wish to highlight the uniqueness of racial identity and the uniquely urgent need to move toward racial equity. The 400-year history of oppression and injustice against African Americans in our country—and particularly in Charlottesville—reverberates in current disparities for all people of color. The gravity and depth of this issue necessitates a specific commitment to antiracism. As it applies to our work, we define antiracism as the practice of identifying, challenging, and changing the values, structures and behaviors that perpetuate systemic racism at our organization and in our community.

Vision and Values Statements

Our Vision and Values Statements embody the trauma-informed approach, our commitment to cultural humility, and our goal of reducing mental health disparities:

Vision

All women in our community will have access to innovative, effective, evidence-based mental health care.

Values

We believe every woman has a capacity for healing that, once supported, results in better mental and physical health for her, her family and our community. We believe it is critical to address each woman's unique emotional, physical, spiritual and cultural needs and strengths. We are committed to providing compassionate care that maintains the highest standard of excellence in an environment that is welcoming, safe and supportive.

PLAN OF ACTION

On an annual basis, The Women's Initiative staff, Staff Advisory Committee on Cultural Humility (SACCH), and Board of Directors partner to develop a Plan of Action to accompany the Cultural Humility Commitment.

Note About Terms

Throughout this document we use the term “women” and “clients” interchangeably to describe those receiving our services, due to the fact that our model of care was founded with the goal of providing a safe space for women to heal. As we have grown, we have recognized the impact of gender-based health disparities more broadly and have therefore embraced the opportunity to serve more transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals. We also provide care to men in select programs, such as our partnership with the Charlottesville Free Clinic. We recognize the need to address this discrepancy between who we are serving and the way we describe our services, values and commitments, which is a component of our current strategic planning process.