

Culturally tailored outreach drives action



Altering the approach

The need for transformation in the healthcare industry remains unequivocal; however, progress has been slow. Change is being driven by rising healthcare costs, public health crises exacerbated by COVID-19, and the acceleration of health equity initiatives to address systemic inequities. In addition, consumers have raised their expectations of the businesses they engage with. Informed consumers want a more personalized experience that addresses their needs, and they can become frustrated when they don't receive that tailored interaction.¹ Health

Cultural characteristics inform self-identity

Cultural characteristics play an integral role in understanding and respecting who people are. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) describes several elements that are often specific to ethnic, racial, religious, geographic, or social groups, which include personal identification, language, thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions.²

These characteristics largely impact how members engage in the management of their health, as well as those they care for. The elements described also affect health outcomes, with implications from access and care navigation to health education and treatment adherence and, they remain critical factors in building trust.

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plans have a renewed focus to develop effective strategies and approaches to engage their members, especially within diverse member populations where health disparities are most prevalent. To do this well, plans need to understand the cultural characteristics that influence how their members think about, engage with, and manage their health.

The historical one-size-fits-all approach to member outreach is long overdue for change.

and preferences, messaging, and more. This is an important step forward in building personalized, trusted relationships with members.

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Building trusted relationships

Health plans generally lack the quality and completeness of essential data required to better understand their members including race, ethnicity and language data, which may help a plan begin to understand the cultural characteristics of their members.³ Some of the current challenges to collecting the data include historic and present-day structural racism, lack of trust in health plans, limited racial categories that don't allow for individuals to describe their identity, and little clarity regarding data use.⁴

To begin to address these challenges, plans need to build trust. An important first step is to clearly communicate the purpose behind collecting the information and how it will create a better experience for members. This can encourage members to feel more comfortable in providing these essential data points. Once health plans have more complete information about each member and better understand who they are at a cultural level, they can begin to create more personalized and engaging experiences with their members.

Role of culture in healthcare

According to SameSky Health Founder and CEO Abner Mason, “Building trust with members requires two things: humility and patience.” Learn more from this [video](#) featuring Abner and Rudy Bozas of Tufts Health Plan, a Point32Health company, in which they discuss the critical role culture plays in advancing health equity.

Culturally tailored outreach is key

We all have different perceptions, points of reference, customs, and influences based on our own cultures and prior experiences. Without considering these aspects, healthcare messages are likely to be ignored or misinterpreted. As a result, engagement suffers.

When addressing complex health challenges, understanding and empathizing with different members based on their cultural characteristics remains imperative, while considering the barriers that traditionally underserved communities are likely to face. Speaking to members in ways that demonstrate a concern for what matters most to them fosters trust.

Cultural understanding also shapes the framework for member participation. While members may come from the same race, ethnicity, and community, they remain individuals with varied needs and personal circumstances. Considering clinical histories, social determinants of health (SDOH), and behavioral psychology can assist in creating culturally tailored outreach that resonates with each member.

Engaging underserved communities

It's extremely important to understand and empathize with people based on their cultural characteristics when addressing complex health challenges like COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy.

As an example:

- An analysis conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation in 2021 found that there was a growing gap in COVID-19 vaccines among Hispanic people.⁵
- The study found that barriers included confusion around the vaccination being offered at no cost, even though many providers requested insurance information upon scheduling the appointment.
- Providers also required proof of state residency, which created fears that getting the vaccine may impact immigration status.
- Limited transportation also proved to be a major barrier to vaccination.

To address hesitancy related to health decisions, health plans must be willing to inquire, analyze, and understand the underlying context.



Conclusion

It's time to evaluate and implement a new approach when engaging members in their care. Health plans are uniquely positioned to collect the necessary information about their members to be able to create a culturally tailored, personalized member experience that drives action to address health disparities.

SameSky Health works with health plans to put this into action. In a recent study, SameSky Health worked with a national Medicare Advantage plan to engage members who had not seen a provider in 16 months or more. In the first six months of engagement, SameSky Health was able to guide 33% of those members to complete their annual wellness visit, demonstrating that culturally tailored outreach drives action.



Critical steps forward

[Watch this webinar](#) in which SameSky Health Founder and CEO, Abner Mason, along with Dr. Rishi Manchanda, CEO of HealthBegins, discuss actions to be taken now in order to advance health equity.

Examples underscoring the need for culturally tailored outreach



Postpartum

SameSky Health research revealed Latinx women are more amenable to messages that encourage them to call on friends and family for postpartum support. In contrast, Black, white, and other ethnicities showed a preference for receiving links and tips to self-service postpartum support resources. Messaging needs to consider how cultural backgrounds affect social structures and individuals' willingness to leverage them in times of need.



Mistrust

The Tuskegee Syphilis Study is an example of the valid reasons that Black Americans may not trust the healthcare system.⁶ Creating messaging that builds trust is especially important to developing effective outreach to this member segment.



Stigma

As with HIV, monkeypox has been portrayed in stigmatizing ways and has been characterized as a "gay men's disease."⁷ Fear-based messaging can perpetuate stigmatizing stereotypes. Sensitivity is needed to create messaging, especially for gay Black males who live in areas with high infection rates. Vaccination rates are lowest among this demographic, possibly due to mistrust.



Nutrition

Food has strong cultural foundations. Messaging needs to be culturally specific when educating diabetic members about eating better and more healthfully. Suggestions about food ideas and recipes should be tailored to the member's ethnic background.

References

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About SameSky Health

SameSky Health is a cultural experience company that removes barriers to care and forms meaningful relationships to bring people to health. We guide health plan members on their annual wellness journeys by building trusted relationships that encourage dignity, autonomy, and companionship as they navigate disparate life experiences within a complex healthcare system.

Launched in 2017, SameSky Health engages 2.3 million+ members across 15 states, in 25+ different languages. The company’s cultural expertise and technology-based solutions enable health plans to grow member engagement, improve quality measures, and increase overall health outcomes. We are on a mission to create cultural connections for a healthier, more equitable world. SameSky Health is based in North Hollywood, CA. To learn more, visit sameskyhealth.com.



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