

## **Cultural Competency**

Culture—a person's beliefs, norms, values, and language—plays a key role in how people perceive and experience mental illness, whether or not they seek help, what type of help they seek, what coping styles and supports they have, what treatments might work, and more. To effectively serve Minnesota's diverse populations, mental health systems need to understand and respect cultural differences.

The Surgeon General reports people of color, both adults and children, are less likely than their white counterparts to receive needed mental health care. People with different cultural backgrounds can face additional barriers such as poverty, lack of service and supports, pervasive stigma and prejudice, language barriers and lack of cultural competence in service delivery. It is important to create a variety of services that will address the demographics of people accessing care.

Culture biases against mental health professionals prevent many African Americans from accessing care due to prior experiences with historical misdiagnoses, inadequate treatment, and a lack of cultural understanding; only 2% of psychiatrists, 2% of psychologists and 4% of social workers in the U.S. are African American. Many people of different cultural backgrounds face stigma within their communities. Working with providers who can be sensitive to the needs of specific cultures can reduce barriers to treatment.

### **The Mental Health Legislative Network Supports:**

- Creating a loan forgiveness program to increase the number of culturally specific mental health professionals (SF 858/HF 575)
- Authorizing grants to nonprofit organizations to be a bridge between culturally specific communities and mental health professionals and to provide supports to individuals and families (SF 858/HF 575)

All these provisions are also contained in HF 196 and SF 148.