

CASE STUDY

Vision, Values, & Corporate Strategy

at Tufts Health Plan*



How a nationally-recognized health plan **improved its business diversity plan** using cultural competency training from the experts at **Quality Interactions**.

Key Facts

The action point

Tufts Health Plan identified a need to incorporate cultural competency training into its business diversity program to emphasize cultural sensitivity and inclusion as key company values and establish a baseline level of cultural agility among staff.

The mechanism

Quality Interactions suite of cultural competency eLearning courses provided a core curriculum for all staff, as well as specialized training relevant to job roles and responsibilities at a health plan.

The result

With more than 98% participation of employees and new hires, pre- and post- assessments show an across-the-board improvement in cultural competency knowledge with concrete benefits for members and staff.

**Tufts Health Plan combined with Harvard Pilgrim Health Care as of January 1, 2021, to form a newly combined organization. Given that this engagement was prior to the combination, this report speaks only to Tufts Health Plan organization and does not address the newly combined organization.*





About Tufts Health Plan

Tufts Health Plan is a not-for-profit organization nationally recognized for its commitment to providing innovative, high-quality healthcare coverage. Staying true to its mission of improving the health and wellness of diverse communities, Tufts Health Plan serves more than one million members in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Connecticut, offering health insurance coverage across the life span, regardless of age or circumstance. Tufts Health Plan employs nearly 3,000 individuals.

Diversity and inclusion are key company values that not only emphasize recruiting and retaining diverse employees who embrace differences and act equitably, but are also critical to Tufts Health Plan's business growth. Tufts Health Plan's Business Diversity program is a strategic priority within the company and is an integral part of the entire senior leadership team's planning and goals.

A Call to Action

Tufts Health Plan's regional expansion coincided with rapidly changing demographics that created a market imperative for growth and improved service to diverse populations. Senior leadership examined its expanding market, the diverse communities in the region, and identified ways to address health disparities in those communities.

Examples of regional health disparities include:

- In Connecticut, 69% of Hispanics have health insurance, versus 94% of non-Hispanic white populations

- In Rhode Island, African Americans are 67% more likely than non-Hispanic white populations to have diabetes
- In Massachusetts, people with disabilities are twice as likely to report depression than people without disabilities.

Tufts Health Plan also compared the racial and ethnic diversity of its membership to the diversity of the regions it served. Its analysis revealed that shifting demographics not only underscored the importance of Tufts Health Plan's mission, but also that attracting and retaining more diverse members would be critical to business growth.

A Strategy for Success

Tufts Health Plan made a strong commitment to increase the diversity of its membership while focusing on health equity and building the cultural competency of its teams. Five years after implementing the strategy, it increased its diverse membership by 50% to nearly 200,000 individuals.

5-Part Journey to Health Equity

Tufts Health Plan recognized a business case to attract and support a more diverse membership, including new clinical programs and improved member experience for these populations.

The company also realized it was embarking on a journey without boundaries—that it would have to prioritize diversity in every facet of its business to create real and lasting change.

Tufts Health Plan created a 5-Point Business Diversity Plan to embed diversity and inclusivity in every aspect of the business. This plan worked to:

- Support Diverse Communities
- Improve Multicultural Member Experience
- Develop Culturally Innovative Health Programs
- Expand Partnerships with Diverse Suppliers
- Promote Diverse Workforce



Incorporating Training

Tufts Health Plan recognized that its Business Diversity Plan depended on a culturally competent workforce to establish buy-in and solidify the work of creating an inclusive and diverse organization. Tufts Health Plan needed to provide foundational education for its staff to increase cultural competency, build cross-cultural communication skills, and reduce unconscious bias.



The company issued a broad RFP in search of cultural competency training that could meet the entire business' needs, from senior leadership to cross-functional departments that included human resources, finance, clinical, and customer services.

Tufts Health Plan had specific objectives for cultural competency training, including:



Cultural competence is the ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures.

- A core curriculum for all staff to provide baseline understanding of how diversity, perception, and bias factor into healthcare
- Specialized training for frontline teams working with members on benefits, plan, and care needs
- Accurate reporting and the ability to measure success

Quality Interactions met Tufts Health Plan's requirements with on-point, effective training programs that offer:

- A research-based and field-tested approach to cultural competency
- Challenging content relevant to job roles and responsibilities in the healthcare industry
- Courses and assessments that incorporate engaging learning strategies
- Convenient and accessible 24-hour eLearning available on desktop, tablet, and phone

Co-founded by practicing physicians and clinical researchers, Quality Interactions provides the highest level of cultural competency training specific to health plans and healthcare organizations. Robust, flexible, and practical, Quality Interactions' cultural competency training was the preferred solution for Tufts Health Plan's needs.

The Quality Interactions Curriculum

Tufts Health Plan wanted to integrate cultural competency training into the fabric of its business, including its core customer service structure. In collaboration with Quality Interactions, they designed a cultural competency training initiative that sought to establish a baseline level of cultural competency throughout the organization and provide comprehensive, progressive

learning opportunities for member-facing staff. Importantly, it also aligned with Tufts Health Plan's established protocols and practices.

Tufts Health Plan's custom curriculum included four distinct learning pathways:

1. Live training

Tufts Health Plan began its cultural competency training with a presentation by Quality



Interactions co-founder, Dr. Joseph Betancourt, to the leadership team. This lecture connected unconscious bias, healthcare disparities, and social drivers of health to the core challenges and opportunities specific to the organization.

2. Foundational coursework

Tufts Health Plan chose to roll out Quality Interactions' foundational *ResCUE Model™ for Cross-Cultural Communication* to all employees and contractors, representing a wide range of roles from member services staff to actuarial staff to the chief executive. The ResCUE Model emphasizes a person-centered approach to cross-cultural interactions and provides actionable skills that improve communication in the workplace. Real-world scenarios and interactive exercises engage learners to practice applying skills.

3. Custom lesson plans

Quality Interactions developed

Sample Syllabi



Member Service Reps:

- ResCUE Model™ for Cross-Cultural Communication*
- Recognizing & Overcoming Unconscious Bias
- Disability Awareness & CUEs for Quality Interactions
- Creating a Welcoming Environment for LGBTQ Individuals

* Required foundational training for all staff



Care Managers:

- ResCUE Model™ for Cross-Cultural Communication*
- Recognizing & Overcoming Unconscious Bias
- Cross-Cultural Care: A Person-Centered Approach for Health Plans
- Cross-Cultural Care in Mental Health and Depression
- Culturally Competent Care for the Medicare Population
- Working with Specific Populations: Hispanic/Latino

custom training materials for Tufts Health Plan's internal use, providing 12 lesson plans and four case studies to support ongoing learning and engagement with the customer service team. Lesson plans included facilitator notes, activities, resources, and job aids. Topics included:

- Recognizing assumptions and unconscious bias
- Establishing common vocabulary
- Understanding differences
- Responding to heavy accents and language barriers during customer service calls
- Adding cultural competency concepts into rep-provider/member interaction cycle

4. Intensive coursework

Quality Interactions' eLearning program provided comprehensive training program, allowing Tufts Health Plan's staff to access up to eight cultural competency courses. Staff was encouraged to deepen their learning with self-designed and self-paced curricula, offered over the course of a year, based on job function.



Participant Experience

Quality Interactions cultural competency training is an essential part of a continuous learning process for participants in various job roles at Tufts Health Plan.

Care managers

Quality Interactions courses helped care managers realize the value of cultural competency in their daily interactions with members from diverse cultural backgrounds.

They found that, when they used the cross-cultural communication skills they learned, members become more open, trusting, and receptive. Therefore, the care is more efficient, and members are more likely to accept help.

Care managers also reported that they better understand where diverse members are coming from related to health issues, which helps them meet members halfway, ultimately making their relationship less frustrating and more productive.

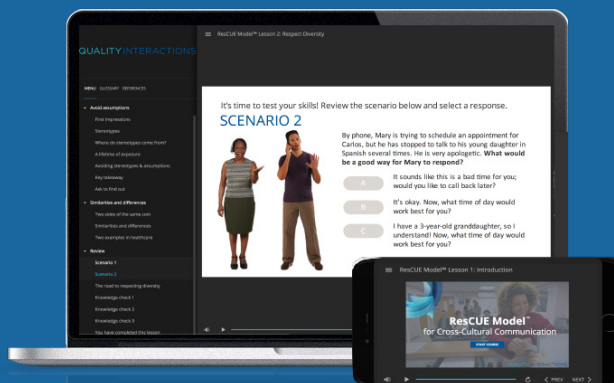
Call center representatives

Quality Interactions courses revealed the hidden power of stereotypes and how that can influence a rep's actions. For example, reps noted that older callers who sound "nice" remind them of their grandparents and they kinder to them. If an older caller sounds "cranky," the rep might shut down and be less accommodating.

New hires

Quality Interactions courses have helped new hires at Tufts Health Plan understand that bias doesn't always equal overt racism (or ageism, or sexism, etc.) Rather, everyone uses unconscious bias to make decisions on a very basic level. Bias can influence whether we like/dislike or trust/distrust someone. In a call center, this can influence the outcome of a call.

For most new hires, it is a revelation to recognize that they do have unconscious bias. Without a doubt, in each and every class, there comes an "a-ha moment," when the reps realize there have been times when they have let unconscious bias guide their actions—and when they have been affected by someone else's unconscious bias towards them.





Results: Participation & Feedback

The roll-out of the Quality Interactions' cultural competency courses was successful. The foundational ResCUE Model course achieved 98% uptake, a result of leadership initiative and staff support.

In addition to providing cultural competency training to employees and contractors, Tufts Health Plan offers Quality Interactions courses to select commercial insurance customers. Tufts Health Plan has been pleased with participation rates.

Total participation:

- All Quality Interactions courses: **8,508**
- The ResCUE Model: **3,593** (more than 98% of employees during initial roll-out and continued training of new employees)
- Recognizing and Overcoming Unconscious Bias: **1,251**
- Other courses: **3,664**

Tufts Health Plan considers Quality Interactions cultural competency training as integral to its success in advancing its comprehensive Business Diversity program because it created broad

awareness of unconscious bias in healthcare and cultural issues across various populations. Moving forward, Tufts Health Plan and the newly combined organization are focused on building upon its foundational work in cultural competency and deepening its commitment to health equity, anti-racism efforts, and community service.

Participant feedback

“Relevant and evidence-based.”

“Tangible scenarios.”

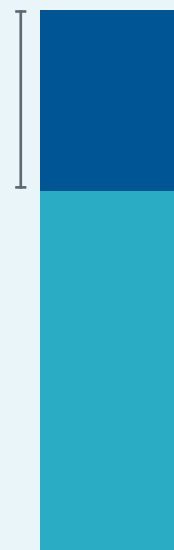
“The healthcare setting is very instructive.”

“Interactive modules keep you engaged.”

“Eye-opening and challenging material.”

Percent Change in Average Pre- & Post-Assessments

+47%





BE PART OF THE SOLUTION

Quality Interactions can help your organization achieve its **cultural competency goals** with person-centered training, just for you.

Blended learning

Accredited courses

Assessment

Consultation & training

Contact us today

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