

Culturally Competent Long-Term Services and Supports: Spotlight on Keiro Northwest

Keiro Northwest, a nonprofit organization located in Seattle, Washington, was established in 1975 by the Japanese American community, and now serves the wider Asian and Asian American community in the Seattle area. Keiro, which means “respect for our elders” in Japanese, started as a skilled nursing facility founded by second-generation Japanese Americans (Nisei) to take care of the aging first generation (Issei). Since the 1970s, the organization has expanded to include multiple long-term services and supports (LTSS) programs: an assisted living facility, adult day social programming, and home care. This Spotlight highlights various aspects of culturally competent LTSS programs at Keiro Northwest.

Target Population

Keiro Northwest currently serves 250 individuals, most of whom are Asian or Asian American, across LTSS programs. Keiro Northwest tailors program components, including activities and food, to the cultural backgrounds of program participants. Approximately 60 percent of their participants are dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid coverage for their health and long-term care needs. Nikkei Manor, the assisted living facility, serves 56 individuals, and 10 percent of these residents are dually eligible.

Keiro Northwest: LTSS Programs

Assisted Living: Nikkei Manor

With 96 percent of Nikkei Manor’s residents Japanese or Japanese American, Keiro Northwest emphasizes competence in Japanese culture among its assisted living staff. Staff at Nikkei Manor identify every incoming resident’s preferences for language, food, and activities during the intake assessment, and the results of the assessment guide resident activities and programming.

Hiring and Training for Cultural Competence at Nikkei Manor

To meet the cultural needs and preferences of their residents, Keiro Northwest hires reception and activities staff who are either native Japanese or bilingual Japanese American (front desk staff must be bilingual); some direct care workers, nurses, and dietary staff are also Japanese. To train non-Japanese staff, Keiro Northwest provides an orientation and ongoing education around cultural norms, such as cultural expectations around eye contact and means of conveying respect. In monthly staff meetings, staff discuss a “word or phrase of the month,” and some staff take Japanese language classes. When staff miss a cultural cue, supervisors do a mini “in-service training” to help reinforce the culturally sensitive approach to the situation.

Skilled Nursing Facility: Rehabilitation and Care Center

Keiro Northwest's Rehabilitation and Care Center is a 140-bed skilled nursing facility, with a 24-hour secure memory care wing, serving diverse Asian and Asian American individuals. Keiro Northwest works to create a culturally familiar setting for their Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese residents through diverse menu offerings and staff who are native language speakers.

Rehabilitation and Care Center residents may experience a decline in their ability to taste food, leading to lack of enthusiasm for eating and related weight loss. The culturally familiar foods and flavors provided at the Rehabilitation and Care Center encourage residents to increase their food intake. Additionally, bilingual patients with cognitive decline may default to speaking their native language. Having native language speakers on staff help residents to communicate their needs and desires, even if their use of English is disrupted.

Adult Day Center: Kokoro Kai

The adult day program at Keiro Northwest provides a place for Asian and Asian American older adults to socialize with peers of similar backgrounds and interests, while also providing caregivers with respite during the day. Participants in the program enjoy participating in various activities – including mental and physical exercise, culturally-appropriate meals, creative programs, and social outings into the community.

Home Care

Keiro Northwest's home care program allows for older adults to safely stay in their homes by providing the supports individuals may need to live independently as they age. The caregivers in this program provide a range of services, including meal preparation, grooming, and transportation, as well as assistance with activities of daily living (ADLs), like bathing and assistance with incontinence. Keiro Northwest matches home care staff with clients based on language and culture when possible.

Keiro Northwest: Culturally Competent Elements

Community Connections

Supporting individuals' sense of cultural identity and community connection is an important part of culturally competent LTSS. Keiro Northwest's adult day program helps to facilitate social connections among older adults in both English and Japanese through bonding over shared interests and participation in group activities. Nikkei Manor, the assisted living facility, has developed robust connections with community organizations, including advocacy groups, organizations supporting veterans, and culturally-sensitive counseling services. Staff at Nikkei Manor also facilitate trips to cultural events and places and invite community organizations to come to the facility. Past trips have included visiting summer Japanese cultural festivals and the Minidoka National Historic Site, a former internment camp in Idaho that housed Japanese Americans from Washington, Oregon, and Alaska.

Linguistic Competence

Meeting individuals' language preferences is integral to high quality care in LTSS settings. Nikkei Manor staff print all calendars and menus in both Japanese and English. Additionally, Nikkei Manor conducts bilingual resident council meetings and provides meeting minutes in both languages. Nikkei Manor prioritizes hiring bilingual staff, especially for consumer-facing positions; for example, front desk staff must be bilingual. Staff also take the time to learn more about the Japanese language directly from the residents, and additional learning opportunities occur during monthly staff meetings where all staff members learn a new Japanese word or phrase to help encourage meaningful interaction with residents. When Nikkei Manor has residents who speak other languages, such as Korean and Cantonese, staff also learn new words and phrases in those languages during monthly meetings.

Architecture and Décor

For residential facilities, such as Nikkei Manor, architecture and décor can play pivotal roles in creating a sense of familiarity and comfort. Nikkei Manor's building and landscape architecture aligns with Japanese cultural aesthetics. When residents and visitors enter the building, they encounter lintels from Japan hanging over the door frames and art from local Japanese American artists. Outside, there is a "Japanesque" garden, designed by students at the University of Washington School of Landscape Architecture. The students conducted focus groups to determine which design elements were most familiar and desired among the residents. As a result, landscaping and architecture designs, including a ceremonial Torii gate and traditional crane motifs, came directly from residents themselves, with the goal of creating meaningful spaces reflective of Japanese culture.





Food

Incorporating traditional foods into an LTSS setting can improve resident satisfaction and health.¹ Nikkei Manor residents and their families often share how important traditional food is to them. Nikkei Manor offers both traditional Japanese foods and more typical American foods to residents. Additionally, Nikkei Manor provides traditional celebratory foods for special occasions, like *sakura mochi* for Girls' Day and *osechi bento* for the Japanese New Year. Nursing assessments and intake forms for Nikkei Manor include residents' dietary preferences, and staff also collect feedback on meal offerings through resident comment forms. In addition, the adult day program starts the day with tea time, and provides traditional meals for participating older adults.

Activities and Music

Keiro Northwest regularly asks residents to provide feedback on activities in which they would like to participate, and residents frequently request traditional cultural activities. Activities at Nikkei Manor like *mochi* pounding, *sumi-e* calligraphy painting, Japanese cherry blossom viewings, and concerts with both traditional music and J-Pop performed by students from Japan are very popular with residents. Older adults in the adult day program also participate in traditional cultural activities, including calligraphy, painting, and cooking with their peers.

Customs and Traditions

Residents at Nikkei Manor have expressed interest in continuing their customs and traditions within the residential setting, and as a result, staff help residents sustain their cultural practices. For example, on tours for prospective residents, Nikkei Manor staff point out which walls face north because Japanese culture considers sleeping with the headboard facing north to be inauspicious. Furthermore, Keiro Northwest worked with the local fire department to ensure that residents were able to burn traditional incense in *butsudans* (small shrines used to honor ancestors) in their rooms. Housekeeping services also receive training on the sacred nature of the *butsudan*, and know not to disturb it when cleaning.



¹ Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (2016). *Tribal Nursing Home Best Practices: Traditional Foods*. Retrieved from <https://www.cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/American-Indian-Alaska-Native/AIAN/Downloads/NH-best-practices-traditional-foods.pdf>.

Keiro Northwest's Impact

Across LTSS programs, Keiro Northwest has received feedback from participants that cultural competence, both in care and in setting, has had a positive impact on their lives and general wellbeing. Read Hae-un's story below to learn more about the impact Keiro Northwest's culturally competent LTSS have had on participants.

Hae-un's Story

Hae-un, an older Korean woman, began attending Keiro Northwest's adult day program, Kokoro Kai, after being diagnosed with vascular dementia. Attending this program three days a week provided her husband (her primary caregiver) with respite, and also allowed Hae-un to interact with other Asian older adults in a social setting. Hae-un adjusted to her new routine and enjoyed the food and activities offered by Kokoro Kai. Keiro Northwest staff members also learned some key Korean phrases to communicate with her, as she speaks little English and no Japanese, to help her feel more comfortable in her new setting.

After several months of participating in Kokoro Kai, Hae-un's family made the decision to move her into Nikkei Manor (the assisted living facility) so she could receive appropriate care and services in a culturally familiar setting. While this change of routine and transition was initially challenging, staff helped guide Hae-un around the facility in order to help her feel more safe and comfortable. Staff also added a Korean "word or phrase of the month" to the monthly all-staff meeting so they could communicate with Hae-un in her native language. After a month of living in Nikkei Manor, a new staff member introduced herself to Hae-un with a bow and a Korean greeting. Hae-un was delighted with this familiar greeting in her new home.

Resources for Culturally Competent LTSS

Want to learn more? The [Resources for Integrated Care](#) website includes additional resources that describe strategies for culturally competent LTSS.

[Culturally Competent LTSS Resource Compendium](#): This compendium is for providers and health plans that are interested in enhancing their capacity to provide and coordinate culturally competent LTSS. It includes reports, guides, tools, and trainings applicable to a range of LTSS settings.

[Providing Culturally Competent Care: Meeting the LTSS Needs of Dually Eligible Beneficiaries](#): This webinar describes strategies plans and providers can use to effectively meet beneficiaries' LTSS needs in both institutional and community-based settings, while respecting their diverse cultural preferences.

The Medicare-Medicaid Coordination Office (MMCO) in the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) seeks to help beneficiaries dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid have access to seamless, high-quality health care that includes the full range of covered services in both programs. This spotlight is intended to support health plans and providers in integrating and coordinating care for dually eligible beneficiaries. It does not convey current or anticipated health plan or provider requirements. For additional information, please go to <https://www.resourcesforintegratedcare.com/>.