

[MUSIC PLAYING - STEVE WAH, "HOME"]

**MAUREEN FITZGERALD:** Hello, everyone. This is Maureen Fitzgerald of the Great Lakes Addiction Technology Transfer Center, your host for today's Great Lakes ATTC podcast. The Great Lakes ATTC podcast bring interviews and insights to the addiction treatment and recovery services field in the Great Lakes region and beyond. Today's podcast is part of our premier series celebrating National Recovery Month.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration holds National Recovery Month every September to celebrate the message that behavioral health is essential to overall health, prevention works, treatment is effective, and people can and do recover. Also in September, our nation observes National Hispanic Heritage Month held from September 15th to October 15th. National Hispanic Heritage Month honors the generations of Hispanics and Latinos who have contributed to our culture in countless ways.

Our guest today is Dr. Haner Hernandez, nationally recognized for his work to improve addiction and recovery services for Hispanic and Latino populations. Haner is originally from Puerto Rico and has worked for more than 20 years in the human services field developing, implementing, and evaluating culturally and linguistically competent youth and adult health prevention intervention treatment and aftercare programs. Haner, thank you for joining us today.

**HANER** Thank you for inviting me.

**HERNANDEZ:**

**MAUREEN FITZGERALD:** Would you like to share some information on your background and your recovery journey?

**FITZGERALD:**

**HANER** Let's see. I am a person in long term recovery, and what that means for me is that I haven't used a drug, including alcohol, for the last 31 years. What that has enabled me to do is to be a productive member of my family, my community, and to do the type of work that I do. I am really happy to be here and privileged to be able to do this type of work, and my recovery makes that possible.

**MAUREEN** Thank you, and congratulations on your long term recovery.

**FITZGERALD:**

**HANER** Thank you.

**HERNANDEZ:**

**MAUREEN** Turning to this year's Recovery Month theme, invest in health, home, purpose, and  
**FITZGERALD:** community, can you comment on the factors that help people with mental health and substance use disorders sustain recovery?

**HANER** I truly believe that, in terms of those four domains, a recovery conducive place to live is  
**HERNANDEZ:** extremely important for people who are seeking or in recovery. Unfortunately, many people seeking recovery don't have a recovery conducive place to live. I think that that is essential.

When I think about health and that domain related to recovery, I think about physical health, mental health spiritual health, financial health, many forms of health that are needed in order for one to sustain recovery in the long run and this whole idea of purpose.

All of us have a purpose in life, and I truly believe and have witnessed that all people who come into recovery want to develop a purpose related to their recovery that helps them recover. We hear people constantly talk about wanting to give back, and giving back is in the form of working, volunteering, being around communities that support recovery, organizations that support recovery. You get a great deal from participating in those processes by way of making a contribution, but also, what you get back by way of supporting your own recovery and growing in that process.

And then, community. For me, and the folks that I work with, have to do with many different forms of community. For Latino folks and Hispanic folks as well as other people. Community has many different types of definition. Me, myself, I belong to the Latino community. I'm Puerto Rican, so I belong to the Puerto Rican community, but I also belong to a recovery community, I belong to a professional community, I belong to many different forms of community that helps me sustain recovery.

In those places of community, we come in contact with good people who become mentors, who become guides, who become coaches that help us provide services to other people, but it also provides support around who we are and growing in our own recovery. I think that those four domains are extremely important, but I also think that we need to couch those domains in understanding how some communities are disproportionately impacted by mental health as

well as substance use disorders in different ways. I draw attention to issues of disparities there.

**MAUREEN  
FITZGERALD:**

Thanks, Dr. Hernandez. That leads me to my next question which is about health disparities, one of your specializations. As you mentioned, they have a tremendous impact on people who are seeking treatment. What's one thing that communities or organizations that provide treatment and recovery services can do to help reduce these disparities?

**HANER  
HERNANDEZ:**

There's a number of things. I think I'll draw attention to self-assessments. This is something that we educate community organizations as well as individuals to take a part in. The National Center for Cultural Competence, you can go on the web and see their information. They have a self-assessment for individuals, and that self-assessment helps us look inward to see where our strengths lie and areas of improvement.

If we are to be effective in working with people with a focus on disparities, we first need to assess ourselves and see where we're at to be able to work with people effectively. They also have an assessment for organizations. I recommend that organizations do a self-assessment, look inward, and see where their strengths are, what areas they need to improve, that sort of thing. That's one level of the work.

The next level of the work is to understand communities in which they serve. It's to get out into the community, know who's there, to understand the demographics of those communities, to begin with the census data, and then, to actually go out into events, into the community, and meet people, that sort of thing. Then, you have a better understanding of the community, what the issues are, and to be involved.

There's communities across the country right now being impacted disproportionately by way of the opioid overdose crisis. To understand how that is impacting certain communities, as well as other areas regarding drug use and mental health, then, individuals, as well as organizations, have positioned themselves better to address disparities and build health equity.

**MAUREEN  
FITZGERALD:**

Thank you. Your two recommendations are self-assessment for organizations and individuals, and you recommended going to the site for the National Center for Cultural Competence to find those assessments online, and you also recommended learning more about the community that you're serving and finding out how different types of substance use issues are affecting specific communities.

**HANER** Yes.

**HERNANDEZ:**

**MAUREEN FITZGERALD:** As a Latino in long-term recovery, you bring insight into the specific needs of Hispanics and Latinos in the US who may need or who are seeking treatment. What recommendations do you have for organizations that want to begin to provide or to improve existing services for Hispanics and Latinos?

**HANER**  
**HERNANDEZ:** One of my main recommendations has to do with the CLAS standards, and those are standards in a blueprint developed by the Office of Minority Health. What I would say there is that CLAS stands for Cultural and Linguistic Appropriate Services. Organizations, obviously led by individuals, can do a lot by way of implementing the CLAS standards. There are different themes in the CLAS standards, and one of those has to do with governance and staffing.

For organizations that serve Latinos or Hispanics and/or are interested in serving that population in terms of governance and staffing, the recommendation is to think about who's on your staff, who's on your board of directors, who is in senior management, who is in front-line positions, that sort of thing, and make sure that, at all levels of the organization, it is reflective of the communities that you serve or that you want to serve.

That recommendation, in terms of the CLAS standards. Another one has to do with language and communication assistance. To have people who are bilingual or multi-lingual, because not all Latinos who are Hispanic speak Spanish, some of them speak Portuguese and/or other languages. To have that capacity in-house becomes important.

And then, another area has to do with the culture of the organization. Looking at, is the organization set up in a way that is friendly towards Latinos and Hispanics, and is there cultural intelligence and cultural humility built into those organizations?

When those things are attended to, then people will come in, and when they come in, they will be your best advocates for other people to come in. If those areas are not attended to, then the people who come in who are Latino or Hispanic, they will be responsible for telling people your organization is not friendly to this population, so you always run into those problems.

If you have heard what I've said from the beginning is, I am recommending a look inward. This is not looking at the community and saying, the community has all of these barriers. Many

communities do. But if we just focus on the barriers that the community has, and we point at them and say, you need to overcome these barriers, then we're not looking inward and saying, what are the barriers that we have in reaching these communities? Because we are the ones that are being paid to reach these communities, so that responsibility runs in multiple directions.

**MAUREEN FITZGERALD:** Thanks, Dr. Hernandez. Those are great suggestions. What are some other practical things that people can do to support recovery?

**HANER HERNANDEZ:** Thank you for the question. I truly believe that, at the very basic level, at the very human level, we have a responsibility to believe in people. I like to say that we should believe in people more than what they believe in themselves. Particularly, people in early recovery.

What that means is that, I don't look for faults in people, I look for strengths, and I look for resiliency, and I hope to build resiliency, strength, and self-efficacy. For me, in a very practical way, that means supporting people from where they're at and understanding maybe the stage of change that they're in, and helping them move forward in the pathway of recovery of their choosing. That is extremely important, a pathway of recovery of their choosing, not of my choosing.

There are multiple pathways of recovery, and we can do a great deal by way of understanding those, and then supporting people in that process. I think that the other thing that we can do is to build organizations and systems that are recovery-friendly. There's this whole idea of ROSCs, Recovery Oriented Systems of Care, that take into account issues of recovery when treating people.

Health care providers can do that, criminal justice systems can do that, health and human services organizations can do that, employment and training organizations can do that. By that, I mean building programs and services that are recovery-friendly, that understand issues of mental health, of substance use disorders, and can help people come in. Obviously, we're talking about understanding issues of disparities and building health equity for the populations that we serve.

In my house, we are as healthy as the sickest person in the house. We want to make sure that the people who are in need of services get the services that they need, and that we are at the center of providing that support and guidance to communities.

I have yet to find someone who is actively using drugs that some way, somehow, doesn't want to get better. My responsibility is to understand that, and then, to support recovery and the multiple pathways of recovery for different people.

**MAUREEN**

**FITZGERALD:**

Thanks, Dr. Hernandez. Many of the ideas that you've presented today are available in products produced by the ATTC network. For those of you listening, you can visit the ATTC network at [www.attcnetwork.org](http://www.attcnetwork.org), or visit your ATTC regional center to find out more information on the National CLAS Standards, cultural competence, and recovery-oriented systems of care. Thanks again, Dr. Hernandez, and once again, congratulations to everyone on National Recovery Month, 2018.

Today's podcast was produced by Great Lakes ATTC. All of our podcasts will be available for download from the Great Lakes ATTC website and from the products and resources catalog on the ATTC network.

[MUSIC PLAYING - STEVE WAH, "HOME"]

The music for today's podcast is titled "Home," an original piece composed and performed by Steve Wah.