

Belonging: A Shared Goal in Healthcare



Culture is the patterns of human behaviour, norms, traditions and values that affect the thinking and behaviour of members of a particular group of people.

Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion, 2022

Cultural competence is our ability to effectively interact with people belonging to different cultures.

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Foreword

Nursing is a profession built on caring for others, but all too often, the person behind the professional role is left feeling invisible. Maybe you feel unseen, misunderstood, or quietly pushed aside. Maybe you love nursing but still feel like you don't fully belong in it. Or maybe you're not sure how you feel anymore.

According to The Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI), belonging refers to the profound feeling of security, support, acceptance, and identity that an individual experiences within a group, allowing them to bring their whole, authentic self to work or a community (CCDI, 2025).

Many of us learned early in our careers that being a “good nurse” means working harder, staying quiet, suppressing our discomfort, taking care of our patients and managing heavy workloads without complaint – all while not feeling seen and heard. WeRPN's vision of nursing includes a community where every nurse feels valued, supported, and empowered to bring their whole self to work. We strive for a culture of belonging that celebrates diversity, encourages collaboration, and nurtures professional growth, so every nurse can thrive and provide the highest quality care.

The need for belonging should not be seen as a weakness but as a strength, because we are stronger together.

In this workbook, you will find areas for reflection as well as prompts and tools to help deepen your understanding of cultural competence.

No matter where your journey takes you, this workbook is a resource to help you grow your professional values and behaviours.

The entire WeRPN team has deep respect for all that you carry.



Introduction

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) in healthcare means fostering an environment where all nurses and healthcare professionals, regardless of race, gender, background, abilities, or beliefs, feel valued, supported, and empowered.

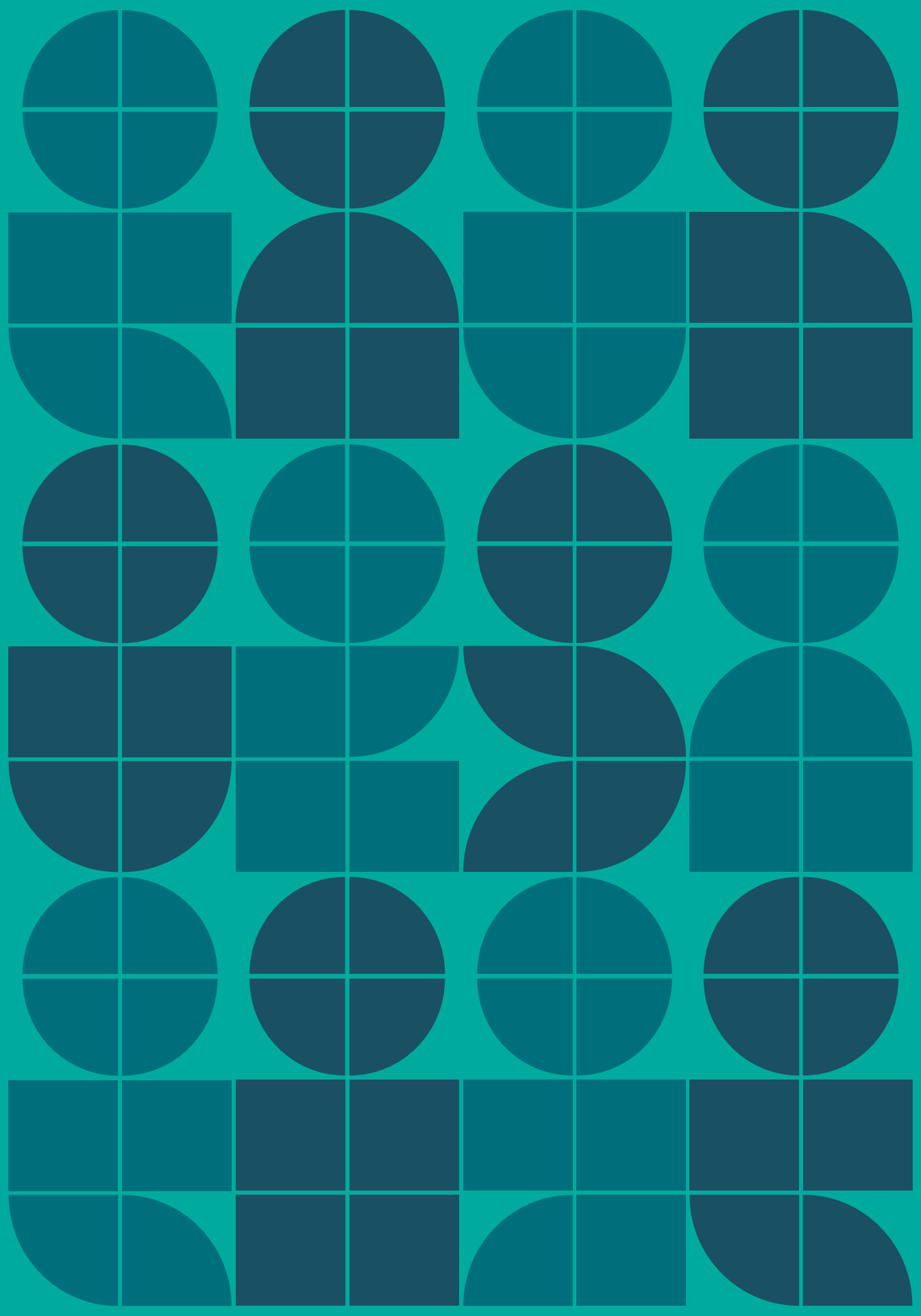
A strong DEIB culture promotes equitable opportunities, respectful collaboration, and a sense of community, enabling teams to provide safer, more compassionate, and culturally responsive care to all patients.

American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), 2017

DIVERSITY

Diversity refers to the wide range of differences among individuals, including race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, ability, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic background. Intersectionality is the concept that these identities often overlap and interact, shaping a person's unique experiences and challenges. Understanding diversity and intersectionality is essential in healthcare, as it helps providers recognize how systemic inequalities, biases, and overlapping identities affect patient experiences and access to care.

CCDI, 2025; Baker & Vasseur, 2021



ACTIVITY 1

Defining terms

Match the definitions to the correct term:

1. Ensuring all individuals are equally supported, valued, and respected. This is best achieved by creating a research environment in which all individuals (students, faculty, staff and visitors) feel welcomed, safe, respected, valued, and are supported to enable full participation and contribution (Baker & Vasseur, 2021).
2. Fair treatment and access to equal opportunity (justice) that allows the unlocking of one's potential, leading to the further advancement of all people. This pursuit is about the identification and removal of barriers to ensure the full participation of all people and groups (Baker & Vasseur, 2021).
3. The profound feeling of security, support, acceptance, and identity that an individual experiences within a group, allowing them to bring their whole, authentic self to work or a community (CCDI, 2025).
4. A wide range of attributes within a person, group or community which make them distinctive. Dimensions of diversity consider that everyone is unique and recognizes individual differences, including: ethnic origins, gender (identity, expression), sexual orientation, background (socio-economic status, immigration status or class), religion or belief, civil or marital status, family obligations (i.e., pregnancy), age, and disability (Baker & Vasseur, 2021).

A. Equity

B. Diversity

C. Inclusion

D. Belonging

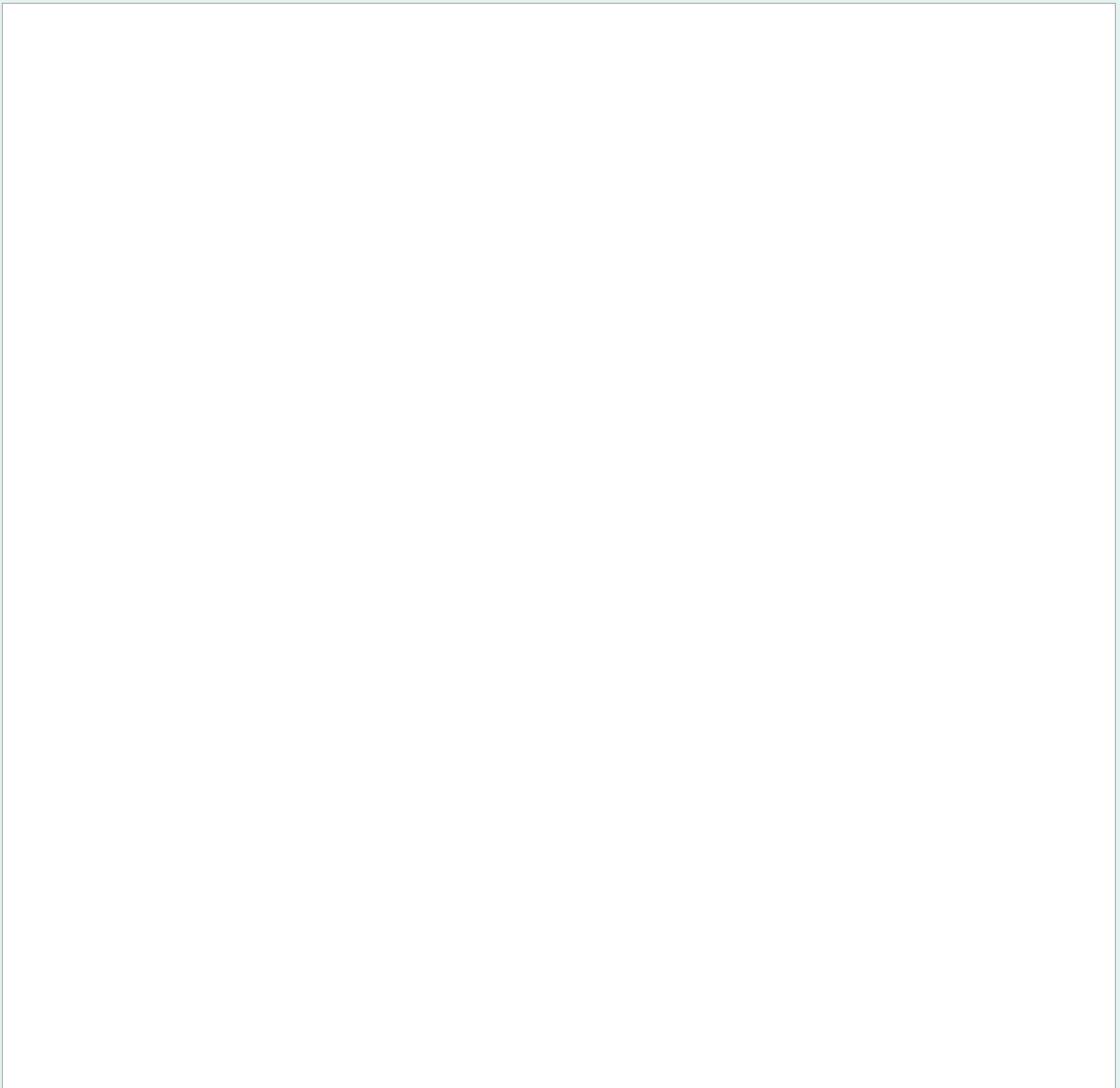
See the answer key on page 41

ACTIVITY 2

Personal Diversity Self-Assessment

Reflect on your understanding of diversity and identify opportunities for learning and growth.

1. Explain what diversity means beyond race or ethnicity.

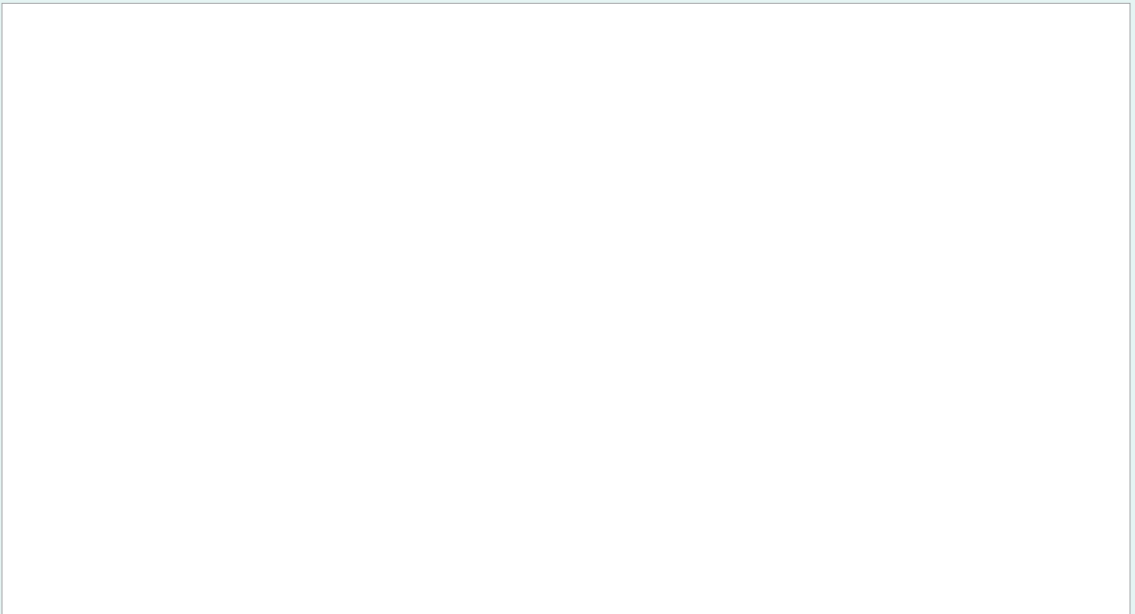


2. Provide examples of how social identities (race, gender, disability, class, religion, sexual orientation, age, etc.) intersect in real life:

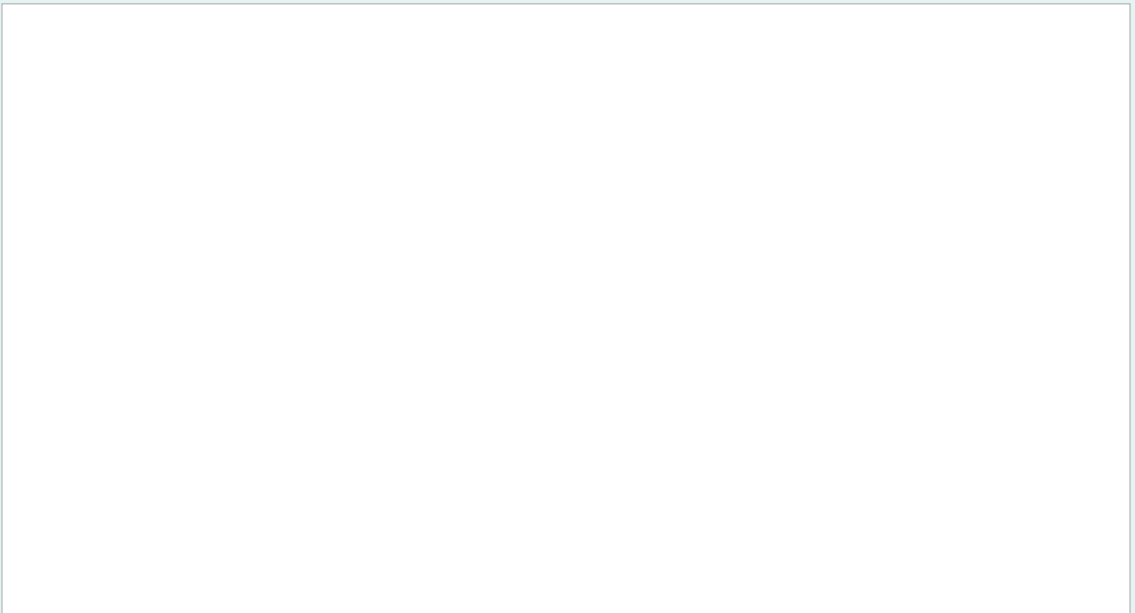
A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to provide examples of how social identities intersect in real life.

Note: The Personal Diversity Self-Assessment will be used at the end of the workbook to turn your reflections into action.

3. Describe a time when certain groups were treated unfairly because of larger systems or rules.



4. How does your own identity, experiences, or background influence the way you see and understand the situation you described in question 3?



INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality is the idea that different aspects of a person's identity, such as race, gender, class, or ability, combine to create unique experiences of discrimination or privilege. People with multiple marginalized identities can face disadvantages that are different from those experienced by individuals with only one marginalized identity.

Crenshaw, 1991



ACTIVITY 3

Case Study: RPN Practice Through an Intersectional Lens

Aki is a 47-year-old First Nations woman admitted to the medical floor with poorly controlled type 2 diabetes and hypertension. She has a history of chronic pain and depression, which contributes to limited mobility and partial dependence in order to participate in activities of daily living. Aki has been experiencing frequent episodes of high blood sugar and elevated blood pressure, and often refuses meals, avoids group activities, and exhibits socially withdrawn behaviors, which some staff interpret as non-compliance.

Aki lives alone, works part-time and does odd jobs, and has limited social support. Her First Nations heritage and Catholic faith are central to her identity and coping strategies, making culturally safe care essential to her well-being.

1. Considering Aki's background and current situation, list the intersections of her life and explain how each might impact her care needs.

2. Describe what nursing interventions could help address Aki's needs to support her overall health and well-being?

3. What outcome would you expect to see?



Our professional accountability requires nurses to engage in reflective practice, and it is essential in translating knowledge into action. Our Code of Conduct serves as a blueprint for how nurses play a critical role in advocating for patients, building therapeutic relationships, and creating safe spaces where individuals feel heard and valued. Through ongoing reflection and cultural humility, the nurse ensures care decisions are ethical, inclusive, and grounded in empathy, ultimately improving health outcomes and patient experiences (CNO, 2025).

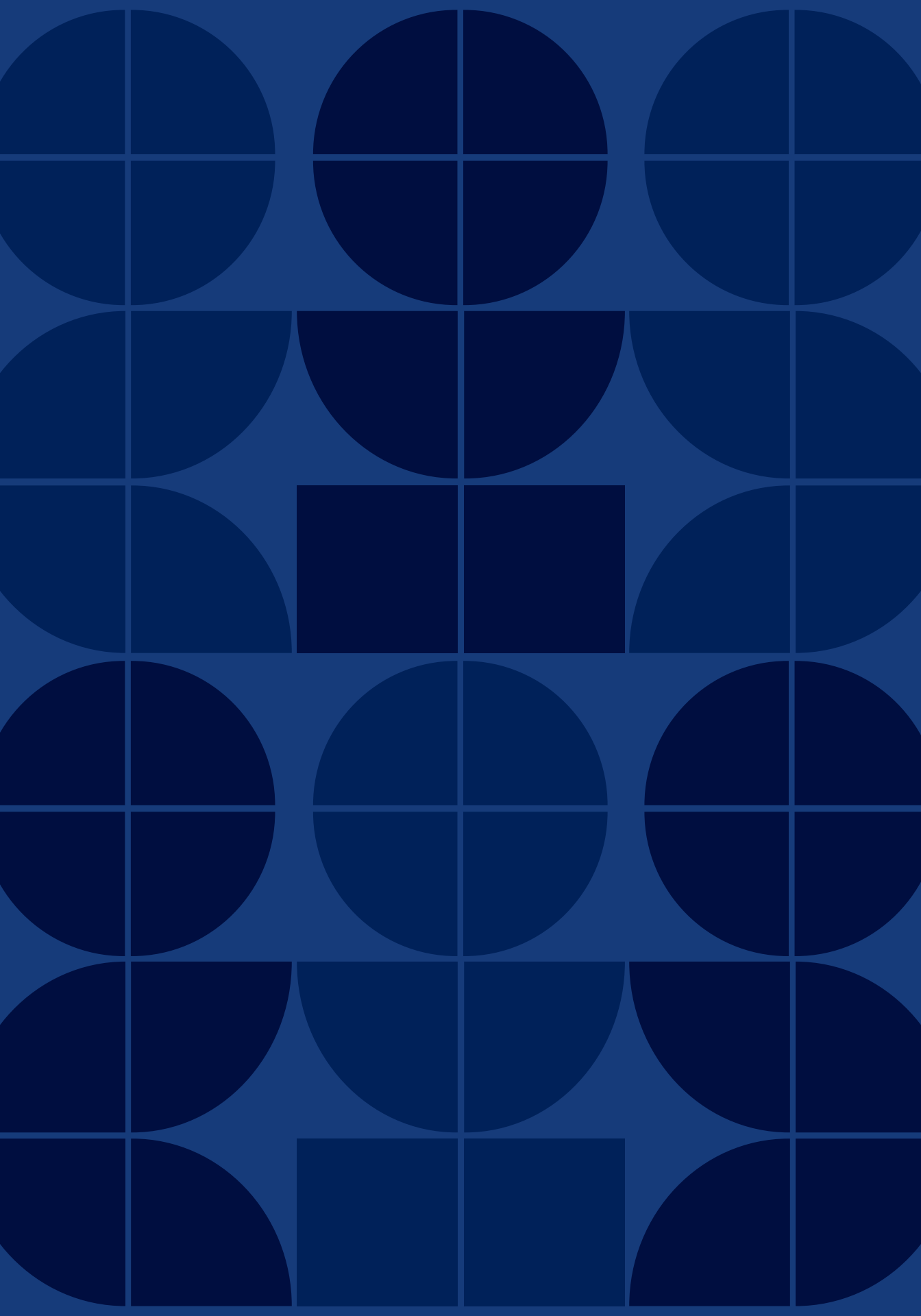
Understanding the intersection of culture, gender, mental health, socioeconomic status, and trauma is essential to person-centred, equitable, and culturally safe care. By recognizing everyone's unique experiences and circumstances, care can be tailored to meet their needs, reduce barriers to access, and promote fairness. This approach fosters respect, trust, and inclusion, ensuring that care is responsive, compassionate, and supportive of each person's overall well-being (CNO, 2025).

See the answer key on page 41

INCLUSION

A sense of inclusion and belonging is a critical part of nursing practice, influencing job satisfaction, teamwork, patient safety, and staff retention. Nurses who feel valued, accepted, and supported are more likely to provide high-quality care and remain in their roles long-term.

CNA, 2025



ACTIVITY 4

Case Study: Inclusion in Practice



A newly graduated RPN is working on a busy medical-surgical unit in a large hospital. Although she received a formal orientation, she often feels excluded by senior staff. Team conversations occur without her input, and requests for help are sometimes met with impatience or silence.

During handovers, the RPN hesitates to ask questions due to fear of being judged. She has noticed that other new nurses experience similar treatment. Over time, the RPN's confidence declines, and she begins to feel anxious before shifts. She has considered transferring units or leaving the hospital altogether.

Inclusion is a shared responsibility across all levels of healthcare that requires collaboration among individuals, teams and organizations.

What strategies could make a difference in this situation?

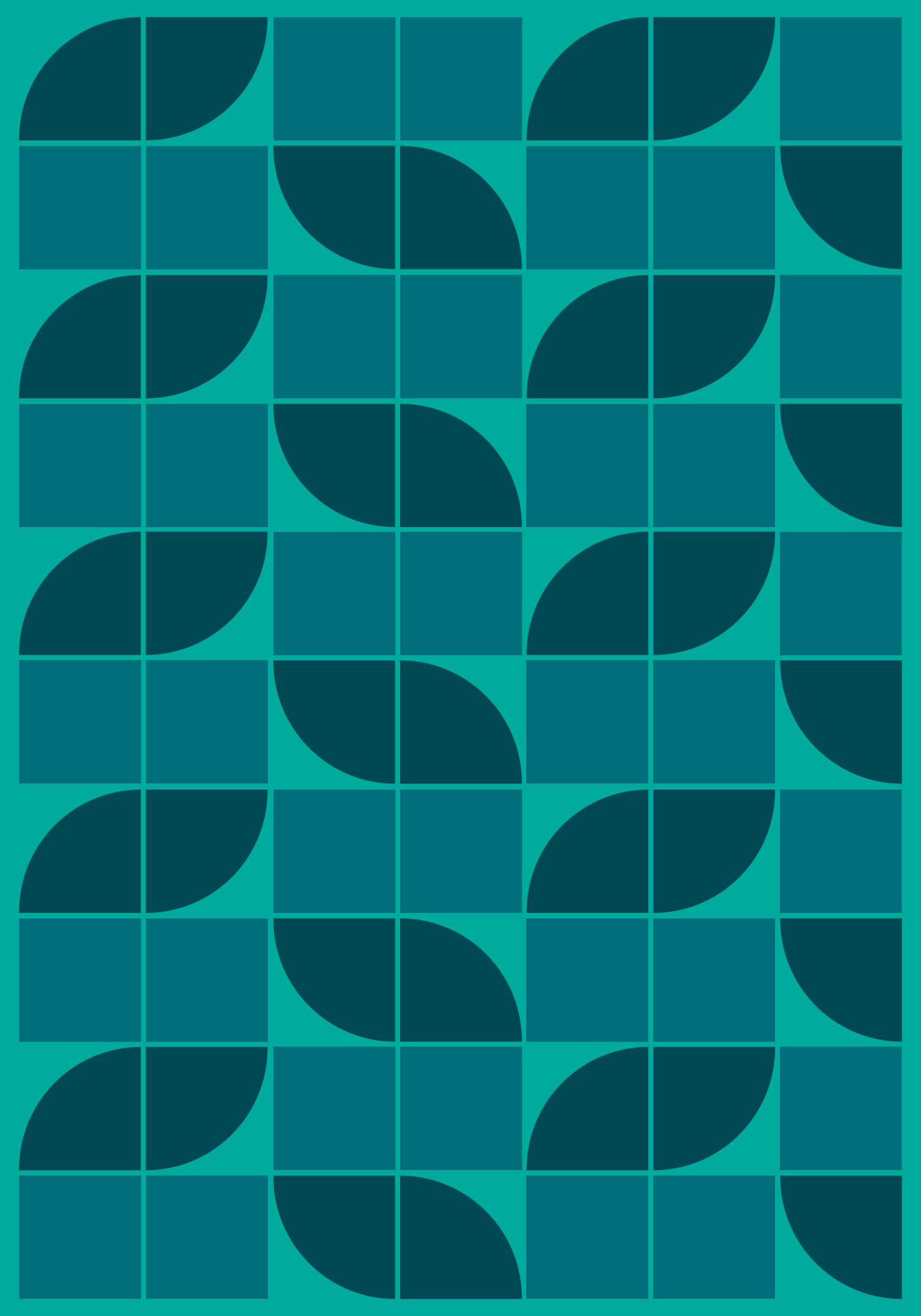
Nurse (Self)
Team (Co-Workers)
Organization (Leaders)

See the answer key on page 42

BELONGING

Belonging is a fundamental human need and a cornerstone of safe, ethical, and sustainable nursing practice. Research across nursing, psychology, and healthcare quality shows that when nurses experience belonging – characterized by psychological safety, respect, inclusion, and voice – outcomes improve for nurses and patients alike. In contrast, the absence of belonging contributes to moral distress, burnout, disengagement, the impact of workplace violence, and workforce attrition.

Maunder et al., 2023



Why Belonging in Nursing Matters

In nursing, the need for belonging is heightened by the emotional, moral, and relational demands of the profession. When nurses feel excluded or silenced, the consequences extend beyond personal well-being to ethical practice and patient safety. Psychological safety is central to belonging, enabling nurses to speak up, ask questions, and raise concerns without fear, thereby strengthening trust and team effectiveness. Strategies such as role clarity and collaborative practice further support respectful and safe work environments where nurses can fully participate (WeRPN, 2014).

Workplace violence undermines a nurse's sense of safety and belonging, leading to isolation and disconnection. Organizational support and self-care resources, such as WeRPN's Self Care Toolkit, promote healing, resilience, and reconnection, influencing whether nurses feel valued, respected, and able to envision a future in their workplace.

Belonging is not equally experienced across nursing. An intersectional lens reveals how power, privilege, language, and professional hierarchies shape exclusion (Crenshaw, 1991), underscoring the need for systemic and organizational approaches to foster genuine belonging.

Ultimately, belonging is inseparable from patient safety and quality care. Teams grounded in trust and inclusion communicate more effectively, reduce risk, and achieve better outcomes. The CNO's Code of Conduct (2025) affirms that fostering safe, respectful, and inclusive environments is a professional responsibility, making belonging essential to ethical practice, workforce sustainability, and high-quality care.



ACTIVITY 5

Reflection

Belonging in the workplace can be understood through five key dimensions: being welcomed, known, included, supported, and connected (Dewar, 2025). These dimensions provide a practical lens for nurses to reflect on their own experiences and on the culture of their teams.

1. Welcomed: think of a time when you felt truly welcome at work. Describe what happened and how it made you feel:

2. Known: identify colleagues, mentors, or leaders who notice and value you. Describe the impact they have on your sense of belonging:

3. Included: reflect on a situation where you were invited to contribute meaningfully to a team or project. How did inclusion affect your confidence or engagement?

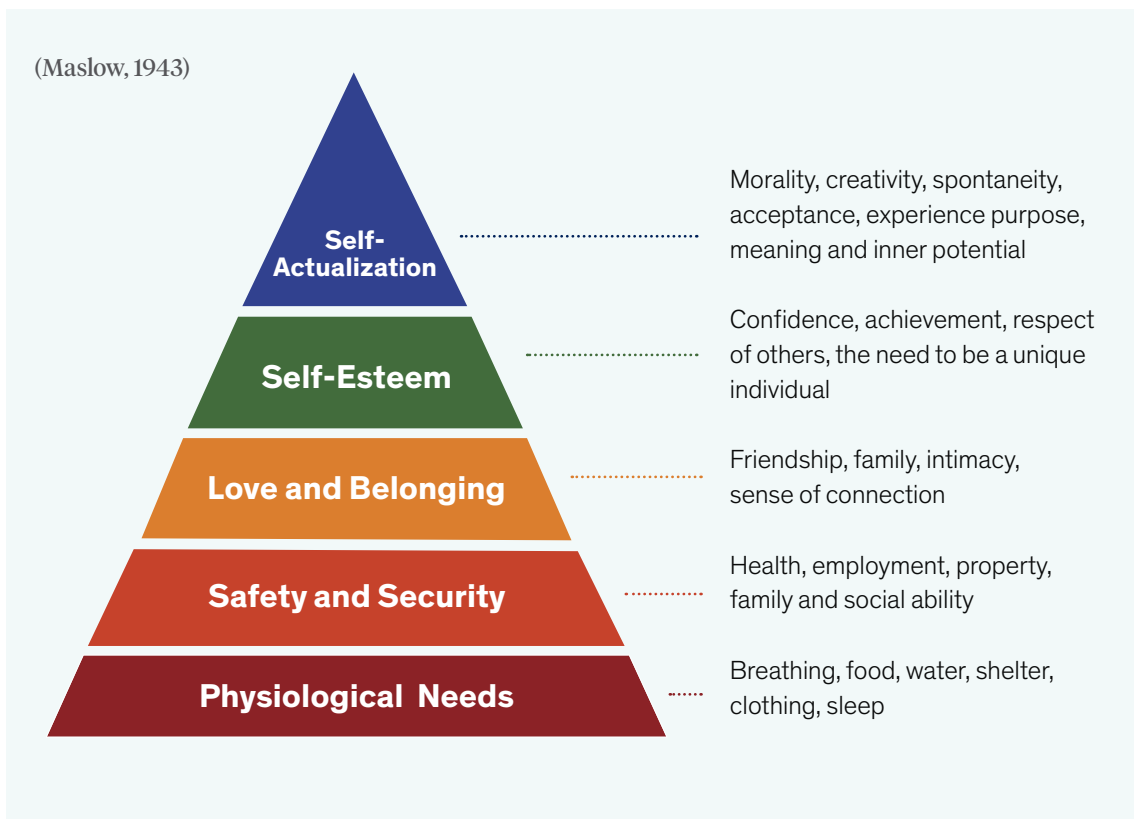
4. Supported: describe a moment when support was offered or lacking. How did it affect your ability to care for patients or colleagues?

5. Connected: list relationships and networks that make you feel connected at work. How do these connections influence your daily experience and professional growth?

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

A sense of belonging is essential not only for staff well-being but also for delivering high-quality patient care. Belonging, a fundamental human need, influences motivation, job satisfaction, and engagement within healthcare settings. Maslow's hierarchy of needs provides a useful framework for understanding the role of belonging in the workplace.

Once basic physiological and safety needs are met, individuals seek social connections, recognition, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Within nursing, meeting the need for belonging involves creating supportive environments where nurses feel valued, respected, and integrated into the healthcare team.



Positioning Diversity, Intersectionality, Inclusion, and Belonging within Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Diversity and intersectionality, along with inclusion and belonging, do not fit neatly into a single level of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Instead, they span multiple levels of the hierarchy and are best understood as foundational and enabling conditions that support human motivation, well-being, and performance.

Primary Alignment: Belongingness and Love Needs

Inclusion and belonging align most directly with Maslow's belonging and love needs. This level reflects the human need for connection, acceptance, and membership within groups and communities. When individuals experience inclusion, they feel respected, accepted, and psychologically safe within teams, organizations, and professional environments. Conversely, exclusion or marginalization can impede an individual's ability to meet this core psychological need.

Secondary Alignment: Esteem Needs

Inclusion and intersectionality also strongly relate to esteem needs. Beyond feeling that one belongs, individuals require recognition, respect, and validation of their full identities. Inclusive environments support confidence, professional credibility, and a sense of personal value, reinforcing self-respect and esteem from others.

Foundational Connection: Safety Needs

For many individuals, particularly those from historically marginalized or underrepresented groups, inclusion is closely tied to safety needs. Psychological and emotional safety, freedom from discrimination, and trust in systems and leadership are essential prerequisites for belonging. When environments are not inclusive, safety needs may remain unmet even if physical safety is present.

Higher-Level Connection: Self-Actualization

When diversity and intersectionality are meaningfully acknowledged and supported, individuals are better able to reach self-actualization. Inclusive environments enable people to bring their full selves to their work, fostering creativity, leadership, purpose, and advocacy. In this way, inclusion and belonging act as enablers of self-actualization rather than discrete endpoints.

Inclusion and belonging are primarily rooted in Maslow's Love and Belonging dimension, reinforced by safety and esteem, and serve as essential enablers of self-actualization, particularly when viewed through an intersectional lens.

ACTIVITY 7

Defining Belonging for Yourself

Purpose: Clarify personal meaning and values

Thought: I feel that I truly belong in a work environment and notice that:

I can be myself when

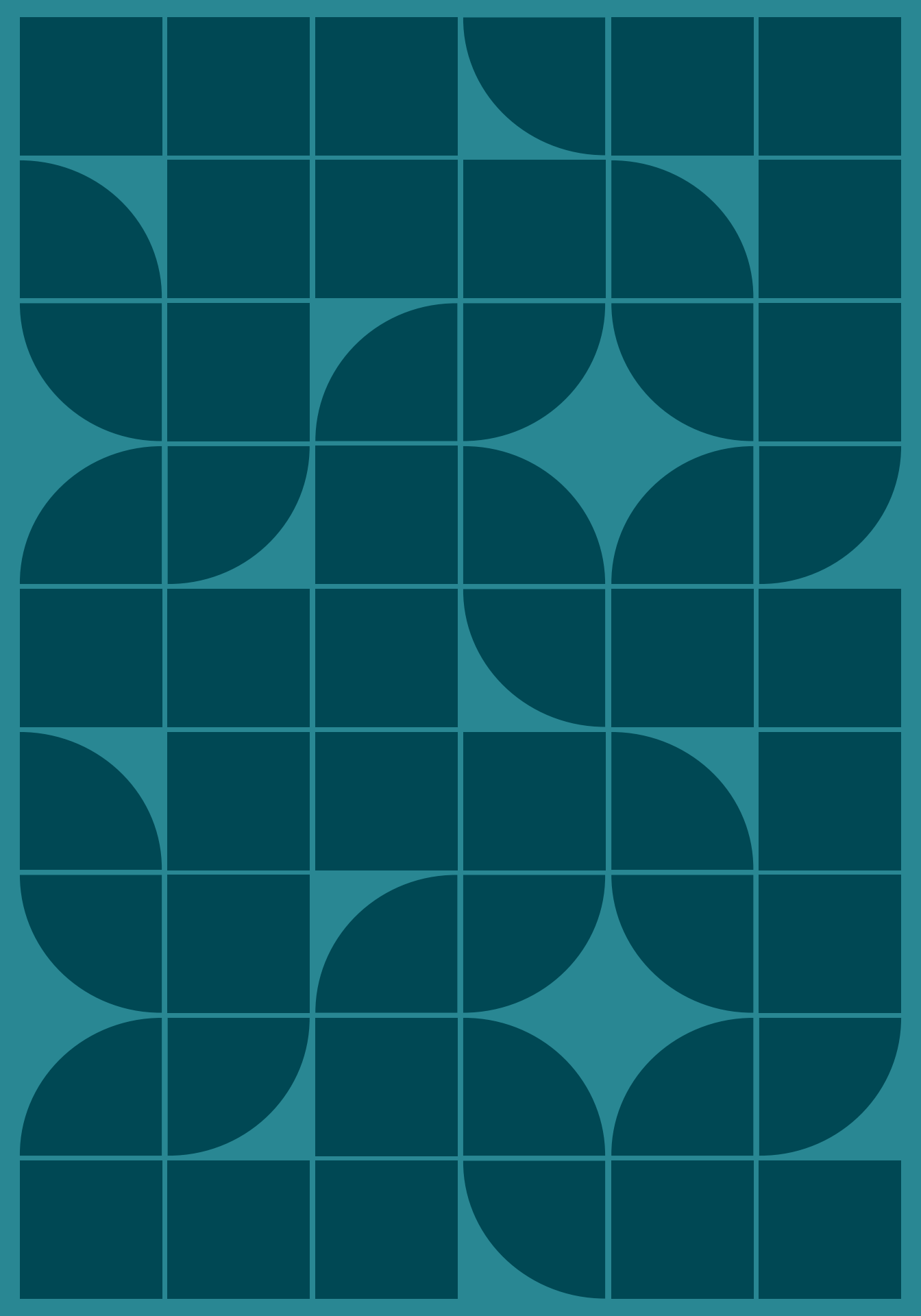
I feel safe to speak up about an issue when

I feel respected when

I feel valued beyond my tasks when

MODULE 5

PUTTING IT TOGETHER



ACTIVITY 8

My Commitment to Diversity, Intersectionality, Inclusion and Belonging Worksheet

Begin by reviewing your reflections and answers on the previous pages and identifying your learning gaps. Choose two areas where you can improve and help create a more inclusive and supportive work environment where every nurse feels valued.

A SMART goal is a statement with five components: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-limited (College of Nurses Ontario, 2018).

Specific:

A specific goal is one that explains what you want to learn and what action steps you will take to achieve your goal.

Measurable:

Setting a measurable goal helps ensure you can evaluate your progress.

Attainable:

Your goal should be attainable, meaning that it is realistic. Although it should be something that you can achieve, it is important to challenge yourself to grow; realistic doesn't mean it is going to be easy.

Relevant:

Ensuring your goal is relevant means that it is a skill or behaviour that applies to your role or a role you may be interested in pursuing.

Time-sensitive:

A time-limited goal ensures you are setting a deadline by which your goal will be completed.

Tip: To help develop your goals, watch CNO's video resource [Are your Learning Goals SMART?](#)

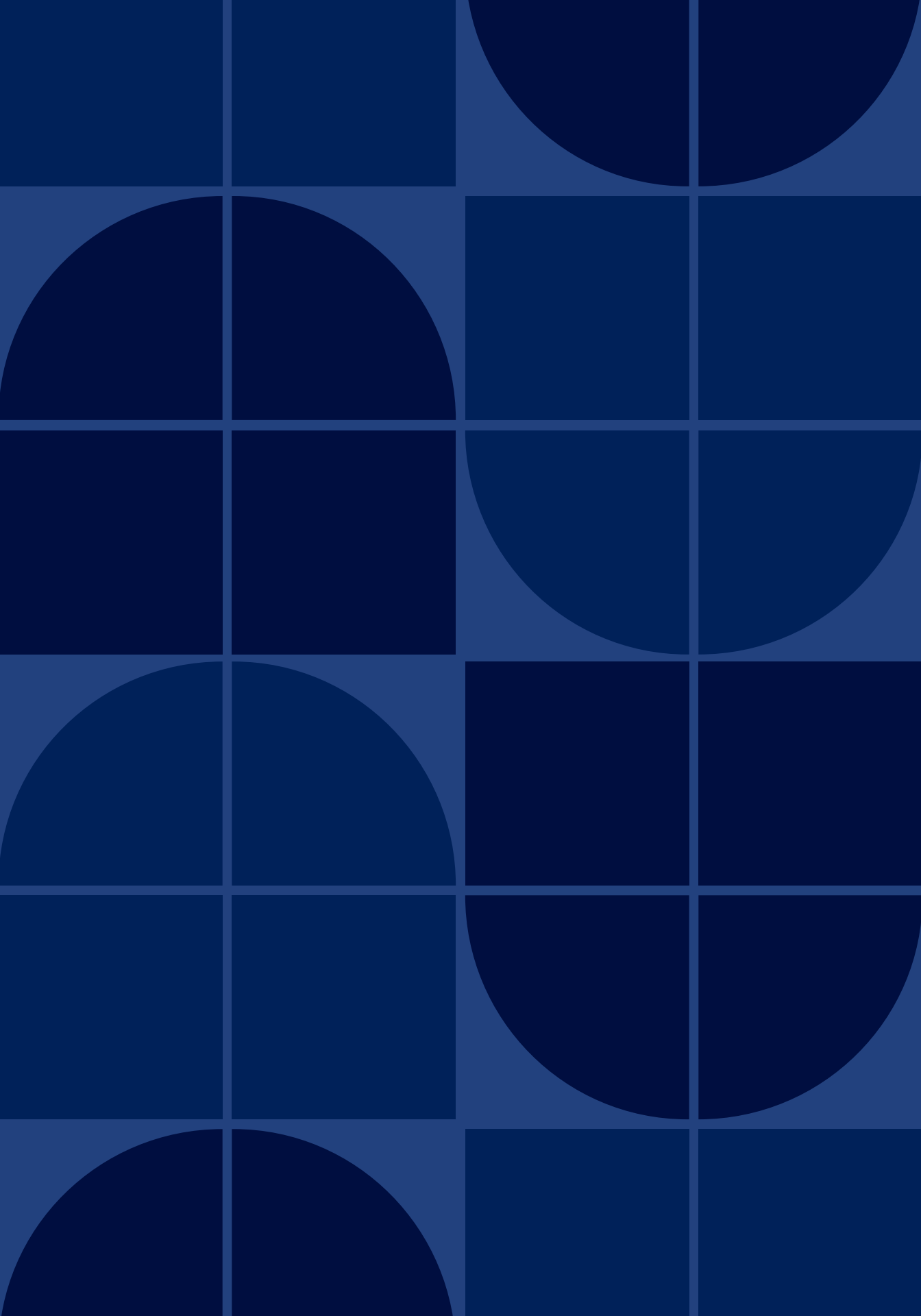
Identify learning gaps and areas for improvement in the chart below.

SMART Goal #1

SMART Goal #2

MODULE 6

FINAL REFLECTIONS



Nurses play a vital role in promoting health, healing, and equity across diverse communities. It is essential for nurses to remain committed to continuous learning to ensure we deliver evidence-based, culturally responsive, and adaptable care that responds to the evolving needs of the individuals we serve. By continuously expanding our knowledge and skills, nurses can better recognize and address health disparities, advocate for inclusive practices, and deliver compassionate, person-centred care.

Embracing the principles of Diversity, Equity, Intersectionality, and Belonging (DEIB), strengthens nurses' ability to enhance patient relationships, build trust, and support favourable health outcomes for all individuals.

Ultimately, empowered and educated nurses are essential to improving the quality of care, advancing health equity, and creating meaningful, positive impact.

Answer Key

Activity 1 – Defining terms

1: C (Inclusion) 2: A (Equity) 3: D (Belonging) 4: B (Diversity)

Activity 3 – Case Study: RPN Practice Through an Intersectional Lens

You conduct a holistic assessment that considers both clinical and social determinants of health:

- Aki avoids meals because many contain foods that are not culturally familiar.
- She feels uncomfortable discussing mental health due to cultural stigma.
- Past experiences as an indigenous person contribute to mistrust of authority figures.
- Language barriers make it difficult for her to fully understand medication instructions.
- Chronic pain limits her mobility, increasing isolation and depression

Nursing Interventions

Using an intersectional lens, you implement the following:

CULTURALLY SAFE CARE

- Collaborates with dietary services to provide culturally appropriate meals.
- Ensures privacy during care and respects religious practices.

COMMUNICATION & ADVOCACY

- Uses plain language and visual aids when explaining medications.
- Advocates for access to an Elder during care conferences with Indigenous patients.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

- Gently screen for depression using culturally sensitive language.
- Refers Aki to the interdisciplinary team (social worker, mental health nurse).

TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

- Build trust by explaining procedures clearly and seeking consent at every step.
- Encourages autonomy and shared decision-making.

Answer Key

PAIN & MOBILITY MANAGEMENT

- Collaborates with physiotherapy to support mobility.
- Monitors pain levels and reports concern to the NP/physician.

Possible outcomes over time:

Aki becomes an active participant in developing her health management plan.

- Increased awareness of blood sugar and blood pressure management.
- She participates in social activities that respect her cultural identity.
- Strengthen trust between Aki and the care team.
- Has mental health support and access to resources.

Activity 4 – Case Study

Nurse (Self):

- Participate actively in committee meetings.
- Advocate for inclusive policies, practices.
- Engage in education or training opportunities related to equity and inclusion.

Team (Co-Workers):

- Support colleagues by acknowledging and valuing differences.
- Engage in team training on diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Provide constructive feedback to improve team culture.

Organization (Leaders)

- Encourage open dialogue about inclusion and equity.
- Engage in training and professional development on cultural competence and bias.
- Provide feedback on policies, procedures, and workplace culture.

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