

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA FOR THE 112TH CONGRESS

January 2011 – December 2012

[NASW](#) remains concerned about a broad range of issues that affect the quality of life for people both nationally and internationally, and also about the ability of professional social workers to provide quality services. The Association will also work to ensure that the role of professional social workers is acknowledged, protected, and supported in federal legislation. During the 112th Congress, we will focus our legislative advocacy in the areas of:

- Social Work Reinvestment Initiative
- Health
- Mental health
- Aging
- Children and families
- Education
- Economic security
- Civil and human rights
- Military and veterans affairs

Social Work Reinvestment Initiative

The [Social Work Reinvestment Initiative](#), which was first launched in 2007, has achieved significant [successes](#). It will continue to secure [federal](#) and state investments in professional social work to meet the increasing public demand for services. The profession faces significant [workforce challenges](#) such as incomparable salaries, high educational debt, and serious safety concerns. These issues are affecting the profession's ability to recruit potential social workers and retain experienced social workers to keep pace with this need. The current economic recession has also had devastating effects on the clients that social workers serve, which are often the most vulnerable individuals in society. In addition, state and federal budget cuts have contributed to a contracting social work workforce.

During the 112th Congress, NASW, in collaboration with the [Action Network for Social Work Education and Research \(ANSWER\)](#) Coalition, will:

- Reintroduce and work for passage of the Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act (HR 1106/S. 584)
- Work in support of federal legislation that maximizes the ability of our nation's social workers to provide services to clients including:

- The National Office for Social Work Research Act
- Strengthen Social Work Workforce Act
- Social Worker Safety Act
- Various legislation addressing loan forgiveness for social workers and training for child welfare workers

Finally, NASW will continue its work to promote public awareness and understanding of the social work profession through public education efforts and collaboration with the Center for Workforce Studies and the Social Work Policy Institute to inform the public and policymakers about the importance of professional social workers services.

Addressing health care for all, physical and behavioral

NASW [advocates that all individuals have the right to affordable, accessible, and high-quality health care](#). Likewise, the Association believes in universal access to the full continuum of health and behavioral health services including, but not limited to: behavioral health treatment, prescription drug coverage, trauma and disaster services, chronic disease management, substance abuse prevention and treatment, wellness care, case management, home health care, long-term care, and end-of-life care. Social workers are the nation's largest group of mental health providers and are often the only providers in medically underserved areas.

During the 112th Congress NASW will:

- Support efforts to protect the Affordable Care Act
- Work to protect and expand funding for key federal safety net programs such as Medicaid, Medicare, and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)
- Advocate for the addition of strong health privacy protections in federal rules implementing new statutory protections secured in 2009 (HITECH Act)
- Work to close the imbalances related to health disparities among all populations
- Monitor efforts regarding other important issues such as the maintenance of choice in reproductive health
- Support Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) initiatives that improve access to quality care for consumers of all ages and empower clinicians to render the most appropriate clinical care to their clients
- Support the Health Resource and Services Administration (HRSA) initiatives to study the social work workforce
- Work to protect the aged and people with disabilities, support retention and implementation of the CLASS Act

Addressing the needs of an aging population

With the [aging](#) of baby boomers and the lengthening of the life span, the number of older Americans is rising rapidly. This leads to an increased need for social work services and competent social workers to provide those services.

During the 112th Congress, NASW will:

- Ensure that the Older Americans Act is reauthorized and provisions within the Older Americans Act are fully funded
- Support proposals that would generate more revenues to ensure that social security remains solvent

Strengthening families

Strengthening families and providing family support are priorities of the social work profession. Social workers understand that the family is the primary socializing agent and economic unit in our culture. Addressing the appropriate role of government in providing support for families, as well as in adopting effective family policy is important to the profession.

During the 112th Congress, NASW will:

- Support a strong federal role in, and adequate funding for programs such as the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (TANF)
- Support worker training programs, and improvements to the child welfare system such as reducing the disproportionate number of African American and other children of color in the child welfare system
- Concentrate efforts on promoting policies that protect the best interests of children, including the use of qualified staff and reasonable workloads that permit adequate contact with children and families
- Support efforts to increase Medicaid funding for vulnerable populations

Addressing the School Social Work Workforce

The education of our nation's children continues to be a top priority of NASW. Public education is a primary institution that partners with the family in the responsibility for raising and training children and youth.

During the 112th Congress, NASW will:

- Support and advocate for federal legislation such as the "Increased Student Achievement Through Increased Student Support Act," that will increase the number of school social workers to serve both students with identified disabilities and students in the general school population
- Advocate for full funding for early childhood education programs like the Child Care and Development Block Grant, Head Start and Early Head Start.

Loan Forgiveness and Training for Social Workers

Higher education in America continues to be critical for both individual success and the economic and political health of our country. More social work students must rely on student loans to pay for a four-year degree, thereby starting their post-collegiate life with significant debt.

During the 112th Congress, NASW will:

- Support and advocate for legislation that will provide funding for training, tuition assistance and loan forgiveness for social workers
- Urge Congress to fully fund the loan forgiveness provisions in the Higher Education Act, which provides loan forgiveness for social workers in the practice areas of child welfare, aging, schools, and mental health

Addressing economic security

NASW supports federal tax, budget, and spending mechanisms that help to narrow the gaps in resources available to people at different income levels as well as provide an adequate safety net for marginalized people and communities. Such federal measures should not include budget policies that arbitrarily cap spending for human needs.

During the 112th Congress, NASW will:

- Support proposals that protect the welfare of all Americans, including our most underserved populations, often consisting of women, children, and minorities
- Seek enactment of proposals that engender livable wage opportunities and require equal pay for equal work

Protecting civil and human rights

NASW supports full [civil and human rights](#) for all people and opposes public policies that alienate individuals by race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, age, physical or mental abilities, marital status, sexual orientation, or religious belief.

During the 112th Congress, NASW will:

- Support or oppose federal judicial nominees based on the Association's convictions and the core values of the profession
- Support federal policies, including affirmative action, and those which protect the liberties of distressed populations
- Advocate for proposals that prevent family violence, redress racial profiling, and promote racial harmony
- Support immigration reform proposals that unify families, create pathways to citizenship, and provide meaningful opportunities to attain economic, social, and political equality
- Urge Congress to extend the promise of equal opportunity to all citizens, including gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons through the passage of the Employment Nondiscrimination Act (ENDA)

Supporting members of the military and veterans

Since October 2001, about 1.9 million US troops have been deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq. They experience physical and mental disruptions with long periods away from home and exceptional emotional circumstances.

The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that there are over 24,000,000 veterans in the United States. Due to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a once declining population is now on the rise and in need of behavioral health treatment to address issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, drug and alcohol addiction, and suicidal tendencies.

During the 112th Congress, NASW will:

- Support the development of a qualified social work workforce prepared to serve active duty military, veterans, and their families to ensure that a high priority is given to human values and social welfare needs
- Advocate for funding to address human service needs of active duty military personnel and veterans and for access to services such as case management, crisis intervention, and housing
- Work with allied organizations to ensure that the psychosocial needs of this population are being met

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the world's largest membership organization of professional social workers, with chapters in every state and members in every congressional district. NASW seeks to promote federal legislation and policies that support effective social work practice, enhance the lives of the people we serve, and promote fairness and well-being. Professional social workers contribute a unique perspective to the social policy debate, one that includes the relationship between public policies and the people affected by them.

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