



**Statement for the National Academy of Medicine meeting:
Assessing Progress in End-of-Life & Serious Illness Care
May 23, 2016**

As the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the United States, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) works to enhance the professional growth and development of its 130,000 members, to create and maintain professional social work standards, and to advance sound social policies. Thus, the association has a dual mission of advocating for the social work profession and advocating for the individuals, families, and communities served by social workers. Work to improve end-of-life care and care for people affected by serious illness is an integral part of that mission. To that end, NASW has implemented a multipronged strategy:

- enhancing social work practice with, and interdisciplinary team care of, individuals and families affected by serious or life-limiting illness
- enhancing consumer access to high-quality care for serious or life-limiting illness, especially hospice and palliative care
- enhancing understanding—among consumers, service providers, policymakers, accreditation organizations, payers, and the media—about palliative care, hospice, and the social work role in end-of-life and serious illness care.

Enhancing Social Work Practice and Interdisciplinary Team Care

Hospice and palliative social work is a growing specialty area of practice that requires specialized knowledge and skills. The [*NASW Standards for Palliative & End of Life Care*](#) (2004) continue to guide social work practice in this area and to enhance public understanding about the social work role in end-of-life and serious illness care. NASW looks forward to updating these standards in collaboration with social work experts in the field. The [*NASW Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice*](#) (2015), the [*NASW Standards for Social Work Practice with Family Caregivers of Older Adults*](#) (2010), and the [*Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers*](#) (2008) also provide fundamental guidance in the delivery of person-centered care for individuals and families affected by serious or life-limiting illness.

NASW has also offered extensive continuing education related to end-of-life and serious illness care:

- multiple sessions, including a preconference workshop on advance care planning, at the association's [June 2016 national conference](#); numerous sessions at NASW's [2012](#) and [2014](#) national conferences
- approximately 20 [Specialty Practice Sections](#) and [Lunchtime Series](#) webinars and teleconferences for NASW members between 2007 and June 2016; archived programs remain available online
- a hospice social work practice conference in conjunction with the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization's (NHPCO's) Clinical Team Conference in 2010
- two web-based courses, *Achieving Cultural Competence to Reduce Health Disparities at the End of Life* (2009) and *Understanding End of Life Care: The Social Worker's Role* (2004), which were completed, free of charge, by more than 60,000 people by 2011; both courses remain available, along with other relevant distance-learning courses, through NASW's [Professional Education and Training Center](#)
- educational activities at the chapter level.

Moreover, the association has published multiple issue articles and newsletters related to end-of-life and serious illness care. Recent examples include a [Legal Issue of the Month](#) on end-of-life decision making (2015); [Practice](#)

[Perspectives](#) on advance care planning (2013); [Specialty Practice Sections](#) newsletters devoted to end-of-life care (aging section) and palliative care (health section) in 2015; numerous articles in the [NASW News](#); and articles in the [Encyclopedia of Social Work](#) (20th ed.) (2010); more recent content available [online](#), published by NASW Press.

Recognizing the need for credentials distinguishing specialized knowledge and skills in hospice and palliative care, NASW collaborated with NHPCO to develop two advanced practice specialty credentials for social workers. The master's-level credential, Advanced Certified Hospice and Palliative Social Worker (ACHP-SW), has been available since 2008. The bachelor's-level credential, Certified Hospice and Palliative Social Worker (CHP-SW), has been available since 2009. These credentials recognize professional experience, ongoing education, and documented competency in palliative and hospice social work practice. Development of the credentials was spurred by a change in federal regulations allowing individuals without social work degrees to provide social work services in hospice programs that receive Medicare or Medicaid funding ([Medicare and Medicaid Programs: Hospice Conditions of Participation Final Rule](#), 2008). In the [absence not only of strong federal personnel requirements for hospice social work](#), but also of federal title protection for social workers, the NASW–NHPCO hospice and palliative care credentials help employers and consumers to distinguish professional social workers with specialized expertise from paraprofessional social services staff who have not earned social work degrees—and who, consequently, may not be able to provide the high-quality care individuals and families need and deserve.

In addition to strengthening social work practice in end-of-life and serious illness care, NASW works to strengthen interdisciplinary team care. As a member of the [National Consensus Project for Quality Palliative Care](#), NASW helped to revise the [Clinical Practice Guidelines for Quality Palliative Care](#); the third edition was released in 2013. The association currently participates in the [Coalition for Quality in Geriatric Surgery Project](#), led by the American College of Surgeons and funded by the John A. Hartford Foundation, as well as in the Professional and Technical Advisory Committees for the Joint Commission's [Home Care](#) and [Nursing Care Center](#) accreditation programs. NASW has also contributed feedback on the development and revision of the Joint Commission's advanced [certification for hospital-based, inpatient palliative care programs](#). Furthermore, NASW [participated in the development](#) of consensus-based [Dementia Care Practice Recommendations](#), published by the Alzheimer's Association in four phases during 2009 and 2010. One phase focused on end-of-life care in assisted living residences and nursing homes; another phase, focused on home care, included substantial content on care at the end of life.

Enhancing Consumer Access to High-Quality Care

NASW's work to enhance end-of-life and serious illness care is complemented by the association's macro-level advocacy in this area. The publication [Social Work Speaks: National Association of Social Workers Policy Statements 2015–2017](#) (10th ed.) (2015) guides NASW's advocacy. Five policies in this book are especially relevant to end-of-life and serious illness care: Aging and Wellness; End-of-Life Decision Making and Care; Health Care; HIV and AIDS; and Hospice Care.

NASW's legislative advocacy related to end-of-life and serious illness care has included support for the [Palliative Care and Hospice Education and Training Act \(S. 2748/H.R. 3119\)](#), the [Hospice Evaluation and Legitimate Payment \(HELP\) Act](#), the Affordable Care Act, [Older Americans Act reauthorization and funding](#), the [Improving Access to Mental Health Act of 2015 \(S. 2173/H.R. 3712\)](#), and various appropriations related to health and to aging.

NASW's regulatory advocacy in this area includes comments to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services supporting [Medicare reimbursement of advance care planning](#) in the calendar year 2016 Physician Fee Schedule (and, in [2010](#), in the annual wellness visit); the inclusion of hospice and care in Essential Health Benefits ([2011](#),

[2012](#)); and the inclusion of quality measures related to hospice, palliative care, and cancer in requirements for Accountable Care Organizations ([2011](#)). NASW has also supported hospice and palliative care performance measures (2012) and the need for robust advance care planning measurement (2014) in comments to the National Quality Forum.

Other related advocacy includes (a) NASW's January 2016 [comments](#) on the Senate Finance Committee Bipartisan Chronic Care Working Group's [proposal](#) to eliminate the hospice carve-out for Medicare Advantage beneficiaries and (b) the association's June 2015 comments to the [White House Conference on Aging](#), in which NASW advocated for increased education regarding and access to advance care planning, hospice, and palliative care. Additionally, in 2010, the Social Work Policy Institute, a think tank within the NASW Foundation, convened an invitational [symposium](#) focused on hospice social work. Practitioners, administrators, educators, researchers, advocates, and federal government representatives helped to develop recommendations for strengthening the links between practice, policy, and research.

NASW leverages its advocacy by participating in multiple policy coalitions. For example, the association played a key role in the development of [Advanced Illness, Hospice, and End-of-Life Principles](#) (2014) for the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations.

Enhancing Public Awareness

NASW recognizes that public education is integral to improving end-of-life care and care for people affected by serious illness. The association has promoted [National Healthcare Decisions Day](#) since the observance's NASW 2008 inception and regularly promotes [National Hospice and Palliative Care Month](#). In 2012, NASW participated in a small group of stakeholders that developed a consumer education brochure on [serious illness and palliative care](#) as part of the Joint Commission's [Speak Up™](#) initiative. Furthermore, NASW's consumer Web site, [Help Starts Here™](#), includes extensive content addressing advance care planning, caregiving, pain, living with illness, grief and loss, death and dying, and specific medical conditions. Consumers also use *Help Starts Here* to [find social workers](#) with expertise in specialties such as pain management, physical illness, and grief and loss.

Conclusion

NASW supports end-of-life and serious illness care by developing resources for practitioners, by advocating with policymakers, and by educating the public. In collaboration with interdisciplinary partners, the association will continue its efforts to ensure that individuals and families facing serious or life-limiting illness receive high-quality, person-centered care.