

PREPARING THE PROFESSION THROUGH CONTINUING EDUCATION AND TRAINING: NASW'S RESPONSE TO THE HIV/AIDS PANDEMIC

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For over two decades, our work with individuals, families, couples, and communities has provided the opportunity for the social work profession to respond to the increased need for HIV/AIDS related services across diverse practice settings. Working as clinicians, administrators, case/care managers, educators, and as volunteers, social workers have provided—and continue to provide—expertise through research, policy, and direct services. To ensure a professional response to this public health pandemic, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has provided social workers and allied health and mental health professionals with continuing education opportunities through the federally funded NASW HIV/AIDS Spectrum: Mental Health Training and Education of Social Workers Project (or *NASW HIV/AIDS Spectrum Project*).

The goal of the *NASW HIV/AIDS Spectrum Project* is to provide the necessary HIV and mental health practice skills for people working in social work, mental health, and substance abuse fields to enhance and promote culturally competent practice with individuals, families, and communities affected by HIV/AIDS. Provider education is offered through on-site workshops, Web-based education, distance learning (such as audio-conferencing and tele-video conferencing), and technical assistance. NASW members have identified continuing education and colleagues as the most important sources for professional development (85 percent and 74 percent respectively) (NASW, 2003a). Since 1996, through skill building on-site workshops, plenary sessions, and lectures, the *NASW HIV/AIDS Spectrum Project* has reached more than 9000 social workers and allied health and mental health care providers. Additionally, in 2006, NASW introduced a web-based curriculum (WebEd) addressing HIV/AIDS and

mental health social work. Launched in July of 2006, the course has been completed by over 6,000 providers from around the globe.

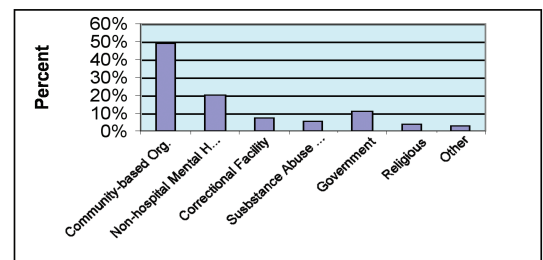
The following report is based on data completed and collected through the on-site workshops from 1996 through 2005, with a total sample size of 7,100 participants.

Who are the providers accessing the NASW HIV/AIDS Spectrum Project for continuing education and technical assistance?

Of the 7,100 providers in attendance, 80 percent were identified as female, and 20 percent as male; the majority of participants hold master level degrees (63 percent MSW; 13 percent MA or MS).

Continuing education workshops are provided in both rural and urban locations, and are promoted in collaboration with NASW chapters, community-based organizations, schools of social work, and other federally funded organizations and agencies. Clearly, social work professionals recognize that participation in continuing education focused on HIV/AIDS and related health and mental health issues is a necessity, regardless of one's practice setting. This is demonstrated in the diversity of practice settings or facility settings identified in Table One.

TABLE ONE
Facility of Employment



The 7,100 participants identified the following race/ethnicity and cultural information: 4 percent Asian/Pacific Islander; 10 percent Latino/Hispanic; 21 percent African American; and 65 percent White (non-Hispanic). Comparatively, NASW data of regular members list their racial/ethnic origin as: two percent Asian/Pacific Islander; two percent Latino/Hispanic; five percent African American; and 87 percent White (non-Hispanic). (NASW, 2003b)

How do participants assess their preparation to address issues related to HIV/AIDS after attending a skill-building workshop?

The self-assessment is based on participant feedback provided during one or more of the following workshops:

- “Substance Use, Mental Health, and HIV/AIDS: An Integrated Response”
- “Ethical Issues and Social Work Practice: HIV/AIDS as a Case Study”
- “Mental Health and HIV/AIDS: A Framework for Social Work Practice”
- “The role of Provider in Medication Treatment Adherence: the ADHERE Model.”

The goal of the workshop titled, “Substance Use, Mental Health, and HIV/AIDS: An Integrated Response,” is to train social workers to more effectively serve drug using clients affected by HIV/AIDS. After participating in the workshop, 94 percent of participants better understood why it is important to be concerned about the connection of HIV and substance use or abuse; while 90 percent said they felt more comfortable working with drug using clients with HIV/AIDS related issues.

The “Ethical Issues and Social Work Practice: HIV/AIDS as a Case Study” workshop presented a process and framework for considering legal and ethical issues in social work practice, using HIV/AIDS as a case study. Ninety-five percent of participants increased their understanding that ethical concerns emerge naturally in working with HIV affected individuals and families, while 92 percent gained an understanding of a problem solving model for use when addressing ethical dilemmas.

“Mental Health and HIV/AIDS: A Framework for Social Work Practice” focused on helping practitioners distinguish common psychosocial issues, mental health problems, and signs of HIV-related neuropsychological problems, all in the context of culturally competent practice skills. Participants believe that participation in the skill-building workshop provided a better understanding of the barriers to care (85 percent), with 90 percent having learned the importance of utilizing strengths-based skills in HIV mental health treatment.

“The Role of Provider in Medication Treatment Adherence: the ADHERE Model” workshop helped providers to understand their unique role in addressing the complex bio-medical, psychosocial and cultural issues that both challenge and facilitate HIV/AIDS treatment adherence. Eighty percent of participants noted increased understanding of the unique role of the mental health care provider in helping clients living with HIV/AIDS to better adhere to treatment.

Preparing the profession through continuing education and training extends beyond the individual attending a workshop. As noted earlier, in the PRN study, 74 percent of respondents identified colleagues as their second most important source of information for professional development. Participants in the *NASW HIV/AIDS Spectrum Project* stated they would promote HIV/AIDS awareness and knowledge through sharing training resource materials with colleagues; as well as modifying content for use with clients or consumers. Additionally, 80 percent of workshop participants self-reported an increased willingness and readiness to provide treatment and/or care for individuals with HIV/AIDS.

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- Table one:
Zibalese, Crawford M., & Tomaszewski, E. (2003) *NASW HIV/AIDS Spectrum: Mental Health Training and Education of Social Workers Evaluation Findings*. Poster presented at the meeting of the HIV/AIDS 2003: the Social Work Response, Albuquerque, New Mexico.