

# Social Work Practice: Engaging Individuals, Community, and Systems in Support of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy

Social workers provide HIV/AIDS prevention and early intervention services in a range of practice settings, including child welfare, schools, criminal justice, substance use treatment, mental health centers, primary care clinics, hospitals, and private practice. Social workers have the skills, opportunity, and commitment to engage clients in HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment utilizing a comprehensive bio-psycho-social approach.

Throughout the 30 year pandemic, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has taken an active role in addressing HIV/AIDS policy and practice issues. NASW continues to advocate for health and behavioral health equity and is committed to initiatives designed to increase consumer engagement and to build a skilled and culturally competent social work and allied provider workforce. Through the *NASW HIV/AIDS Spectrum Project*, NASW provides professional development workshops, online training and education, and workforce capacity building targeting providers in HIV/AIDS, mental health, and substance use.

## THE NATIONAL HIV/AIDS STRATEGY AND THE HIV CARE CONTINUUM

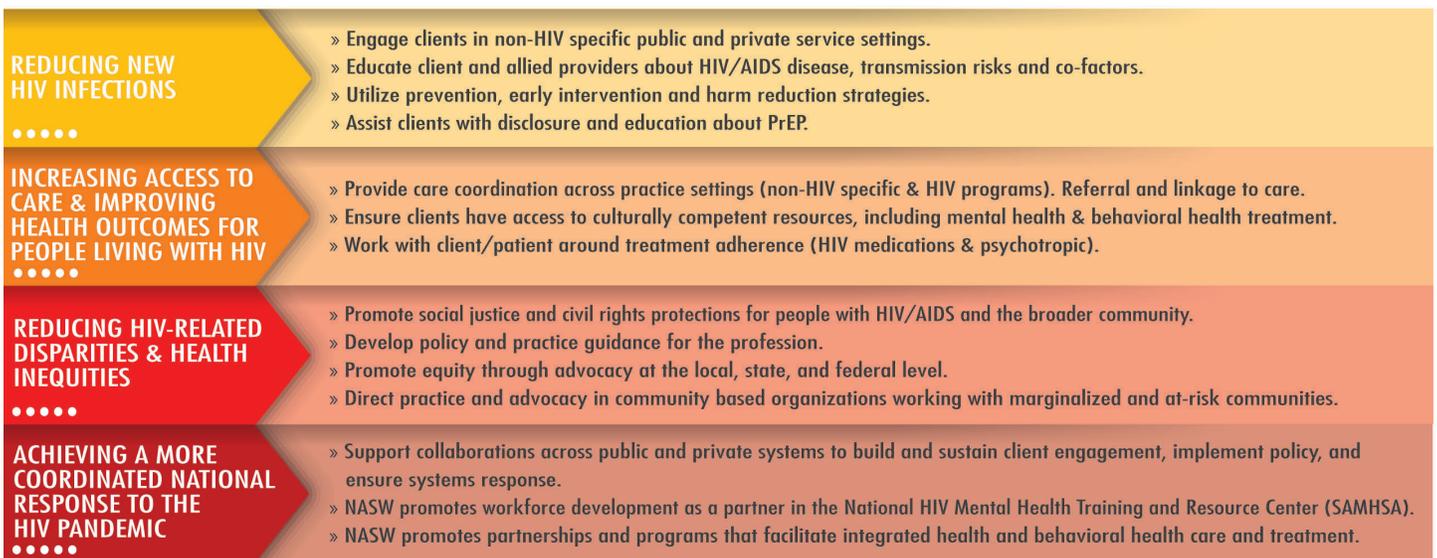
The National HIV/AIDS Strategy (NHAS) directs federal agencies to prioritize the HIV Care Continuum in their efforts – be it funding research or implementing community-level interventions to develop best practices and policy guidance. Successful movement through the HIV care continuum requires understanding the gaps in services or policy that may be a barrier to connecting people to care and treatment.<sup>1</sup> Social workers have taken an active role in identifying and addressing gaps: approaching HIV prevention, care and treatment from a holistic perspective. Examples of social work practice integrating the psychosocial and health and behavioral health interventions necessary to a comprehensive approach to ending HIV/AIDS are illustrated below (see Figure 1).

Skilled in cross-disciplinary care and treatment, professional social workers are well-prepared to help address the myriad of complex health, mental health, and structural issues associated with HIV/AIDS

**FIGURE 1: FACILITATING THE HIV CARE CONTINUUM THROUGH SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE**



**FIGURE 2: SOCIAL WORK SKILLS & THE NATIONAL HIV/AIDS STRATEGY**



prevention and care. Social work practitioners across the nation provide skilled interventions that support the goals of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy: Reducing new HIV infections, increasing access to care and improving health outcomes for people living with HIV/AIDS, reducing HIV-related disparities and health inequities, and achieving a more coordinated national response to the HIV pandemic (see Figure 2).

## RECOMMENDATIONS: MEETING THE NEEDS OF CLIENTS, COMMUNITY AND THE WORKFORCE

The National Association of Social Workers offers the following recommendations for the United States National HIV/AIDS Strategy:

- » **Continue to build strong provider capability:** to ensure a skills-based workforce knowledgeable about evidence-based behavioral strategies, comprehensive health and mental health assessments, and culturally relevant interventions to optimize outcomes and reduce health inequities.
- » **Provide targeted funding for comprehensive, integrated, and accessible mental health and substance abuse services as part of case management services:** ensure accessibility to all persons regardless of ability to pay; include referral mechanism through partnerships with health departments, community based organizations, and health and social service providers.
- » **Support and fund public health approaches to prevent, test and treat HIV:** eliminate HIV criminalization laws, establish publicly and privately funded needle exchange programs, and include structural interventions

- » **Increase provider and community engagement:** build cross-sector collaborations that build provider capacity to provide culturally competent and relevant services and programming.
- » **Sustain comprehensive service delivery system based on a quality case management model:** to include access to suitable and affordable housing, violence and trauma services, adult and child foster care, home health care, mental health and wellness, legal services, and transportation.
- » **Create policy that ensures accessible and affordable bio-medical interventions:** to include full and equal access to antiretroviral therapy (ARV), hepatitis treatments, and/or psychotropic medications.
- » **Support research and implementation studies for initiatives that address structural factors:** support interventions that can curtail the HIV/AIDS pandemic: equal access to mental health and substance use programs, ending health disparities, interpersonal violence prevention, and poverty reduction.

<sup>1</sup> HIV/AIDS Care Continuum. AIDS.gov.  
[www.aids.gov/federal-resources/policies/care-continuum/](http://www.aids.gov/federal-resources/policies/care-continuum/)

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the world. NASW works to enhance the professional growth and development of its members, to create and maintain standards for the profession, and to advance sound social policies. NASW also contributes to the well-being of individuals, families and communities through its advocacy.

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