



**NASW Statement on Integrative Pain Management
for
The Integrative Pain Care Policy Congress**

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Social workers are a critical part of integrative services across health care settings. They address psychosocial needs, provide mental health services, treat substance use disorders and facilitate coordination of care to assist individuals in achieving their goals. Using their understanding of “the interplay between the physiological elements of acute, chronic, and life-limiting illness and biopsychosocial–spiritual health and well-being” (*NASW Standards for Social Work Practice in Health Care Settings*, 2016, p. 19), social workers practice from a strengths perspective that promotes resilience and self-determination. Thus, social workers play multiple roles in integrative pain care: using multidimensional approaches to prevent and alleviate pain, helping individuals to advocate for effective pain care, and helping other disciplines to understand the wide-reaching effects of pain within the context of each person’s unique biopsychosocial environment.

The increase in opioid abuse and its spread across socioeconomic, ethnic and racial groups has many unintended consequences. Efforts to prevent and reduce opioid misuse have created increased barriers to integrative pain care. There may be reluctance—and, in some settings, refusal—among some prescribing practitioners, including pain specialists, to integrate opioids into the treatment plan. Moreover, in an attempt to increase practitioner accountability and improve safety, insurers have created additional barriers for coverage of opioids.

It is germane that policies, regulations, and provider practices be adapted to address opioid misuse. For example, research that identifies best practices in the use of pain medication would be helpful in enhancing prescriber comfort and to ensure that pain care is based on evidence, maximizing benefit and minimizing harm. At the same time, maintaining equitable access to integrative pain care—including, but not limited to, appropriate use of opioids—is essential to the quality of life for individuals, families, and communities. The continued integration of social workers in health care teams can help to achieve this outcome, and the increased intervention

of health social workers to pain care may be one of the positive consequences of the opioid crisis.

The Integrative Pain Care Policy Congress has the potential to frame outcomes and to develop plans that respect and engage the multidimensional needs and goals of individuals who live with pain. NASW and its members look forward to collaborating with other advocates to enhance access to integrative pain care.