



May 2020

Response to COVID-19

NASW has been hard at work to ensure pandemic-related supports for social workers and the clients we serve through the federal relief packages enacted to date.

To date, there have been four legislative packages related to COVID-19.

Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act: Provides \$8.3 billion to respond to the crisis, including support for state and local health agencies, vaccine and treatment development, and loans for affected small businesses.

Families First Coronavirus Response Act: Provides \$104 billion for free coronavirus testing and strengthens food security initiatives through additional investments in WIC, food banks, and older adults' nutrition. The bill also makes sure that children who depend on free and reduced-priced meals have access to food during school and childcare closures and provides for paid leave.

Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) Act: The \$2 trillion stimulus package provides direct payments to low- and middle-income families, expansion of unemployment insurance benefits, and includes a temporary provision that allows employers to pay down employees' student loan debt without a tax to the employer or the employee, as we are seeking a permanent fix through the Employer Participation in Loan Repayment Act ([S. 460/H.R. 1043](#)).

Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act: The package provides additional funding for small business loans, health care providers, and COVID-19 testing. It provides \$75 billion to reimburse health care providers for health care related expenses or lost revenues that are attributable to the coronavirus outbreak; and \$25 billion for expenses to research, develop, validate, manufacture, purchase, administer, and expand capacity for COVID-19 tests to effectively monitor and suppress COVID-19.

NASW has sent a [letter](#) to congressional leaders articulating our requests for provisions in the next relief package for social workers as well as the clients we serve. This includes access to personal protective equipment and hazard pay and addressing disparities in COVID-19 testing and care.

There have also been major regulatory developments around COVID-19 response. Due to vigorous advocacy by NASW, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) are now allowing the use of audio-only devices (e.g. landlines) to provide psychotherapy. The agency implemented numerous flexibilities in telehealth beginning in March, including the use of smartphones with video chat apps. NASW was successful in gaining the greater flexibility of audio-only devices also being allowable.

NASW also issued a Social Justice Brief on the [Implications of Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) for America's Vulnerable and Marginalized Populations](#).

Below are letters to Congress and federal regulators requesting supports and relief to address the pandemic. [COVID-19 advocacy](#):

NASW Letters

- [NASW sends letter to Congressional Leaders seeking COVID-19 Relief for Social Workers and Underserved Communities](#)
- [NASW and the American Psychological Association \(APA\) send joint letter to Congress urging reimbursement by Medicare for audio-only telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic \(3/19/2020\)](#)

Coalition Sign on Letters

- [NASW joins Families USA and over 400 organizations in letter to Congress to share policy priorities to protect health during the COVID-19 pandemic \(4/23/2020\)](#)
- [NASW joins MHLG letter to House and Senate leadership urging the creation of a federal COBRA subsidy program for Americans who have lost health insurance coverage \(4/23/2020\)](#)
- [NASW joins 170 national, state and local LGBTQ+ and allied organizations on a letter to health and policy leaders highlighting the importance of measures to prohibit discrimination in COVID-19 treatment and prevention \(4/21/2020\)](#)
- [NASW joins the American Psychiatric Association \(APA\) , the National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\) and over 40 interdisciplinary organizations in submitting a letter to Congressional leadership for COVID-19 seeking relief funding which targets at risk individuals incarcerated in the nation's jails and prisons \(4/20/2020\)](#)
- [NASW signs on to open letter urging Congressional leaders to include provisions to fortify the long-term financial stability of physician and non-physician practices across the health care delivery system in the COVID-19 response \(4/17/2020\)](#)

- NASW signs on to NEA letter urging Congress to include student loan debt cancellation in any future COVID-19 relief package (4/16/2020)
- NASW signs on to open letter urging the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights to discourage health care rationing based on age or disability during the COVID-19 pandemic (4/16/2020)
- NASW signs on to SSBG Coalition letter urging Congress to increase funding to the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) by \$4.1 billion to respond to the growing needs of older people, children and families, and people with disabilities in the midst of COVID-19 (4/15/2020)
- NASW signs on to ASAE letter urging Congress for additional association relief amid the COVID-19 pandemic (4/14/2020)
- NASW signs on to letter to the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regarding: COVID-19 pandemic results in government to ration treatment (4/13/2020)
- NASW signs on to PARCA letter to Congressional leaders requesting relief for non physician providers in the next COVID-19 package (4/13/2020)
- NASW signs on to letter to Congressional leaders demanding \$4 billion in election assistance (4/13/2020)
- NASW signs on to letter to Congressional leaders urging them to act immediately to provide crucial support to families facing the stress and disruptions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, by equipping the child welfare system with the tools it needs to handle the crisis (4/10/2020)
- NASW signs on to open letter urging CMS to facilitate enrollment in marketplace plans and Medicare during COVID-19 (4/9/2020)
- NASW signs on to Leadership Council of Aging Organizations letter urging Congress to implement changes on behalf of older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic (4/8/2020)
- NASW signs on to letter to OMB requesting extension for poverty measures' comment period in light of COVID-19 (4/8/2020)
- NASW signs on to Leadership Council of Aging Organization letter urging the federal government to provide automatic payments to Supplemental Security Income enrollees and people who receive benefits from the Veterans Administration (4/3/2020)
- NASW signs on to letter to HHS and CMS urging them to immediately expand Medicare coverage of telehealth to allow audio-only communications and waive the current Medicare requirement for audio-video connecting during the COVID-19 public health emergency (4/3/2020)
- NASW signs on to letter to top 10 private health insurance companies urging insurers to waive all patient costs for care associated with COVID-19 (4/1/2020)
- NASW signs on to open letter urging Congress to include paid sick leave for family caregivers of people with disabilities and older adults in the third coronavirus stimulus package (3/27/2020)
- NASW signs on to MHLG letter to Congress urging flexibility in state telebehavioral health coverage (3/25/2020)
- NASW signs on to MHLG letter to the National Association of Insurance Commissioners urging states to temporarily lift restrictions on telebehavioral health (3/25/2020)

- NASW signs on to letter from SSBG Coalition urging Congress to increase funding to the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) by several billion dollars to respond to the growing needs of older people, children and families, and people with disabilities in the midst of COVID-19 (3/22/2020)
- NASW joins 150 national civil and human rights organizations in writing Congressional Leadership requesting \$2 Billion to ensure the integrity of the 2020 elections- which could face serious disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic (3/22/2020)
- NASW signs on to letter with 200+ organizations urging HHS to Create an Emergency COVID-19 Special Enrollment Period on federal and state-based marketplaces (3/20/2020)
- NASW signs on to letter asking to ensure that personal protection equipment (PPE) is available to all health care systems, facilities, and providers (3/20/2020)
- In response to COVID-19, NASW joins many organizations to advocate on behalf of survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence and stalking (3/19/2020)
- NASW signs on to Leadership Council of Aging Organizations sign-on letter urging Congress to take steps to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on people with disabilities and older adults (3/17/2020)
- NASW joins 200 civil and human rights organizations in requesting that federal, state, and local election officials ensure safety and the orderly conduct of the 2020 primary and general elections in light of the current threat posed by COVID-19 (3/17/2020)
- NASW signs on to letter to President Trump urging affordable pricing for coronavirus treatments and future vaccines (3/5/2020)

Additional Efforts

- Letter to Senate Leadership from Senators asking to provide additional emergency funding for nonprofits in the next coronavirus package (4/27/2020)
- Mental Health Caucus sends letter to Secretary Azar and Administrator Verma urging CMS to include audio-only access as a telehealth flexibility for psychotherapy (4/3/2020)
- The National Child Abuse Coalition, of which NASW is a member, sends letter to encourage the United State Senate to support the Court Improvement Program (CIP) to help mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the functioning of child welfare court cases
- Senator Markey calls for extended telehealth access for Medicare recipients (3/27/2020)

Congress: Advancing the Profession



Improving Access to Mental Health Act (S. 782/H.R. 1533):

NASW continues to pursue this legislation which will provide a crucial step forward in access to mental health care for Medicare beneficiaries and in advancing pay equity for social workers. If you have not already done so, please [email your lawmakers](#) now to urge them to cosponsor.

Protecting Social Workers and Health Professionals from Workplace Violence Act (S. 2880/H.R. 5138): This bipartisan legislation has 13 cosponsors in the House and one in the Senate. The legislation will create a federal grant program within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to enable employers to purchase and deploy safety equipment (such as security cameras and GPS locators), make facility improvements, implement safety training programs, and provide support services for professionals who have been victims of violence. There is no state or local match required for these grants. [Contact your congressional lawmakers](#) and urge them to cosponsor this legislation.

Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act (H.R. 1309): After passing the House in November, this legislation is now pending consideration by the U.S. Senate. Please contact your Senators and urge them to cosponsor the companion bill, [S. 851](#), by responding to NASW's [action alert](#). S. 851/H.R. 1309 will require OSHA to institute a standard requiring employers to develop and implement workplace safety plans. These measures will be instrumental in promoting safer working conditions for millions of social workers, nurses and other similar professionals who experience unacceptably high levels of violence on the job.

The Employer Participation in Repayment Act (S. 460/H.R. 1043): NASW promotes loan debt relief for social workers as part of its ongoing work to improve working conditions, salaries, and other benefits for members of the profession and to ensure that consumers have access to qualified professionals. S. 460/HR 1043 will help social workers pay off their loan debt faster by enabling employers to contribute up to \$5,250 tax-free annually to their employees' student loans – providing employees with much-needed relief and employers with a unique tool to attract and retain talented employees. Provisions were temporarily authorized through the CARES Act, but we still need support for this legislation. [Contact your lawmakers](#) today.

Social Justice

Affordable Care Act (ACA): On March 23rd NASW celebrated the 10th Anniversary of the ACA. NASW shared messages across social media sites, and staff participated in Protect Our Care's coalition call with Speaker Pelosi.

National Association of Social Workers
March 11 at 10:00 AM · 🌐

#NASW joins other organizations in thanking the U.S. House for passing H.R. 2339. This legislation would protect youth from tobacco addiction by prohibiting the sale of flavored tobacco, flavored pipe tobacco, flavored vape e-juices, electronic cigarettes, and disposable nicotine products. [POLITICO](#)

The image displays a grid of logos for various professional organizations, including AACCC, Academy of General Dentistry, ASH, ASPO, AAOAMP, American Academy of Pediatrics, AACR, AADR, AAC, AAOMR, American College of Health Care Administrators, American College of Cardiology, ACP, American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, ADA American Dental Association, American Public Health Association, American Lung Association, APHA, ASCO, Asthma, American Society of Human Resources, AHA, ABC, ASPPH, AWHONN, American Heart Association, Black Caucus, and Black Women's Health Initiative.

Tobacco Use Prevention: On March 11th, NASW was included in ads in the Washington Post and Politico, thanking members of the House and members of the Congressional Black Caucus for their votes to pass the Reversing the Youth Tobacco Epidemic Act, HR 2339. NASW is an active member of the **Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids Partners Coalition**.

Older Americans Act (OAA) Reauthorization:

NASW celebrates the passage by Congress of the bipartisan Supporting Older Americans Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-131), which was signed into law on March 25. This law, **supported by NASW**, reauthorizes the OAA through September 2024 and authorizes funding increases of seven percent in year one and six percent in each subsequent year. NASW thanks the 900 members of its Legislative Advocacy Listserv who urged Congress to pass the law. In collaboration with coalition partners, the association will advocate for Congress to implement the approved funding increases through the appropriations process.



Regulatory

Tobacco Use Prevention: NASW contributed to comments on a request for information from the CDC, Achieve Health Equity and Identify and Eliminate Tobacco-Related Disparities. Coalition comments will be submitted by the National Partnership on Behavioral Health and Tobacco Use.

Collaboration

Older Americans Month (OAM): May is OAM! Visit the Administration for Community Living OAM site for logos, posters, templates, and other materials focused on the OAM 2020 theme, *Make Your Mark*. Use these materials and information from NASW to bolster your policy efforts in aging.



local events and screenings.

May is Mental Health Month: Since 1949, Mental Health America, a coalition partner of NASW, and its affiliates across the country have led the observance of May is Mental Health Month by reaching millions of people through the media,

May is National Foster Care Month: This is a time to recognize that we can each play a part in enhancing the lives of children and youth in foster care. Starting in 1988, U.S. Presidents issued

annual proclamations in recognition of National Foster Care Month to show appreciation and gratitude to foster parents across the nation.

The purpose of National Foster Care Month continues to evolve based on the needs of the time. Current activities focus on increasing the visibility of the needs of children and youth in foster care and highlighting how the child welfare system can prioritize foster care as a service to families and promote reunification.



World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD):

Preparations for WEAAD (June 15) are underway. Visit the [WEAAD Web site](#) of the National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA), an ACL-funded resource center based at the University of Southern California Keck School of Medicine. Take a dynamic, on-demand [video lecture series](#), created by NCEA and the [FrameWorks Institute](#), to learn how to communicate effectively about elder abuse and policy solutions. (Obtain the course at no cost through June 30, 2020, by adding the course to your cart and, during the checkout process, entering the discount code *WEAAD2020*.) Access written materials from the December 2019 meeting of

the federal [Elder Justice Coordinating Council](#) (EJCC) and read NASW's fall 2019 [recommendations to the EJCC](#).

Get Involved! We encourage you to join [NASW's Advocacy Listserv](#) to stay up-to-date on legislative, regulatory and other activity at the Federal level. We also have a variety of valuable [resources](#) on our web page to guide members in connecting with their lawmakers.

For questions about the Washington Update or to suggest content that you would like us to consider for inclusion in a future communication, please contact Dina Kastner, Senior Field Organizer, at dkastner.nasw@socialworkers.org.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the largest membership organization of professional social workers representing the interests of over 700,000 social workers nationwide. We promote, develop and protect the practice of social work and social workers and enhance the well-being of individuals, families, and communities through advocacy. [Become a member of NASW.](#)



750 First Street, NE, Suite 800 | Washington, DC 20002

Anna Mangum, MSW, MPH, Deputy Director, Programs, amangum.nasw@socialworkers.org
Sarah Butts, LMSW, Director, Public Policy, sbutts.nasw@socialworkers.org