

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

Overview of the Social Work Profession

BACKGROUND

Every day, over 650,000 social workers assist over 10 million individuals in the United States. The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic needs of all people, with particular attention to persons who are ill or are experiencing mental, physical, or intellectual challenges, and to populations that are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. For more than a century, social work has achieved a reputation as *the* helping profession and has made significant contributions to the strength and vitality of our nation's individuals, families, and communities.

Social workers help people to find solutions and assist those dealing with addiction, emotional distress, medical illness, poverty, discrimination, disasters, and other psychological, economic, and social issues. They work in child welfare agencies, veterans, and military settings, services for older adults, inpatient and outpatient health and mental health settings, schools, social service agencies, private practices, advocacy organizations, government agencies, legislatures, and many more settings in the public and private sectors. In short, social workers provide vital services in supporting the well-being of our nation and the people who live in it. This fabric of service and care has become even more essential as economic inequality and health disparities increase, as the population ages, and as the middle class struggles to maintain stability.

Federal policymakers have critical roles to play in promoting policies that help individuals, families, and communities to fulfill their potential and to lead healthy, productive lives. Confronting vast societal challenges can only be achieved through a bipartisan approach that seeks sustainable and meaningful solutions to benefit Americans in need. To assist in this effort, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) proposes several public policy recommendations for consideration by the executive branch and the 114th Congress.

NASW POLICY PRIORITIES

- » Support Medicare reimbursement rate parity for clinical social workers (CSWs)
- » Modify Health and Behavior Assessment and Intervention (HBAI) Codes and expand the Social Security Act's definition of clinical social worker services
- » Support student loan forgiveness for social workers in high-need areas; during deliberations on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA); and by providing funding to support implementation of the programs as authorized in the HEA
- » Maintain the 50 years of success of the Older Americans Act (OAA) by reauthorizing the legislation (S. 192) in 2015; maintain and restore funding for OAA and other discretionary programs by ending the sequester and averting other funding cuts
- » Support passage of the Social Work Reinvestment Act (S. 789, H.R. 1378)
- » Ensure that health and mental health services are available to all populations, especially people with low incomes, and across the lifespan, and that resources are allocated to ensuring an adequate professional social work workforce
- » Introduce and pass the Medicare Beneficiary Mental Health Equity Act

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