The Affordable Care Act and Clinical Social Workers

Implementation of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) brings significant changes to the health care system in the United States. The changes come in the form of Medicaid expansion and enhanced federal support for the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and through the development of state-based Health Insurance Exchanges where health plans will be offered to individuals and small businesses. Americans will be required to have a qualifying health care plan or be penalized. Clinical social workers in private practice can expect to become paneled as providers and negotiate payment rates with exchange plans just as they do with health plans in the private industry.

The ACA reserves employer-based health coverage and transforms the underlying health care system to one that addresses the health needs of a patient by promoting primary and integrated care, preventive services and quality improvement. Clinical social workers will continue to provide services in the employer-based system as they do now, and participate in primary and preventive care initiatives as salaried or contracted employees. Health plans will continue to credential clinical social workers as mental health providers and opportunities will continue for private practice referrals.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has implemented preventive health care programs for Medicare beneficiaries. Clinical social workers will continue to provide services to Medicare beneficiaries and the process to become paneled as a Medicare provider and receive referrals will remain the same at this time.

The ACA expands access to mental health services for millions of Americans. It benefits mental health patients by:

- Providing health insurance coverage to those who have a pre-existing mental disorder
- Expanding health plan coverage to include mental health services as a core benefit
- Increasing funds for Community Mental Health Centers
- Establishing a national center of excellence for depression treatment
- Expanding research to include postpartum depression and psychosis, education and screening
Despite workforce challenges and speculations, the expansion of mental health services by the ACA presents a promising workforce opportunity for clinical social workers. The integration of mental health services in primary care, the expansion of federal health funds in community mental health centers, the development of health insurance exchanges, and the requirement of mental health services as a core benefit of health plans provides increased job opportunities in the workforce for clinical social workers. There are over 170,000 licensed clinical social workers in the United States who are prepared to meet the demands of the ACA workforce and have the expertise to provide quality mental health services to the health care community in the United States.

NASW has developed several other resources for its members on the ACA which are available online at the following links:

- Affordable Care Organizations (ACOs): Opportunities for the Social Work Profession
- The Affordable Care Act: Implications for Low-and Moderate-Income Women’s Health and Well Being
  [www.socialworkers.org/assets/secured/documents/practice/health/Affordable%20Care%20PP.PDF](http://www.socialworkers.org/assets/secured/documents/practice/health/Affordable%20Care%20PP.PDF)
- State Health Insurance Exchanges: What Social Workers Need to Know
- Essential Health Benefits and the Affordable Care Act: What Social Workers Need to Know

Additional Information about the Patient Care and Affordable Care Act is available online at: [www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-111hr3590enr/pdf/BILLS-111hr3590enr.pdf](http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-111hr3590enr/pdf/BILLS-111hr3590enr.pdf)

*Hyperlinks may change without notice.

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**The National Association of Social Workers 2014 National Conference**

Social workers are leaders of change and strengthen the safety net of society. They bring hope, and inspire people to find their courage and fulfill their potential. Join renowned keynote speakers and gain new skills at innovative workshops.

**Conference Details**

- **Theme:** Social Work: Courage, Hope & Leadership
- **Dates:** July 23-26, 2014
- **Location:** Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, Washington, DC
- **Registration Fees:**
  - Early Bird (Jun-Jul 2014): $375 NASW Member, $425 NASW Member (Jun-Jul 2014)
  - Regular (Aug-Sept 2014): $425 NASW Member, $475 NASW Member (Aug-Sept 2014)
- **Presentation Formats:**
  - Symposium: Topic-focused 90 minute panel sessions with three speakers
  - Individual Presentation: 30 minute presentations (conference committee will place three individual speakers in a 90 minute session based on a common theme)
  - Poster Presentations: Posters will be displayed in the exhibit area throughout the conference. Poster presenters are encouraged to discuss their work with attendees at designated breaks
- **Call for Proposals:** Available Online
- **Exhibit Registration Open:** Available Online
- **Registration Open:** January 3, 2014

Network with 2,000 of your colleagues at NASW’s meeting of the profession—the 2014 NASW National Conference. For more information visit NASWCONFERENCE.ORG or email NASWCONFERENCE@NASWDC.ORG.
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