



PUBLIC POLICY

COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

CSWE Members Meet with Federal Policymakers To Promote Social Work Education March 25, 2010

As part of the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) ongoing Public Policy Initiative, on March 25 CSWE leaders participated in meetings with key policymakers in Washington, D.C. The purpose of these meetings was to promote the value of social work education and offer CSWE as a resource to federal decision makers. This was the second year in which CSWE Board and Commission members advocated for social work education on Capitol Hill and at federal agencies. This year, the volunteers were grouped into three thematic teams addressing: health disparities, veterans health, and the social work workforce. Below are highlights from each of the meetings.

Health Disparities

The issue of health equity was given quite a bit of attention throughout the health care reform debate. In the end, the final health care bill that was enacted into law on March 23 – the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* – did not go as far in addressing health disparities as proponents had hoped. Therefore, advocacy for health equity continues.

Mit Joyner, CSWE President-Elect, West Chester University of Pennsylvania; David Jenkins, Texas Christian University; Goutham Menon, University of Texas, San Antonio; and Harriet Cohen, Texas Christian University participated in three meetings with Congressional committees that oversee legislative issues important to health disparities and social work education. First, the team met with staff from the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), which is currently chaired by Congresswoman Donna Christensen (D-VI). The CBC works closely with two other Congressional caucuses – the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), and the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) – on issues of common concern, such as health disparities. Together the three caucuses are known as the "Tri Caucus." During the health care debate, the Tri Caucus introduced the *Health Equity and Accountability Act* (H.R. 3090), a bill which seeks to eliminate health disparities by utilizing social workers and other health professionals to help vulnerable populations navigate the health care system and gain a voice in meeting their health care needs. CSWE endorsed this legislation and sent letters of support to [House leaders](#) and to [President Obama](#). Despite broad community support, H.R. 3090 did not make it into the final health care reform bill. In this meeting with CBC staff, team members expressed CSWE's ongoing commitment to working with the Tri Caucus to enact health disparities legislation. In addition, the group discussed CSWE's broad activities relating to diversity and health disparities, including the work of the Commission on Diversity and Social and Economic Justice. Staff expressed appreciation for learning more about CSWE and indicated an interest in working together going forward. They specifically asked to stay apprised of efforts to develop CSWE's Center For Diversity and Social and Economic Justice.

Next, the team met with staff in the Office of Indian Affairs within the House Natural Resources Committee. The Office of Indian Affairs is responsible for addressing and reversing trends such as inadequate health care facilities, high rates of illness and life-threatening diseases, and crime and violence among Native populations. In addition to discussing CSWE's broad health disparities activities, the purpose of this meeting was to present and discuss the recently completed CSWE Native American Task Force Report, [Status of Native Americans in Social Work Higher Education](#), which was accepted by the CSWE Board of Directors in the fall. The group discussed the findings of this report with staff, which include the need for social work graduates to have baseline knowledge of Native American cultures in order to effectively practice. The group encouraged the Office of Indian Affairs staff to read the report and

to consider CSWE and the Native American Task Force as resources. Staff expressed appreciation for learning about social work education and indicated an interest in maintaining an ongoing relationship with CSWE.

The team's final meeting was with staff from the Senate Indian Affairs Committee. Similar to the meeting with the House Office of Indian Affairs, the purpose of this meeting was to present the Native American Task Force report and promote CSWE as a resource to the Committee. Earlier that day, the Committee held a hearing entitled, *Youth Suicides and the Urgent Need for Mental Health Care Resources in Indian Country*. The discussion with staff focused largely on the mental health needs of Indian Country and what social work education can do to address these challenges. Particularly, the Committee is interested in data about mental health care providers in Indian Country, noting that tribes need consistency in their mental health providers, something they currently do not have. Team members expressed CSWE's commitment to addressing these challenges, starting by implementing the recommendations made within the Task Force report. In addition, noting that universities are rarely seen working with tribes, the Committee staff encouraged social work faculty and students to conduct field placements and/or spend a few weeks with a tribe observing the culture and the needs of the Nation to enhance understanding. At the suggestion of the Senate staffer, on March 31 CSWE [submitted](#) the Task Force report to the Committee so that it can be made part of the official record for the March 25 hearing. The staff also suggested that CSWE foster relationships with Native American organizations, such as the National Congress of American Indians and the National Indian Health Board. The Committee and CSWE agreed to continue to look for ways to collaborate.

Veteran Health

CSWE President Ira Colby, University of Houston; CSWE Executive Director, Julia Watkins; Denise Montcalm, University of Nevada, Reno; and Karen Sowers, University of Tennessee, Knoxville participated in meetings with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), staff in the Office of Congressman Ciro Rodriguez (D-TX/23), and the House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC). Congressman Rodriguez, who is a social worker and a member of HVAC, has been working with CSWE's government relations staff over the past year on legislation that would authorize education incentive programs to enhance the number of social workers in the VA. Specifically, last winter Congressman Rodriguez introduced legislation, the *Veterans Health Professionals Educational Assistance Act of 2009* (H.R. 4166), that would revive the Health Professionals Educational Assistance Scholarship Program, which sunset over a decade ago. H.R. 4166 would also expand an existing Health and Human Services loan repayment program for health professionals from disadvantaged backgrounds and the National Health Service Corps Scholarship Program to include work within the VA as obligated service under each program. In the meeting with Congressman Rodriguez's new military fellow (a staffer who is working in a Congressional office as part of his or her military service to advise on military-related issues), the team expressed CSWE's continued support for H.R. 4166 and offered CSWE's ongoing assistance on other issues relating to social work, veterans health, or education projects. Rep. Rodriguez's staffer was appreciative to learn about CSWE and expressed his desire to continue working on projects of mutual interest.

Later in the day, CSWE leaders met with staff from HVAC to engage in strategic discussions about moving H.R. 4166 forward and other options for getting the VA Health Professionals Educational Assistance Scholarship Program reinstated. The staffer provided information about other pieces of legislation that are currently being considered by the House and/or Senate, including an omnibus VA health bill that has already passed the Senate and is pending in the House. This bill, the *Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2009* (S. 1963), includes language that would reinstate the VA Health Professionals Educational Assistance Scholarship Program and extend its eligibility to social workers – a big win for CSWE. CSWE's government relations staff will continue to interact with HVAC and with Congressman Rodriguez's staff as this legislation moves forward.

The team also met with officials in the Office of Care Management and Social Work Service within the Office of Patient Care Service at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The purpose of this meeting was to reconnect with the VA social work staff with whom CSWE already has an existing relationship in order to follow up on past projects and explore new ways in which CSWE can be helpful to the VA as they train and prepare social workers for practice in VA facilities. The VA officials explained some of their new

foci, including ensuring individuals have access to the training needed to become successful social workers, working to increase the diversity of the social work workforce, and developing efforts to provide access to underserved communities. Also discussed at the meeting was CSWE's [military social work education initiative](#), as the two VA officials with whom the team met sit on the panel of experts advising the initiative. CSWE and the VA will continue to work together on these and other future activities.

Social Work Workforce

Wynne Korr, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; Sue Tebb, Saint Louis University; and Diane Elze, SUNY Buffalo traveled to Rockville, Maryland for a meeting at the Bureau of Health Professions within the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). The purpose of this meeting was to discuss federal health professions programs for which social workers and social work students can apply, such as loan forgiveness and training opportunities, as well as new programs that were enacted in the health care reform legislation. Specifically, the team discussed [HRSA's Title VII Health Professions programs](#), the extent to which social workers are eligible, and ways in which to be successful in achieving funding. The team expressed concern about some of the barriers that currently exist when social work schools, faculty or students apply for Title VII funding. For example, the condition that medical schools must serve as the applicant for HRSA's Geriatric Education Centers (GEC) program often pits schools of social work against medical schools within a single institution. As was discussed in the meeting, the health care reform bill makes some changes to existing Title VII programs, such as the geriatrics program, in an effort to open them up to other professions. However, recognizing that more work is still needed in order to ensure social work's place within these programs, the HRSA staff suggested holding a session at CSWE's Annual Program Meeting (APM) in October featuring HRSA officials to discuss the Title VII programs and teach CSWE members how best to apply for these funds.

The group also discussed some of the new programs that were authorized in the health care reform bill that was enacted on March 23. Among these new programs is the Mental and Behavioral Health Education and Training Grants Program, which if funded would provide grants to institutions of higher education (schools of social work and other mental health professions) for faculty and student recruitment. The team relayed CSWE's enthusiastic support for this program and encouraged HRSA to work with CSWE in its implementation. In addition, the HRSA staff encouraged CSWE members to consider applying for the National Health Service Corps programs, especially given recent new investments in the program via the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and health care reform. CSWE was also encouraged to monitor HRSA's Advisory Committee on Interdisciplinary, Community-Based Linkages and participate and provide public comment to the Committee when appropriate. The Committee is responsible for advising and issuing reports to HRSA on matters concerning Title VII.

If you have any questions about this or any other CSWE Public Policy activity, please email CSWE's [government relations staff](#).