



COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

STRENGTHENING THE PROFESSION OF SOCIAL WORK
Leadership in Research, Career Advancement, and Education

1701 Duke Street, Suite 200, Alexandria, VA 22314

TEL 703.683.8080

FAX 703.683.8099

www.cswe.org

Ensuring Access to Care and Protecting Underserved and Vulnerable Populations: Principles for Health-Care Public Policy

As the 115th Congress and the new administration consider health-care policy, especially changes to the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA)*, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) maintains the position that increasing access to care, strengthening the care individuals receive, and improving health outcomes is critical. This includes the need to address social determinants of health and eradicate health disparities to improve overall health and health care in communities across the country. There also must be an acknowledgment of the critical role of social work and social work education in the health-care infrastructure in the United States, which is reflected by making sure social work is included in any new health-care policy.

Social Work and Health Care

Social workers are vital to health care in the United States, and in areas such as mental health they are estimated to be the largest workforce. The need for health-care social workers is expected to increase. Social workers provide services in a variety of settings in communities including schools; clinics; hospitals; child welfare agencies; and local, state, and federal agencies. Social workers ensure that individuals are linked with the care and services they need, addressing the critical gaps in the continuum of care, which is essential to improving health outcomes. Furthermore, social workers address factors that affect individuals and families but are often missed in clinics or hospitals; they work to address the social determinants affecting health and health-care outcomes.

Principles for Ensuring Access to Health Care and Protecting Vulnerable and Underserved Populations

As policy-makers consider making reforms to the ACA, CSWE supports the following principles that support its mission:

- ***Protect Access to Care for All Populations:*** Federal policies should ensure access to health care and coverage for all populations, without the creation of new and undue burdens, especially for low-income and vulnerable populations. CSWE does not support policies that disadvantage or create gaps in care for vulnerable populations.
- ***Federal Policy Should Address Social Determinants of Health to Improve Health and Health Care:*** Social determinants of health are important variables in meeting the health needs of certain populations and are essential to building a strong culture of health. Policy-makers should acknowledge the value of addressing social determinants of health to improve health and health outcomes, as well as improve the health of communities across the United States.
- ***Federal Health-Care Policy Should Aim to Eradicate Disparities and Not Worsen Existing Inequities in the United States:*** Although some progress has been made in

addressing health disparities, the United States is far from bridging health inequity gaps and helping those disproportionately affected by the burden of poor health. Federal health-care policy should reflect the value of coverage and access to care, especially among the nation's most vulnerable populations, to help eliminate health disparities and in turn improve health outcomes.

- ***Maintaining Mental and Behavioral Health Parity:*** The United States has made great strides recently to ensure that individuals with mental and behavioral health disorders do not fall through the cracks. A critical step has been making health-care coverage available for those living with, or at risk for, mental and behavioral health diseases and ensuring that individuals get the proper treatment and preventive services. Federal policy should build on, not erode, the progress that has been made to ensure mental and behavioral health parity.
- ***Continue Efforts to Transition to Coordinated Interprofessional Team-Based Health Care:*** There is recognition that coordinated team-based care improves health. Over the last few years federal policy has moved in this direction and is improving health and health-care outcomes, especially when a social worker is included in the team. Federal health-care policies should continue to support interprofessional team-based care to meet the needs of populations with complex health-care conditions and improve health for all.
- ***Recognize the Important Role of Education and Training Policy in Health-Care Policy:*** Federal policies should reflect the importance of education and training programs for health professions, which includes social work, to increase the number of health professionals prepared to work in an integrated team-based environment and help meet the increasing health demands in the United States.
- ***Federal Efforts to Collect Data and Evaluate Programs Should Include Social Work:*** Data are important in evaluating programs and making policy decisions. Data collected on health-care programs, when applicable, should convey the role/value of each member of this team, including social workers.
- ***Policies Should Allow a Professional to Perform to the Full Extent of Training and/or Licensure:*** Policies that allow a professional to perform to the full extent of training and/or licensure in a health-care setting are critical to meeting the increased health demands in the United States, particularly in rural and underserved areas.
- ***Social Workers Should Receive Fair and Adequate Reimbursement for Health Services:*** Policies should ensure that today's social work students are educated and trained to work in a health-care environment that values the role of social work as a conduit to improved health and health care. Financial policies should encourage care coordination and recognize the significance of an integrated team-based approach to improve health and health care.
- ***Support Social Work in Health-Care Demonstrations and Pilots to Provide a Well-Trained Workforce to Help Ensure Access to Care:*** To meet the growing and diverse needs of patients, medical education policies and federally funded demonstration projects should be expanded and replicated, to support graduate education for social workers.

(February 2017)

CSWE is a national association of social work education programs and individuals that ensures and enhances the quality of social work education for a professional practice that promotes individual, family, and community well-being, and social and economic justice.