



**COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION'S  
PUBLIC POLICY INITIATIVE:  
ACCOMPLISHMENTS UPDATE**

**REPORT TO THE CSWE BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
CSWE SPRING GOVERNANCE MEETING  
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*This status report provided to the CSWE Board of Directors is a summary of federal advocacy and outreach efforts conducted by Lewis-Burke Associates LLC between September 1, 2019 and February 1, 2020.*

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## I. Introduction

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Public Policy Initiative (PPI) advances federal support of social work education by engaging with members of Congress, their staff, federal agencies, and other federal policy makers. Led by Lewis-Burke Associates LLC (Lewis-Burke), the CSWE PPI engages leadership and membership of CSWE in promoting social work education and defending against threats to individuals, families, and communities. CSWE's PPI works purposely to increase federal funding and policy support in the priority areas of higher education, workforce development and training, social work research, and social and economic justice. The CSWE PPI has balanced proactive actions that advance the mission of CSWE, while responding to threats and adverse actions at the federal level. Policy wins are evident in increased funding for programs important to social work and in the responses defending at-risk populations and communities. As we approach a seminal election in November, the CSWE PPI is committed to advancing CSWE's priorities, continuing to raise the profile of the organization and social work education, and navigating any November election outcome in a manner that will promote health, well-being, and justice for all people.

A major focus for the CSWE PPI in 2019 and going forward in 2020 will be around the social determinants of health (SDOH). In the fall, CSWE organized a briefing, "Integrating Social Determinants of Health into Future Health-Care Policy." More information on that effort is in the section detailing health care advocacy. The CSWE PPI sees SDOH as a way to capitalize on a policy area where social work education and social workers can and need to lead. Working with other social work and health-care organizations, CSWE will work to increase support for SDOH within health-care legislation and policy and will work to increase federal funding for those efforts. In early 2020, the CSWE PPI will develop a series of principles on SDOH that will be used to engage current and future policy makers. Additionally, efforts to improve federal data around the social work workforce continue to be a priority for the CSWE PPI.

In the higher education space, continued promotion of a reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act* (HEA), support for programmatic accreditation, student aid, graduate education, and Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) continue as mainstays of the CSWE PPI advocacy efforts. Additional efforts include advocating for increased support and attention to Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) and support for mental health efforts in higher education. The CSWE PPI will look to highlight and vigorously advocate for the importance of Pell Grants and student aid via the increased attention being paid by policymakers to student debt and college affordability.

Promoting social work research is another area where the CSWE PPI has experienced success in 2019 and will remain active in 2020 through its government relations collaboration with the Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR). Nominating social workers and social work researchers to federal advisory councils is one way the CSWE PPI has engaged and will continue to engage with SSWR. Increasing support for the Minority Fellowship Program and engaging with important stakeholder coalitions like the Mental Health Liaison group are some of the other initiatives the CSWE PPI has and will remain active in pursuing.

There is no question that 2020 is a decisive year given the political contests for the Presidency and Congress. Since 2016, the CSWE PPI has leveraged opportunities to increase federal funding for programs important to social work while denouncing affronts to safety and well-being, such as family separation at the border. This approach of maximizing policy opportunities while defending vulnerable populations and standing for the values of the social work community will continue in 2020. Additionally, the CSWE PPI will work to engage and influence future candidates through outreach and

profile-raising efforts. A transition document that articulates the policy goals, priorities, principles, and values of CSWE will be developed and disseminated in 2020. This effort will help inform future engagement with a new Administration or the continuation of the current Administration. The CSWE PPI will also continue efforts to cultivate new congressional champions and expand the influence of the Congressional Social Work Caucus.

As outlined, over the last six months the CSWE PPI has engaged in a robust advocacy agenda and strategy that advances the goals and missions of CSWE. Looking ahead, the CSWE PPI is committed to making progress in the areas of SDOH, health-care workforce, education access and affordability, research, social justice, and more. 2020 presents the opportunity to maintain the important role of CSWE in supporting social work educators and championing the importance of the social work profession in addressing societal challenges. Lewis-Burke looks forward to continuing to ensure that CSWE and social work education are influencing policy that benefits its members, and the communities where its members live, work, teach, and practice.

## **II. Review of Federal Public Policy Activities**

This section details significant CSWE public policy activities since September 2019 as they pertain to federal agencies, Congress, and the Administration. CSWE and Lewis-Burke work in tandem to further CSWE's mission and advocacy agenda. Please note that this is not a comprehensive compilation of activities and actions. In addition, for the purpose of this report, the term "CSWE PPI" refers to the coordination between Lewis-Burke and CSWE leadership on federal issues.

### **Higher Education Advocacy**

#### ***Accreditation and Higher Education Policy***

The CSWE PPI is very active in promoting the role of CSWE's Commission on Accreditation as the sole accrediting agency for social work education in the United States and its territories. As noted in previous reports to the board, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) has been very active in promulgating new regulations as it relates to accreditation. The regulatory space is often an area overlooked in the larger policy world but is one where federal agencies can exercise great latitude. The CSWE PPI has been very active in ED's rulemaking process around accreditation and developed and submitted [comments](#) during the process in an effort to ensure that regulations would respect the importance of programmatic accreditation. An example of ED's acknowledgement of CSWE's comments is seen in the proposed definition of "programmatic accrediting agency":

- CSWE comment: "CSWE encourages the Department to ensure that programmatic accrediting agencies have the autonomy to focus on institutional quality."
- ED comment: "Another commenter remarking on the definition of "programmatic accrediting agency" encouraged the Department to ensure that programmatic accrediting agencies have the autonomy to focus on institutional quality... The Department appreciates the commenter's request that we ensure programmatic accrediting agencies have the autonomy to focus on quality... We are confident that these regulations provide that autonomy."

Other areas where ED acknowledged and incorporated feedback from CSWE include around the definition of “separate and independent” (as it relates to the relationship between a sponsoring organization and an accrediting agency) and charges of “credential inflation” in certain professions. The CSWE PPI will continue to monitor these regulatory efforts and in conjunction, is advocating for the importance of programmatic accreditation in a reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act* (HEA). As an example of these efforts, the CSWE PPI and Director of Accreditation Mary Kurfess recently met with congressional offices to champion the importance of accreditation and the need of an HEA that supports social work educators and students.

### ***Public Service Loan Forgiveness and Student Aid***

Maintenance and implementation of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program is a major component of the CSWE PPI’s advocacy. Through its active involvement in the PSLF Coalition, the CSWE PPI is able to weigh in with ED and policy makers overseeing the implementation of the program. When engaging congressional offices, PSLF is highlighted as a program crucial to CSWE members and the social work community. Support for PSLF will also inform the work the CSWE PPI does in the run-up to the 2020 election, as many candidates have referenced increase support for public sector work.

In the fall, H.R. 4674, the *College Affordability Act* was introduced and approved by the U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor. The CSWE PPI provided feedback on the drafting of the bill and noted its support for many of the bill’s provisions. These include:

- Increases to the maximum Pell Grant award by \$625 and permanently indexing the award to inflation;
- Extension of Pell Grant eligibility to 14 semesters and Pell eligibility for graduate studies;
- Improvements to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program; and
- The elimination of origination fees on student loans and bringing back subsidized loans for graduate students.

Other provisions in the *College Affordability Act* that CSWE hopes will be addressed include:

- Exploring ways to ensure that efforts to change accreditation do not come at the expense of institutional autonomy and independence; and
- Preserving the “separate and independent” requirement related to programmatic accreditors that currently exists in statute.

Acknowledging the growing attention to the important work done by Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), the CSWE PPI has noted for policy makers that social work degree programs at U.S. Department of Education recognized MSIs enroll 24.5% of all students and 26.2% of all degrees are conferred at MSIs. Increasing support for MSIs and graduate education will continue to be mainstays of the CSWE advocacy agenda. The CSWE PPI is in the process of executing a legislative strategy around the Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need (GAANN) program in order to increase support for social work graduate students. As noted above, the CSWE PPI is committed to ensuring the social work educators and students have access to vital programs like PSLF and student aid, and will continue to engage on these and other higher education issues.

## Health-Care Advocacy

### ***Preserving and Expanding Mental Health and Substance Use Workforce Programs***

CSWE PPI's appropriations activities are primarily focused on ensuring federal funding for health-care education and training programs that support schools and programs of social work. The CSWE PPI worked closely with key social work champions in Congress to advocate for CSWE's funding priorities throughout the fiscal year (FY) 2020 appropriations process. More specifically, the CSWE PPI worked with long-time social work champions Representative Barbara Lee (D-CA) and Representative G.K. Butterfield (D-NC), as well as key House and Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (Labor-HHS-ED) Appropriations Subcommittee staff, to ensure support for existing and new pipeline programs critical to the social work community.

Given continuous proposals to cut several programs in the President previous budget requests, the CSWE PPI invested in efforts to ensure funding for programs of importance including the Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training (BHWET) program, the Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program (GWEP), the Minority Fellowship Program (MFP), and Scholarships for Disadvantaged Students (SDS). Additionally, the PPI advocated for new workforce and loan repayment programs that would benefit social work, including the Loan Repayment Program for Substance Use Disorder Treatment Workforce and Mental and Substance Use Disorder Workforce Training Demonstration. The following illustrate successful outcomes as a result of the CSWE PPI's appropriations advocacy efforts:

- Regarding funding for BHWET, the final FY 2020 Labor-HHS-ED minibus funding package provided \$102 million for the program, a \$27 million increase over the previous year's funding level. This increase includes additional funding for the Loan Repayment Program for Substance Use Disorder Treatment Workforce, a new program authorized by Representative Katherine Clark (D-MA) and endorsed by CSWE. Additionally, the Mental and Substance Use Disorder Workforce Training Demonstration, which was authorized in the *21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act* and specifically calls out CSWE as an "eligible partnership organization" for grant recipients, was also included in the final appropriations package.
- Regarding funding for MFP, CSWE PPI's advocacy efforts contributed to an overall increase for the MFP program in the final FY 2020 spending package. The program received \$14.69 million, which was a \$1.5 million increase above the previous year's funding level. The CSWE PPI continues to serve as a leading voice for the MFP coalition of current grantees to help increase funding for the program.
- Regarding the SDS program, the program would maintain core level funding, as well as a \$2.5 million increase to support efforts for training midwives.
- Regarding the GWEP program, level funding was maintained for the program in the final FY 2020 appropriations package.

In addition to CSWE PPI's appropriations advocacy in Congress, CSWE also continued activities around the Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA's) behavioral health workforce projections, which predicted an oversupply of behavioral health professionals, including social workers. The CSWE PPI continues to engage with the National Center for Health Workforce Analysis (NCHWA) on strengthening its data methodology to inform more accurate projections. Further, CSWE PPI is currently working on a congressional strategy with the American Psychological Association (APA) that would address HRSA's methodology gaps in evaluating HRSA programs, such as BHWET, through programmatic reauthorization legislation.

### ***Growing Policy Footprint in Addressing Social Determinants of Health***

CSWE PPI's advocacy efforts are also focused heavily on informing relevant policies to address social determinants of health and engaging congressional champions in this space. In conjunction with the release of the National Academies report "Integrating Social Care into the Delivery of Health Care: Moving Upstream to Improve the Nation's Health," the CSWE PPI organized and coordinated a fall 2019 congressional briefing on the topic. The CSWE PPI also facilitated and secured Rep. Karen Bass (D-CA) and the Congressional Social Work Caucus as congressional co-hosts for the event. The briefing provided a platform to elevate the social work education perspective with key congressional staff. The panel was moderated by CSWE President and CEO Dr. Darla Spence Coffey, and panelists included Kathy Stack, former Deputy Associate Director for Education, Income Maintenance and Labor, White House Office of Management and Budget; Robyn Golden, Co-Director of CHaSCI and Associate Vice President of Population Health and Aging at Rush University Medical Center; and Laudan Aron, Senior Fellow for the Center on Labor, Human Services, and Population at the Urban Institute.

The CSWE PPI also used the briefing as an opportunity to build on efforts earlier in the summer to cultivate relationships with co-sponsors of the *Social Determinants Accelerator Act*, including the offices of Representatives Cheri Bustos (D-IL), Tom Cole (R-OK), Jim McGovern (D-MA), and Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA). As evident by the event's successful registration and attendance rate, the briefing has teed up opportunities for future briefings on the topic of social determinants of health.

## **Social Work Research and Social Justice Advocacy**

### ***Promoting Research and Advancing Social Justice***

The CSWE PPI continues to work to advance CSWE's research priorities in addition to its continued work with the Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR). Additionally, the CSWE PPI has been responsive to members and organizational mission on several social justice activities. These include action alerts and efforts around the Census and family separation. The CSWE PPI developed "Advocacy Resources from APM Countdown," which provided resources for members to engage their congressional representatives on four issues, Student Aid and PSLF; Gun Violence and School Safety; Immigration; and Voter Mobilization. Another example of social justice advocacy efforts is the joining by CSWE of two amicus briefs that were submitted to the United States Supreme Court in support of protecting Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients. In 2017, the Administration terminated the DACA program, which provides qualified immigrants temporary residency and work authorization. One brief details how DACA has removed barriers to higher education for immigrants and children of immigrants (i.e., Dreamers) and allowed these individuals to receive the benefits of higher education. Another brief details how termination of the program will have a negative impact on educating and training health-care providers. CSWE recognizes the importance and necessity of diverse student bodies and a culture of inclusiveness in social work education.

The CSWE PPI is excited to be hosting a "Doctoral Student Policy Forum" in June alongside GADE and SSWR. These effort will be an opportunity for doctoral social work students to learn more about how research can influence policy. The CSWE PPI will be working with the respective organizations to review applications and develop programming for the event. Additionally, the CSWE PPI will be working with several SSWR committees, including the Social Policy Committee and Communications Committee, to ensure that advocacy efforts benefit from evidence-based policy making that is supported by social work research. Finally, the CSWE PPI will be engaging with the CSWE Connected Communities efforts around policy and advocacy to ensure issues of importance to membership and the organization are reflected in outreach to policy makers and leverage the power of collective action by CSWE members.

### **III. Coalition Activities**

#### ***Eldercare Workforce Alliance Public Policy Committee (EWA PPC)***

The CSWE PPI actively contributes to the work of the Eldercare Workforce Alliance (EWA) Public Policy Committee (PPC). EWA is a coalition of 34 national organizations, including CSWE, working to support policies aimed at improving the eldercare workforce. Participation includes representing CSWE on EWA PPC bimonthly calls, attending the EWA Full Alliance meetings, and making recommendations on EWA policy activities to CSWE. On December 9, the CSWE PPI attended EWA's biannual full alliance meeting. The meeting focused on the Alliance's involvement in policies touching various topics, including social determinants of health and reauthorization of the *Older American's Act*.

#### ***Health Professions and Nursing Education Coalition (HPNEC)***

An important part of strengthening federal funding for health professions programs includes making sure that social work is included among other health professions in policy making. To further these efforts, the CSWE PPI remains an active member of the Health Professions and Nursing Education Coalition (HPNEC). HPNEC is a coalition of over 60 national organizations representing schools, programs, health professionals, and students dedicated to ensuring a well-trained healthcare workforce. The CSWE PPI actively participates in HPNEC's monthly calls and meetings to weigh in on and support the Coalition's Title VII funding and authorization strategies. Additionally, as a member of the coalition's "Executive Committee" CSWE's PPI has an active voice in shaping the coalition's future activities.

#### ***Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG)***

CSWE is an active member of the Mental Health Liaison Group, which is a coalition of mental health and addiction stakeholders and organizations with a federal focus on elevating the conversation around mental health and substance use. MHLG works to provide input to policymakers on legislation, influence their mental health and substance use agenda, as well as join together to promote activities and policies that support the mission of the MHLG.

#### ***Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) Coalition***

Minority Fellowship Programs representatives from the grantee organizations continue to meet and correspond regularly through the MFP Coalition. The government relations representatives from the grantee organizations meet regularly to discuss how best to advocate for funding and how to coordinate MFP policy efforts in Congress. CSWE met with the coalition in December 2019 to discuss FY 2020 strategies as it relates to the program's future appropriations and reauthorization.

#### ***Federation of Associations of Schools of Health Professionals (FASHP)***

The CSWE PPI is a member of the Federation of Associations of Schools of Health Professionals (FASHP), which works on a variety of issues, including improving federal loan and repayment programs for health-care professionals, ensuring that any *Higher Education Act* (HEA) reauthorization is beneficial for students, and elevating the national importance of interprofessional education. Activities by the coalition include providing feedback on letters to members of Congress and attending meetings with congressional offices and committee staff. These actions help to keep social workers at the table for advocacy on student debt and other issues of importance to social work students, as well as making sure social workers are not left out of coalition advocacy related to topics such as appropriations for research and education, Public Service Loan Forgiveness, threats to independent accreditation, and interprofessional education.

### ***Executive Agency Advocacy Groups***

The CSWE PPI continues to look for new communities in which to raise the profile of social work and social work research, and groups with which there is an alignment with CSWE priorities in an effort to help amplify the message of the important role social workers play across a wide range of federal priorities. To that end, CSWE has joined the “Friends of NIA,” an advocacy coalition which supports the National Institute on Aging (NIA), and looks forward to opportunities for engagement in 2020.

## **IV. Conclusion**

In times of turbulence and threats, it is important to capitalize on opportunities and not become paralyzed by what can seem to be an endless stream of negative news and developments. Through its focus on securing funding for programs critical to social work, the CSWE PPI has been able to navigate today’s challenging political environment. The CSWE PPI sees 2020 as an opportunity to continue to elevate CSWE as an organization and support and expand policy priorities and opportunities. In 2020 the CSWE PPI will work to ensure that CSWE and the social work profession are at the forefront of efforts to address and incorporate SDOH into health-care policy. Additionally, advocacy for student aid and PSLF will continue to form a critical foundation to higher education advocacy efforts. The success in securing funding for MFP, BHWET, and other workforce training programs will continue to be leveraged. The CSWE PPI is also eager to highlight the role of social work as part of the growing interest in aging, mental health, and other areas to ensure that social work educators and practitioners are included in potential opportunities. The CSWE PPI stands ready to continue its role in aiding CSWE and its members in advancing a policy agenda that supports the social, health, and behavioral health needs of all Americans.