



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

As the 116th Congress and the Administration consider health-care policy legislation and regulations, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) maintains the position that increasing access to care, strengthening the care individuals receive, and improving health outcomes are 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 of the United States, which is reflected by including social work 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 and behavioral health, social workers are estimated to be among the largest providers of care. 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 are direct service providers, facilitate transitions, link individuals and families to available resources, administer programs, and influence policy. In all these roles, social workers address the critical gaps in the continuum of care, which is essential to improving health outcomes. Furthermore, social workers address the factors that affect individuals and families that are not often recognized within the walls of a clinic or hospital; 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 health-care policy, CSWE endorses the following principles that support its mission:

- ***Ensure Access to Health Care for All Populations:*** Federal policies should ensure access to health care and coverage for all populations, without the creation of new and undue burden, especially for low-income and vulnerable populations. CSWE does not support policies that create disadvantages or gaps in care for vulnerable populations.
- ***Federal Policy Should Address Social Determinants of Health to Improve Health and Health Care:*** Social determinants of health, such as socioeconomic status and access to adequate housing, 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 of individuals and communities.
- ***Recognize the Important Role of Education and Training in Health-Care Policy:*** Federal policies should reflect the importance of education and training programs for health professions, which includes social work, to successfully increase the number of health professionals prepared to work in integrated team-based environments and help meet the increasing health demands in the United

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States. CSWE believes that robust federal investments should be made in health-care workforce programs that include social work.

- ***Federal Health-Care Policy Should Aim to Eradicate Disparities:*** Although some progress has been made in addressing health disparities, the United States is far from bridging health inequity gaps. 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 Physical 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 insurance 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:*** Coordinated team-based care improves health and health-care outcomes, especially when social workers are included in the teams. Federal health-care policy should continue to support interprofessional team-based care to meet the needs of populations with complex health conditions and improve health for all.
- ***Federal Efforts to Collect Data and Evaluate Programs Should Include Social Work:*** Data are important in the evaluation of programs and creation of policy decisions. Data collected on health-care programs, when applicable, should convey the role/value of health professionals, 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 increased U.S. health demands, 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 realize 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.

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