



The Role of Social Work in Mental and Behavioral Health Care ***Principles for Public Policy***

Social workers are critical to the future of the mental and behavioral health infrastructure in the United States, especially as efforts are made to ensure that people are connected with the mental and behavioral health services they need. Social workers touch many Americans' lives through work in public schools, veterans' hospitals, general and special service health-care facilities, substance abuse prevention and treatment programs, child protective services, family service settings, and gerontological long-term care facilities. They are also on the front lines, working in teams and in a variety of settings ensuring that people are successful in their treatment and care for mental and behavioral illness.

Social workers are one of the largest groups of professional mental health and substance use service providers, with 35.3 clinically trained and active social workers per 100,000 Americans (Clark, 2002). The critical role of social work will continue to increase as the mental and behavioral health needs of the United States grow. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the need for social workers specializing in mental health and substance use is expected to grow by 23% from 2012 to 2022 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014), much faster than the average for all occupations.

As Congress considers legislative policy surrounding mental and behavioral health, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) will abide by the following principles in determining its support. CSWE encourages policy makers to consider these principles as they draft legislation and use CSWE as a resource to inform policy.

Meeting the Needs of the Individual

- CSWE recognizes the necessity of meeting the full needs of an individual, including diagnosis, access to care, medication management, treatment, therapy, and support services.
 - CSWE supports proposals that include licensed clinical professionals critical to ensuring the best care and outcomes for the individual, not just proposals limited to MD and PhD professionals.
 - CSWE supports proposals that incorporate adequate requirements for professionals who provide services and ensure that peer-to-peer programs have the proper training, experience, and oversight.

Recognizing Social Determinants of Health

- CSWE recognizes that social determinants of health can be important variables in the mental health needs of certain populations.
 - CSWE supports proposals that address social determinants of health in identifying methods to best serve unique populations.

Supporting a Team-Based Approach

- CSWE recognizes that interprofessional and collaborative efforts often provide the best care and often result in the best outcomes.
 - CSWE supports proposals that use interprofessional approaches to serve individuals with mental and behavioral health needs, including psychiatrists, social workers, pharmacists, nurses, and others.
 - CSWE supports proposals that include interprofessional education programs focused on team based approaches to serving individuals with mental and behavioral health issues.
- CSWE recognizes the need to increase the number of licensed health professionals in the United States trained to serve mental and behavioral health needs.
 - CSWE supports proposals that maintain and/or expand mental and behavioral health training initiatives, including the Minority Fellowship Program and at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).
 - CSWE supports proposals that maintain and/or expand mental and behavioral health training initiatives, including the Mental and Behavioral Health Education at Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and the Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training program, which is a SAMHSA-HRSA collaborative grant.

Recognizing the Value of Social Workers

- CSWE recognizes the value that social workers contribute not only to mental and behavioral health services, but also to the overall trajectory of policy related decisions.
 - CSWE supports proposals that include social workers in advisory capacities to agency leaders, including through formal advisory committee membership.

References

- Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2014). *Occupational outlook handbook, 2014-15 edition*. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/social-workers.htm#tab-6>
- Clark, E. J. (2002, July 19). Testimony submitted to the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health. Retrieved from <http://www.socialworkers.org/pressroom/events/nfcmh.asp?print=1>

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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.

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