

# Setting Priorities, Serving the Nation: A Shared Agenda for Social Work Education

Presented by the  
Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)  
and the  
Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors (BPD)  
Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education in Social Work (GADE)  
National Association of Deans and Directors of Schools of Social Work (NADD)  
St. Louis Group for Excellence in Social Work Research and Education  
Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR)

November 2016



**COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION**  
STRENGTHENING THE PROFESSION OF SOCIAL WORK  
*Leadership in Research, Career Advancement, and Education*



**ST. LOUIS  
GROUP**  
*for Excellence in  
Social Work Research  
and Education*

## Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	3
<b>Section 1: Meeting Societal Challenges by Sustaining High-Quality Social Work Education and Ensuring Student Success</b> .....	5
<b>Section 2: Protecting Vulnerable Communities and Populations</b> .....	9
<b>Section 3: Enhancing Social Work Impact through Informed Research</b> .....	11
<b>Section 4: Improving Health/Behavioral Health Outcomes for Diverse Populations by Preparing a Social Work Workforce to Address the Societal and Health-Care/Behavioral Health-Care Gaps Experienced by Individuals and Families</b> .....	14

## Executive Summary

Across the country— in schools, hospitals, veterans’ facilities, rehabilitation centers, social service agencies, child welfare organizations, assisted living centers, nursing homes, and faith-based organizations— social workers are integral components of our national care network. Because of their work in this breadth of care and service settings, it is likely you or someone you care about will interact with a social worker at some point in your lifetime.

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) is a nonprofit national association representing over 750 accredited undergraduate and graduate programs of professional social work education. CSWE ensures and enhances the quality of social work education for professional practice that promotes individual, family, and community well-being, and social and economic justice. CSWE pursues this mission in higher education by setting and maintaining national accreditation standards for baccalaureate and master’s degree programs in social work, by promoting faculty development, by engaging in international collaborations, and by advocating for social work education and research. CSWE’s Commission on Accreditation is the sole accrediting agency for baccalaureate and master’s programs of professional social work education in the United States and is responsible for developing and ensuring compliance with accreditation standards that define competent preparation of social workers entering the profession. Social work education prepares students to work across gender, generation, race, economic status, culture, and belief, teaching students about the human dimensions and complexities of social interactions. It is through these lenses that social workers assume leadership positions, impact policy, and engage in direct practice roles helping individuals, families, groups, and communities, empowering people to be productive, contributing members of their communities.

Despite social workers’ reach into communities, barriers still exist that prevent the profession from having sufficient strength to support those in need. These issues must be addressed immediately as the need for social workers is expected to grow as more Americans seek services. For example, in 2014 the Bureau of Labor Statistics projected the social work profession to grow by 12 percent by 2024 due to an increase in demand for health-care and social services.

This *Shared Agenda for Social Work Education* is offered by CSWE and its partners in the social work education community: the Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors, the Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education in Social Work, the National Association of Deans and Directors of Schools of Social Work, the St. Louis Group for Excellence in Social Work Research and Education, and the Society for Social Work and Research. Together we offer 20 recommendations for key investments the incoming presidential Administration can make to achieve real, measurable improvements for meeting the social, health, and behavioral health needs of all Americans by investing in the social work profession.

These recommendations are organized into four sections, with specific actions identified within each.

*Section 1: Meeting Societal Challenges by Sustaining High-Quality Social Work Education and Ensuring Student Success*

**Recommendation 1** – Ensure integrity in higher education and programs of professional social work by supporting the autonomy of professional accreditors.

**Recommendation 2** – Encourage transparency and create common sense reporting requirements regarding college cost and student outcomes.

**Recommendation 3** – Enact a reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act*.

**Recommendation 4** – Support income-driven repayment plans and fully fund loan forgiveness programs created in the *Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008* and the *College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007* and ensure social workers have access to these critical programs.

**Recommendation 5** – Reinstate year-round Pell Grants.

**Recommendation 6** – Continue to vigorously enforce Title IX regulations to protect students and ensure equal opportunity in the classroom.

**Recommendation 7** – Increase funding for doctoral education in social work and establish more federally-funded doctoral traineeships.

*Section 2: Protecting Vulnerable Communities and Populations*

**Recommendation 8** – Support efforts crucial to helping our nation’s veterans re-enter civilian life.

**Recommendation 9** – Actively promote social work leadership throughout the federal government as well as inclusion of social worker practitioners, educators and researchers on federal advisory bodies.

**Recommendation 10** – Actively promote the important role of social workers in the pursuit of social justice by both helping individuals address their respective needs and problems by connecting them with the necessary resources and to advocate for policies and practices to support citizens leading full, productive lives.

**Recommendation 11** – Invest in social work education and the social work profession to ensure the profession continues to meet the needs of the most vulnerable populations.

*Section 3: Enhancing Social Work Impact through Informed Research*

**Recommendation 12**– Promote a more culturally and professionally diverse researcher pool at Department of Health and Human Services and the National Institutes of Health.

**Recommendation 13** – Invest in social and behavioral science research that coordinates basic and applied research to scale successful models of social services and support the full diversity of our nation’s populations.

**Recommendation 14** – Incorporate evidence-based approaches in social service policies and programs.

**Recommendation 15** – Integrate social and behavioral science research with education and training programs, ensuring interprofessional care providers are well-prepared to develop and execute coordinated, individualized care plans.

*Section 4: Improving Health/Behavioral Health Outcomes for Diverse Populations by Preparing a Social Work Workforce to Address the Societal and Health/Behavioral Health-Care Gaps Experienced by Individuals and Families*

**Recommendation 16** – Support health professions training programs at the Department of Health and Human Services, and ensure social work is included in such programs, especially programs that promote a workforce designed to meet the needs of diverse populations.

**Recommendation 17** – Ensure that policy discussions around improving health professions training and the future of medical education include social work.

**Recommendation 18** – Incorporate social determinants of health into new models of care and research the impact of such models on meeting the needs of unique and underserved populations.

**Recommendation 19** – Further incorporate social work into activities and initiatives across the federal government to promote and advance interprofessional education, training and practice.

**Recommendation 20** – Continue support for provisions under the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* (ACA) and identify opportunities to expand access and care for underserved populations.

## Section 1: Meeting Societal Challenges by Sustaining High-Quality Social Work Education and Ensuring Student Success

As the sole recognized accreditor of baccalaureate and master’s programs of professional social work education in the U.S. and the largest social work education membership organization, it is important for CSWE to be active and engaged in national conversations regarding education policy issues, such as transparency, student outcomes, and education quality. In addition, federal policies should provide accreditors with the latitude and flexibility they require to appropriately regulate programs to meet the needs of students and ultimately the profession.

Further, because social work jobs commonly offer low salaries, loan forgiveness and other incentive programs are needed to help encourage recent graduates to take these much-needed jobs and serve in communities with high need populations. Social work students also need access to programs that expand accessibility to postsecondary education, such as Pell Grants.

### Recommendation 1

The Administration must **ensure integrity in higher education and programs of professional social work by supporting the autonomy of professional accreditors**. This includes support for the existing voluntary peer-based accreditation system and rejecting proposals to federalize the current system of accreditation.

**Context:** The nation’s system of accreditation has been under close-scrutiny in the past few years, particularly in light of the public collapse of the for-profit Corinthian Colleges. The National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI), which advises the Department of Education and the Secretary on matters of accreditation, reviews and recommends accrediting agencies for recognition, and identifies issues with accreditation processes. The Department of Education is interested in holding NACIQI and both regional and programmatic accreditors accountable to ensure institutional and program quality, with increased focus on student outcomes.

**Position:** The social work education community rejects attempts to federalize the accreditation process, including efforts to define a *credit hour* and regulate program integrity. Although CSWE is not recognized by the Department of Education, we support the efforts of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation to respond to greater calls for transparency and measures of quality in education. We also value the need for transparency and accountability, and equipping our students with information about schools and programs; however, we encourage the Administration to consider the time and cost burden of increased data collection and reporting regulations, as well as the risks of oversimplifying our role through standardized definitions.

## Recommendation 2

The Administration should **encourage transparency and create common sense reporting requirements regarding college cost and student outcomes** to provide the best information to prospective students.

**Context:** The Administration and Congress have urged greater transparency in college cost and student outcomes in recent years.

**Position:** The social work education community supports efforts in the reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act* to encourage transparency on college cost and student outcomes, but asks that policy makers work with institutions of higher education to create thoughtful measurements and reporting mechanisms that will provide the best information for students.

## Recommendation 3

The next Administration must **support congressional efforts to enact a reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act (HEA)* in the next Congress**. HEA reauthorization is needed to address new and emerging challenges in postsecondary education, support historically-disadvantaged student populations, and expand access to higher education for all Americans.

**Context:** The *Higher Education Act (HEA)* was last reauthorized by Congress in 2008 and expired in 2013. Given the significant changes in the higher education landscape (e.g., disruptive innovations, increased prominence of non-traditional students, renewed focus on outcomes), the next Administration must prioritize reauthorizing the HEA in a bipartisan manner. This critically important legislation has historically been allowed to expire significantly before reauthorization, and the next Administration should encourage prompt action.

**Position:** The next Administration should support bipartisan congressional action to reauthorize the HEA. In particular, the reauthorization should support educational initiatives critical to social work programs, including strong support for the federal work-study program, the Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need (GAANN) program, and Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP). HEA reauthorization will prove critical to advance our nation's education goals, including those related to social work.

## Recommendation 4

The Administration should **continue support for income-driven repayment plans and encourage borrowers to enroll in the plans**. Congress should fully fund loan forgiveness programs, including the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program created in the *Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008* and the *College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007* and ensure social workers have access to these critical programs.

**Context:** The **Income-Based Repayment (IBR)** program and the **Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF)** program were created as part of the *College Cost Reduction and Access Act* in

2007. IBR was expanded by the Obama Administration to include the Pay As You Earn Repayment Plan and Revised Pay As You Earn Repayment Plan, which allow eligible federal student loan borrowers to cap payments on federal student loans at 10-15 percent of discretionary income. After 20-25 years in an income-driven repayment program, federal student loans may be forgiven. The PSLF program forgives federal student loans after 10 years of on-time payments for those borrowers who have full-time qualifying employment in the public service sector, including social workers employed through government or at nonprofit institutions. While support for income-driven repayment plans has grown, skepticism over PSLF has increased, predominately around the expected costs. Congress may consider the elimination or consolidation of PSLF and income-driven repayment plans during the HEA reauthorization.

**Position:** Student assistance programs and policies are critical for social workers who complete years of schooling, especially due to the possible burden of carrying student loan debt and earning low wages that come with a position intended to serve the public good. With an aging population and more people generally seeking health-care and social services, the need for additional social workers is increasing. These programs were created to encourage students to consider public service without giving them the crippling concern of high debt and low wages. Social work education associations strongly oppose the elimination of income-driven repayment plans or the reduction of eligibility or forgiveness within the PSLF program.

#### Recommendation 5

The Administration should enhance educational access for historically disadvantaged populations and encourage timely degree completion through **reinstating year-round Pell Grant eligibility**. The Administration should support bipartisan legislative proposals already introduced to achieve this important goal.

**Context:** The Pell Grant program provides crucial financial support to our nation's most disadvantaged student populations. Following a brief one-year cycle of year-round Pell Grant awards, Pell Grant eligibility has been restricted to support study only during the fall and spring semesters since 2011, enacted with the intention of protecting award funding following a period of economic uncertainty and the related increase in the number of Americans pursuing postsecondary education. In an environment of stabilizing enrollment and the current Pell Grant program surplus, the next Administration should prioritize the restoration of year-round Pell Grant eligibility.

**Position:** Pell Grants are one of the most important programs to increase access to and the affordability of higher education, ensuring that all students, regardless of their economic circumstances, can complete postsecondary study. A major goal of social work education is recruiting students from diverse backgrounds (e.g., LGBTQ students, students of color, first-generation students) with the hope that they will return to serve their communities once they have completed their education. Without support from programs like the Pell Grant, many historically-disadvantaged individuals would not be able to access higher education, and in turn, would not acquire the skills needed to best serve in the communities that would most benefit from their expert assistance. CSWE

supports both increased funding for individual Pell Grant award levels as well as reinstating year-round Pell Grant eligibility.

#### Recommendation 6

The Administration should **continue to vigorously enforce Title IX regulations to protect students and ensure equal opportunity in the classroom.**

**Context:** Recent high profile cases of sexual assault and violence on college campuses have increased the federal focus on campus safety. The Office of Civil Rights at the Department of Education has launched hundreds of investigations into cases at colleges and universities across the country. While the federal government and institutions of higher education are united in the goal of ensuring the safety of students, existing proposals and laws contradict that very goal.

**Position:** As Congress considers the *Higher Education Act* reauthorization, the social work education community does not support legislative solutions that increase the administrative burden on college campuses, limiting their ability to effectively advocate for students and establish safe environments for students.

#### Recommendation 7

The Administration should **increase funding for doctoral education in social work and establish more federally-funded doctoral traineeships** to ensure there is a sufficient pool of well-trained doctoral-level researchers and educators to meet national needs.

**Context:** The field of social work has launched a major Grand Challenges Initiative to help improve our understanding of key social problems and to develop appropriate interventions that can help alleviate them. This initiative requires researchers with advanced training who can develop and test these new interventions. Unfortunately, the field of social work has been experiencing a crisis in doctoral education. There are concerns that there are not enough early career scholars in the pipeline to conduct this required research, and there are currently not enough PhDs graduating annually to even fill the open faculty positions in schools of social work.

**Position:** The Administration should increase funding for doctoral education in social work through both increasing funding of existing pre- and post-doctoral programs and should establish more federally-funded doctoral traineeships to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of well-trained doctoral-level researchers and educators.



## Section 2: Protecting Vulnerable Communities and Populations

In communities throughout the United States, vulnerable populations remain underserved or face enormous challenges every day. For example, the number of people living in concentrated poverty has more than doubled since 2000.<sup>1</sup> Cities throughout the U.S. are facing an affordable housing crisis. Disparities in health-care continue to plague the health-care system; and according to the U.S. Census about 21.3 percent of the U.S. population participates in government assistance programs each month. This means for almost a quarter of the U.S. population access to public assistance programs is critical.

Social workers are on the frontlines working with communities and individuals to ensure that people are connected with the services they need and are able to cope with the challenges they face in their everyday lives. 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 also work in teams and in a variety of settings ensuring that people are successful in their treatment and care for mental and behavioral illness. Investing in the profession to meet growing needs is critical to helping protect vulnerable communities and populations.

### Recommendation 8

As America's overseas combat obligations draw down, more and more of our men and women in uniform will return to civilian life as veterans; an estimated 20 million of whom were living in this country in 2014, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). **Our country must make good on its commitment to support efforts crucial to helping veterans reenter civilian life.** Social workers are critical to veterans' successful reentry and reintegration into civilian life.

**Context:** This important population will require novel care approaches to re-integrate into civilian life, and social workers stand ready to assist. In fact, the VA is already the largest individual employer of social workers in the United States, demonstrating the important role social workers will play in caring for our veterans' needs, particularly with regard to mental health-care.

**Position:** Returning veterans will require sustained, dedicated national attention to acknowledge their service and best position them for successful re-entry into civilian life. Social workers are uniquely well-positioned to support the diverse breadth of health and wellness priorities experienced by this population, and as such the next Administration should support efforts to expand the social worker care community through education and training programs and dedicated, veteran-specific field experiences.

### Recommendation 9

The Administration should support and promote the **appointment of social workers** (including social work educators and researchers) **to senior executive service and other positions** throughout the federal government when appropriate. In addition, federal agencies should seek **inclusion of social workers**,

---

<sup>1</sup> *THE STATE OF THE NATION'S HOUSING 2016*. JOINT CENTER FOR HOUSING STUDIES OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY. 2016 Page 5-6.

**educators, and researchers on federal advisory bodies** and in other capacities to provide helpful insight into agency priority setting.

**Context:** Engaging stakeholders such as social work educators, practitioners, researchers, and leaders in decision-making can help ensure the development of policies that make sense in the real world. Social workers employ interventions based on evidence, helping vulnerable populations find their voices and achieve access to fundamental necessities such as health-care, employment, and education. Social workers offer a unique perspective into the social service and health-care needs of society, and their expertise should be used whenever possible.

**Position:** As policies continue to be created to tackle challenges such as veteran suicide, homelessness, bullying in American schools, families still struggling to escape from the economic recession, and other important issues, the perspective of the social worker, who serves on the frontlines in these areas, should be sought to provide a holistic view of the population being served. As the Administration seeks to fill positions throughout the federal agencies and seeks external expertise to inform federal agency priority setting and decision-making, the Administration is encouraged to look to social workers with sound credentials, extensive experience, and demonstrated leadership in understanding and addressing the needs of vulnerable populations. In particular, social work expertise should be sought for advisory bodies that provide external advice to the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the agencies within HHS, as well as the Secretary of Education.

#### **Recommendation 10**

The Administration should actively promote the critical role of social workers in the **pursuit of social justice** by both helping individuals address their respective needs and problems by connecting them with the necessary resources and by advocating for **policies and practices to support citizens leading full, productive lives.**

**Context:** Social justice is the conviction that all individuals deserve equal social, economic, and political rights and opportunities. Social workers play many different roles in our society, but central to each is the execution of social justice by helping individuals address their respective needs and problems and connecting them with the necessary resources to help them lead full, productive lives. Through their efforts, both direct and indirect, social workers seek to mitigate factors that make leading a full and productive life a challenge for many by addressing poverty, discrimination, lack of political power, oppression, and unequal opportunity. Cognizance and consideration of the contexts which contribute to these issues is a critical component of social work education. Through this, social workers promote social justice on behalf of clients.

**Position:** The federal government could improve its dialogue with the stakeholder community at every level and in every agency that has a role to play in addressing the needs of vulnerable populations. Incorporating qualified social workers among agency conversations on such topics as policing, smart decarceration, public health, LGBTQ issues, gun violence, substance abuse, child welfare, immigration, homelessness, veterans and families, and income inequality would be a strong first step to bridging

community needs with the federal government. Social workers provide a unique, experience-based perspective as the boots on the ground for these issues and more, and would give voice to the voiceless to help achieve equal social, economic, and political rights and opportunities for all.

### Recommendation 11

The Administration must **invest in the social work profession and social work education** to ensure that the profession is able to meet the needs of vulnerable populations. This investment should include efforts to build capacity in the social work workforce to address challenges around recruitment and retention.

**Context:** There has never been a national program geared toward building the social work workforce. Instead, investment has been random, driven primarily by the specific missions and needs of federal agencies or populations served by the federal government. Social workers are one of the largest groups of professional mental health and substance use service providers. With the exception of a few fields of practice such as child welfare, maternal and child health, and veteran health, social work has not traditionally been seen as the go-to profession by the federal government, despite the role social work plays in so many areas of interest to government agencies and programs. Social workers serve in all settings in which vulnerable populations seek care, assistance, or support, but the profession is often overlooked. Furthermore, at the local level, the workforce provides critical services to vulnerable populations, yet can suffer when federal, state, and local budgets are constrained, impacting the populations served by social workers. Social work must be considered a prioritized profession.

**Position:** The Administration should direct the creation of a commission or interagency working group to make recommendations on how to build capacity in the social work profession to bolster a robust health professions workforce capable of meeting Administration priorities. The commission or working group should investigate the extent to which federal agencies engage social workers in their activities, and develop agency-specific plans for addressing shortfalls. The Administration is encouraged to take steps to prioritize and invest in the social work profession.

## Section 3: Enhancing Social Work Impact through Informed Research

Social work research, education, and practice are inextricably linked and focus on a common goal: ensuring vulnerable populations receive appropriate services. In order to develop and revise social service policies and programs, legislators and practitioners evaluate care and service models of existing programs and adapt them based on evolving trends. The evaluation process for social service programs takes into consideration the effectiveness of interventions intended to address specific societal challenges, scale effective models, and broaden access to larger populations.

Social work research is used to (1) study the circumstances facing vulnerable populations and the needs of those populations to succeed in their circumstances; (2) evaluate access to and effectiveness of existing services; and (3) determine best practices for social work educators and practitioners for serving communities. With increased investment in social work research, social workers can integrate evidence-

based approaches to social work practice, which in turn allows them to provide the very best service to vulnerable populations.

### Recommendation 12

The Administration **must promote a more culturally and professionally diverse researcher pool** across the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), including the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Increasing engagement of and investment in social work researchers across HHS and NIH would improve understanding of health disparities and methods to address growing health needs.

**Context:** HHS and NIH are committed to reducing health disparities in the United States through the support of scientific research focused on identifying the underlying causes of diseases and other conditions that disproportionately affect historically-disadvantaged populations. Further, the health-care system relies increasingly on interprofessional care teams to efficiently and holistically address physical and mental health. Programs like the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) seek to improve behavioral health-care outcomes for racial and ethnic minority populations through sponsorship of master's and doctoral students, encouraging more racial and ethnic minority students to join the behavioral health workforces, as well as promote cultural competency when serving minority populations. Social welfare research and inquiry into the social and environmental determinants of health are essential components of the innovation pipeline that begins with the most basic biomedical research and ends with services to consumers and patients.

**Position:** To effectively address health disparities and advance minority health research and develop next-generation care practices, the Administration and Congress must increase the federal investment in HHS and NIH for health disparities and minority health research. Efforts must also be made to support researchers trained in social work, social welfare, and the social sciences by expanding the pool of funding available to these investigators and their research areas.

### Recommendation 13

The Administration **must invest in social and behavioral science research that coordinates basic and applied research** to scale successful models of social services and support the full diversity of our nation's populations.

**Context:** The United States faces evolving health-care and social service challenges, including developing and implementing new models of care and access to services for geriatric, minority, and rural populations. In addition, telemedicine and mobile health are rapidly emerging and creating new frontiers for individualized health-care. The federal government, through agencies like the NIH Office of Behavioral and Social Science Research (OBSSR), seeks to seamlessly transition basic and applied biomedical and behavioral science research to practice.

**Position:** In social work education, social work students are taught to apply, evaluate, and investigate various models of care for diverse populations in order to support the best

achievable outcomes for their clients. This grounding in evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence is the foundation for continuous improvement in policies and services. The Administration should further invest in NIH, specifically OBSSR, and other federal agencies to promote the adoption of strong empirical research outcomes to improve social service programs for diverse and unique population needs.

#### **Recommendation 14**

The Administration **must incorporate evidence-based approaches in social service policies and programs.**

**Context:** Our nation faces a variety of existing and emerging societal needs, including escalating health-care costs and disparities in access to services, among others. Congressional and federal policymakers respond to these needs by creating legislation and programs to improve life outcomes and experiences. In order to develop and revise social service policies and programs, legislators and practitioners must evaluate the care and service models of existing programs and adapt them based on rising trends. The evaluation process of social service programs considers the effectiveness of interventions intended to address specific societal challenges, scale effective models, and broaden access to larger populations.

**Position:** The Administration should continue to invest in the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI), as well as increase investment in HRSA and SAMHSA. These federal entities support evidence-based approaches to address current and emerging health-care needs, while providing a platform to scale successful models and evaluate existing approaches. Further, social and behavioral science research outcomes should be applied to social service policies and programs to ensure the most effective interventions and services are accessible and accountable.

#### **Recommendation 15**

The Administration **must integrate social and behavioral science research with education and training programs,** ensuring interprofessional care providers are well-prepared to develop and execute coordinated, individualized care plans.

**Context:** As the United States moves to a more integrated and coordinated team-based approach to care, policies must allow a professional, such as a social worker, to perform the full extent of his or her training and/or licensure in a health-care setting. Social and behavioral science research, when coordinated with education and training programs, offers health-care providers across disciplines relevant, evidence-based approaches for developing and executing individualized care plans. Programs, including the Title VII Comprehensive Geriatric Education Program at HRSA, support interprofessional education and training to ensure the health-care workforce is prepared to practice patient-centered team-based care. Further, models of care are tested through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' (CMS) Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation.

**Position:** The Administration and agencies, such as HRSA and CMS, should integrate and encourage social and behavioral science research and practices in models of care, training and education programs, and the evaluation of program effectiveness to meet the goals of better care, better health, and lower costs to consumers.

## Section 4: Improving Health/Behavioral Health Outcomes for Diverse Populations by Preparing a Social Work Workforce to Address the Societal and Health-Care/Behavioral Health-Care Gaps Experienced by Individuals and Families

Social workers are vital to health-care in the United States, working in a variety of settings in communities including schools, clinics, hospitals, child welfare agencies, and local, state, and federal agencies. As federal policies chart a new course for health-care in the United States, focusing on increasing access to care, improving the care individuals receive, and improving health outcomes, robust support for social work is critical. 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 the factors that impact individuals and families that are not often realized within the walls of a clinic or hospital; they work to address the social determinants impacting health and health outcomes. This element is a critical aspect of health-care delivery as the United States moves forward with its health policies.

The United States cannot only view health-care as services provided in a hospital or clinic by a physician. It must address the societal and health-care gaps experienced by individuals, families, and communities through a team-based approach that includes a social worker as a vital part of the health-care team. Equally, the United States must comparably invest in its workforce by supporting professions like social work, which are vital to improving health and health outcomes. The United States must ensure it has the number of social workers it requires to meet the current and future health-care demand in an environment that recognizes the role and value of social work and encourages students to enter into and remain in social work careers.

### Recommendation 16

The Administration must **support health professions training programs** at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and ensure social work is included in such programs, especially programs that **promote a workforce designed to meet the needs of diverse populations**.

**Context:** As the demand for qualified physical and mental health providers continues to grow, it is important to support efforts to create a more robust, well-trained, and culturally competent social work workforce capable of meeting the health and wellness needs of vulnerable populations, and continue to invest and grow current programs. Critical programs include the Title VII Health Professions programs at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), the Minority Fellowship Program (MFP), and Minority Fellowship Program-Youth (MFP-Y) at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). These programs help increase minority representation in the health-care workforce. For many health, behavioral health, and human service

professions such as social work, the Title VII programs are the only source of federal support to build much-needed capacity. SAMHSA's MFP and the more recent MFP-Y are major sources of support for social work doctoral and graduate students. These programs work to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities by increasing the number of racial/ethnic minority individuals who are trained to work with underrepresented and underserved persons with or at risk for mental health and/or substance abuse disorders.

**Position:** The Administration should support federal funding that provides resources for social work and social work education to foster a skilled, sustainable, and diverse social work workforce that meets the holistic needs of the United States. HRSA's Title VII Health Professions programs are the only federal programs designed to offer interprofessional training to health-care providers to meet the needs of all Americans, including the underserved in rural and urban communities and those with special needs. The Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training (BHWET) for Professionals program has been vital to social work by supporting efforts to expand the behavioral health workforce to serve children, adolescents, and transitional-age youths in integrated settings. In addition, the Administration should ensure that social work is included in all future competitions. Excluding social work from the competition, even for one year, threatens the pipeline of qualified professionals serving this important population.

The Administration should also work with Congress to either reauthorize the Mental and Behavioral Health Education and Training Grants authorized in the *Affordable Care Act* (ACA) to strengthen the clinical experience of social workers or expand current programs to include the education and training social workers need to serve populations not covered by the BHWET program, such as older adults. The Administration should continue to support the MFP programs and, in the coming years, look for opportunities to increase funding. The Administration should be cognizant of the limited resources for this vital program and avoid expanding activities or the program to other professions without adequate additional resources to maintain current grantees.

### Recommendation 17

The Administration must ensure that policy discussions around **the future of medical education includes social work and other health professions. The decentralization of health-care from acute medical settings to a community-based continuum of care means that interprofessional approaches are needed to promote health equity and well-being.**

**Context:** Social work field placements promote the development of professional competence and are a vital component of social work education. A field placement requirement includes 400 hours for baccalaureate programs and 900 hours for a master's degree, which is considered a terminal degree. There is a growing need for social workers to meet the increasing health demands in the United States, yet federal training dollars for social work are limited despite the trend toward team-based, interprofessional coordinated care. For example, even though evidence suggests that using a team-based approach reduces the demand on physicians and improves health outcomes, most of the federal funding for medical education supports the training of physicians. A holistic approach to

investing in health-care education and training would help meet the health needs of individuals now and in the future.

**Position:** Federal health-care education and training programs should prepare social workers for work in health-care settings. The Administration should consider federal policy that is innovative and provides federal support for education and training of health professions, including social workers, to improve health outcomes. This includes considering investments in the training of other health professionals and how the current Medicare graduate medical education (GME) program can incentivize other health professionals and field placements to meet the current health demands in the U.S. Federal pilot programs are encouraged at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, for example, to not only finance the training of physicians in interprofessional team-based settings, but also other providers such as social workers in field placements.

### Recommendation 18

The Administration should **incorporate social determinants of health into new models of care and research the impact of such models on meeting the needs of unique and underserved populations.**

**Context:** With recent changes to the current health-care landscape, especially following the passage of the *Affordable Care Act* (ACA), there has been a general shift in recognition of the value in addressing social determinants of health. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), social determinants of health are defined as “the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the condition of daily life.” As more individuals gain health-care coverage under the ACA, particularly low-income populations, the need to incorporate and evaluate the inclusion of social services into health-care models will continue to grow.

**Position:** The social work education community supports expanding its role in a changing health-care environment, especially as it pertains to innovative efforts to meet the Triple Aim: better care for patients, better health for communities, and lower costs. Social determinants of health can be 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 and invest in models of care that incorporate social services. Support for further research on the impact of such models on overall cost-effectiveness, health outcomes, and reductions in health inequality should also be encouraged.

### Recommendation 19

The Administration should further **incorporate social work into activities and initiatives** across the federal government **to promote and advance team-based interprofessional education, training and practice.**

**Context:** The health-care system is experiencing a trend where more physicians are working in interprofessional, team-based, and coordinated care settings to improve health-care and meet the needs of patients. As the health-care delivery system continues to move in



the direction of high-value, highly-collaborative care, the need to increase the number of health professionals prepared to work in an integrated team-based environment will be critical.

**Position:** The social work education community supports programs which promote interprofessional education, training, and practice to provide resources for social work and social work education to foster a skilled, sustainable, and diverse workforce that meets the holistic needs of patients. The Title VII Comprehensive Geriatric Education Program at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) is one example of an important program that supports interprofessional geriatrics education and training. Policy makers can help advance interprofessional team-based training through the expansion of traditional graduate medical education (GME) programs to include social workers, particularly social work educators, to help meet the demands of all populations in an evolving health-care system.

## Recommendation 20

The Administration should **continue support for provisions under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) and identify opportunities to expand access and care for underserved populations.**

**Context:** The ACA was landmark health-care legislation providing access to health insurance and services for millions of individuals, families, and communities, especially underserved populations. Per the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), “Since 2013, the uninsured rate has declined 9.2 percentage points for African Americans, resulting in 2.3 million adults gaining coverage and 12.3 percentage points for Latinos, resulting in 4.2 million adults gaining coverage. Since 2013, the uninsured rate among women declined 7.7 percentage points, resulting in 7.7 million women gaining coverage. An estimated 55 million women are also benefiting from preventive services coverage with no out-of-pocket costs.” Furthermore, the ACA served as a catalyst to advance interprofessional team-based care, which is a critical component to meet the goals of the ACA, strengthen the health-care delivery system, create better care for patients and communities, and improve health outcomes.

**Position:** The social work education community supports the main pillars of the ACA including expansion of access to health insurance and services, as well as the advancement of interprofessional team-based care. We urge the Administration to build on the vital path set forward by the ACA and continue these important efforts, including ensuring every state expands health insurance access under the Medicaid expansion provisions of the ACA. We also urge the Administration to continue to combat and address inequalities that exist in our health-care system and work to end factors that create disparities in health-care, including addressing social determinants of health. Treatments, medications, and services must be available and affordable for all populations. The Administration should also continue efforts focused on mental and behavioral health integration and parity.