



Nevada Public Health Foundation promotes health and wellbeing in communities through collaboration and sustainable solutions.

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Organization

Nevada Public Health Foundation, Inc.

Dr. Ikram Khan,

The Nevada Public Health Foundation, Inc. is working on several important social work workforce development projects. We are grateful for the opportunity share with the Patient Protection Commission what we are learning about social workers essential role in the provision of health care, the demographics of the profession, and the opportunities to strengthen the workforce. Thank you for your consideration of our recommendations.

Respectfully,

Natalie Gautereaux

Introduction

Social workers are an essential part of health care and, as with other health care professionals, Nevada has a significant shortage. Unfortunately, social workers are often overlooked as key agents for addressing mental health, behavioral health, and social determinants of health, despite being uniquely qualified to address all three. At Nevada Public Health Foundation, Inc. (NPHF) our mission is to promote health and well-being in communities through collaboration and sustainable solutions. To this end, we are working on several important social work workforce development projects that align with the Patient Protection Commission's recommendation of attracting and retaining talent to address health care workforce challenges in urban and rural communities.

Social Work Workforce Demographics

National research on social workers entering the field in the last three years shows the incoming workforce is 90% female, racially and ethnically diverse, and 46% of new social workers are first generation college students (Fitzhugh Mullan Institute for Health Workforce Equity the George Washington University, 2020). Through NPHF's engagement and interviews with social work students, we are learning that many social worker students feel "called" to the profession because of their lived experiences and desire to help people in their communities. As a result, many are nontraditional students who work full-time and go to school.

Due to the nature of the up-and-coming social work workforce, supporting students throughout their education and licensing process is essential to building the pipeline.

What do Social Workers do?

The primary mission of Social Work is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic and complex needs of all people. Social workers put a particular focus on helping people who are vulnerable, oppressed, or living in poverty, identify the factors contributing to their unique circumstances and help them implement solutions. Social workers are committed to advancing human rights and environmental justice and are foundational to advocating for and implementing policies and programs that bring about the social change necessary for families, groups, organizations and communities to thrive.

Regardless of their practice setting, social workers serve populations with the highest needs. The focus of their work most often includes children and families, people with mental health and substance use disorders, people receiving healthcare, and people who are seriously ill and in need of assistance with activities of daily living (Fitzhugh Mullan Institute for Health Workforce Equity the George Washington University, 2020).

Social workers in Nevada help people with:

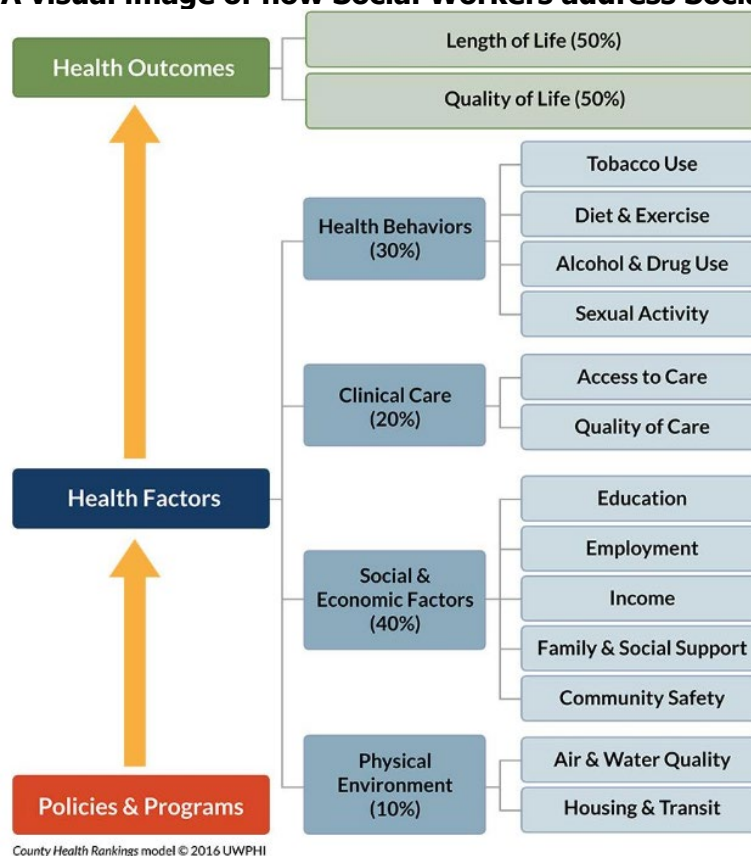
- Behavioral health
- Mental health
- Access to resources
- Health literacy and psychoeducation
- Case management
- Prevention and management of disease
- Inadequate housing
- Unemployment

- Substance use
- Domestic conflicts
- Program and policy development

Frequently, social workers' clients live below the federal poverty level and are Medicaid eligible. Because social workers connect people with state and community resources, they are uniquely qualified to address the social determinants of health for these populations. Studies show 10-20% of health outcomes are the result of the amount of time a patient spends with their doctor, while 80-90% of health outcomes are the result of environmental conditions such as housing, transportation, economic stability, family and social support, and services for mental and behavioral health (Magnan, 2017).

Including social workers as part of a multidisciplinary approach provides a more comprehensive and holistic approach to patient care and addresses needs at the lowest level of care.

A visual image of how Social Workers address Social Determinants of Health



Where do Social Workers work?

Social Work is a community-based service. Social workers work in all facets of our society, including schools, hospitals, community organizations, the military, mental health centers, social service agencies, corporations, and local, state, and federal government (National Association of Social Workers, 2024). Further, Social Workers are on the frontlines in helping this nation solve pressing social problems, including an increased demand for mental health services; an opioid addiction crisis; and economic inequality (National Association of Social Workers, 2024).

Social workers are often overlooked in clinical settings as they are generally referred to as allied health care professionals.

Scopes of Practice and Educational Requirements for Levels of Licensure

Nevada’s licensing structure enables social workers to provide mental and behavioral health services at every level of licensure. In fact, licensed bachelor level social workers are qualified to provide the same mental and behavioral health services as master level social workers, including the following: screenings for suicidality, mental health assessments, interventions to restore social functioning, psychoeducation and skills training, case management, and provision of linkages to community services (Nevada Board of Examiners for Social Workers, n.d.). Further, clinical social workers are essential to mental and behavioral health care and are recognized by federal law and the National Institutes of Health as one of the five core mental health professions including clinical social workers, clinical psychologists, marriage and family therapists, psychiatrists, and advanced practice psychiatric nurses (National Association of Social Workers, 2024).

Because social workers can immediately begin addressing mental and behavioral health at every level of practice, investing in their education provides a quick turnaround in service delivery.

The following table provides Nevada's scopes of practice for each level of licensure, highlighting the mental health services that may be provided as early as the bachelor's level:

	LASW	LSW	LMSW	LCSW	LISW
DEGREE		Bachelors	Masters	Masters	Masters
POST-GRADUATE INTERNSHIP	None	None	None	YES	YES
Direct practice					
Pre-admission general assessment for mental health facilities				X	
Assessment for suicidality	X	X	X	X	X
Identification of presenting problems	X	X	X	X	X
Interviewing clients regarding client's situation	X	X	X	X	X
Psychosocial assessments (non-clinical)	X	X	X	X	X
Comprehensive clinical psychosocial				X	
Administration and scoring of assessment instruments requiring interpretation	X	X	X	X	X
Administration and interpretation of psychometric instruments				X	
Diagnosis of mental or emotional conditions or addictions				X	
Diagnosis of mental or emotional conditions or addictions with diagnostic coding				X	
General treatment planning and evaluation	X	X	X	X	X

Clinical treatment planning and evaluation				X	
Interventions with individuals, couples, families, or groups to enhance or restore the capacity for social functioning.	X	X	X	X	X
Intervention methods using specialized and formal clinical interactions				X	
Individual psychotherapy with children, adolescents or adults				X	
Couples / family psychotherapy with children, adolescents or adults				X	
Group psychotherapy with children, adolescents or adults				X	
Psychoeducational / Skills training groups with children, adolescents or adults	X	X	X	X	X
Case intervention evaluation	X	X	X	X	X
Case management (for individuals, families, couples, groups)	X	X	X	X	X
Provision of linkages to community services	X	X	X	X	X
Imparting general information and referral for assistance	X	X	X	X	X
Coordination and evaluation of service delivery	X	X	X	X	X
Teaching or education of a client	X	X	X	X	X
Monitor client's compliance with program's expectations	X	X	X	X	X
Consultation regarding clinical issues				X	
Private Practice - Clinical				X	
Child or adult custody assessment and recommendations	X	X	X	X	X
Competency evaluations				X	

License Levels in Nevada are:

- Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) – Independent clinical practice in behavioral health and any practice areas of other license categories. Requires 3,000 hours of supervised field experience after a master’s degree
- Licensed Independent Social Worker (LISW) – Independent non-clinical practice. Requires 3,000 hours of supervised field experience after a master’s degree.
- Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW) – General practice, case management, entry level license which requires at least a master’s degree
- Licensed Social Worker (LSW) – General practice, case management, entry level license which requires at least a bachelor’s degree
- Licensed Associate of Social Work (LASW) – Grandfathered licensing category that is no longer used. Allows for general practice, case management

Nevada has a shortage of social workers in all practice areas.

Shortage in Nevada

According to a report issued by the State of Nevada Board of Examiners for Social Workers in July 2022, there were 1,808 LCSWs (including 454 out of state offering services through telehealth) available to Nevada residents. This is an average of 1 LCSW to approximately 1,740 Nevadans. Additionally, there were 2,213 LMSWs, LSWs, and LASWs (including 152 out of state offering services through telehealth). This is an average of 1 SW to approximately 1,420 Nevadans.

The report also indicated that when Governor Sisolak declared a State of Emergency related to the COVID Pandemic in April 2020, the Social Work Board began to issue "waivers" to practice in Nevada without a license in Nevada. From April 2020 through May 2022 the Board issued 234 LCSW and 31 LMSW/LSW waivers to Social Workers nationally. These individuals were practicing throughout the state via telehealth platforms. When the Emergency Directive closed, each of these individuals was contacted regarding intent to license in Nevada. Approximately 20% indicated that they would consider pursuing licensure in our state.

Our state is facing a critical shortage of social workers, especially in our rural and frontier counties. As an example, Esmeralda, Eureka, Lander, Lincoln, Mineral, Pershing, and Storey counties have a range of 0-5 SWs available in their counties. White Pine and Humboldt counties have approximately 13 SWs each available to the community. These counties also have DHHS offices employing SW services.

Established state positions are often vacant at a rate topping 40% in some areas of non-

NPHF's Efforts to Strengthen Social Work Pipeline

NPHF is working on several social work workforce development projects aimed to build the social work pipeline:

- Stipends for clinical social work supervisors

In collaboration with the Bureau of Behavioral Health, Wellness, and Prevention (BBHWP), NPHF is providing up to \$5,000 a year in stipends to 20 board-approved clinical site supervisors who oversee post-graduate internships in rural and frontier counties in Nevada. The goals for this initiative may include increasing the number of clinical social work site supervisors and clinical social work internship positions in rural and frontier Nevada by 20%.

This project emphasizes peer support/ lived experience and relies on collaboration with multiple partners including the following: State of Nevada Board of Examiners for Social Workers, Nevada Rural Hospital Partners (NRHP), University of Nevada, Reno and University of Nevada, Las Vegas, The State of Nevada Division of Public and Behavioral Health rural clinics, and Nevada Recovery-Friendly Workplace. NPHF is modeling this program after NRHP's Nurse Apprenticeship program.

- Scholarships and stipends for social work students engaged in work with DHHS

To support social work workforce needs for the state, in collaboration with the DHHS, NPHF is providing scholarships and stipends for education-related expenses to

eligible social work students who are interested in public service and are an employee, intern, practicum student, volunteer, or contractor of DHHS. Scholarships are awarded in an amount up to \$1,000.00 and limited to one scholarship per student per academic semester. Any remaining funds may be awarded for Summer Sessions or stipends to cover education-related expenses.

As part of this project social work students engage in voluntary interviews, providing valuable insight into what inspired them to pursue social work, what supports they have in place, and what barriers they face during their academic career. This helps NPHF better understand the challenges aspiring social workers face and what initiatives we can support to build a more robust pipeline. NPHF awarded 17 scholarships for the 2023-2024 academic semester and, with each announcement of scholarship opportunities, continues to receive inquiries from new social work students.

Suggestions PPC can Make to Strengthen the Social Work Workforce

To address shortages in the social work workforce, especially for non-clinical social workers, there are opportunities in areas of education, recruitment, and retention.

- Develop stronger education paths for social workers pursuing careers in medical social work, children's mental health, family services, the justice system, aging and disability services, and family services, especially those with inclusive backgrounds from rural and frontier communities
- Increase opportunities for paid internships and/or stipends for travel and expenses, and scholarships for rural placements
- Modify policies and NRS to include bachelor and master level social workers in the state loan repayment program
- Support Social Workers' occupational wellness through enhancing programs promoting awareness, evaluation, mentorship, and ongoing training.
- Include both non-clinical and clinical social workers as part of a multidisciplinary approach to provide a more comprehensive and holistic approach to patient care and address needs at the lowest level of care.

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