

PREFACE

Ethical standards in social work have been transformed. Like all other professionals, social workers' understanding of ethical issues has matured dramatically. When the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) published its first code of ethics in 1960, the entire set of 14 guidelines fit on one side of one page. The current *NASW Code of Ethics*—ratified by the NASW Delegate Assembly in 2017 and implemented in 2018, consists of 172 ethical standards and six broad ethical principles. In the time between, social workers have developed stronger grasp of the profession's core values, the ways in which these core values sometimes conflict in practice, and the ethical dilemmas that can occur in the profession. In addition, social workers have become more familiar with patterns of ethical misconduct engaged in by a relatively small number of the profession's members.

The *NASW Code of Ethics*, which constitutes a marked change in the profession's understanding of and approach to ethical issues, reflects this remarkable transformation. It embodies what has been learned about ethics throughout social work's history—most of which has emerged since 1980, when the broader field of applied and professional ethics began to burgeon.

This book has several purposes. First, it provides social workers with a detailed overview and discussion of the *NASW Code of Ethics*. It includes a summary of the evolution of ethical issues in the profession; discussion of the profession's core values, mission, and broad ethical principles; and explanations and illustrations of the profession's more specific ethical standards. My hope is that the material will provide the profession with a useful educational tool for both experienced and fledgling practitioners.

In addition, this book should be useful to social workers who seek advice and consultation on ethical issues. Although *Ethical Standards in Social Work* cannot provide formulaic solutions to all ethical issues and should be supplemented by other literature and resources pertaining to social work and professional ethics, it can provide social workers with an overview of the relevant guidelines and issues to help them navigate their way through ethical thickets.

Ethical Standards in Social Work should also be useful to social workers and others who rely on the *NASW Code of Ethics* in relation to ethics complaints and lawsuits involving social workers. Members of NASW ethics committees and state licensing boards, as well as those engaged in litigation involving social workers, will find this book helpful in identifying prevailing ethical standards in the profession.

This edition updates the literature and examines a number of emerging issues in more depth (for example, boundary issues, social workers' use of technology, and involvement in end-of-life decisions). It also includes an updated appendix that provides readers with an opportunity to apply the *NASW Code of Ethics*. Chapter 1 provides an overview of ethical issues in social work, relevant historical developments, and the purposes and core contents of the *NASW Code of Ethics*. The remaining chapters focus on the code's standards pertaining to social workers' ethical responsibilities to clients, to colleagues, in practice settings, as professionals, to the social work profession, and to the broader society. The chapters on ethical standards provide a summary and analysis of key ethical issues, often including case examples.

During the years in which I have paid serious attention to ethical issues in social work, beginning especially in the mid-1970s, I have been amazed by the exponential growth of interest in the subject among social workers. The reasons for this growth are complex, and they are both reassuring and distressing (see chapter 1). The net result, however, is that contemporary social workers have a better understanding of ethical issues in the profession than have those in any preceding generation, and that is good. Although I have learned a great deal over the years about these issues, I do not claim to have definitive answers to all ethical quandaries. My hope is that the commentary and analysis in this book will provide readers with thoughtful and thought-provoking guidance as they wrestle with difficult ethical questions and issues. (The views and opinions expressed in this book are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of NASW.)

Serving as chair of the NASW Code of Ethics Revision Committee that drafted the 1996 code and on the task force that updated the code adopted in 2017 was a genuine privilege. I will always count this work among my most treasured professional experiences.

There is no question that the *NASW Code of Ethics* is a vital component of social work's identity and integrity: The code serves as a lodestar for this remarkably diverse and honorable profession.