

Foreword

The policy statements in this book set the parameters for the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) positions on a broad range of critical public policy and professional issues ranging from human trafficking and transgender and gender nonconforming people to immigrants and refugees. *Social Work Speaks* is a comprehensive collection of policies adopted and revised by NASW's key policy-making body, the Delegate Assembly, comprised of 277 professional social workers who represent NASW's diverse membership. The Delegate Assembly sets broad organizational policy, establishes program priorities, and develops a collective stance on public and professional issues. Since NASW's inception in 1955, policy statement adoption has been a part of its governance process. This edition includes all of the revised policies approved by the 2017 Delegate Assembly as well as those approved by previous assemblies. These policy statements will guide the association's advocacy on professional and public policy efforts.

As a society, we are facing great challenges—individuals are living longer with chronic health and mental health conditions, older adults are in need of critical supports as they age, people are still experiencing economic insecurities, and we continue to see trauma as a result of long-standing family, community, and global conflicts. At the same time, the state of our economy, legislative changes, and shifts in government and philanthropic funding streams create challenges for health and human services agencies and organizations. This affects both the individual and families who receive services and the professionals who work in these settings. Programs are being reevaluated and are at risk of being reduced or eliminated. Furthermore, people without social work degrees are being hired for positions that social workers previously held. Our social work value systems and our expertise lend themselves to the creation of, and advocacy for, poli-

cies that provide effective solutions not only in the United States but also globally.

THE PROCESS

To ensure that NASW makes available relevant up-to-date policies, it divided the policy revision process into separate phases allowing for the first time the release of an eBook version of the policy statements in spring 2017. The first phase included nine policies that were released in an addendum entitled *Social Work Speaks: eBook Update Spring 2017*. These nine policies and the remaining 15 of the updated policies are featured in this edition.

The policy revision process for the 2017 Delegate Assembly continued to use online tools that began with the Delegate Assembly in 2008. Panels for each policy revision included delegates who volunteered to serve because of their expertise and other NASW members who were subject matter experts. The panels worked with NASW's social work staff to review the policies and to identify areas that needed to be updated.

During this process, the "Drug Testing in the Workplace" policy was eliminated as its intent and recommendations were included in other policy statements. A new policy statement, "Licensing and Regulation of Social Work Practice," was also added to this edition.

After the initial revisions, policy statements were made available online for public comment by NASW membership. This allowed members to make suggestions to improve the policies. Policy review panels met by teleconferencing and used online tools taking comments into account and making any necessary revisions to finalize policy statements. With the opportunity for input by all NASW members, these policy statements represent the collective thinking of thousands of experienced social work practitioners. Once policies were finalized, the delegates from all states, the District of Columbia,

and three U.S. territories participated in an online voting process that took place in two different periods: November to January 2016 (voted on nine policies) and June to August 2017 (voted on 15 policies). The voting results were reported to the full Delegate Assembly, resulting in the adoption of the 24 policies.

LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY

Before taking a position on any federal legislation, NASW staff compares the proposed legislative policy with policies in this book. Whether the proposed legislation is consistent with the thrust of an NASW policy statement or contradicts the statement, NASW's position will be readily apparent. However, in many cases, the proposed legislation contains some provisions that support NASW's policies and some that are inconsistent with, or only partially support, the NASW recommendations. In these cases, a decision is not made easily, and other factors must be taken into consideration. NASW then weighs the potential for revising the proposed legislation, the overall value of possible policy gains, political concerns, and other factors before a decision to support the legislation is made.

For social workers to be heard as one voice on federal, state, and local policy, the national office coordinates action on federal legislation at the national, chapter, and member level. Chapters coordinate similar actions on state legislation. Action may include endorsements for, or opposition to, a bill before Congress or state legislatures; letters, phone calls, "tweets," and e-mails to Congress or states requesting action on a bill; or participation in town hall meetings or coalition actions for or against a piece of legislation.

LEGAL ACTION AND THE LEGAL DEFENSE FUND

The NASW Legal Defense Fund initiates or participates in a number of amicus curiae (friend of the court) briefs annually in precedent-setting cases that advance social policy and the social work profession. In deciding which cases to support with a brief in a federal

or state court, NASW looks to its Delegate Assembly-adopted policy statements for guidance. For example, NASW joined more than 70 civil and human right organizations in filing an amicus brief in *Maslenjak v. United States* (2017), a case that involved the government's ability to criminally prosecute and strip naturalized citizens of their citizenship, even years after the fact, for making minor, immaterial misstatements and omissions during immigration proceedings and the naturalization process. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled, in a unanimous decision, that a nonmaterial misstatement in an applicant's naturalization process cannot be the basis for denaturalization. This ruling is consistent with NASW's policy statements that promote social justice and uphold equity and human rights for naturalized citizens.

In another case, NASW and other mental health and prisoners' rights advocacy organizations submitted an amicus brief to a U.S. Court of Appeals Sixth Circuit case *Arrington-Bey* (2017) about access to mental health care for detained and incarcerated people. The brief argued the importance of constitutional standards for mental health care access and delivery for people with mental illness while in custody. NASW contends that incarcerated individuals should be provided full access to mental health services, including screening, assessment, medication counseling, and discharge planning. NASW also supports access to quality health care, medications, nutrition, treatment, and rehabilitation programs for incarcerated individuals.

NASW also participated in the U.S. Supreme Court case *Gloucester v. G.G.* (2017), which supported transgender students' use of bathrooms matching their gender identities. NASW asserts that people of diverse gender expression and identity—including those who are transgender—should be afforded the same respect and rights as that of any other people. NASW supports safe and secure educational environments at all levels of education, in which children, youths, and adults may obtain an education free from discrimination, harassment, violence, and abuse.

In another example, NASW and other organizations submitted an amicus brief in the

Utah Supreme Court case *Mower v. Baird* (2017), which argued the importance of protecting the child abuse reporting process, the need for immunity for mandated reporters, and the reasons that no duty is owed to third parties. NASW asserts that imposing third-party liability on social workers who are mandated reporters of suspected child abuse would jeopardize effective treatment and have detrimental consequences in preventing child maltreatment.

NASW also submitted an amicus brief in *AIDS Support Group of Cape Code v. Town of Barnstable, Board of Health* (2016), where the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled unanimously that needle access programs such as those run by HIV service programs, community health initiatives, or other social service agencies are legal without restriction under state law. The brief educated the court about the current public health crisis of HIV and hepatitis C transmission in the current opioid epidemic and provided medical and scientific literature that established needle distribution programs to prevent diseases to save lives, reduce health care costs, and provide entry to substance abuse treatment. NASW policy statements support the implementation of prevention strategies that focus on harm reduction and the establishment of programs to increase drug abuse prevention and treatment to reduce HIV incidence among IV drug users, including efforts to mitigate the inequality of access to health care and the lack of prevention.

These cases illustrate the importance and influence of NASW policy statements in the legal advocacy of the association and the need to advance implementation of the policies through the courts. In addition, the statements are referenced when developing positions in relation to proposed federal and state legislation and regulations.

POLICY STUDY AND ANALYSIS

Social Work Speaks may be used as a text or as supplementary reading for overview, introductory, or macro courses in social and public policy. It may also serve as an adjunct to a wide range of specialty courses because so many of

the policy statements address specific fields of practice.

As an articulation of what one Delegate Assembly viewed as an ideal policy, individual statements are useful for analysis and review. They are excellent resources for classroom discussion and debate and can be used to raise questions such as the following:

- What important issues have practitioners raised in the subject area?
- Are the issues ones I deem critical?
- In my opinion, are there major issues that were not considered?
- Do I concur with NASW's policy stance?
- What documentation did NASW provide for the conclusions?
- On what course work, research, other readings, or practice experience do I base my stance?
- How do the positions compare with the public positions of other groups and organizations on the same subject?
- How might the statements be improved?
- How can I use the statements to become a more effective advocate?

For lobbying or analysis, policy statements should be considered in the context of their purpose and the time in which they were adopted. Social workers developed the statements to serve as broad parameters for advocacy work and to help professionals who are concerned with social or professional issues focus their thinking. Nonetheless, because of the breadth of issues and constantly emerging new information, readers may find that they need more specificity than what the statements contain. Contemporary professional literature will serve as an important extension of the policy statements, and NASW national and chapter offices may also provide updated information in many areas.

MOVING FORWARD

NASW must have up-to-date and timely policy statements that can be used to conduct

work on Capitol Hill, in state legislatures, with the media, and in professional practice. Technology, media, and national and global interconnectivity have shifted how public policies that affect professional practice are being communicated.

NASW must be able to address the ongoing changes in professional, political, economic, and social issues. We value the involvement of social workers in policy development and believe that NASW members can affect the policies that the association addresses by making suggestions for the development of new policy statements or the revision or elimination of existing policy statements. (To submit suggestions for new policy statements or the revision

or elimination of current statements, please visit <https://www.socialworkers.org/about/Delegate-Assembly/New-Comment>.)

Social workers who want to be informed and involved in policy analysis, advocacy for social or professional policies, or the formulation of future policy statements will find *Social Work Speaks* a useful resource to inspire important discussions about public policy and the role of social work in effecting social change.

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